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Food Security Communications Toolkit

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Introduction

Food security professionals increasingly realize that they must use communications strategically for their work to have a maximum impact. While most organizations have invested heavily in food security analysis and research, many still need to enhance their communications to ensure their findings reach their intended users and action is taken.

This toolkit is geared towards helping food security professionals develop a communication strategy and communicate more effectively with their target audiences. Specific sections of the toolkit focus on policy makers and the media, because of the important role they play in implementing and influencing food security policies.

The toolkit also looks at specific information products such as policy briefs, reports and early warning bulletins, and suggests ways to structure and improve them. A section on writing effectively, which focuses on grammar and style, makes sure that written documents are easy to read. Finally, the toolkit gives tips for using the internet, social media and Web 2.0 tools as these technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for engaging in two way dialogues with global audiences. The toolkit also includes readymade templates and dozens of tips and tricks distilled from many years of experience.

While aimed at professionals working in food security related fields, the lessons in this toolkit can easily be applied to many other fields.

DESIGNING YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY



1.1

1.1 Identify and analyse your audiences

1.2 Define your communication objectives and messages

1.3 Select the best channels for presenting your information

1.4 Plan and evaluate your communication activities

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the major audiences of an organization dealing with food security;
- apply criteria for selecting and prioritizing audiences of a communication strategy for food security information; and
- identify the characteristics and information needs of priority audiences.

Introduction

Why does a project need a communication strategy?

.....
It is a way of ensuring that communication efforts help achieve the project's goals, and that they are coordinated and effective.

It also helps clarify what staff, time and resources are needed, and how to use them
.....

Outline of a Communication Strategy

The design of a communication strategy consists of the following **elements**:

- Identify and analyse your audiences
- Define your communication objectives
- Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences
- Select the channels to use
- Create a communication workplan
- Evaluate your communication activities

This lesson looks at the first element: **Identify and analyse your audiences**.

Analysing your audience

Most organizations have to deal with the following **types of audiences**:

- **clients**: actual or potential project beneficiaries. These may be men or women, young or old, disabled or ill, farmers or pastoralists, landowners or the landless, from different ethnic groups, etc. Most are poor, but some are better off than others;
-

- **intermediaries:** organizations or individuals who provide information or services to the clients. Examples: agricultural extension workers, agricultural input suppliers, traders, microfinance organizations;
- **peers:** other organizations or projects engaged in the same area or in similar work, partner organizations;
- **donors:** organizations that provide funding (or that might do so in the future);
- **policymakers:** people and organizations that make decisions that affect the clients or the project. Examples: local and national government officials, ministers and senior civil servants, parliament members;
- **the public:** other people not directly concerned with the project, but who may be interested in food security;
- **the media:** newspapers, magazines, television, radio, websites. They are not really an audience in themselves, but they are an important means for reaching other audiences, so it's a good idea to deal with them separately;
- **internal audiences:** managers and staff of the organization.

Developing a list of audiences

To correctly analyse your audience you should **start by developing a list** of the main audience categories, then writing down examples of each audience type.

Here some practical suggestions for listing audiences:

- Get **other people to help you** list the audiences, to make sure you don't miss anyone.
- Check the project documents to make sure that you **include all the audiences** that the project is supposed to serve.
- Try to be as **specific** as possible.

For example, "women" is probably too general. "Pregnant women and women with small children in rural areas" is more specific.

- If necessary, **split some audience categories** into smaller groups.
-

For example, two ethnic groups may speak different languages.

Women and men may need different types of information

- Instead of just listing organizations, think of **who** in each organization you want to reach. The manager? The project specialists? The secretarial staff? The field staff? That will help you define your audience more closely.
- **Combine groups** for certain purposes (it can be difficult and expensive to target a lot of different audiences). For example, you may be able to send the same newsletter about project activities to donors and peers, but may have to shorten it for policymakers.

If you are having problems coming up with categories, there is another way to develop a list of your audiences:

- Write the names of different individuals, organizations or social groups you need to communicate with on small pieces of paper.
- Spread the pieces of paper out on a table.
- Sort them into groups that have common characteristics and information needs.
- Label each group – for example, “donors”, “women beneficiaries” and “project staff”.
- If you end up with a large number of different groups, try to combine them until you end up with a manageable number – between 5 and 10.

Prioritizing your audiences

You have probably realized by now that some audiences are more important than others. You need to focus limited time and resources on serving the priority audiences.

You can divide your audiences into four categories:

- 1. Top priority - Must communicate:** you must communicate with this audience in order to achieve the project’s goals
- 2. Second priority - Advisable to communicate:** communicating with this audience is useful and helps forward the project’s goals
- 3. Third priority - Nice to communicate:** communicating with this audience would be good, but will not help to achieve the project’s goals
- 4. Bottom priority - Not necessary to communicate:** the project should not try to serve this audience

Rather than relying on your own judgement alone, you should get **your colleagues to help you** prioritize your audiences.

Defining the audiences' characteristics

List the **characteristics** of the **priority audiences**.

Think of things like their number, location, education, language, background, organization and employment.

Example: Audiences' characteristics

Name of audience:

Characteristics	Question	Example
Number	How many people (or organizations) are there?	A small number; hundreds, thousands, millions of people
Location	Where are they located?	Scattered in remote rural areas, concentrated in a few hard-hit locations, in a capital city, in a foreign country
Education	What type of education do they have? In what subjects?	Literacy levels, educational level attained, subjects studied
Language	What languages do they speak?	International languages, national and local languages
Background	Where do they come from? What are they like?	Local people, migrants, refugees, foreign specialists...
Organization	Do they belong to an organization?	Members of farmers' associations, staff of a ministry...
Livelihood and employment	How do they earn a living? What type of work do they do? What are their job responsibilities?	Crop farming, livestock raising, unskilled labour, reliant on food aid...

There are different ways to **gather information** about your audience:

- **Check reports and other literature.** Your project's baseline survey or design documents may already have much of the information you need.
- **Discuss with colleagues or partners** who interact with the audience. They may have insights. Ask several people to get different viewpoints.

- **Conduct an informal survey.** Take every opportunity to meet members of the audience. Get to know them as well as you can. Ask them about themselves, where they get information, and the sorts of information they need.
- **Conduct a formal survey.** You may be able to build communication-specific questions into a survey your project is already planning. Rather than using a formal questionnaire, consider conducting a series of focus-group meetings or a participatory rural appraisal to learn more.

How should you **gather information** on your audience? This depends on two factors:

1. the **size and complexity** of your project or organization

In a small project, you probably do not have many resources, so you will have to rely on the first three methods (Checking reports and other literature; discussions with colleagues or partners who interact with the audience and informal surveys). In a big project, it may well be worth doing a formal survey;

2. the **nature of the audience**

You may be able to organize a formal survey of beneficiaries, but a formal survey is not suitable for audiences such as donors and policymakers. For these audiences, you will have to rely on information you can gather in other ways.

Defining audiences knowledge, attitudes and practice

In addition to audiences' characteristics, you should also understand:

- **What the audiences already know about the subject (knowledge)**
Are the audiences aware about it at all? Are they experts? Or something in between?
- **What their opinions are (attitudes)**
Are they in favour of the solutions your project is proposing? Or are they opposed?
- **What they currently do about it (practice)**
Are they already pushing for the changes your project proposes? Or are they doing nothing?

Knowing these things **will help you choose the messages** you send to each audience.

For example, if they are already pushing for the changes your project proposes, then maybe you need to provide them with more evidence they can use as ammunition. Or, if they are doing nothing, you will have to motivate them to take action.

Example: classification of information gathered on one of the priority target audiences of a project promoting food security

Name of audience: Pastoralists (project beneficiaries)

	Question	Findings
Existing knowledge	What do they know about food security?	Detailed traditional knowledge of rainfall patterns, grazing areas and animal management.
Existing attitudes	What do they think about it?	Major concerns are to maintain herds and locate good grazing and water.
Current practice	What do they do about it?	Split herd and send different parts to distant areas in hope of finding grazing and water. Send family members to food distribution points to pick up grain.

Determining the audiences' current source of information

Where do the audience currently **get information** about the subject?

Do they read reports? Do they listen to the radio? Do they attend meetings? Do they get information from their friends and neighbours? Do they have access to the internet?

Knowing this will help you determine what **channels** you can use to reach the audience.

Perhaps you can use the same channels, or maybe you can think of new channels that no one else is using.

It will also help you to find out what **other types of information** the audience is using.

For example, maybe **another organization** is also providing them with information that supports or contradicts yours.

Example: analysis of information sources

Name of audience: Pastoralists (project beneficiaries)

	Question	Findings
Information sources	Where do they currently get information? What media do they use?	Informal exchange via clan leaders. Discussions at watering points and markets. No print or broadcast media. Some use mobile phones in towns. NGOs provide training. Some children attend school.

Defining your audiences' interests and information needs

Finally, you should think of your audiences' **interests and information needs** concerning your subject.

Different audiences are often interested in very different things.

An audience may need several **different types of information**. For example, donors and policymakers may want "hard" data on prices, food supplies and nutrition levels, as well as "soft" human-interest stories that show the impact of a project.

Remember that what **they say** they need may be different from what **you think** they need!

Here, you should think of what **they say** they need.

Example: types of information audiences say they need

Name of audience: Pastoralists (project beneficiaries)

	Question	Findings
Information sources	What types of information do they need?	Market prices for cattle, location of trading opportunities, availability of vaccines and parasite treatments.

Name of audience: Actual and potential donors

Information sources	What types of information do they need?	Market prices for cattle, location of trading opportunities, availability of vaccines and parasite treatments.
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Summary

A **communication strategy** is a way of ensuring that communication efforts help achieve the project's goals, and that they are coordinated and effective. It also helps you understand what staff and resources are needed, and how to use them.

Identifying and analysing your audiences is the first step in designing a communication strategy.

As a first step, you should **list your audiences** and identify the most important ones (**priority audiences**).

For each of the priority audiences you should identify:

- **characteristics** (i.e. number, location, education, language, background, organization and employment);
- **knowledge, attitude and practice** on the project's subject;
- **information sources**; and
- **interests and information needs**.

By defining your audience's interests and information needs, you have completed the first stage in the process of designing a communication strategy.

Annex I: Audience categories

You may use the following table to list your audiences.

Audience Category	Members
Clients	
Intermediaries	
Peers	
Donors	
Policymakers	
The public	
The media	
Internal	

Annex II: Audience characteristics

You may use the following table to describe each primary audience.

Name of audience:		
Characteristics	Question	Findings
Number	How many people (or organizations) are there?	
Location	Where are they located?	
Education	What type of education do they have? In what subjects?	
Language	What languages do they speak?	
Background	Where do they come from? What are they like?	
Organization	Do they belong to an organization?	
Livelihood and employment	How do they earn a living? What type of work do they do? What are their job responsibilities?	
Knowledge, attitude and practice		
Existing knowledge	What do they know about food security?	
Existing attitudes	What do they think about it?	
Current practice	What do they do about it?	
Information sources		
Where do they currently get information? What media do they use?		
Information needs		
What types of information do they need?		

Annex III: Example of audience characteristics

The following table shows how you can describe your primary audiences.

Name of audience: Actual and potential donors		
Characteristics	Question	Findings
Number	How many people (or organizations) are there?	3 actual donors (five key staff members in each organization). 12 potential donor organizations.
Location	Where are they located?	Capital city of country. Occasional visits to field. In-country staff make funding decisions up to €100,000. Staff in donor country make funding decisions for projects over \$100,000.
Education	What type of education do they have? In what subjects?	Postgraduate degrees in development or related subjects. Specialist skills, but not necessarily in food security.
Language	What languages do they speak?	English, French. No local languages. Foreigners with commitment to development but limited field experience.
Background	Where do they come from? What are they like?	Foreigners with commitment to development but limited field experience. National staff with more field experience, but tend to have urban rather than rural backgrounds.
Organization	Do they belong to an organization?	Staff of donor organization. Typically in job for maximum of 3 years.
Livelihood and employment	How do they earn a living? What type of work do they do? What are their job responsibilities?	Designing, monitoring and evaluating projects, preparing reports for home government agencies. Often responsible for several projects at same time.

DESIGNING YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

1.1 Identify and analyse your audiences

1.2 Define your communication objectives and messages

1.3 Select the best channels for presenting your information

1.4 Plan and evaluate your communication activities

1.2

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify the key issues to consider when you define your communication objectives and messages.

Introduction

The first step in designing a communication strategy for a project promoting food security is to identify and analyze your audience. The second and third steps are to **define your objectives and key messages**.

Steps in designing a communication strategy:

- Identify and analyse your audiences
- Define your communication objectives
- Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences
- Select the channels to use
- Create a communication workplan
- Evaluate your communication activities

Deciding on your objectives

What do you want to achieve in communicating with your audience?

First decide on your communication objectives for **each** audience. These objectives will depend on the **overall project objectives**.

Communication activities should support the project objectives in achieving a change in the following three characteristics of the project audiences:

- **knowledge:** what new things do you want them to learn about your subject?
- **attitudes:** what changes in opinions do you want to stimulate?
- **practice:** what changes do you advocate in what the audience does? What new things would you like them to do, and what things should they stop doing?

**Example: Desired changes for audiences
(based on project objectives)**

Desired change in:	
Knowledge	They should be informed of the latest market prices for cattle.
Attitudes	They should want to sell cattle when the animals are healthy and prices are good, rather waiting until they are dying of thirst.
Practice	They should sell cattle when prices are good.

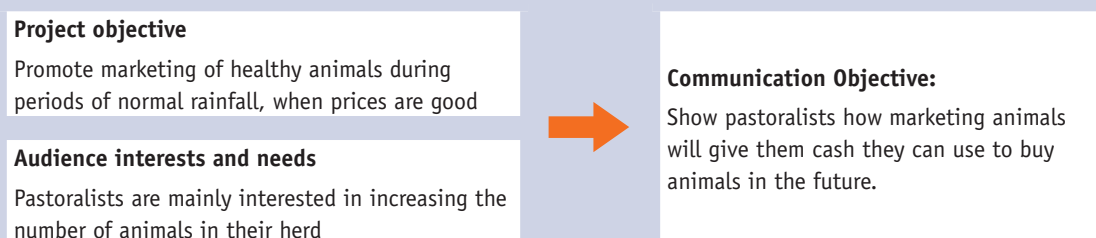
Relating your objectives to the audiences' needs

In order to define your communication objectives:

- **project objectives** should be **linked with audiences' information interests and needs**. Sometimes, the match will be good (if your audience says they want information on market prices, and one of your project's objectives is to provide them with this information, then it will be very easy to match their interests and needs!). However, the match can be less obvious.
- you need to find ways to **relate** project objectives to the audience's interests and needs.

Remember to take the audience's current knowledge, attitudes and practice into account.

Example: Matching audience needs with project objectives



Formulating your objectives

Communication objectives have to be **well formulated**. This will help you to:

- **focus on your communication activities**, design messages and choose the right communication channels. Well developed objectives can be used to justify spending resources on your communication activities; and
- **monitor and evaluate your activities**, as they enable you to check the effectiveness of communication activities and adjust them if necessary.

Tips for developing communication objectives

Make your objective...	Answer the question:
specific	How many people do you want to communicate with?
measurable	How can you collect the data?
appropriate	Is it relevant to project objectives?
realistic	Is it not too ambitious?
time bound	By when?

Examples of well developed communication objectives

Practice

To increase the number of healthy cattle sold during periods of normal rainfall by 10,000 a year by December 2012.

Attitudes

To persuade 1,000 pastoralists that they would be better off selling healthy cattle when prices are good, rather than waiting until a drought.

Knowledge

To increase the number of healthy cattle sold during periods of normal rainfall by 10,000 a year by December 2012.

Converting objectives to messages

For each of your objectives and each of your audiences, you should think of the **basic messages** you want to convey.

- Messages should **address the audience's interests and attract their attention**.
- Basic messages should be kept **simple**. Details can be added later if necessary.

Example: convert an objective to a set of messages for a specific audience (pastoralists)

To promote marketing of healthy animals during periods of normal rainfall when prices are good



A weak animal is not worth anything
A good animal means good money
You can earn ten times more by selling a few weeks earlier
Sell a few animals each month to pay for school fees

Match your messages to your audience and objectives

You should make sure that your message matches your audience and your objectives. Specifically:

- **Match the language and style to your audience**
For example, don't write in a scientific style for farmers
- **Don't tell the audience something they already know**
(unless you use it as a basis for telling them something new)
- **Give the audience information they can use**

For example: Don't tell farmers that they must control soil erosion. Instead (or as well), tell them how to stop a gully from forming on their land. Don't ask people to do something impossible (like "save the world"). Instead, tell them something they can do (like "write a letter to your member of parliament" or "donate to organization XYZ").

Messages that move your audience

You must find a way to **move your audience**, pushing them to take action.

Remember that you want to cause change...

Imagine that you want to raise money from individuals for your school farm. Your message will tell them how the children are growing their own vegetables and will not give them statistics about poverty and child malnutrition.

Identify some good stories about how people faced a problem is more motivating than just providing information.

Other than identifying good stories, there are other ways to **move your audience**:

➤ **Create a snappy slogan**

Make it short and memorable, and use it in all your publicity materials (remember the value of repetition).

➤ **Use good presentations**

That means good visual design, good audio and visuals, and clear and interesting graphics.

Don't make your materials too slick and glossy, though: people may think you're spending too much on communication and not enough on the activity itself.

➤ **Tie your message to something that people can relate to**

For example: "Imagine if you had to send your own children to school each morning hungry..."

➤ **Give the audience something to do**

For example: "One euro can buy seeds for a vegetable plot for a whole class – here's how to donate..."

Food security can be a highly technical field. But most of our audiences do not understand and are not interested in complex details. They need simple information that is **clear** and **easy to understand**.

A good exercise is to take a complicated piece of text and to try to translate it into simpler language for different audiences.

Example: take a complicated piece of text and to try to translate it into simpler language for different audiences.

Original text (complicated)

The major challenge to food security in Africa is its underdeveloped agricultural sector that is characterized by over-reliance on primary agriculture, low fertility soils, minimal use of external farm inputs, environmental degradation, significant food crop loss both pre- and post- harvest, minimal value addition and product differentiation, and inadequate food storage and preservation that result in significant commodity price fluctuation.

Simpler text

In Africa, the major challenge to food security is the underdeveloped agricultural sector. Many people earn their income from farming. Soils are poor, farmers use little fertilizer or other inputs, and soil erosion is common. Farmers lose much of their crops to pests and diseases, either before or after the harvest. They add little value to the crop (for example by grading or processing it), and cannot store the crop, so are forced to sell it straight after harvest when prices are low.

Even simpler text

Farming problems mean that many Africans go hungry. Many people cannot grow enough to eat or sell. The soils are poor, heavy rain washes the soil away, and insects attack the crops. Many farmers cannot afford to buy fertilizers. They get low prices because they sell their crop straight away. They would earn more if they processed it, or packaged it ready for sale.

Note that there are slight variations in meaning between the three versions. The best version to use will depend on the audience.

Summary

Your **communication objectives** should be related to your audiences' information interests and needs as well as match the project objectives.

It's important to formulate the objectives correctly in order to better focus on, monitor and evaluate your communication activities.

For each of your objectives and each of your audiences, you should then develop the **messages** you want to convey.

Your messages should address the audience's interests and attract their attention.

It is important that you provide simple information that is clear and **easy to understand**.

By defining your communication objectives and the messages you want to convey to your audiences, you have completed the second and third stages in the process of designing a communication strategy.

Annex I: Tips for developing messages that move

Just providing information is not enough to cause change. You must find a way to move your audience. Here are some ideas of how to do this:

Tip	Examples and questions
Identify some good stories about how people faced a problem	If you want to raise money from individuals for your school farm, don't give them statistics about poverty and malnutrition. Instead, tell them how the children are growing their own vegetables
Create a snappy slogan	Make it short and memorable, and use it in all your publicity materials (remember the value of repetition)
Use good presentation	That means good visual design, good audio and visuals, and clear and interesting graphics. Don't make your materials too slick and glossy, though: people may think you're spending too much on communication and not enough on the activity itself
Tie your message to something that people can relate to	"Imagine if you had to send your own children to school each morning hungry..."
Give the audience something to do	"One euro can buy seeds for a vegetable plot for a whole class – here's how to donate..."

DESIGNING YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- 1.1 Identify and analyse your audiences
- 1.2 Define your communication objectives and messages
- 1.3 Select the best channels for presenting your information
- 1.4 Plan and evaluate your communication activities



1.3

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the key characteristics of various communication channels; and
- identify criteria for selecting the most appropriate channels for a specific audience.

Introduction

The first step in designing a communication strategy for a project promoting food security is to identify and analyse your audience. Then communication objective for each audience has to be developed and converted into messages.

Steps in designing a communication strategy:

- Identify and analyse your audiences
- Define your communication objectives
- Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences
- **Select the channels to use**
- Create a communication workplan
- Evaluate your communication activities

This lesson looks at the fourth element: **Select the channels for presenting your information.**

Communication channels

.....
A communication channel is a method of getting a message to an audience.
.....

There are many ways of doing this. Here are some possible communication channels:

- via a radio or TV programme
- on a poster
- on the packaging of a product
- by letter or email
- in a phone call
- as part of a training course or meeting

The word “**media**” is often used to mean the same thing as a communication channel, but the mass media (newspapers, television, radio, etc.) are only one type of media.

There are many ways of classifying **communication channels**. One of them is based on the size of the audience they can serve:

- **Large Audiences:** mass media, print, outdoor
- **Medium-sized Audiences:** electronic and small media
- **Small Audiences:** group, one-on-one

Communication channels with large audiences

Communication channels with large audiences include:

➤ **Mass media**

Radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, music, cinema and drama tend to reach audiences mainly in **urban areas**. However, these communication channels are good for **reaching illiterate audiences** and those with minimal education.

Mass media convey **short-lived information** (e.g. there is the risk of listeners missing a radio programme) and are professionally managed by **journalists and editors**, so your project does not control what appears.

You need to prepare information in a **form** that mass media can use, and the product (e.g. a professional-looking video for TV broadcast) can be **expensive to produce**.

➤ **Print media**

Books, brochures, pamphlets, calendars, diaries, newsletters and information sheets can be produced **by the project alone** and can convey **fairly long-lived** information, since people can keep them to read later. However, they can reach **fewer people** than mass media, they depend on **literacy** and distributing them to the audience can be a problem.

Print media does not allow interaction with the audience.

➤ **Outdoor**

Banners, billboards, signboards, roadside advertisements and loudspeakers provide **high visibility** and are good for raising awareness. However, they can carry only a small amount of information (e.g. a slogan) and have a **limited lifespan**.

Communication channels for medium-sized audiences

Channels with medium-sized audiences include:

► Electronic media

Computers, internet, CD-ROMs, email, chatting, social networking media, telephones and SMS offer a wide variety of possibilities. They are developing very quickly. Their audience is limited by their access, they can allow **interactivity** and reach audiences that are **dispersed** – all over the world. Mobile phones are becoming very widespread, even in rural areas. Electronic media can also **support other media** (e.g. putting reports online).

► Small media

Photos, notice boards, certificates, displays, exhibits, flip charts, logos, t-shirts, hats, badges and buttons are easy to **combine with group channels** (e.g. using a flip chart during a training session). They can carry only a small amount of information (e.g. a slogan or announcement).

Communication channels for small audiences

Communication channels with small audiences include:

► Group channels

Training, meetings, field visits, demonstrations, participatory appraisal, drama, street theatre, speeches, sermons and video presentations are effective, especially for **practical demonstrations**. They allow audience **feedback**, since people can ask questions and comment, and can stimulate **discussion** among audience members. Group channels tend to be **expensive per person reached** (you may need to pay for facilities and accommodation) and require **expert staff** to present and answer questions.

► One-on-one channels

Letters, memos, meetings (formal, informal), phone calls and email can be very effective for **very small audiences**. They allow audience **feedback** and discussion and can be **personalized** to suit individual audience members. These channels are very **time-consuming**.

Audience size

Summarizing the characteristics of the various communication channels...

Channels with large audiences are:

- cheap per person reached
- good for raising awareness and increasing knowledge

Channels with small audiences are:

- expensive per person reached
- effective in changing the behaviour of individuals
- easy to target to specific audiences
- allow feedback or discussion

Choosing a channel

To choose among different channels, three different criteria should be applied:

1. The audience

Different channels can be used to reach different **audiences**.

Well-educated audiences need printed, technical information they can refer to, so a written report is most appropriate for them. Illiterate audiences need to see things and try things out, this can be done through a demonstration. Audiences that need to see how things work need more technical details: a training course is a good way to do this.

Some audiences, such as journalists, need pre-packaged information in a form they can use immediately: a press release is appropriate.

.....
Some channels may be suitable for more than one audience, for example, a field visit may be useful for both donors and journalists.
.....

2. The messages you want to convey

The channel has to match the message. For example, if you need to convey detailed technical information, radio is probably not the best channel as it is hard for the audience to remember technical details.

Detailed and technical information may need several pages of explanation, so a manual may be the best choice: readers can always go back to the manual later to check on the details.

In the case of information that changes constantly, for example market prices, an SMS service (or perhaps a regular radio programme) is a good way to reach users.

For short and “to the point” information, for example a summary of project activities, the best channel is a project brief. Most people find it easiest to learn how to do something by watching, trying it out themselves, and asking questions. A training course or demonstration makes this possible.



Several combinations of messages and channels are possible.



3. The cost-effectiveness of different channels

When you have a choice among several different channels there is a way of comparing the **cost-effectiveness** of different communication channels.

First, list the **possible channels** you are considering for specific audiences (for example, radio, TV, newspaper, meetings, training course). Then, for each channel, make the following estimates:

Steps	
A	Estimate how many audience members your message would reach if you used that channel
B	Estimate how much it would cost to create and deliver a message using that channel. Remember to include your own staff costs
C	Calculate the cost of reaching one person : $C = B/A$
D	Estimate how effective the channel is (think of a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting as 100, so a score of 10 is one-tenth as effective as this)
E	Divide the effectiveness score by the cost of reaching one person: $E = D/C$. This is the cost-effectiveness score for that channel

The higher the cost-effectiveness score, the more attractive the channel is.

The results of this calculation depend very much on the estimates of audience size, cost and effectiveness that you put in. Try to be as realistic as possible.



Estimating the cost-effectiveness of different channels

Example

Steps		Training course	Radio
A	Estimate how many audience members your message would reach if you use that channel	20 people	500,000 people
B	Estimate how much it would cost to create and deliver a message using that channel. Remember to include your own staff costs	Training course delivery: \$1,000	Programme production: \$5,000 Broadcast fee: \$5,000 Total: \$10,000
C	Calculate the cost of reaching one person : $C = B/A$	$\$1,000 / 20 = \50 per person	$\$10,000 / 500,000 = \0.02 per person
D	Estimate how effective the channel is (think of a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting as 100, so a score of 10 is one-tenth as effective as this)	80	1
E	Divide the effectiveness score by the cost of reaching one person: $E = D/C$. This is the cost-effectiveness score for that channel	$80 / \$50 = 1.6$	$1 / \$0.02 = 50$

In this case a training course has a score of 1.6, while radio scores 50, so it is better to invest in radio.

Once you have identified the most cost-effective way to reach your audience, it is unwise to spend the entire communication budget on designing and producing content for the chosen channel. Some communication funds should be used to monitor and evaluate the communication campaign to make sure it is effective.

Repetition and combining channels

Channels are not perfect substitutes for each other. A radio programme, for example, cannot impart the same skills as a well-conducted training course. If one channel does not reach an audience, perhaps a different one will.

It is better to **use a mix of several channels** rather than putting all the resources into a single one. Different channels reinforce each other. Copy ideas from advertising: it uses several different channels (TV advertisements, radio, magazines, billboards, labels on the product itself) in order to reach potential customers.

