



EAST & SOUTH ASIA

Literature Review Guidance

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A literature review is an analysis of the research that has been carried out on a topic and can be used to identify good practices, lessons learned and areas for further research.

Literature reviews play a key role in grounding project design in existing knowledge and good practice, identifying learning questions relevant for project implementation and, ultimately, increasing program quality. While literature reviews are generally conducted as part of project design, either to inform the assessment or the strategy, they may be conducted at any point during the project cycle when key

implementation decisions must be made or simply to advance broader sectoral discussions.

This guidance is intended to structure the literature review process and help teams increase the usefulness of literature review findings. The guidance document outlines the following key steps required to conduct and document a strong literature review:

The literature review process



faith. action. results.

1. Determine a purpose

The purpose(s) of the literature review relates to the ultimate use of its findings and should reflect the project or team's specific information needs. Examples of purpose statements for recent literature reviews include:

- To locate the geographic areas which are worst-affected by a particular problem
- To identify the most vulnerable groups in a given geographic area to inform the project's targeting strategy
- To determine the immediate and root causes of a problem
- To identify good practices to improve community ownership of a project intervention
- To document innovative practices

The purpose statement guides the scope of the review and the synthesis of information collected. Sub-topics and themes may also be identified at this stage and defined as

specific information needs associated with a given purpose statement. It might be helpful to use the Integral Human Development (IHD) framework or another existing conceptual framework to help analyze what is already known, identify the gaps and define the purpose statement for the literature review.

Consider a T.O.R.

Many teams have found it useful to develop a terms of reference (TOR) for the literature review process. The TOR should document the purpose(s) and the **process** for the review, including **roles and responsibilities** of team members, the **outline** of specific information needs, and the **plan** for disseminating the findings. Refer to Annex A (Page 6) for an example of a TOR for a literature review.

Starting with good intentions

How a literature review helped significantly reshape an initial idea in India

CRS India started with an idea for operations research to address malnutrition in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Before proceeding with design, the team conducted a literature review in order to: 1) analyze existing data and documentation on the causes of young child malnutrition in Uttar Pradesh; and 2) review achievements and learning from actual nutrition interventions/strategies in India and the Asia region.

The findings resulted in a significant shift in approach from testing pre-mixes to a focus on complementary feeding and hygiene. The review findings became the touchstone in all of the design discussions and ultimately provided an evidence-based way to finalize the project design and proposal. Here, the literature review process helped shape what was simply a good idea into a relevant initiative.

2. Consider a collaborative approach

While the time required to plan and conduct a literature review will vary based on its scope and focus, it can often be too much for one staff member alone. Taking a collaborative approach or creating a team to conduct a literature review has several benefits beyond simply sharing the workload: all participants will learn from the process and from each other, and diverse perspectives are more likely to be reflected in the synthesis of information.

The collaborative approach can take different forms. It can involve regional technical advisors

(RTAs), program staff or partners. The various participants might have various levels of engagement, for example, in developing the outline, reading selected material or reviewing draft reports. The lead must have strong analytical, organizational and writing skills.

It can be helpful to document the roles and responsibilities of each team member in a TOR, and possibly also to designate a literature review manager to take responsibility for communication between team members and adherence to the timeline.

3. Identify information sources

Based on the purpose statement(s), draw up a list of potential sources of information for the review. Common sources of information include government strategy documents, national-level survey reports, academic journals¹, peer organization reports, locally published books, and personal communication with stakeholders. Online search engines are a useful starting point, and regional or CRS headquarter staff may also have ideas of useful information sources. See Annex B (Page 8) for a list of common databases and search engines.

Online search engines include specialist sites (such as [PubMed](#) for health) or general academic sites such as [Google Scholar](#), which searches the entire web for full-text journal articles, technical reports, preprints, theses, books, and other documents. [J-PAL's](#) website hosts an array of randomized evaluation reports and policy lesson papers, and documents good practices that have been successfully scaled up. Donors have set up portals providing access to development research, such as the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) [development clearing house](#) for peer-reviewed articles and suggestions from experts, and the UK's Department for International Development's (DFID) [Research for Development](#) online portal linking to research funded by DFID, including details of current and past research in over 30,000 project and document records.

