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MAKERERE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH AND INNOVATIONS FUND (Mak-RIF)

Policy Brief Guidelines

‘How to do it and what it is intended to be’

1.0 Introduction

The Makerere University Research and Innovations Fund (MAKRIF) is a special funding stream to Makerere University from the Government of Uganda to support high impact Research and Innovations that inform National development priorities. The objective of the fund is to increase the local generation of translatable research and scalable innovations that address key gaps required to drive Uganda’s development agenda.

During the Financial Years 2019/20 and 2020/21, over 500 grants have been awarded by this fund and at least half of these have been implemented to completion. Therefore, there is a need to present findings and recommendations of these projects to policy makers in order to influence policy decisions towards accelerating development across different sectors of the economy in Uganda.

Policy makers are usually very busy individuals with a need to master complex, substantive issues in a short period of time and make decisions based on partial or imperfect information in order to satisfy their bosses or constituents. It is therefore paramount that research findings and recommendations are presented to policy makers packaged in a short document that is easy to read and understand by a non-specialist audience known as a **Policy Brief**. These are often recommended as a key tool for communicating research findings to policy actors.

1.1 Why should each project develop a Policy Brief?

- Policy Briefs provide busy policy makers with information they need to do their jobs
- The Policy Briefs break down complex issues into essential facts
- Policy Briefs evaluate alternative courses of action
- Policy Briefs provide recommendations for action

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- Decision/policy-makers consider Policy Briefs to be a precious communication tool and use them in decision-making
- Senior officials have a preference for “pre-digested” results and concise documents
- It is known that Policy Briefs presenting the opinions of experts “might affect intended actions and intentions persisting to actions for public policy” for instance those coming from the people who carried out the study, helps to reinforce certain messages arising from the study

2.0 How to write an effective Policy Brief

2.1.1 When writing a Policy Brief, ask yourself...

- What is the principal message being conveyed?
- What do I want the policymaker to do/remember?
- Are the actions feasible? Convincing?
- What are the risks to the decision maker if the recommendations are followed?

2.1.2 What should be included in an effective Policy Brief?

1. Explain why the issue is important; why a decision needs to be made
2. Provide essential facts and the supporting evidence
3. Provide alternative courses of action
4. Are there obvious risks to the proposed action?

2.1.3 Tips for writing an effective Policy Brief

- Orient writing to your audience needs/actions
- Organize around key, memorable points/actions
- Support the key points with results or evidence
- Avoid technical jargon
- Format information so that it is easy to read and understand
- Use short sentences
- Use bold type or bullet to highlight
- Use simple graphs (table, charts, diagrams and infographics)



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- Restrict information to no longer than 2-5 pages (double spaced)
- Present all essential information in first paragraph

2.1.4 Structure of an effective Policy Brief

A. Heading

B. Summary

- What is the issue/problem?
- Why is a decision needed?
- What key information is contained in this memorandum?
- What course of action is recommended?

C. Background

- Brief, essential points that explain how this issue has evolved or become a concern.

D. Issues/problem

- What are the key issues to be addressed by the policy maker—one to three at most?
- What position(s) have others taken on these issues?

E. Options

- What are the plausible courses of action, along with the pros and cons of each?
- What are the approximate financial costs of each option?
- What are the political risks and potential opposition that might result from choosing an option?

F. Recommendation

- Your recommended course of action and why.
- Offer specific actions that you urge a policymaker or program planner to take
- Start with an action verb and should be SMART



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- G. 1-3 policy or program implications from the data
- Focus on results of taking a particular course of action (do not start with verbs)
 - First identify implications, then recommendations
 - Implications help policymakers to see anticipated result (related to the key message, key findings)

REMEMBER!

- ✓ Policymakers make decisions every day based on incomplete or imperfect information.
- ✓ Perfection of a Policy Brief is not the goal but good enough basis for the decision.
- ✓ Your job is to provide the best available evidence on the problem and evaluate possible solutions.
- ✓ Add relevant pictures, graphs, charts, diagrams, and or infographics etc. from the research and or innovation engagements or data to your Policy Brief, for the fact that pictures speak louder than words or text.
- ✓ Overall, give your Policy Brief a simple but professional design so that the document is appealing to the eyes of the user. Follow branding guidelines if any, required and or given.

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