Documenting Good Practice in Girls' Education and Gender Equality:

Guidance on how to produce a case study

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Introduction

This guidance note gives advice on how to document good practice interventions in the field of girls' education and gender equality, so that you can design, research and write up your own case study. It draws on learning from two projects. The first is the Fund for Documentation of Good Practice in Girls' Education and Gender Equality (subsequently called the UNGEI Good Practice Fund), which was launched in 2014 by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)[1]. Through the Good Practice Fund 17 organisations received grants from UNGEI to document their programmes or projects on girls' education and/or gender equality in education, exploring the factors that helped or hindered the implementation and outcomes. The second project is the Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Development Progress,[2] an ongoing project that was set up in 2009 and has produced 49 case studies of progress at the national level across eight dimensions of women and girls' wellbeing, including education, health, women's empowerment and environment.

While each of these projects has taken a different approach to documenting case studies, they have both generated important learning about how to document an evidence-based good practice case study, and what its key components should be in order to inform future policies and programming by decision-makers and development practitioners.

The World Bank has also produced a useful resource recently as part of its Global Delivery Initiative – *Guidelines for Delivery Case Studies: Learning from operations, for operations*[3] – part of its Science of Delivery programme, which investigates underexplored complex delivery problems and processes. Case studies developed under this programme are intended to capture implementation knowledge from operations and give practitioners access to insights about how others have confronted issues of delivery.

In the case of the UNGEI Good Practice Fund, based on a call for proposals, UNGEI selected the 17 organisations concerned on the basis of the outcomes their activities achieved for girls' education and gender equality, or the promise they had shown. The case studies include interventions that are not extensively documented elsewhere or are being implemented in a very different context and have the potential to provide new learning. The organisations are thus very diverse; some had previous experience of analysing and writing case studies, while others did not. As a result, UNGEI partnered with the ODI to provide technical support to the successful applicants to the Good Practice Fund to help them write their case studies and eventually produce more homogenous case study reports. The nature of this support included creating templates for the case study format, providing detailed feedback on several early drafts, providing one-to-one support for case study writers where necessary, conducting webinars and establishing a peer-review process whereby organisations commented on each other's case studies, thereby promoting mutual learning.

This process of close engagement and support enabled each of the 17 organisations to produce their own full case study. Each organisation also produced a shorter briefing, giving a quick overview of the intervention and the key findings, as well as lessons learned and recommendations. (These briefings are available on the websites of UNGEI and ODI websites. The full case studies are available from UNGEI upon request.)

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[1] UNGEI (2014) 'UNGEI Fund for Documentation of Good Practice: announcing the successful recipients for 2014-2015', UNGEI website, 21 August (http://www.ungei.org/news/247_5826.html).

[2] www.DevelopmentProgress.org

[3] For further information, please see: http://www.worldbank.org/reference/GDI/index.html

Why is it helpful to document good practice?

According to the World Bank's Global Delivery Initiative (2015),[4] *'A case study is not just another "story" but an important method of applied and empirical research. Case studies can provide a clearer understanding of the sequence of events and balance the perspectives of key actors, helping us untangle cause and effect.'*

Documenting good practices creates a record of what actions took place, when, and how they led to a positive outcome. The process of analysing good practice should also include reflection on the challenges and risks that affected implementation of activities, and how these challenges were overcome. In this way, documenting a good practice can contribute to the process of learning within a group, organisation, geographical area or sector.

There are several reasons why you or your organisation might want to document good practice:

- to provide an opportunity to systematically record and share the good practice concerned within and between countries and regions, especially those which are 'lesser known' among development practitioners
- to demonstrate the diverse ways that organisations/actors are addressing a particular problem
- to enhance our understanding of what works, and encourage adaptation of good practices to local contexts in other countries and by other organisations by influencing policy-makers and practitioners.

Case studies are expected to balance information and details related to the good practice in question with sound analysis to create a knowledge base of 'what works' and also 'why certain strategies work in particular contexts'. This information is supported by the presentation of robust evidence. The World Bank's Science of Delivery programme stresses the importance of 'learning *from* operations, *for* operations'. It is vital then that case studies do not simply document what happened and why, but also how and what other organisations can learn from the implementation process.

How do you know when an intervention is a good practice case study?

This section sets out the criteria you should consider when assessing whether an intervention on girls' education and gender equality in education could be a good practice case study. These criteria should be included and analysed in the case study itself. While it may not be possible for each case study to meet all these criteria, they provide useful guidance for your analysis and writing-up.

