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WRITING MORE EFFECTIVELY

Catherine Liamzon

It is in your best interest to communicate effectively to achieve desired results. Writing is a skill that can be easily improved. Below are some useful tips to help make our reports more lucid and readable.

- Plain and simple language is good. Use it.
- Be concise. Stick to the relevant. Know how to summarize. Rather than the complete history of land reform in your country, a concise summary will serve your purpose even better.
- Avoid extraneous words. Avoid jargon. Avoid bureaucratic language or verbiage, which the Merriam–Webster dictionary defines as: “a profusion of words usually of little or obscure content”.
- Use the active voice instead of passive. Always think: Who did what? The subject should be performing the action.
- Use active verbs such as: yield, clarify, assert, define, summarize, attribute, suggest, imply, estimate, depict, specify, support, evaluate, propose, and measure. These tend to be clearer than the overused “deals with” and “shows”.
- Use spell check and grammar check. Make sure that your writing is always checked.

Area for improvement	Instead of	Try
Using the active voice	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">A rally was organized by LWA.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">There is poverty in the region.</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">LWA advocates organized a rally.</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">Poverty exists in the region.</div>
Using better, more meaningful active verbs	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">The report deals with land evictions in Cambodia.</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;">The report describes (or summarizes, details, introduces, etc.) land evictions in Cambodia.</div>

Area for improvement	Instead of	Try
Avoiding bureaucratic language, simplifying	It is important to note that farmers bear the brunt of poverty in the Asian region.	Farmers bear the brunt of poverty in Asia.
Simplifying	The land reform monitoring indicators are very useful. (“Very” adds little value to the statement.)	The land reform monitoring indicators are useful; or The land reform monitoring indicators are highly useful.

MAKING YOUR REPORT MORE ACCESSIBLE AND INTERESTING

The truth of what you want to communicate should be enough in itself—land rights for the poor are indisputably important—but the reality is, people first have to be *interested* enough in what you are saying so that they read on.

How can we get our target audiences’ attention, and then retain it?

- Add **narratives: anecdotes** and stories. These enliven your text and enrich our reports. Here, it is useful to provide stories from the ground, for example, about how people may be affected by a certain land investment or law, or share experiences of women farmers. But use these at the right moment, and at the right place.
- Consider using **boxes**. Boxes are useful in calling attention to a special feature, or to give more detailed information about something mentioned in the text.





- Add tables, graphs, and other presentation tools. These visuals help readers understand the text better. Information graphics or infographics present the relationships of complex data in creative and aesthetically appealing ways. Several free visualization tools are available online.

PITFALLS IN REGIONAL WORK: ACHIEVING COMMON UNDERSTANDING

We recognize our contexts vary across countries, especially since Asia is a highly diverse region. At the same time, we belong to a *regional campaign*, where we voice our issues at different regional and global platforms. For this, we need to highlight shared perspectives and common voices.

We thus attempt to “standardize”—not to squash diversity, but rather to help make terms more understandable to a greater number of people. *Note that most of the comments in this section speak of writing for submission to the **regional** and **international** levels, where readers will be unfamiliar with your country context.*

At the country level, it is of course always better for you to use the terms that everyone is used to, and in your mother tongue.

BEING UNDERSTOOD AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Challenges

Solutions

Terms specific to countries and cultures (e.g. *khas*, *adivasis*, *adat*, *haliya*, *bayanihan*)



Italicize terms. Provide a glossary of terms. Ensure all words in your glossary are contained in the report.

Alphabet soup of acronyms and abbreviations



Provide a list of abbreviations in the beginning. Make sure all abbreviations mentioned are actually found in the main text. If the acronyms are foreign e.g. KPA—provide the non-English name, then its English equivalent in parentheses [e.g. KPA—Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (Consortium for Agrarian Reform)]

Different units of measurement (e.g. *lakhs*, crore, decimals, acres, hectares)



Be consistent with use. When easily convertible to the metric system, as in the case of *lakhs*, use the metric system. Provide explanation and conversion in a footnote. (e.g. A decimal is approximately 0.01 acre or 40.46 square meters.)

Different calendar systems (e.g. Bikram Sambat vs. Gregorian)



Use the Gregorian/Western/Christian calendar. Or put in parentheses the Gregorian date.

