Training of HIV/AIDS Committees at Local Government Authorities

REPORT WRITING SKILLS
Cover Picture:
An Officer writing a Report
REPORT WRITING SKILLS

Overall Objective

To equip the CMACs and WACs with knowledge and skills in report writing.

Specific Objectives

At the end of the module, the participants should be able to:

- Identify types of reports and why reports are important.
- Identify components of a good report.
- Evaluate a good report.

Training Methodology

- Lecture and plenary discussion
- Group discussions

Training Materials

- Overhead Projector
- Transparencies
- Flip charts (or chalkboard)
- Pieces of paper
- Masking tape or cello-tape
- Marker pens (or chalk)

Assessment

- Questions and result of the group work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic No</th>
<th>Topics of Module 9</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Title, Table of Contents, Acknowledgements and Executive Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Goals, Objectives and Methods, Conclusion and Recommendations</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>120</td>
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</table>
Module 9
Report Writing Skills

Topic 1: Title, Table of Contents, Acknowledgements and Executive Summary

Time frame: 30 minutes

Topic Objectives
At the end of the topic, participants should be able to:
- Explain the meaning and selection criteria of a title
- Explain the format of table of content and its components
- Explain the importance of acknowledgment and its contents
- Explain what has to appear in the executive summary

Content
- Title and its formulation criteria
- Format of table of content and its components
- Importance of acknowledgment and its contents
- Importance of executive summary and its contents

Specific Activities

1. Introduce the topic 5 min. FN 1
2. Give a lecture on different elements of a report, namely
   - The table of contents
   - The acknowledgements
   - The executive summary 15 min. FN 2-5
3. Allow questions from participants and summarize using the model answer. 10 min.
4. Announce that practical skills in report writing will be developed during the field training period
FN 1 Introduction

For various reasons we find ourselves required to write one or another form of report. The reasons can be a requirement of law, a requirement of our job description, a requirement by donors or financiers of our projects etc. The main aim of report writing is to give feedback to those who assigned us a job or gave us resources to implement a particular project. The people to whom they are submitted use the reports in various ways. In most cases they are used for information, documentation or control to ensure that things are done the way they should be done.

Reports can be about an ongoing activity in which we report on the current status and the remaining work, or on an accomplished activity in which we report what has actually taken place. In this module we will cover several basic issues of report writing so that we may be able to write better, more appealing and acceptable reports.

FN 2 Title and how it should be

A title is the heading of the report. It gives information about what is inside the report. A title should be short, clear and unambiguous. In most cases it is written in “CAPITAL LETTERS.” Sometimes only the “First Letter of Each Word” is written in capital letters, the rest in small letters. The title should be consistent with the contents of the report.

Example:
The title of this module is “REPORT WRITING SKILLS”. The reader expects from the beginning to come across something on report writing skills. It would be surprising and confusing if the reader would find that the main subject of this module is, let say “AIDS Competence”. The title of this module is written in capital letters. Alternatively, it could be written “Report Writing Skills”, as explained above.

FN 3 Table of contents

A table of contents is a list of the major items that are inside a report. It helps readers to quickly and easily find where a particular item is found in a report. Tables of contents make reports more reader-friendly. The major items in a report are normally presented in topics and sub-topics and the page(s) in which these appear are shown. Besides, the major topics and sub-topics such things like foreword, acknowledgement, appendices, list of tables, list of abbreviations and references/bibliography should also appear in the table of contents.
Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation progress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FN 4 Acknowledgements**

Acknowledgements in reports are words of appreciation the author(s) give to all those who made the accomplishment of the projects and activities possible. It is a way of appreciating and recognizing their very valuable inputs and participation in preparing the reports.

In the first place it is polite and humane to give thanks to all those who help us in one way or another. It should not be taken for granted that it was the duty and responsibility of those who help us to do so. If we do not acknowledge other people's help in our accomplishments, we are in a danger of being denied more help in future.

Basically we are supposed to acknowledge all those individuals and institutions that made possible the accomplishment of a particular project/activity for which we are writing a report. These are normally those who gave us resources like finance/money, time, information and expertise.

