

ASSET Practice Note

Using Case Studies in SSR Education and Training

What are case studies?

Case studies used in education or training are typically short presentations – verbal or written – of detailed information on a particular country, event or theme. They can be real or fictitious. Case studies are ideally suited for use in SSR education and training because they provide an opportunity for participants to apply their conceptual knowledge and ‘learn by doing’. If the case study is based on a real-life context, it also builds participants’ understanding of the intricacies of SSR on the ground.

Case studies help to bridge the gap between theory and practice in SSR as well as being an excellent resource for:

- Lesson identification and lesson learning, particularly in a mixed group with different language, work experience and educational backgrounds.
- Encouraging student-centred learning that draws upon participants’ own experiences.
- Exploring and debating issues within SSR.
- Promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

How is a good case study put together?

Choosing an appropriate case study topic

Case studies should be on topical subjects of interest to SSR practitioners, students and academics. Some topics may not be suitable for case studies because of the breadth or depth of the subject such as a whole SSR overview or an in-depth look at the root causes of a particular conflict. Topics for case studies should be selected because they can be adapted to fit the case study format and requirements (see below).

Case Study Essentials

- No more than 3000 words
- Provides background information
- Limited in scope to a particular event or timeframe

Writing a good case study

Ideally, experts in a particular topic should be selected to write the case study. However, fictitious or real case studies can also be developed by the teacher or trainer. The emphasis of a case study should be on providing a nuanced description of the event and rather than drawing generalisations.

There are many different ways of structuring a case study. However, a structure that we have found useful when drafting a case study based on an actual event is to divide it into seven main sections:

1. Aim/Objective
2. Key facts and map
3. Background
4. Main section
5. Conclusion
6. Discussion questions
7. Bibliography

A written case study can start off with a clear **aim** that tells the reader in one or two sentences what the case study is going to achieve including information on what timeframe, event or entity is to be reviewed. Example of an aim: “This study aims to examine the security transformation process in country X in order to identify next steps.”

Alternatively, the case study can begin with a **learning objective**, such as “The objective of this study is for students to apply SSR assessment skills and gain a better understanding of the security transformation process in country X.”

Where appropriate, a section of **key facts** about the country or subject can be included, as it is always helpful to provide the reader with a quick overview of the country or entity. A map is often also helpful, particularly if the text makes reference to places, rivers, or geographical features, which can be highlighted on the map. A scale is also important when providing a map.

Key facts can include:

- Capital city
- Population
- Currency
- Languages
- Religions
- Natural resources
- Age structure
- Ethnic groups
- GDP

The key facts should be followed by a **background** that provides an overview of the whole case study. The background to the case study can provide historical context, including political, social, cultural and economic factors at the local, national, regional or international levels. This should include a description of the different security and justice needs of men, women, boys and girls as well as different needs based on ethnicity, religion, geographic location and other factors.

The **main section** includes a detailed description of the specific event/theme/process/project. This should include a description of the different actors involved in the specific event/theme/process/project as well as the relationships between the different actors and their underlying motivations.

The **conclusion** should reflect the aim/objective of the case study and be derived from the information contained within the case study itself. The **bibliography** can be supplemented with a short list of key sources for additional information – ideally free to access online.

Case studies provoke discussion and draw out participant’s experiences. Including sufficient time for discussion as well as clear **discussion questions** are important tools for learning that allow students time to reflect and explore ideas. Discussion often flows naturally from a case study however pre-determined questions or topics for discussion are important to guide the discussion and tackle specific issues. Discussion can be held in plenum, small groups and buzz groups of two or three.

In identifying discussion questions or topics it is important to ask open-ended questions that may have several possible answers or outcomes. It is imperative that discussion questions are adapted to the specific audience bearing in mind their level of experience and background as well as the overriding aim/objective of the case study. Discussion questions can be conceptual, for example a discussion on the concept of security sector reform versus security sector management, governance or transformation. Alternatively, questions can be action-oriented, for example living into the role of a UN SSR unit or a national security council and developing a national action plan for SSR or debating the top SSR priority. It is important that facilitators are familiar with the discussion topics proposed and have a good understanding of the issues involved in order to be able to facilitate the discussion.