Different ways of writing numbers (e.g. 1.455 vs. 1,455, 5,05,000 vs. 505,000, 125,81 vs. 125.81)



Use commas to separate thousands from one another, and use decimal points (rather than decimal commas). [e.g. 100,000,000.99]





ACKNOWLEDGING SOURCES

Catherine Liamzon

Here we talk about citations, which any serious publication should have. We explain why citations are important, and provide a quick guide on how to cite, using the American Psychological Association (APA) style.

Passing off someone else's work as your own is a serious offense. We must give credit where it is due, and we do this by acknowledging, through citing, all the sources we have used in our study. We also want to support our claims with solid evidence. To do this, we will sometimes need to cite from other sources. When we properly cite sources, we maintain intellectual integrity, raise our publications to a higher standard, and prevent plagiarism.

We document sources from which we have borrowed not just quotations, but also *ideas*. And just because you have cited your sources, it does not mean that you are already free to paraphrase as you please. For more information, see section on Plagiarism.

There are various systems for citing sources, the most popular being: Chicago Manual of Style; Modern Language Association (MLA) Style; the American Psychological Association (APA). APA style is the most commonly used in the social sciences. Since CSOs conduct research mostly in the tradition of the social sciences, we will use APA style for our publications. This is also to maintain consistency among different studies and papers.

HOW TO CITE—APA STYLE

When we talk about citing sources, we mean two things: in-text citations and the reference list. In-text citations will look familiar. They follow the author-year of publication format and are enclosed in parentheses: (Quizon, 2013) or (ANGOC, 2012). In other systems, footnotes are used. However, remember that providing in-text citations is not enough—these should be accompanied by a complete reference list.

Be precise. When you are citing a source from a publication with several studies written by different writers (as opposed to chapters written by the same author), treat the papers as independent. For example, the Cambodia country paper, “Overcoming a Failure of Law and Political Will” comprises a chapter in ANGO’s *Securing the Right to Land*. Cite the Cambodia paper as included in ANGO’s publication.

Moreover, follow capitalization rules. For in-text citations, capitalize proper nouns. For the reference list, only the first word of the title needs to be capitalized.

A sample reference list

Anseeuw, W., L. Alden Wily, L. Cotula, and M. Taylor. (2011). *Land rights and the rush for land: Findings of the global commercial pressures on land research project*. Rome: International Land Coalition.

Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. (2010a). *Advancing the land rights advocacy agenda in Asia: The CSO land reform monitoring initiative*. Highlights of the Proceedings from the Experts’ Meeting, 12–13 May 2010, Bangkok. www.angoc.org/portal

Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. (2010b). *Ideas in action for land rights advocacy*. Quezon City: Author.

Bending, Tim. (2010). *Monitoring Secure Access to Land: Progress and Prospects*. Land Monitoring Handbook. Rome: International Land Coalition.

Community Self-Reliance Centre. (2012). *Land reform monitoring indicators, Nepal*. Kathmandu: Author.

NGO Forum on Cambodia. (2011). *Statistical Analysis on Land Disputes in Cambodia, 2010*. Phnom Penh: NGO Forum on Cambodia.

Sajoygyo Institute & Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria [Consortium for Agrarian Reform]. (2011). *Land issue and policy monitoring initiative: Indonesia report*. Report submitted to ANGO.





FINAL WORDS ON CITATIONS

After all is said and done, APA style is merely a guide. Use your best judgment; be guided by the reason why we must cite sources. The essence of citing sources is to duly acknowledge someone else's contribution—whether this is an idea or an actual quote—and to help readers track down the original source in case they are interested.

Follow the general principles, but do not go overboard in trying to conform to the APA prescriptions. CSOs have to deal with an assortment of sources such as brochures, press releases, monographs, declarations, statements, paid advertisements, memos, and minutes of meetings. It can get confusing.

APA suggests following the sample format most like your source. Make sure that the vital information—author, title of publication, year of publication—are present.

SOME EXCELLENT REFERENCES ON REFERENCES

Surely this short article cannot do the job of listing and explaining all the rules of APA. Of the many online resources providing detailed instructions on how to use APA style, we recommend Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) at **www.owl.english.purdue.edu**. It provides the basics, illustrated with examples.

To hark back to the original source, refer to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition.

