

EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme

**Distance Learning to Support Capacity Building and Training
for National and Local Food Security Information Systems
and Networks**

REPORTING FOOD SECURITY INFORMATION

LESSON 4. REPORTING FORMATS FOR FOOD SECURITY

NOTE

Please note that this PDF version does not have the interactive features offered through the courseware such as exercises with feedback, pop-ups, animations etc.

We recommend that you take the lesson using the interactive courseware environment, and use the PDF version for printing the lesson and to use as a reference after you have completed the course.

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



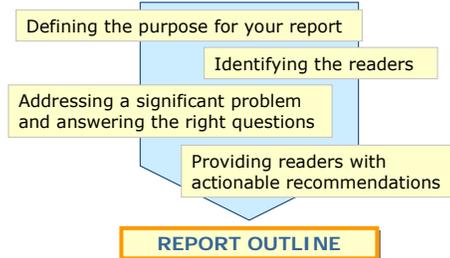
In this lesson we will look at how to structure reports for the major contexts that you may be asked to report in.

You can draw on the examples and ideas presented in this lesson too developing your own reports. But remember that the context and purpose that you are writing for will be complex and unique.

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:



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?

We will now have a look at some of the major types of reports that you may be called upon to produce.

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts



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 can not 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.

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts



Early Warning Bulletins

Early warning is about providing a glimpse of the future.

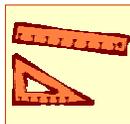


These reports provide decision makers with an indication of **whether a food security problem is emerging**.

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.

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts



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.

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts

Your choice of report type or structure will be determined by the purpose and the frequency of your reporting.

Before looking at other types of reports, which of the mentioned reports would you select for the following purposes and frequency requirements?

Purpose: Recommending an appropriate emergency response

Frequency: As needed

Purpose: Activating a needs assessment

Frequency: Continuous

Purpose: Contributing to long-term development planning

Frequency: Infrequent

1 Research Report

2 Early Warning Bulletin

3 Needs Assessment Report

Please pair the items in each column using the dropdown boxes (i.e. match the numbers) and click "Check Answer".

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts



Policy Papers or Briefs

Food security information and analysis is required to inform the **development of relevant policies**.



Policy papers or briefs start from a stated need or problem, provide a selection of choices and recommends adopting one, some, or none of the options presented. For example, you may have been asked to examine policy options for establishing a national safety net.

The paper answers the question "**Which option(s) should we choose?**" and supports the recommendations with comprehensive information and persuasive arguments.

Reporting formats used in various food security contexts



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

Which type of report would you select for the following purposes and frequency requirements?

Purpose: Identifying and evaluating policy options

Frequency: Infrequent

Purpose: Assessing progress against targets

Frequency: Continuous

Purpose: Identifying the extent and impact of a humanitarian emergency

Frequency: As needed

1 Research Report

2 Early Warning Bulletin

3 Needs Assessment Report

4 Policy Paper or Brief

5 Monitoring or Evaluation Report

Please select the items using the dropdown boxes and click "Check Answer".

Selecting the best report type

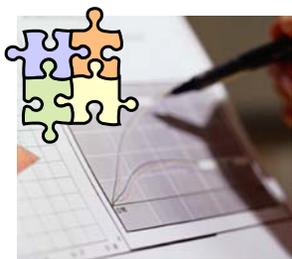
The table below may help you to think about which is the most suitable report format to apply to a specific situation you are writing for.

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

Selecting the best report type

In the real-world, the different **report types often combine**.

For example, you might see elements of policy recommendation combined with a research report; or an early warning bulletin may incorporate 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 see how to **define the outline** of each type of report.

Selecting the best report type

Other kinds of documents

There may be many other documents that you are responsible for, such as:

Instruction manuals

Instructions are step-by-step explanations of how to do something: how to build, operate, repair, or maintain things. If you have been responsible for managing a food security survey you might have written an instruction manual for the enumerators – where you would describe and define tasks.

Proposals for funding

A proposal is an offer or bid to do a certain project for someone. While a proposal may contain other elements, the unique part is that it asks the audience to approve, fund, or grant permission to do the proposed project. For example your unit might want to conduct a needs assessment, but in order to do this you need to write a proposal asking for approval or funding.