Repeating messages, perhaps in slightly different ways, is one way to get your audience to remember them. It may not be enough to transmit your message just once. People may not notice it the first time. Even if they notice it, they may not think it is important, or they may not remember it.

Deciding how to get your messages to your audience

When selecting your channels, make sure you are realistic about:

► time

Some messages can be produced very quickly (an update to a website or a live interview goes out immediately), but some require months of preparation (setting up a crop-demonstration plot, publishing a book, holding a training course).

Do you have the time needed? Can the message wait that long? Make sure that you allow enough time for the inevitable delays in production.

► equipment and skills

Producing some types of information materials (such as a broadcast-quality video) takes specialist equipment or skills. Do you have the right staff or equipment? Can you hire an outsider to take on the task?

► funds

Make sure you have the funds to pay not only for production, but also for distribution. If you make a video, will you have to pay the TV station to broadcast it? Will you have to pay people to attend a training course?

► distribution system

Make sure that you can get your message to the audience. If you produce printed materials, how are you going to distribute them? Do you have a list of addresses? Will your radio programme be broadcast at the right time of day when your audience is listening? How can you persuade people to put up the posters you give them?

Summary

There are many ways of classifying **communication channels**. One of them is based on the size of the audience they can serve: large, medium-sized and small audiences.

In general, channels with **large audiences** tend to be cheaper per person reached and are good for raising awareness.

Channels with **smaller audiences** are more expensive per person reached, but they tend to be more effective in addressing specific audiences and changing their attitudes and behaviour.

The **choice** of the communication channels should be based on the audience, the **message** that you want to convey, and the **cost-effectiveness** of the channel.

Repeating your message and **using a mix** of several communication channels can help your message actually reach your audience.

By defining the channels for presenting your information, you have completed the fourth stage in the process of designing a communication strategy.

Annex I: Communication channels classified by audiences

There are many ways of classifying communication channels. Here is one.

Note that the categories overlap: some channels fall into more than one category.

Channels	Examples	Characteristics
Large audiences		
Mass media	Radio TV Newspapers Magazines Music Cinema Drama	Can reach very large audiences but tend to have low effectiveness. Audiences tend to be mainly in urban areas, not the poorest people. Short-lived (e.g. risk of listeners missing a radio programme). Professionally managed by journalists and editors – so your project does not control what appears. Need to prepare information in a form that mass media can use. Can be expensive to produce (e.g. a professional-looking video for TV broadcast). Radio, TV, music, cinema and drama: good for reaching illiterate audiences and those with minimal education.
Print	Books Brochures Pamphlets Calendars Diaries Newsletters Information sheets	Can be produced by the project alone. Fairly long-lived (people can store them to read later). Depend on literacy. Distribution to the audience can be a problem. Can reach fewer people than mass media. Do not allow interaction with the audience.
Outdoor	Banners Billboards Signboards Roadside advertisements Loudspeakers	High visibility, good for raising awareness. Can carry only a small amount of information (e.g. a slogan). Limited lifespan.

Medium-sized audiences

Electronic	Computers Internet CD-ROMs Email Chatting Social networking media Telephones SMS	Audience can be very dispersed – all over the world Wide variety of possibilities, developing very quickly Audience limited by access to computers and skills Can support other media (eg, putting reports online) Can allow interactivity. Mobile phones becoming very widespread, even in rural areas.
Small media	Photos Notice boards Certificates Displays, exhibits Flip charts Logos T-shirts, hats Badges, buttons	Easy to combine with group channels (eg, use a flip chart during a training session). Can carry only a small amount of information (eg, a slogan or announcement).

Small audiences

Group	Training Meetings Field visits Demonstrations Participatory appraisal Drama, street theatre Speeches, sermons Video Presentations	Effective, especially for practical demonstrations Allow audience feedback (people can ask questions and comment). Stimulate discussion among audience members Tend to be expensive (may need to pay for facilities and accommodation). Require expert staff to present and answer questions.
One-on-one	Letters Memos Meetings (formal, informal) Phone calls Email	Can be very effective. Very small audiences. Possible to personalize to suit individual audience members. Very time-consuming. Allow audience feedback and discussion.

Annex II: Web2 and social media

Introduction

The Web offers new ways to interact with other people online and publish information with free, easy to use tools. **Web 2.0** is a term that people loosely apply to these web-based tools, which are often called “**social media**”.

Social media allow organizations and communities to maintain small group communications even when they are geographically distributed.

They can also give you potential access to a massive, international audience.

Tools for publishing content

Social media tools include tools that make it easy to publish content which can be delivered to your audience in a variety of formats (via web browser, as e-mail messages, mobile text messaging, and even audio files for radio broadcasting).

- E-newsletters allows you to send e-mail regularly to a group of subscribers.
- Blogging tools are some of the most accessible and easiest to use of these tools. They allow you to have visibility and a presence on the web.
- Microblogging allows you to post immediate and short messages to a group of subscribers.
- Podcasts allow you to distribute content in form of easy-to-produce audio files.
- Feeds provide your subscribers with up to date content the moment you post it on the web.

E-newsletters

A useful alternative to newsletters, newspapers and other printed materials that get issued on regular basis are e-newsletters or e-bulletins.

E-newsletters are e-mail messages that:

- provide information focused on a specific topic; and
- are sent to all addresses on a subscriber list.

People with an interest in the topic can subscribe to an e-newsletter and automatically receive it whenever it is sent out.

E-newsletters can also be used to promote and support content that you are publishing online.

Blogs

A blog or weblog is an easily created web page usually made up of postings of text, images or multimedia posted in chronological order with the newest content at the top of the page.

Blogs were originally created as public online “journals” since they can be frequently updated and are intended for general public consumption.

Soon not only individuals but also groups and organizations were also publishing blogs as a periodical outlet for their news and information.

Some commonly used blogging services include Blogger and Wordpress. According to WordPress.com, most blogs contain the following elements:

- a main content area with articles listed chronologically, newest on top (often, the articles are organized into categories);
- an archive of older articles;
- a way for people to leave comments about the articles;
- a list of links to other related sites, sometimes called a “blogroll”;
- one or more feeds such as RSS, Atom or RDF files.

Microblogs

Microblogging is a more recent form of blogging that allows the user to post short text updates via web browser, instant message, e-mail or mobile text messaging.

These short updates let others know of your “status” at the time. So instead of a more formal posting, you post a stream of short messages over the course of a day or week.

Twitter is a very popular micro-blogging service. It is a website which enables its users to send and read other users’ messages called tweets. Tweets are text-based posts displayed on the user’s profile page. Users may subscribe to other users’ tweets - this is known as following and subscribers are known as followers.

Services such as Tweet Deck allow you to connect with your contacts across different services such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and more, so that you can update your status and post messages in all these services simultaneously. They also allow you to find communication of others in your area of interest.

Podcasts

Podcasts are audio files (such as MP3 or .wav formatted) which can be downloaded to a compatible digital audio player or a computer.

Podcasting is an affordable way to produce audio content, almost as a “new generation” radio show. Audio can bridge literacy gaps, and the relatively small file sizes are easier in low bandwidth situations than video files.

The digital content can also be broadcast via community radio where there is no internet connectivity, making this a **good medium to bridge online and offline audiences**.

Feeds

Most web 2.0 and social networking services give their users the ability to subscribe to their content by **RSS or XML feeds**.

Instead of constantly visiting a website to check for updates, users can subscribe to a content feed and get the new content delivered to their computer **at the time of publication**.

Feeds can be used to:

- provide your subscribers with up to date content the moment you post it on the web;
- exchange information and news with other websites and services, and keep your site always up to date;
- increase the number of channels for your content that can be now seen not only on your website but by email and mobile devices.

DESIGNING YOUR COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- 1.1 Identify and analyse your audiences
- 1.2 Define your communication objectives and messages
- 1.3 Select the best channels for presenting your information
- 1.4 Plan and evaluate your communication activities

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- combine the elements into a communication strategy;
- identify the elements of an annual workplan based on the communication strategy; and
- identify ways to evaluate your communication activities.

Introduction

To design a communication strategy for a project promoting food security, it is necessary to identify and analyse your **audiences**, decide on **objectives** and **messages** and choose which communication **channels** to use.

All these elements should be converted into a **full communication strategy**.

Steps in designing a communication strategy:

- Identify and analyse your audiences
- Define your communication objectives
- Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences
- Select the channels to use

➤ Create a communication workplan

➤ Evaluate your communication activities

This lesson looks at the last two elements: **Create a communication workplan** and **Evaluate your communication activities**.

Creating your communication strategy

A **full communication strategy** will:

- identify and prioritize your audiences;
- state your objectives for communicating with each audience;
- define the messages you wish to convey to them; then
- say which channels you will use to reach them.

Example: set of decisions about a communication strategy

Channels	We will do a series of radio programmes
Objectives	We will focus on helping pastoralists plan for drought
Workplan	We will hire a radio production specialist to help us produce the programmes
Strategy	We will back up the radio programmes with advice from field staff
Audience	We need to reach pastoralists and livestock traders
Messages	We will try to persuade people to sell their livestock before the drought

It's a good idea to **write down your communication strategy**, even if you work in a very small organization. That way you have a document that your boss can sign off on (and give you a budget for!). You also have a document to refer to periodically. Much communication work consists of "putting out fires" – responding to urgent needs. If you do not have a written strategy, it can be easy to forget the non-urgent (but perhaps more important) activities.

A communication strategy does not have to be a detailed document. Depending on the nature of your project, 10–30 pages are probably enough.

Creating an annual workplan

You can now turn your strategy into a **work plan** for the **first year**.

The work plan should specify these items:

- **The channels you will use for each audience**
For example: Press releases, video, annual report, newsletter, website...
- **The number of outputs planned for the year**
How many press releases, how many videos...
- **A calendar of activities**
When each output should be ready, and a timetable for producing each item
- **Who is responsible for producing each item**
Existing staff, part-timers, or contractors

► **The budget**

How much money is available for each item

It is necessary to be sure there is enough leeway in the plan to allow for the delays, crises and extra work that always occur. It's a good idea to keep 10% of the budget and time in reserve for such items. Be sure to get your boss's approval for the plan.

Evaluating your strategy

Evaluating your communication activities is a very important step in the overall communication process.

Your evaluation should be based on the achievement of the communication objectives you defined earlier. You will need to work out **indicators** for these objectives, as well as finding ways to measure them.

Here are some suggestions:

- number of people attending training courses;
- number of people subscribing to an SMS service (the phone company should be able to tell you this);
- number of visitors to a website or field day; and
- number of cattle sold (the market administration should keep records).

Ask your project's monitoring and evaluation officer to help evaluate the communication activities. You may be able to build communication into the project's overall monitoring and evaluation effort.

If you target the **mass media**, you should keep track of how often your project and its work are mentioned.

These are some ways of keeping track:

- Subscribe to the main newspapers in your area and keep a file of clippings.
- Ask other people to send clippings to you that mention your project or the area you are working in.
- Ask journalists who interview project staff to send you copies of their stories.
- Ask radio and TV reporters to tell you when a programme is being broadcast. Make a recording if possible.
- Subscribe to a web alert service so you know which websites link to yours.

This monitoring may alert you to the need to take urgent action. For example, if a negative news story appears about your project, you may need to respond to it.

How to find out which websites link to your website

Type your website address into a **search engine** such as:

- Google, www.google.com
- Bing, www.bing.com
- Yahoo, www.yahoo.com

Check incoming links using one of these services:

- Google Alerts www.google.com/alerts/
- Yahoo Site Explorer, <http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/>
- Backlinkwatch, <http://www.backlinkwatch.com/>

If you have a **blog**, enable the **backlinks** setting.

Audience members (and people who are not in your main audiences) may give you **feedback about the project**.

- If you produce a newsletter, encourage readers to write to you, and consider including a feedback form.
- Make sure visitors to the project website can contact you via a feedback form, by leaving comments on the site, or via email.
- Keep a record of letters and emails you receive in response to communication activities.
- Keep notes of informal feedback you receive from audience members. Ask your colleagues to tell you about feedback they receive.

You may decide you need to do an **audience survey** to get the information you need. This can be done formally or informally.

Informal Survey:

- Go out **periodically** and meet members of your audience.
- Find out whether they have received information from the project, and if so, what they did as a result.
- See if you can spot evidence that they have received and used your information.

Formal Survey:

- Consider doing a formal survey of an audience's knowledge, attitudes and practice.
- Decide whether a formal **questionnaire** is appropriate, or whether a **participatory appraisal** or series of **focus groups** would be better.

Using monitoring and evaluation data

Once you have collected your data, you need to **analyse** it to see:

- if your messages reached the audience;
- if the messages resulted in changes in knowledge, attitudes or behaviour; and
- what changes are needed to increase the effectiveness of the communication effort.

Then you can revise your communication work plan – and perhaps your strategy.

Summary

A **full communication strategy** will identify and prioritize your audiences, state your objectives for communicating with each audience, define the messages you wish to convey to them, then say which channels you will use to reach them.

It's a good idea to write down your communication strategy, before turning it into a **work plan** for the **first year**.

Evaluating your communication activities is a very important step in the overall communication process.

Once you have collected your data, you need to **analyse** it to see if you have achieved the communication objectives you defined earlier. This will help you to understand what changes are needed to increase the effectiveness of the communication effort.

By analyzing the data you have collected and, eventually, by revising your communication work plan, you have completed the process of designing a communication strategy.

Annex I: Outline of a Communication Strategy

Northeastern Province Food Security Project

Sample of text	Comments
<p>Introduction</p> <p>The Northeastern Food Security Project aims at improving the food security of 100,000 pastoralists in the drought-prone Northeastern Province. It does this by promoting the sale of cattle by pastoralists during periods of normal rainfall so they have income that can carry them over the drought.</p> <p>The project needs to develop strong communication linkages with pastoralists and with individuals and organizations that support them.</p>	<p>The Introduction should give the background and a summary of the project objectives and strategy. It should show why a communication strategy is necessary and how it can help the project achieve its goals.</p>
<p>Major audiences</p> <p>The Project has five main audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoralists • Livestock traders • Extension workers, other projects and organizations working on food security in the province • Donors • Policymakers <p>We will deal with each of these audiences in turn.</p>	<p>This section should list each of the main audiences you have identified.</p>
<p>Pastoralists</p> <p>The 100,000 pastoralists in the province are scattered over an area of 50,000 km². They keep herds of camels, cattle, sheep and goats, and are highly mobile. Many are illiterate...</p>	<p>For the first audience, give the information you have gathered about their characteristics: their number, location, educational levels, language, background, organizational affiliations, livelihood and employment, and existing knowledge about your subject.</p>
<p>The pastoralists try to maintain large herds as a store of wealth. They are often reluctant to sell their animals during periods of good rainfall when prices are good; during a drought, animals become weak and prices fall as large numbers come into the market.</p> <p>They currently have few sources of information other than contacts with other pastoralists (often at watering points or markets) and traders. Some have radios and mobile phones. Their main information needs are current livestock prices, the location of trading opportunities, and the availability of veterinary treatments.</p>	<p>Then describe their current attitudes and practice, their information sources and needs.</p>

<p>The project aims at:</p> <p>Knowledge: Teaching 5,000 pastoralists in the Northeastern Province by December 2012 how to get the latest cattle prices via mobile phones.</p> <p>Attitudes: Persuading 1,000 pastoralists that they would be better off selling healthy cattle when prices are good, rather than waiting until a drought.</p> <p>Practice: Increasing the number of healthy cattle sold during periods of normal rainfall by 10,000 a year by December 2012.</p>	<p>Then describe your communication objectives (in terms of knowledge, attitudes and practice) for this audience.</p>
<p>Key messages include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send an SMS to 0123 456789 to get the latest cattle prices • A weak animal is not worth anything • A good animal means good money • You can earn ten times more by selling a few weeks earlier • Sell a few animals each month to pay for school fees 	<p>List the messages that you hope to deliver.</p>
<p>The project will use a combination of short radio broadcasts, supported by informal communication via extension staff and traders, and simple brochures in the local language.</p>	<p>Describe the communication channels you plan to use.</p>
<p>Livestock traders...</p> <p>Extension workers, other projects and organizations...</p> <p>Donors...</p> <p>Policymakers...</p>	<p>Then go on to each of the other audiences and describe a similar set of information.</p>
<p>Workplan</p> <p>February–January: 5-minute weekly radio broadcasts with a combination of price and weather information, along with persuasive messages about livestock sales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 52 broadcasts x \$200 = \$10,400 <p>January–February: Training for extension workers and staff from other organizations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 courses x \$10,000 = \$30,000 <p>February: Brochures about SMS market information service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,000 copies x \$0.10 = \$500 	<p>Finally, outline your communication workplan and budget.</p>

Annex II: Elements of a Communication Strategy

Characteristic	Question	Analysis
Name of audience:		
Audience analysis		
Number	How many people (or organizations) are there?	
Location	Where are they located?	
Education	What type of education do they have? In what subjects?	
Language	What languages do they speak?	
Background	Where do they come from? What are they like?	
Organization	Do they belong to an organization?	
Livelihood and employment	How do they earn a living? What type of work do they do? What are their job responsibilities?	
Existing knowledge	What do they know about food security?	
Existing attitudes	What do they think about it?	
Current practice	What do they do about it?	
Information sources	Where do they currently get information? What media do they use?	
Information needs	What types of information do they need?	
Objectives, messages, channels analysis		
Objectives	What do you want them to do?	
Messages	What you want to tell them?	
Communication channels	How best to communicate with them?	

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

2.1 Approaching the media

2.2 Techniques for working with the media

2.1

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the different types of mass media;
- understand advantages and disadvantages of using mass media in your communication strategy;
- understand the media needs; and
- apply guidelines on maintaining a relationship with journalists.

Introduction

How can you use the **mass media** as part of your communication strategy?

In this lesson you will see what mass media are and how they can be used to convey information related to food security according to users' needs.

You will also learn how to provide your content to the media and keep a good relationship with media professionals.

What are the mass media?

Radio

International radio	A few broadcasters have worldwide coverage and are listened to widely. Examples: BBC World Service, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle.
National radio	Stations with nationwide coverage, often government-controlled. Some broadcast different styles of music, entertainment, news etc. on different stations.
Local radio	Stations with local coverage, often broadcast on FM frequencies (which can cover only a small area). Government or commercially managed.
Community radio	Small-scale, community-controlled stations, often run by an NGO or church. They focus on community issues.

Television

International TV	Usually available only if the viewer has a satellite dish. A few broadcasters provide worldwide news coverage (e.g. BBC World Service, CNN, Al Jazeera)
National TV	Government or commercial. Stations focus on different things: news, entertainment, children, etc.
Local TV	Many stations broadcast a few hours of locally oriented programming each day

Performance

Film	Cinemas may show international or locally made movies. They may include advertising or announcements at the beginning or end of the movies. In many countries, small cinemas show rented videos.
Music	Live performances and recorded music are popular throughout the world. It is possible to use song lyrics to convey messages about health, farming and other food security-related issues.
Drama	Street theatre and local drama groups stage plays for local entertainment. Puppetry has a long tradition in some cultures.

Newspapers

International press	Large foreign newspapers can be very influential. Those with international coverage and circulation include the <i>Guardian</i> (UK), <i>Le Monde</i> (France), the <i>International Herald Tribune</i> (USA). News magazines include <i>Time</i> , <i>Newsweek</i> and the <i>Economist</i> .
National press	Newspapers and magazines that circulate within the country. Magazines may carry general news and current affairs, or may focus on specific topics (such as farming or health).
Local press	Local newspapers or newsletters are often produced by community organizations.

Websites

Media websites	Many media organizations also have websites that allow users to view content even after a programme has been broadcast or the newspaper printed. Some media websites offer different content from what is broadcast or printed (eg, www.bbc.co.uk).
Special-interest websites	These sites focus on a specific topic, such as agriculture or nutrition. There may be a printed equivalent (such as <i>Spore</i> , http://spore.cta.int/), or have no printed or broadcast equivalent (such as the <i>New Agriculturist</i> , www.new-ag.info).
Humanitarian, food security and early warning websites	Sites such as Relief Web (www.reliefweb.int), the Global Information and Early Warning System (www.fao.org/gIEWS), and (www.fews.net) provide timely, reliable and relevant humanitarian, food security and early warning information and analysis. These provide access to current and historical reports, news items and alerts, and make extensive use of maps and images. Information is often classified by various categories such as country or region, crisis or event, and by information format. Many of them include social media tools and some allow you to contribute your content.

Social Media

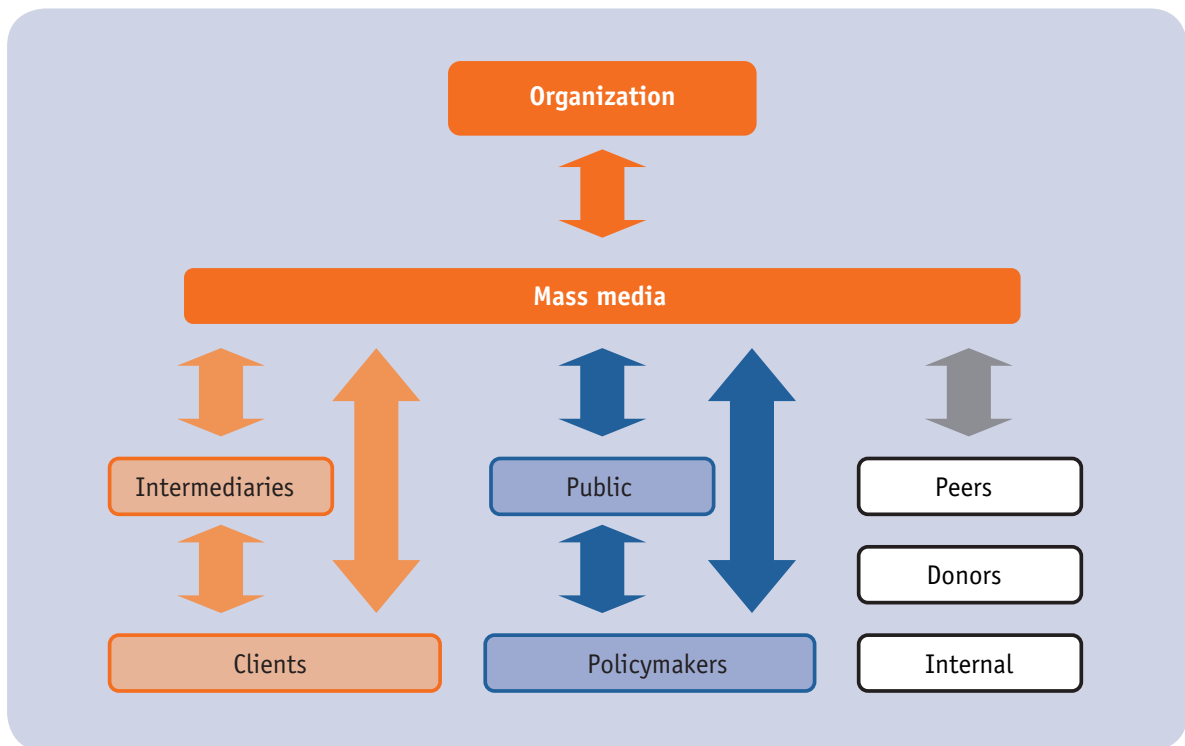
Blogs and micro-blogging	Blogs offer a convenient way to provide periodic updates on ongoing activities, and to keep people up-to-date on situations for which there is a continuous demand for new information. Micro-blogs provide a mechanism for continuous updates delivered over the web and by SMS. These can be used to transmit snippets of information as short updates from a cell phone. Micro-blogging has seen much use in providing real time field updates.
News feeds and e-newsletters	Newsfeeds provide a means for people to subscribe to automatic updates from your website or blog. A e-newsletter is an e-mail that is sent to your subscribed readers. Both can call attention to new alerts, capital reports and products.
Social Networking Sites	Social networking sites such as Facebook have gained in popularity over recent years. Many news outlets and groups are setting up social networking sites to develop their networks and to promote their activities and products.

Why work with the mass media?

The mass media act as important conduits and filters of information between your organization and its various audiences.

They may reach your audience both **directly** and **indirectly** - by reaching other people who then discuss your message with their friends.

How the mass media can help you reach your audiences



The mass media can reach **very large numbers of people**, at little or no cost to your organization.

The media are also good for **raising awareness and setting the agenda** on an issue. That makes them indispensable if you want to advocate a change in government policy or a widespread change in people's behaviour (for example, to persuade them to stop smoking).

For some audiences (such as scattered clients or the public in general), they may be the **only** way for you to communicate with them.

Advantages of mass media

Advantages	Comments
Large audience size	The media can reach very large numbers of people – far larger than the project could reach through other channels.
Low cost	The cost of distributing the message is generally borne by the media (and ultimately advertisers, readers or the government).
Awareness raising, agenda setting	The media are good at raising awareness and mobilizing public opinion on an issue, and at putting it on the political agenda.

Types of media content

Here are some media you might want to consider for food security information:

Content type	Description	How you could use it
All media (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, websites)		
News	Short, objective story about recent events	Produce a press release about a project initiative, or to give the project's view about a news event
Feature story	A longer, in-depth story, examining different aspects of an issue. Often prepared in collaboration with an expert source	Work with a journalist to produce an in-depth story about the issues your project deals with
Advertising	Paid content, usually used to promote a product or service	Announce a conference or job vacancy
Newspapers, magazines, websites		
Opinion piece	Article that gives someone's opinion (rather than trying to be objective)	Submit an article to the editor about an issue your project deals with
Column	A series of articles that appears regularly	Agree with an editor to submit articles regularly
Supplement	A special section focusing on a specific issue (such as farming or health). Often contains how-to information	Work with a journalist to write items for the next supplement Sponsor a special pull-out supplement on your topic
Radio, TV		
Documentary	Programme that investigates an issue in depth (equivalent to a feature story in a magazine)	Hire a production team to produce broadcast-quality programme
Magazine programme	Programme consisting of shorter segments, each focusing on a different topic	Arrange for your topic or project to be covered in one segment
Drama, soap opera	Entertainment programme used to carry a development message	Commission a special series of programmes, or negotiate for your topic to be included in an existing development soap opera
Talk show	Interview with one or more people about a subject	Arrange for an expert from your project to be interviewed
Public service announcement	Non-commercial advertising that is in the public interest	Promote a service or change in behaviour (e.g. growing vegetables in home-gardens to improve family nutrition)
Jingle	Short, catchy tunes or slogans used to promote an organization, product or service. In effect, a very short advertisement	Remind listeners about something (e.g. Eating fruit helps keep you healthy!)

Disadvantages of working with the mass media

The following are potential disadvantages in working with the mass media. Let's look at them and at some ways to overcome them.

Disadvantages	Comments	Ways to overcome disadvantages
Audience location and characteristics	Their audiences tend to be concentrated in urban areas, and they do not reach the poorest people.	Select those media that serve your audience. For example, radio (not newspapers) in remote rural areas.
Difficult to target	Because the media have such large audiences, it is difficult to target your information to a particular group.	Choose media that you know are more likely to reach your target audience. For example, choose community radio or a local newspaper rather than a national station. Put your message into the format that your audience prefers. For example, produce a radio soap opera (rather than a documentary), or a newspaper farm supplement (rather than aiming to get on the news pages).
Low effectiveness	The media are less effective than some other channels – especially compared to face-to-face communication. They tend to be not very effective at convincing people to change their behaviour.	Use mass media to raise awareness and to keep the issue in the audience's mind. Produce media that grab the audience's emotions .
Loss of control	Because the information goes through a filter of journalists and editors, you lose control over it. It may not appear at all. The story or programme may be oversimplified or inaccurate. It may be presented alongside an opposing view.	Produce information in a form that journalists can use (such as press releases). Offer to check facts before a story is broadcast or printed. Be prepared to counter contradictory views Consider paying to broadcast programmes or to print articles (as advertisements or "placed articles").
Short-lived messages	Newspapers tend to get thrown away the next day. And if someone misses a TV or radio programme, they miss your message.	Get radio and TV programmes repeated Record them to reuse (e.g., in training courses). Target longer-lived media (such as magazines).
Cost of production and distribution	Some types of media can be expensive – such as staging events or producing broadcast-quality video. You may have to pay radio and TV stations to broadcast your programme.	Balance cost against audience size : spending \$10,000 to produce a TV programme is cheap if it reaches 1 million people – \$0.01 per person!
Coverage may be negative	Most news is bad news – and it may be critical of your organization.	Maintain good relations with the media, and respond appropriately to negative coverage. Always be honest and open . Appoint one person or department to manage contacts with the media.