More information on citation is also available from Wikipedia at **<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/citation>**

THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Catherine Liamzon

The executive summary is one of the most underestimated tools in advocacy. How many potential readers have we lost because of a poorly prepared and badly written executive summary? We may write pages upon pages of detailed reports—but if the executive summary does not engage readers and attract their interest, they will not even go beyond the first page. We aim to make a compelling executive summary that convinces our target audiences—policymakers most especially—to act on our recommendations.

WHAT IS AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY?

The word “executive” is no accident—it is originally intended for busy executives who do not have enough time to read the full report. Simply put, it is a brief overview of a report. Upon scanning, its readers should know what the report is all about. This implies that all major points—and the supporting evidence—are mentioned.

An executive summary should summarize the key findings, and explain the importance of the findings.

WHAT SHOULD IT CONTAIN, WHAT SHOULD IT DO?

In considering the executive summary, think about the *most important points* in your report that you want readers to take home. Then write concisely.

- What is the **focus**? What is the **purpose**? These are two different things. Focus is the “what”, while purpose is the “why” of the study. What is the report all about? Why are we monitoring land reform implementation or enhancing ownership and access to land in our countries in the first place?





- ➔ What is the **context**?
- ➔ What was the **methodology** of the study? What tools, framework, and indicators were used? What is the geographical scope of the study—did you look at the entire country or only selected provinces or villages?
- ➔ What are the **findings** and **conclusions**? The study findings must be tight and related to the objectives of the study. What is the basis for the conclusions?
- ➔ What are the **recommendations**? What are the specific actions that you want specific people to take?

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

It depends. Some people think that 10% of the length of the full report is a good estimate. We prefer one page—or a maximum of two. This means about two to five paragraphs. We know it's difficult, *but it can be done!*

PRACTICAL TIPS

- ➔ Include only the essentials or the heart of the report: brief introduction and context, purpose, conclusions, and recommendations. An executive summary should summarize the *key findings*, and explain the *importance* of the findings. Don't throw in too much detail.
 - ⦿ Do not spend too much time discussing the history of agrarian reform in your country. The executive summary is not the introduction to your paper—again, it is a summary.
 - ⦿ For example, you don't have to mention the sources for the study, or that the study cited sources, anymore. "The end of the report cites major references ..." does not belong to the executive summary.

PRACTICAL TIPS (con't.)

- Everything in the executive summary must be in the original report. The executive summary must “match” the contents of the original report; do not suddenly add new information in the summary.
- In preparing the executive summary, a good guideline is to follow the “flow” of your report.
 - ⊙ A useful tip found online: “Write the executive summary after you have completed the report and decided on your recommendations. Look at first and last sentences of paragraphs to begin to outline your summary. Go through and find key words and use those words to organize a draft of your summary; look for words that enumerate (first, next, finally); words that express causation (therefore, consequently); words that signal essentials (basically, central, leading, principal, major) and contrast (however, similarly, more than, less likely).”¹
 - ⊙ But avoid simply copy-pasting from the main text.
- Your executive summary should be stand-alone—it must communicate independently of the original report. Test this by asking someone unfamiliar with the report to read it and see if it makes sense.
- Edit, edit, and edit! Check for spelling and grammar. Proofread. Make sure your statements are as precise and sharp as possible. Avoid vagueness, extraneous words, or redundancies. You have a page or two to make a good impression—invest your energy in writing your executive summary well and then polishing it.
 - ⊙ Avoid “agrarian reform has still not progressed”. Be more specific. After all, this is a monitoring initiative, and we are using *indicators* to be able to measure progress.

¹ Farmer School of Business, Miami University. (2002). Guidelines for writing an executive summary. Retrieved from http://www.astia.org/resources/How_to_write_an_execsummary.pdf