Official speeches

You may have been called on to help draft an official speech. For example a senior manager, such as a Minister, may need to open a meeting or workshop on food security. They may need to refer to the current situation and policies.

Selecting the best report type

Let's learn more about each one of the following report types. For each report type, you will know what elements should be included in it and analyze some examples with the support of an expert.



▶ [Research Reports](#)



▶ [Early Warning Bulletins](#)



▶ [Needs Assessment Reports](#)



▶ [Policy Papers or Briefs](#)



▶ [Monitoring and Evaluation \(M&E\) Reports](#)

Please continue through the lesson or select a specific report type

Formats for research reports



Research Reports



In the course of your work you may undertake 'research' in order to better understand the nature of food security in a country or region. For example you might want to understand:

- What are the basic livelihoods of groups?
- What are known or likely hazards that they might face?
- What is the likelihood of these occurring?
- Who are the most vulnerable groups?
- What are the available coping and risk minimization strategies?
- What capacities, services and resources exist to mitigate vulnerability?

Formats for research reports

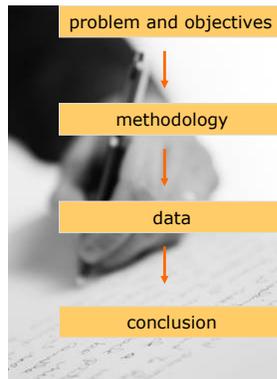
Your research may be based on field work (primary sources) or analysing previous surveys, other published research or talking to people (secondary sources).



The report presents your data and draws conclusions from it. It provides information in a way that is adapted for a particular audience that has specific needs for that information.

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.

Formats for research reports



The typical research report would loosely follow the same **chronological order** as your research.

First, you discuss the issues that led to undertaking the research work (the problem and objectives), then you would discuss the data collection methodology, then the data itself 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...

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

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.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

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 to find specific sections or information that they are particularly interested in.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Executive Summary

The executive summary represents the whole report by providing a synopsis of all the main parts and findings.

The executive summary aims to interest readers 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.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title	Introduction The introduction to the research report also needs to get the readers ready to read the full report. Some of the other elements, such as the background or the purpose, can be handled in the introduction. 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.
Table of Contents	
Executive summary	
Introduction	
Background and purpose	
Review of literature	
Method and procedure	
Findings and results	
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations	
Appendices	
Bibliography	

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title	Background and purpose You will need to discuss the situation that led to the research. What is the problem that the research set out to address? 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?
Table of Contents	
Executive summary	
Introduction	
Background and purpose	
Review of literature	
Method and procedure	
Findings and results	
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations	
Appendices	
Bibliography	

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Review of the literature

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.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Method and procedures

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.

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.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Presentation of the data

The heart of the research report is the data. These can go in the body of your report, or alternatively as appendices if the data would interrupt the flow of your discussion.

Future readers may want to utilize the original data in ways that you can not always anticipate.

In this section you would not add interpretation to the presentation of data. You merely present the data, without trying to explain it.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Conclusions and recommendations

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.

This section would explain your data and interpret it.

This section, or area of the report, is also the place to make preliminary recommendations or state ideas for further research.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Appendices

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.

For example you may place a detailed methodology as an appendix.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Background and purpose
Review of literature
Method and procedure
Findings and results
Discussion, conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Bibliography

The purpose of a research report is to build upon or add to the knowledge in a particular area.

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.

Formats for research reports

Let us look at a couple of **examples of research type reports**.

You will find an example of a baseline report written for Djibouti and a food security situation report prepared for Georgia.

 Remember that these examples are provided to illustrate certain points – not necessarily to serve as templates for you to use.

You don't need to read these reports in detail.

Example: a baseline report written for Djibouti



 **Baseline reports**

 [See the report](#)

Example: a Food Security Situation Analysis from Georgia



 **Background reports**

 [See the report](#)

Formats for research reports

Can you answer the following questions for each of the two reports?



Which of the possible elements are included in the structure?
Which ones are unused? Does this affect the ability of the paper to fulfil its' purpose?

Expert's comment

Neither report includes the full list of common elements. However, the critical question to ask is: What is the purpose of the report? And who is the primary audience? Communicating the message effectively is the key. Ideas on structure are only there to help guide you in achieving this. In some cases the effectiveness may be diminished by omitting critical elements. For example even a relatively short report such as the Djibouti baseline study would benefit from an executive summary. You should consider whether a presentation of data is sufficient, as given in the Georgia report, or if your readers require further analysis and preliminary recommendations.

