

DOING A LITERATURE REVIEW

Reviewing is about finding out what is already known or has been done, before moving on to explore new areas and questions. Literature reviews help acknowledge those who have worked on these questions before, and prevent us from reinventing the wheel. They give you the broader picture before you proceed with an evaluation or research project. Here are some tips on shaping good literature reviews – including **finding resources**, **selecting and organising** them, and **writing your literature review**.



FINDING RESOURCES: THE HISTORIC AND THE LATEST

In a literature review, we want to know both **the history** of a topic and **the latest** that has been said about it. You can review what has been said on your topic in **three main areas**:

- **Practice** Does your organisation have programme experience on this topic already? Can you learn from other NGOs doing similar work?
- **Policy** Have governments, international bodies, agencies or other NGOs produced policy on this topic? Any related laws or legal framework?
- **Research** Are there books, journals, and reports about the topic?

Other sources are **experts** and the **media** (websites, newspapers, newsletters). These often publish the latest insights on a topic including parts that have not yet been studied!



SELECTING AND ORGANISING: WIDTH AND DEPTH

- **Reviews of several articles** Include resources that are *already a summary* of several articles and authors - reviews that summarise several studies or include a thorough mapping of authors and schools of thought that have talked about a topic. This helps to give you the overall picture.
- **Statistics and indicators** These can also help you set your topic in a wider picture. For example, if you are studying 'tax systems and public education', try to find statistics and indicators related to tax and education.
- **Single empirical studies** A complementary source to summary reviews and statistics are single studies with new data that give you info on a specific sub-topic or geographic area. Remember, reviews must rely on evidence not opinions.



WRITING: STAY FOCUSED!

- **Stick to your topic** If your topic is 'climate change impact on refugees', stick to writing about what others have said on the **LINK** between climate change **AND** refugees. Do not write too much about climate change only or refugees only. Just define them as your key terms and move on to explore the relationships of both together – this is what you are interested in!
- **Go from general to specific** As you write (or read?) a review, use paragraphs strategically to gradually narrow down your topic. Give special attention to studies on the topic in the geographic area you are interested in.
- **Reference** Acknowledge who said what if it is someone else's work.