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Presenting the results

Household economy approach (HEA) studies are usually done in order to communicate something: for example that a drought is likely to have a specific effect on the food supply or economy of a population, and to make suggestions as to the possible actions which should be taken about this. There is never certainty that a report will lead to action. Government or donors may not respond for a variety of political, economic or organisational reasons. However, unless the information about the situation is clearly communicated, in terms which can be quickly understood by non-specialists (who often make the decisions) and in terms which are clear and convincing, there is no possibility that anything will be done. This chapter outlines the way to present a report.

The presentation of an HEA study is usually straightforward. The way in which the analysis is done provides a logical structure for a report, beginning with a description of the normal economic conditions in an area and the shock or other changes which have occurred, and proceeding logically through the effects which this is likely to have on households of different types.

Note that a report should be written for the convenience of the reader, not to demonstrate the knowledge and skill of the author. You may feel that the situation which you are describing is important: your reader may have several such cases to deal with at any one time.

Include all the information necessary to an understanding of the problem that you are trying to communicate. Avoid including extraneous information, no matter how interesting.

A report should be structured along the following lines:

A summary

This should be a summary of the whole document – background, main findings, major points of uncertainty, main conclusions and recommendations.

The summary is an important part of the document – it will be all that the majority of your audience will read. The summary is often left until the end of report writing and then written badly, in haste. It is better to begin by outlining the summary and using this to form the structure of the main report.*

An introduction

This should describe:

- the purpose of the report ("The purpose of this report is to provide an update of the food economy of Kakuma Refugee camp, which is situated in Turkana region of north-western Kenya")
- the origin of the study ("This report, and the short food economy study it is derived from was commissioned by the UNHCR and WFP...")
- what it will be used for ("...and will be used as background for the Joint Food Assessment Mission of 1999").

The dates of the study

A brief background should be given ("Save the Children previously conducted food economy assessments in Kakuma in October 1996 and 1997...").

Any relevant additional information ("Simultaneous to the food economy assessment WFP/Vulnerability Analysis Mapping was studying the immediate external environment of the camp and the camp's effects and impact on the local Turkana population. The site of the camp and the refugee's relationship with the host community is important in determining their income options and possibilities for self-reliance. This and the fact that Turkana district is highly vulnerable to food insecurity, makes it important to consider the livelihoods of the population near to the camp, and their interactions with the refugees").

* The example is drawn from Save the Children: Kenya Refugee Study Food Economy Updates of Kakuma Camps I, II, and III. Conducted on behalf of World Food Programme Kenya and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Kenya, September 1999, by Phillippa Coutts and Alexandra France.

After a few paragraphs the reader should know what the report is intended to communicate; what sort of information it is based on; what it is to be used for (and whether they need to read further), and why the study is important.

A main background section

This should describe:

- where the place or area is located ("Kakuma is located in north-western Kenya 100 km south of the Sudan border.") Give a map
- who lives there ("The camp was established to cater for Sudanese refugees, the majority of whom at that time were Dinka fleeing from Bor County, Upper Nile... since then it has been expanded to accommodate Somali refugees who were transferred from camps which closed in Mombassa.")
- the size of the population.

Any other information necessary to fill out a picture of the place and its people. This may be historical information, where for example there have been major crises in the recent past; a brief description of other actors in the place (governments, UN, non-governmental organisations).

If the situation has been changing rapidly over time – influxes of people, conflict, drought – it is useful to give a timeline, so that the reader can get a quick idea of how the current situation has arisen. For example:

January 1998: *Kakuma II is opened. Cholera continued to be widespread.*
February 1998: *Wheat and corn-soy blend substituted for oil in the general ration.*
March etc.

Where parts of the background are complex, use subheadings. For example, in some cases an understanding of the context may require much more detail on the demographic structure of the population, the economic conditions or some other aspect of the case.

The aim of a background section is to ensure that the reader has a clear, and sufficiently complete picture of the location and the people living in it, to allow them to set the subsequent sections of the report in context. Avoid including extraneous information at this point.

A methods section

State clearly and succinctly where you obtained the information used in the report. This should include major documentary sources, the field work done, who did it ("Fieldwork was done by two teams of two people each, the author and a trainee"), and when. Outline the time spent doing interviews and mention any special difficulties which arose.

A summary of the HEA methodology should be included as some readers will be unfamiliar with this. Put this in a footnote or annexe.

The aim is to give sufficient information to allow the reader to judge for themselves the likely quality of the information which is presented in the report.

The food economy

A description of the normal economy of the population (or populations) concerned. This can follow the logic of the study:

- the selection of food economies
- the basis of wealth
- the different wealth groups within each food economy, and the proportion of the population falling into each group
- the sources of food and non-food income and expenditure by wealth group and household type
- the exchange relationships of each group.

It is helpful to show income and expenditure in the form of pie charts.

Where data is reported as an interval (eg, food crops = 30–40% of food supply for "poor" households") ensure that the interval is shown.

Refer to any additional relevant information in the text ("A small proportion of poor households also obtain honey from wild hives").

Include only descriptive information. Do not use this section to discuss findings.

The problem

If the study is concerned with a specific event or events, such as a drought and/or change in price, this should be described under a separate heading. Give the sources of information used (official reports, remote surveillance, key informants) any relevant historical evidence ("On the last occasion when drought of this severity occurred, in 1996, it was estimated locally that this caused maize yields to fall by approximately 20–30 per cent").

The effect of the shock on the economy

As with the description of the normal economy, work through the problem in steps (as described in Chapter 8). Pie charts are helpful.

A discussion

Use this section to make observations on the findings and analysis. Indicate any areas where you are not confident in the analysis, point up anomalies if these exist.

The aim is to complete the description for the reader and ensure that they are aware of any potential holes in the argument. It is not the reader's job to find these for themselves.

Conclusions and, if required, recommendations

Conclusions should be drawn directly from the evidence presented. For example:

> "Ninety-five per cent of households in Kakuma access around 90 per cent of their food needs from the WFP ration. Around 40 per cent of the population, the "poor", derive the majority of their cash income by selling a quarter of their cereal ration (whole maize and wheat flour). They spend the money on small quantities of alternative foods, like milk and firewood or charcoal. The amount of ration "poor" households sell depends on whether or not they receive a ration of firewood. When wood is distributed they will sell less cereal and consume a larger proportion of their ration."

Recommendations should arise directly and logically from the conclusions. In the example given, a recommendation might be to maintain, or increase, the quantity of firewood distributed.

Keep in mind the need to present your case, and any recommendations, in a practical way. For example, it may be logical to recommend the supply of additional firewood, but there is no point in doing this if firewood is not available. Think through the alternatives (eg, kerosene, other fuels). Do not make recommendations which are beyond your technical competence. Additional expertise may be required.

Summary

The aim of a report is to communicate information: a report should provide all the information required by the reader in as clear and accessible a way as possible.

A report should include the following sections:

- summary
- introduction
- background
- methods
- discussion
- conclusions and recommendations.

Each section should include only information relevant to that section. Avoid including extraneous information.

The summary is important: it is often the only section which will be read.

Do not make recommendations which go beyond your technical competence.