Research Guidelines

OSAA Research Management Guide

Table of contents

Welcome

Welcome to the OSAA Research Guidelines. This book provides a comprehensive framework for conducting applied research within the context of a knowledge broker organization, such as OSAA. It aims to establish a common methodological approach for gathering, processing, translating, and building awareness of existing trustable evidence, ultimately contributing to evidence-informed policy development in Africa.

The guidelines cover the entire knowledge output development process, including preliminary research, analysis planning, data inventory, and output development. By following a structured approach, OSAA staff can ensure consistency, transparency, and credibility in their work, maximizing impact and aligning with the organization's strategic goals.

Structure of the Book

This book is divided into several chapters, each focusing on a key aspect of the research process:

1. **Preliminary Research**: Establishing the foundation for your study by identifying knowledge gaps, conducting literature reviews, and performing stakeholder analysis. This phase ensures that your research is relevant and well-informed. Within this section two very important sub-contents are included:
    1. **Research Design**: Crafting a robust framework for your study, including developing a conceptual framework, selecting appropriate research methods, and formulating clear research questions and hypotheses. This stage lays out the plan for how your research will be conducted.
    2. **Data Inventory**: Systematically identifying and documenting relevant data sources, both internal and external. This includes assessing the quality and accessibility of data to ensure that you have the necessary information to support your research.
2. **In-depth Research**: Engaging in detailed and thorough analysis to develop comprehensive policy analysis outputs. This involves analyzing data, interpreting findings, and generating insights that are crucial for policy development.
3. **Output Development**: Producing various knowledge products such as executive summaries, policy papers, and briefs. This stage focuses on effectively communicating your research findings and recommendations to your target audience.

How to Use This Book

Each chapter provides detailed guidelines and templates to assist you in every step of your research journey. It is recommended to follow the chapters sequentially for a comprehensive understanding of the research process. However, you may also refer to specific chapters as needed.

Table of Contents

8. Annexes

    - Research Compliance Survey
    - Analysis Plan Template
    - Data Inventory Template
    - Editorial Guidelines
    - Annotated Bibliography

Executive Summary

Main Sections

The OSAA Research Guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for conducting applied research within the context of a knowledge broker organization, such as OSAA. The purpose of these guidelines is to establish a common methodological approach for gathering, processing, translating, and building awareness of existing trustable evidence, ultimately contributing to evidence-informed policy development in Africa.

The guidelines cover the entire knowledge output development process, including preliminary research, analysis planning, data inventory, and output development. By following a structured approach, OSAA staff can ensure consistency, transparency, and credibility in their work, maximizing the impact and aligning with the organization's strategic goals.

Preliminary Research is vital for identifying research gaps, guiding analysis planning, and enhancing research relevance. Key components of preliminary research include literature review, stakeholder analysis, preliminary data analysis, and defining the study scope and objectives.

The guidelines also present a detailed process for developing an **Analysis Plan**. Emphasis is placed on the importance of a conceptual framework, which provides a theoretical foundation for the research study. It is crucial to identify and articulate assumptions underlying the research to ensure transparency and clarity. **Research Design** and **Research Methods** are distinguished sections, with research design referring to the overall structure and plan of the study, while research methods are specific techniques used to collect and analyze data. The selection of appropriate research methods is essential for addressing research questions and hypotheses.

Data Inventory is a crucial step in identifying and gathering information about relevant data sources, both internal and external. Staff members should prioritize public, freely available country-level data and clearly identify any non-public data needs as risk factors.

The **Output Development** section focuses on the core components of a policy analysis output, including foundation, argumentation, and conclusion. The executive summary holds paramount importance, as it succinctly summarizes the main points and recommendations for busy readers.

The guidelines also provide a comprehensive list of document formats used within the context of OSAA's knowledge production work, including studies, policy papers, policy briefs, and snapshots. This section includes suggested output components for each document format. Staff members should consider the intended audience (stakeholders) and main function (i.e., advisory, advocacy, or monitoring) of the document when selecting the appropriate format.

Appendix

the appendixes offer valuable resources to support the research process. These include templates for analysis plans, data inventories, compliance surveys, editorial guidelines, and an annotated bibliography. These tools are designed to enhance research quality and ensure adherence to best practices.

Outro

In summary, the OSAA Research Guidelines offer a structured approach to conducting applied policy research, ensuring consistency, transparency, and credibility in the work of OSAA staff. By adhering to these guidelines, staff can contribute to evidence-informed policy development and maximize the impact of their research.

Part I

Main Section

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of These Guidelines

The objective of this document is to outline the key components and steps involved in conducting applied research within the context of a knowledge broker organization, such as the Office of the Special Advisor for Africa (OSAA). It aims to establish a common methodological framework for gathering, processing, translating, and building awareness of existing trustable evidence for policy decision-making. The scope of this document encompasses the entire research development process within OSAA, which corresponds to Phase 2 (Development) of OSAA's project management workflow. It covers guidance on formulating research questions, selecting appropriate research design and methods, and developing analysis plans.

Following a structured approach to research development ensures that:

1. Research objectives align with the overall goals of OSAA's Cluster Strategy and the Strategic Guidance of the Under-Secretary-General Special Adviser on Africa (USG).
2. Process consistency and transparency are improved, enabling effective collaboration, consultation, and communication of findings and recommendations within and outside of OSAA.
3. OSAA staff provide a standardized level of consistency, transparency, and credibility in the delivery of the knowledge outputs of the organization.

