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**Structuring your policy brief**

Here is the recommended structure for HSRC policy briefs; note that it differs radically from the structure of a journal article

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**Section**

**Description**

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.

EXAMPLES

* Food security in protracted crises: What can be done?
* HIV, food security and nutrition
* Farmer field schools on land and water management: An extension approach that works

Executive summary

Ask yourself, ‘What are the main points you want policymakers to get – even if they read nothing else?’

EXAMPLE

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.

This Policy Brief examines the causes of rising food prices, expected trends, the likely impact and possible policy responses.

Introduction/statement of the aim of the policy brief

Critique of the policy context/option

Think of the introduction as the problem statement:

* 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.)
* The policy relevance of the problem/ current policy situation on the problem
* The aim of the policy brief

The Study findings

* Here you describe the key aspects of the study/ies on which the policy brief is based 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

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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.

Recommendations (for an advocacy brief)

Policy implications

(for an objective brief / information sharing)

Recommendations

* 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.
* 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

Policy implications

* 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?

[In some PBs these appear up front or as part of the body of the PB. For HSRC PBs, the Recommendations/Policy Implications will always appear as a final numbered section]

Conclusion (not necessary)

A conclusion is not normally necessary in a policy brief. The Summary (at the beginning) and the Recommendations section typically render a Conclusion section in a policy brief superfluous.

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.

Endnotes

This section will function as both endnotes and references. No more than fifteen references.

NB Do not use the (author/date) system in the body of the PB but superscript notes only.

Acknowledgements

Include any funding or other acknowledgement here as necessary.

Policy Brief Authors

Insert the professional affiliation of the PB authors and a contact email here as follows:

***Sharlene Swartz***, PhD; Research Director, Human Sciences Research Council; adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology University of Cape Town.

***Benita Moolman***, PhD; Research Specialist, Human Sciences Research Council

Enquiries to: Prof Sharlene Swartz: [sswartz@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:sswartz@hsrc.ac.za)



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In addition, a policy brief may contain the following special features:

Boxes and sidebars

Boxes or sidebars can be used 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 more than one box per page.

Please do not format this yourself, i.e. do not insert a box into your PB. Simply insert [BOX info] at the beginning of the box info and [end BOX info] at the end of the box section and the typesetter will do the necessary formatting.

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.

Simply insert [CASE] at the beginning of the case and [end CASE] at the end of the case section and the typesetter will do the necessary formatting.

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.

* 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.
* 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.

Please insert this in the PB at the appropriate point.

Figures

Figures include diagrams (such as flow charts or schematic diagrams), graphs (such as bar charts, line graphs and pie charts) and maps. Figures are an important element in the design. Readers often look at them before reading the text. So make them clear and easy to understand.

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* 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.
* Give clear labels.
* Give an explanatory title or caption.

Either insert this in the PB at the appropriate point or simply indicate [Insert fig 1] at the point where the figure should appear. All graphs must be submitted as an excel file with the worksheet clearly numbered, e.g. Fig 2.2 and only one figure per worksheet.