



CITY REGION FOOD SYSTEM TOOLKIT

Assessing and planning resilient and sustainable city region food systems

Template: Policy brief

Brief description	This document contains a template for a policy and some basic tips on writing an effective policy brief.
Expected outcome	Project teams can produce their own policy briefs, enabling them to make effective, targeted communications to policy makers and investors
Expected output	Policy briefs
Scale of application	Project level
Expertise required	Synthesising information and writing
Examples of application	
Year of development	2022
Author(s)	Jess Halliday, adapted from a template shared by the CGIAR International Water Management Institute (IWMI)
Relevant CRFS Handbook modules; related tools, examples and activities	Action planning module

Full description and justification

This document contains a template for a policy and some basic tips on writing an effective policy brief.

Adhering to the template and guidance will enable the project team to make effective, targeted communications that capture the attention of policy makers, by raising awareness of priority problems and making a strong case for action.

1 What is a policy brief, and who is it for?

A policy brief is a concise, professional document that sets out clear reasons for adopting one particular policy approach or course of action. A well-written policy brief convinces readers of the urgency of a problem, and that the recommended approach or action will address it effectively.

A policy brief provides a clear, succinct overview of the policy options for ‘policy-makers’ – people who have the power to act, but have a limited amount of time and are unlikely to read long reports or recommendations.

The term ‘policy-maker’ can refer to decision-makers in various different kinds of entities. It can refer to elected leaders within local, regional, provincial, or national governments; directors or strategic heads of international and donor agencies; budget holders within local funding bodies; NGO boards of directors; research leaders within universities, etc.

Because policy briefs are intended to be read quickly, the writing style should be clear and concise. As a general rule of thumb, sentences should be no longer than 20 words, with a mix of longer and shorter sentences. The average paragraph should be less than 45 words. The tone should be formal and authoritative. Academic and technical jargon should be avoided, because target readers will probably not be experts in food systems or resilience.

In addition to text, a policy brief can contain simple figures or diagrams to summarize data. A striking photograph may be used on the cover, and additional photos can be used to add visual interest elsewhere in the document if no other figures/diagrams are used. If there is space, one or two short pieces of text (10 words max) may be highlighted as ‘pull quotes’.

2 Policy brief template

Section	Your text
<p>Title</p> <p>Descriptive, relevant and to-the-point. Use key words and phrases in the kind of language that policy-makers are familiar with, while avoiding too much jargon.</p>	<p>[15 words max]</p>
<p>Short intro</p> <p>Two or three sentences outlining the problem and making the case for urgent action. The introduction must hook the reader’s attention, and flow directly from the title above. It must convey the main message of the policy brief – that urgent action is needed.</p>	<p>[50 words max]</p>
<p>Action needed</p> <p>Up to 6 bullet points of recommended policy actions. As some people may not read beyond the first page, this is a means</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Bullet point 1 – 30 words] • [Bullet point 2 – 30 words] • [Bullet point 3 – 30 words] • [Bullet point 4 – 30 words]

<p>to get across the advocacy messages in the most succinct way possible.</p> <p>As a general rule, use a verb at the start of each bullet point start, such as 'Build', 'Establish', 'Strengthen'.</p> <p>If actions are directed at different stakeholders, make this clear. E.g. 'Urban planners should....'.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Bullet point 5 – 30 words] • [Bullet point 6 – 30 words]
<p>What is the problem?</p> <p>An brief explanation of the problem, and why it needs to be addressed urgently.</p> <p>Use short paragraphs and a series of sub-headings to provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set out the context, nature of the problem, and its causes; • Why the problem is relevant to the current policy agenda; • How it affects the well-being and success of the local community; • Facts and figures to show the scale of the problem and (if available) likely costs of not addressing it. 	<p>[Around 200 words]</p>
<p>What can be done to solve this problem?</p> <p>A series of 3-5 sub-headings (each 12 words max), followed by about 200 words outlining the solution. Each sub-heading should reflect at least one of the actions set out in bullet points on the first page.</p> <p>This core section should have logical progression and narrative flow to build a strong argument. It is recommended to set out the steps that need to be taken and why, and how these steps will improve the current situation.</p> <p>If other solutions may have been proposed to the same problem, it gives credibility to acknowledge these and to explain why the recommendations are better or more effective.</p>	<p>[First sub-heading – 12 words]</p> <p>[Text to outline solution – 200 words]</p> <p>[Second sub-heading – 12 words]</p> <p>[Text to outline solution – 200 words]</p> <p>[Third sub-heading – 12 words]</p> <p>[Text to outline solution – 200 words]</p> <p>[Fourth sub-heading – 12 words]</p> <p>[Text to outline solution – 200 words]</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	

<p>An inspiring and positive take-away message on the potential gains of taking action. This is an opportunity to re-state the problem and solution, reinforce the arguments and communicate a vision that the reader may use to convince their peers.</p>	<p>[150 words max]</p>
<p>Standard info on CRFS, including mention of partners and funders</p>	
<p>Link to full assessment report, action plan, or other info]</p>	
<p>Contact name/email address</p>	