Ways to reach the media

You can provide information to the media in many different ways.

Method	Comments
Direct contact	Phone calls, emails or personal meetings with reporters or editors. They are a good way to alert the media to breaking news or to tell them about a forthcoming story. Be careful not to overuse these methods.
Field visit	A visit by one or more journalists to a project site. The project arranges interviews with clients and staff. It may pay for the journalists' transport.
Interview	A staff member of your organization gives an interview to a reporter, perhaps as an "expert".
Letter to the editor	Appear on a special page in newspapers. Use them to start or contribute to a debate, or to respond to or correct information that has appeared in the paper.
Placed article	An article (often a feature story) written by a staff member or a freelancer and provided exclusively to a newspaper or magazine.
News conference	A question-and-answer session with several journalists and one or more news sources or spokespersons.
Press kit	A packaged set of information and promotional materials about the project or organization. Often given to reporters before an event, news conference or field visit. Include contact names, contact details, areas of expertise and short biographies.
Press release	The standard way of getting information to the media. A press release is 1–2 pages of information, written in the same format as a news story.
Staged event	A newsworthy event such as a ceremony, charity walk, exhibition or publicity stunt, designed (among other things) to attract media attention.
Website	Make sure your project has a website, and keep it up to date. Provide information such as contact details, a description of the activities, and the most recent publications and press releases.
Social media	Social media such as blogs, micro-blogging, feeds, e-newsletters, can be used to provide your subscribers with up to date information and content.

How to work with the mass media

To maximize your chances of getting your story covered, you have to:

- understand the needs of the media, and
- be able to provide the information they need, when they need it, in the form they need it.







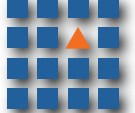
Each type of mass medium needs different types of information.

These media...	... need this type of information
News desks in newspapers and in radio and TV stations	Fresh news each day.
Magazines and documentary producers	Feature stories that go into a topic in depth.
Local radio stations and newspapers	Stories that affect and interest their own listeners and readers. There should be some local angle to the story – maybe a local person is involved, or the activity has local implications.
International media	Stories that have a wider interest outside a single country.
News agencies (AFP, Reuters, UPI, etc.)	High-interest stories. News agencies rewrite these stories and make them available to other news organizations.
Freelance reporters	High-interest stories. They make their living by writing and selling stories to media companies.

What makes news?

Here are some elements of a successful news story.

Make sure your news stories have at least two or three of these elements.

News value	Explanation	What to do
<p>Timeliness</p> 	<p>The story must be new. Old news is no longer news! (Note, though, that “new” means “new to the outside world”, not necessarily “new to your organization”).</p>	<p>Make sure your story is up to date. Relate your information to a current event (e.g. World Food Day). Put out farming information in the right season (e.g. information on seeds at planting time).</p>
<p>Interest</p> 	<p>If your story is boring, journalists will not report it, and people will not read or watch it.</p>	<p>Find an angle to show how your story relates to the audience. Find an interesting story, and tell it in an interesting way.</p>
<p>Audience fit</p> 	<p>Different groups have different interests. Young people are interested in different things from older people; men in different things from women.</p>	<p>Tailor your topic so it fits your target audience.</p>
<p>Proximity, relevance</p> 	<p>People are interested in what happens in their community. “Proximity” may be psychological – people feel close to other people they can identify with.</p>	<p>Find a local angle: your project has a site in the district, or perhaps a local person is involved.</p>
<p>Impact, significance</p> 	<p>The story should have major implications for the community, the country or the world.</p>	<p>Show why the story is important.</p>
<p>Conflict</p> 	<p>The conflict may be real (e.g. a fight over land) or metaphorical (a disagreement), or a fight against a threat (“the battle against hunger”).</p>	<p>Find elements of conflict in the story (without overdramatizing them).</p>
<p>Novelty, unusual angle</p> 	<p>Things that are new, weird or offbeat attract attention.</p>	<p>Highlight something new, odd or unusual.</p>

Making contact

How to make contact with the media? Simple: get their phone numbers, and call. Find out who is the editor or reporter in charge of your topic, and introduce yourself. Let the media know...

- Your organization or project exists
- What it does
- What the staff's expertise is
- Where you are
- How to contact you

For key local media, visit the media offices.

Once you know who to contact in each media organization, make a list of their names and contact details.

You can now send them press releases, invite them to events and field visits, and get in touch with them if you have newsworthy items.

Maintaining a relationship with the media

You and **journalists** need each other: you need journalists to get your stories into the media, and journalists need good, reliable sources of news and background information. It's important to cultivate good relations with journalists.

You should **keep in contact** with them and maintain mutual respect, trust and cooperation.

You should also provide your content **in time** and in the **form and language** they need.

Tips for maintaining a good relationship with journalists

- Give them a friendly welcome when they visit.
- Give journalists information in a **form and language they need**: send them a press release, not a technical report.
- **Respect deadlines**: call journalists in mid-morning, when they may have time to talk. Don't wait until late afternoon, when they will probably be fighting a deadline. And when a journalist calls, don't say "Come back next week, when we're not so busy".
- Add your media contacts to your **mailing list** for press releases, newsletters and annual reports. But do not flood the media with trivial or technical information that they cannot use.
- **Keep up with the news**: you may be called upon to comment on it.
- When a major story that touches your area of expertise hits the media, even if your organization has nothing to do with it, **offer your expertise** to help the media produce a better-informed story.
- If a story appears about your project, get in touch with the journalist to say "**Thank you**". Don't complain about minor errors.
- During the holiday season, send your media contacts a **greetings card** or message with good wishes.

When the media approach you...

Sometimes **journalists may approach you** for a story.

This may happen if something happens where your organization has expertise, such as a drought, a nutrition-related story, or a change in government policy on food imports.

You should always return journalists' phone calls **promptly**, and always **tell the truth**.

Most journalists are **generalists**: they probably are not experts in your topic. That means they need detailed **explanations**, and a lot of **help** to get technical information into a form that they – and their audiences – can understand.

You may also offer to check a story they have written for **technical accuracy**. If you do it, correct only the factual errors – not the opinions or story structure.

Press officer or media relations coordinator

You may want to appoint someone as **press officer** or **media relations coordinator** to provide information regularly to the media.

Give this person's phone number to your media contacts.

This person should have the information and expertise to be able to respond to most calls from journalists. He or she should be good in front of the camera or microphone, and should know which other staff members to contact for details.

He or she should know what the media are doing, the stories they are covering and how the media operate.

Because reporting deadlines are tight, he or she should be ready to field phone calls late at night.

If a **crisis** occurs in your organization (a scandal, a failure, criticism from a prominent politician), the media may want to report it.

Will my story appear?

A journalist cannot guarantee a story will actually appear in the evening news or next day's newspaper.

After the journalist writes a story, it is sent to an editor, who may change it, cut it, slant it, or kill it.

The story that appears may be very different from what you hoped for.

If the story contains errors...

- If the errors are minor, don't do anything. You are probably the only person to notice. Even if others notice, the errors are not important enough to matter.
- If there is a major error, consider contacting the journalist to point this out.
- If the error is very serious, contact the editor and ask for a correction.

If the story does not appear...

- Don't give up: only a small proportion of press releases ever make it into a newspaper or broadcast.
- Journalists often keep good story ideas on file and come back to them later.
- Journalists may remember you as a good source of information, and contact you in the future on another story.

Summary

The mass media are usually taken to include **newspapers, magazines, radio** and **television**. They may also include performing arts (**film, music, drama**). Many media organizations also run **websites**.

Different **types of content** may be considered to convey information related to food security. For example you may use news, feature stories or advertising.

Analysing **the way your audiences use the various media** is essential for communicating your information in the best way.

You can **provide your content to the media** in several ways. For example, through direct contact, interviews, news conferences, press releases, etc.

Understanding **media professionals' needs** and journalistic ethics is also important for maintaining a good collaboration with them.

Annex: Analysing your audience's use of the media and developing a media strategy: an example

Analysing **the way your audiences use the various media** is essential for communicating your information through the right media.

Example

Sonia works as a communication specialist for a food security project. She wants to use the mass media as part of her communication strategy.

She managed to get some questions about information sources and media use into the project's baseline survey. And she has visited the field several times and got to know some of the project's partners and clients. She's also familiar with the institutional and policy environment.

Here is her analysis about the use of mass media:

Audience	Analysis
Clients	The clients are poor and live in remote areas. They do not read newspapers or magazines. There is no electricity in their area, so they do not watch TV. The baseline survey found that some have radios , and they listen to the farming programme on one of the stations.
Intermediaries	The project aims at influencing various service providers: microfinance organizations, farm input suppliers, retailers, extension agents, and so on. Most of them are located in the towns where they do get newspapers and watch TV . They listen to the same radio programme as the clients.
Policymakers	Most work in government ministries in the national capital, or in the provincial administration. It's hard to get appointments with them. Amina knows that newspapers and television are important in setting the policy agenda. One of the project's goals is to persuade the government to change its policy on food security, so the project needs to make its voice heard.
The public	The public are not one of the project's major audiences, But the project's management want it to have a reasonably high public profile: they want the public to see the project as one of the leading food security organizations in the country. That means using newspapers and TV .
Peers	Amina's project is one of several organizations working on food security in the country. Amina wants to raise her project's profile among these organizations, and perhaps influence them to adopt some of its approaches. Most of the organizations have offices in the national capital, and the staff there read newspapers and watch TV .
Donors	Some of the project's donors are based in the national capital, where they read the national newspapers and watch TV . Others are outside the country and use the international media.
Internal	The project's field staff live in remote areas, but they sometimes listen to the radio or watch TV . The office staff in the capital read newspapers and watch the TV news in the evenings.

Sonia realizes that the mass media are not the main information channel between the project and most of its audiences. Other channels – printed materials, meetings, and so on – are more important. But the media can play an important supporting and reinforcing role. They are also useful for raising awareness about issues that the project thinks are important.

The project serves a large number of **clients**. It runs various field activities, training courses and demonstrations. However, these reach a relatively small number of people. To reach more people, the project must rely on two channels – intermediaries and the mass media.

The mass media are the **only** way Sonia's project can communicate directly with one audience: the **public**.

Sonia has developed her communication strategy for the mass media.

Sonia's mass media strategy

- The project will develop segments on growing food for broadcast on the **radio** farming programme.
- She will produce a **video** for broadcast on TV (project staff can also use this video in their training courses).
- It will promote two or three project staff as "experts" to be **interviewed** on radio and TV programmes.
- Sonia will produce occasional **press releases** for newspaper and TV journalists.
- She will invite journalists on **field visits** to view project activities and meet field staff and clients.
- She will take advantage of **outside events** such as World Food Day (16 October each year) to publicize aspects of food security.
- The project will also **stage events** (such as inviting prominent people to open a new water supply system) that will attract media coverage.
- Sonia will produce a **press kit** with information about the project, its work and the policy implications, contact names and details, plus the latest press releases. Amina will give this kit to visiting journalists. She will update it every few months.

She will make sure the **project website** is up-to-date: that is where journalists often go for information on what a project is doing and who to contact.

To convert this strategy into a workplan, Sonia estimates the budget, staff skills, equipment and time needed for these activities.

She also draws up a calendar showing when each activity will take place and how long it will take.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

2.1 Approaching the media

2.2 Techniques for working with the media



Learning objective

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify the main components and uses of press releases, news conferences, feature stories and interviews.

Introduction

The following are four common ways to provide content through the media:

- Press releases
- News conferences
- Feature stories
- Interview

This lesson will describe their main characteristics and how to deal with each of them.

Press releases

A **press release**, or **news release**, is a short, **1–2 page statement** written in the form of a news story.

Press releases are sent to the mass media – wire services, daily newspapers, magazines, radio or TV stations.

They are used for:

- reporting a **recent activity**;
- announcing a **future event**;
- announcing something new that may **interest people and influence them**; or
- providing **basic facts** that the media may use in reporting the story.

A press release contains information about a newsworthy activity, topic or event that the sender wants to have covered by the media.

It has a **maximum of 500 words** (2 pages, double-spaced).

Example of a press release

The Coast Development Authority is to increase the water supply and acreage under irrigation to boost food production.

Under the five-year strategic plan unveiled by the authority's managing director, Mr Nesbert Mangale, more than Sh10 billion will be required for projects to make the region self-sufficient in food.

Dr Mangale said food security would only become a reality through irrigation.

The agency intends to put 2,000 hectares under irrigation.

While the bulk of the funding is expected to come from the government, Dr Mangale said they planned to create a regional development trust fund.

This will help in mobilising resources in the region including co-funding from the Constituency Development Fund.

The 2008-2012 strategic plan laments that the region is poor despite its rich resources. Some 62 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

The recovery plan is, however, threatened by the degradation of water sources, which could cause negative social, economic and ecological impact.

With the recent climate change, the banks of Lumi, Tsavo, Voi, Mwatsama, Ndzovuni, Mwache Marere, Sabaki and Tana rivers are likely to bust their banks.

"The authority will develop projects to protect river banks and conserve soils, water and forests", Dr Mangale said.

The plan was launched by Regional Development minister Fred Gumo who urged the authority to come up with project proposals that included the input of key ministries.

He said funding from the Treasury depended on the involvement of ministries such as Water, Agriculture, and the Environment. The proposed projects include coastal and marine management, water supply and livestock development.

Source: *The Daily Nation*, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200908190884.html>

Structure of a press release

Press releases must be brief and accurate. Editors and reporters don't have time to dig for information, so the most important information should go upfront.

They should read like a newspaper news story: the most important information goes in the first paragraph. The supporting details come later.

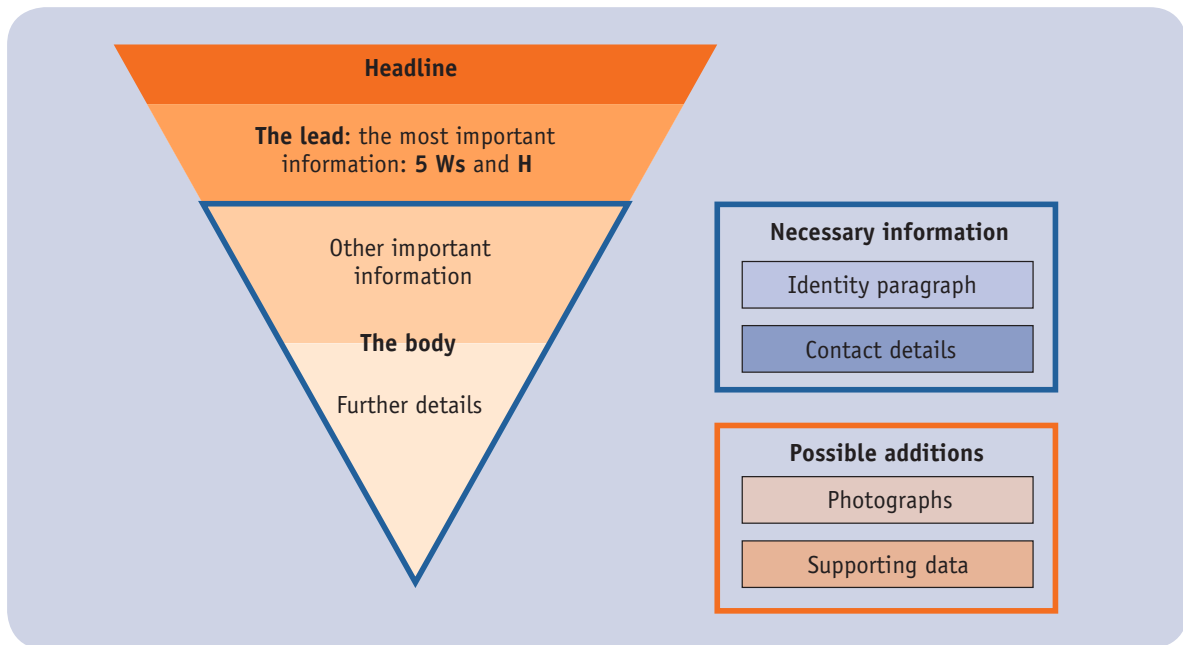
A press release contains the following elements:

- The headline or title
- The lead (the first paragraph)
- The body
- An identity paragraph
- Contact details

It may also contain:

- Photographs
- Supporting data

This style of writing is called an “**inverted pyramid**”, because it is like an upside-down pyramid.



Reasons for using an inverted pyramid structure

There are two reasons for this structure:

- **Readers tend to read headlines first, then the first paragraph.** If they find the story interesting, they then continue reading. By putting the main points right at the front, a newspaper can be sure the readers see them even if they stop reading immediately after.
- **Editors have only a limited amount of space on a page.** If there is not enough space for a complete story, the editor will cut off the bottom to make it fit. Any information there will be lost.

You should use the inverted pyramid style in news releases:

- **You save the editor work.** The editor can see the story quickly, and may decide to use the story with only a few changes. If your news release is not in inverted pyramid format, the editor may decide it is too much work to rewrite it in the right style.
- **You avoid errors.** If a lot of rewriting is needed, errors can creep in.

The following are some guidelines for writing various elements of a press release.

The headline

The **headline** should summarize the story in a **few words**.

It tells the reader what to expect in the story.

Many readers skim through newspapers reading only the headlines, so an attention-grabbing headline is important.

The headline might also be used to deliver your key message.

But remember, most of all, it should arouse the reader's curiosity.

Here are three styles of headlines and some examples:

Headline - Examples

Informational

- More money to promote good nutrition
- New pipes for the Northeastern Province
- Asian water reform urgent to prevent severe food shortage

Teasing

- Do Grenadans have the Caribbean's best diet?
- Climate change: A high price to pay

Cute

- Prime Minister goes bananas over new variety
- Trouble brewing for Colombia's coffee

It's probably easiest to write your headline last, after you have finished writing the rest of the press release.

The editor may use your headline, or (more likely) may change it.

The lead: the most important information

The lead is the first 1–2 sentences in the story.

It summarizes the story in a few words and tells the reader what the story is about. It should be short, but not too short.

News stories tend to have informational leads, which answer the **five Ws and the H**:

- **Who** is the story about?
- **What** happened?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen?

Here are three examples of informational leads.

Informational leads - Examples

Mobile phones are helping farmers in remote areas to source drought-tolerant seeds in a pilot project launched in Kenya.

What (yellow box) points to "Mobile phones are helping farmers"

Where (white box) points to "in remote areas"

Why (blue box) points to "to source drought-tolerant seeds"

Who (orange box) points to "in a pilot project"

When (grey box) points to "launched in Kenya"

notes:

- Who** - not included in the lead, but stated in next paragraph
- When** - a current activity (shown by verb "are helping")

Source: Spore, http://spore.cta.int/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&lang=en&id=952&catid=7

The body

The body of the press release contains **details of your story**.

Put these in a logical order, most important first, followed by progressively less important details.

Some do's and don'ts when writing:

DO's

Write short sentences and short paragraphs. In newspapers and on websites, paragraphs are often only one sentence long. Try reading out loud what you have written: if you find yourself stumbling over a sentence or having to take a breath in the middle, try to simplify your wording.

Write for a 14-year-old. Most newspapers are written so that an educated 14-year-old can understand them. Radio and TV programmes are even easier to understand. Rewrite any jargon in plain language, then get it approved by a specialist.

Microsoft Word has a useful feature, called "Readability statistics", that checks how easy your writing is to understand. Check Word's Help function to find out how to use it.

Make your point clearly, preferably in a short, memorable statement.

Give the evidence. Back up your points by providing the most important evidence, stated in a simple way.

Be honest and accurate. Quite apart from the ethical considerations, journalists are trained to cross-check "facts", so may well find out if your story is inaccurate.

Use quotes. Use real quotes (something that someone actually said) where possible. A useful trick is to "manufacture" quotes: put what you want to say in the mouth of a staff member, like this:

"Malnutrition rates among under-fives have fallen by half over the last three years", says Osman Farouk, the project director. "That shows the mothers' education programme is working."

Another trick is to use a member of your key target audience as your spokesperson. For example, a quote from a well respected policy maker praising your programme's work may hold more clout among other policy makers. Make sure to check manufactured quotes with the source first!

Provide human interest. Give people's names and positions (e.g., "project director" or "a farmer in village X"). If you do so, get their permission first – a journalist may want to interview them. A story might feature one or two people: often a staff member and a project client or beneficiary.

KIS MII. Keep It Simple, Make It Interesting!

DON'Ts

Do not give lots of details, or hedge your statements with many "ifs" and "buts".

Avoid jargon and abbreviations. Your audience will not understand them; nor will the journalist.

Do not use lots of numbers. Three or four figures are probably enough for a press release. If you must provide extra figures (for example, data on malnutrition in several provinces), put them in a table at the end so the journalists can choose the ones they want to use.

Do not use bullets or lists. Newspaper articles very rarely use them.

Do not mention too many people or organizations. Readers find lots of names confusing.

Don't make your project too prominent. Editors and journalists will ignore material they think is merely public relations for your project or organization. They want facts and objective information, not a promotional piece.

Press releases as announcements

A press release may be a simple **announcement** of a forthcoming event, such as a conference or book launch. Such press releases should include:

- The date, time and place of the event
- A description of the event
- Background information: why is the event taking place?
- Information about the host project or organization
- An invitation to attend
- Contact details for further information

If there is to be a speech or award made, the press release may contain a copy of the speech or details of the awardee. If this is to be kept secret until the event itself, mark the release clearly “Do not use before...” (and give the date and time).

Don't start with your Director's name: most editors will change this.

Using the right style

Many newspapers and magazines follow strict rules for spelling, punctuation, etc.

The most common style guides in English are:

- **The Associated Press stylebook** (US usage), <https://www.apstylebook.com/>
- **The Times online style guide** (British usage): http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools_and_services/specials/style_guide/
- **The Economist style guide** (British usage): <http://www.economist.com/research/styleguide/>

If you write a lot of press releases, you should find out what style your main newspaper and magazine contacts use, and follow their style.

Necessary information

Identity paragraph

At the end of each news release, you need to include a standard identity paragraph which describes your organization and what it does.

Avoid self-promotional phrases like “the leader in water management” or “the best-known advocate for land rights”.

A hypothetical organizational identity paragraph and contact details

The Northeastern Food Security Project operates in five districts of the Northeastern Province in Kenzania. Funded by the World Food Programme, the project helps local people build irrigation and domestic water supply systems, promotes home gardening, and provides education on nutrition and marketing.

Contact: Amina Hassan

Tel. +123-456 789

Email amina@nefsp.org

Website: www.nefsp.org

Contact details

This is where the journalist can contact you for more information. It should have the names, telephone numbers and email addresses of your organization's press officer and the staff members named in the release.

Possible additions

Photographs

If you have a suitable photograph, include it with the press release: it will increase the chances of the release being used, and of readers actually reading it.

Write a **caption** for the photograph, for example to name the people it shows and say where they are and what they are doing.

Photographs are usually sent **digitally**. They should be good enough quality (at least 300 dots per inch, dpi), or at least 3 megapixels for a standard-sized photo. Send photos as separate files, not embedded in a Microsoft Word document (which can make them impossible to convert into the right format).

If you do not have a photo that is good enough, **don't use one**.

Supporting details

If you have a technical subject or one that uses a lot of numbers, consider providing these details in a separate **fact sheet**, perhaps as a table or graph.

For example, you might provide a table of malnutrition rates in each province in the country. The journalists in each province can then use the numbers for their area.

Logistics of press releases

You can **distribute press releases** in various ways. Here are six:

- As hardcopies (printed double spaced, on your organization's letterhead), sent to media offices by post
- As hardcopies given to journalists at events or as part of a press kit
- Faxed to a media office
- Emailed to a media office
- Uploaded onto your website
- Distributed via email or web-based networks.

.....

Ask your media contacts how they want to receive press releases from you – by mail, fax or email, and to what address?

.....

News conferences

At a **news conference**, or **press conference**, you invite a group of journalists to hear a prepared statement and ask questions.

There may be one or two speakers (often the organization's director or a specialist on a particular subject), or a panel.

You should consider calling a news conference:

- **To make important announcements**, such as a technological breakthrough, a major expansion, or a merger with another organization.
- **To respond to criticism** that has appeared in the media.
- **To make high-profile statements**, for example at an international conference being covered by the media.

There are two main reasons for holding a news conference:

- **To save time**: you can answer a lot of questions at the same time and avoid many individual phone calls.
 - **To attract media attention** to something that journalists were not interested in before.
-

News conferences can be very useful. But they can also be **difficult** and **risky**.

What if no one attends? What if a journalist asks aggressive questions about something you don't want to talk about?

You need to plan news conferences and manage them carefully.

You should **think like a media editor**. Ask yourself:

- Why should I send a reporter?
- What kind of story will the reporter get?

If the answers are not positive, then don't call a news conference.

A number of activities must be done **before, during and after a news conference**. The following are some guidelines for managing each of these stages.

Before the news conference

Plan carefully

You can hold a news conference indoors or outside. If the location is outdoors, make sure there is an alternative if it starts to rain.

Provide a speakers' table, podium or platform so everyone can see and hear the speakers.

Check if there is a good sound system for speakers and journalists' questions, along with audiovisual projection and recording equipment. Make sure there is electricity with enough multi-way adapters.

Provide enough chairs for the people you expect to attend, and have sufficient refreshments and enough serving staff.

Check the venue beforehand

1–2 hours before the start, check the venue. Is the equipment working? Is everything ready?

Cater to the press

Know their deadlines and constraints. If the announcement is aimed at the evening TV news, don't call a news conference for 4 pm. The journalists will not have time to get back to the office and submit a story before the deadline.

Back at the office

Have someone to respond to phone calls during the news conference. Reporters who cannot attend may call to ask for press kits.

During the news conference

Make people feel welcome

Have enough staff to manage the number of visitors you expect. Give them name badges to wear. Greet journalists as they arrive. Have them sign a sign-up sheet with columns for phone numbers and email addresses, before you give them the press kit. Exchange business cards – you will be able to contact them in the future.

Manage time

Allow time at the beginning for latecomers to arrive. Provide snacks and refreshments, but make your announcement within 30 minutes of the starting time. If you wait too long, the busiest reporters may have left.

Provide a press kit

This may consist of a folder containing the following:

- Copies of the speeches or statements to be made
- Photographs of the organization's building, the director or staff involved
- An organizational brochure
- A factsheet about the project
- Information about other relevant activities or products
- Perhaps your most recent annual report.
- Have more than enough materials to go around: journalists are competitors, so do not expect them to share.

Use visuals

Prepare visuals (charts, diagrams, photos) for use during the presentation. Make them large, with big letters (visible from the back of the room) and colourful graphics. Display them so cameras can zoom into them.

Consider providing video footage as part of the press kit, or offering to take journalists around the site so they can shoot extra photos (for example, of one of the speakers in a crop field).

Think of good places for photographs – in an experimental plot or laboratory, or with a group of farmers in the field.

Stage-manage the presentations

Keep the number of presenters to a minimum. Make sure their prepared remarks are short and to the point. Put a large-type name card in front of each speaker. Have someone introduce each speaker and perhaps manage the questions afterwards. If the speakers are inexperienced, get them to practise beforehand.