1.2 Evidence-based Knowledge Brokerage

As OSAA seeks to solidify its role as a knowledge broker organization, the specifics of what this means can be visualized as follows:

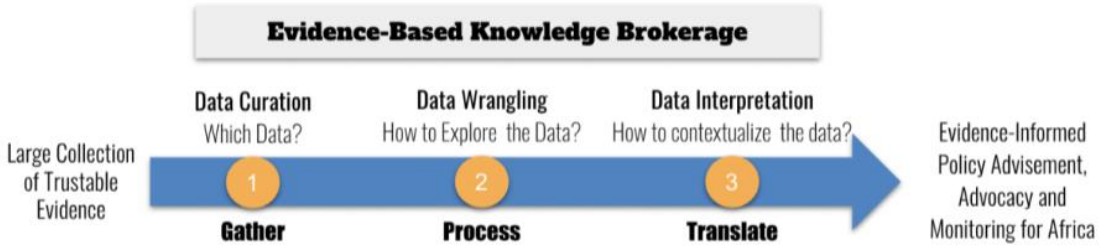


Figure 1.1: Evidence-Based Knowledge Brokerage

1. **Curation**: OSAA prioritizes synthesizing a vast array of evidence and data that exists in the public domain (within or outside the United Nations). This process involves not only selecting the most pertinent (trustable) sources but also doing so according to a purposefully crafted policy narrative, which aligns with its stakeholders' interests (i.e., OSAA's Strategic Clusters' Framework and the USG's Strategic Guidance). This careful information curation process ensures that OSAA presents the most significant and relevant information to its stakeholders, in accordance with OSAA's own strategic criteria and narratives.
2. **Processing**: OSAA endeavors to process this data into a robust, actionable framework for decision-making, monitoring, and evaluation. This consists of:
    - Combining the data into a cohesive set of related and trustable data, ready for analysis.
    - Uncovering relationships, patterns, and trends from the curated data, and developing well-founded hypotheses on the underlying mechanics of cause and effect.
3. **Translation**: OSAA strives to extract meaningful insights, construct a clear narrative, and contextualize the relationships, patterns, and trends uncovered from the curated information.

OSAA understands the value of cohesive and empirical data, recognizing that it is not only the gathering of data that is important, but how it is combined and used that truly makes the difference. This enables the office to provide comprehensive advisory and advocacy services,

with the ultimate goal of aiding the formulation and implementation of effective, evidence-based policies in Africa. By doing so, OSAA turns evidence into actionable knowledge, helping its stakeholders navigate the complexities of the African context and make informed decisions that drive impactful change.

1.3 Elements of an Effective Research

An effective knowledge product comprises two essential components: the research question and the corresponding answer. The research question poses an inquiry to be addressed, such as verifying a theory, a hypothesis, or an assumption, evaluating a policy, assessing a body of evidence on a specific matter, or exploring the relationship between policy issues.

Beyond the research question, a research output typically includes additional elements. Firstly, it is crucial to provide a rationale for the chosen question before delving into its exploration (i.e., the substantiation). Secondly, the output should explain the methodology employed to address the research question. Following this, the output proceeds to present the findings, which ultimately lead to the answer to the research question.

An OSAA adaptation to these elements is presented in the Core Components of a Policy Analysis Output section. It is intended to be more suitable to a knowledge broker role, tasked with producing knowledge outputs for policy monitoring, advocacy, advisory, and coordination, as is the case of OSAA.

2 Preliminary Research

2.1 Preliminary Research as a Foundation for Analysis Planning

Preliminary research lays the foundation for the subsequent phases of the research process, particularly analysis planning and in-depth research. It provides the opportunity to:

- **Identify Research Gaps**: Preliminary research helps identify existing gaps in knowledge or understanding of the research area. By exploring relevant literature and engaging with stakeholders, researchers can determine what aspects require further investigation and contribute to filling those gaps. Additionally, this process can uncover data gaps, which are the differences between the data we have and the data we need to answer a research question.
- **Guide Analysis Planning**: The insights gained from preliminary research inform the development of an effective analysis plan. Staff members can identify tailored research methods, data needs, and analytical approaches based on their understanding of the research area and its existing body of knowledge.
- **Improve Research Relevance**: Preliminary research ensures that the study is relevant and aligned with the objectives of OSAA, as well as the needs and perspectives of its stakeholders.

2.2 Key Components of Preliminary Research

The preliminary research phase helps policy analysts lay the groundwork for their study. It involves gathering relevant information, exploring existing knowledge, and identifying gaps in the current understanding of the topic. The key components of preliminary research include:

- **Literature Review**: Conduct a comprehensive review of existing literature, academic publications, reports, and other relevant sources to gain a thorough understanding of the topic. This step helps identify existing theories, concepts, data sources, bibliographic references, and methodologies related to the field of study and provides a foundation for further analysis.

- **Stakeholder Analysis**: Identify and engage with key stakeholders who have expertise or interest in the research area. This may include policymakers, practitioners, subject matter experts, and individuals or organizations directly impacted by the research topic. Understanding stakeholders' perspectives and needs can guide the research process and ensure its relevance and applicability.
- **Preliminary Data Analysis**: Research available quantitative studies related to the research topic. This can include analysis reports on existing datasets, surveys, case studies, or other relevant information sources. Preliminary data analysis helps identify previously reported evidence of relationships, patterns, trends, and potential areas for further investigation.
- **Study Scope and Objective Definition**: Outline what the research aims to achieve and the boundaries within which it will operate. This includes:
  - **Research Objectives**: Establish clear and measurable research objectives that align with OSAA's strategic goals and the USG's strategic guidance. These objectives should outline the desired outcomes of the research and guide the entire research process.
  - **Research Scope**: Determine the specific focus of the study by clearly defining the boundaries of the research area. This includes identifying the target population (and any gender, class, or age segment criteria), geographical location, time frame, and other relevant parameters that define the scope of the research.
  - **Research Questions**: Develop specific research questions that address the gaps in understanding identified during the preliminary research phase. These questions should be focused, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives. They act as a guide for the research process and help researchers stay focused on the purpose of their study's narrative.