In addition to searching through more official channels, it is also worthwhile seeking out grey

literature² in the form of evaluation reports or working papers from peer organizations. This grey literature is most likely to document emerging trends or good practices specific to a region or country. Much of it is not available online and can instead be solicited during working-group meetings or more informal contact with staff at peer organizations.

DON'T FORGET to check for CRS resources on the [CRS program quality](#) site. Publications on this site are organized by core programming area and cross-cutting areas to allow for sectoral searches.

Some tips for online searches:

- Identify the key words in, or related to, your purpose statement.
- Include key words that peer organizations may use with the intended same meaning in your search.
- Truncate, i.e. find the base of a word in order to find any words that begin with that base: *Nurs** = *nurse, nurses, nursing, nursery*
- Use wildcards which are symbols that replace one or more characters in a word: *Wom?n* = *woman or women*

Additional information sources can be identified by examining the footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies of relevant articles identified through the processes above.

¹ While some academic journals provide free access to content, others charge a substantial fee per article. Contact your head of programming and or regional advisor to secure the funding needed to access any key articles.

² [Wikipedia](#) defines grey literature as informally published written material (such as reports) that may be difficult to trace via conventional channels such as published journals and monographs because it is not published commercially or is not widely accessible. It may nonetheless be an important source of information for researchers, because it tends to be original and recent.

4. Conduct the search

List potential information sources as you find them, then select which to include in the review. Consider that both quantitative and qualitative data can play important roles in the review, as can maps. It may be helpful to develop tables or lists of maps required in advance, so that you know what data you need to collect to populate the tables, or which maps to select.



5. Select and organize documents

This selection might best be made by two people, one making selections based on the title and the other, based on the abstract. It may be helpful to define *exclusion* criteria to keep your list manageable and focused. Criteria could include language, date of publication or type of publication. Most selections end up with between 1% and 10% of the original list of information sources.

SOFTWARE SUCH AS [Mendeley](#) offers an all-in-one package for storing and organizing documents, as well as saving notes, and generating bibliographies. Training resources that document how to use the various functions of the software for literature reviews are available on the Mendeley website.

6. Extract pertinent information

Individuals have different preferences for how to read and organize information. It is important to agree on an approach if working as a team, and to be systematic and organized. Consider entering information into the literature review outline, or tables that organize information by theme and by source. [Google docs](#) is a useful platform on which to house the outline or tables as it will

automatically consolidate contributions from different note-takers.

For quantitative data, you might want to focus on key statistical results, and for qualitative data, focus on key findings, useful quotes, and recommendations. It is important that information is noted accurately and that ideas for analysis are noted separately.

Top tips

For conducting a literature review³

- Begin with the up-to-date, the well-known, and general introductions to your topic
- Read with a purpose: know how it could contribute to your program (it's easy to go off-track)
- Be disciplined about reading only what is relevant
- Prioritize your reading
- Devise a personal note-taking system
- Keep careful records of source ideas, papers, quotes, etc
- Use bibliographical software to facilitate appropriate citation of sources e.g. Endnote or Mendeley

DURING THE READING, additional sources may be identified for review. If working as a team, ensure that the process for inclusion of additional sources is accessible to all team members.

While reviewing information sources, enter basic information into an annotated bibliography listing the document's title and link or URL so that it can be easily accessed for future reference. An example is included in Annex C (Page 10).