Manage the questions

Have a facilitator chair the news conference and invite questions from individual journalists. Ensure that the speaker does not get into an argument with a journalist. It is normal to allow one question and a follow-up from a journalist before moving to the next question. Make sure that as many different journalists as possible have a chance to ask questions.

Keep it short

45 minutes is long enough for a statement and questions. Many news conferences at larger events (such as international conferences) take place during the lunch break.

After the news conference

At the end

Thank everyone for coming. Have the speakers stay a short time for follow-up interviews – broadcast journalists in particular may want an opportunity to ask questions one-on-one.

Update your mailing lists

Use the sign-up sheet and business cards you have collected.

Respond to further questions

Journalists may call with further questions and requests for clarification.

Follow up contacts

News conferences are a good way to meet and build relationships with journalists. You can find out what they are interested in and provide them with new story ideas.

Feature stories

A **feature story** is a journalistic article that covers a subject in some depth.

It is normally longer than a news article and does not have to follow an inverted pyramid structure.

Feature stories are common in the **inside pages of newspapers**, in newspaper **supplements**, and in **magazines**.

They may be directly related to a news event, only somewhat related, or not related at all.

Types of feature stories

There are **many types** of feature stories, and many ways of classifying them. Here are some that are useful in writing about food security, and some ideas on how you could use each one.

Types of feature stories

Backgrounder

Accompanies the main news story. It gives the background information necessary to understand the main story. It may appear as a “sidebar” (a small article in a box) next to the main story. Backgrounders often use one of these formats:

- **Background briefing format.** A statement of the facts, in a logical and easy-to-understand order.
- **Question-and-answer format.** A series of questions and answers.

Biographical profile

An article about an individual, like a mini-biography. It may contain multiple perspectives (for example, interviews with various people who know the individual).

How you could use it: Do a profile about a local innovator who developed a technique your project is promoting.

Colour story

Portrays a scene, or a “slice of life”, or conveys the atmosphere or “feel” of event.

How you could use it: Describe a day in the life of a refugee in a camp, showing how residents cook, wash, eat, feed their children, and get food. Show how your project is helping them improve their lives.

Types of feature stories

Column

A regular feature in a newspaper or magazine, written by one author. It may show a combination of knowledge, wit and personality. There are five main types of columns:

- **Service and advice** – like a regular lifestyle feature (e.g., on gardening)
- **Gossip** – who said what, what’s “hot”
- **Pundit** – gives an opinion rather than trying to be objective
- **Personal** – any topic the columnist wants to talk about
- **Specialist** – expert advice on a particular topic

How you could use it: Persuade a newspaper or magazine to let you write a regular column about food security in your area. In your project newsletter, write a column of nutrition tips using local ingredients.

Human interest story

Focuses on a person or group. It may focus on a dramatic event or difficult situation, and show how the person or group has overcome this.

How you could use it: Tell the story of how a widow has managed to keep her late husband’s land despite local customs that would have given the land to his relatives.

Interview piece

Confined to a single interview with a prominent or interesting person. It is often in question-and-answer format. It may also include background information about the person.

How you could use it: Interview one of your staff members about how they found a solution to a particular problem.

Investigative feature

An in-depth study of a topic or issue, giving the background and different points of view. It is well-researched, and contains revelations or controversy.

How you could use it: Show how the increased production of biofuels is having unintended consequences on food prices and production.

Types of feature stories

Lifestyle feature

A service story, or “news you can use”. It gives the reader information about life and how to live it better.

Here are three major types of lifestyle features:

- **List** (e.g. “Six nutritious vegetables to grow”).
- **Issue** (e.g. “Vegetable growing for a better diet”).
- **How-to** (e.g. “How to grow carrots”).

How you could use it: Find a topic you deal with and look at it from your audience’s point of view. Then write up advice on how they can deal with the issue.

News feature

The most common type of feature in newspapers. It starts with the news, then explains why the events occurred or examines their implications.

How you could use it: Show how a national news event (such as a drought or flood) affects people in your project area, and show how your project is helping people deal with the aftermath.

Describe the government agencies that are involved in making decisions about food imports.

Project profile

A description of a project, initiative or activity. It typically describes a problem, then shows how the project has solved it, or is helping to overcome it.

How you could use it: Describe a food security issue and show how your project has successfully dealt with it. If you are submitting the story to the mass media, be careful not to make it appear too promotional or self-serving.

Review

A review of a book or film.

How you could use it: Write a description of a book or guide that your project has produced, saying what is in it and who might find it useful. Write a critique of a government policy, and show how it can be improved.

Writing a feature story

Writing a feature story consists of the following steps:

- Developing story ideas
- Gathering information
- Finding a focus
- Organizing the information
- Writing the lead
- Writing a draft
- Reworking the draft

Let’s go step by step...

Developing story ideas

Looking for **ideas** for a feature story? Here are some questions to ask:

- What interesting thing has happened in your project?
- What problem do people in your area face?
- What topic interests your audience?
- What topic is in the news now? How does your project relate to it?
- What bigger issue does your organization want to focus on?
- What new thing do you have to say?

Gathering information

Once you have chosen your topic, start **collecting information**.

Read reports, and visit the field to observe and ask questions.

Make lots of notes, especially of interesting details that might add colour to your story.

Soak up information like a sponge.

While you are gathering information, think of what interesting angles you can use in the story.

Finding a focus

The focus is the point you are trying to make in your story.

It is what the story is all about. It answers the question “**So what?**”.

Everything else in the story depends on it. Establishing a focus helps you decide what bits of information are relevant and which should be dropped.

Examples

For example, you may want to make the point that **villagers can plan a new irrigation system themselves**. Your story would tell how the villagers got organized, how they made decisions, and how they put their plan into effect. Or, you might decide to focus on the **impact of the new system**: people can now grow more crops, and their standard of living has improved. Your story would then describe how the irrigation system has done this.

Organizing the information

You need to organize the information around the focus. You should decide what bits of information to use, and what is irrelevant.

Develop an outline that shows the order the information will appear.

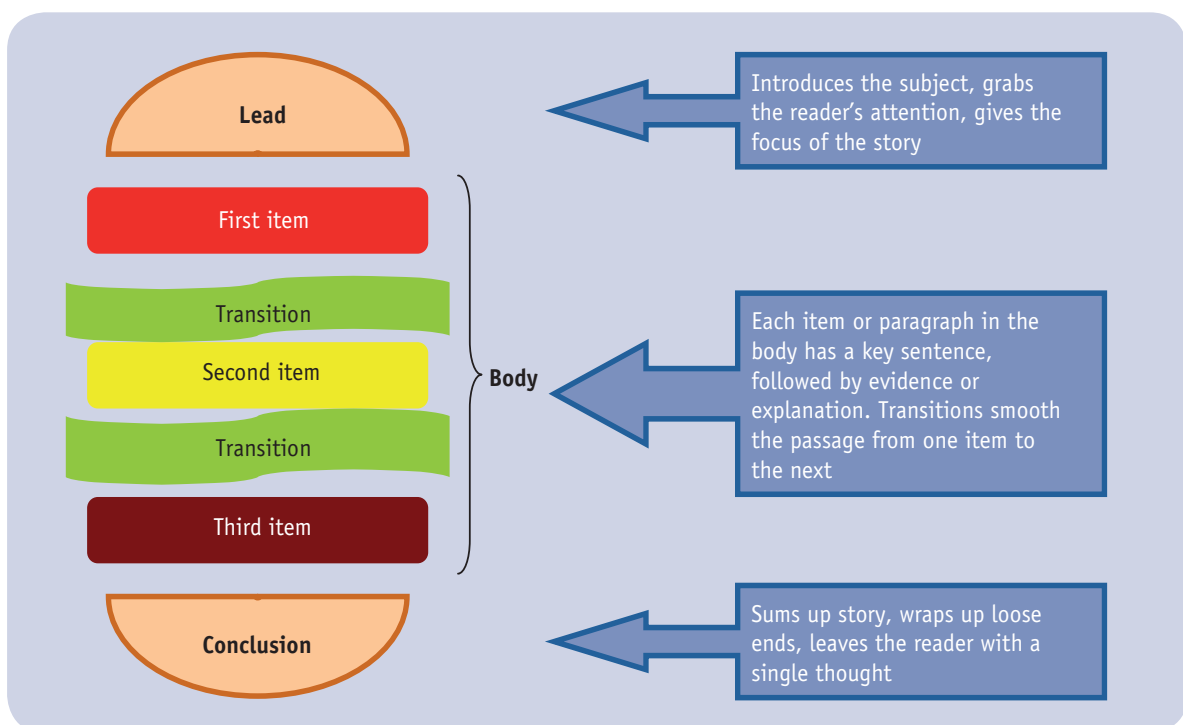
Feature stories may have many different possible structures. Here we look at three possibilities:

- the hamburger,
- problem–action–result and
- lead–quotes–conclusion.

However, many other story structures are possible. Check articles in newspapers and magazines and see if you can spot the structure each story follows.

The hamburger

The hamburger is the simplest structure for a feature story. It consists of three parts, like a hamburger: a beginning (the introduction or lead), middle (the body), and the end (the conclusion).



More information: <http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/english/essay/>

Problem–action–results

This structure is useful if you are describing **a project or other intervention**.

It consists of three main parts:

- a statement of the **problem** that was faced;
- a description of the **action** taken to overcome the problem; and
- a summary of what happened as a **result**.

One way to start writing a story like this is to write three sentences, one each for the problem, action and results.

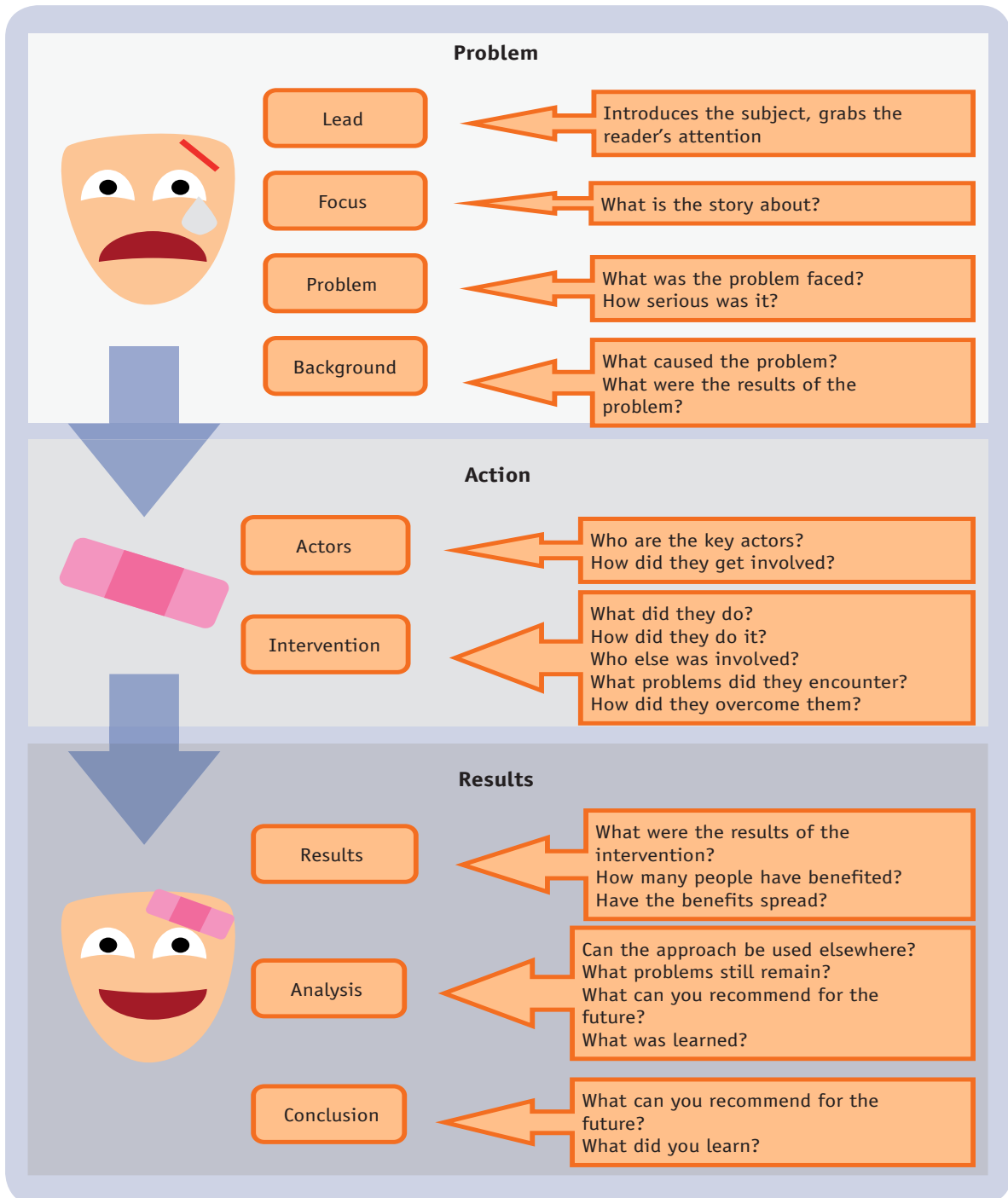
Here are some examples:

Examples

Problem	Farmers in Zimbabwe find it difficult to sell goats, so they are not interested in raising them
Action	The project has introduced an auction system that gives farmers a good price for their animals
Results	As a result, farmers in 10 villages are now investing in goat raising
Problem	Schools in District X lack basic facilities such as classrooms, desks and textbooks
Action	The project is encouraging parents and local people to get involved in managing the schools
Results	In five schools, parent associations are now helping build classrooms and raising money to buy textbooks
Problem	People in District Y defecate in the open, spreading diseases
Action	Another donor has found a way to persuade them to build and use pit latrines
Results	Our project will use this method to promote latrines in 50 villages

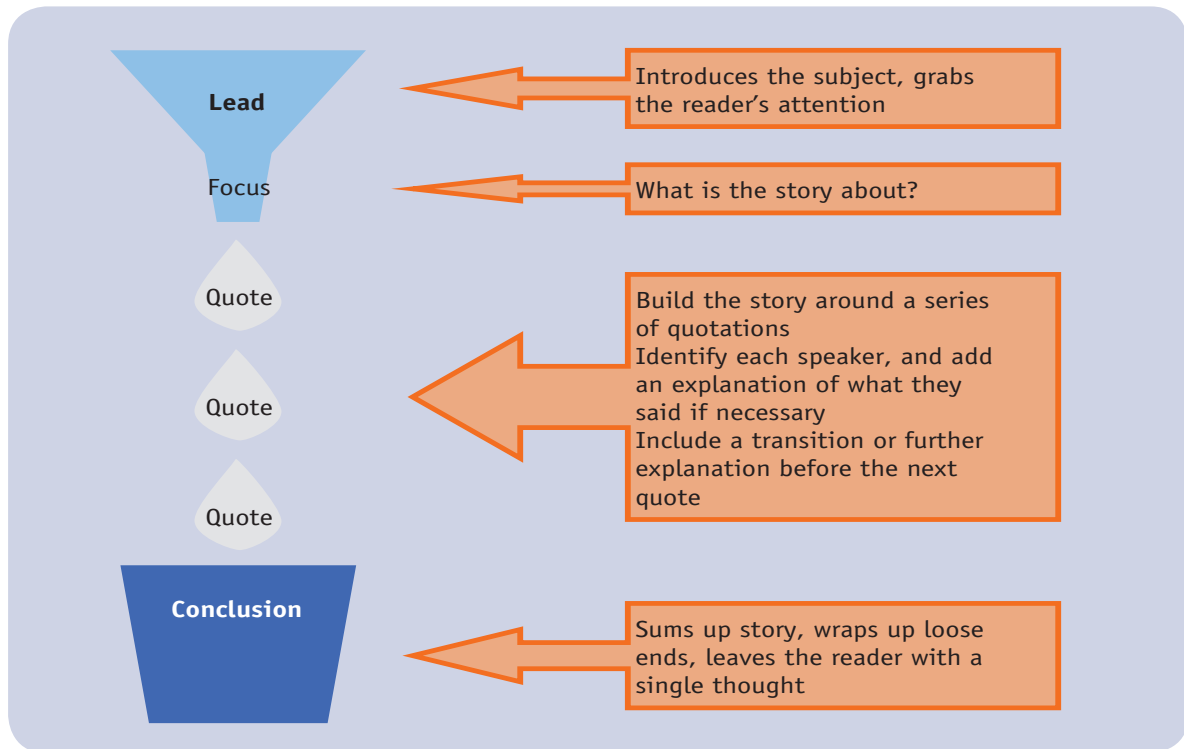
You can then expand each of the three sentences to provide more information. You can add sub-elements to each part:

- **Problem:** Lead, Focus, Problem, Background
- **Action:** Actors, Intervention
- **Results:** Results, Analysis, Conclusion



Lead-quotes-conclusion

This structure is useful if you have good interview material with one or more people.



How to get your feature story into the media?

You can prepare a **press release** following a feature story format.

Be sure to label the piece as a “feature” (perhaps in an accompanying message).

The media like to have **exclusive rights** to feature stories – so consider sending it to just one journalist or editor rather than to your whole media mailing list.

Feature stories on radio and TV

Feature stories are not confined to newspapers and magazines.

Lifestyle and current affairs programmes, documentaries, interviews and magazine programmes on **radio and TV** also use a feature story format.

The mass media are much more likely to carry a feature story if they are already **familiar with you** and your organization.

Rather than spending a lot of time and effort to produce a feature story and then have it rejected, **try first contacting the media** with a story idea and offer to write a story (or offer to identify people to interview).

Other uses of feature stories

You can use feature stories in many other ways:

- Annual reports. Many annual reports consist of a mix of feature stories and technical information.
- Case studies. Feature stories are very similar to case studies that appear in books and specialist publications and that are used in training. (Case studies are more analytical and systematic, and they tend to have a more formal structure.)
- Donor reports. Feature stories can add colour and human interest to donor reports.
- Newsletters. Features make good articles for newsletters aimed at staff and clients. People especially like to see their own name in print – but make sure that the article is not critical of their work.
- Public relations materials. You can use feature stories in brochures, handouts, letters to contributors, and many other types of materials to publicize your work.
- Video. You can convert a feature story into a video for use in training and publicity activities.
- Websites. Features can be a valuable addition to your project website.

You may have to adapt your feature story somewhat to suit each of these formats. Do not be afraid to reuse a good story several times in different forms.

Interviews

Interviews are a standard way for all kinds of journalists (print, radio, TV and web, as well as freelancers) to collect information.

You might also want to conduct interviews yourself with staff members or clients to gather material for recordings or publications.

Interviews are normally **one-on-one**, with a single reporter posing questions to one person. But similar techniques apply to other situations, such as group interviews, panel discussions, debates, and question-and-answer sessions during news conferences.

You may have to deal with print, radio, telephone and TV interviews.

The following are some guidelines on how to prepare for being interviewed, what to do during the interview, and how to control the interview.

Preparing for the interview

The best interviews are where both the interviewer and interviewee are **well prepared**.

Here are some tips on how to prepare for an interview:

- **Find out what the interviewer wants to ask you about.** Give him or her background information (articles, press releases, brochures) so he or she can read up beforehand.
- **Select the image and a short specific message you want to convey,** and prepare

some suitable phrases, words and issues. Even if the interview is about a different topic, think of ways you can relate it to something you want to talk about. Repeat your key message several times.

- **Get information about the reporter:** his or her views and interviewing style.
- **Be up-to-date** on events relating to your organization – the reporter may ask you about them.
- **Anticipate the questions the reporter may ask**, and practise your responses.
- **Choose the right location.** Find a suitable place to conduct the interview, free of disturbances (especially for radio and TV interviews). Turn off your mobile phone and ask not to be disturbed.

Surviving the interview

During the interview...






- **Answer the questions.** Listen to the interviewer's questions carefully and answer them directly, confidently, and in few words. If a question is unclear, ask for a clarification, or rephrase it before answering.
 - **Be natural.** Look the interviewer in the eyes; forget the microphone or audio recorder. Speak clearly and in a relaxed way. State your ideas clearly, using simple words and short sentences. Do not mumble or use jargon.
 - **Don't be afraid of silence.** Leaving a long pause is a common technique reporters use to get you to say something. Just wait for the next question.
 - **Avoid giving figures.** They may obscure your message, be misheard or misquoted, or be open to dispute. If they are needed, write them down or give the interviewer a factsheet.
 - **Correct errors.** If you or the interviewer make an inaccurate statement, correct it immediately.
 - **Don't argue.** If the interviewer is argumentative, you run the risk of sounding hostile (the recording of the interview may be edited before it is broadcast). Stay calm and don't argue back.
 - **If you don't know the answer.** Say you don't know. Refer the interviewer to someone who knows, or offer to check the information and get back to the interviewer later. Never say "No comment", but give a valid reason for not answering.
 - **Don't say anything off the record.** Assume that anything you say (even before or after the interview proper) may get reported. Some reporters suggest going "off
-

the record” in the hope of getting you to divulge sensitive information. Never give information off the record: some reporters misuse the information, and it may get traced back to you. Don’t say anything you don’t want attributed to you.

► **Keep the ultimate audience in mind.** The interviewer is only a conduit.

Controlling the interview

Here are five **techniques** you can use to **control an interview**.

Technique	What to do	Examples
Repetition 	Repeat your message to help the interviewer and audience remember it State main message several times Vary the words a little	<i>“Let me say that another way...”</i> <i>“I’d like to repeat what I said earlier...”</i> <i>“I think we’re getting away from the main point, which is...”</i>
Bridging 	Use a phrase to “bridge” to your message Deal with question, then follow with the message	<i>“You’re correct...(answer) but in addition, let me say...” (bridge)</i> <i>“That’s not 100%... (answer) let me explain...” (bridge)</i> <i>“Well, that’s the way it used to be (answer), but here’s what we do now...” (bridge)</i>
Flagging 	Emphasise the most important points	<i>“The most important thing you have to remember is...”</i> <i>“We’ve talked about a lot of things today, but I think it comes down to these three main points...”</i> <i>“Finally, let me make one thing perfectly clear...”</i>
Hooking 	Add on an additional bit of information to attract a follow-up question – like a fishing hook with bait	<i>“We are currently developing a major project with mothers in.....” (reporter may ask for more info)</i> <i>“I believe that the countries in the Caribbean can overcome their nutrition problems” (reporter may ask how)</i>
Sound bites 	Find a memorable phrase, or a short, snappy summary of your main message The reporter may well use this as a quote or use it in a broadcast	<i>“In this project we have three priorities: education, education and education”</i> <i>“Local people should have the say, not someone sitting behind a desk”</i> <i>“In this area, water is life. We are trying to help people get water while they are still alive”</i>

After the interview

After the interview...

- Make sure the audio recorder and camera are **turned off** (some reporters keep them running in the hope of recording something interesting).
- **Thank the reporter.**
- Tell him or her **how to reach you** if more information is needed. Offer to introduce the reporter to colleagues who can provide details.
- Offer to **check the story** for factual errors only. The reporter may not agree to this, but some appreciate the opportunity to do so.
- Ask **when and where** the story is to be printed or broadcast.

When the story appears in the media...

- Record the broadcast or collect the newspaper cuttings.
- If the story is **positive**, consider sending it to key stakeholders.
- If story is fairly **accurate**, don't complain about minor errors.
- If story **very inaccurate**, ask the editor or producer for a correction.
- Keep in touch with the reporter: add him or her to your mailing list for news releases, and offer to provide information on other stories.

Print, telephone, radio and TV interviews

Print interviews

Interviews for newspapers, magazines and websites are generally longer than radio or TV interviews. A printed article can have more words than a broadcast interview.

This gives you an opportunity to say more about your issue or your organization, and you can give more details.

Tips for dealing with print interviews

The following are a few suggestions for dealing with print interview:

- Ask beforehand **where and when** the story will appear. This will help you pitch your story: for example, you can give a reporter from a specialist publication more technical detail than one from a general magazine.
- The reporter may **record** what you say. Don't be afraid of the audio recorder – it increases the chances that you will be quoted correctly. If you are dealing with a controversial subject, consider bringing your own recorder so you can verify what was said.
- Bring along some **written facts and figures** to refer to, and give a copy to the reporter.
- Offer to **check the text** for factual errors before it is published.
- Ask the reporter to **send you a copy** of the finished article, or to let you know where and when it appears.

Radio interviews

Interviews for the radio may be on-air (live) or recorded, to be aired at a later date. The recording may be used as is, or it may be edited.

They may take place in a studio, on location, inside or outside (for example, in your office) or over the telephone.

Tips for dealing with radio interviews

Before the interview...

- **Find out the interview situation.** What is the location? Is it live or recorded? (Hint: If you cannot find a quiet room for the interview, try sitting with the reporter inside a parked car. Close the windows to shut out outside noise.)
- **Find out the topic and reason for the interview.** That will let you prepare some messages and phrases beforehand.
- **Find out who the audience is.** Is the interview to be broadcast on a farming programme, a programme aimed at mothers, or a news programme? Then, during the interview, you can imagine you are talking to the audience and pitch your message accordingly.
- **Set yourself at ease.** The reporter may chat with you first. This is a good opportunity to give the reporter some ideas about what to talk about.
- **Get familiar with the microphone** and other equipment (audio recorder, headphones). The reporter may ask you to do a sound check (to check the audio recording levels).

During the interview...

- **Control your voice.** Open with a confident voice, and do not speak in a monotone. Vary the speed, tone and volume of your voice.
- **Use the interviewer's name** in some answers: "Well, James, that's one question I can answer."
- **Put your key messages** in several short responses (combine repetition and sound bites). If the recording is edited, you hope that some of these messages will remain.
- **Use conversational language.** Avoid long, rambling responses. Use short sentences, and make sure you state your message clearly.
- **Steer the conversation.** If the reporter asks a question you could answer with just "yes" or "no", expand on your response. For example, "Yes, but that also means that..." Use the techniques of repetition, bridging, flagging, hooking and sound bites to steer the conversation.
- **Don't mumble.** Sit or stand upright, and keep your hands away from your face. Don't say "um" or "er". Avoid quirks of speech such as "like", "you see" or "if you know what I mean".
- **Don't be afraid of silence.** Clever interviewers may create silences, to lure you into talking. You don't need to fill gap. Let the interviewer break the silence.
- **Avoid distractions.** Disconnect your phone and ask your colleagues not to disturb you. Don't fidget, hit the table, jangle coins or click your pen.

Telephone interviews

If a radio reporter calls and asks you to give a telephone interview immediately, you may...

- Ask what they want to talk about, then say that there's someone with you and you'll call back in a few minutes: this gives you time to prepare.
- Make sure nothing will disturb you: close the office door and turn off a noisy air conditioner or fan.

TV interviews

Television interviews are like radio interviews, but now you can be seen as well as heard, so your appearance and actions are important.

If the interview is in the studio, get there early so you are familiar with the set and camera positions.

Think "the audience is interested in this topic". If you think they are interested, you will be able to present it in an interesting, lively way.

Tips for dealing with TV interviews

Here are some do's and don'ts for television interviews.

DON'T	DO
Clothing	
Don't wear white: it can reflect the light. Avoid unusual styles or vivid colours. Don't wear loud checks or stripes, or small prints. Don't wear sunglasses or light-sensitive glasses. Don't wear rings, bracelets, necklaces, or flashy watches.	Dress conservatively, in solid colours. Make sure your jacket pockets are empty: no bulky items. Keep your jacket pulled straight so there are no wrinkles.
Body language	
Don't slouch. Avoid sweeping arm movements or other eye-distracting movements. Don't fidget: swivelling your chair, playing with your pencil, drumming with your fingers.	Look directly at interviewer, not at camera (unless told to do so). Sit erect. Lean forward slightly from time to time to give the impression that you are alert, in control and interested in the questions. Use gestures to emphasize something.

