

# Introduction to policy briefs

MATHEMATICAL MODELING FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASE PLANNING IN  
AFRICA

120 minutes (activity integrated)

# Learning objectives

At the end of this lecture, you would:

1. Describe the role of policy briefs for scientific communication
2. List the key components of a good policy brief
3. Evaluate the quality and effectiveness of a good policy brief.

# Outline

1. Communicating our science
2. Overview of policy briefs
3. Review of quality of policy briefs

# Who needs to know what, when?

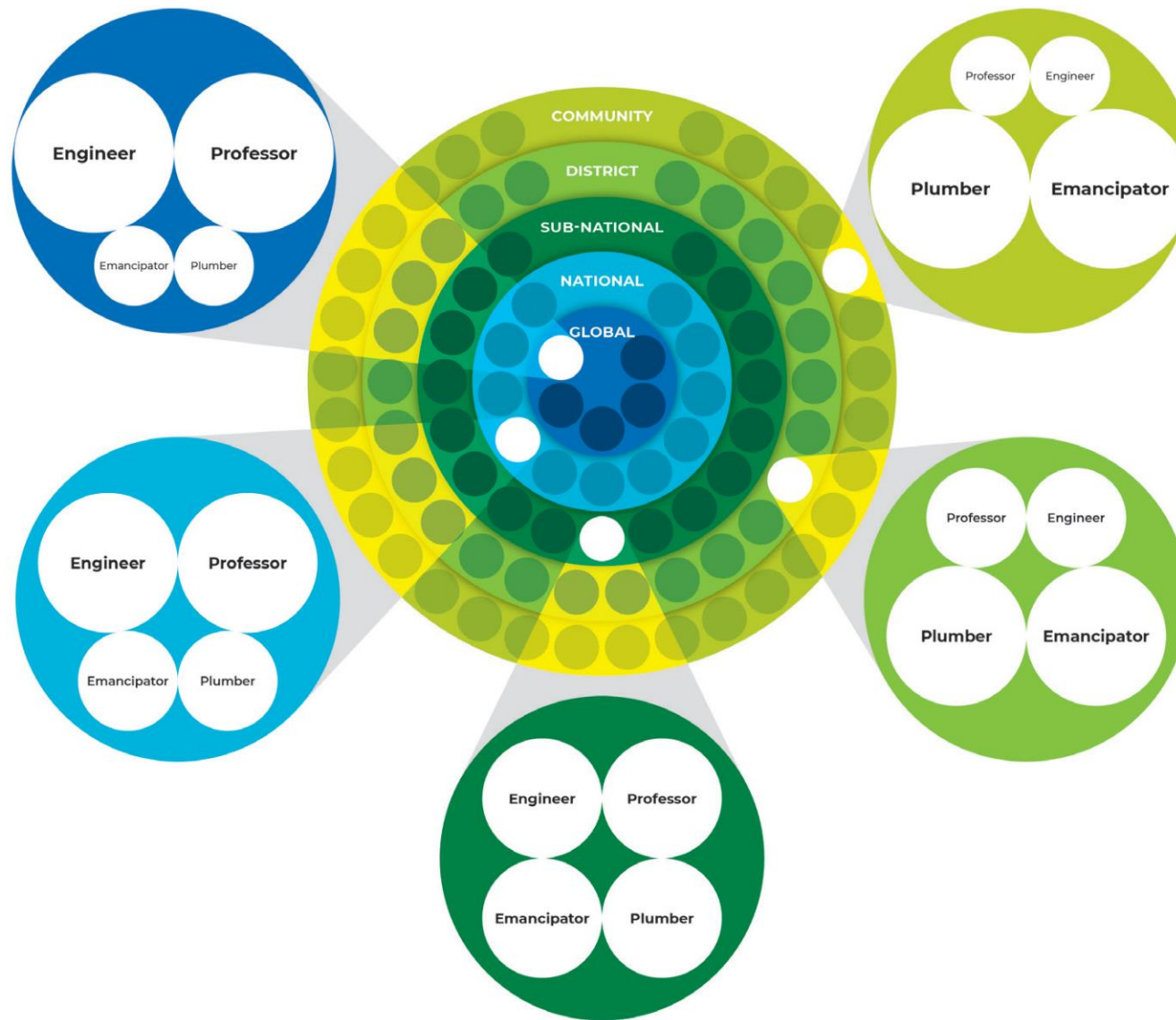
# The uses of knowledge in global health

Seye Abimbola  <sup>1,2</sup>

Position	Attitude	
	Activist/Constructive	Accepting/Corrective
Proximate/Local/Primary	“Emancipator”	“Plumber”
Distant/Foreign/Subsidiary	“Engineer”	“Professor”