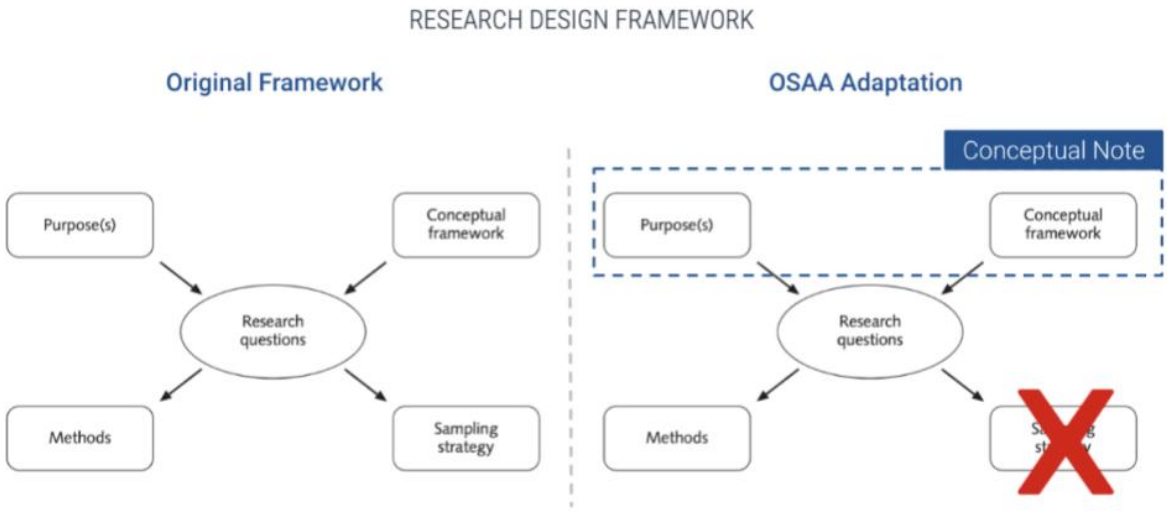
2.3 Designing an Analysis Plan

2.3.1 Research Design

Research Design vs. Research Methods

> "Research design is a plan to answer your research question. A research method is a strategy used to implement that plan. Research design and methods are different but closely related, as good research design ensures that the data you obtain will help you answer your research question more effectively." — *Research Methods Guide: Research Design & Method, Virginia Tech*

Research design, also known as research methodology, concerns the various aspects which should be considered when carrying out a research project. It involves turning research questions into research projects and primarily deals with goals, purposes, intentions, and plans while considering practical constraints such as location, time, and resources.



There are a number of research design models. The one presented in the image above (on the left) is a simple framework by Robson & McCartan (2016) [1]. The model (on the right) has been adapted to OSAA's procedures in two ways:

1. To exclude sampling concerns, as OSAA staff are not expected to conduct statistical surveys.
2. To combine the purpose and conceptual framework into one Conceptual Note element, as is OSAA's current practice (see section above for details on the Conceptual Note).

[1] Robson, C., & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real world research: A resource for users of social research methods in applied settings*

BOX 1: Research Design vs Research Methods

Research Design VS Research Methods: what are the main differences?

Research Design refers to the overall structure and plan of the study, including:

- Deciding on the research objectives and approach (quantitative, qualitative, case study, etc.).
- Determining whether primary or secondary research will be conducted.
- If primary research is conducted, specifying the data collection methods and procedures.
- Defining the research/data analysis methods.

Research Methods are the specific techniques used to collect and analyze data, such as:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Statistical analyses
- Literature reviews
- Discourse analysis
- Exploratory data analysis

2.3.2 Conceptual Note

The Conceptual Note establishes: 1. **Purpose**: What the study aims to achieve (describe, explain, or understand a phenomenon) and relates back to the study's scope and objectives. 2. **Conceptual Framework**: The concepts, theoretical foundation, mechanics, and assumptions that contextualize and guide the research, helping to interpret the findings.

The conceptual framework provides a structure for organizing ideas, ensuring coherence in the research design and analysis by: - Guiding the research: Developing a clear understanding of the relationships and concepts that underpin the research. - Informing hypotheses: Outlining key variables, their interrelationships, and the expected direction of effects.

2.3.2.1 Identifying and Articulating Assumptions

Assumptions are the presuppositions that underlie the conceptual framework. They are beliefs the research relies on but does not verify. Identifying and articulating these assumptions ensures transparency and clarity, helping stakeholders understand the analyst's perspective and ensuring that the study's objectives and outcomes are aligned.

2.3.3 Research Method Selection

The selection process involves determining the most appropriate approach to address the research questions and hypotheses, considering factors such as:

- The nature of the research topic (exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory).
- Available resources (time, budget, and access to data).
- Time constraints.
- The desired level of detail and accuracy in findings.

Common research methods include:

- **Quantitative Methods**: These involve collecting numerical data and analyzing it using statistical techniques. Quantitative methods are useful for measuring and analyzing relationships, patterns, and trends.
- **Qualitative Methods**: These focus on gathering non-numerical data, such as interviews, focus groups, or textual analysis. Qualitative methods provide in-depth insights, capturing perspectives, experiences, and contextual nuances.
- **Mixed Methods**: These combine quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Mixed methods can provide a deeper exploration of complex phenomena. This can be achieved by a back and forth analysis of underlying patterns, trends and relationships, through quantitative analysis, combined with in-depth exploration of cause-and-effect mechanisms behind these trends, through study case analysis.