It is difficult to do a good interview. So it's a good idea to practise.

You may want to practise delivering your message in front of a mirror, or record yourself on video.

Another way is getting a colleague to interview you and asking him/her how you might improve.

After an interview, it may be useful to get a copy of the recording and go through it critically to see how you can improve.

If you anticipate that others will be in the news, you should help them prepare, and offer to give them some practice.

Summary

Press releases, news conferences, features stories and interviews are common ways to provide content through the media.

A **press release**, or **news release**, is a short, 1–2 page statement written in the form of a news story.

At a **news conference**, or **press conference**, you invite a group of journalists to hear a prepared statement and ask questions.

A **feature story** is a journalistic article that covers a subject in some depth.

Interviews are a standard way for all kinds of journalists (print, radio, TV and web, as well as freelancers) to collect information.

COMMUNICATING WITH POLICYMAKERS

3.1 Presenting information to policymakers

3.2 Lobbying for food security

3.1

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify key policymakers relevant to food security;
- understand typical policymakers' information needs; and
- identify objectives, messages and channels for communicating with policymakers.

Introduction

If you work with a food security project, you probably realize that it needs the support of policymakers to be more effective.

How best to get their support?

This lesson will illustrate how to present information to policymakers, and how to influence policy decisions.

Steps of a communication strategy

As with any other type of audience, when you communicate with policymakers you should apply the six steps of a communication strategy:

1. Identify and analyse your audiences
2. Define your communication objectives
3. Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences
4. Select the channels to use
5. Create a communication workplan
6. Evaluate your communication activities

Let's focus on the first four steps and see how they apply to this particular type of audience.

Step 1: Identify and analyse your audiences

These are some examples of policymakers at various levels of government.

International	National	Province, state, region	District, local
United Nations officials Staff of international organizations (e.g., African Union) National government ministers Ministers and senior civil servants in other governments Government representatives and civil servants in international negotiations	President, prime minister Minister of Agriculture, other government ministers National politicians Members of parliament Civil servants in the Ministry of Agriculture and other ministries Planning commission, advisory bodies Specialist national government organizations (e.g. food security agency)	Provincial commissioner, state governor State representatives Regional members of national parliament State-level civil servants	Mayor, district council leader Local politicians District councillors District agency heads Traditional chiefs Clan elders

Who provides information to policymakers?

Policymakers do not make decisions in isolation. They rely on information and advice from many other specialists and organizations. You can also **target these intermediaries** with policy-related information.

Information sources that policymakers often use include:

- statistical and analytical organizations;
- specialist research institutes;
- mass media;
- individuals;
- lobbyists; and
- international organizations and NGOs.

The following table lists some sources that policymakers often use.

Information source	Examples	When useful
Statistical and analytical organizations	Census authority Statistics agency Famine early warning system Market price monitoring service Parliamentary research organization	Providing alerts about problems Providing data on the scale and importance of problems Providing data to support analysis
Specialist research institutes	Crops research institute Universities Government researchers and technical specialists NGO–government coordination groups Think tanks Public opinion polls	Analysing problems Discovering possible solutions Prioritizing solutions
Mass media	Radio and TV stations (news, current affairs, documentary and farming programmes) Newspapers, magazines Bloggers	Bringing problem to public attention Digesting problem Analysis of problem (may be superficial) Maintaining interest and public pressure
Individuals	Political advisers Ministry specialist advisers and research team Respected academics and professionals Political pundits, newspaper columnists	Providing digested information Outlining policy options Advising on policy options
Lobbyists	Farmers' union, crop growers' association Industry associations (food, transport, trade, construction, retail) Individual firms (commercial farmers, supermarkets, transport, trade, etc.)	Highlighting potential solutions to problem Providing summary of interests of particular stakeholders Highlighting shortcomings of alternative solutions
International organizations and NGOs	International Food Policy Research Institute (www.ifpri.org) Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (www.fao.org) International Fund for Agricultural Development (www.ifad.org) World Food Programme (www.wfp.org) Major donors International and national NGOs (development, emergency relief, human rights) Faith-based organizations (church and mosque leaders, faith-based development organizations)	Analysing problem and options Providing potential solutions to problem Highlighting shortcomings of alternative solutions Providing point of view of poor and disadvantaged groups

You probably have lots of information about your chosen issue.

All you have to do is to package this into a report and send it to the policymakers. Right?

Wrong. Remember that...

➤ **Policymakers are busy**

They have many subjects to deal with, many meetings to go to, many demands on their time. They do not have time to read long reports.

➤ **Most policymakers are not specialists in your area**

Politicians and other policymakers come from many different backgrounds – but food security is not likely to be one of them. Many policymakers do not have a university degree, so they are unlikely to understand jargon and complicated explanations. They may rely on technical specialists to summarize and explain complex subjects to them.

➤ **Policymakers have many conflicting sources of information**

Policymakers listen to many points of view before making a decision. They want information presented clearly and concisely, without longwinded explanations, and without lots of ifs and buts.

This means that you have to:

- Present information in a **short, easily digestible form**.
- Use language that a **non-specialist** can understand.
- Summarize the information, and present **clear arguments** for a particular course of action.

Step 2: Define your communication objectives

How do you select the most relevant information?

This is based on your **communication objectives**. There are many reasons for communicating with policymakers:

Objective	Example
To achieve visibility for your organization	"We need a higher profile in the government."
To gain policymakers' support for your activities	"We want the Minister to support our new project."
To alert policymakers to your organization's experience and expertise	"We have done a lot research on food security: others could learn from it."
To persuade them to change a policy or law	"The policy should be modified to increase food availability in our province."

The type of communication activity will depend on your objectives.

Step 3: Decide on your message

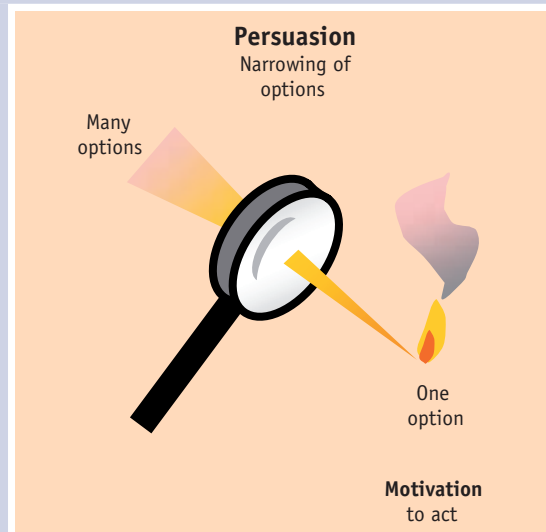
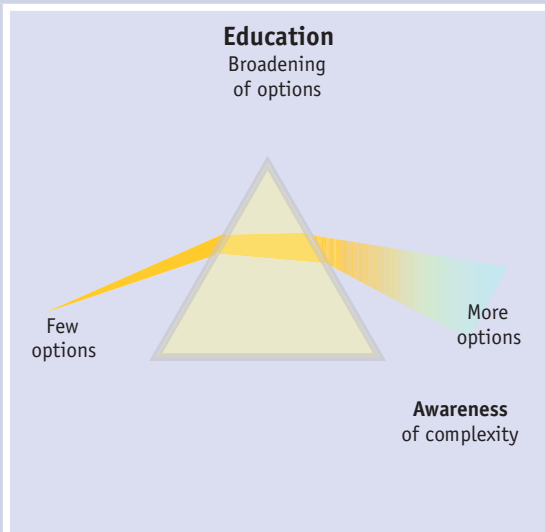
What kinds of messages do you need to develop to achieve your objectives?

This depends on policymakers' needs, which change over time. In the beginning, they will need information about the **existence and importance** of the problem. Towards the end, they will need more **detailed evidence** in favour of a particular policy option, as well as **specific language** needed for drafting a law.

Difference between education and persuasion

Remember that **education** and **persuasion** are different.

- **Education** involves increasing someone's knowledge and broadening their horizons. It makes them realize that the world is complex, and that there are many options for action.
- **Persuasion**, on the other hand, is about narrowing options and motivating decision makers to choose one.



When communicating with policymakers, you may have to begin by **educating** them about your issue. But then you will need to **focus their attention** on a single option (or a small number of acceptable options), and motivate them to choose it.

The following are the different kinds of messages that you may have to convey:

- **Awareness.** If policymakers are not aware that a problem exists, they will not do anything about it.
- **Importance.** Information about the scale of the problem. How big is it? How many people are affected? Where are they?
- **Analysis.** A discussion of the background, causes and effects of the problem. Why does the problem exist? What are its effects?
- **Options.** Information about the policy options. What are the options for solving the problem? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each option? (Note: you may decide to leave the options out and focus instead on just one recommendation).

- **Recommendations.** Evidence in favour of a particular option. Why is this option better than the others? Give evidence to show that that it will be effective (and cost-effective).
- **Legal language.** Proposed language for a draft law or policy. It may be useful to suggest specific wording for a new law or agreement – or to comment on an existing proposal for wording. The devil may be in the detail!

.....

Remember that...

You probably have a lot more information than you need. Keep it in reserve in case you need to back up your arguments with extra evidence.

You may also have to go out and find new information for specific needs. For example, you may realize you need some dramatic video footage showing the scale of the problem, or a human interest story showing how the problem is affecting a particular family.

.....

Step 4: Select the channels to use

The following are the different channels that you can use to reach policymakers.

Printed and audiovisual materials

These are the most common ways of communicating with policymakers.

Examples:

- Briefing paper
- Policy briefs
- Brochures
- Letters to policymakers
- Books
- Evaluation reports
- Videos
- Websites, blogs

You produce and distribute the information materials yourself.

.....

Mass media

Examples:

- TV/radio interviews, chat shows
- Documentaries
- Current affairs programmes
- TV/radio spots
- News stories
- Opinion articles

You can reach a much larger audience this way, but lose control over the message: a newspaper may not print your version of the story at all, or it may print conflicting opinions. Remember that policy makers are part of the general public, and thus influenced by mass media.

Face-to-face

Examples:

Meetings

- Lobbying
- Conferences
- Study tours
- Presentations
- Briefings
- Debates

These methods reach relatively small numbers of people, but they can provide valuable feedback.

Social, professional

Examples:

- Friendships
- Social events
- Trusted associates
- Former colleagues or students
- Staff hiring

These methods can be valuable in reaching very small numbers of influential people.

A friend who works in the Ministry can spread information for you, or can let you know who best to contact.

Which channel should you choose?

That depends on the nature of the issue and the policymakers you want to reach.

Probably a combination of printed and audiovisual materials, mass media and face-to-face communication is best. Social and professional links should be used sparingly.

Remember...

Avoid anything unethical. If someone else who opposes your recommendations resorts to unethical means (e.g. expensive gifts or expenses- paid trips), you may need to find legal and ethical ways to counter their influence.

You will probably need some kind of information materials to back up any lobbying and advocacy work you do.

Typically, you will need at least...

- A **policy brief** or briefing paper with the key information policymakers need.
- An attractive **presentation** you can use in meetings and conferences.
- A **brochure** about your project or organization.

You may also want to prepare...

- A **video** about the topic.
- A **poster** or **exhibit** you can put up at exhibitions or meetings.
- Additional **handouts** and **photographs**.
- A **press release** to circulate to newspapers and radio and television stations.
- **Statements** with memorable soundbites to use in case you are interviewed by the media.
- Information on your **website**.
- A **report** or **book** with further details.

You can deliver your message to policymakers in various ways:

- you can **send them a hardcopy** of your printed information - find out their names and addresses, and mail it to them; or
- you can also distribute them at **conferences** and **workshops** that policymakers attend.

If at all possible, **meet them in person** to introduce the subject, then give them your information materials as a reminder.

If you have **softcopies** of printed materials and presentations, you may...

- **Send them an email.** If you know the policymaker, then consider sending them an attachment. Make sure you include the subject and a short cover note: most people hate getting spam.
- Put it on your **website**.
- Distribute it (or announce it) via **email groups** or professional **social networking** sites.

Summary

As with any other type of audience, when you communicate with policymakers you should apply the six steps of a communication strategy:

- Identify and analyse your audiences.
- Define your communication objectives.
- Decide on the messages to convey to your audiences.
- Select the channels to use.
- Create a communication workplan.
- Evaluate your communication activities.

Remember that policymakers are busy and not specialists in your area. They have many conflicting sources of information and are given huge amounts of reading materials.

They are likely to read only something that looks attractive, appears interesting, and is short and easy to read.

Their information needs change over time: in the beginning, they will need information about the existence and importance of the problem. Towards the end, they will need more detailed evidence in favour of a particular policy option, as well as specific language needed for drafting a law.

COMMUNICATING WITH POLICYMAKERS

3.1 Presenting information to policymakers

3.2 Lobbying for food security



Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the difference between lobbying and advocacy;
- identify five windows for influencing and providing information to policymakers on food security;
- understand how to analyse the context to refine your messages and strategies; and
- identify different types of campaigns.

Introduction

If you really want to make a difference on your issue, merely preparing information materials and getting them to policymakers is not enough!

You need a carefully thought-out communication campaign strategy on the issue.

This lesson looks at how to organize a communication campaign to get a policy changed.

Lobbying and advocacy

What does “lobbying” mean?

Let’s first distinguish between advocacy and lobbying.

Advocacy has a broad meaning: it means pushing for some kind of **change in society**. It includes trying to persuade people to change their behaviour, pressing companies to change their activities or rules, or persuading the government to change its policies and laws.

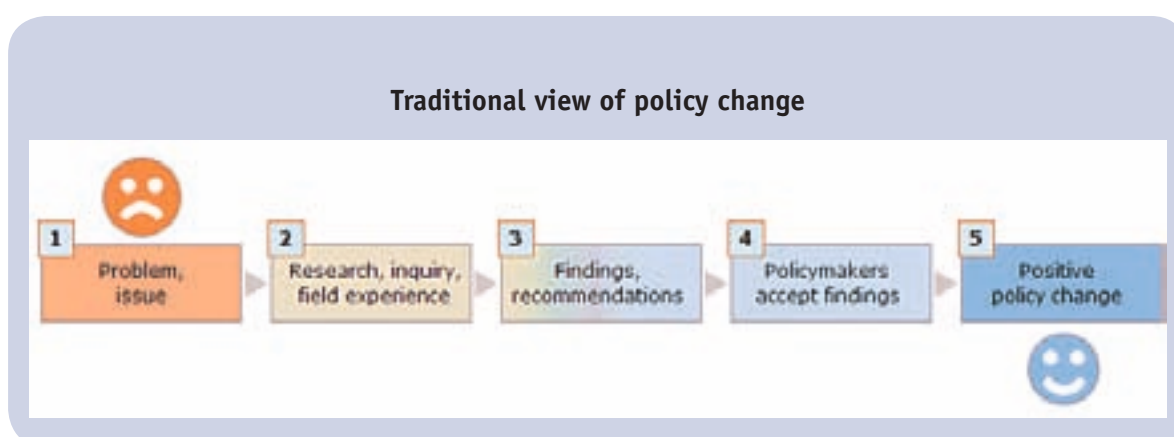
Lobbying has a narrower meaning. It is advocacy efforts that try to influence **legislators** such as ministers and members of parliament.

The policymaking process

To influence policy making, you need to understand the **policymaking process**.

The **traditional view** is that policy change is a linear, logical process.

1. At the beginning a problem or issue is identified.
 2. An organization such as a research institute or NGO does some research into the problem and gathers field experience.
 3. It presents its findings to the policymakers...
 4. ...who accept their recommendations...
- ...and change the policy.



This view assumes that the policymakers are benign and are receptive to research findings and field evidence.

But reality is different...

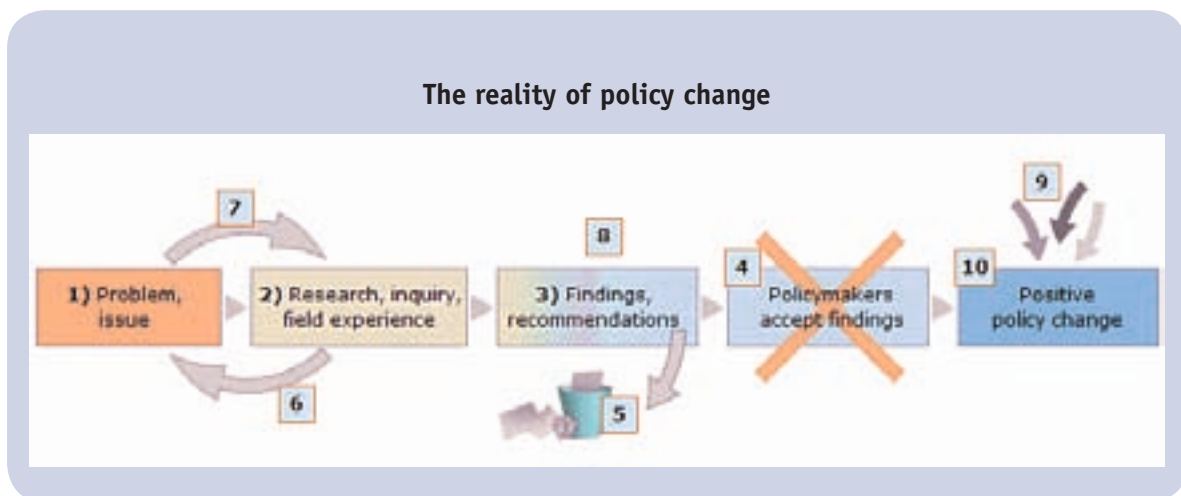
The **real policymaking process** is less logical and linear. It has many loops and iterations, and involves many other players – including some who oppose the organization's recommendations.

4. Instead of accepting the recommendations, policymakers may ignore them...
5. ...or reject them.
6. That forces the organization to revise how it views the initial problem...
7. ...and gather more information.
8. That may lead to more findings and recommendations, which by roundabout, unpredictable routes...

9. ...find their way into a revised policy draft...

10. ...along with many other influences.

The result is something like positive policy change, though it rarely goes as far as the organization originally hoped.



When trying to influence policy, **timing** can be very important.

Policymaking can be a very long, drawn-out process – one that follows its own logic. Once a decision has been made, it can be very difficult to get it changed. You may have to wait several years for another opportunity to influence the policy.

That means you must **anticipate the policy decisions** and understand the timetable and processes that lead up to key decisions being made.

Let's see what policy windows you might use...

Routine servicing

Various government bodies prepare regular reports on the food security situation. For example, they may prepare monthly reports of food availability, seasonal yield forecasts, or Reserve Bank reports. Moreover, government bodies **meet regularly** to plan policy changes, such as in Food Security Council meetings.

How can you use the window?

You can...

- Release information just before regular meetings.
- Try to get your issue onto the meeting agenda.
- After the meeting, prepare information in response to decisions made.

Cyclical events

Cyclical events occur at more-or-less predictable intervals. Some events (such as World Food Day) offer an opportunity to bring issues to policymakers' attention. Some emergencies (such as droughts leading to food security crisis) can be predicted in advance and tend to follow a cycle.

How can you use the window?

You can...

- Prepare an information campaign in the build-up to the event.
- Use the event to bring policymakers' attention to your topic.

One-off events

One-off events do not occur in a predictable cycle, but usually have a long lead-time during which you can get policy-related information to those who need it. Examples of one-off events are:

- policy reviews;
- development of new party policies;
- an international speech by the Prime Minister;
- discussion of a new law in parliament; or
- negotiations over a new international agreement.

How can you use the window?

You can...

- Prepare an information campaign in the build-up to the event.
- Prepare detailed briefs on the issue in time to influence the decision.

Emergencies

Emergencies are unpredictable events that call for an immediate response. Examples of emergencies are:

- a livestock epidemic leading to a ban on livestock movement;
- a food safety scare; or
- major flooding.

How can you use the window?

You can...

- Respond quickly with policy proposals to solve the problem (or avert future problems)

Stimulated policy discussions

Finally, rather than waiting for the issue to appear on the agenda, you can try to put it there!

You can stimulate discussions, for example, on an issue which is not yet on the policy agenda.

How can you use the window?

You can...

- Run a campaign to raise awareness about the issue.
- Prepare policy suggestions about the issue.

The policy context

Policy change does not happen in a vacuum.

There are always an existing set of policies (some of which may conflict with one another), a history of decisions, vested interests, opposing viewpoints, and individual personalities of decision makers to take into account.

How to make sense of all this?

Issues map or problem tree

One way is to create an **issues map** or **problem tree**.

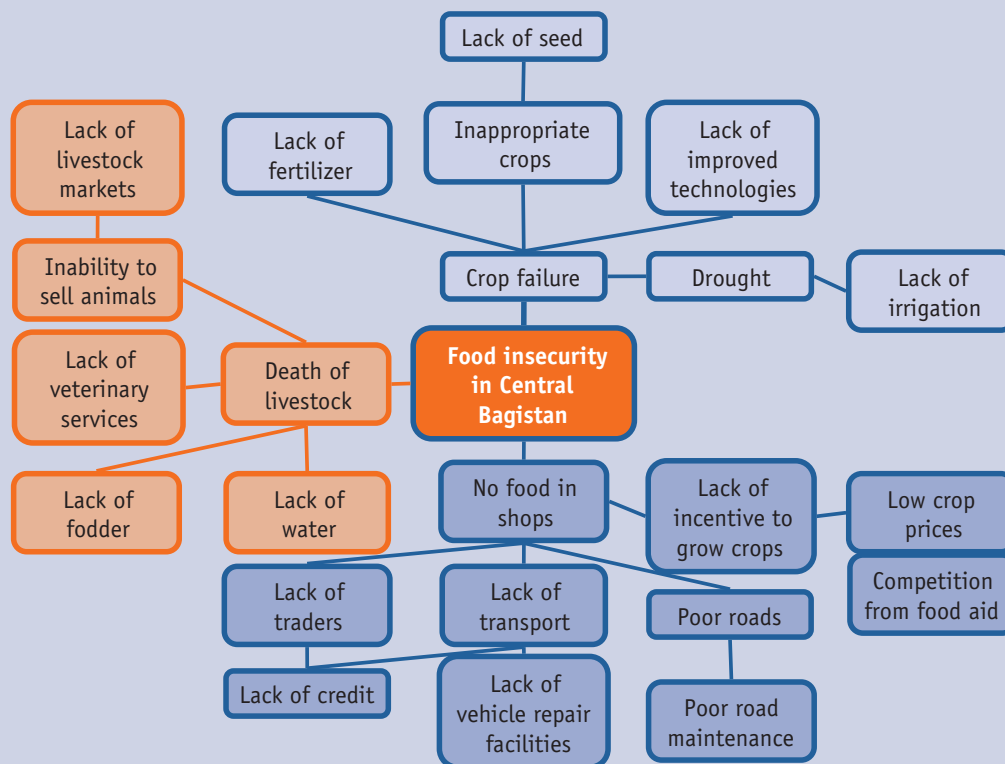
This is a diagram that shows the main issue you are dealing with, along with the factors or problems that relate to it.

This is a diagram that shows the main issue you are dealing with, along with the factors or problems that relate to it.

Your organization may already have developed an issues map or problem tree during its planning stage. You can expand on this, or create a new one.

Example of an issues map

This example shows an issues map for food security. It is based on the problem analysis undertaken during the project planning, with additional insights gained during the project implementation.



The map allows you to check for areas that can be influenced by policy.

For example, irrigation is not the only factor that influences crops, and drought is not the only problem.

Perhaps the government should promote the use of other farming technologies, and provide appropriate seeds and fertilizer.

The government should also address other factors that affect food insecurity: the death of livestock and the lack of food in shops.

Organizational analysis

You can also draw up an issues map showing **which organizations** have what interests, responsibilities or opinions about your issue. That is called ‘**organizational analysis**’.

You will determine two things:

1. What organization has **responsibility** for what aspect of the issue? This will help you decide whom you need to convince.
2. Who has what **attitude** towards the issue? Are they positive, negative, or neutral towards your proposals? Note that the government is not a single body. Different government agencies may have different interests and opinions about an issue. There may be a range of opinions even within a single agency.

Example of Organizational Analysis

This example shows the governmental organizations interested in a grazing scheme.

Category	Organization	Responsibility	Attitude towards issue	Reason for attitude
Government	Ministry of Livestock	Increasing livestock production	Strongly positive	Promotes livestock production and welfare of herders
	Ministry of Tourism	Promoting tourism	Negative	Fears grazing will deter tourists
	National Parks authority	Maintain nature reserve	Strongly negative	Fears grazing will damage ecosystem
	Food security agency	Ensuring that people have enough to eat	Positive	Wants to reduce risk of animals dying in drought
	Office of the President	Coordinating policy	Neutral	...
	Supreme Court	Ensuring laws comply with the Constitution	Neutral	

Other stakeholders could be added to the list – e.g. pastoralists, local farmers, non-government development organizations, conservation and wildlife groups, tour operators, and so on.

Another example of Organizational Analysis

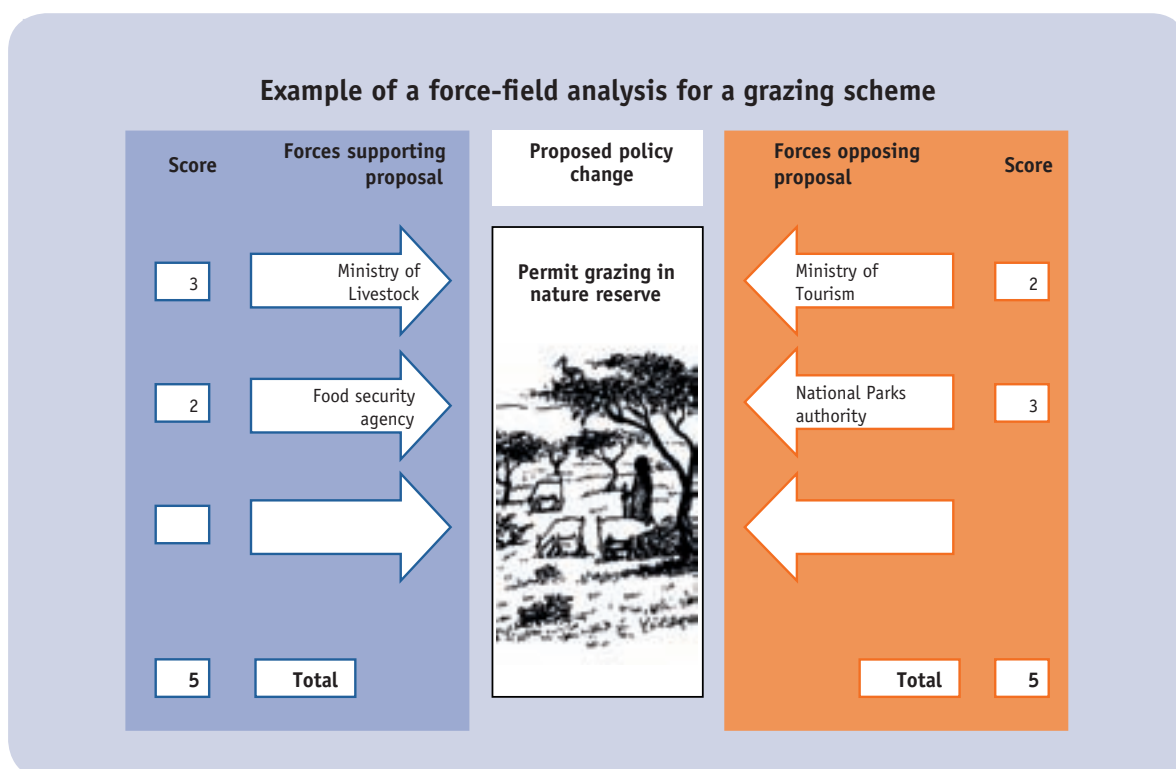
This example shows organizations interested in an irrigation scheme proposed by a project.