3. Student Learning Support Service (2007) Literature review. Victoria University of Wellington: New Zealand. http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/slss/studyhub/handouts/Writing A Literature Review.pdf

7. Reflect on the findings

Once the reading is complete, plan a discussion of the initial findings with all team members or with the programming staff who will carry findings forward. Ask that all team members read through the outline and notes prior to the discussion. The purpose of the discussion will be to:

- identify emerging trends or conclusions
- agree upon key points especially in the case of conflicting information sources
- revisit the outline to determine if additional

sub-headings or means of presenting information will be useful (i.e. maps or charts or tables)

Ensure that extensive notes are taken on the discussion so as not to miss key points or reflections shared by team members. Revisit the timeline for drafting and finalizing the literature review findings document and confirm that team members will be available to comment on the draft document.

8. Summarize the literature

The summary will present the reader with a structured report of the findings. Notes need to be organized into a logical sequence. Tips for writing the summary:

- Organize the findings around ideas and themes and not by sources, studies or authors.
- Move from more general to more specific themes and ideas in the narrative.
- Include key points and emerging trends from the reflection with the team (Step 6) as part of the analysis section.
- Ensure that the reader will be able to distinguish between summarized findings and the writer's analysis of findings - for example, analysis and recommendations can be in a separate section at the end.

As with most reports, it is useful to have a fresh perspective on the report before it is finalized.

Ask reviewers to comment on the content of the document as well as on its format.

CONSIDER SHARING the draft with members of the regional team or the sectoral leads at headquarters for comment, in addition to circulating the draft among members of the literature team for their comments.

Include the annotated bibliography as an annex of the document so that teams may revisit the references included for other purposes.

9. Disseminate and apply findings

Once the literature review findings document is finalized, ensure that all programming staff engaged in the topic receive and read it. Consider printing copies and providing partners with hard copies. Upload the document onto the country page and East & South Asia Program Quality (PQ) page (under 'Sectoral references'). Share the document with the regional team and sectoral leads at headquarters and ask that

they share it with other country programs or audiences as appropriate. Discuss the literature review with program staff and develop a plan to implement findings. Refer to the findings and recommendations in program and partner meetings, allow time for dissemination of findings in workshop sessions (e.g. concept note design) and ask for feedback on how it has been applied in program design and implementation.

Annex A. Example of a terms of reference (TOR) for a literature review⁴

Background

Catholic Relief Services India (CRS India) plans to develop an operations research (OR) project to test innovative approaches to preventing malnutrition among children aged 6 to 24 months in the state of Uttar Pradesh (UP). The proposed project will promote innovation, learning and the identification of promising practices in child nutrition, thus aligning CRS India's Health Strategy that emphasizes innovative programming. Based on recommendations from CRS' Asia Regional Office, the country program is undertaking a secondary data and literature review prior to initial (primary) assessment and OR project design.

The Nutrition OR Project is expected to be a three-year initiative beginning in October 2010.

Purpose

The purpose of the literature review is two-fold: 1) to analyze existing data and documentation on the causes of young child malnutrition in India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh; and 2) to review achievements and learning from actual nutrition interventions/strategies in India and the Asia region.

Objective

CRS India has sufficient knowledge and understanding of young child malnutrition in Uttar Pradesh to proceed with initial assessment and/or design of a Nutrition OR Project.

Methodology

The literature review will be a joint effort of the Lucknow state office (SO) and the program quality (PQ) team. The Review will be undertaken in three phases:

