

# Module on “Writing Policy Briefs”\*

13 August 2008

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Philippine Institute for Development Studies

\*A training module for participants to the Philippine National Health Research System (PNHRS)-sponsored capacity-building program aimed at translating research results into policies and actions, Pan-Pacific Hotel, August 13, 2008.



# Outline

- **Morning Session**

- 1) Context: Bridging the research-policy gap through communication and information-knowledge intermediation

- 2) Policy Notes as a tool

- Definition: What is a Policy Brief
- Features and distinguishing characteristics
- Objective(s)
- Increasing demand for Policy Brief
- Examples

- 3) Structural elements of a Policy Brief

- 4) Aspects of Policy Briefs

# Outline

- **Morning Session**

- 5) The “How-tos” of Policy Brief

- Preparing to do the Policy Brief
    - Getting down to work
      - Culling the message: what’s the story
      - Putting the parts together

- 6) Some guidelines or “tips” in producing a good Policy Brief

- 7) Additional tips in terms of form: good titles, creative openings, good summation

- **Afternoon Session**

- 1) Workshop

- Writing a draft Policy Brief
    - Presentation and critiquing of outputs

- 2) Concluding session

# Research-Policy Links: The Role of Communication

1 of 3

- An often-repeated statement that we hear is: “Sound policy recommendations emanate from good policy research”
- Good policy research and sound policy recommendations, however, do not always necessarily get translated into sound policy decisions and the desired policy change.

# Research-Policy Links: The Role of Communication

2 of 3

- Why?

For many reasons. Among which are:

- Lack of appreciation for research or of a research culture among policymakers
- The political element involved in the policy reform process
- The matter of “champions” among policymakers on certain issues or concerns
- The lack and/or ineffectiveness/inadequacy of communication between researchers and policymakers.

# Research-Policy Links: The Role of Communication

3 of 3

- For today, we will just concentrate on the latter; and on just one element of communication: that is, packaging or the translation of research into more “policymaker-friendly” vehicles of information and knowledge that can serve as inputs in policy deliberations.
- And the vehicle that we shall focus on is the *Policy Brief*.
- Incidentally, we can also use the terms: popularizing, laymanizing; or recasting when we refer to packaging

- Before we proceed to the discussion on Policy Brief, let me just point out something that may be going on in your minds. That is: the role of researchers in this packaging or popularization aspect of communication.
  - Should researchers actively engage in it? Is it their mandate to do so? Do they have the necessary skills or even the inclination for it?

- My response would be:
  - If researchers think that they have something very important to say and that their particular message may be useful in effecting a change in policy for the better, then somehow, they have to be involved. And thus, it is important for them to rethink the attitude that “their task is done once their research has been completed.”
- That is the essence of this one-day module: to help you hone your skills in preparing one instrument or tool that can possibly facilitate your “reach” to policymakers.



**Policy Briefs** –normally a 4-6 page writeup featuring an analysis and observation on a particular issue, with implications to policy

- May be called/known by other names like Policy Notes, Executive Memorandum, Focus, etc.

# Features and Distinguishing Characteristics (Principles)

- Brevity
  - it must be short; can run from 4 pages to a maximum of 8 pages
- Conciseness of points
- Simplicity and sense of understanding
  - Less abstraction
  - Laymanized concepts with concrete meanings and examples
- Reader-friendly
  - Ease in language comprehension
  - No technical jargon
  - Quickly read
- Clarity and focus
  - Logical and organized presentation of issues
- Attractiveness/appeal

# **And the most distinguishing characteristic:**

- **Its policy orientation**

# Objectives

- In other words, we want to convey an issue of great policy importance to our policymakers/decisionmakers in the clearest and simplest way to increase the chances of their reading and understanding the issue.
- In the process, the chances of the issue being transformed from “key findings of a study” to inputs for policy are facilitated/enhanced.

## Increased demand for Policy Briefs

- The growing globalization in trade and of the economy brought more complex policy problems requiring quicker responses.
- The information “explosion” from various sources necessitated a new form of conveying these responses.
- And research institutions and academic institutions had to *rethink* about the nature and manner of providing and *disseminating* research.
- Thus, even as the in-depth and scholarly research remains as the main source of information and analysis, these studies are regularly translated into repackaged and recast forms.
- These are the Policy Notes or Policy Briefs or Executive Memos that are shorter, more focused and concise in format.