The Research Methods Guide: Research Design & Method, by Virginia Tech, presents a non-exhaustive list of methods' options, of which these are the most likely options in the context of OSAA's work:

- **Non-household surveys**. These may be conducted to collect information on African countries not included on public/paid country data available online, or otherwise. For instance, maintaining an updated database with historical information on all ODA concessional loans in Africa. Some crucial information may not be systematically collected by any other sources at this point.
- **Interviews and/or focus groups** may be conducted with experts, stakeholders, field staff (UN or National Governments), etc.
- **Secondary Data Analysis**, one common method currently applied at OSAA, as the main focus of the organization has been to leverage the vast amount of information already produced within the data ecosystems of the United Nations, African Union, academia and many more.

- **Documentation review**, likely the most commonly applied method at OSAA. Along with interviews and surveys, it forms the most common combination of methods for case studies.
- **Mixed Methods**, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, as, for instance, the combined approach of secondary data analysis and case studies. These combine quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Mixed methods can provide a deeper exploration of complex phenomena. This can be achieved by a back and forth analysis of underlying patterns, trends and relationships, through quantitative analysis, combined with in-depth exploration of cause-and-effect mechanisms behind these trends, through study case analysis.

The possible combinations can be extensive, and, some, uncommon. In any case of doubt, the staff member should seek out the assistance of OSAA's Strategic Management Unit (SMU) Data team.

2.3.4 Research Question and Hypotheses

2.3.4.1 Formulating a Research Question

Research questions should be specific, concise, and scoped on the **key aspects** of the research topic. Staff members should ask themselves: what needs to be known in order to achieve the purpose(s) of the study? Is that feasible to ask given the time and resources available?

Formulating clear research questions is essential for guiding the research process and addressing the **objectives** of the study. They provide a focused direction and serve as a roadmap for the investigation and help staff stay on track throughout the study. When formulating research questions, also consider the following:

- **Ensure clarity**: Research questions should be concise, specific, and clearly articulated. They should address the key issues or gaps in knowledge, identified during preliminary research, and the discussion presented in the conceptual note.
- **Establish relevance**: Research questions should align with the strategic objectives and guiding principles of OSAA. They should aim to deliver on the USG's strategic guidance and provide actionable insights to inform decision-making.

2.3.4.2 The Relationship Between Research Question and Hypotheses

Research questions and hypotheses are closely related components of the research process. Research questions outline the overall inquiries to be addressed, while hypotheses are specific

statements that propose relationships or predictions about **variables** in the study, which the study aims to test or, simply, investigate.

> **BOX 2: Variables vs Indicators**
>
> For the purposes of the data work at OSAA, a variable is defined the same as a column (aka an attribute) in a spreadsheet. For instance, in a table with country data (i.e. each row is a different country) and a column with each country's GDP value, aptly named **"GDP"**, **"GDP"** is a variable. It is called a variable because, even though it measures the same phenomena (the country GDP), it varies from country to country (or from row to row). An indicator may be the equivalent to a variable (**GDP** can itself be an indicator) or require computation from more than one variable. In the same example, to get the **"GDP per Capita"** indicator, one must compute it using both the **"GDP"** and **"Population"** variables.

Hypotheses provide a more precise and testable framework for data collection and analysis, supporting the research questions by offering **specific propositions** (i.e. predictions) **to be evaluated**.

In summary:

- **Research Questions** These guide the overall inquiry and investigation. They are broad and open-ended, seeking to explore and understand a particular aspect of the research topic.
- **Hypotheses** These are specific statements or assumptions **derived from the research questions**. Hypotheses provide a **testable proposition about the relationship between measures** (i.e. variables). They help researchers frame their analysis and provide a structured approach to answering the research questions.

3 Data Inventory

3.1 Identify Data Sources

3.1.1 Internal Sources

Internal data sources (e.g., databases, organizational records) refer to data generated or collected within the UN System. These sources can include databases, administrative records, surveys conducted by the organization, or any other data repositories specific to the organization's operations or research activities. Staff members should identify and list all the internal data sources that may contain pertinent information for their research.

3.1.2 External Sources

External data sources (e.g., public datasets, research studies) encompass data that is obtained from external entities or organizations. These sources can include publicly available datasets, research studies, reports published by government agencies, academic institutions, think tanks, or other relevant sources of publicly accessible data. Staff members should identify and list the external data sources that may contribute to the policy analysis.

3.2 Gather Information on Each Data Source

For each identified data source, gather information about the data itself. This information will help in assessing the compatibility and usability of the data for the policy analysis, which will help estimate the amount of data work required for extracting, transforming, and making the data available for analysis.

Furthermore, the data inventory procedure provides a comprehensive overview of the data available for the analysis (and the data missing, or the data gap). This helps ensure that the necessary information is available for subsequent stages of analysis, i.e., the in-depth research.

3.2.1 Steps in Developing a Data Inventory Annex

Detailed instructions are provided in the Data Inventory Template in the Annex. In general, however, the information on data (i.e., the metadata) collected in the data inventory can be classified into two categories:

1. **Source Metadata**: Identifies the specific **formats** in which the data is available, such as spreadsheets, databases, text files, CSV, PDF, or APIs.
2. **Data Metadata**: Identifies the relevant **measures**, **type** (numerical, text, or categorical measures/variables), **indicators**, and **visuals** for the list of research questions and assumptions identified during the analysis planning phase.