Such individuals may include data collectors in the field, respondents to our questionnaires, experts who gave their insights and improved earlier version(s) of the current report, secretaries who typed and proofread the report etc. Institutions will mainly include those who facilitated the accomplishment of the project. These are typically those who financed the project, those who gave special permissions and other assistances in the due course of implementing the project.

At the end we state that possible shortcomings in the report are the author’s own responsibility.

Normally acknowledgements do appear at the beginning of reports, just after the table of contents. Sometimes however, they may appear at the end of reports.
Example of an acknowledgement

Assume that you as a CMAC member have been conducting a survey to identify the impact of AIDS/HIV on the economic development of your council. You have been financed by TACAIDS. You interviewed a hundred people in your council. Saidi Juma, an expert from Mzumbe University helped you to analyse the collected data and your secretary Mary Hamisi typed and proofread earlier versions of the report. The following is a proposed way of writing an acknowledgement in this particular case.

An acknowledgement is to say “Thank You”.

Example:

**Acknowledgement**
The author of this report would like to extend his sincere acknowledgements to all those who made the accomplishment of this project possible. Sincere thanks are extended to all those who responded to the questionnaires. Generous financial support from TACAIDS is highly appreciated. We thank Mr. Saidi Juma of Mzumbe University for his assistance in data analysis. Lastly but not least, the tireless work of Mary Hamisi who typed and proofread the draft of the report is highly appreciated. The author is entirely responsible for possible shortcomings that may appear in this report.

**FN 5 Executive summary**
An executive summary is a precise and brief description of the whole report and the context/background to which the report is written. It is a condensed presentation of the major contents in a report or simply a summary of the contents. It helps the readers to get a general and concise picture of what is being reported. It should be kept in mind that some people are very busy and may not have time to read long reports word-by-word or page-by-page. These people can get highlights or insights of what is in the report by going through an executive summary.

*Often the executive summary is the only part of the report which is read.*

**The contents of an executive summary**
An executive summary gives the background, context and reasons for the project or an activity that is being reported. It also contains major findings or issues, methodologies used in accomplishing the activity that is being reported, problems encountered and suggestions or recommendations for the way forward.

**The place of an executive summary in a report**
An executive summary will normally appear at the beginning of the report, normally just after the acknowledgements.
Participatory report writing.
Topic 2

Goals, Objectives and Methods, Conclusion and Recommendations

Time frame: 90 minutes

Topic Objectives

At the end of the session participants should be able to:
• Explain what is included in an introduction to a report
• Explain how to formulate the goals, objectives and methods of a report
• Explain what should be included in the contents of a report
• Identify the characteristics of a good report
• Describe the format of the conclusion of a report and its contents
• Explain recommendations and their importance in a report
• Identify types of information to be included in the appendices and importance of appendices to a report

Content

• An introduction of a report
• Goals, objectives and methods in a report
• Contents of a report (format/layout)
• Characteristics of a good report
• Conclusion and its contents
• Recommendations and their importance in a report
• Appendices and their importance in report

Specific Activities

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduce the topic objectives</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Ask the participants to form 4 groups. Assign the groups the following questions:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explain goals, objectives and methods of a report?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the contents of a good report?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the contents of a body of a report? Layout/format.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the characteristics of a good report?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What are the contents of a conclusion and recommendations?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What are references and appendices and their importance?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Let each group work 30 minutes, present for 5 minutes and discuss for 5 minutes</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Summarize by presenting the model answers</td>
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**FN 1** Introduction

An introduction is like an eye opener for the reader about the topic being reported. It gives the first general but not detailed description of the topic. Therefore, when writing an introduction you should present the general but not detailed information. This will require you to have good knowledge about the topic. You have to introduce your readers not only to the report itself but also to the problems that initiated the work in the first place. Therefore, you have to give a background of some issues, for example how the problem arose; the purpose of the work and how it was tackled and whether it was successful or not.

**FN 2** Goals, objectives and methods in a report

In writing the goals, objectives and methods in a report we use the past tense. We are now reporting something that actually took place.
Example
If we were writing a report about how we have used the money that was donated for raising awareness on HIV/AIDS in Piviunu council we would state the goals, objectives and methods in the following way:

Example:
If we were writing a report about how we have used the money that was donated for raising awareness on HIV/AIDS in Piviunu council we would state the goals, objectives and methods in the following way:

Goal:
• The goal was to increase the awareness on HIV/AIDS in PIVIUNU council.