## Health Brief

### Moving Forward: Meeting the Challenges of Medical Tourism and Retirement

gtz



Philippine Institute  
for Development Studies  
Sumit sa mga Pilap-apat  
Pangkalahatang ng Pilapinas

## Policy Notes

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### Fishpen and fishcage culture in Laguna de Bay: its importance and problems

Danilo C. Israel

Laguna de Bay or Laguna Lake has a water area of 90,000 hectares representing about 45 percent of the total area of all lakes in the Philippines. This relatively large size and close proximity of the lake to Metro Manila make it an important resource for the practice of various economic activities including aquaculture.

From its humble beginnings in the early 1970s, fishpen and fishcage culture, which is the main form of aquaculture practiced in Laguna de Bay, has grown with increasing intensity and is now widely practiced. From 2001 to 2006, in particular, the number of fishpen operators and total area of fishpens in the lake had generally increased (Table 1). For fishcages, although its total area had

decreased, the number of fishcage operators had generally increased.

The proliferation of fishpen and fishcage culture in Laguna de Bay, meanwhile, caused certain social and environmental problems that negatively impact not only on aquaculture itself but also on other sectors in the lake. Because of this, there have been suggestions and ongoing efforts to discontinue fishpen and fishcage culture in the lake (e.g., Adranada and Macairan 2008, The Daily Tribune 2008).

To help provide an analysis of the situation so that decisionmakers and other stakeholders

PIDS Policy Notes are observations/analyses written by PIDS researchers on certain policy issues. The treatise is holistic in approach and aims to provide useful inputs for decisionmaking.

This Note is based on the results and findings of the joint study of the Southwest Asian Fisheries Development Center-Aquaculture Department (SEAFDEC AQD) and the PIDS which assessed aquaculture development in Laguna de Bay (Israel et al. 2008). The author is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of PIDS or any of the study's sponsors.

**But the question is:  
Are they being  
read?**

# Results of a PIDS Awareness Survey

- In terms of usage, almost 90 percent of those aware of PIDS have read the Institute's research outputs/publications
- The most frequently cited outputs/publications that they have read are: *Policy Notes*, *Development Research News*, *Philippine Journal of Development and Discussion Papers* (in that order)



# Model Structure for Writing a Policy Brief 1 of 3

- Introduction
  - Introduce the theme or topic of your writeup. This is a general statement of the topic which you will expound later on in the body of your article
  - Mention or define the policy dimension and characterization of the socioeconomic issue or problem being addressed in the Policy Brief. This is the context of the issue.
  - Briefly state the objective or purpose of the Policy Brief or what it tries to look into or address.

## Model Structure for Writing a Policy Brief 2 of 3

- Body of the text
  - Introduce the methodology used
  - Present research findings and analysis
  - Establish your argument; identify the strongest argument(s) in your research and focus on it (them); may involve mention of winners and losers so that the impact and consequences of the issue on overall society are made known and policymakers may formulate strategies accordingly on said basis
  - Discuss the policy recommendations
  - The body consists of a number of paragraphs organized in a logical manner.

## Model Structure for Writing a Policy Brief 3 of 3

- Conclusion
  - Summarize research results and policy recommendations
  - State the specific course(s) of action you want the policymakers to undertake

# Two aspects of Policy Notes

- Content
- Form

**Under *Content*, we consider the following:**

- Audience
- Purpose
- Message
- How much to say?
- How to make them understandable
  - Define terms
  - Explain statistics
  - Use illustrations and examples

# Audience Analysis 1 of 2

- Questions to consider
  - What is audience composition? Is it homogenous or heterogeneous?
  - What is the participants' educational level?
  - What are some special backgrounds?
  - What is the age range?
  - What are their current positions
  - \*How much do they know?
  - What could be the audience expectations in the presentation-content, style, substance?

## Audience Analysis 2 of 2

- Questions to consider (cont.)
  - \*What are the prevailing attitudes of the listeners? Are they open or resistant to new ideas?
  - \*What do they need and want?
  - \*What points are they likely to agree on?
  - What are some “turn ons” / “turn-offs” of the audience?
  - Is my audience conservative or innovative?

# When Presenting

## Ideas/Recommendations

<b>Reader (Frame of reference)</b>	<b>Writer (Sequence of presentation)</b>
1) Why should I read?	1) Statement of initial benefits
2) Where am I now?	2) Background of problem and key findings
3) Where do I want to go?	3) solutions
4) How can I get there?	4) Features of solution
5) What's in it for me?	5) Benefits/rationale
6) Do I understand what you're saying?	6) Summary
7) How do I begin?	7. Action

\*Normally, we begin with what we want to say. But in our presentations, we should always consider the audience's frame of reference first.