1. **Compile** secondary data on key health and nutrition indicators (national and state-level), relevant national policy and identification of key documents for review. (Anjali, Marianna, Vikas)
 - CORE's *Nutrition Program Design Assistant: A Tool for Program Planners* workbook will be the template for compiling indicators and national policy information.
 - A site on CRS India's intranet will be used to consolidate documentation and facilitate information exchange.
2. **Review** documentation on the causes of young child malnutrition in India and outcome/impact of actual nutrition interventions.
 - *Complementary feeding*: Identify the reported contribution of poor infant and young child feeding (IYCF) to child malnutrition in UP; barriers to good complementary feeding practice; lessons learned and recommendations for complementary feeding interventions. (Vikas)
 - *Supplementary feeding and food security*: Assess the contribution of food insecurity (especially poor food access) to young child malnutrition in India, particularly in UP; challenges to supplementary feeding through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme; role/potential of supplementary foods and/or promotion of local foods in preventing malnutrition in UP. (Anjali)
 - *Causes of young child malnutrition (general) and recommendations*: Review information on the range of underlying and basic causes of young child malnutrition in India, including care of the sick child, access to quality health services and gender issues; Government of India (GoI), World Bank and other studies on the persistence of child malnutrition in spite of India's economic growth; policies and recommendations. (Marianna)
3. **Consolidate** findings and develop recommendations for initial assessment and project design. (Anjali, Marianna, Vikas)
 - Review information compiled in literature review summary tables and NPDA tables.
 - Develop brief summary document of review findings and recommendations.
4. Literature Review to inform CRS India's Nutrition Operations Research

Output

- Summary of review findings and recommendations for nutrition operations research design and methodology
- NPDA quantitative, food consumption and policy tables
- Literature review summary tables
- Index of documents collected and reviewed

Timeframe and action plan for literature review

- May – June 2010
- Target completion date: 14 July 2010

Activities	Responsible	Involved	Deadline	Comments
Conference call: discuss Review process	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas, Deepti, OP, Katherine	14 May	Completed
Search for information and complete NPDA tables	Anjali, Marianna, Vikas	-	28 May	(2 weeks for search) Completed
Consolidate information into NPDA tables	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas	31 May	Completed
Conference call: review NPDA tables and next steps	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas	1 June	Completed
Draft template and for literature review	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas	2 June	Completed 3 June
Consult with USAID/India on what nutrition-related assessments/research/interventions they have funded and their future direction(s)/interest in nutrition—especially in UP	Katherine	Vikas	by 30 June	Completed 16 June
Review documents as assigned and complete literature review template	Anjali, Marianna, Vikas	-	1 July	In progress
Consolidate literature review summary tables	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas	5 July	
Meeting: review findings and develop recommendations	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas, OP (Deepti, Katherine?)	12 July	To be confirmed
Draft and circulate literature review summary document	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas	14 July	
Feedback on literature review summary document	Anjali, Vikas, OP, (Deepti, Katherine)	Marianna	19 July	
Incorporate feedback and finalize document	Marianna	Anjali, Vikas	20 July	

Annex B. Common databases and search engines⁵

Sites for searching for the literature

Web Site	Good for ...	Not for...
www.pubmed.gov	Health-related, peer-reviewed articles using this major database; search using key words, focused medical subject headings, ethnicities, geographic terms.	
scholar.google.com	Quickly highlighting popular and seminal research. Lists number of citations – a good indicator of importance of paper.	Searching in specific subject areas
www.google.com	Comprehensive search across websites; access to grey literature from non-governmental organizations.	Online resources publicly available
books.google.com	Full-text books and book excerpts.	Consistent access to all book text
www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psycinfo/index.aspx	Citations and summaries of journal articles, book chapters, dissertations, and technical reports from professional and academic literature in psychology and related disciplines.	Literature unrelated to psychology
www.wikipedia.com	General description of theories, models, and terms, with references to other sources.	Referenceable material
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books	Free access to books and documents in life science and healthcare on its Bookshelf, which enables users to easily browse, retrieve, and read content, and spurs discovery of related information.	
reliefweb.int/	Assessments and reports from humanitarian and development agencies.	Scientific publications
www.doaj.org/	Free scientific publications.	Literature published outside of open access journals
www.who.int	Publications on a wide variety of health topics with international credibility.	
indexmedicus.afro.who.int/	Articles published in African journals. Supplements PubMed searches. Search portal in multiple languages.	Articles published outside of Africa
www.emro.who.int/information-resources/imemr/imemr.html	Articles published in the Eastern Mediterranean region (i.e., Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, occupied Palestinian territory, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen). Supplements PubMed searches.	Articles published outside of Europe and the Middle East
indmed.nic.in/	Articles published in India. Supplements PubMed searches. Search portal in multiple languages	Articles published outside of India
www.eldis.org/	The best in development, policy, practice and research. Eldis is an online information service providing free access to relevant, up-to-date and diverse research on international development issues.	
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/	The latest information on specific diseases.	Health statistics
www.globalhealthlibrary.net/php/index.php	Querying multiple journal and health report databases	
www.crsprogramquality.org	CRS reports, including some operations research findings	Non-CRS publications