Category	Organization	Responsibility	Attitude towards issue	Reason for attitude
Government	Ministry of Agriculture	Increasing crop production	Positive	Promotes food production
	Food logistics agency	Maintaining strategic reserve of staple foods	Positive	Needs food to fill reserve
	Ministry of Infrastructure	Irrigation schemes	Negative	Lack of funds; other priorities
	Northeastern Province government	Provincial food distribution centres	Positive	Desire to reduce province's food dependency
	District authorities	Local food distribution centres	Positive	Wish for investment in district
Civil society	International donors	Support for development and relief efforts	Neutral	Major donors developing new strategy
	International NGOs	Implementation of development and relief efforts	Positive	Favour increased food production
	National development NGOs	Field-level development and relief work	Positive/negative	Support farmers
	Conservation organizations	Wildlife protection	Negative	Predict ecological damage
Private sector	Small-scale farmers	Growing food for subsistence and surplus for sale	Positive	Wish to increase production and income
	Large-scale commercial farmers	Growing crops for sale	Negative	Fear of competition
	Pastoralists	Raising livestock for subsistence and sale	Negative	Fear that irrigation will lead to loss of pasture
	Large food retailers	Retailing food in main towns	Negative	Fear restrictions on food imports

Force-field analysis

Next, you can weigh up the factors for and against your proposal as it follows (**force-field analysis**):

1. Write your proposal in the middle of a sheet of paper.
2. List all the organizations (or forces) that support the proposal on the left, and all the organizations (or forces) that oppose the proposal on the right.
3. Give each force a score from 1 to 5 reflecting its strength (1 means low ability to influence policy, or weak commitment to its position; 5 means high ability to influence policy, and a strong commitment to its position).
4. Sum the forces for and against the proposal: this will help you to decide who to form an alliance with.

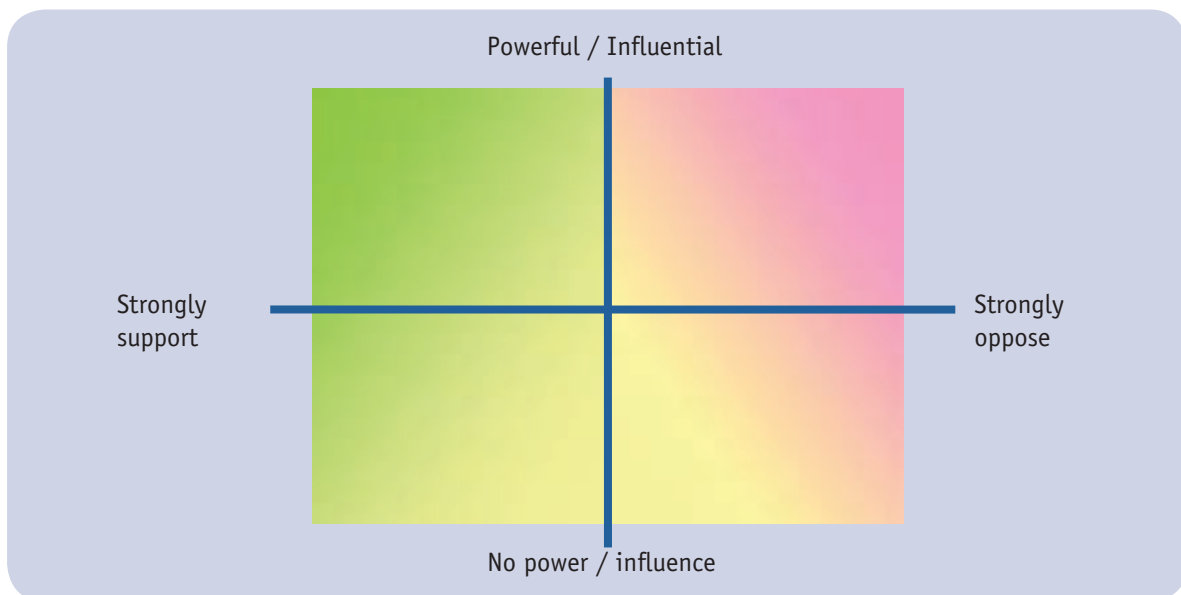


Once you have worked out who has what position on the issue, you can decide who to form an alliance with.

Stakeholder analysis

You can also use **stakeholder analysis** to determine who your main audiences should be.

1. For each stakeholder, think about their current position. Would they support or oppose your proposal?
2. Then work out how much power and influence they have. Do they have a big say in the decision, or is their influence limited?
3. Plot the stakeholders on the following diagram:



You will find that your stakeholders fall into five groups:

➤ **Powerful supporters**

You should **work together** with this group.

➤ **Less powerful supporters**

You should try to find ways to increase their influence and give them a **voice**.

➤ **Powerful opponents**

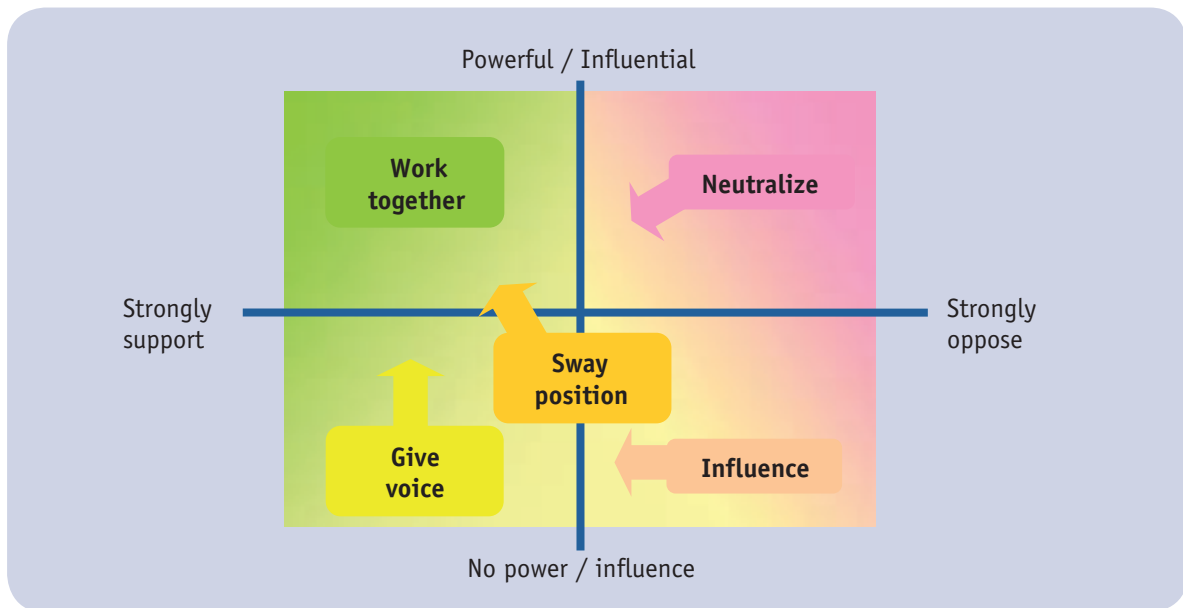
You should try to **neutralize** them, either by finding ways to soften their opposition or by making them have less of a say in the decision.

➤ **Less powerful opponents**

You can try to **influence** them to reduce their opposition, and prevent them from getting a more powerful voice.

➤ **Fence-sitters**

You should try to **sway their opinion** in favour of your proposal, and then make sure their voice is heard.



Focusing your efforts

The force-field and stakeholder analysis will help you decide where best to focus your energy, and what your message should be.

For example...

- You may realize that the forces opposing the proposal are too strong, and you would be wasting your time trying to change that aspect of policy. You might instead **look for another aspect** to change that has more chance of success.
- You may seek ways to **neutralize the opposing forces**.
- You may decide to throw your weight against the point where you expect **resistance to change** to be **weakest**.
- You may try to find other ways to **increase the forces** in favour of policy change.

Four types of campaigns

Campaigns may pass through several different stages.

- Start off by trying to **negotiate**. Bring the issue to policymakers' attention during meetings. Provide them with **policy briefs** and other information. A friendly approach is much more likely to be successful than one where you are confrontational.
- At the same time, bring the issue to public attention to build **public pressure** on the policy process. You can do this by using the **mass media**.
- If that does not work, consider **public action**: organizing stunts, demonstrations and protests. Make sure you get maximum media attention for these activities.
- You may be forced to seek **legal remedies** – for example, by appealing to the courts to stop a particular project from going forward. Be warned: legal action can be very expensive, so make sure you have the funds and expertise to see it through.

Negotiation	Public pressure	Public action	Legal remedy
Policy briefs	Public pressure on policymakers	Demonstrations	Judicial reviews
Expert opinion	Media campaign – e.g., press releases, interviews, etc.	Boycotts	Court cases
Coordination meetings		Stunts	Class actions
Non-public pressure – e.g., letters to Ministers		Occupations	
		Vigils	

Finding “champions”

Some policy change occurs through routine processes. But much happens through special initiatives.

Find out who takes these initiatives. How can you identify them? How can you get their attention?

The “**champion**” is often someone outside the government, but who:

- has experience in government;
- is known and trusted in government;
- has access to decision makers;
- is charismatic; and
- has access to the media.

Try to get such people interested in your cause. Give them the information they need, and involve them in your planning and coordination activities.

.....

Remember that...

Information alone does not necessarily lead to action. Giving them a personal stake in the success of your initiative by involving them as early as possible in the process will increase the likelihood that they will take action.

.....

Building coalitions

Your issues map and force-field analysis will have shown you who is engaged in the issue and what their interests are.

Try to build **coalitions with other organizations** that have the same or similar aims.

.....

Remember that...

Each member of the coalition will have its own interests and goals. Make your own position clear, and understand others' positions. That will show you whether there is sufficient overlap to build a collaborative lobbying effort.

.....

Seek **other types of organizations** that share your goals.

For example, if you are part of an NGO coalition, your position will gain credibility if you can convince private companies to join you.

Summary

Advocacy means pushing for some kind of change in society. Lobbying has the narrower meaning of trying to influence legislators such as ministers and members of parliament.

Policymaking can be a very long, drawn-out process: you must anticipate the policy decisions and be aware of the timetable and processes that lead up to key decisions being made.

It is also important to understand the policy context. Developing an issues map and carrying out an organizational analysis can help you to decide where to focus your efforts and to who to form an alliance with.

Campaigns may pass through several different stages: negotiation, public pressure, public action and legal remedy.

Getting champions involved in your project and seeking coalitions with other organizations will help you to achieve your objectives. Please also remember to respect your organization's and country's laws.

WRITING EFFECTIVE REPORTS

4.1 Preparing policy briefs

4.2 More reporting formats

4.3 Writing effectively





Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify two types of policy briefs (advocacy and objective);
- describe the characteristics of a policy brief;
- describe the structure and contents of a policy brief; and
- conceptualize a policy brief about a food security issue.

Introduction

In this lesson we will take a close look at policy briefs and learn how to produce them.

What are policy briefs?

A policy brief is a concise summary of a particular issue, the policy options to deal with it, and some recommendations on the best option.

It is aimed at government policymakers and others who are interested in formulating or influencing policy.

Policy briefs can take different formats. A typical format is a single A4 sheet (210 x 297 mm), containing perhaps 700 words. It has an attractive design, and may have one or more photographs. Longer briefs (up to 8 pages, or 3,000 words) and other formats are also possible.

Examples of policy briefs

Here are some examples of policy briefs from different organizations:



Braun, J. von, and M. Torero. 2008. Physical and virtual global food reserves to protect the poor and prevent market failure. IFPRI Policy Brief 4. International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, DC. www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/bp004.pdf



FAO. 2005. Strengthening sustainable agricultural and rural enterprises. SARD Brief 3. SARD-Farming Systems Evolution project. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome. www.fao.org/sard/common/ecg/2461/en/SARD_Brief_3.pdf



EC - FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme, Food Security in Protracted Crises: What can be done?, Policy Brief, December 2008 <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/ak057e/ak057e00.pdf>



INMASP and FAO. 2006. Farmer field schools on land and water management: An extension approach that works. INMASP and FAO Pilot Project on Land and Water Management through Farmer Field Schools. Jinja, Uganda. www.mamud.com/Docs/ffslwm_policy_brief.pdf



NCCR North-South. 2009. Natural resources: The climate change challenge. Evidence for Policy 4. NCCR, University of Bern, Switzerland. www.cde.unibe.ch/userfiles/file/NCCR_Policy_Brief_Climate_Change.pdf



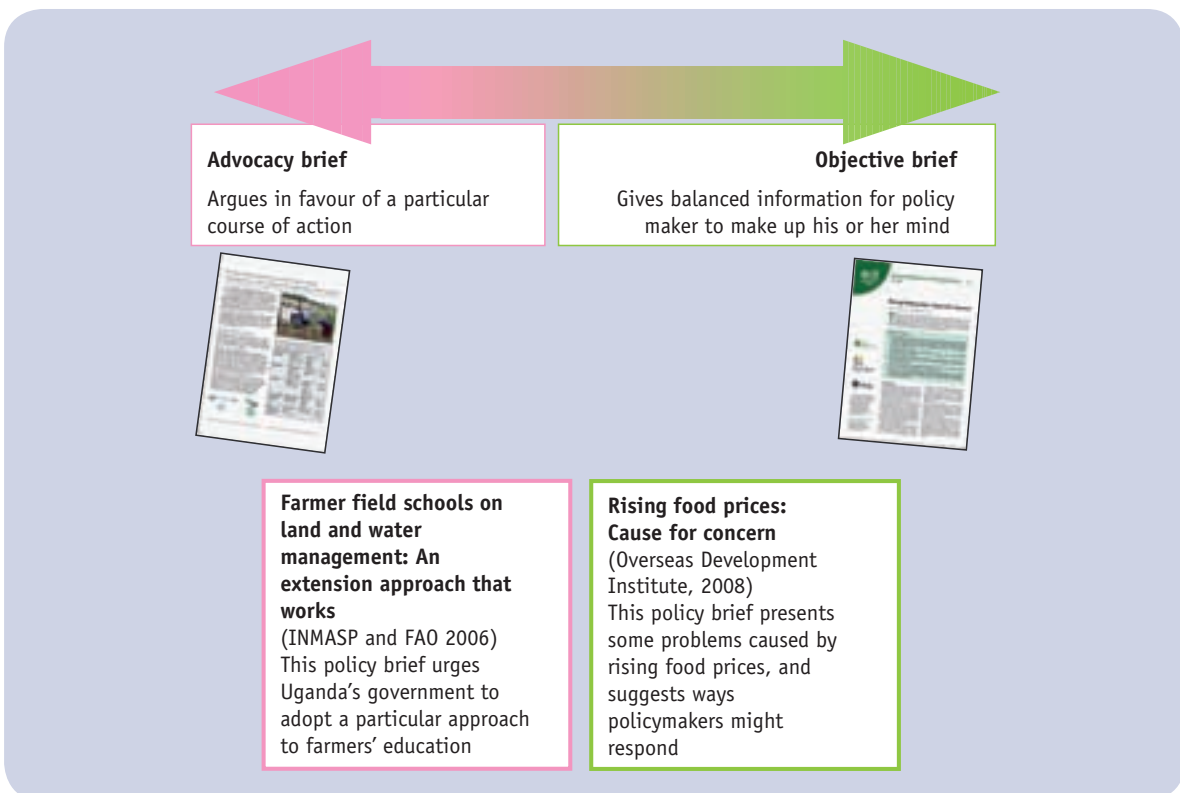
ODI. 2008. Rising food prices: A global crisis. Briefing paper 37. Overseas Development Institute, London. www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1009.pdf

	<p>ODI. 2008. Rising food prices: Cause for concern. Natural Resource Perspectives 115. Overseas Development Institute, London. www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/1896.pdf</p>
	<p>UNAIDS. 2008. HIV, food security and nutrition. UNAIDS Policy Brief. http://data.unaids.org/pub/Manual/2008/jc1515a_policybrief_nutrition_en.pdf</p>

Types of policy briefs

There are **two basic types** of policy briefs:

- an **advocacy brief** argues in favour of a particular course of action.
- an **objective brief** gives balanced information for the policymaker to make up his or her mind.



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**.

What should a policy brief contain?

To achieve its objectives, a policy brief should:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **Relate to the big picture.** The policy brief may build on context-specific findings, but it should draw conclusions that are more generally applicable.

Remember that...

Policymakers are busy people, and are probably not specialists in your area.

They are likely to read only something that...

- *Looks attractive*
 - *Appears interesting*
 - *Is short and easy to read.*
-



Part of a series?

Many policy briefs are part of a **series**. Check with the series editor, or the head of the publications or public awareness unit in your organization, for any requirements:

- the total **number of words**;
- the **structure** of the text;
- whether you can include **graphics** and **photographs**, and whether you can use colour;
- the type and level of **language** to use; and
- **manuscript submission** and editing requirements.

Structuring your policy brief

There are many ways of structuring a policy brief. Here is one way:

- Title
- Summary
- Recommendations
- Introduction
- The body (the main text)
- Policy implications
- Conclusions

In addition, a policy brief may contain the following:

- Boxes and sidebars
- Cases
- Tables
- Graphics
- Photographs

You also need to include various additional items of information:

- The masthead (the series title)
- Authors
- Acknowledgements
- Publication details
- References






Let us look at each of these items in more detail.

Title

The title should be short, catchy, and to the point.



- **Short:** Try to keep it to less than 12 words. If that is not possible, consider breaking it into a title and subtitle.
- **Catchy:** It should grab the reader's attention. Try to include relevant key words, or find an unusual turn of phrase that sticks in the mind. Also consider using a question as a title.
- **To the point:** It should be relevant to the topic.

Example: Policy Brief Title

	Title	Comments
	Food security in protracted crises: What can be done?	Posing a question in the title is a good way to lure someone into reading the text.
	HIV, food security and nutrition	A simple title that brings together the three main subjects discussed in the policy brief.
	Farmer field schools on land and water management: An extension approach that works	The main title describes the content of the paper. The subtitle gives more explanations and invites the reader to find out why the approach works.
	Rising food prices – A global crisis: Action needed now to avoid poverty and hunger	The main title is only six words. The subtitle reinforces the urgency of the issue.
	Natural resources: The climate change challenge	“Climate change” is currently a hot topic, so is expected to attract attention. “Challenge” implies that the policy brief will show how to address this issue.

Summary

Some policy briefs include a brief **summary** or policy message at the beginning – sometimes printed in a box or in bigger type. This may contain three or four bullets giving the main points in the policy brief. Ask yourself, “What are the main points you want policymakers to get – even if they read nothing else?”

Example: Summaries		
	Summary	Comments
	<p>Soaring food prices pose problems for three groups. First, the poor whose ability to buy food is undermined. Second, governments of low-income countries facing higher import bills, soaring costs for safety net programmes and political unrest. Third, aid agencies juggling increased demands for food, cash and technical advice. High food prices threaten the gains made since the 1960s and highlight the long-term need for investment in, and better management of, the global food supply.</p> <p>This Paper examines the causes of rising food prices, expected trends, the likely impact, and possible policy responses.</p>	<p>92 words.</p> <p>Neatly shows how rising prices affect three groups, then describes what is in the paper.</p>
	<p>The effects of a changing climate are felt most acutely in the countries least equipped to deal with them. Developing and transition countries are particularly vulnerable through their high dependence on natural resources much of the population is employed in the primary sector, as farmers or pastoralists. The view that the “North” should mitigate and the “South” must adapt has dominated discussions on climate change, with developing countries seen as bearing the brunt of the negative effects of global warming primarily caused by industrialisation. However, on this issue of evidence for policy will attempt to show, effective natural resource management in developing and transition countries can contribute to both mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and to a more sustainable development.</p>	<p>122 words.</p> <p>Describes the problem and outlines what is in the rest of the paper.</p>

Recommendations


You do not have to put your recommendations at the end: a policy brief is not a detective story where the answer comes on the last page! There are various ways to present recommendations:

- on the **first page** – as part of the Summary, or immediately after it, or in a separate box or sidebar.
- at **the end** as a separate section.
- distributed **throughout the policy brief** where they best relate to the text, but with each recommendation highlighted in some way (e.g. with boldface type).

Wherever you put them:

- **State the recommendations clearly and in a way that is easy to understand.** You can do this by starting each recommendation with an action verb and boldfacing the key words.
- **Make them easy to find.** Print them in boldface, put them in a different colour, or put them in a box labelled “Recommendations”. Many readers will skip straight to the recommendations without reading the rest of the text.
- **Keep them short.** Do not overwhelm the reader with a long list of recommendations. Five or six are enough. If you have more recommendations than this, drop some of them, combine them, or consider writing separate policy briefs on different aspects of the problem.
- **Make them realistic.** Policymakers will be more interested in recommendations that they can implement: that are politically, economically, socially and technically feasible.

Example: Recommendations

	Recommendations	Comments
	<p>Key points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food prices have been rising since 2000, spiked in early 2008, and may remain high for another ten years • Prompt action is needed to protect the poorest and support low-income countries faced by surging import bills • In the medium term, economic and agricultural growth can offset the damage, but this will require more determined efforts to boost food production 	<p>Three bulleted points placed in the sidebar on the front page – where the reader cannot fail to see them.</p>



Policy Message

Countries in the South have a potential both to mitigate climate change and to adapt to its effects through good natural resource management:

- Sustainable land management (SLM) systems can be suitable for buffering weather extremes and storing carbon in degraded soils.
- Conserving headwater forests can help to reduce the impact of climate change by sustaining dry season flows downstream.
- Good water management is of increasing importance as rain patterns change and glaciers recede.
- Predicting and anticipating geographic shifts in agricultural zones is vital for adapting future agricultural production.

Four bullet points on the first page summarize the contents of the policy brief.



Actions for international partners

- Feed multilateral HIV programming that incorporates effective food and nutrition interventions, in line with scale-up trends.

Actions for civil society

- Advocate policies and programmes nutrition and food security in line with national and international commitments.

Actions for governments

- Use poverty reduction strategies, social protection and sector, district and local plans—including disaster preparedness plans—to sustain livelihoods and to integrate approaches to food security.

Most of the **last page** is taken up with a series of specific recommendations: 11 bullet points in all. This list is digestible because it is divided into recommendations for different sets of readers: governments, international partners and civil society.

Each recommendation begins with a verb: “**Use** poverty reduction strategies...”, “**Incorporate** nutrition indicators...”, “**Engage** the private sector...”



Policy conclusions

- Food prices have been rising since the start to decline later this year, the next seen in the early 2000s, thanks to demands for staples as populations grow, as incomes rise.
- Prompt assistance is needed for countries and for low-income households.
- Low stocks threaten the functioning of land to be switched back into food production from “set-aside” in the EU.
- In the medium term, economic and social recovery will require more determined efforts.
- Beyond action, a better understanding of such events are rare. Increased variability

The recommendations appear in a box labelled “**Policy conclusions**” on the first page, immediately after the summary.



Introduction


This is the first part of the main body of the text. Think of it as a statement of the issue or problem. The introduction does four things:

- It grabs the reader's attention.
- It introduces the topic.
- It says why it is important.
- It tells the reader why he/she should do something about it.

Here is one way to structure the introduction:

- **The problem** (What is the problem? Why is it important?)
- **Background, context** (What happens, where, who is involved?)
- **Causes of current situation** (Why? Give evidence or examples.)
- **Effects of current situation** (What effects does it have? Give evidence or examples.)

Example: Introduction



Introduction

Since the 1970s, the real price of staple foods has been falling on world markets, interrupted briefly by price spikes in the early 1970s and mid 1990s. Low prices were attributable both to high levels of production in OECD countries as well as to the substitution of...

...but since the early 1990s, food prices have been rising on world markets, and since 2006 have climbed strongly. The price of a tonne of wheat, for example, that cost just US\$106 in January 2006, reached US\$316 in January 2008, and US\$491 in March 2008. Some exceptionally poor harvests have been important, but forecasts for the next few years are for higher food prices than seen in the recent past owing to structural changes in supply and demand.

On the demand side, the world population is projected to rise from 6.5 billion in 2006 to 9.1 billion in 2050. This translates into rising demand for meats that in large part are produced by feeding grain to livestock. In addition, high oil prices and concerns over energy security in the US, make biofuels competitive, so that grain, sugar and other crops are diverted into producing ethanol and biofuels.

Food price rises threaten to reverse recent gains in poverty reduction. Low income countries are faced by heavy increases in the cost of imported food, draining foreign exchange, increasing inflation, and putting back brakes on growth and development.

Now, then, can governments and donors respond to these changed circumstances? In the medium term, growth can raise incomes to compensate for the higher cost of food. The right policies can help farmers respond to the opportunity by growing more and putting prices back down. More support for agricultural research from governments and donors will be needed.


Necessary background

The problem

Causes of the problem

Effects of the problem

Ways to deal with the problem: transition to main body of the text



Why do food security and nutrition matter in responding to HIV?

Often neglected, food security¹ and nutrition² are critical for individuals, households and communities affected by HIV. Lack of food security and poor nutritional status may hasten progression to AIDS-related diseases³ and undermine adherence and response to antiretroviral therapy. HIV infection itself undermines food security and nutrition by reducing work capacity and jeopardizing household livelihoods.

HIV impairs nutritional status by undermining the immune system and nutrient intake, absorption and use.⁴ Adults with HIV have 10–30% higher energy requirements than a healthy adult without HIV and children with HIV 50–100% higher than normal requirements.⁵ Food availability and good nutrition are thus essential for keeping people with HIV healthy and able to resist opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis for longer.

Addressing food security and nutrition in all settings is vital to achieving the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010, to which all Member States of the United Nations have committed themselves.⁶ This policy brief highlights actions that governments, civil society and international partners can take to promote food security and nutrition in the context of the AIDS epidemic.

A question as a heading to draw the reader in

The problem

Causes of the problem

Effects of the problem

Ways to deal with the problem

The body

Example: Various ways to structure the main body of the text

Paper	Structure	Comments
International Food Policy Research Institute	<p>Problem – effects – causes – solution</p> <p>Begin by outlining the problem in more detail, then show what effects it has. Describe the causes, and finally offer some solutions (the policy implications).</p>	<p>This policy brief from the International Food Policy Research Institute discusses ways to prevent market failure in food supplies.</p> <p>It describes a malfunction in grain markets (the problem), and briefly mentions the impact of the problems (the effects). It then analyses why the problem has occurred (the causes), before considering various ways to overcome it (the solution).</p>
Natural Resource Perspectives	<p>Subject 1 – subject 2 – subject 3 – policy implications</p> <p>Divide the topic up into several subjects or subtopics and discuss each one in turn, before going into the policy implications.</p>	<p>This <i>Natural Resource Perspectives</i> paper from the Overseas Development Institute looks at three aspects of rising food prices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why have food prices risen so much in recent years? • What is the expected path for food prices? • What will be the impact on the poor? <p>It then discusses various options for policymakers to consider.</p>
UNAIDS policy brief – HIV, Food Security and Nutrition	<p>Subject 1 – subject 2 – subject 3 – policy implications</p> <p>Divide the topic up into several subjects or subtopics and discuss each one in turn, before going into the policy implications.</p>	<p>This policy brief from UNAIDS discusses three aspects of HIV and food security:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention of HIV transmission • Treatment • Care, support and impact mitigation <p>It then reminds governments of their international treaty obligations, before listing policy actions for governments, international partners and civil society.</p>
Swiss NCCR North–South Evidence for policy	<p>Example 1 – example 2 – example 3 – policy implications</p> <p>Give one or more examples of the problem you want to address. Then generalize from these to derive policy recommendations.</p>	<p>This brief in the Swiss NCCR North–South <i>Evidence for policy</i> series focuses on how climate change affects land management. It draws on three examples – from Kenya, Central Asia and Ethiopia – and uses these as a basis for policy recommendations.</p>
INMASP & FAO: Farmer schools on land and water management	<p>Problem – intervention – results – policy implications</p> <p>Describe the problem, and show how an intervention overcame it. Then make some recommendations on how to implement the intervention more widely.</p>	<p>This advocacy brief by INMASP and FAO describes a problem (poor land and water management). It then outlines an intervention (farmer field schools) and shows how this can solve the problem (the results). It suggests how the government could spread the approach more widely.</p>

Structuring the body

Make sure you structure the text in a **logical manner**. Do not force the reader to work to understand the logical flow. Some ways to do this:


- **Keep the paragraphs short** and restricted to a **single idea**. Consider putting this idea into a single phrase or sentence and printing it in boldface at the beginning of the paragraph.
- **Use more headings** and subheadings than you would do normally. In a four-page policy brief, you should have at least six subheadings – one for every two to four paragraphs.
- Re-read each paragraph and ask yourself **“so what?”** If it is not obvious what the paragraph is trying to say, rewrite it or delete it.