# Possible contents for various purposes

1 of 2

Purpose	Contents
1) To inform without decisionmaking; simply to increase understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specifics—who, what, where, when, why and how</li><li>• Sequence of events—cause and effect</li><li>• Significance of information to reader</li></ul>
2) To inform for decisionmaking; supplies information and analysis to help reader make a decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specific facts that affect the situation</li><li>• Influence that the facts have on reader's objectives/goals</li><li>• Significant parts of overall situation</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Courses of action</li></ul>

# Possible contents for various purposes 2 of 2

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Contents</b>
3) To recommend; presents information and suggests a specific action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reasons for recommendation</li><li>• Expected benefits</li><li>• Winners vs. losers based on recommendation</li></ul>

## **Form involves:**

- Language
- Format/design
- Interesting title
- Creative opening
- Effective summation

# Preparing to write Policy Briefs

- Make sure that data and information are correct and doublechecked.
- Check tables, figures and other supporting evidence to make sure that they strengthen your arguments and message(s).
- See to it that all preliminary sentences and references are completed and counterchecked.
- Make sure your conclusions are supported by facts and hard data. Or may be backed up by logical presentations.

# Organizing the Policy Brief 1 of 5

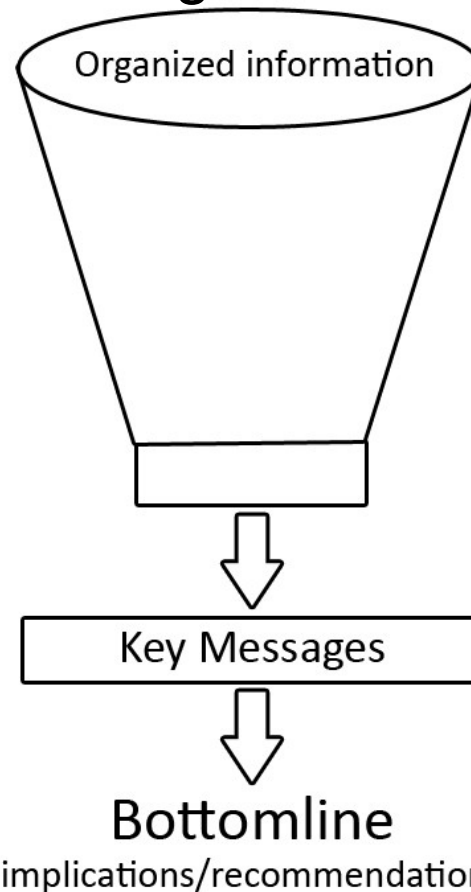
## 1) Organize your key message

- Before writing, it is necessary that you know what you want to communicate. Thus you have to determine first the key messages and how you wish to present them
- MESSAGE—represents the major findings, paradigms, postulates, theories, models and/or generalizations resulting from the research

# Organizing the Policy Brief 2 of 5

## 1) Organize your key message (cont.)

- Culling messages



Source: Guthrie Jensen

implications/recommendations

# Organizing the Policy Brief 3 of 5

## 1) Organize your key message (cont.)

- Culling messages:  
some techniques
  - Clustering
  - Freewriting
  - Outlining

# Organizing the Policy Brief 4 of 5

## 2) Write a draft

- Without worrying about grammar or punctuations or editing, write quickly everything that comes into your mind and put them down in writing.
- To help in this stage, try to:
  - Divide the subject into analytical blocks to draw out the logical connections
  - Discuss the reasons for one argument and show the results/outcomes [this is an example of showing cause and effect]
  - Compare and contrast by showing two or more related things as similar or



# Organizing the Policy Brief 5 of 5

## 3) Revisit what you wrote

- Go over the draft that you wrote with a critical eye now on checking consistencies in logic and flow of arguments, repetitions or those that are not relevant to the story
- This is also where you check for words, sentences, paragraphs and see how they can be improved for better readability and overall structure

## 4) Edit/rewrite/revise

# Qualities of a Well-written/presented Policy

## Brief (start with sentences and paragraphs) 1 of 4

- **Unity**
  - When a paragraph contains one, single main idea only. Points not relevant to said idea are not included.
    - [cite example: Spot the sentence that does not belong]

- Example:

The conflict in Muslim Mindanao, particularly in Lanao del Sur, spans decades, even centuries, and is complex, deeply rooted and multifaceted. Its long history has brought tremendous economic losses to those affected. But more than the economic costs which are so high, it is the social costs that have almost systematically destroyed the lives of the people directly affected. People were generally happy and progressive.