5. Paul Perrin (2013) for CRS Operations Research Design Workshop

Data sources

These are general purpose websites that will hopefully lead you to specific websites that provide more resources. Here are some common engineering sources that are not commonly found through these:

Organization	Web Site	Good for ...
UNICEF Child Info	www.childinfo.org/	Accessing UNICEF's child-related statistical information, including data used in UNICEF's flagship publications, The State of the World's Children and Progress for Children .
Centers for Disease Control	www.cdc.gov/DataStatistics/	US-focused statistics related to specific diseases or health topics.
UN DevInfo	www.devinfo.org/	Generating custom datasets and visuals based on data from a wide variety of UN agencies and development partners.
Measure DHS (Demographics and Health Surveys)	www.measuredhs.com/ (particularly under the "Resources and Tools" section)	A wide variety of health indicators obtained through detailed population-based surveys.
World Bank Data	data.worldbank.org/indicator	A wide variety of development indicators by country, in areas such as economics, agriculture, demographics, health, education, and environment.
Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation	www.healthmetricsandevaluation.org/gbd	Global burden of disease statistics, relative importance of health conditions.
World Bank Health, Nutrition and Population Data and Statistics	datatopics.worldbank.org/hnp/	World Bank datasets by country, focusing on demographics and health indicators.
Kaiser Family Foundation Global Health Facts	kff.org/globaldata/	Pulling data from a variety of sources in an easy-to-use interface.
World Health Organization Global Health Observatory	www.who.int/gho/en/	Comprehensive health statistics by country.
United Nations Monthly Bulletin of Statistics Online	unstats.un.org/unsd/mbs/app/DataSearchTable.aspx	Up-to-date development data aggregated from a variety of UN agencies.
UNAIDS Data and Resources	www.unaids.org/en/Resources/	AIDS-related data and assessment reports.

Annex C. Example of an annotated bibliography⁶

Last updated: 28 July 2010		Anjali to review		Vikas to review		Marianna to review	
No.	Source	File name	Article title	Author(s)	Date	Subject	Pages
1	http://at.yorku.ca/c/a/i/m/08.htm	A_K_Nigam_Analysis_of_Data_on_Malnutrition[1]	Analysis of Data on Malnutrition - Revisited	A.K. Nigam	22-Nov-01	Approach to analyzing nutrition data: advantage of analysis by age in single months (e.g., 0, 1, 2 months, etc.) as opposed to by age groups (e.g., 0 - 5 months, etc.)	2
2	http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC292811/	Garg_CFI_Index_rural_india_Dec09	Index for Measuring the Quality of Complementary Feeding Practices in Rural India	Aashima Garg and Ravinder Chadha	Dec-09	Report on the use of a new Complementary Feeding Index to assess IYCF practices in UP	9
3	http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1301/00296640260130849/abstract	Infant_feeding_styles_Barriers_and_Opportunities_India	Infant Feeding Styles: Barriers and Opportunities for Good Nutrition in India	Patrice L. Engle, Ph.D	Not dated	Barriers to good IYCF practices in India	6
4	http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02758565#page-1	influence_of_infant_feeding_practices_article	Influence of Infant-feeding Practices on Nutritional Status of Under-five Children	Dinesh Kumar, N.K. Goel, Poonam C. Mittal and Purnima Misra	May-06	Survey of children under 5 years in urban Allahabad (UP) to assess nutritional status (underweight, stunting, wasting) and identify determinants	6

6. CRS India's literature review for the ReMIND project (2010)