

# Food Security Information for Action

## Reporting Food Security Information **Reporting Formats for Food Security Exercises**



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## Exercise 1

Your choice of report type or structure will be determined by the purpose and the frequency of your reporting. Which of the following reports would you select, to best comply with these purposes and frequency requirements?

1. Research Report
2. Early Warning Bulletin
3. Needs Assessment Report

**A.**

**Purpose:** Recommending an appropriate emergency response. **Frequency:** As needed

**B.**

**Purpose:** Activating a needs assessment  
**Frequency:** Continuous

**C.**

**Purpose:** Contributing to long-term development planning. **Frequency:** Infrequent

*Tick the correct option*

- 1A, 2B, 3C
- 2A, 3B, 1C
- 3A, 2B, 1C

## Exercise 2

Your choice of report type or structure will be determined by the purpose and the frequency of your reporting. Which of the following reports would you select, to best comply with these purposes and frequency requirements?

1. Research Report
2. Early Warning Bulletin
3. Needs Assessment Report
4. Policy Paper or Brief
5. Monitoring or Evaluation Report

**A.**

**Purpose:** Identifying and evaluating policy options. **Frequency:** Infrequent

**B.**

**Purpose:** Assessing progress against targets  
**Frequency:** Continuous

**C.**

**Purpose:** Identifying the extent and impact of a humanitarian emergency.

**Frequency:** As needed

*Tick the correct option*

- 4A, 5B, 3C
- 2A, 3B, 1C
- 4A, 2B, 5C

## Exercise 3

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

1. A table of contents
2. Summary
3. Recommendations
4. Appendices

*Tick the correct option*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

## Exercise 4

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We examined the main features of a needs assessment report. Which of the following elements would you **always** expect to see included in a needs assessment report?

1. The data from the field survey
2. Short-term response interventions
3. Policy recommendations
4. The status of on-going responses

*Tick the correct option*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

## Exercise 5

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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?

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

*Tick the correct option*

- 1
- 2

## Exercise 6

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We have looked at two examples of research reports. One example is a baseline report written for Djibouti, and the second one is a food security situation report prepared for Georgia. Can you answer the following questions, for each of the two reports?

1) 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?

2) Are the primary audiences specified in the reports?

Do you think that the format is appropriate to these different audiences?

*Please look on page 14 of this document, to confront your opinion  
with the comment of an expert.*



## Exercise 7

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We have looked at two examples of early warning bulletins. One bulletin was prepared for Somalia, and one report was from Kenya. Please, read the following questions, which refer to both reports. What would you answer?

1. Can you tell by simply glancing at these reports whether there is a food security problem that needs attention or not?
2. Do the bulletins provide recommendations? Are these clearly visible in the text?
3. Do the bulletins provide the necessary information and data to support the conclusions and recommendations?

*Please look on page 15 of this document, to confront your opinion  
with the comment of an expert.*

## Exercise 8

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We have looked 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. Please, read the following questions, which refer to both reports.

What would you answer?

1. Look at the titles given to the reports. Do these clearly indicate the purpose and contents of the report?
2. 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?

*Please look on page 16 of this document, to confront your opinion  
with the comment of an expert.*

## Exercise 9

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We also looked at a couple of policy papers; one produced by an academic and one produced by an NGO. (The ODI Social Protection Policy Paper and the Oxfam cash distributions).

Please, read the following questions, which refer to both reports. What would you answer?

1. 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?

2. 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?

3. 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?

*Please look on page 17 of this document, to confront your opinion  
with the comment of an expert.*

## Exercise 10

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We examined briefly the Global report and at the MDG report provided for Nepal, as examples of monitoring reports.

Please, read the following questions, which refer to both reports. What would you answer?

1. Do the reports clearly show progress against the targets?
2. Do the reports provide clear recommendations for action?

*Please look on page 18 of this document, to confront your opinion  
with the comment of an expert.*

## Solutions

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### Exercise 1

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Options	Correct answer	Comment
1A, 2B, 3C		Not really. There are report types which may be better suited to the specified requirements.
2A, 3B, 1C		Not really. There are report types which may be better suited to the specified requirements.
3A, 2B, 1C	<b>X</b>	Correct. These are the most suitable report types.

### Exercise 2

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Options	Correct answer	Comment
4A, 5B, 3C	<b>X</b>	Correct. These are the most suitable report types.
2A, 3B, 1C		Not really. There are report types which may be better suited to the specified requirements.
4A, 2B, 5C		Not really. There are report types which may be better suited to the specified requirements.

### Exercise 3

---

Options	Correct answer	Comment
1		Even a short bulletin might include a table of contents to guide users around the information.
2		Even a relatively short bulletin should have a summary for the busy decision makers.
3		Recommendation should be clear - even if the recommendation is to take no action.
4	<b>X</b>	That is correct. This type of report needs to communicate a simple and concise message. A short bulletin would be unlikely to include appendices.

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## Exercise 4

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Options	Correct answer	Comment
1		You would present analyzed information rather than data. Try to provide the minimum information needed to support your recommendations.
2	<b>X</b>	Correct. The major role of a needs assessment is to recommend an appropriate emergency response.
3		An emergency needs assessment focuses on providing programmatic recommendations rather than policy responses.
4		While the needs assessment might include details of on-going responses you would look at impact in an evaluation report.

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## Exercise 5

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Options	Correct answer	Comment
1	<b>X</b>	Correct. A good policy paper will look at all the policy options, even the ones that are not preferred. This analysis should support your recommendation.
2		That is not correct. You need to identify and evaluate different policy options – not just present your preferred option.

## Exercise 6

Options	Comment
1	<p>Neither report includes the full list of common elements. However, the critical question to ask is:</p> <p>What is the purpose of the report? And who is the primary audience?</p> <p>Communicating the message effectively is the key. Ideas on structure are only there to help guide you in achieving this.</p> <p>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.</p>
2	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>



## Exercise 7

Options	Comment
1	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
2	<p>Both bulletins are clear about the need to respond. One report provides much more definitive and practical recommendations on what should be done.</p> <p>There may be factors outside of your control as a report writer that influence the detail of recommendations that you can provide.</p>
3	<p>Both reports go into much greater detail about the nature and extent of the problem in the later sections.</p> <p>Having stated that a problem exists and needs to be dealt with, data are subsequently provided to justify how this conclusion was reached.</p>

## Exercise 8

Options	Comment
1	<p>One report is entitled a food security monitoring report and the other is a needs assessment. But both reports provide recommendations on how to respond to the needs of populations affected by a temporary shock.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Clear and unambiguous titles are important. Take care to choose these carefully.</p>
2	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

## Exercise 9

Options	Comment
1	<p>The purpose of a policy paper is to provide policy recommendations.</p> <p>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?”</p> <p>Effectively communicating these points is important – the structure itself should be flexible.</p>
2	<p>An effective title for your policy paper is crucial to 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.</p> <p>Both titles are clear and concise.</p> <p>One of the titles also succeeds in conveying the main message of the report: “making the case for cash”.</p>
3	<p>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 <i>advocates</i> for one particular policy choice.</p> <p>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.</p>

## Exercise 10

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Options	Comment
1	<p>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.</p> <p>The report then provides the context to explain what factors are promoting or hindering progress towards these goals.</p>
2	<p>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.</p> <p>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 the policy recommendations.</p>

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