3.3 Data Access and Data Risk Protocols

Prioritize **public**, **freely available country-level** data for the data inventory. Identify any crucial non-public data that may be required for the analysis. Clearly indicate these as risk factors to the data analysis, as their limited availability or access restrictions may impact the development of the analysis.

By prioritizing public, freely available data at the country-level and clearly identifying any non-public data needs as risk factors, the data inventory process ensures a focus on accessible and transparent data sources while acknowledging potential limitations. This approach promotes transparency, reproducibility, and the use of reliable data, while also highlighting any potential challenges or gaps that may arise from limited access to certain datasets.

When opting to work with non-public data, staff members should also consider the legal and ethical implications of accessing this restricted data, as well as ensure compliance with relevant regulations and obtain appropriate permissions, if necessary.

4 In-depth Research

4.1 Output Development

4.1.1 Core Components of a Policy Analysis Output

To help set a fluid flow for the document, it is suggested that staff members start by presenting the **research substantiation**. This is an opportunity to expand on the conceptual note and anchor the output on the USG Strategic Guidance.

Secondly, authors should present and discuss the findings of their analysis **while supporting their claims with evidence**. This should be achieved either by presenting specific data, references, or quotes, or by arriving at logical conclusions based on previously introduced evidence. Expert opinions can, and should, be presented, but they should be coupled fairly with the evidence provided in the document. It should not be expected of the audience to simply *"take your word for it."*

Finally, the concluding remarks should serve to clearly and concisely emphasize the main messages or insights that the analysis aims to elucidate.

4.1.2 Practical Contributions

Here are a few key attributes to keep in mind at each stage. These are not compulsory and should be regarded as simple advice, to be taken on if perceived as helpful:

4.1.2.1 Substantiation

This segment expands on the conceptual note. It starts with an exposition on the importance of the topic, followed by a literature review that identifies existing theories, conflicts, or gaps leading to the research question. Finally, the research question (and corresponding hypothesis, if applicable) and an outline of the document are presented. The introduction section follows a progressively narrowing approach, starting broadly and gradually focusing on the research question.

Tip

Focus on defining the problem or issue. Emphasize its priority or gravity level and objectively present the evidence landscape to persuade the audience that this is a priority, and why. Prioritize objectivity, reserving your voice for the discussion phase.

4.1.2.2 Discussion

The discussion section serves two primary objectives: 1. To demonstrate that the research provides a convincing answer to the posed question. 2. To illustrate the value of that answer.

The discussion section may begin with a brief summary of the research methods and results (if applicable). This is followed by an interpretation of the findings, explaining their significance and whether they support the hypothesis or if there could be other explanations.

Often, a section is dedicated to discussing the limitations of the study. This includes acknowledging the weaker aspects of the research and assessing whether these limitations invalidate the conclusions or if they can still be drawn despite the limitations. This should be optional and decided on a case-by-case basis, considering the specifics of the work.

Tips

- Analyze, do not merely present the data. Your conclusions should make sense of the (quantitative or qualitative) data presented.
- Develop a theory of change that connects your arguments to your conclusions.

4.1.2.3 Conclusion

The final segment of the discussion section is the summary and conclusion. This component aims to encapsulate the learnings from the research and delineate the subsequent steps or recommendations. The significance of this section lies in its position as the final part of the document that readers will engage with. Readers often jump directly to this section to glean a summary of the research's insights. If they find the summary compelling, they may invest time in reading the entire article. Therefore, it is advisable to begin with the research question, swiftly move to the results, bypass the method, and dedicate more space to reiterate the key insights, implications, and the value of the research. Mentioning limitations is not recommended in this section.

Tips

- Briefly remind the audience of the overall picture: the goal of the work and the gravity of the matter. Remind the audience why the recommendations matter.
- Address the feasibility of your recommendations and any caveats or reservations to keep in mind, if appropriate.
- Provide allies for further analysis and/or a call to action (whichever makes sense in the reasoning developed).

4.1.2.4 Executive Summary

The executive summary leverages the expertise and credibility of the analyst and conveys key recommendations to the reader. It succinctly summarizes the main points for busy readers, while also highlighting recommendations in a memorable manner that drives future discussions. It may help to consider the perspective of the decision maker: What key points will best ensure the audience's remembrance and understanding of the analysis arguments and conclusions?

As a general rule, the executive summary should not exceed five percent of the complete document. However, its length should be adjusted as necessary to effectively summarize the key points. The executive summary should be crafted with precision and conciseness, ensuring that it captures the essence of your research and recommendations. A recommended structure for this section would include summarized versions of:

1. The problem statement
2. The methodological approach (if applicable)
3. The key findings/recommendations
4. The main conclusions and/or implications

A recommended framework approach to draft your summary is to use the journalist's questions: "*Who / What / Why / How.*" [1]

4.2 Output Standard Formats

This section outlines the standard formats used for knowledge production within OSAA. These formats are designed to cater to different purposes, audiences, and content requirements, ensuring that the outputs are tailored to the specific needs of the stakeholders and align with the strategic objectives of the organization.

[1] *"Asking Journalistic Questions"* is a useful resource that can help reformulate these questions within the context of research.