- ⊙ Instead of "...suggest the following recommendations", use "The findings suggest" or "The study recommends".
 - ⊙ Instead of "deals with"—use stronger words like "analyzes" or "discusses"
- ➔ Define your terms and try to avoid using too many abbreviations. Spell out acronyms.
- ➔ Be precise and specific, especially with recommendations.
 - ➔ Don't merely describe the study—dive right into the **analytical** part. And in discussing the analysis, make sure you mention the parameters and indicators used.
- ➔ Be clear about your purpose and focus. What is the focus of the study: the set of indicators or the topic of land reform itself? Be upfront and state this.
 - ⊙ Purpose: are you stating the objectives of the CSO monitoring initiative (which is to enhance CSOs' capacities to support advocacy through the development of a land reform monitoring framework)? Or rather, the objectives of the monitoring reports per se (which is to strengthen our recommendations through solid evidence)?
 - ⊙ Who is the subject? The subject is the "study"—not the country. "The Philippines developed a framework..." - it is not the Government of the Philippines that conducted the study. Use instead: "This study..."
- ➔ Avoid our NGO and monitoring "jargon". Don't assume that readers will know what you mean if they do not work within the NGO/CSO community or the development sector.
 - ⊙ For example, phrases like "input indicators" or "effect indicators". We prefer "this study focuses on changes in policies" or "outcomes".
 - ⊙ "Strengthening mechanisms" as a recommendation—what exactly do you mean? Be more specific about which mechanisms and how these are strengthened.

SOURCES

Many of the examples here are based on the exercises during the training program. We truly learn from our mistakes! Antonio Quizon's comments on participants' sample executive summaries proved a useful resource for some of the tips.

Major reference

Farmer School of Business, Miami University. (2002). Guidelines for Writing an Executive Summary. Retrieved from http://www.astia.org/resources/How_to_write_an_execsummary.pdf

Here is an example of an edited executive summary. Note the common pitfalls in writing an executive summary.

Too much detail. Just summarize the main point, and only mention the most important points.

See example:

Only a fifth (21%) of the land is cultivable. The average landholding is less than a hectare, and one-third (32.1%) of households are landless. Ownership is highly skewed, and also biased against women.

Nepal is a land scarce country. Only about 21% out of the total area of the country (147,181 sq km) is cultivable. Out of agricultural land (2,498,000 ha in 2001, mountain (6.8%), hills (40.4%) and Terai (52.9%) is available for farming where 7.3%, 44.3% and 48.4% people, live in these ecological belts, respectively. An average land holding size is 0.96 ha and 32.1% of households are landless (CBS, 2002: 45). Out of the total land holdings, 1.4% landowners own 14% of arable land. Of the total cultivable land, about 9% is under tenancy system.

The country has a fairly new democracy, which is in the process of land reform. There is ongoing struggle of landless, poor and marginalized people, who have land, based livelihoods but are deprived to access and control over the land and other basic resources. Community Self Reliance Center (CSRC) is facilitating the Land





and agrarian rights movement across the country organized through Land Rights Forum (NLRF), which is active in 53 out of 75 districts of Nepal.

As civil society organizations (CSOs) continue to implement various land rights programs, a new initiative has been the development of CSO land reform monitoring indicators. CSRC has analyzed the status, scope, issues, and challenges relevant to the monitoring indicators for land

reform. The process of developing CSO monitoring indicators revealed the information and data gaps in various components of land reform policies and implementations. Government land reform policy framework includes all the stakeholders.

The role of CSOs is to coordinate with other stakeholders for policy development and implementation. Nepali people from five decades (1961–2011) are been in Nepal in the issue of land reform. Especially in the last two decades. Only 21% of total area of the country is cultivable.

This inequality was 0.544 in 2001 (CBS, 2006). About 47% of land-owning households have claim to only 15% of the total agricultural land with an average size of less than 0.5 ha, while the top 5% occupy more than 37% of land. The distribution of land is very unequal. For example, 47 percent of land-owning households own only 15 percent of the total agricultural land with an average size of less than 0.5 ha, while the top 5 percent occupies more than 37% of land.

Inequality in land distribution as measured by Gini Coefficient was 0.544 in 2001 (CBS, 2006). About 29% households do not own any land (UNDP, 2004). About 80% of the indigenous population is marginal landowners, owning only less than 1 acre, or small cultivators (owning 1–2

Question: Is this the “objective” of the study? Or is this the “perspective” used for the study?

Not relevant.

What are these? Are these some findings? If so, the key points should just be summarized.

"The study shows that the.." [Add before "Number of holdings"]

Summarize findings and implications or significance.

Not relevant.

acres). Most Dalits are landless (around 44% in Terai, 22% in Hill). The gender dimension of land distribution is even more critical: men own 92% of the land holdings (Adhikari, 2008).