Objective:
• The objective was to increase the proportion of people in this council who are aware of HIV/AIDS.

Methods / strategies:
• The method used in giving information was in meetings, schools, hospitals, and places of worship and in the market place.

FN 3 Contents of a good report
A good report contains at least the following items, preferably in the chronological order as follows:
► Title
► Table of contents
► Acknowledgement(s)
► Executive summary
► Introduction
► The “body” or major issues
► Summary and conclusion
► Recommendations
► List of references (where applicable)

FN 4 The body of a report
The body of a report contains all major issues related to the project. These major issues are the approach, the methods used, the results achieved and the problems encountered.

Typical contents of a body of a report:
Below is a practical example of contents of a report. The contents are taken from a report by the Ministry of Health,
Title: Surveillance of HIV and Syphilis among Antenatal Clinic Enrollees 2001 - 2002

1. Methods:
   - Study population, Region and ANC site selection
   - Surveillance Protocol Training
   - Field supervision
   - Specimen sampling, Data collection and Transport
   - Syphilis testing and Treatment
   - HIV testing
   - Quality Assurance
   - Ethical Clearance
   - Data Entry and Analysis

2. Results:
   - HIV prevalence
   - Syphilis prevalence
   - HIV/Syphilis co-infection

3. Discussion:
   - planned, accomplished, and remaining activities
   - reasons for not finishing planned activities and when they may be finished
   - planned, used and remaining resources
   - reasons for over/under-using planned resources
   - problems faced and how they were solved

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**FN 5 Characteristics of a good report**

A good report has several characteristics. The main characteristics of a good report include the following:

- Comprehensiveness
- Well-elaborated and concise executive summary
- Covering all major issues concerned
- Well written with no grammatical or spelling errors
- Having a logical flow and presentation of ideas and issues
- Well-designed layout and general organization (readable and appealing)

**FN 6 Conclusion**

A conclusion should be written in complete and concise paragraphs. The most important paragraphs must be written first. You should only write what follows or what comes from your work. Do not introduce new ideas that have not been covered in the report at this stage.
The contents of a conclusion
Nearly always, a conclusion will be closely related in content to the introduction. It should only contain issues that have been discussed in the report and are anchored in the project results or in the study findings.

Where should a conclusion appear in a report?
Normally, a conclusion should appear at the end of a report before recommendations.

**FN 7  Recommendations**
The author of a report gives his or her suggestions and opinions that are based on the issues that have been reported. Recommendations are like polite ways of instructing, ordering, counselling and consulting the practitioners on what should be done to make things better in future.

Need for recommendations
Recommendations are needed so that our reports may be followed by specific actions. It is a way of digesting and synthesizing the issues presented in the report for policy and decision makers. The rationale for having recommendations is that not all readers or practitioners have adequate time and ability to read, interpret the issues spelled out in the report. In addition those who wrote the report know best what will be feasible in future.
Whom to recommend to
Normally, recommendations are directed to stakeholders, clients, policy, and decision makers at the appropriate levels. For a report to be effective (be followed by specific desirable actions) there is a need for directing the recommendations straight to the appropriate authority that we know will act accordingly.

How to write recommendations
Recommendations should be brief. Like conclusions, the most important recommendations should be presented first. Recommendations should be in the same order as the basic findings presented in the conclusion. Recommendations are presented in such a way that policy and decision makers and other stakeholders can understand clearly what the author of the report intend to suggest.

FN 8 Appendices
Appendices are attachments to a report. They are illustrations and supporting materials, documents and evidence for what has been presented in a report.

Each appendix should be given a title or a number. This number should be repeated on each page of the appendix. Each separate appendix should be numbered starting a fresh from one with each appendix. Titles of all appendices must appear in the table of contents.

Need for appendices
Appendices are needed to justify, illustrate, elaborate, confirm and provide evidence for some critical issues presented in the main body of a report. They are needed to provide extra information, thus clear any possible doubts that may be raised by readers of our reports. E.g. operation plan, speeches, minutes of meetings, list of participants, Terms of References, Memorandum of Understanding, letters of communication etc. Appendices do appear at the end of the report.
Notes