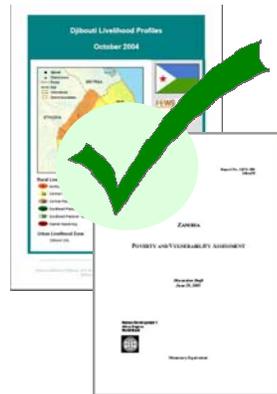


Are the primary audiences specified in the reports?
Do you think that the format is appropriate to these different audiences?

Expert's comment

The primary audience for the Djibouti report is given as "policy makers". The Georgia report does not specify the audience. However, it is not unusual for research and data rich reports to be targeted to a fairly wide audience. It is still important to design a research report that is appropriate to the needs of even a broad target group. Policy makers may not have time even to read and absorb the level of detail that is presented in these reports. As a report writer it is important to clearly define the primary audience. You can then consider utilizing a more targeted format – or prepare supplementary briefs.

Formats for research reports



 Checklist of questions to consider

As you develop your research paper you should 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 that you have investigated to the target audience?

Then, you should check the following elements of your report:

- title
- headings
- executive summary
- objectives
- description of methods and procedures
- summary of previous studies
- presentation of original data
- findings and conclusions
- recommendations
- appendices

Formats for research reports

Research reports: checklist of questions

As you develop your research paper you should consider the following checklist of questions:

- Does your research report achieve its purpose and communicate an increased understanding of the topic that you have investigated to the target audience?
- 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?

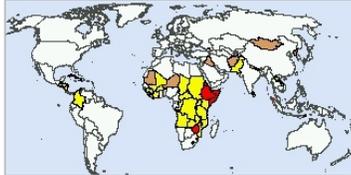
Formats for early warning bulletins



▶ 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?

Formats for early warning bulletins



The EW bulletin will need to keep key decision makers informed about 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.

Formats for early warning bulletins

In your opinion, which of the following structural elements would you probably **not** expect to see in an early warning bulletin?

- A table of contents
- Summary
- Recommendations
- Appendices

Please select the answer of your choice

Formats for early warning bulletins

An early warning bulletin may include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Summary
Recommendations
Problem description

Title

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.

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.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Summary
Recommendations
Problem description

Table of contents

Even though EW bulletins are usually very short – between one and four pages in length – a table of contents can still be appropriate.

The table of contents is a skeleton or overview of the structure of the report.

It provides readers with a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed.

It helps readers locate specific information that they may be particularly interested in.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Summary
Recommendations
Problem description

Summary

The summary provides a synopsis of the whole bulletin.

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.

It should be tightly drafted, short and focus on the main analytical points and recommendations.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Summary
Recommendations
Problem description

Implications and recommendations

The section summarizes the current problem; what is the intensity, extent and duration of the problem and who is affected?

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.

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.

Formats for research reports

Research type papers commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Summary
Recommendations
Problem description

Problem description

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.

It would 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. Lastly it would look at what is already being done to respond to the problem and what is planned in the near future.

Formats for early warning bulletins

Let us look at two examples of early warning bulletins.

One bulletin was prepared for Somalia and one report from Kenya.

 Remember that these examples are provided to illustrate certain points and stimulate ideas – not necessarily to serve as templates for your use.

Example: a report prepared for Somalia



 See the report

Example: a report from Kenya



 See the report

Formats for early warning bulletins

Let's now focus on the following questions for each of the two reports.



Can you tell by simply glancing at these reports whether there is a food security problem that needs attention or not?

Expert's comment

Both reports contain highlighted statements – in the summary or as titles – which do identify the existence of a major humanitarian emergency. It is a common mistake of many early warning bulletins to concentrate on presenting the data rather than communicating whether a problem exists or not. An EWS system operated by the Arid Lands Resource Management Programme (ALRMP) provides an interesting example of how to communicate this key information clearly to the decision makers. Each district is categorized into a predefined sequence of warning stages, from “normal” to “alert” to “alarm” to “emergency”. This is the first information that appears on the report. This presents an easily understood summary analysis to decision makers, which can be directly linked to response interventions.



Do the bulletins provide recommendations? Are these clearly visible in the text?

