

## **SANPAD DISSEMINATION WORKSHOP 17-19 AUGUST 2006**

### **WRITING POLICY BRIEFS**

**Facilitated by:**

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## **DAY 1**

### **What is Policy?**

#### **1. Policy – Process**

As discipline, process, policy events

#### **2. Policy Brief**

- 2.1. Technical Aspect – length, language
- 2.2. Structure
- 2.3. Substance- what goes into policy briefs

#### **3. Types of Policy Writing**

- 3.1. Writing a policy brief by people outside government but would like to influence impact policy makers.
- 3.2. Those in government who are tasked to write a policy – writing policy action.
- 3.3. Writing about policy. Evaluate decision made by policymakers (Policy analysis).

#### **4. Evidence and Politics**

- 4.1. Emphasis on evidence based policy research. Politics of policy, within institutions, between institutions and the outside world. Prominent phase of “nuance in policy

How should we take this further into our own documents?

1. Need to know whom you are writing for.
2. What his/her assumptions about reality? Achilles heel of policy is stakeholder participation – who gets included and who gets excluded?

### A myriad of definitions of Policy

- Priorities set by those with decision-making powers.
- It is the goal- oriented decisions taken by those in authority for society.
- Policy involves those with the decision-making powers and their decisions.
- Policy about agenda setting.
- Policy is a political process
- Policy is a combination of competing interests.
- Important function of policy is symbolic.
- Policy is a constant trade off between competing needs/demands and limited resources

### Policy as change

Concerned with three things:

1. What to change?	Mission
2. What to change to?	Vision
3. How to change?	Strategy

**It also involves knowing:**

<b>What government does?</b>
<b>Why do they do what they do?</b>
<b>What are the alternatives?</b>

### **Policy as process**

There is something mythical about policy. Literature has reduced policy to between 4-7 key stages. Some scholars argue that this is an *iterative process*. The notion that we have clear boundaries between initiators, formulators, implementers, evaluators, is a myth. Group called initiators give it to the policymakers to decide then the implementers then the evaluators and so on. First hard lesson that we learn is that this iterative process is a ‘messy’ business. The task is to make it less ‘messy’ do all these things concurrently. These boundaries do not exist – it’s a myth.

### **Phases in the Policy Process**

**Five essential phases in policy process:**

**1. *Agenda setting phase/ Policy initiation stage***

What should the agenda be for this society? Ideology- setting stage. Who sets the agenda? The presidency has a huge role in the agenda setting phase. What should the societies/organisations/research priorities be? Somebody with authority (maybe even in writing a policy) the agenda must be spelt out. Spells out the broad vision of where we want to go e.g. manifesto for a party – democratic non-racial, non-sexist unitary state. Another myth is that civil society is excluded – this is a myth. The poor marginalized, unorganised that have been excluded. This thing participation keeps government awake at night. Test policy by its outcomes, how it is received and tested on the ground. Look at the government agenda to establish what the priorities of OUR research should be – where should we position our research? (see state of nation

speech – see www). Government programme of action. What are the indicators?  
Interface between policymaking and research?

## ***2. The Formulation Stage***

Turn the agenda into policy – in pursuit of the agenda. Translate agenda into policy.

## ***3. Policy Decision Stage***

After this cabinet meets and takes a decision about the policy.

## ***4. Policy Implementation Stage***

Gap between the policy decision phase and the policy implementation phase. What do we mean by implementation – programme of action, timeframe, budget, resources etc. When we say implementation sometimes even if you have all the resources, do we have the human resources/skills? Service delivery. Problem of the breakdown in delivery when somebody in the cogwheel does not have a clue of what to do. Implementation is directly linked to budget. The implementation stage is an interesting one because SA likes to make world-class policy we compete against other countries, adopt other policies. Implementers should always be invited to the earlier policy making stages.

## ***5. Monitoring and Evaluation Stage***

## ***6. Feedback Stage***

Can write a policy brief on any one of these stages of policy, or can test the policy against each stage. These stages give a sense of what a comprehensive policy should be. Good research policy should be like a good business plan.

### **Guidelines of Cabinet for Policy – What do they look for?**

- Who has been consulted? Element of consultation is taken seriously.
- Whether or not they have actually done so
- What the responses of those particular groups are?

- What are the implications of the things put on the table – financial and vulnerable groups (women, children and disabilities)
- What is the strategic focus – what is it answering of the priorities of Government?
- What are the communication implications both inside and outside of Government?
- What are the recommendations?

### **The role of the policy intellectual?**

It is simply the allocation of values for society. Assumptions and the role and impact of those assumptions. We need to go out and test those assumptions so that we can inform policy.

### **Nine Steps in Policy**

#### **What kind of questions do we ask to get to the Policy?**

##### ***1. Problem identification***

What is the problem and how do you identify the problem? What is the problem? What is the issue we seek to address? How was it identified i.e. who was included who was excluded? This is the real issue. Is it affirmative action as a policy issue, is it gender relations of power? How is the problem defined? Who brought it to the attention of the agenda?

##### ***2. Causes of the problem***

What is the policy context?

Is it national, provincial, local?

Social policy, economic?

##### ***3. Fact gathering and Information***

This is the substance of all the steps. Fact gathering is absolutely key to the process of policy brief.

- Was all the information available?
- Do we get the information that government needs?

- Where do you get your information the hard core? Get close to reality

#### ***4. Option identification***

Must spell out options. Particularly, at the policy design phase. Spell out implications for every option. Human cost, moral cost, ethical cost, image of the country. Cost benefit – what are the positive and negative implications.

