

REPORT ON EVIDENCED INFORMED POLICY WRITING WORKSHOP

FROM 24TH -28TH OCTOBER, 2011 IN BOLGATANGA

IN THE UPPER EAST REGION

ORGANISED BY



AND



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Every nation and institution is fashioned on certain laid down policy framework which serve as a guide to help them charter a worthy course and be able to evaluate and track their progress. In Ghana, Non-Governmental Organisations and other Civil Society Organisations are key in both the formulation and implementation of government policies but most of these NGO's lack the requisite skills that are needed to effectively and efficiently influence policies in the country. It is against this backdrop that Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) in partnership with International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) organised a five day workshop from the 24th -28th October, 2011 for some selected NGO's and other Health workers in the Upper East region on how to write evidenced based policy briefs and how to present these briefs in such a way that it influences the general policies.

Opening the five day workshop, the executive secretary of GINKS, Mr. Inusah Ibrahim, told participants that the workshop was aimed at equipping development practitioners with the requisite skills to enable them to contribute to policy making and to influence policy with evidence informed information.

Mr. Ibrahim also briefed participants about the aims, vision, mission and activities of GINKS and explained that it operates in mainly health, education, youth development and gender empowerment.

PARTICIPANT EXPECTATION

Participants expressed their expectation in respect of the five day workshop. These ranged among other things they desire to;

- Create a regional platform for knowledge sharing
- Improve upon available content and invest in other knowledge sharing opportunities.
- Learn more about policy frameworks
- Effectively use ICT to enhance evidenced based policy making
- Gain insight into policy frameworks
- Acquire relevant skills on evidenced based policy making.

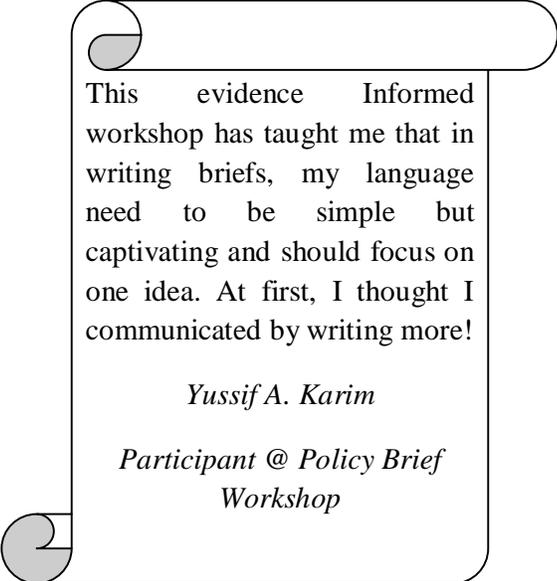
Participants hoped that the workshop will be very interactive and knowledge packed and that GINKS and INASP will conduct a follow up in future to find out if the knowledge acquired is put into practice.

1.1. INTRODUCTION TO INFORMATION LITERACY

Mr. John Stephen Agbenyo, using scenario and brainstorming explained *information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to **recognize** when information is needed and have the ability to **locate, evaluate and use effectively** it effectively to enhance development and growth*. He explained further that as community based organisations that work closely with both the local people and the government, they need special skills to seek information from both partners, evaluate it and use it to lobby to bring about change that will ultimately transform the lives of the people. The facilitator further explained that Information literacy has seven pillars as its bedrock and these require an information literate person to be able to;

- Recognise the information needed at a particular time
- Locate and assessing information
- Distinguish and create innovative ways of addressing information gaps
- Construct strategies of locating information required
- Synthesise and evaluate every information that is acquired

Participants were entreated to at all times know the extent of information needed be able to use it effectively and efficiently since information is not absolute and there is the need to always authenticate the source of the data and also incorporate the selected information into already existing knowledge base. Participants were admonished to conduct research or seek information from credible sources and use information effectively to advance the course of their organisations, the country and the local people. Understanding the economic, legal and social issues surrounding the accessed information and ethically and legally information was hammered on by the facilitator.



This evidence Informed workshop has taught me that in writing briefs, my language need to be simple but captivating and should focus on one idea. At first, I thought I communicated by writing more!

Yussif A. Karim

*Participant @ Policy Brief
Workshop*

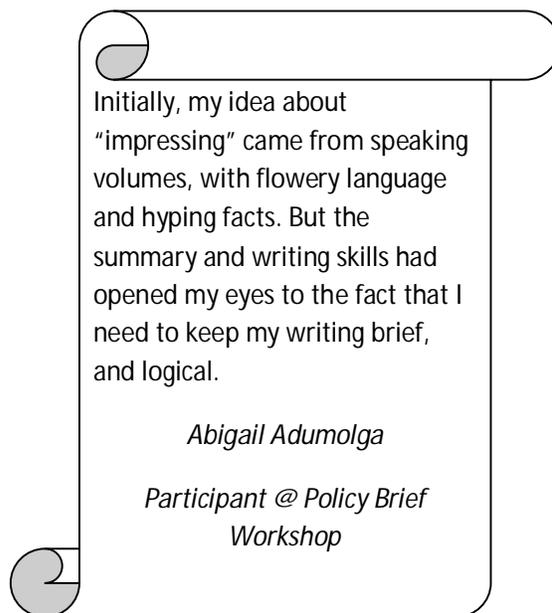
Evidenced Informed Policy Writing Workshop

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At the end of the presentation, participants expressed satisfaction that their hitherto held view about an information literate person has been reshaped because they have come to understand that being literate in information goes beyond the ability to search for information and deals more with managing the information to achieve developmental goals.