**Figure 1** Units of knowledge use(r)s in global health.

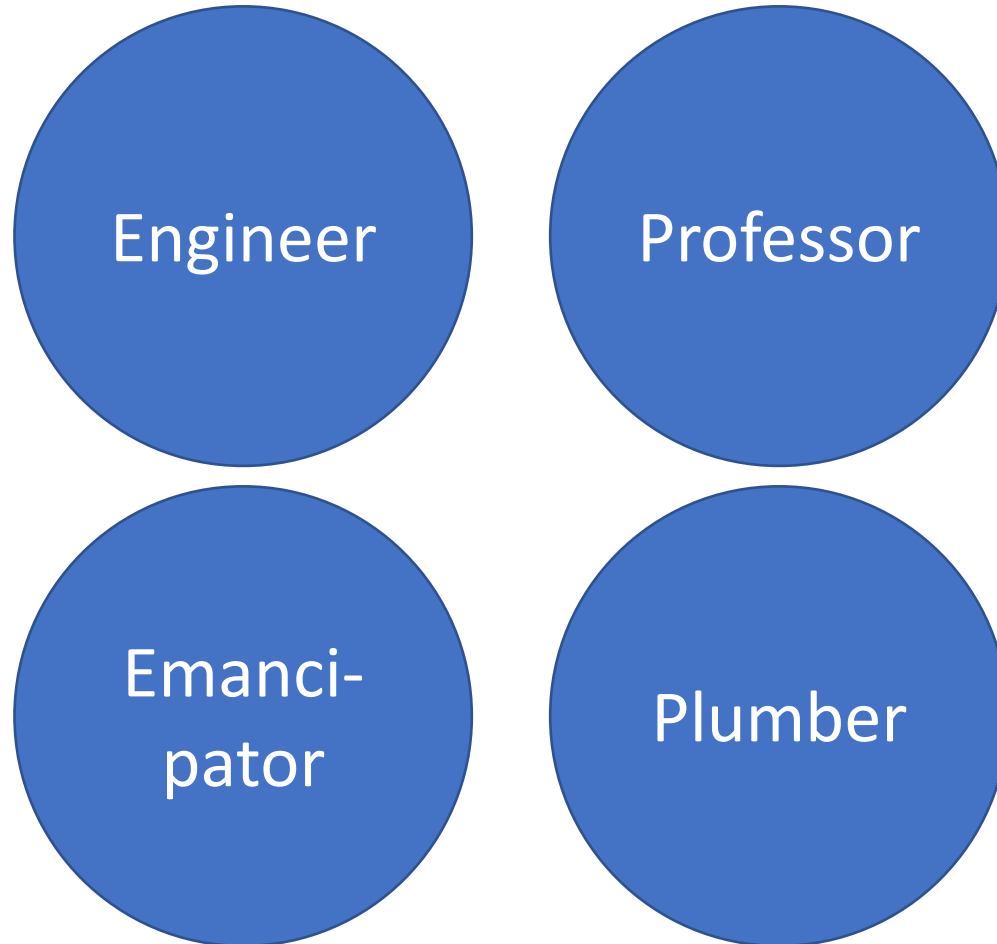
Note: the distinctions drawn here are partly inspired by Dekker (2020)<sup>27</sup> and Abimbola (2019).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 2** Concentric rings of knowledge use(r)s in global health.

Note: this figure shows (1) examples of the scales of organisation at which knowledge is used for equity (ie, the five concentric rings); (2) the spaces in which the knowledge is used (ie, the small circles that line the concentric rings); and (3) the four use(r)s or units of knowledge which are represented as four labelled circles within each small circle. Note that the size of the primary use(r)s or units (ie, emancipators and plumbers) is larger closer to the community 'ring', while subsidiary use(r)s or units (ie, engineers and professors) is larger closer to the global 'ring'.

# Who we are communicating with changes what and how we communicate.



Scientific papers

News articles

Policy briefs

Academic conferences

Social Media

Community outreach

Hospital meetings

Congressional meetings

# Policy briefs

- Short, stand-alone writing that conveys:
  - Key recommendations
  - Science behind key recommendations
  - Uncertainty/outstanding questions
- With the goal of influencing decisions and policies.



# What makes a good policy brief?

## **15 minute activity:**

Review the policy brief: “Saving urban informal settlements from Typhoid”

- What have they done well?
- What should they have done different/better?

# Types of policy briefs

- **Advocacy briefs:** Have a specific position that you are presenting and for which you are advocating.
- **Objective brief:** Presenting multiple positions on an issue and not advocating for a specific position.

# Content of a policy brief

- Title
- Summary
- Introduction/Current context
- Results
- Recommendations with evidence
  - +/- some methods
  - +/- uncertainty – outstanding questions
- Appendices (if necessary)
- References

## *Could include*

- Figures
- Tables
- Pictures
- Sidebars

# Writing styles do's and don'ts

## Do:

- Write in a concise and focused style – be economical in word choice.
- Write in a professional, rather than academic style.
- Use an active voice ('people do things', rather than 'things were done').
- When possible, use a verb rather than its noun form: "this study focuses on" rather than "the focus on this study is".

## Don't:

- Use health or development jargon as the reader may not understand this
- Use dramatic language to convince the reader.
- Repeat yourself.

From Resyst. 2013

# Briefs checklist – from Resyst

## **Argument flows clearly**

- Clear aims
- Clear conclusions from the outset
- Evidence-supported problem statement
- Clear and specific recommended actions
- Recommendations flow logically from the evidence presented
- All information is necessary for the development of the argument

## **Content is appropriate for the audience**

- Importance to the audience is clear
- Recommendations are appropriate for the audience
- Understandable without specialised knowledge

# Briefs checklist – from Resyst

## **Language is clear, concise and engaging**

- Words are not unnecessarily complex
- No jargon
- Clear, concise sentences
- Text is engaging (e.g. active voice)

## **Data are presented effectively**

- All data are necessary for the argument
- Data are easy to understand
- Data are presented in the most appropriate format
- Graphics are not redundant with text

# Briefs checklist – from Resyst

## **Visual cues help the reader navigate and digest information**

- White spaces and margins sufficient
- Text is broken into sections with identifiable focus
- Headings cue the key points that follow
- Key points are easy to find.

# Activity 2:

- Review the new policy briefs. Assess the quality of the briefs using the Resyst checklist.