1. **Relevance:** The good practice in question should demonstrate a response that is sensitive to the cultural, social and economic context and the challenges of delivering education in specific contexts, as well as identifying the needs and priorities of the target population.
2. **Gender analysis:** The design and implementation of the good practice should systematically reflect on the linkages between gender relations and the specific education issue being addressed. The analysis should focus on the social norms, practices or beliefs and rules, policies or procedures that influence the opportunities, choices and achievements of girls and boys and women and men.
3. **Monitoring and evaluation:** The good practice being described should include details of the M&E system, which can demonstrate impact of the intervention on the intended group,

[4] Global Delivery Initiative (2015): Guidelines for Delivery Case Studies, Learning from operations, for operations. GDI. September 2015

system or organisation, in ways that can be measured, or at least offer preliminary evidence on its effectiveness. It could also demonstrate the potential for generating data based on its M&E systems.

4. **Efficiency and cost-effectiveness:** The good practice in question should indicate efficient and effective use of resources in its implementation, demonstrating the link between activities and results (actual or expected) in women and girls' lives, and in relation to systems being strengthened.
5. **Participation and partnership orientation:** The good practice should demonstrate a participatory and collaborative approach, involving a broad range of actors (civil society, private sector, government, etc.) as well as girls and boys and men and women equally in leadership positions.
6. **Sustainability:** The good practice should demonstrate elements of sustainability, including leveraging funds for continuation, securing its adoption into policies or programming, or building the capacity of actors (whether government, academic institutions, civil society, schools or communities) to integrate the initiative into existing service delivery systems to ensure continued institutional and financial support.
7. **Replication:** Given similar conditions and circumstances, the good practice should have the potential to be replicated in different contexts and countries.
8. **Lessons learned:** The good practice should facilitate learning, generating lessons that are relevant for dissemination and transfer to other contexts. It should identify and reflect on the conditions that contributed towards success and provide additional knowledge to inform broader thinking about girls' education and gender equality, including the potential constraints it faces moving forward.

How to research and write a good practice case study

In order to document a good practice through a strong, evidence-based report, it is important that you have a research plan. This plan should draw on any M&E information and data, where this has been a strong component of the intervention. You should also conduct a desk review, which can be complemented by analysing existing knowledge on the particular delivery challenge(s) in question.

To complement the desk review and to generate additional and relevant data, you should conduct some primary research. Depending on the nature of the intervention, and the time and resources available for the case study, you need to decide which methodology to use: qualitative, quantitative, or a mixed-methods approach. Generally, if there is useful quantitative M&E data already available, the research plan for the case study can focus on qualitative data, using tools such as interviews and focus group discussions to obtain the necessary information. On occasion, and depending on the scope of the research endeavour, you can also collect data to assess relevant quantitative indicators for the intervention.

Ideally, you should convene an experienced research team to conduct and analyse the research and report the findings. Where this is not feasible, it would be useful for those conducting the case study research to receive some technical support or input from a relevant expert. Your organisation might also be able to seek support from external partners with relevant experience in providing feedback and peer review. The level of external support involved in helping to produce your case study will partly depend on the resources your organisation has available.

Documenting the case study

Remember, your case study should report on evidence-based outcomes, drawing on the available quantitative and qualitative data, presenting a strong analysis of the processes involved so that you help people learn about the opportunities that led to those outcomes, any challenges facing the intervention, and how these were overcome. A strong documentation will combine text, data and visuals to communicate a clear message about a project or intervention to a target audience with the aim of sharing good practice and encouraging others to adopt or adapt it.

Writing style

Bear in mind your target audience and how you want the document to be used. To reach as wide an audience as possible, keep acronyms and academic jargon to a minimum. The use of visuals – such as graphs, maps, flow-charts and tables – can be a really effective way of conveying complex information clearly and efficiently. Including quotes from people who have benefited from the intervention can quickly give insights into how the programme has worked and will really engage the reader.

A useful template

This section provides a format that you can use to produce a case study of 18–20 pages (approximately 8,000–10,000 words). This is only a guide though; you should write a significantly longer case study if that is deemed necessary (and if resources allow) to cover all of the issues, or if this would be a better way to communicate the research. You might also want to produce a summary (or briefing) of up to 3,000 words to reach a wider audience – for instance, policymakers often have limited time to read longer documents but they are also a crucial audience in ensuring that any recommendations are acted on; or it might be easier to disseminate a briefing rather than a longer document to specific audiences (such as high-level officials in international organisations). Your briefing can, of course, direct the reader to the full version of the case study.

Cover page

Title, organisation and authors

Contents

Table of contents; list of figures, tables and boxes; acknowledgements; list of abbreviations and acronyms

Abstract (100-200 words)

This section should provide an overview of the case study's key messages and lessons, and clearly state why the case study is relevant to broader debates.

