



Documenting Our Research Methods & Major Findings

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THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTING OUR RESEARCH METHODS

Conducting research, whether it involves primary and/or secondary data collection, is an expensive and time-consuming endeavor. Since 1994, research and analysis has become an important aspect of CARE's work helping us to better understand livelihood systems, rights realization, and more recently our focus on understanding underlying causes of poverty.

CARE has come to understand that conducting research and analysis is a critical, ongoing aspect of our work. We conduct research – both primary and secondary – to help us understand the contexts within which we operate; to help us make decisions that will have a significant and sustainable impact on poverty eradication and social justice; as well as to use research and knowledge acquisition as an empowerment process.

A critical aspect of any research and analysis project is to carefully document – or “write up” – the research methods used and key findings. Documenting our research methods is not just a good idea. It is a professional obligation that provides the reader with certain essential information about how the research was conducted to:

- ✓ Ensure that others can understand the research questions we are asking and meaningfully interpret our key findings.
- ✓ Ensure that others can clearly understand the methods and level of rigor we chose to use for the study.
- ✓ Ensure that others can make use of our research findings.

If you develop a Research Plan to guide your work, and you systematically document each stage of your research process, your Research Methods and Major Findings Report will be quite easy and straightforward to “write up.”

A METHODS & FINDINGS SECTION SHOULD ANSWER THESE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Why did you begin the study?

- WHAT WERE YOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS?
- WHAT DID YOU WANT TO KNOW?

How did you do it, or what did you do?

- WHAT METHODS DID YOU CHOOSE TO ANSWER YOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

What did you find out?

- WHAT ARE THE KEY FINDINGS OF YOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

What does it mean? How do you interpret the findings?

- WHAT DO THEY TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS?
- WHAT DO THEY TELL YOU ABOUT THE CONTEXT
- WHAT DO THEY TELL YOU ABOUT HOW WE DO OUR WORK?

ENSURING BROAD USE OF OUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

Documenting our Research Methods is a professional responsibility that allows other researchers to understand the methods we used; determine if our findings are reliable; and be able to use our findings rather than have to initiate their own research projects.

AN OUTLINE TO HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR RESEARCH METHODS & MAJOR FINDINGS REPORT

INTRODUCTION – For your introduction section, think of it as telling the “story” about the interesting questions that you set out to answer with your research. Discuss why you wanted to

conduct the research in the first place; what were your objectives? Tell the reader what it was that you were hoping to find out through conducting the research. Provide the reader with your hypotheses or the research questions that you wanted to answer. Provide any relevant contextual data, which simply means describe the local study area, or explain what is happening that makes you want to answer these research questions. You can also use secondary data or your literature review to describe the context and more fully develop your “story.” Thinking of your research report as documenting and telling the “story” can help make a standard, and sometimes dull, research report much more interesting to the reader. ***Specifically this section might include the following:***

- ✓ Introduce the general subject matter or the problem statement.
- ✓ Introduce the research objectives, hypothesis, or questions.
- ✓ Briefly discuss your assumptions.
- ✓ Discuss the research area and paint a picture of why these questions need to be addressed.

METHODS – This section includes information on when, where and how you collected your data and how you analyzed the data. It describes whether you chose to use secondary data or primary data collection; and whether you chose to use quantitative or qualitative or a mix of these methods. It tells the reader how many people you interviewed and the types of interviews that you chose to use. The following will help you decide what to include in your methods section.

For a Quantitative Study this section *might* include:

- ✓ Questionnaires – close-ended questionnaires; questionnaire coding; questionnaire analysis software used
- ✓ Materials – refers to any research materials used in the study (e.g., tape measures, weighing scales, anthropometer, etc)
- ✓ Procedures – chronological account of how research was carried out
- ✓ Data sampling – type of sample methods used; sampling errors found
- ✓ Data analysis – data collation, statistical tests run; statistical significance

For a Qualitative Study this section *might* include:

- ✓ Questionnaires – open-ended questionnaires
- ✓ Interviews – group, key-informant, expert consultations
- ✓ Sampling – sampling methods; how interviewees were selected
- ✓ Processes or Procedures – chronological account of how research was carried out
- ✓ Data analysis – how was data and how data and information was analyzed, compared and summarized.

For a Secondary Data Study this section *might* include:

- ✓ Discussion of available data and literature found; types of information collected
- ✓ Cross-sector comparison and analysis of secondary data
- ✓ Any verification of data with sector experts that was conducted
- ✓ Any verification of data with other local experts that was conducted
- ✓ Any expert consultation workshops that were conducted to verify and analyze the data.

For an Analysis Workshop using secondary data and information, this section *might* include:

- ✓ A brief overview of the secondary data you are using for the workshop; types of data, when it was collected, who collected it, sectors or topics covered, etc.
- ✓ Discussion of the number of workshops conducted (e.g., 3 analysis workshops over a 4-month period)
- ✓ Discussion of the number and variety of internal expert participants by profession
- ✓ Discuss the number and variety external expert participants and other partners by profession
- ✓ Discussion on the working group topics (e.g., working groups were used to analyze data and determine key leverage points, potential interventions)
- ✓ Details about the various workshop processes used (e.g., groups were asked to select the 3 key indicators or topics related to X from the larger group of 28)

MAJOR FINDINGS OR RESULTS –

This section provides the opportunity to present and describe the most important results or major findings from the research study. All major findings should be presented, even if they do not agree with your original hypotheses or assumptions. ***This section might include:***

- ✓ Findings from statistical analyses
- ✓ Tables, charts, and graphics to illustrate your data and information
- ✓ Representative quotations from people interviewed or field notes
- ✓ Synopses of key workshop discussions and conclusions
- ✓ Stories or ethnographies about the situation, setting, or scene
- ✓ Discussion of why the information and data is significant (or not)
- ✓ Interpretation of the findings in relation to research questions, hypotheses, or assumptions

REFERENCES CITED OR

CONSULTED – All references that you cite and use intensively to develop and conduct your study should be cited. In some cases, you might want to also list those references that you “consult” but do not specifically cite, particularly if you think this will help orient the reader.

Every discipline has a particular citation style that they follow. The style that you choose for your references cited section is not important. What is important is that you use the same style consistently and that you cite all references. A couple things to include that are pretty consistent across disciplines are:

- ✓ Year
- ✓ Author(s)
- ✓ Title
- ✓ Book titles are underlined
- ✓ Articles titles are put in “quotation marks”
- ✓ Journal names are underlined
- ✓ Publisher
- ✓ Place of publication

The following are two simple book citation styles that you might consider using:

Sachs, Jeffrey D. (2005), *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Future*, New York: The Penguin Press.

Sachs, Jeffrey D.,
2005 *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Future*, New York: The Penguin Press.

CONCLUSIONS

This short document was designed to use as a guide for writing up your Research Methods and Findings Report. It provides a brief description of some of the key aspects of methods documentation and some ideas for content.

Remember that if you develop a good research plan and document each step as you go, writing up your Research Methods and Findings Report will be a simple task.

THE BASICS OF YOUR RESEARCH REPORT

Introduction – explains the “why” of your study.

Methods – explains the “how” you arrived at the results of your study.

Findings/Results – explains “what” you found out.

Conclusions and Recommendation – explains “what” your results mean and “what” can be done to address the situation.

References Cited – gives credit to the other researchers and authors whose work was used to develop and validate your study.

REFERENCES CONSULTED

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1990 *Writing up Qualitative Research: Qualitative Research Methods Volume 20*, London: Sage Publications.