Expert's comment

Both bulletins are clear about the need to respond. One report provides much more definitive and practical recommendations on what should be done. There may be factors outside of your control as a report writer that influence the detail of recommendations that you can provide.

Formats for early warning bulletins



Do the bulletins provide the necessary information and data to support the conclusions and recommendations?

Expert's comment

Both reports go into much greater detail about the nature and extent of the problem in the later sections.

Having stated that a problem exists and needs to be dealt with, data are subsequently provided to justify how this conclusion was reached.

Formats for early warning bulletins



As you develop your research paper you should 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?

Then, you should check the following elements of your report:

- title
- table of contents
- summary
- recommendations
- problem description

Formats for early warning bulletins

Early warning bulletins: questions checklist

As you develop your early warning bulletin you should consider the following checklist of questions:

- Does your bulletin achieve its purpose of informing decision makers of current levels and trends in food security?
- 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



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 is local coping capacity and provision of services overwhelmed?
- What are the major logistical and resource considerations?

Formats for needs assessment reports



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.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Which of the following elements would you **always** expect to see included in a needs assessment report?

- The data from the field survey
- Short-term response interventions
- Policy recommendations
- The status of on-going responses

Please select the answer of your choice

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Title

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.

At minimum, the title should clearly indicate the topic (a needs assessment), the geographical location and period. It may also be used to begin communicating your main message.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

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 specific sections.

The table of contents leads readers through the whole report. It provides readers with a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Executive Summary

The executive summary represents the whole paper by providing a synopsis of the main findings and recommendations.

The executive summary aims to interest readers 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 recommendations of the study; especially decision-makers.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Introduction

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.

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.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Objectives and methodology

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?

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.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Background

To set the context for the recommended response, the report should discuss the background and pre-crisis conditions in the affected areas.

This would summarize the livelihoods (including the economic, social and political dimensions) and their vulnerabilities and capacities.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Problem description

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.

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 would 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. Lastly it should look at what is already being done to respond to the problem and how successful these efforts have been.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Conclusions and recommendations

This section provides a concise *synthesis* of the major findings - this is more than a *summary*. It presents a clear case to the decision makers and provides a call to action.

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.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs Assessments would usually include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Objectives and methodology
Background
Problem description
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Appendices

Appendices can be useful for presenting the detailed data or additional information when including it in the text would interrupt the flow of the main discussion.

For example this may include maps, details of methodologies and background information on livelihoods.

Formats for needs assessment reports

Let us look at two examples of needs assessment reports. One example is the Vulnerability Assessment Report from Malawi and the second is a WFP needs assessment update for Sri Lanka.

 Remember that these examples are provided to illustrate certain points and stimulate ideas – not necessarily to serve as templates for your use.

Quickly skim through these reports. Look through the contents and structure and compare them to the elements identified in the previous page. How does it vary?

Example: a Vulnerability Assessment Report from Malawi



 [See the report](#)

Example: a WFP needs assessment update for Sri Lanka



 [See the report](#)

Formats for needs assessment reports

Now consider the questions posed below...



Look at the titles of the reports. Do these clearly indicate the purpose and contents of the report?

Expert's comment

One report is entitled a food security monitoring report and the other is a needs assessment. However, both reports provide recommendations on how to respond to the needs of populations affected by a temporary shock.

Readers might be confused by different terms used for the same product. If they misunderstand or are unclear about a title, then they might well ignore an important report.

Clear and unambiguous titles are important. Take care to choose these carefully.



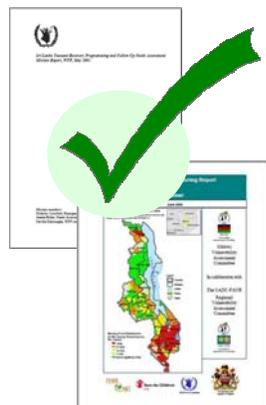
Assume that you are a decision maker consulting the reports to plan a response. Can you extract the information that you need easily? What elements of the structure facilitate this?

Expert's comment

Both reports clearly contain a wealth of detail that would be very valuable in planning a response. However, one report tends to go into greater depth in presenting the data and methodology and has more similarities with the structure of a research report. The other concentrates on communicating the recommendations.