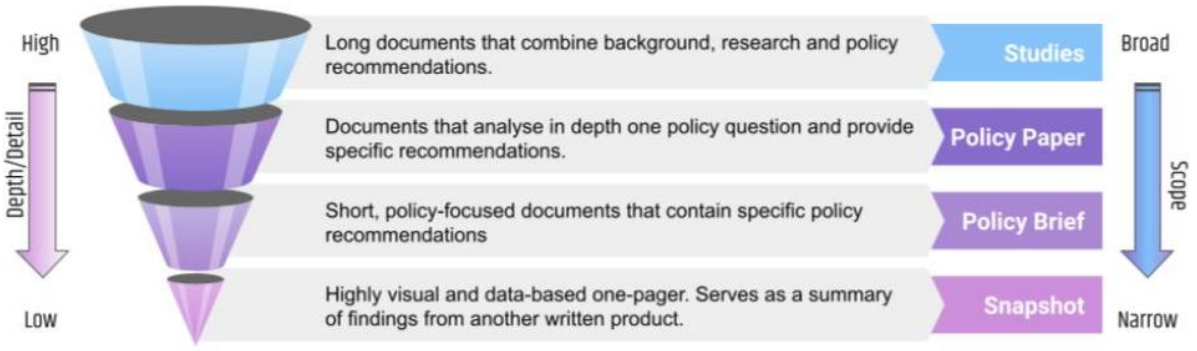


Figure 4.1: Knowledge Products

4.2.1 Document Formats

Below is a comprehensive list of document formats used within the context of OSAA's knowledge production work. Each format serves a unique purpose and is characterized by specific length and content criteria. These clear and concise definitions aim to facilitate effective communication and understanding among the staff and all OSAA stakeholders.

- **Studies**: Long documents (approximately 10,000 words) that combine background, research, and policy recommendations.
- **Policy Papers**: Longer documents (approximately 5,000 to 6,000 words) that analyze in depth a specific policy question.
- **Policy Briefs**: Short, policy-focused documents (approximately 3,000 or less) that contain specific policy recommendations, normally derived from a previous Policy Paper's concluding remarks.
- **Snapshot**: Short (1 page or less) and highly visual and data-based document to convey information about a specific topic. It usually summarizes findings of another written product, i.e., any of the above.

4.2.2 Publications & Technical Writings

Besides these guidelines, the staff member should consider if the document is intended as a general or technical publication. Technical publications are intended for a technical/expert audience, meaning the audience is expected to have some technical background on the content of the exposé. General Publications do not assume specialized background knowledge and have greater concern with designing storytelling arcs to help persuade its broader audience.

4.2.3 Output Functional Alignment

A second classifier to keep in mind, other than general vs. technical publication, is to consider which OSAA function the document best aligns to. The staff members should consider if the document is intended as:

i) A **diagnostic tool** that serves policy monitoring,

ii) An **advisory contribution** to assist/inform a specific need of a specific audience, or

iii) An **advocacy output** aiming at broadcasting and persuading a larger audience on the merits of a specific narrative being presented.

4.2.4 Output Outline Framework

The **Output Outline Framework** is a structured guide designed to assist OSAA staff in organizing and presenting their research findings across various document formats, including Studies, Policy Papers, Policy Briefs, and Snapshots. The framework is visually represented in the accompanying table, which categorizes key sections of a document—such as the Executive Summary, Introduction, Methodology, Literature Review, and more—into three essential components: **Substantiation**, **Discussion**, and **Conclusion**. Each section is further defined with specific descriptions and aligned with the type of document to which it applies, with optional elements marked where there is flexibility. This structured approach ensures that every output is comprehensive, logically organized, and tailored to effectively communicate the research's key messages, findings, and recommendations to its intended audience.

Substantiation Discussion Conclusion

† Includes optional items

‡ Optional

#	Section	Description	Studies	Policy Papers	Policy Briefs	Snapshots
1	Executive Summary	Provide a concise overview of the key points and recommendations of the policy paper.	☑	☑	☑	☐
2	Introduction and Background	Introduce the broad goals and motivations of the paper. Provide historical context and rationale for the issue. Describe the overall context for the research and highlight the theory of change, if applicable.	☑	☑	☑	☐
3	Methodology†	Briefly explain the research methodology used. Detailed data, and specific rationale should be included in the appendices, if necessary.	☑	☑	☐	☐
4	Literature Review	Describe the existing academic work or thoughts related to the issue. Situate your research within the context of unanswered questions.	☑	☐	☐	☐
5	Policy Options or Policy Context‡	Explore the pros and cons of possible policy options, depending on the research orientation. Describe the current status quo of the policy, including ongoing intervention efforts.	☑	☑	☐	☐
6	Analysis of Findings or Evidence	Present your original research in a logical and coherent manner. Use descriptive headings and subheadings to guide the reader through the analysis.	☑	☑	☑	☑
7	Case Studies and Best Practices†	If applicable, present individual case studies with "Lessons Learned" for each. Summarize case study details in annexes, if needed, and include "Lessons Learned" (and possibly "Best Practices") in the main text.	☑	☑	☐	☐
8	Policy Options and Recommendations	Use specific subheadings to break down policy options and recommendations. Link recommendations directly to relevant findings. Clearly explain the relevance of the evidence to the analysis.	☑	☑	☑	☑
9	Implementation and Next Steps‡	Discuss the implementation mechanics and specific steps for adopting the recommendations. Address significant risks, costs, or obstacles associated with implementation. Acknowledge implementation as part of the "Next Steps" if it is not fully developed.	☑	☑	☐	☐
10	Conclusion	Recap the goal and motive of the analysis or policy recommendations. Highlight the importance of the analysis and the potential consequences of not acting on the recommendations.	☑	☑	☐	☐
11	Appendices‡	Include any details that support your analysis.	☑	☐	☐	☐
12	Bibliography	Provide a comprehensive list of references and sources used. All research should include a full bibliography and properly cited footnotes or endnotes.	☑	☑	☑	☐

Figure 4.2: Product Outline Framework

Part II

Appendix

5 Research Compliance Survey

This survey has been designed to serve as a valuable checklist tool, enabling staff members to assess their research's compliance with the essential steps, requirements, and standards outlined in OSAA's Research Management Guide. By undertaking this survey, staff members can exercise self-compliance control and identify further areas of improvement, if any.