# Qualities of a Well-written/presented Policy

## Brief (start with sentences and paragraphs) 2 of 4

- **Coherence**
  - When sentences follow one another in such a way that the writer's ideas are expressed in a clear, logical manner and when the process of unfolding ideas is done smoothly without sudden shifts or gaps of thoughts.
  - How to achieve coherence:
    - By arranging the details in logical order to avoid thought gaps
    - By using transitional devices or signals to link the thought sequence from one idea to another
    - [cite example: Please comment in terms of the coherence or incoherence of the paragraph]

- Example:

The lack of clear and consistent population policy starkly sets the Philippines apart from the rest of East and Southeast Asia and partly explains its anemic economic growth and persistent mass poverty. Some observers would, of course, point to problems of poor governance, corruption and political economy, among others, as the culprit. The counterargument, however, is that these problems also beset or affect the other Asian economies. And so, the question remains—why have they consistently performed better than the Philippines?

# Qualities of a Well-written/presented Policy

## Brief (start with sentences and paragraphs) 3 of 4

- **Emphasis**
  - An emphatic paragraph shows what is important and project the overall thought and emotion of the article
  - How to attain emphasis:
    - By use of parallelism and/or repetition (important words/phrases are repeated to keep them in the readers' mind)
    - By proportion (important ideas are allotted more space in the paragraph)
    - By position (important ideas are placed at the end which is the most conspicuous position in the paragraph and at the beginning which is the second most conspicuous)  
[Cite example... Comment on it]

- Example:

In the Philippines, many non-bank government agencies have tried to “quack like a duck” but failed miserably. Thus, if we really want to hear a genuine “quack”, we should get a real duck to do it.

» From: PIDS Policy Notes 1999-06 “Credit Programs for the Poor: A Tale of Two Studies”

# Qualities of a Well-written/presented Policy

## Brief (start with sentences and paragraphs) 4 of 4

- Order
  - Contents are arranged in a manner that makes it easy for the reader to follow. Related to the principles of logic and coherence
- Accuracy and consistency
  - Information presented should not only be accurate but also consistent. Every cross reference (to a table, a figure, a chapter or another page) should match.  
[cite example]



- Example:

Table 2 shows that the mean income per capita, mean expenditure per capita, ...and mean expenditure per student decline with increasing family size. These clearly indicate that deterioration in family welfare is associated with larger family size.

Larger number of children also results in lower investments in the education of children. Cross-tabulation results show that while school attendance declines only slightly with larger family size (Table 4), decline in expenditure per student clearly accompanies increases in family size as seen in Table 2.

» From: PIDS Policy Notes 1999-06 “Credit Programs for the Poor: A Tale of Two Studies”

## Other Guidelines 1 of 3

- Keep your sentences and paragraphs short
  - Principles for this:
    - Logic—sentences in the paragraph should be related but not redundant
    - Readership—short sentences and paragraphs are easier to read
    - Sense—short paragraphs give emphasis
    - Appearance—long paragraphs tend to appear like a solid wall that may discourage readers
- At the same time, you may also use a combination of short and long (relatively) paragraphs so as not to bore your readers.

## Other Guidelines 2 of 3

- Put up your guideposts
  - Titles and headings are basic guideposts. But they should be parallel with each other.
  - Heading:
    - Evaluation results: how did the DCPs perform?
  - Subheadings:
    - DCPs of GNFAAs
    - DCPs of GFIs and GOCCs/NBFIs
      - » From PIDS Policy Notes 1999-06 “Credit Programs for the Poor: A Tale of Two Studies”

## Other Guidelines 3 of 3

- Put legends and explanations in tables and illustrations.

- Example:

Do not just write

Decile 1: identify it as, for instance, representing the lowest income bracket vs. say, Decile 10, representing the highest income group.

