

Session 4 Handout – Appraising Quality of Non-Scientific Information

Questions to Consider when Appraising the Quality of Non-Scientific Information

- Who is the author of the information?
 - Is the author an expert on the issue of focus?
 - What else has the author published related to the issue before?
 - Is the author objectively interested in the issue or is s/he biased for some reasons?
- Who is the publisher or the publishing institution?
 - Is it a publisher with a reputation of publishing on the issue?
 - Is the publishing institution an authority on the issue?
- Is the information consistent with what you may already know about the issue?
 - Does the information make sense given what you may already know about the issue?
 - If the information contradicts what you already know, is the contradiction explained? And is the explanation convincing?
- Is the content consistent throughout the document?
 - Are there any contradictions from one section to the other?
 - Does the ‘story-line’ flow well?
- Is the information complete?
 - Are there any obvious gaps in what the publication should have covered given its title?
 - What is the depth of the information on the issue of focus?
- Is the information current?
 - When was the information published?
 - Have there been important changes since the information was published?
- How was the information generated and who was involved in its generation?
 - For instance, if the information is a policy document, who was involved in the policy development process (refer to acknowledgement section in the document)?
 - What approach was used in developing the document – was it a consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders?
- Is the information presented accurate and authentic?
 - If any information or data is cited, is the cited information or data authentic?
 - In the case of statistics either from government agencies or other sources, one should try interrogate numbers and their interpretation. It is important to pay attention to denominators used to come up with rate
- Is the information presented in a format that implies it is final and ready for dissemination?
 - Is the information professionally presented in a format that implies it is final, e.g. is it in PDF format?
 - If it is a policy document or government report, has it been signed off by the relevant official and officially launched?
- Who funded the production and publication of the information?
 - Does the funder have interests that may bias the information?