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What is a Policy brief?

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What is a Policy brief?

by

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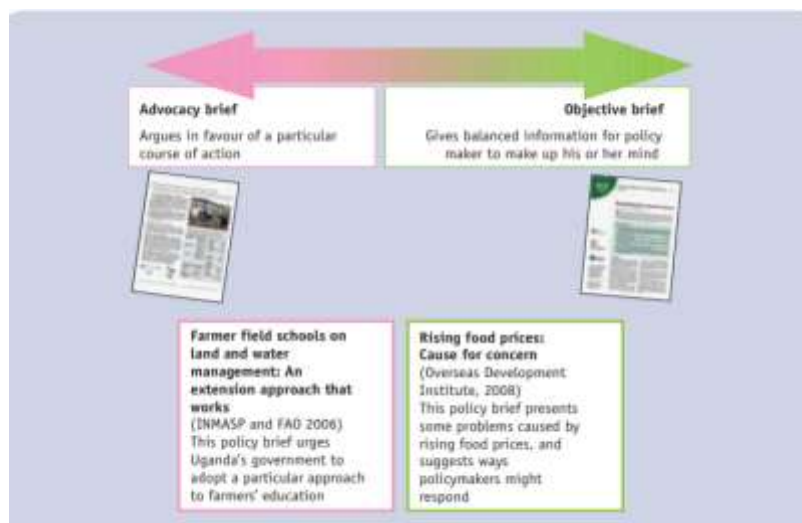
Definition

Policy briefs can be described as an instrument/ pivotal tool to promulgate research findings and their concomitant findings. They function as a vehicle that offers evidence-based policy advice to the reader/end user make informed decisions. A potent policy brief is able to distill complex key research findings in simple, intelligible language and effectively creates precise as well as precise links to targeted policy initiatives/options. In other words, a well-written policy brief clearly and concisely as a standalone document, draws attention and focus on a single subject matter.

Types of Policy briefs:

Advocacy brief argues in favor of a particular course of action or policy option.

Objective brief gives balanced information and alternative courses of action for the reader to make up his or her mind.



What should a policy brief practically do?

- Provide sufficient background for the readers including non-specialized audience to understand the issue at hand.
- Compel readers the problem must be dealt with immediately and urgently.
- Offer alternatives in case of an *objective brief*.
- Provide evidence to back the alternative being advocated in case of an *advocacy brief*.
- Elicit a decision from the reader OR stimulate the reader to make up his/ her mind.

To achieve its goals, a policy brief ought to:

- Be to the point and short. It ought to aim to focus on a specific issue and shouldn't encompass all the details. Conversely, provide sufficient information for the reader to not only understand a problem but also land on a decision.
- It should be ground in firm evidence and ought to draw aforementioned evidence from multiple sources; examples of various instances, organizations and domains etc.
- It is crucial to understand that briefs should provide meanings rather than mere methods. The reader is enticed to know your key findings and recommendations. Knowing about the background or details of your methodology isn't why the reader is reading the brief in the first place.
- Always link it up to the bigger picture. Paradoxically, policy briefs focus on specific context and findings, but a good brief is able to draw deductions that are more generally applicable.

How to plan your policy brief?

Audience, purpose, structure and content are the sine qua non elements of a strong policy brief.

Purpose

The purpose of a policy brief is to inform and update the readers/policymakers about a particular problem and provide best policy course (s) of action and offer recommendations. As a writer, one ought to be straightforward and upfront from the beginning and keep a laser focus on the direction suggested along with linking every

paragraph to the purpose. Avoid discussing tangential information since there is a word limit and need for conciseness. A compelling brief should be able to put across the urgency of the issue and ought to have a firm focus on the advantages of espousing the advocated policy option/advice

Tips:

- It is helpful to write the purpose of your brief beforehand, and refer back to it repeatedly while drafting the brief, in other words make sure that every step of the way in writing a brief serves the pre-written purpose.
- It is helpful to keep a laser focus on how the brief provides advice to remedy a particular problem for the readers, sticking to this thought will keep you from going astray.

Audience

Policy briefs are for a specific and targeted audience. It is helpful to imagine and establish who the prospective readers are, their level of knowledge, their understanding of the problem under discussion, their level of interest and how much and what type of information must be included in the brief for them to form a decision.

Content

It goes without saying that a policy brief is succinct, clear and focused. It uses persuasive language to spur/stimulate the reader into action.

Tips:

- Try not to exceed 1,500 words.
- Include only essential information. Avoid tangents or being overly descriptive about methodology. Only most essential information is required. Avoid digressing or being excessively descriptive especially about things like the methodology.
- Avoid cutting down an existing report to draft a policy brief.
- Use plain and persuasive language.

Structure

It is key to understand that the structure of the brief ought to lead the reader from the problem towards the solution/remedy. Make section headings to guide or help the reader navigate different part of the brief. Articulate how your recommendations are corroborated by the evidence provided.

Structure is also determined by the type of audience and their interest. A government official may favor greater brevity compared to focus on evidence for researchers.

Basic outline of a policy brief

Title

Summary/Abstract

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Methods
- Data Analysis (Argument/Position)
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

Introduction

- Succinct and clear summary of the aim and scope of your research
- Start with contextual research and include some relevant data.
- Outline the primary themes or issues.
- Conclude by reiterating the basic argument of your brief.

Problem Statement

- Specify the problem that governs your policy brief.
- Address the need, significance or relevance of the issue.

Methods

- Conduct in-depth study on the subject and support your stance by referring to a variety of sources: scholarly publications, news items, reports etc.
- Use statistical information if and where needed
- Review literature to strengthen your perspective
- Can use comparative analysis, cost-benefit analysis to demonstrate the viability of your policy stance

Policy Analysis

- Assess the present programs or policies to solve the issue earlier
- Identify gaps in the existing policies
- How would you deal with these gaps?

(Your) Policy Position

- Explain the significance of the topic; problem's effect on society, people or any group etc.
- Provide key arguments/ main points of the paper
- Clearly state the purpose, goals & objectives of the paper
- State the rationale and preliminary evidence that supports your stance

Implementation and Evaluation

- Outline the specific steps to implement the proposed policy
- Discuss potential challenges or obstacles to implementation
- Identify metrics for evaluating the effectiveness of the policy

Recommendations

Conclusion

- Summarize the key arguments and evidence
- Reiterate the importance of the problem and the need for a policy position
- Call for action to implement the proposed recommendations