#### ***5. Spell out goals/objectives.***

#### ***6. Spell out the process***

Who must be involved?

#### ***7. What structures***

#### ***8. Monitoring and evaluations***

#### ***9. How was the implementation policy designed?***

How is this thing going to be institutionalised, operational? Purpose of the policy brief is to impact policy.

### **Three kinds of policy briefs**

- 1. Writing a policy brief as someone from the outside**
- 2. Writing a policy as a person who has been tasked to do so – a policy writer**
- 3. Writing a policy that critiques a policy**

## **Elements of a Good Policy Brief**

- Confidence to write policy briefs and to make decisions.
- Communicate research findings that would make it palatable to policymakers.

### **Policy brief purpose is to impact policy (1000 - 2000 words)**

- Subject area: education
- Policy topic: eg. OBE
- 5 phases: the problem: how was the agenda arrived at?
- Identify the current relevant, most controversial issue for you at that particular moment – take one aspect and try to influence that aspect.
- Apply our existing knowledge – pitch on existing policy and face it in another direction.
- Crucial aspect are the problems and the solutions
- Macro-social report. Ten year review - Social Cohesion – Nation Building
- Narrow it down – don't write over all stages

## **Policy Brief Template**

### **1. Abstract**

Sum up everything you have done. (1 page policy brief then 1 sentence abstract – 2000 words then 1 paragraph abstract). Never write a policy brief that is more than 2000 words.

- Must tell us the main policy area in education.
- Specific topic: OBE. For example, this policy brief deals with foreign policy and specifically the mountain kingdom of Lesotho
- Policy questions
- Policy suggestions – blunt policy solutions

### **Key elements of a Policy Brief**

Consider the entire policy brief as a box. Contain the policy statement, questions and suggestions. Policy is a beginning of a policy engagement.

## **Eg: Subject: Education**

### **Topic: Desegregated classroom environments**

- As an introduction will have a clear policy statement the problem I am going to address. Turn the policy statement into 1-3 questions that you are going to address. I did extensive research – hard-core evidence based on my interviews. The introduction situates the argument in a current political debate.
- Ask about 6 big questions in the body of the policy brief.
  1. Who is involved? Who was affected positively and who was affected negatively.
  2. What? What is the issue, what alternatives?
  3. Why do I think it is wrong to do it or why I think it is right? In the why question will address 3 things:
    - Motive - e.g President Mugabe is motivated that he wants to attack.
    - Process - it's going to be too long a process, actors.
    - Cause - causal facts – links between economic, social or political affects.
  4. When is it likely to become a very serious issue? When will it explode in your face? Don't delay or leave it for very long. When could the process of correcting a policy begin? When the consistency should meet?
  5. How to do? Teachers should be involved in the process to make OBE an acceptable policy. You must spell out how and the cost implications.
  6. How much is it going to cost me politically, ethically, morally, financially?
- Address the findings not the data and methodology. What are the alternatives, what do you propose now?
- No references and footnotes. No academic citations but must have academic rigour. How you pitch your argument, style and presentation.
- Use authoritative figures in the policy brief.
- Depends whom you targeting and what you want to achieve.
- Give the caveats but be mindful of the length of the policy brief.

**What does this research that we have just done mean for macro policy?**

## Evidence based research policy

### What is evidence-based policy?

- Coherency
- Effectiveness and outcomes of policy
- Concerned about the participatory processes of policy research
- All encompassing approach

### Six elements to take the debate forward

- **Availability** – places emphasis on the adequacy of data
- **Credibility** – Is the quality of research high, credible – data up to date. Can we explain our research techniques? Sources need to be credible. Nuance and objectivity. Rigorous peer analysis and review
- **Generalisability** – the information gathered and how we gathered it, can we extrapolate from it?
- **Relevance** – topical relevance and dimensions of the issue at hand
- **Accessibility** – how accessible do we make our information and how do we put our info together. How do we decide on the constituencies that we want to influence
- **Tacit knowledge** – explicit and implicit knowledge. Based on the evidence you can also use tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge – articulated and accessible public knowledge. Implicit – familiarise ourselves with the knowledge from the many constituencies out there.

## **DAY 2:**

### **Writing Policy Briefs( continued)**

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**Government policies—they should include the ff:**

**1) Primary objectives of the policy**

**2) Scope of the policy**

**3) Implementation framework**

### **Writing about policy (critical policy analysis)**

Analysis has to take into account competing/conflicting interest. Analysis should spell out which issues are preferred over others. You also want to explain, predict and be able to measure.

### **7 Ideas in policy analysis**

- 1. Identify the underlying values and aspirations that drive the policy.**
- 2. Identify if the problem is with policy, structure, process, institution, or is it about people.**
- 3. Understand the problem in context**
- 4. Identify options available to policy makers**
- 5. Decide which dimensions of the problem are the most important.**
- 6. Predict the likely outcomes of the alternatives**

**Measuring the chosen causes of actions against stated goals and resources.**

## Summary

- 1. What is the problem?**
  - 2. What is the possible solution?**
- What are the recommendations?**

- All these should be based on evidence.
- These have to be succinct, understandable, and accessible (style)
- keep it focused
- **Policy Brief—1000 words maximum**

Visit policy brief site— at UWC (Plaas) , Carnegie Institute etc.

### **SANPAD Policy brief**

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