This survey is also intended to ensure research integrity, and its input will support improved quality control and accountability during knowledge products development at OSAA. Ultimately, it is expected this will contribute to the enhancement of research practices and the pursuit of excellence in scientific endeavors.

5.1 Preliminary Research

Conduct thorough preliminary research to identify research gaps, guide analysis planning, and enhance research relevance.

1. Have you developed an understanding of the main existing theories, concepts, data sources, bibliographic references, and methodologies related to the field of study?
2. Have you identified the gap in knowledge/understanding you plan to fill with this output?
3. Preliminary research requirements:
    - **Literature review:** Do you have a clear outline of the problem, its causes and effects?
    - **Stakeholder analysis:** Have you identified the key stakeholders who have expertise or interest in the research area?
    - **Preliminary data analysis:** Have you identified data patterns, trends, and potential areas for further investigation?
    - **Defining scope and objectives:** Have you defined the scope and objectives for your study that align with the gap identified?

5.2 Designing an Analysis Plan

Communicate the purpose of the study and develop a conceptual framework, identify and articulate assumptions, and distinguish between research design and research methods.

1. Have you used the Data Analysis Plan and Data Inventory templates to build a roadmap for data gathering, analysis, and interpretation?
2. Does your research purpose (goal) match the knowledge gap you plan to address?
3. Conceptual Framework:
    - Have you outlined the key measures, their interrelationships, and the expected direction of effects?
    - Have you presented your assumptions, i.e., the intentions and desired contributions of your work? Do these align with the study scope and objectives from preliminary research?
4. Research Method Selection:
    - Have you identified the nature of your research? I.e., is it exploratory, explanatory, or descriptive?
    - Have you listed the methods you are considering using, whether they are quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods?
5. Research Question and Hypothesis:
    - Have you clearly identified specific research questions that address the gap in knowledge identified during preliminary research?
    - Do your questions align with OSAA's strategic goals?
    - Have you listed your hypotheses as testable propositions on the relationship between the variables you will be looking at?

5.3 Data Inventory

Identify internal and external data sources, gather information on each data source, and prioritize public, freely available country-level data.

1. Have you identified your sources as Internal vs. External?
2. Have you added source and data metadata to each of your sources?
3. If you require non-public data sources, have you confirmed there are no suitable public alternatives?
4. If you require non-public data sources, have you clearly identified those as risks?

5.4 Output Development

Structure policy analysis output with a foundation, argumentation, and conclusion, and craft an effective executive summary.

1. Have you followed the output components matrix framework when designing your output outline and, later, your first draft?
2. Are you satisfied you have aptly presented the foundation, argumentation, and conclusion of your narrative?
3. Does your executive summary help the reader get a sense of who/what/why and how?

6 Analysis Plan Template

The section items presented below should be approached not as a mere formality where every item must be checked off, but rather as a thinking and memory aid. It is important to reflect on each item, as some aspects may be applicable to a specific study while others may not. In any case, taking time to reflect on each item will help ensure comprehensive planning.

6.1 Strategic Context

- The relevance of the research topic to OSAA's strategic goals should be briefly introduced, highlighting the knowledge gap being addressed.
- The importance of the analysis plan in ensuring a structured and effective research process should be explained.

6.2 Introduction

- The key components of preliminary research, including literature review, stakeholder analysis, preliminary data analysis, and the definition of study scope and objectives, should be summarized.
- A conceptual framework should be presented, outlining key measures, their interrelationships, and the expected direction of effects. The alignment of these elements with the intentions and desired contributions of the work should be highlighted.

6.3 Research Design

- The conceptual framework should be delineated.
- The research questions and hypotheses should be presented.
- The nature of the research, chosen knowledge output format, and selected methods for answering the defined questions and hypotheses should be stated.
- If data analysis is planned, the linkage of preliminary data analysis to the criteria used in selecting the sources listed on the data inventory should be explained.
- The choices made in the research design should be justified based on the overall objective of the research.

6.4 Conclusion

- The key elements of the analysis plan and their importance in ensuring a structured, transparent, and effective research process should be summarized.
- The potential impact of following this analysis plan template in contributing to evidence-informed policy development should be emphasized.

6.5 Annex

- Data Inventory
- Research Management Compliance Survey

7 Data Inventory Template

A data inventory table typically includes several attributes meant to capture relevant information about the data. Here are the attributes (columns) to be included in your data inventory table:

1. **Data Element**: This attribute refers to the specific data element or field being recorded in the inventory. If the source is a dataset or a database, it corresponds to the column (aka, variable, measure, attribute) name.
2. **Description**: This attribute provides a brief description of the data element, outlining its purpose or meaning.
3. **Data Type**: This attribute specifies the type of data contained in the element. The options are: text, numeric, date, or categorical.
4. **Source Type**: This attribute identifies the source or origin of the data, whether it is internal (generated within the UN), obtained from a third party, or collected through an OSAA survey.
5. **Source Access**: Whether the source is public and free.
6. **Format**: This attribute describes the format in which the data is stored, such as CSV, spreadsheet, database, PDF, or text file.
7. **Location**: This attribute specifies the URL location where the data is accessible.
8. **Data Frequency**: This attribute indicates how frequently the data is updated, whether it is weekly, monthly, annually, or as needed.
9. **Visual (optional)**: What is the intended graph to visualize this data element?
10. **Visual Goal (optional)**: What type of data relationship will this data element be used for?
11. **Visual Title (optional)**: What would be the title of the graph? (this would be equivalent to the smart indicator name: the Specific Measurable Time-bound Indicator)

Table Columns

Variable/ Series	Description	Data Type	Source Type	Source Access	Format	Location	Data Frequency	Visual (optional)	Visual Goal (optional)	Visual Title (optional)

8 Editorial Guidelines

The Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) primarily adheres to the United Nations Editorial Manual for its written outputs. This manual serves as an authoritative guide for drafting, editing, and reproducing United Nations documents, publications, and other written material. The full manual can be accessed at https://www.un.org/dgacm/en/content/editorial-manual.