1.2 SEARCH STRATEGIES: USING THE BOOLEAN OPERATORS

Making the presentation on how to effectively search for information online, Mr. Joseph Kpetigo demonstrated how the right combination of the Boolean operators is key to searching for information for specific purposes. The internet and the World Wide Web, he explained, are the key tools for searching for information for personal, organizational and societal development but without inputting the correct operators. Participants were, therefore, taken through the concept of searching for information online using the “and” “or” and “but” operators and were made to understand that the internet is a vast network of computers that connects millions of people all over the world. Participants were made to understand that there are myriads of information on the internet with different websites have been created by different people or organizations and cautioned to try to at all times evaluate the information.



The developmental workers were encouraged to use live searches to get up to date information on topics and issues and not rely on outdated data since most of them can be misleading. They were

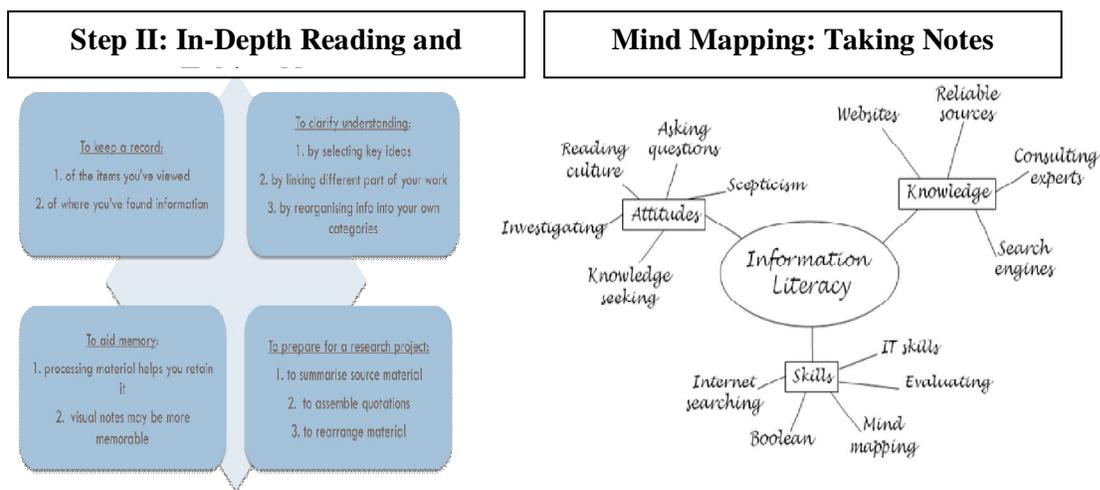
also entreated to use a directory or Subject Guide when they need to acquire lots of information on your topic and narrow down your searches to more relevant and reliable information which has already been indexed and evaluated by human indexers and subject experts. Using of Google translate and Google alert, participants were made to understand that language barrier on the internet is a thing of the past since with Google translator, one can write a mail in English and translate it into Swahili and email it to a friend in Uganda or South Africa and can also read information to communicate with people from across the globe and from different linguistic backgrounds.

2.0 WRITING AND SUMMARY SKILLS

Knowing that good policy briefs are contingent on the ability of people to package information such that it benefits all those concerned, the facilitators took the development workers through the basic skills in writing and summarising information. Participants were given the opportunity to survey the difference between good and bad writing, with particular focus on brevity, clarity, and structure as the essentials of good writing. Joseph Kpetigo, who facilitated this segment, reminded participants that any type of writing that focus more on itself that the topic exaggerates facts in order to gain attention or misrepresents opinions or theories and ignores the reader is a poor write up. Good writing on the other hand is simple, precise and goes straight to the point without too much linguistic embellishments so that the reader easily understands what he/she reads. Good writing also sounds natural since its purpose is not to impress to convey a message to its target audience without any ambiguity.