Policy implications

Here is where you focus on the policy options and implications. Some items to consider including:

- **Suggested revisions in policy.** What are the various options?
- **Effects of the revised policy or policies.** How will the policy changes improve the situation? Give evidence or examples if possible.
- **Advantages and disadvantages of each policy option.** What are the potential benefits? What will it cost? What side-effects might there be?
- If you have not given the **recommendations** at the beginning of the policy brief, you can put them here.


Example: Policy implications



Policy implications

- Promoting SLM at the farm level creates multiple benefits: it provides the possibility to mitigate climate change by carbon sequestration, while making land use systems more resilient to climate extremes and increasing agricultural production.
- Protecting headwater forests is particularly important in arid and semi-arid regions to support the infiltration of rainfall water in the highlands, which in turn sustains dry season flows.
- Improving the state of irrigation systems and technologies ensures that melt water is efficiently used for cultivation. It is a necessary adaptation strategy in Central Asia where global warming is causing a reduction in snow cover.
- Predicting geographic shifts in agricultural zones is vital for determining which production areas will become unsuitable for currently cultivated crops. Maps on current and future production areas support affected farmers in assessing production risks. These maps are based on the agroecological conditions of crop production as well as on regional climate change scenarios.

This policy implications section draws on the examples given in the main body of the text to give four more generally applicable guidelines for policy.



Policy options and priorities

At the macro level
Policy objectives should be designed primarily to boost the local economy (i.e. primary production, industries and services), giving options that take into account local resources and future development trends.

National government policy makers are primarily responsible for **macro policy** decisions that are relevant to SMEs, in particular exchange rate and **trade policies**. In the latter connection, regional or sub-regional free-trade agreements can play an important role since they can boost domestic and sub-regional trade, or help in selecting or promoting sensitive products (e.g. USMCA in West Africa, EC-CAFTA in Central America and ASEAN in Asia).

At the sectoral and subsectoral levels
At the domestic sectoral level, and in the absence of agreement, decision makers should compare the strengths and weaknesses of each sector following economic subsectors.

At the institutional level
The development of the sector sub-sectors alone has to be sustained and accompanied by initiatives that can strengthen local institutions, particularly in terms of focusing on gender and youth issues. Key options include the following:

Education and training are major drivers of medium- and long-term change in rural areas. Literacy and numeracy, college-level skills development, and education for rural people are vital to diversify economic activities. Universities should adapt curricula and research and development programmes to better suit income-generation priorities.

This policy implications section suggests policy implications for a range of fields at the macro, sectoral, subsectoral and institutional levels.

Conclusions

A conclusion is not normally necessary in a policy brief. The Summary (at the beginning) and the Recommendations section (also probably at the beginning) often take over the role of the conclusions section in a policy brief.

If you do decide to include a Conclusions section:

- Keep it short – one paragraph is enough.
- Do not merely repeat what you have already stated. Instead, draw the text to a close by explaining how urgent the situation is, or how important it is to select the policy option you recommend.

Boxes and sidebars

You can use **boxes or sidebars** (small boxes positioned in the margin) to present various types of information that do not fit well in the flow of the text:



- cases;
- definitions or explanations;
- information that does not fit within the main flow of the text;
- lists; or
- examples to illustrate points in the text.

Boxes should be self-contained: the reader should be able to understand them without having to read the main text.

Give each box a title, and refer to it in the text.

Do not have too many boxes: one on each page is enough.

Example: Boxes and sidebars






Characteristics of Protracted Crisis

In recent years, the term 'protracted crises' has been used to emphasize the persistent nature of certain emergencies (Schafer, 2002). Elements that characterize protracted crises include:³

- non-existent or weak public institutions;
- weak informal institutions;
- state control is challenged by the lack of resources and institutional failure;
- external legitimacy of the state is contested;
- a strong parallel or extra-legal economy;
- existence of or a high susceptibility to violence;
- forced displacement;
- the deliberate exclusion of sectors of the population from enjoying basic rights;
- livelihoods are highly vulnerable to external shocks; and
- widespread poverty and food insecurity.

This box presents a bulleted list that would interrupt the flow if it were included in the main text.

Mitigation

"In the context of climate change, a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases. Examples include using fossil fuels more efficiently for industrial processes or electricity generation, switching to solar energy or wind power, improving the insulation of buildings, and expanding forests and other 'sinks' to remove greater amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere."

Adaptation

"Adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities."

Source: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
http://unfccc.int/essential_background/glossary/items/3666.php

An example of a box that contains definitions.

Cases

The text may contain one or more **cases**: particular examples or stories about what happened in a particular location at a certain time. You can include such cases as part of the main text or by putting them in a **box**.

Cases should be short (one or two paragraphs only) and self-contained (readers should be able to understand them even if they do not read the rest of the text).

Focus on the subject, and avoid giving unnecessary details. Ask yourself: so what? What is the point of including this case in the policy brief?

Make sure that the case is relevant to the rest of the text. It may depict a particular point you are making, or provide the basis for the rest of the text, or show how reality is more complex than theory.

Example: Cases



The NCCR *Evidence for policy* series is based on case studies in various countries. A summary of the cases appears in a box: this one covers Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Ethiopia.

NCCR North South case studies on the link between climate change and development in Africa and Central Asia

Assessing local conservation measures in Tajikistan
Soil erosion on sloping agricultural land poses a serious problem for the environment as well as for production, particularly in highly erodible soils, such as the best zones in Tajikistan. A study carried out in Fozilabad evaluated the potential of local conservation measures on cropland to provide decision support for planning sustainable land use in a spatially explicit manner. It revealed that current average soil loss could be reduced by low-cost measures such as contouring (by 11%), buffer plants (by 18%) and drainage ditches (by 15%). More expensive measures such as terracing and agroforestry can reduce erosion by as much as 63% for terracing) and 91% for agroforestry combined with terracing). More details: www.north-south.unibe.ch, search entry "Tajik Buzhismam".

Improving irrigation systems in Kyrgyzstan
The organisational structure of water distribution in Kyrgyzstan dates back to Soviet times and is largely outdated. NCCR North South research in Kyrgyzstan has brought forward arguments for alleviating the water distribution problem by introducing new water discharge stabilisers, which reduce the fluctuation range of water levels upstream. The improved technology, which has been patented, also has economic benefits. More details: www.north-south.unibe.ch, search entry "Balyk Ashkashov".

Coffee: a high mountain crop?
Coffee cultivation in Ethiopia will be heavily influenced by climate change mainly due to rising temperatures and, to a lesser degree, due to changing precipitation. Research predicts that the lower critical value of the optimal cultivation zone – currently at 1900 metres – will rise up to around 1800 metres above sea level. The most important coffee-growing region in Ethiopia is Oromia. By the end of the century, the optimal cultivation area there will be reduced by up to one third.



The ODI *Natural Resource Perspective* series puts cases in coloured boxes. This one refers to a case in Cambodia.

Box 1: Overall effects of rising food prices on households in Cambodia

Rice prices are expected to increase by 20% above their 2005 levels by 2016/17. How would this affect country such as Cambodia where rice is the main staple? A Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model of the Cambodian economy has been used to simulate the impacts.

Not surprisingly, a higher rice price stimulates production of rice – by around 13% – and rice exports rise by more than 80%.

But while rice farmers redouble their efforts, the rest of economy suffers. Resources are shifted from other farm activities into the paddy fields, so livestock and fish production declines.

Throughout the economy, the higher prices ruling for rice reduce the amounts that households have to spend on other goods and services, so depressing the economy. GDP falls by around 0.2%.

Household incomes vary: farming households are better off, with the incomes of surplus producers rising by almost 4%, but other households see their incomes fall, by around 2%.

Models such as these may underestimate the degree to which the economy will adapt in the medium term – with, for example, technical advances in rice farming.

Source: Initial computations by authors using a CGE for Cambodia

Tables

Tables are a good way to present certain types of information. But keep them simple. A table with too many rows and columns will confuse readers more than help them understand what you are trying to say. You can use tables to present either numbers or textual information.

- Keep the **number of rows and columns** to a minimum – no more than four columns and six rows. Cut out those that you do not need.
- Put columns you want readers to compare **next to each other**.
- Put the rows in a **logical order**: by size or alphabetical order.
- **Highlight table cells** (using shading, labelling or boldface type) that you want to draw the readers' attention to. Make it easy for them to see the information you want to present.
- Consider **converting a table into a graph**. Would it make the information easier to read?
- **Give round numbers**: 25,000, not 24,567.23.
- Do not include **statistical significance levels** (such as $p < 0.05$): they are appropriate for a scientific paper, not a policy brief.
- **Make the title talk**: "Irrigation boosts yields" is better than "Comparison of yields on irrigated and non-irrigated land".
- Say where **the information comes from**: the date, place, project, etc. Put the details in a footnote if needed.

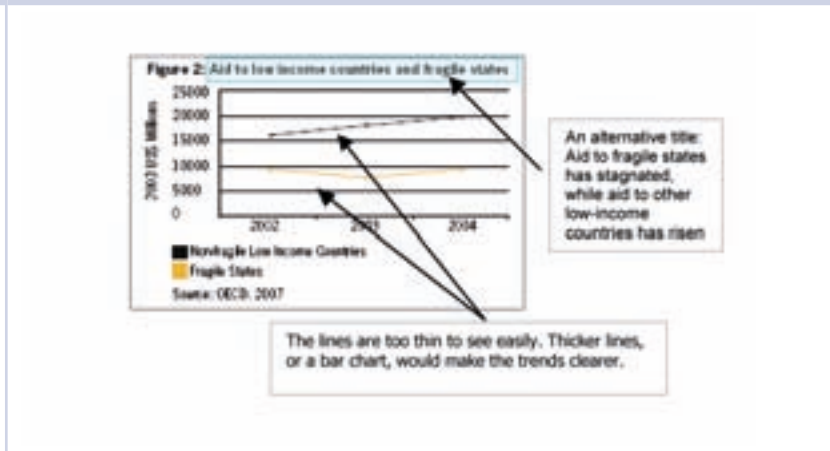
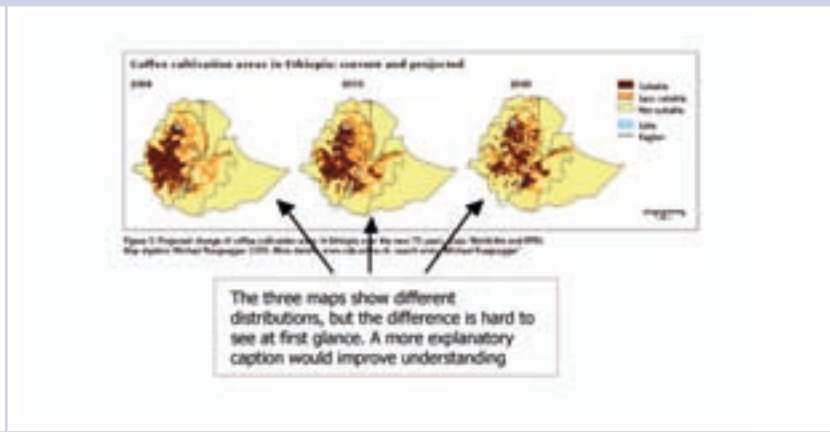
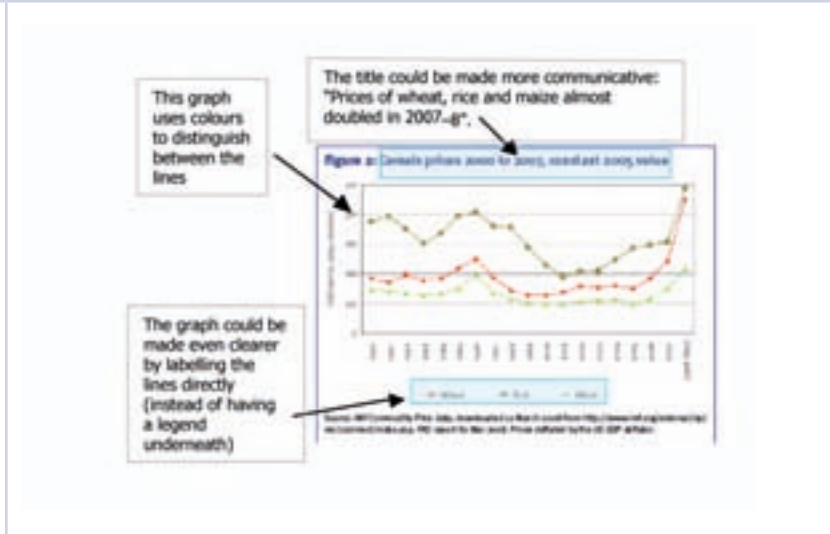
Graphics

Graphics include **diagrams** (such as flow charts or schematic diagrams), **graphs** (such as bar charts, line graphs and pie charts) and **maps**.

Graphics are an important element in the design. Readers often look at them before reading the text. So make them clear and easy to understand.

- Choose the type of graphic that **best suits** the information you want to present.
- Use **bar charts** or **pie charts** to compare figures
- Use **line graphs** for time series.
- Keep it simple! Do not try to make a single graphic do too much work. For example, do not clutter a graph with too many lines: show only the most important variables.
- Make the labels legible.
- Give an explanatory title or caption.
- Finally, choose colours, shading patterns and symbols that are easy to distinguish from one other.

Example: Graphics



Photographs







Even more than graphics, photographs attract the reader’s attention.

So if you use photos, select them carefully to **carry a message** as well as to make the page attractive.

Remember to:

- Use only **good-quality photos**: if you do not have one that is suitable, do not use one that is substandard.
- Make sure the photos have at least a 150 dpi (dots per inch) resolution (preferably 300 dpi), if the policy brief is to be printed. Try to keep a gender balance and avoid reinforcing stereotyped gender roles.
- Give a **descriptive caption** that helps carry your message. “Steep slopes and small land parcels limit agricultural production in Bagistan” is better than “Landscape in Bagistan”.
- Make sure that you have **permission** to use the photographs, and give the photographer’s name if necessary.

Example: Photographs

	 <p>The rising price of corn poses a threat to the world's poor.</p> <p>The caption turns a generic photograph into one that supports the overall message of the policy brief</p>
	 <p>This photo has no caption but is positioned next to the text it depicts. It has two functions: it attracts the readers' attention, and depicts a farmer field school (an extension approach that is unfamiliar to many readers).</p>
	 <p>This policy brief series uses black-and-white photos on the first page, immediately above the title. This prominent position means extra care is needed to select a photo and caption that carries the message.</p>

The masthead

The **masthead** goes at the top of the first page. It shows the title of the policy brief series, the issue number and date, and perhaps the organization's logo.

If you are writing for an established series, you do not need to worry about this: the publications manager will put your text into the right format and add design elements such as the masthead.

If your policy brief is a one-off, or the start of a new series, you should design an attractive masthead.

Example: Masthead



Authors

Some organizations print the names of the **authors** prominently – just under the title. Others put them in a footnote, or at the end of the text. Still others do not name individuals as authors at all – since the policy brief is deemed to have come from the organization as a whole.

If you do name the authors, include their names, positions, institution, and email address for correspondence.



If you do not name the authors, at least give an email address where readers can write to for more information.

Acknowledgements and publication details

Remember to provide the following **additional information**:

- An **acknowledgement** of funding sponsors and organizations and individuals who made significant contributions to the content of the policy brief.
- An address where readers can find **more information**.
- The **publisher** and **date**.
- Information on the **copyright** – can others reproduce the material without permission?
- If necessary, a **disclaimer** stating that the views expressed in the policy brief do not necessarily reflect those of the publishing organization.

Example: Acknowledgement and publication details

	Example	Comments
	 <p>© FAO 2008 Published by the EC - FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme website: www.foodsec.org e-mail: information-for-action@fao.org</p> <p>The EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.</p>	<p>No authors named – implying that the policy brief reflects the views of the publisher.</p> <p>The first section gives information about the publisher and tells the reader where to find more information.</p> <p>The final paragraph acknowledges the donor.</p>



A longer version of this policy brief is available at http://dca.unsw.edu.au/pubs/Manual2008/11115a_policybrief_nutrition_en.pdf

No authors named.
The only indication of where to go for more information is a web address on the last page. No date or information on the publisher – except the logos at the top of the front page.



Rising food prices: Cause for concern
Steve Wiggins and Stephanie Lory



Steve Wiggins and Stephanie Lory are research fellows at the Channay Development Institute.
Email: s.wiggins@odi.org.uk and s.lory@odi.org.uk

Authors' names printed prominently beneath the title on the first page.
Their contact details are given on the last page.
A sidebar on the last page gives the publication details.



The authors are listed prominently on the last page – together with their photos and contact details. Clearly, this publisher hopes readers will contact the authors for more information.
A section on the last page gives information about the publisher, sponsors and collaborators.



References and footnotes

It is not necessary (and there is often not enough space) to include a full list of references. Instead, just provide references to one to four sources where readers can find further information. Give the web addresses of publications if you can.

It is best to avoid footnotes if you can. Put vital information instead in the main text or in a box or sidebar. If you must use footnotes, keep them to a minimum.

Developing policy briefs

Tips for the preparation of a policy brief

- Prepare the brief in a word processing programme. Follow the guidelines set out by the series editor (number of words, structure of the text, etc.).
- Reread the draft several times to make sure that it is correct and easy to understand. Ask an editor or a colleague to go through the text and suggest changes.
- If you are writing for a policy brief series, do not try to put your draft in the design. Let the person in charge of producing publications do this.
- Make sure you get your boss's approval for the final draft before you submit it.

Using the right language

Policymakers come from a wide range of backgrounds. They are unlikely to be specialists in your area. So you must write in a way that they will find easy to understand.

- Make the language clear, simple and easy to understand.
- Do not use academic terms or development jargon.
- Keep the headings short and clear, and keep the paragraphs short.

You may have to rephrase the language so it does not sound like a project report.

Example:

Original report	Policy brief
<p><i>"The project distinguished between agronomic, vegetative, structural and management measures."</i></p>	<p>There are four ways to conserve soil and water:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By changing cropping practices: For example, by planting crops along the contour. • By planting trees and grass: For example, by planting grass strips to slow down runoff. • By building earth or stone barriers such as terraces or drains to divert water. • By improved management – such as ploughing at different times of year.

Note that the policy brief replaces the jargon "agronomic", "vegetative" etc., with an explanation that readers are more likely to understand.

One policy brief	Several policy briefs on different topics at the same time
<p>This method takes several hours to one day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together a small group of colleagues or people who are working on your topic. • Make a brief presentation about what a policy brief is and what it contains. • Brainstorm ideas for what to include in the policy brief. • Allocate each person a section to write. Give them a short time – say, one hour, to write some text. • Ask each person in turn to present what they have written. Ask the other participants to comment and suggest improvements. • Gather all the sections together in the right order, and edit into the final form. 	<p>This approach takes 2–5 days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together a group of people who want to write policy briefs on various subjects. • Make a brief presentation about what a policy brief is and what it contains. • Invite the participants to conceptualize their own policy briefs and discuss the outlines in small groups. • Get the participants to write their own policy briefs section by section, following the format presented in this Lesson. • Help the participants when necessary. • Invite the participants to present what they have written, and allow other participants to comment and suggest improvements. • Ask the participants to submit what they have written for final editing.

Turning a big report into a policy brief

Probably the hardest job is to edit a 300-page report down to 700 words.

If you try to edit the text, you will run into two problems:

- It is hard to throw things away
- What remains has no natural flow.

When you need to condense a big report into a small policy brief, try to:

- Think of the **big picture**
- Then, write **from scratch**.

Finding the big picture

Take a step back and look at the report from a distance, as if through a **telescope**. Ask yourself:

- What **problem** did the project address?
- What did the study try to find out?
- What **did** it find out?

Then, think of your **audience**:

- Who is your policy audience?
- What aspects are of interest to policymakers?
- What do you want them to do differently?

That will help you select those aspects of the report to focus on. Perhaps your report already has a section on policy, so you can start there, and think of what other bits of information you need to include to put your recommendations in context.

Writing from scratch

There are two main ways to write a policy brief from scratch:

Start at the beginning

Write the policy brief in the logical order:

- First, write the **introduction**.
- Then work out the **body structure**.
- Write the **body**.
- Put the **supporting material** together: the cases, boxes, tables, graphics, photos and other information.

- Write the **recommendations**.
- Then reorder the text so the recommendations come at the **beginning**.

Start at the end

Write the text in reverse order, starting with the recommendations:

- Write the **recommendations**.
- Work out the **body structure** that will lead up to these recommendations.
- Write the **body**.
- Put the **supporting material** together: the cases, boxes, tables, graphics, photos and other information.
- Write the **introduction**.
- Reorder the text so the recommendations come at the **beginning**.

In practice, you may want to use a combination of these approaches in order to come up with your final text.

Using policy briefs

Once you have prepared your policy briefs, you can use them in many ways:

- As printed hardcopies, you can give them to policymakers in person, mail them to policymakers and other stakeholders and distribute them at conferences and workshops.
- As softcopies, you may send them by email (but don't spam!), put them on your website and distribute them via email groups or professional social networking sites.

You can also combine them with other types of information materials, such as:

- A **presentation** to use in meetings and conferences.
 - **Information sheets** with technical details.
 - A **brochure** about your project or organization.
 - A **video**.
 - A **poster** or **exhibit** for exhibitions or meetings.
 - Additional **handouts** and **photographs**.
 - A **press release**.
 - Statements to use in media **interviews**.
 - Information on your **website**.
 - A **report** or **book** with further details.
-



Summary

A policy brief is a concise summary of a particular issue, the policy options to deal with it, and some recommendations on the best option. It is aimed at government policymakers and others who are interested in formulating or influencing policy.

A policy brief can have the following structure: Title – Summary - Recommendations – Introduction – Body - Policy implications – Conclusions.

In addition, a policy brief may contain the following: Boxes and sidebars – Cases – Tables – Graphics – Photographs.

You also need to include various additional items of information: The masthead – Authors – Acknowledgements - Publication details – References.

Policy briefs are high-profile publications, and they go to important people. So it is important to get them right. You should get your boss's approval, consult with colleagues and do your own research carefully.

WRITING EFFECTIVE REPORTS

4.1 Preparing policy briefs

4.2 More reporting formats

4.3 Writing effectively





Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the major report types used to present food security information;
- understand the key features of these alternative report types; and
- structure a food security report for various contexts and purposes.

Introduction

In this lesson we will look at how to structure reports. You can draw on the examples and ideas presented in this lesson in developing your own reports.

Each report should be tailored to the needs of the primary audience: you will need to apply your own creative talent in developing your final report.

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts

Let's quickly review the main steps that you should follow to plan a report:

1. Defining the purpose for your report
2. Identifying the readers
3. Addressing a significant problem and answering the right questions
4. Providing readers with actionable recommendations

= REPORT OUTLINE

Once these steps have been completed, you can develop an outline of the report.

At that point you should already have ideas of what the report will need to contain. But exactly what format will you use? What sections or elements should it include? What will it look like? In short, what **type of report** will you produce?

Let's look at some of the major types of reports.

1. Research Reports

You may need to report on a piece of research that you have conducted on food security in your country or region; for example a baseline report or a study on vulnerability.

This type of report primarily presents and records your findings which may be used for **purposes that you cannot fully predict**.

While preliminary recommendations may be made, especially on longer term food security interventions, the emphasis is on increasing understanding of the issue through analysis.

2. Early Warning Bulletins

Early warning is about providing a glimpse of the future.

These reports provide decision makers with an indication of **whether a food security problem is emerging**. It should show where and how quickly is it developing and the dimensions of the problem. It may recommend further in-depth assessments or immediate interventions.

3. Needs Assessment Reports

Emergency Needs Assessments provide governments, relief organisations and the wider international community with **information to plan an immediate response** in the aftermath of a crisis. They establish the extent of a humanitarian emergency and the right response to reduce its impact.

Needs Assessments reports communicate these findings and recommendations to programmers and planners.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Reports

M&E is a process of assessing an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy.

M&E assesses the design, implementation and results. A monitoring report checks progress and recommends remedial actions. An evaluation report looks at the impact and recommends whether to continue, modify or stop the project, programme or policy.

Selecting the best report type

The table below may help you to think about which is the most suitable report format to apply to a specific situation.

Table I: Summary of Report Types

Report Type	Frequency	Primary purposes
Baseline or Research Report	Infrequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicates an increased understanding of food security Contributes to long-term development planning
Early Warning Bulletin	Continuous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs decision makers of current levels and trends in food security Activates and focuses needs assessment and mitigation plans
Emergency Needs Assessment	As needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies the extent and impact of a humanitarian emergency Recommends an appropriate emergency response Mobilizes resources
Policy Papers or Briefs	Infrequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defines an urgent policy issue Identifies and evaluates policy options Recommends a preferred alternative
Monitoring and Evaluation Reports (Programs and Policies)	Continuous (monitoring) Periodic (evaluation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assesses progress against targets Recommends changes to activities and design Mobilizes resources

Different **report types** are **often used in combination**.

For example, you might see elements of policy recommendation combined with a research report; or an early warning bulletin that incorporates recommendations on emergency needs.

Remember that there are many other documents that you may be responsible for. However, we will concentrate on reporting food security information.

Now we will **define the outline** of each type of report. For each report type, you will learn what elements should be included, and analyze some examples. Please see the previous lesson for a discussion on policy briefs.

Formats for Research Reports

In the course of your work you may undertake research to better understand the nature of food security in a country or region.

Your research may be based on field work (primary sources) or on analysing previous surveys, other published research or talking to people (secondary sources).

The report presents your data and draws conclusions from it. It should provide information that meets a particular audience's specific needs.

This type of report may not provide systematic recommendations. While preliminary recommendations may be included, the emphasis is on analysis and **contributing to an increased understanding** of the issue.

The typical research report would loosely follow the same **chronological order** as your research:

Problem and objectives	→	First, you discuss the issues that led to undertaking the research work,
Methodology	→	then you would discuss the data collection methodology,
Data	→	then you would discuss the data itself,
Conclusions	→	and finally the conclusions based upon that data.

The length of each section may vary greatly between different reports. Section headings may be combined, separated or renamed according to the purpose of the report.

Let's have a look at these sections more in detail. Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title

The title is the first thing that readers will see. A well chosen title should give readers a quick overview of the subject and problem addressed in the report. A reader may use the title in deciding whether to read the full report or not.

Table of contents

The table of contents is a skeleton or overview of the structure of the report. It shows the overall organization, the main sections and their sub-sections and page numbers to locate sections in the report.

The table of contents leads readers through the whole report. It provides a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed.

The table of contents also helps readers find specific sections or information that they are particularly interested in.