However, in instances where the UN Editorial Manual may lack specific guidelines, such as in reference styling, the American Political Science Association (APSA) Style Manual is applied to complement the specific style guidelines for OSAA written outputs. The APSA Style Manual provides a set of rules and conventions for writing, citing, and formatting papers in the field of political science. It offers a uniform framework for consistency across publications and can improve readability across OSAA's written knowledge products. The full manual can be accessed at https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/.

Below are summarized sections with a minimal set of instructions to abide by at OSAA. For illustration purposes, each section includes an example of style use. More detailed information is available at the links provided.

8.1 References

OSAA adopts the UN's approach to references, which should be clear, concise, and consistent, usually placed in footnotes and always in the bibliography section. However, in terms of formatting, APSA's style is to be applied. Bibliographic references should be listed alphabetically by the author's last name, including the author's name, the publication year, the title of the work, and the publisher's information.

For example, a book reference would appear as:

> *Smith, John. 2005. Politics and Policy. New York: Political Science Press.*

8.2 Footnotes and Text Notes

Text Notes (In-line Citations) should include the author's last name and the year of publication, for instance, (Smith 2005). Footnotes are used to provide additional information or to cite sources. They should be numbered consecutively throughout the document. For example, a footnote citing a UN document might look like this:

> *"1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-fifth Session, Supplement No. 20 (A/75/20), para. 53."*

8.3 Cross References

Cross-references are used to direct the reader to another part of the same document or to another document. They should be clear and precise. For example, a cross-reference to another paragraph in the same document might look like this:

> *"See paragraph 15 above."*

8.4 Abbreviations

The use of abbreviations should be limited to avoid confusion. Common abbreviations such as 'US' for the United States or 'UN' for the United Nations are acceptable. However, all abbreviations should be clearly defined at first use.

For example:

> *North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)*

8.5 Indirect Speech

The UN's guidelines on indirect speech are followed, where the tense of the verb should be backshifted. For example:

> *"The representative of France stated that his delegation would support the resolution"*

Instead of:

> *"The representative of France states that his delegation will support the resolution."*

8.6 Managing References

The management of references is a critical aspect of technical writing. It is advisable to use reference management software to organize and format references according to the APSA style. Such software can automate the process of creating, formatting, and updating references, thereby saving time and ensuring accuracy. These tools can be extremely helpful in managing large numbers of references and ensuring adherence to the OSAA's editorial guidelines.

Examples of popular reference management software include Jabref, EndNote, Zotero, and Mendeley. The recommended tool at OSAA is JabRef [1]

[1] Quickstart guide available at https://docs.jabref.org/getting-started

9 Annotated Bibliography

9.1 Why an Annotated Bibliography?

An annotated bibliography serves as a comprehensive guide to the literature on a specific topic, providing a snapshot of the available research and offering a roadmap for further exploration. It is a valuable tool for professional (and academic) research, aiding in the organization, synthesis, and evaluation of sources. An annotated bibliography can be very useful in the following ways:

1. An annotated bibliography promotes organization. It provides a structured way to keep track of the numerous sources one might encounter during the research process. By summarizing each source and noting its relevance, reliability, and quality, researchers can easily recall the content of each source and its applicability to their work.
2. It aids in the synthesis of information. By summarizing and evaluating each source, researchers are forced to engage deeply with the material, fostering a better understanding of the topic. This process can help identify patterns, gaps, or inconsistencies in the literature, guiding future research directions.
3. An annotated bibliography serves as a tool for critical evaluation. It requires the researcher to assess the credibility and reliability of each source, honing their critical thinking skills. This process can help distinguish between high-quality, trustworthy sources and those that may be less reliable or relevant.

9.2 Producing an Annotated Bibliography

To create an annotated bibliography, one must first identify and record citations for relevant sources. Each citation is followed by a brief descriptive and evaluative paragraph, the annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to inform the reader of the relevance, accuracy, and quality of the sources cited.

The process of writing an annotated bibliography can be broken down into three steps:

1. **Citation**: Write the citation in the correct format. This will depend on the citation style guide (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.) you are following.

2. **Summary**: Write a brief summary of the source. This should include the main arguments, topics covered, and the purpose of the work.
3. **Evaluation**: Evaluate the source. Consider the author's credentials, the quality of the evidence, the objectivity of the author, and how relevant the source is to your research.

9.2.1 Resources

For more guidance on writing an annotated bibliography, the following resources may be helpful:

1. Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): Provides detailed guidelines on the process of writing an annotated bibliography.
2. Cornell University Library: Offers a step-by-step guide on how to prepare an annotated bibliography.

9.2.2 The Annotated Outline as an internship deliverable

The development of an annotated outline (or a data inventory, for instance) would constitute excellent goals to design structured internships around. It is highly recommended that staff members leverage these and other items in the research guide as activities for students and young professionals in internship programs at OSAA.