If the purpose of the report is to trigger a response, it may be a mistake to try to include all the data and information produced in the survey process. You should present only the data and information necessary as evidence to support the recommendations that you make.

Formats for needs assessment reports



As you develop your needs assessment report you should 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?

Then, you should check the following elements of your report:

- title
- headings
- problem description
- table of contents
- response alternatives
- framework of analysis
- conclusions and recommendations
- appendices

Formats for needs assessment reports

Needs assessment reports: checklist of questions

As you develop a needs assessment report you should consider the following checklist of questions:

- Does your paper achieve its purpose of presenting clear recommendations on the appropriate response(s) to the current crisis?
- Is the executive summary a good representation of the paper?
- Is the problem (including impact) 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?

Report formats for policy making



Policy Papers or Briefs

The idea of contributing to policy making can be intimidating – especially if this is not something that you have been asked to do before. In practice it is a straightforward process.



Policy making can be understood as a process of identifying real world problems, formulating solutions and a course of action to follow.

IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS

FORMULATING SOLUTIONS

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Policies may be established by any institution or agency. Public policy, which is determined and implemented by Government, is central to food security.

Report formats for policy making



Policy is usually not a single decision, action or reaction but an elaborated approach or strategy.

The policy may be implemented by a single government representative or body or by multiple actors.

If you want to influence policy, or have been invited to do so, then you should consider preparing a policy paper or brief.

Report formats for policy making

In order to prepare a policy report, you need to identify and evaluate different policy options.

In your opinion, what is the most useful content for a policy brief?

- The policy paper should outline and analyse the range of policy options and provide a policy recommendation
- The policy paper should present the policy option that you recommend on the basis of your experience.

Please select the answer of your choice

Report formats for policy making



A policy paper is a decision-making tool.

The aim of the report is not to gather and analyze data about a policy problem (i.e. research), but to develop a set of recommendations for action.

The policy paper should provide a comprehensive and persuasive argument justifying the policy recommendations presented in the paper and therefore act as a call to action for the target audience.

Report formats for policy making

Achieving this purpose usually involves:

- 1 Defining an urgent policy issue which needs to be addressed.
- 2 Outlining the possible ways (policy alternatives) in which this issue can be addressed.
- 3 Evaluating the probable outcomes of these potential options.
- 4 Recommending a preferred alternative (policy recommendation) and providing a strong argument to establish why your choice is the best possible option.

Let's now have a look at the elements of a policy paper...

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Title

The title is the first part of a paper readers see and it begins the process of communicating the message contained in the policy paper.

An effective title of a paper should give readers a quick overview of the subject and problem addressed in the policy paper. A reader may use the title in deciding whether to read the paper or not.

Many policy writers would use these elements, and many readers are conditioned to expect them. However, it is not necessary to include all of these.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Table of Contents

The table of contents is a skeleton or overview of the structure of the policy paper. It shows the overall organization, the main sections and their sub-sections and page numbers to locate sections in the paper.

The table of contents leads readers through the whole paper. It provides readers with a quick overview of the focus and major issues addressed in the paper. The table of contents helps readers to find specific sections or information that they are particularly interested in.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Executive Summary

The executive summary aims to interest readers in reading the whole paper.

However, 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 outcomes of the study findings and proposed policy recommendations, especially decision-makers.

The executive summary represents the whole paper by providing a synopsis of all its main parts and findings.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Introduction

The introduction sets the scene by presenting the context for the policy problem and linking this to the specific focus of the policy paper.

The introduction demonstrates that an urgent problem exists and that your paper is worth reading because it will offer possible solutions to the problem. The introduction will include a statement on the purpose of the policy paper and a brief overview of the methodology used.

The introduction may conclude with a road map showing how the paper is organized.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Problem Description

The problem description identifies, defines and elaborates the nature of the problem being discussed.

This may include the background of the problem (the history of the problem: its causes; who is affected; past policies and their outcomes) and the current status of problem (the current extent and impact of the problem, who is affected, the current policy and its successes and failures).

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Policy Options

This section outlines, evaluates and compares the possible policy alternatives.

All possible policy options should be presented to build a comprehensive and convincing case.

The focus is on evaluating how each option compares in solving the specific problem. On the basis of this evidence an argument is made for the preferred policy alternative.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Conclusions and recommendations

This section clearly presents the case to decision makers and provides a call to action.

This section provides a concise synthesis of the major findings.