● Number of holdings more than doubled in the last 40 years, mainly because of population growth and continuous dependence of people on land. Cultivated land area increased very marginally, especially in the last two decades. The average land holding has been consistently declining, and it reached 0.8 ha (per family) in 2001, and further declined to 0.6 ha in 2009 (CBS, 2009). Land fragmentation is another problem in the country. There are about 3.3 parcels in each land holding, and average size of a parcel was 0.24 ha in 2001. Such a small size of a parcel is also not conducive for the use of modern inputs, especially in building the infrastructure like irrigation facilities

In Nepal the following acts are for land reform process,

- Land Act, 1964,
- Land (Measurement and Inspection) Act, 1963
- Agriculture (New Arrangements) Act, 1963
- Land Administration Act, 1963
- Land Revenue Act, 1978





PRESENTING YOUR RESULTS

Catherine Liamzon

Getting the data is half the battle. The other half is effectively communicating it with your audience. One weakness of many CSO publications is that though we may have data, we cannot communicate them *as well as we should*—our messages do not come across clearly.

VISUALIZATION TOOLS

We generally tell great stories or narratives, but we can further enhance the information by using visualization tools like **tables**, **graphs**, and **charts**. This allows us to highlight key features of our data. But remember that these are not only visualization tools; they are also **analytical tools**—by presenting data differently, we may be able to see new patterns or trends.

Our land reform monitoring initiative could use more creativity and strategy in displaying our results or findings.

Tables are a simple and neat way of presenting data. Instead of merely mentioning data elements, you can neatly put them in a table.

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS IN NEPAL, BY SIZE GROUP

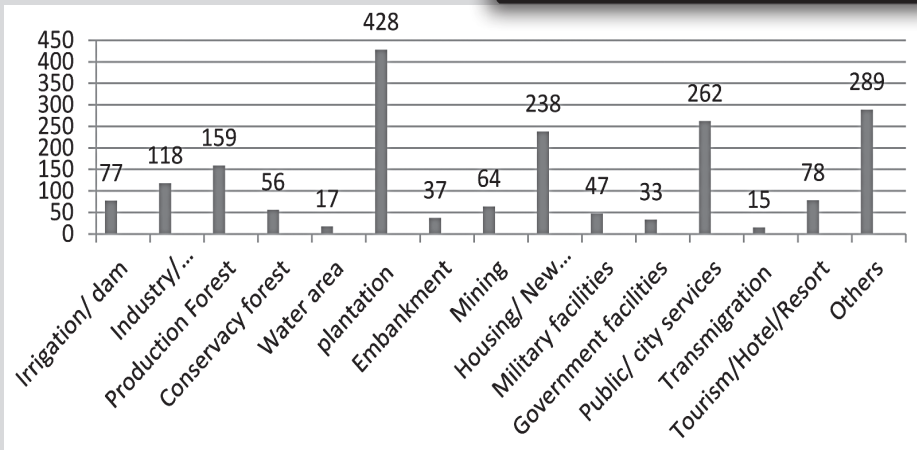
Ranking	Ownership (in ha)	Number of households	Number of households as percentage of total (%)
Landless	0–0.1	287,100	10.13
Marginal	0.1–0.3	670,000	23.64
Small	0.3–0.5	648,000	22.86
Medium	0.5–3	1,131,560	39.93
Rich	3–10	93,700	3.31
Richest	More than 10	3,800	0.13

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006

Charts and graphs are useful tools of analysis. They also help display your information. Microsoft Excel supports the creation of several types of charts. There are many kinds of charts, but for our purposes, we've identified the most useful.

Column charts or bar graphs are ideal for showing data in columns and rows. These are useful for comparing items.

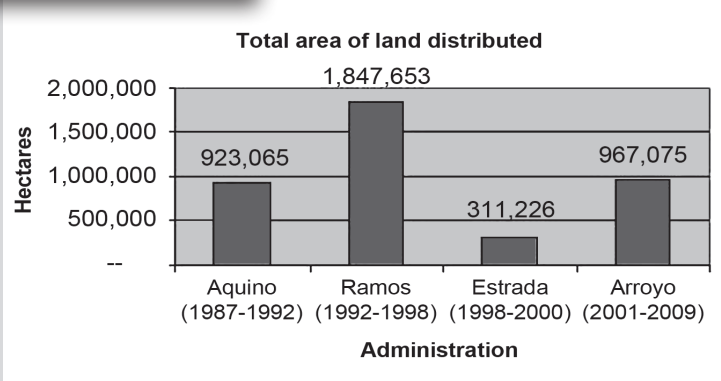
NUMBER OF CASES RECEIVED BY KPA BASED ON CONFLICT TYPE UNTIL 2000



Source: Sajogyo Institute & Consortium for Agrarian Reform. 2011. Land Issue and Policy Monitoring Initiative: Indonesia Report.

