

WEEK 4: DEVELOPING A RESEARCH CONTEXT



READ THE EXTRACT AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

In September 2000, Mozambique joined other countries in signing a declaration that launched the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which used as its baseline the 1990 scenario. Of the eight MDGs, Goal 4 aims to reduce mortality of children aged less than five years (under-five mortality) by two-thirds by 2015. However, as stated by the UN report on the progress of the MDGs in 2010, although child deaths are falling, they are not falling quickly enough to reach the target (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2010). The report found that, overall, sub-Saharan Africa still experiences high levels of under-five mortality compared to other regions of the world, although a reduction has occurred from 184 per 1,000 livebirths in 1990 to 144 per 1,000 livebirths in 2008. Further, the report found that some countries in the sub-Saharan Africa region have achieved absolute reductions in under-five mortality against the odds of poverty. These countries included Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Malawi.

Although the baseline figures for mortality in 1990 are not available for Mozambique, the most recent country report on the progress towards the achievements of MDGs shows that under-five mortality has declined from 219 per 1,000 livebirths in 1997 to 178 per 1,000 in 2003 (Mozambique Ministry of Planning and Development, 2010; UNDP, 2011). In addition, data from the most recent multiple indicator cluster survey showed that a further reduction has taken place, and in 2008, under-five mortality reached 154 per 1,000 livebirths (Mozambique Ministry of Health, 2009). However, despite this positive development in under-five mortality rates at the national level, there is a growing concern regarding the persisting geographical differences in under-five mortality (UNDP, 2011).

Notice how the author introduces the MDGs but does not go into great detail. Why do you think that is?

Government and international body reports are common in context sections; they are often not appropriate for other sections. How can these reports be used in your paper?

How does the author narrow the focus in this abstract?

A good context section should give sufficient information (but not too much) about the main themes or variables of a research paper. Based on the above context section, write a title for this paper.

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The extract below is adapted from a paper on health care reform in Vietnam. Read the extract and explain the purpose of each paragraph. (How effective is each paragraph in developing the theme of the paper?)

As a result of the Vietnam (Second Indochina) War (1954–75), Viet Cong and regular People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) forces unified the country under communist rule. In this conflict, the North and the Viet Cong—with logistical support from the Soviet Union—defeated the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, which sought to maintain South Vietnamese independence with the support of the US military. The war left Vietnam devastated, with the total death toll standing at between 800,000 and 3.1 million, and many thousands more crippled by weapons and substances such as napalm and Agent Orange.

The harsh postwar crackdown on remnants of capitalism in the South led to the collapse of the economy during the 1980s. With the economy in shambles, the communist government altered its course and adopted consensus policies that bridged the divergent views of pragmatists and communist traditionalists. Throughout the 1980s, Vietnam received nearly \$3 billion a year in economic and military aid from the Soviet Union and conducted most of its trade with the USSR and other Comecon countries. In 1986, Nguyễn Văn Linh, who was elevated to CPV general secretary the following year, launched a campaign for political and economic renewal (Đổi Mới). His policies were characterized by political and economic experimentation that was similar to simultaneous reform agenda undertaken in the Soviet Union. Reflecting the spirit of political compromise, Vietnam phased out its reeducation effort. The communist government stopped promoting agricultural and industrial cooperatives. Farmers were permitted to till private plots alongside state-owned land, and in 1990 the communist government passed a law encouraging the establishment of private businesses.

Vietnam already had a rather impressive health care system when it set out to reform the sector in the late 1980s; infant mortality rate was low for a developing country while total expenditure on health (TEH) was only moderately high (World Bank, 2001). It was a largely public system with a network of public facilities at all levels providing health care free or nearly free of charge. However, the prolonged economic sluggishness that followed reunification with the South in 1975 made it difficult for the government to maintain and pay for the existing health care system built on public provision as well as financing. Enormous rebuilding costs after decades of war and dwindling Soviet aid compounded the government's fiscal difficulties and galvanized it to take drastic measures, collectively described as Doi Moi, in 1986 (Beresford 2008). In the health care sector, the aim was to reduce government spending on health care by transferring much of the responsibility to households.

The sequence of health care reforms launched since the start of Doi Moi can be broadly categorized into three overlapping phases. First, public hospitals were allowed and encouraged to collect charges to compensate for the reduction of public subsidies. Next, health insurance was established and expanded to promote access to health care which had been shrinking due to rising user charges. Finally, the health care system was decentralized to improve efficiency and accountability. All three phases of the reforms, as we shall see in the following discussion, aggravated rather than addressed the problems of rising expenditures and declining access.

- Cross-out (example) all the information that is not relevant to the theme of the paper.
- Write a plan for the context section that will be included in your paper.