This is more than a summary of the main findings, but highlights links with the main policy recommendations that follow.

Finally the reader is provided with a set of policy recommendations - practical steps that need to be taken to implement the proposed policy option.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Appendices

Many policy papers do not contain appendices. However, they can be useful for presenting additional information which supports the main arguments, especially when including detailed information would interrupt the flow of the main discussion.

Appendices may present the data and methodology collected and used.

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers commonly include the following structural elements.

Title
Table of Contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Problem description
Policy options
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices
Bibliography

Bibliography

A bibliography provides a list of the sources that you used to develop your argument. Readers may want to refer to these references. It provides them with a comprehensive guide to the current literature on the topic which they may use in their own work.

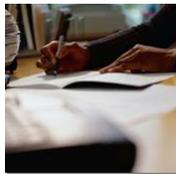
Report formats for policy making

The exact format and structure of the policy paper or brief will need to be adapted to the purpose and primary audience.



For example, if you are **working for government** you may be asked to help develop public policy by carrying out an in-depth study and make policy recommendations.

In this case a **relatively formal policy paper** may be most suitable for reaching policy makers.



Alternatively, you may be a **stakeholder outside of government** looking to influence the policy debate on a particular issue. As part of an advocacy strategy you might want to target a broader audience through the media.

A report suitable for uptake by the media might contain the same main message, but in a **simplified form**.

Report formats for policy making

Let us look at a couple of policy papers; one produced by an academic and one produced by an NGO.

Please scan through the documents, paying particular attention to the structure.

Example: a policy papers produced by an academic



 See the report

Example: a policy papers produced by an NGO



 See the report

Report formats for policy making

Can you answer the following questions for each of the two reports?



Which of the possible elements are included in the structure?
Which ones are not used? Does this affect the ability of the paper to fulfil its purpose?

Expert's comment

The purpose of a policy paper is to provide policy recommendations. Therefore the critical question to ask is "does the paper identify the problem, present possible solutions, evaluate the effectiveness of these alternatives and make recommendations on which course of action to follow?"
Effectively communicating these points is important – the structure itself should be flexible.



Look at the titles.
Which ones succeed in communicating the subject?
Which ones include a message?
Which would you want to read based on the titles?

Expert's comment

An effective title for your policy paper is crucial for attracting and keeping your readers' interest. As the first part of a report that will be seen by the reader, the title is an important opportunity to start communicating the main message to the target audience.
Both titles are clear and concise.
One of the titles also succeeds in conveying the main message of the report: "making the case for cash".

Report formats for policy making



Is there a comprehensive consideration of all the possible policy options? Are the criteria used in evaluating different options clear? Is sufficient evidence included to support a recommended course of action?

Expert's comment

The policy paper needs to provide a comprehensive problem description and discussion of the available policy options. One paper systematically discusses all possible options, while the other *advocates* for one particular policy choice.

Part of the necessary trade-off is length. Policy papers should probably be limited to 10 pages or less if they are to capture the attention of busy decision makers. It is hard to be both brief and comprehensive. The purpose and readership of the paper will determine what works best.

Report formats for policy making



As you develop a policy paper or brief you should consider a series of questions. The following is the most important one:

Does your paper achieve its purpose of presenting an effective argument, to the primary audience, for your preferred policy option?

Then you should check the following elements of your report:

- title
- headings
- executive summary
- presentation of the policy problem and alternatives
- framework of analysis
- conclusions and recommendations
- appendices

Report formats for policy making

Policy papers/briefs: checklist of questions

As you develop a policy paper or brief you should consider the following checklist of questions:

- Does your paper achieve its purpose of presenting an effective argument, to the primary audience, for your preferred policy option?
- Is the title interesting, clear, succinct and descriptive?
- Are headings of sections and sub-sections chosen effectively, and do they provide a clear overview to your paper?
- Is the executive summary a good representation of the paper?
- Is the policy problem clearly and convincingly defined?
- Does your problem description convince the readers that an urgent problem exists?
- Are all possible policy alternatives presented and evaluated?
- Is the basis on which you evaluated each option – the framework of analysis – clearly outlined?
- Do you demonstrate that your chosen alternative represents the best solution to the policy problem?
- Do you outline a course of action to solve the policy 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?

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation



Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Reports



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.