Vertical bar or column graphs are particularly useful in showing changes over a period of time.

TOTAL AREA OF LAND DISTRIBUTED IN THE PHILIPPINES, BY ADMINISTRATION



Source: PhilDHARRA. 2010. Country Land Monitoring Report: Philippines.

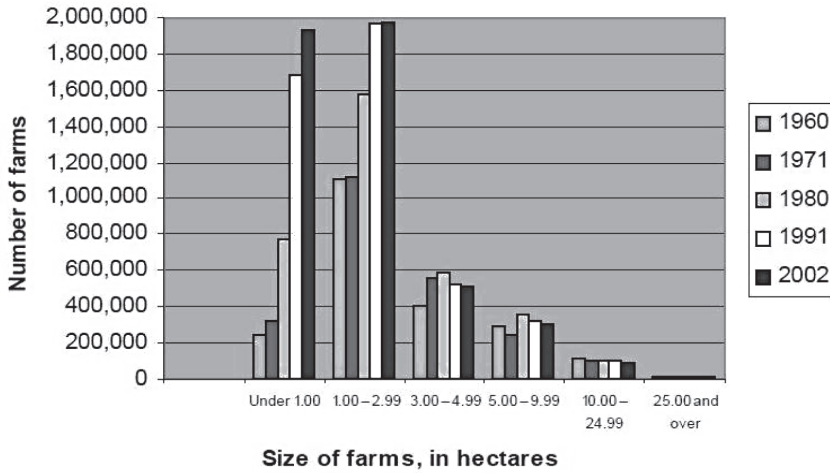




There are more complicated column charts.

The **clustered column** helps compare values across categories.

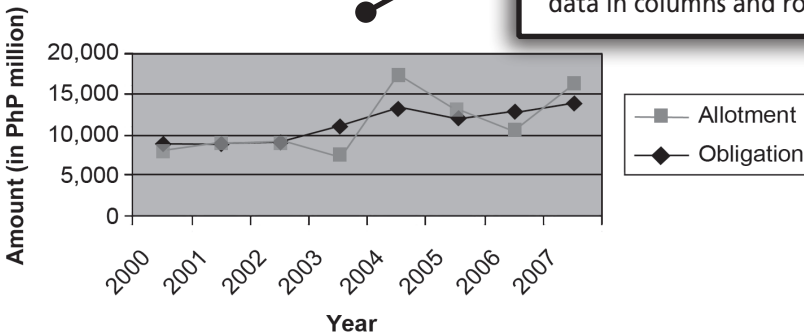
NUMBER OF FARMS BASED ON FARM SIZE IN THE PHILIPPINES (1960–2002)



Source: PhilDHRRA. 2010. Country Land Monitoring Report: Philippines.

A **stacked column** compares individual items in their relation to the whole, across categories. This is useful for multiple data series. The **100% stacked column** is a variation of the stacked column, and is useful when the total is the same for each category, and you want to show how much each part contributes.

ARF ALLOTMENT AND OBLIGATION (2000–2007)



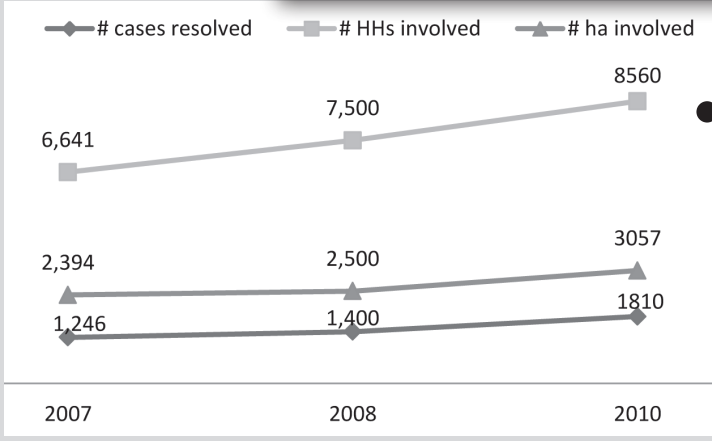
Line charts or **line graphs** are appropriate if you have data in columns and rows.