1. Introduction (700 words)

This section should explain why the particular project or intervention was chosen as a case study, the questions that will be addressed, and the implications of the case study for broader debates. It should briefly set out what each of the subsequent sections covers.

2. Methodology (300 words)

Your case study should include a brief section on which methodology you chose and why, with details of how the research was carried out. This should include any limitations of the study, such as data availability or budgets.

3. Context (1,000 words)

The context should give information regarding the setting of the project – for example, whether it is being implemented in a small rural area with a majority ethnic population or in a large urban slum with specific challenges facing adolescent girls. It should situate the intervention within the broader literature and current debates in the education sector. It is important that this literature is well referenced, ideally using the Harvard system. This means citing the surname of the author(s) and year of publication as a short reference at the appropriate point in the main text, and giving full bibliographic details in a reference list at the end of the document.[5] You should also try to note if other organisations are implementing projects or interventions in the same geographical area that may affect what you or your organisation is doing and the results you are able to achieve.

4. Intervention (2,000 words)

This is where you should describe in detail the project or intervention at the heart of the case study. It needs to give readers who are unfamiliar with the project sufficient information about what activities were involved. It should also explain and justify the rationale behind the intervention. Answering these questions should help you gather the information you need:

- What was the main issue or problem the intervention was trying to address?
- What were the intended outcomes?
- What were the key reasons for designing and implementing this intervention?
- What were its main objectives and strategies?
- What actions or activities helped the project or intervention achieve its objectives?
- Who were the key stakeholders in the project and what roles did they play?
- What was the timeline of the project, and were there some key moments within that?

5. Results (2,000 words)

This section should detail the results achieved by the project or intervention and its impact. Try to include qualitative and quantitative information (although if there are lots of data tables they are probably best presented in an annex). In this section you should try to present and analyse the results – it is not enough simply to describe the results (changes resulting from the programme).

Your analysis should make best use of the evidence to help others understand how and why the changes came about. An effective analysis will draw on both quantitative and qualitative data, exploring both data sources jointly with quantitative data showing the changes in outcomes and the qualitative data being used to show that the project was itself responsible for this change. It is vital that the case study provides evidence that specific actions (or a combination of them) led to the positive outcome. The types of data available will depend on the monitoring of the programme, the primary data collected for the case study and the type of programme being implemented.

Again, answering these questions will help you gather the information you need:

- To what extent did the project or intervention achieve its objectives, and how did it bring about change?
- What were its key outcomes (referencing qualitative and/or quantitative data)?
- What factors have made the project/intervention sustainable? Are the changes it has achieved likely to be sustained in the medium term? How?
- Are there any quotes, anecdotes or short stories that convey just how the intervention led to change (from participants, interviewees, organisations, policymakers or other stakeholders)?

[5] See more details on how to use the Harvard citation method on: http://guides.is.uwa.edu.au/ld.php?content_id=13183347

6. Challenges (1,500 words)

This section should highlight the challenges facing the project/intervention team, as well as challenges in the broader social, political, cultural and economic context, discussing what might be done to overcome them. Try to answer these questions:

- What were the key challenges?
- What did not work, and why?
- How did these challenges affect the way the project or intervention was implemented?
- How could these challenges be overcome in future?

7. Lessons for good practice (1,500 words)

This section should summarise the overall findings of your intervention and the case study research. It should highlight what other organisations can learn from the approach taken, and whether a similar approach could be adopted in different settings. These lessons could include:

- key facts around the improvements the programme made, for example, adapting the way project implementation staff engaged with the community to ensure more effective uptake of the project.
- drivers and enablers of change
- the importance of stakeholder involvement.

Annex

This optional section should include any relevant statistical tables or other useful information such as survey questions, which the reader might be interested to see.

Review process

Once you have produced a first draft of your case study, you should begin the review process. Ideally, try to bring in reviewers who are experts in the sector and/or region, as well as individuals from the target audience. The former is to strengthen the quality and rigour of the documentation, while the latter is to make sure the content is appropriate for the target audience. Once comments from experts have been addressed, and if there are enough resources, you could have the draft copyedited or at least proofread to ensure the writing is clear and conveys the messages well. If there were few comments to the first draft, then the second draft could be the final one. However, if reviewers suggested making many changes to the first draft, it would be useful to have the second draft reviewed again before it is finalised.

How to use your case study

Having produced the case study you now need to make sure it reaches your intended audience. There are various ways you can do this, but it will depend on the type of organisation involved and the intended audience. Some options include:

- a public launch event at a certain venue, with invited speakers
- using an already established network of a larger organisation active in the particular sector or region
- an online launch, which can be boosted by a variety of media including infographics, short films and social media.