Executive Summary	<p>The executive summary represents the whole report by providing a synopsis of all the main parts and findings.</p> <p>The executive summary should make readers interested in reading the whole report. However, the main function of the executive summary is to satisfy the needs of those readers who do not have time to read the entire report and readers whose main interest is in the findings and conclusions of the study; especially decision-makers.</p>
Introduction	<p>The introduction to the research report also needs to get the readers ready to read the full report.</p> <p>Some of the other elements, such as the background or purpose, can be handled in the introduction.</p> <p>However, if these issues require a lot of discussion they may need their own sections. The introduction may conclude with a road map, showing how the report is organized.</p>
Background and purpose	<p>You will need to discuss the situation that led to the research. What is the problem that the research set out to address?</p> <p>You will need to discuss what you intended to do in the research project. What were your objectives? What was the scope of your work? What was not included?</p>
Review of the literature	<p>It is usual in a research report to summarize any relevant research to the study. What other reports or studies have been written about the issue? You should summarize this literature briefly. You should provide the full bibliographic citations at the end of your report so that readers can find these documents if they want to.</p>
Method and procedures	<p>One of the goals in writing this type of report is to allow the reader to visualize how you collected the data, so that they can judge the reliability or limits to the data.</p> <p>You may even want to enable the reader to replicate the survey. You should describe the conceptual framework of your research. You should also discuss the practical procedures used, possibly in some detail.</p>
Presentation of the data	<p>The heart of the research report is the data. These can go in the body of your report, or alternatively as appendixes if the data would interrupt the flow of your discussion.</p> <p>Future readers may want to utilize the original data in ways that you cannot always anticipate.</p> <p>In this section you should merely present the data, without trying to explain it.</p>
Conclusions and recommendations	<p>In a research report, it is useful to interpret or discuss your findings in a section separate from the one where you present the data.</p> <p>This section would explain your data and interpret it.</p> <p>This section, or area of the report, is also the place to make preliminary recommendations or state ideas for further research.</p>
Appendices	<p>Appendices can be useful for presenting the detailed data or additional information, where including it in the text would interrupt the flow of the main discussion.</p> <p>For example you may place a detailed methodology as an appendix.</p>
Bibliography	<p>The purpose of a research report is to build upon or add to the knowledge in a particular area.</p> <p>Your research report builds on the work done by other researchers on the same topic. For that reason, you must list the sources of information you used or consulted in your project.</p>

Now, let's examine the different features of two kinds of reports:

1. Background reports

As part of developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) you may be asked to help prepare a **vulnerability and poverty analysis**. This report is used to increase understanding of local livelihoods, existing conditions, and capacities for dealing with risk.

As a food security analyst you will have an intimate understanding of these issues and may be asked to help research and write such a report. This background report is the starting point for developing the PRSP.

2. Baseline reports

Staff at a Food Security Information System (FSIS) may undertake a **baseline survey**.

A baseline report presents findings from this survey. It serves as a reference point for future assessments. You may want to assess whether the food security situation has gotten better or worse, perhaps due to an external shock.

Or maybe you need to capture the baseline to assess the impact of policies, programmes or projects.

As you develop your research paper you should also consider a series of questions. The most important one is:

.....
*Does your research report achieve its purpose and
communicate an increased understanding of the topic to the
target audience?*
.....

Checklist

Additional questions include:

- Is the title interesting, clear, succinct and descriptive?
- Are headings of sections and sub-sections chosen effectively, and do they provide a clear overview of your paper?
- Is the executive summary a good representation of the paper?
- Are the objectives and scope of your research clearly explained?
- Are the methods and procedures clearly described? Could the reader replicate your survey?
- Have any previous studies on the issue been summarized?
- Are the original data clearly presented to the user?
- Are your findings and conclusions clearly written?
- Are recommendations practical in nature? Are they easily identifiable in the text?
- Are all appendices relevant and appropriate in supporting the paper?

Formats for Early Warning Bulletins

An important function of most food security information systems is to provide early warning of an impending food security crisis.

Over the past two decades relatively elaborate Early Warning (EW) systems have been established in many Countries.

The critical questions that an early warning bulletin needs to answer include:

- Is there a problem emerging?
- What areas are affected and how quickly is the problem developing?
- What response is already underway?
- Are more in-depth assessments needed?

The EW bulletin will need to keep key decision makers informed of the situation.

The primary audience will include staff of national Governments, donors and other humanitarian agencies.

Depending on the situation the report may be used to stimulate further action. However, an EW bulletin would not normally be expected to support detailed programming decisions.

An early warning bulletin may include the following structural elements:

<p>Title</p>	<p>The title can be used to communicate the main message of the bulletin. A one line title can provide a mini summary of the report.</p> <p>This can be very helpful to busy decision makers who need to know at a glance whether there is a problem that needs their attention or not.</p>
<p>Table of contents</p>	<p>Even though EW bulletins are usually very short – between one and four pages in length – a table of contents can still be appropriate.</p> <p>The table of contents is a skeleton or overview of the structure of the report.</p> <p>It provides readers with a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed.</p> <p>It helps readers to locate specific information that they may be particularly interested in.</p>
<p>Summary</p>	<p>The summary provides a synopsis of the whole bulletin.</p> <p>It may be the only part of the report that is read by busy decision makers, so it needs to represent all the key findings and recommendations of the report.</p> <p>It should be tightly drafted, short and focus on the main analytical points and recommendations.</p>
<p>Implications and recommendations</p>	<p>The section summarizes the current problem; what is the intensity, extent and duration of the problem and who is affected?</p> <p>This section provides recommendations for immediate response - practical steps that need to be implemented in the short term. As the bulletin may be reporting on a situation which is evolving quickly and/or where the data is incomplete, recommendations may include collecting further data.</p> <p>In contrast to many of the other report formats it is more common to find the recommendations presented close to the front of the bulletin. This serves to focus attention on urgently needed emergency actions.</p>
<p>Problem description</p>	<p>The problem description identifies the nature of the shock or crisis. The current status of the problem may be discussed in detail, including: impacts on food production; markets and access to food; and health and nutritional consequences.</p> <p>It should identify who has been affected and in what way. Impacts on infrastructure and institutions should be discussed – particularly as they affect the ability to respond to the crisis. Then it should look at what is already being done to respond to the problem and what is planned for the future.</p>

As you develop your research paper you should also consider a series of questions. The following is the most important one:

.....

Does your bulletin achieve its purpose of informing decision makers of current levels and trends in food security?

.....

Additional questions include:

Checklist

- Does the title provide an effective one line summary of the bulletin?
- Is a short table of contents appropriate? If so, does this provide a clear overview to your paper?
- Is the summary a good representation of the main points included in the report?
- Are recommendations clearly written and practical in nature? Are they easily identifiable in the text?
- Is the problem (including the impacts) clearly and convincingly defined?
- If appropriate, does your problem description convince the readers that an urgent problem exists?

Formats for Needs Assessment Reports

An emerging food security problem may trigger a needs assessment exercise to establish the extent and the right response to the emergency.

The needs assessment should answer the following crucial questions:

- What is the nature and dimension of the problem?
- How long is it going to last?
- Who are the most vulnerable groups?
- What and how much is needed; what is the best response?
- To what extent are local coping capacity and provision of services overwhelmed?
- What are major logistical and resource considerations?

The assessment report will need to communicate these findings to a primary audience that includes planners and managers in government departments, donors and other humanitarian agencies.

The report may be used to support decision making on programming, resource mobilization and advocacy.

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title	<p>The title is important as it is the first part of the report read by the reader. A reader may use the title in deciding whether to read the report or not.</p> <p>At a minimum the title should clearly indicate the topic (a needs assessment) the geographical location and period. It may also be used to start to communicate your main message.</p>
Table of contents	<p>The table of contents is a skeleton or overview of the structure of the report. It shows the overall organization, the main sections and their sub-sections and page numbers to locate specific sections.</p> <p>The table of contents leads readers through the whole report. It provides readers with a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed.</p>
Executive Summary	<p>The executive summary represents the whole paper by providing a synopsis of the main findings and recommendations.</p> <p>The executive summary aims to interest readers in reading the whole report.</p> <p>However, the main function of the executive summary is to satisfy the needs of those readers who do not have time to read the entire report and readers whose main interest is in the findings and recommendations of the study; especially decision-makers.</p>
Introduction	<p>The introduction to the needs assessment report prepares the readers for the full report. Other elements such as the methodology, background and purpose, can be handled in the introduction.</p> <p>However if these issues require a lot of discussion they may need their own sections. The introduction may conclude with a road map, showing how the paper is organized.</p>
Objectives and methodology	<p>You will need to discuss what you intended to do in the needs assessment. What were your objectives? What is the scope of the study?</p> <p>This section should briefly outline the methods that were used. How was the primary data sampled and collected; and what secondary data sources were used? How was the data analyzed? This section should indicate the level of confidence in the data and consequent conclusions.</p>
Background	<p>To set the context for the recommended response, the report should discuss the background and pre-crisis conditions in the affected areas.</p> <p>This would summarize the livelihoods (including the economic, social and political dimensions) and their vulnerabilities and capacities.</p>
Problem description	<p>The problem description identifies the nature of the shock or crisis. This may include the history of the problem: its causes; and similar events in the past.</p> <p>The current status of the problem may be discussed in detail, including: impacts on food production; markets and access to food; and health and nutritional consequences. It should identify who has been affected and in what way. Impacts on infrastructure and institutions should be discussed – particularly as they affect the ability to respond to the crisis.</p> <p>Lastly, it would look at what is already being done to respond to the problem and how successful these efforts have been.</p>



<p>Conclusions and recommendations</p>	<p>This section provides a concise <i>synthesis</i> of the major findings - this is more than a <i>summary</i>. It presents a clear case to the decision makers and provides a call to action.</p> <p>The section summarizes the current situation; possible scenarios of how the problem may evolve and the number, level and duration of assistance required. This section outlines, evaluates and compares the possible response alternatives. Finally the reader is provided with recommendations for response - practical steps that need to be taken to implement the proposed policy option.</p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendices can be useful for presenting the detailed data or additional information, where including it in the text would interrupt the flow of the main discussion.</p> <p>For example this may include maps, details of methodologies and background information on livelihoods.</p>

As you develop your needs assessment report you should also consider a series of questions. The following is the most important one:

.....

Does your paper achieve its purpose of presenting clear recommendations on the appropriate response(s) to the current crisis?

.....

Other questions include:

Checklist

- Is the executive summary a good representation of the paper?
- Is the problem (including the impacts) clearly and convincingly defined? Are the immediate and underlying causes of the problem identified?
- If appropriate, does the problem description convince the readers that an urgent problem exists?
- Are the possible response alternatives presented and evaluated?
- Is the basis on which you evaluated each option, i.e. the framework of analysis, clearly outlined?
- Do you demonstrate that your chosen response alternative represents the best solution to the problem?
- Are recommendations clearly written and practical in nature? Are they easily identifiable in the text?
- Are all appendices relevant and appropriate in supporting the paper?

Formats for monitoring and evaluation

1. Monitoring

During the implementation of programmes and projects managers must **keep track of progress**. Managers need to monitor expenditure, resource use and the implementation of activities. Monitoring reports continuously provide information to support internal decision making to fine-tune activities. For example, a monitoring system might tell you how the delivery of food aid compares to the original plan.

2. Evaluation

In contrast, evaluations assess the worth of the project or programme. It will examine the impact and results, for instance:

Have the objectives been fulfilled?

Was the intervention efficient and sustainable?

Did food distribution lead to improved food security?

What lessons can be learned in designing future projects and programmes?

Just like programmes and projects, the **strategies and policies** themselves need to be continuously planned, reviewed, modified and re-planned.

Even if there may be dedicated M&E units responsible for supporting the implementation of specific programmes or policies, your food security information systems may be asked to assist in supporting these processes.

Policies, programmes and projects usually have some type of **design/planning framework**. These frameworks provide the basis for assessment.

They usually specify what was intended to be done - the activities, the results of these activities and the objectives. They may also show which indicators to use and where to collect the data. The most common planning framework is the *logical framework*.

An M&E process will report on what happened and how this compared to what was intended. On the basis of this analysis, **recommendations** will be made. For example, an evaluation might recommend continuing, modifying or stopping an intervention.

For monitoring reports the primary audience will be the internal managers and donors. Evaluation reports may target a broader number of external decision makers.

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title	A reader sees the title first. They may use it to decide whether to continue reading the paper. A well chosen title gives readers a quick overview of the subject of the report and encourages them to look further at the report.
Table of contents	<p>The table of contents is a skeleton or overview of the structure of the paper. It shows the overall organization, the main sections and their sub-sections and page numbers to locate sections in the paper.</p> <p>The table of contents leads readers through the whole report. It provides a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed. The table of contents helps readers to find specific sections or information that they are particularly interested in.</p>
Executive Summary	<p>The main function of the executive summary is to satisfy the needs of those readers who will not read the entire paper and readers whose main interest is in the conclusions and recommendations, especially decision-makers.</p> <p>It should be tightly drafted, and usable as a free-standing document. It should be short and focus on the main analytical points, indicate the main conclusions, lessons learned and specific recommendations.</p>
Introduction	The introduction will describe the project, programme or policy to be monitored or evaluated. It will discuss the study objectives and the methodology used. The introduction may conclude with a road map, showing how the paper is organized.
Findings	The core section of the report will examine the performance of the policy, programme or project against its design criteria. This section should describe the facts and interpret or analyse them.
Conclusions and recommendations	The key points of the conclusions will vary in nature but will often cover aspects of the evaluation criteria. The ultimate value of an evaluation depends on the quality and credibility of the recommendations offered. Recommendations should therefore be as realistic, operational and pragmatic as possible. Recommendations should be carefully targeted to the appropriate audiences at all levels.
Appendices	<p>Appendices should be used to present additional information which might otherwise interrupt the flow of the main discussion.</p> <p>This may include; terms of reference, methodology, planning documents (eg., logical framework matrices original and improved/updated), map of project area, list of persons/ organisations consulted and literature and documentation consulted.</p>

While all these elements should be included in the report, the headings may vary. Some sections may be combined, or expanded and subdivided.

As the audience of monitoring reports is familiar with the activity under discussion, the report may not require much introduction and may compress many of the elements.



The **Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Monitoring Report** is an important example of a monitoring report that a Food Security Information System (FSIS) might contribute to. In September 2000, world leaders adopted a set of development goals – the “Millennium Development Goals” or “MDGs”. The first of these is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – a topic of particular relevance to FSIS.

Each goal has a quantitative target to be achieved by the year 2015, and appropriate indicators have been selected to monitor progress. Every developing country has agreed to produce a MDG monitoring report by the end of 2005.

As you develop a monitoring or evaluation report you should also consider a series of questions. The following is the most important one:

.....
*Does your report achieve its purpose of summarizing progress
and providing recommended actions?*
.....

Additional questions include:

Checklist

- Is the title interesting, clear, succinct and descriptive?
- Are headings of sections and sub-sections chosen effectively, and do they provide a clear overview of your paper?
- Is the executive summary a good representation of the report?
- Do you clearly state what the policy/programme/project sets out to do?
- Is the framework of analysis clearly outlined? What criteria are used in assessing progress?
- Are your conclusions supported by your findings?
- Are recommendations clearly written and practical in nature? Are they easily identifiable in the text?
- Is there a recommendation to match each conclusion?
- Are all appendices relevant and do they support the paper?

WRITING EFFECTIVE REPORTS

4.1 Preparing policy briefs

4.2 More reporting formats

4.3 Writing effectively





Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand techniques for writing clear and concise sentences; and
- effectively edit your documents.

Introduction

This lesson will help you write in a way that engages your readers – easily, convincingly, and perhaps even pleasurably. It will also explain how to review your work to assure that is effective and error-free.

Writing clear and concise sentences

The kind of writing you will be doing needs to be clear, and to move along quickly and in an orderly way.

Clarity, economy and straightforwardness in your writing, especially at the sentence level, can help you establish a high level of **readability**.

Even if there is no ideal sentence construction, readability must be the overriding principle.

To “measure” readability, ask yourself the following questions:

- Will my reader be able to understand what I have just stated by reading the sentence quickly?
- Will my reader be able to understand what I have just stated without having to go back and re-read parts of it?
- Will my reader run out of breath in the middle of the sentence?
- Have I used a big word when a little word will suffice?
- Is there more than one idea in my sentence?
- Are there any words (particularly adjectives and adverbs) that I can remove?

Of course, the list of questions could be much longer, but these basic questions should help keep you on track. Here is an example of some common pitfalls:

Table I: Common pitfalls

Colloquialism (Don't use)	Alternative
In the year 2000	In 2000
During the period May-June	From May to June
In the areas of	In
In the event that	If
Until such time as	Until
Regarding	On, about
For the purpose of	To
Prior to	Before
Utilization	Use
In order to	To

A word of caution: many writers fear that shortening or simplifying their sentences will somehow compromise the professionalism of their document. This could not be further from the truth. Simplifying sentences merely makes them more readable. And your readers will be extremely grateful!

Moreover, often writers begin to write a sentence at the same time that the thought is evolving in their mind.

For example:



The area of communication that the focal points are interested in learning more about is along the line of technical reports used in agriculture and government.

The sentence mirrors the original thought, but thoughts usually are not concise. The sentence needs to be reviewed and tightened up:

The focal points would like to learn more about technical reports used in agriculture and government.

Don't you think the sentence is now more readable?

Editing your documents

Once you have completed a draft of your report, you will need to **review** it carefully. There are at least a dozen elements that you should be paying close attention to, when you review your document:

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Format
- Unnecessary information
- Logical sequence of sentences
- Repetition of information
- Dense, heavy sentences
- Sequencing of paragraphs/ideas
- Clarity of the message
- Missing information
- Politically sensitive issues
- Paragraph coherence
- Unnecessary word repetition
- Grammatical mistakes

An optimal editing process has three stages:

1. Conceptual/structural stage

2. Linguistic stage

3. Proofreading/format stage

Let's consider each stage in more detail...

1. The conceptual/structural stage

In this first stage you are simply scanning the document, in much the same way a reader might do to get a sense of what the document is about.

You should only be focusing on the following elements:

- Clarity of message
- Sequencing of paragraphs/ideas
- Missing information
- Unnecessary information
- Repetition of information

During this stage you should not correct sentences or spelling mistakes. Try to keep a more global perspective. At the end of this stage, you will need to make your corrections – primarily rearranging paragraphs or sections, and eliminating and adding blocks of information.

2. The linguistic stage

The **linguistic editing** is the time-consuming stage, since you are carefully reading the document, word by word, and asking yourself, “Do I like the way that I have expressed this idea?” You will be focusing on the following elements:

- Dense, heavy sentences
- Clarity of the message
- Politically sensitive issues
- Unnecessary word fodder and repetition
- Logical sequence of sentences

Why fret over commas and spelling mistakes when you may end up changing the sentence entirely? At the end of this stage, make all corrections so that you have a perfectly clean copy (whether on screen or hard copy).

3. The proofreading/format stage

Proofreading is simply checking for mistakes. You will be focusing on the following elements:

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Grammar

If you are following a house style, you will want to make sure that there are no violations of that style. Checking the format (paragraph indents, consistency in heading typefaces, justified paragraphs, etc.) should be saved for last. It is difficult to concentrate on spelling mistakes and formatting issues at the same time.

If you systematically edit your document, using the three stages described above, you should feel confident that your document is as effective as you are able to make it.

Editing tips:

- Allow some time to pass between the time you've completed the draft of the document and the time you begin the editing process. If you are under a very tight deadline, even five or ten minutes will help. The more time and "distance" you allow, the better your editing will be.
- For each editorial stage, start with a clean copy.
- If you are accustomed to editing directly on the screen, feel free to do so. If you are not, you may want to make the transition by editing short documents (one page) directly on the screen.
- Use your computer's spelling- and grammar-check programmes to support your proofreading.
- If you are editing a long document directly on the screen, it is always best to have a clean, hard copy of the document by your side. This is especially important for the first editorial stage when you need to easily see the sequence and flow of paragraphs and the overall structure of the document.

Summary

- Incorporating clarity into your writing, especially at the sentence level, can help you establish a high level of readability.
- An optimal editing process has three stages: conceptual/structural stage, linguistic stage and proofreading/format stage.

ANNEXES



1. Tips for rapidly improving your writing

1. Use verbs instead of nouns. Avoid nominalizations.

Example:

Nominalization	Better Alternative
We had a discussion about the new policy.	We discussed the new policy.
The introduction of new farming techniques was a success.	We successfully introduced new farming techniques.

2. Use the active, not passive voice.

Passive voice	Better Alternative
The contract was signed by the manager.	The manager signed the contract.
The project was set up in 2011 by FAO.	FAO set up the project in 2011.

3. Keep the subject, verb and its object close together. Use the Subject+Verb+Object sentence construction often.

Original	Better Alternative
The publication of the report for use by decision makers will enable better food security policy making.	Decision makers will use the report to make better food security policies.
The area of communication that the focal points are interested in learning more about is along the line of technical reports used in agriculture and government.	The focal points would like to learn more about technical reports used in agriculture and government.

4. Keep your sentences short - not more than 15 to 20 words.

Too long!	Better Alternative
As in the case of Latin America, it has been shown that on average rural women have more children during their lifetime fertility age 15-49 than urban women.	In Latin America, rural women have more children than urban women.

5. Use short, rather than long words. Use simple, not fancy, words.

Original sentence	Better Alternative
The road will facilitate the transportation of goods to the village.	The road will make it easier to bring goods to the village.
He was compensated opportunely .	He was paid on time .

6. Remove all jargon and acronyms that have not been previously explained

7. Break gender stereotypes

Original sentence	Better Alternative
The doctor told his patient to eat more vegetables.	The doctor told her patient to eat more vegetables.

8. Use words that are appropriate for your audience. Tip: use non-technical language when writing for policy makers.

9. Do not provide more information than is necessary for your purpose. You are writing to communicate something clearly to your audience – not to impress them with how much you know about a certain topic. Try to understand what information is really of value to your audience before starting to write.

10. Write a first draft and *always* go back and edit your work for content and then for language. Remove as many words as possible. Unnecessary content weakens, not strengthens, your writing and is a waste of time for your reader.

Useful resources:

Writing guides from the Plain English Campaign

<http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html>

The Elements of Style by Strunk and White

Available in various editions and online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>

2. Writing for the Web

People don't read on the web, they **scan**. You should therefore:

- break the text into short paragraphs and use bullet lists
- use sub-headings and sub titles to break up the text into short sections
- highlight key words in bold
- put the most important information at the beginning - most people decide in the first few seconds whether they will read the rest of the page.
- use a lot of white space to make the text easy to scan.

Web writing is "visual writing." If something is important make it big, bold or colorful. But don't overdo it or you will confuse your readers. If a link is very important, make it into a button.

Remember that people come to your website **to do something** specific. Make it very easy for them to find the information they need. More than any other type of writing, writing for the web means **eliminating every unnecessary word**.

Give people only a little information at first and then link to more information. If your text is very long, consider writing a short summary for the web and put the rest into a printable pdf format.

Tip

The best way of testing if your website is designed well and the writing is clear, is to observe how people use it. Gather some volunteers who are not familiar with your website, and ask them to perform specific tasks or look for a specific piece of information. If they have trouble doing this, you know you need to redesign the way you present information.

Further reading:

Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity by Jakob Nielsen. See Nielsen's website: <http://www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/>

Information Architecture for the World Wide Web by Louis Rosenfeld.

3. Using the Web to Publicize your Work

“If you want to catch a fish, go fishing where the fish are.”

Don't wait for your readers to find your information among millions of pages on the web - post it on sites that already get a lot of traffic.

Social and professional networking sites are useful for reaching specific target audiences. Many specialised web portals allow users to post content. The web also allows you to cheaply distribute video, audio, and other multimedia formats. These formats can help you get your key messages across in a memorable way.

Be sure to get web usage statistics so that you can keep track of how well your publicity campaign is doing. Google analytics is a good source for free statistics: <http://www.google.com/analytics/>

Here are some suggested websites for posting links to your work and website:

Portals

General

Wikipedia - contribute to articles covering your field of expertise and link to relevant work

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

Development Portals

Eldis

<http://www.eldis.org/about/contribute.htm>

Relief Web

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Zunia Knowledge Exchange Platform

<http://zunia.org/>

Portals with a Regional Focus

South African Regional Poverty Network

<http://www.sarpn.org/contribute/contribute.php>

Networks and Communities

General

Linked In - Professional Networking

www.linkedin.com

Facebook – Social Networking

www.facebook.com

Food Security, Humanitarian and Development Networks

FAO's Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Forum

<http://km.fao.org/fsn/>

Aid Workers Network

<http://www.aidworkers.net/>

Eldis Community

<http://community.eldis.org/>

Publish and Share Your Work

Videos

You Tube

<http://www.youtube.com/>

Vimeo

<http://vimeo.com/>

Blip

<http://blip.tv/>

Photos

Flickr

<http://www.flickr.com/>

Picasa

<http://picasa.google.com/>

Audio

iTunes

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

Press releases

PRlog – publish your press releases for free on the web

<http://www.prlog.org/>

PowerPoint slides

Slide share

<http://www.slideshare.net/>

Tip

Publish your work on any of these sites and link to it from your website or blog.

4. Communication Strategy Plan of Action Template

Communication Plan Template (use bullet points)

Overall Communication Objectives

Audiences and Stakeholders

Key Target Audience	Info they need	Key Messages	Channels	Who will follow up?	Timing (how often) & deadlines	Budget

QUICK TIPS

Define your target audience and what sort of information they need

- Begin by defining broad groups and then refining them (ex. “Mothers” becomes “Breastfeeding mothers in district XYZ”)
- For your priority audience, consider their educational background, age, information needs, and time constraints
- Understand the **benefit** that they would gain from your communication.
- Define what **action** you want them to take as a result of your communication. Do you provide them with the right kind of information to take that action?

Choosing channels

Make sure the channel you choose is actually one that reaches your audience. Do busy policy makers read unsolicited emails and long reports? Probably not. Consider using intermediaries for hard to reach audiences.

Timing

- Relate press releases to important events locally, nationally, and internationally; Develop a calendar of important events.
- Make sure the information arrives in time to be of use. Consider the frequency as well.

The only way to get it right

- The only way to know if your strategy has been successful is to contact the people you are trying to reach. Conduct occasional surveys or interviews.
- Set priorities in terms of time and budget. Give first priority to reaching your key target audience.

Note for projects funded by the European Union

- The European Union has detailed guidelines which should be respected when planning a communications campaign. Logos and templates for various information products are also available. Please see the link below for more information:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm

5. Press Release Template

Your Project's Name
www.yourwebsite.com

LOGO

Press Release: Embargoed until 01/01/11

TITLE
Place, Date

Start with an interesting opening sentence that captures your readers' curiosity. Mention the Who, When, Where and the What. (2-3 short sentences)

Explain the key challenge or problem to be solved. (2-3 sentences)

Give a few more details. (1 or 2 sentences plus a bullet list)

Get a powerful quote from a well-known person that further explains the main problem. A quote from a member of your target audience is a good strategy. Ex. "Increasing agricultural production is the true key for lasting food security," emphasized the Minister of Agriculture during his opening speech.

Conclusion - end with a key message or strong statement. (2-3 sentences)

Your Project Name

A short description of your project (2-3 lines)

Partner or Other Organization
Information about your partner organization (2-3 lines)
Note: Some donors require you to acknowledge funding. For European Union funded projects, please see additional guidelines in:
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/work/visibility/index_en.htm

Contact Information:

Name
Title
Phone
Address
Email
Website

FURTHER READING



General

Free food security e-learning courses and training materials from the EC-FAO Food Security Programme. The series includes a “Communicating Food Security” e-learning Course: <http://www.foodsec.org/dl>

Writing a Communication Strategy

European Commission. Guide to successful communications: http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/science-communication/index_en.htm

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European Commission. (2010). Communicating research for evidence-based policymaking: A practical guide for researchers in socio-economic sciences and humanities. European Commission, Directorate-General for Research: Science, economy and society, Brussels. http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/guide-communicating-research_en.pdf

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