Source: PhilDHRRA. 2010. Country Land Monitoring Report: Philippines.

Plot the category data evenly along the horizontal axis and the value data evenly along the vertical axis.

Line charts are commonly used to display trends in data at equal intervals, normally over time.

LAND DISPUTES RESOLVED BY CADASTRAL COMMISSION

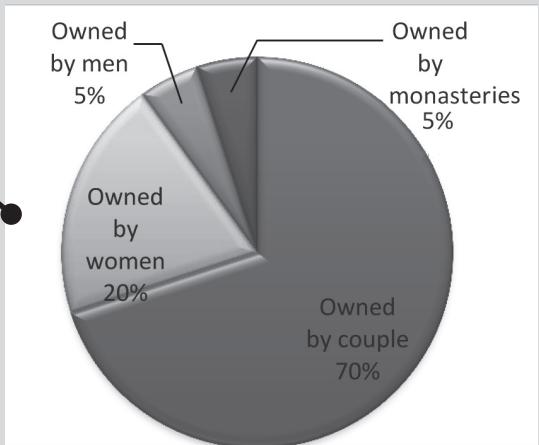


Source: STAR Kampuchea. 2010. *Land Monitoring Report: Cambodia.*

See the examples on the Philippines' Agrarian Reform Fund (ARF) Allotment and Obligation, and Land Disputes Resolved by Cambodia's Cadastral Commission. Both line graphs present different variables (allotment and obligation; cases resolved, households involved, and hectares involved) over a certain period.

Pie charts are good for showing how a whole is divided into several parts or "slices".

DISTRIBUTION OF LAND OWNERSHIP BY LAND TITLES IN CAMBODIA



Source: Based on data from the Royal Government of Cambodia, 2010. Cited in STAR Kampuchea. 2010. *Land Monitoring Report: Cambodia.*



At the simplest level, we can use maps to show the location of what we are monitoring—where land disputes are occurring, or where economic land concessions are concentrated, for example. We can use the maps to show the geographic features of our country to better establish the context. For instance, we can show that our country is comprised of different islands, or is completely landlocked. To understand Nepal and its different tenure systems, development regions and agro-ecological regions, a map is the best tool.

DON'T FORGET

- ➔ Choose the appropriate visualization tool.
- ➔ Graphs should always have immediate visual impact. They must aid the understanding of the reader, not further confuse.
- ➔ Cite the source/s of your data
- ➔ Always give your graph or chart a caption.
- ➔ Check if your units of measurement are correct. Choose appropriate scale (appropriate high and low values) for your graph.
- ➔ Make sure to use a legend, which is a box that identifies patterns (e.g., stripes or dots) or colors representing your data categories.

Many tutorials on making different kinds of graphs are available online.

Practice makes perfect. We encourage you to try and experiment. Consult researchers and academics (including your steering committee) regarding how to best present your data. Also, you can “test” your graphs by asking people (especially from your target audience) what message your graph conveys.

Strike a *balance* when choosing to work with graphs. Don't overdo it. Do not use graphs for the sake of using graphs, or just because they look sophisticated. Check if people understand what you are trying to say. Don't let the graphs distract the reader from your real message.

The Help section of your Microsoft Office program (**Hit F1**) contains useful information on creating charts. Just search for it.





LEARN MORE

The best explanations can be found in Microsoft online help and in the help section of your word processor. **<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel-help/available-chart-types-HA001233737.aspx?CTT=5&origin=HA010099739>**

Digital Research Tools Wiki has a section dedicated to Data Visualization: **<http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/lskills/TLTP3/WN/NumeracyDiagrams.html>**
<https://digitalresearchtools.pbworks.com/w/page/17801661/Data%20Visualization>

If you want to learn more about the fascinating art and science of visualization, do visit Many Eyes, an experimental site brought to us by the IBM Research and the IBM Cognos software group.

By exploring the site, you can learn more about the myriad ways data can be visualized. The best feature of the site is that you can actually upload your data set, visualize it, and receive feedback from others. Visit: **<http://www.many-eyes.com>**