

# HSRC POLICY BRIEFS GUIDELINES



## What is a Policy Brief?

The authors are responsible for:

- A short document for providing policy advice to a non-specialist audience on a single topic
- A concise summary of a particular issue, the policy options to deal with it, and some recommendations on a particular course of action (advocacy)
- A medium for exploring an issue and distilling lessons learned from the research (information sharing/objective)



### Parameters

No more than 2–8 pages (1000 – 2 000 words). A good average is 1 500 words.



## Before you start

Ask yourself:

- Who am I writing this brief for? What are the questions they want answered?
- What are their interests, concerns?
- How knowledgeable are they about the topic?
- How open are they to the message?

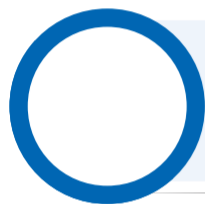
Focus your content as follows:

- Provide the necessary background for the reader to understand the problem.
- Convince the reader that the problem must be addressed urgently.
- Provide information about alternatives (in an objective brief).
- Provide evidence to support one alternative (in an advocacy brief).
- Stimulate/enable the reader to make a decision.



## Tips for writing policy briefs

- Be short and to the point. It should focus on a particular problem or issue. Do not go into all the details. Instead, provide enough information for the reader to understand the issue and come to a decision.
- Be based on firm evidence.
- Focus on meanings, not methods. Readers are interested in what you found and what you recommend. They do not need to know the details of your methodology.
- Relate to the big picture. The policy brief may build on context-specific findings, but it should draw conclusions that are more generally applicable.



## Structuring your Policy Brief

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



## Submission format

- MSWord document
- Font: Times New Roman 12
- Length: Maximum 2000 words
- Use the subheadings as they appear on the structure above

## Section

## Description

Section	Description
Title	The title should be short, catchy, and to the point. <b>Short:</b> Try to keep it to less than 12 words. If that is not possible, consider breaking it into a title and subtitle. <b>Catchy:</b> It should grab the reader's attention. Try to include relevant key words, or find an unusual turn of phrase that sticks in the mind. Also consider using a question as a title. <b>To the point:</b> It should be relevant to the topic. <b>EXAMPLES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food security in protracted crises: What can be done?</li> <li>• HIV, food security and nutrition</li> <li>• Farmer field schools on land and water management: An extension approach that works</li> </ul>
Executive summary / Key messages	Ask yourself, 'What are the main messages that you want policymakers to get – even if they read nothing else?'
Introduction/statement of the aim of the policy brief	Think of the introducing the problem statement through a what, who, when, where, why and how format. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The problem (What is the problem? Why is it important for your audience?)</li> <li>• Where and who is involved?</li> <li>• Why?( Give evidence or examples.)</li> </ul>
Critique of the policy context/option	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy relevance of the problem/ current policy situation on the problem</li> <li>• The aim of the policy brief</li> <li>• It is very important to give this aspect a human angle</li> </ul>
The Research evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key aspects of the research evidence on which the policy brief is based</li> <li>• To the most part stay clear on the technicalities of the methodology</li> <li>• Interpret the data or the key evidence messages for the reader</li> </ul>
Conclusion (not necessary)	Your sense of the positive change that will emanate from taking up your recommendations
Acknowledgements	This section will function as both endnotes and references. No more than fifteen references. <b>NB:</b> Do not use the (author/date) system in the body of the PB but superscript notes only.
Policy Brief Authors	Include any funding or other acknowledgement here as necessary.
Graphics	Insert the professional affiliation of the PB authors and a contact email here as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sharlene Swartz</b>, PhD; Research Director, Human Sciences Research Council; adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Cape Town.</li> <li>• <b>Benita Moolman</b>, PhD; Research Specialist, Human Sciences Research Council</li> <li>• Enquiries to: Prof Sharlene Swartz: sswartz@hsrc.ac.za</li> </ul>
	This may enhance the messaging and ensure that the brief is not too wordy