# Good Titles

- At one glance, you get to grasp the idea of the writeup's content
- Can be in declarative or interrogative sentence form
- Attractive or “tickles” one's mind

# Examples of Interesting Titles 1 of 3

From	To
1) Transforming the Land Bank into a Microfinance Development Institution	1) Is Land Bank EO 138 Ready?
2) Increasing Globalization and AFTA in 2003: What are the Prospects for the Philippine Automotive Industry?	2) Rx for RP's Auto Industry: Market Liberalization to Spur Sweeping Reforms or Implementing the AFTA-CEPT Scheme: Will the Philippine Automotive Industry Survive?

# Examples of Interesting Titles 2 of 3

From	To
1) Competition Policy for the Philippine Downstream Oil Industry	1) Exchange is No Change
2) Assessment of the Role and Performance of Government Nonfinancial Agencies in Implementing Directed Credit Programs and Assessment of the Performance of GFIs and GOCCs/NBFIs in Implementing Directed Credit Programs	2) Credit Programs for the Poor: A Tale of Two Studies

# Examples of Interesting Titles

3 of 3

From	To
1) Developing an Early Warning System for BOP and Financial Crisis: The Case of the Philippines	1) Outsmarting another Crisis: An Early Warning System for the Philippines
2) A Second Look at Credit Crunch: The Philippine Case	2) Credit Crunch! Credit Crunch! Credit Crunch?



# Creative Openings 1 of 2

- For “Credit Crunch! Credit Crunch! Credit Crunch?” Policy Notes:

‘Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim milk masquerades as cream’

–Gilbert H.M.S. Pinafore

- For the “Fiscal Policy: Some Difficult Choices” Policy Notes:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both...  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.’

- Robert Frost

# Credit Crunch! Credit Crunch! Credit Crunch?\*

Mario B. Lamberte\*\*

"Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim milk masquerades as cream."

Gilbert  
H.M.S. Pinafore

**D**espite improving outlook of the Philippine economy in the past few months, recent statistics still show that bank loans have to shrink. The seeming reluctance of banks worried policymakers and some analysts become undermine the strength of the economic recovery. People are now ganging up on the government to supply

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# Fiscal Policy: Some Difficult Choices\*

Gilberto M. Llanto

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both....  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference."

Robert Frost

**R**obert Frost, in very simple but poetic language, tells us that in life, we do have difficult choices to make. Unfortunately, what appears as a plain fact of life—the trade off—is usually lost amidst the great desire to have one's cake and eat it at the same time.

This Policy Notes issue suggests the need to give greater attention to and care in using tax and expenditure policy to achieve several and, sometimes, conflicting objectives. An understanding of the difficult fiscal

\*This draws on Gilberto M. Llanto, "Fiscal Policy in a World Environment." A paper presented at the 1999 World Environment Conference, Center for Environmental and Development Studies, University of the Philippines, Manila.

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PIDS Policy Notes are observed  
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# Creative Openings 2 of 2

- For “The cost of war in human dimension: the case of Lanao del Sur” Policy Notes:  
  
`To be born to create, to love, to win at games is to be born to live in time of peace. But war teaches us to lose everything and become what we were not. It all becomes a question of style’

-A. Camus

# The cost of war in human dimension: the case of Lanao del Sur

Yasmin Busran-Lao

of Mindanao, especially the Maranaos of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City.

*"To be born to create, to love, to win at games is to be born to live in time of peace. But war teaches us to lose everything and become what we were not. It all becomes a question of style."*  
-A. Camus

The effects are succinctly registered in every indicator measuring human development and have consistently placed the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in the bottom rank among all the regions in the Philippines in terms of human development, including human security. Sadly, the region, in particular, the province of Lanao del Sur and the city of Marawi, has otherwise huge potentials for growth and development as was evident during the time prior to the armed conflict.

**B**ased on the human development framework, human security is defined not simply as freedom from fear but also as freedom from want and humiliation.

The conflict in Muslim Mindanao, particularly in Lanao del Sur, spans decades, even centuries, and is complex, deeply rooted and multifaceted. Its long history has brought tremendous economic losses, displacement, pain, humiliation and deep trauma to those affected. And more economic costs which

<sup>1</sup> The term "Moro" refers to the indigenous people of southern Philippines who embraced Islam prior to the coming of the Spaniards.

# Effective Summation

- Conclusion
  - The first lesson in economics is that resources are scarce and must be efficiently allocated. We cannot simply assume an exogenously given expenditure set and then raise the revenues, borrow or print money to finance it. Difficult choices face policymakers each step of the way.

-From PIDS Policy Notes 1998-01

“Fiscal Policy: Some Difficult Choices”