Reminding participants that a good policy brief relies, fundamentally, upon the brevity and conciseness of the facts in the document, Mr. Acheampong Samuel, the Head of the Documentation Unit at Savana Signatures took them through the process of summary. He explained that as policy makers and influencers, it is vital that they learn the skills of summary since it will assist them greatly in selecting main ideas, regrouping and recombining them generalizing and categorizing ideas from their own understanding and deleting unnecessary details that are not important to the overall meaning of the reading. Participants were then taken through the four steps of summary to equip them with the requisite skills they need to function effectively as policy drivers and formulators. This interactive session saw participants examining Skimming, In-depth reading, planning. Writing your summary not just as the steps of effective summary but as how it can contribute immensely to the writing and presentation of effective policy briefs. The use of mind map, outline, tree diagram and flow chart as planning tools for effective writing was also critically examined. They were also given clues on what to do in summary when the reading is very long, or

when the ideas are difficult to understand, when passage is poorly organized and/or written and also when their summary looks very close to the original.



3.0 WRITING A POLICY BRIEFING

This presentation took participants through the concept of policy and how to put out attractive and convincing policy briefs. Making the presentation, Mr. Agbenyo said that a good policy in one that is accurate and has a clear objective, relevant to the needs of the people, comprehensive and concise. The facilitator stated that a good policy brief tells policy makers everything they need to know to make policy decisions on the subject. Participants were urged to make sure to include enough information for statistical data to enable people understand the implications of the figures and further ensure that their briefings draw evidence from other polices and research findings .He admonished them to eschew personal bias and present the facts as they are.

In sourcing for funding, I came across proposal templates that required me to write in 500 words my executive summary and I couldn't. But the summary and writing presentations have given me the insight I need in prioritizing information. This workshop has come at the right time.

Mr. Robert Alagskomah

Participant @ Policy Brief Workshop

Participants were also taken through the various steps involved in writing effective policy briefs. These were enumerated as follows;

➤ **Research**

Mr. Agbenyo reiterated that research, is needed to undertake a background reading to get a good overview of the topic and in doing this , they need good information literacy skills to identify information which is a suitable source for a policy briefing. Participants were tasked to out source knowledge by contacting suitable expert and also check the website of local universities to find out if they have academics working on the issue you are interested in as well as identify trustworthy non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on your topic of interest or contact the government department which deals with the topic of interest

➤ **Structuring and planning**

The facilitator emphasised the need to structure the brief in order to determine the purpose and audience of the document, brainstorm the topics to be covered, and consider any time or other constraints on the document. Planning also aids in deciding the document's content and design. Participants were shown various different techniques they can use to plan their policy briefing (e.g. mind-mapping, compare/contrast table etc)

➤ **Further reading/research.**

In writing the policy brief , there are times that the writer identifies some information gaps that need to be filled and this calls for some extra reading or research to make the document up to date and realistic as well as a masterpiece.

➤ **Writing**

This stage involves the use of previous plan outline as the backbone of the write up by expanding each point into sentences and paragraphs. Initial drafting is best done without too much thought to the actual choice of words, or to punctuation, spelling or mechanics. The purpose is to get your ideas down on paper. Once you have done this, go back over what you have written and revise it. Make sure it is grammatically correct and makes sense- but avoid the temptation to make it more complicated than it needs to be.



Participants doing group work

➤ **Reviewing**

Make sure you leave time to properly proof-read your document at the end. Check each sentence and paragraph for clarity, conciseness, accuracy, correctness, audience considerations and readability. If possible get a colleague to review your briefing and to give you feedback on how easy to read/understand it is. It is also very useful to get experts to review the briefing to check that you have presented the topic accurately.

➤ **Dissemination**

After writing the brief, Participants were advised to make sure it reaches the relevant people by employing relevant and effective modes of reaching the target groups. This can be done by keeping a mailing list (addresses and/or emails) and send all new policy briefings to all, run seminars and workshops. The facilitator ended his presentation by explaining to the participants that even though each policy may come with its template, there are general features like the, Executive Summary, introduction, approaches and results ,eventually conclusion and implications and recommendations.

As part of plans to fully equip the developmental workers with a complete set of skills, the facilitators took the participants through effective presentations. They were made to understand that in making their presentations, there is the need to consider the interest of the audience, the theme of the presentation and ensure that the presentation is not too packed with information since this might affect meaning. They were also given insight into how to design and make PowerPoint presentations in such a way that policy briefs are given the required attention and hype.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the intensive five days policy writing workshop, the executive Secretary of GINKS, Mr. Inusah Ibrahim thanked the participants or availing themselves for the workshop saying that,

but for their commitment and punctuality, the workshop could not have been a success. He also entreated participants to try and utilize their newly acquired knowledge to improve upon their organisations. The facilitators also expressed their gratitude to the participants for their active participants throughout the workshop and urged them to keep the zeal and enthusiasm when they impart the new skills to their co workers. The participants on their part we very grateful to GINKS and INASP for packing the topic for the working saying, it has come at a time that there is great competition among developmental workers to influence both organisation and government policies. They pleaded with GINKS to try and organise a follow up workshop, if even it is for one day to find out how far they have practicalized the knowledge and to also give them the opportunity to share their success and challenges.

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