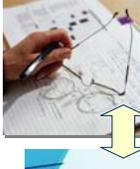
Evaluation

In contrast, evaluations assess the worth of the project or programme. An evaluation will examine the **impact and results**.

An evaluation will examine the impact and results.
Have the objectives been fulfilled? Was the intervention efficient and sustainable?
For example, did the food distributions 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.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation



The policies, programmes and projects you are reporting on will usually have some type of [design/planning framework](#). This framework provides the basis for the assessment exercise.

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 to continue, modify or stop 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.

Planning Framework

The most common planning framework used is the logical framework.

The planning framework will usually specify what was intended to be done - activities, the results of these activities and the objectives.

During the planning exercise it may even be decided how to measure these actions - what indicators to use and where to collect the data.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

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.

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.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Table of contents

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.

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 find specific sections or information that they are particularly interested in.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Executive Summary

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 interests are the conclusions and recommendations, especially decision-makers.

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.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Introduction

The introduction will describe the project, programme or policy to be monitored or evaluated. It will discuss study objectives and the methodology used. The introduction may conclude with a road map, showing how the paper is organized.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

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.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

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.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

M&E reports commonly include the following structural elements:

Title
Table of contents
Executive summary
Introduction
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
Appendices

Appendices

Appendices should be used to present additional information which might otherwise interrupt the flow of the main discussion.

This may include; terms of reference, methodology, planning documents (e.g. logical framework matrices), maps of project areas, lists of persons/organisations consulted and literature and documentation consulted.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

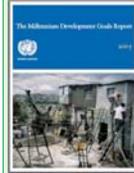
The **Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Monitoring Report** is an important example of a monitoring report that a FSIS might contribute to.

Every developing Country has agreed to produce a MDG monitoring report by the end of 2005.

Look at the Global report and at the MDG report provided for Nepal.

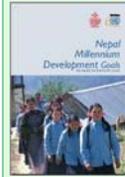
Scan through the reports, looking in particular at the overall structure and the first MDG to halve poverty and hunger.

Example: the MDG Monitoring Report



 [See the report](#)

Example: Nepal MDG report



 [See the report](#)

Millennium Development Goals

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.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

Now consider the questions posed below...



Do the reports clearly show progress against targets?

Expert's comment

Both reports offer excellent examples of clearly reporting progress against the targets. The targets and indicators are explained, progress reported and conclusions drawn on whether progress is on track or not.

The report then provides the context to explain what factors are promoting or hindering progress towards these goals.



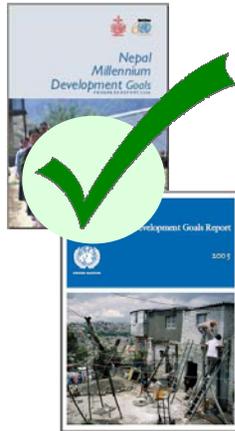
Do the reports provide clear recommendations for action?

Expert's comment

A key objective for the report is to generate an atmosphere where key stakeholders are encouraged to act and accelerate progress towards the MDGs. It is an advocacy tool to engage political leaders, civil society, communities, the general public and the media.

In this case the report itself is not meant to include in-depth analysis and detailed policy recommendations. Other instruments, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), provide policy recommendations.

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation



As you develop a monitoring or evaluation report you should 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?

Then, you should check the following elements of your report:

- title
- headings
- executive summary
- the description of what the policy/program/project set out to do
- framework of analysis
- conclusions and recommendations
- appendices

 Checklist of questions to consider

Report formats for monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation reports: checklist of questions

As you develop a monitoring or evaluation report you should consider the following checklist of questions:

- Does your report achieve its purpose of summarizing progress and providing recommended actions?
- 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 appropriate in supporting the paper?

Summary

The table below summarizes the most suitable formats for reporting on different situations.

Report Type	Frequency	Primary purposes
 Baseline or Research Report	Infrequent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates an increased understanding of food security conditions • 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

If you want to know more...

Suggested references:

Maxwell, D and Watkins, B. (2003), Humanitarian information systems and emergencies in the Greater Horn of Africa: logical components and logical linkages. *Disasters* March 2003, 27(1):72-90.

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Chopak, C. 2000. Early Warning Primer: An Overview of Monitoring and Reporting, Charles Chopak. USAID FEWS Project.
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