How can case studies be used effectively in SSR education and training?

Different numbers of participants

Case studies can be effectively used for many different groups or individuals interested in SSR, including students, academics and practitioners. They can be used with different group sizes as well as for individuals. It is recommended that when case studies are used with a group larger than ten, that the participants are broken up into smaller groups so that everyone can express opinions, share experiences or ask questions. An ideal number is between three-five people per group. One person from each of the small groups can then report back to plenum. If the group is large than thirty, the breakout groups can be clustered together with two or three other groups for the report-back, rather than reporting back to the whole group. This allows for more time for discussion.

Materials needed

Case studies can be presented in a handout format and given to the students with sufficient time to allow for a proper read through. As participants often do not have time to read materials before the course, time should be built in for reading the case study handout during the session. The case study can also be delivered as a presentation with discussion questions at the end. PowerPoint, flipcharts, post-it notes and other materials can be used to facilitate the discussion.

Delivery

Case studies are a flexible learning tool and can be delivered in different manners. However it is often helpful to provide an introductory lecture or presentation prior to the case study exercise. Students can then apply the information and tools that they have acquired to the case study. As such, case study exercises are often planned for the end of a session. They are also a sound but informal way of assessing how much the students have learned. For students who are more experienced, the use of a case study early on in a session can provide a useful diagnostic tool as to the students' competency and areas of interest.

Different case studies can be used throughout the course, or a single case study can be used throughout the course in order to deepen specific knowledge on the topic and explore the various dimensions of SSR. A note of caution must be included here as students who struggle with a foreign language or are not as experienced as may find the practical and discursive nature of a case study overwhelming.

Facilitators play an important role in the delivery of case studies. A facilitator's initial role is to provide clear instructions as to how the case study is to be used, what the objectives of the case study are and any instructions as to how the group is to tackle the questions. Facilitators thereafter must play a flexible role allowing the discussion to flow but assisting and guiding the students with any issues or queries. Each individual group will require a different type of input from a facilitator depending on the experience, background, level of seniority and confidence of a group. It is important that facilitators create the time and space for each member of the group to be included in the discussions and try to prevent the discussions becoming dominated by a few members. Most importantly, the facilitators must recognise that case studies are a means to 'learn by doing' and thus the students should be encouraged to take the lead on the discussions and the issues.

Practical Tips

Case studies are inevitably subjective. They represent an individual or institution's point of view of an event or situation and the context in which it occurred. Case

studies are easily subject to bias, prejudice and sensitivities surrounding events, particularly because of their brevity. It is entirely possible that two case studies on the same topic can draw entirely different conclusions.

- In cases that are particularly sensitive or opinions are divided, two case studies can be written to present the different sides or views of the situation.
- Participants can be asked to briefly give feedback or provide additional information on the case study before the small group discussion.
- Case studies need to be updated regularly. They can quickly become out of date and potentially irrelevant as situations on the ground change.
- Use both the old and new case studies as a study tool to highlight how things have changed and their potential impact on SSR activities.
- Groups should always be chosen carefully and should be informally monitored by the facilitators to see whether they are working well together. It may be necessary to organise the group work on a more formal basis using a Chairperson to encourage everyone to become involved. Facilitators should also go around to the different small groups to check in on the discussion and provide additional facilitation if necessary.

Finally, although case studies are ideally suited to group work, this may alienate some members who do not have the same command of the language as others, and those who are shy or dislike public speaking. At the same time, rank and hierarchical structures in government departments or societies can prevent individuals from taking part in the group work. In order to address this, techniques such as round-robins can make sure that everyone has a chance to participate – or case studies can be delivered as an individual activity and discussion held in plenary so that facilitator can actively guide participation.

How can the use of case studies be evaluated?

Case studies can be evaluated based on evaluation/feedback forms and through a wash-up session immediately after the plenary which follows the group feedback. A case study reviewer could also be engaged to sit through the delivery of the case study and subsequent exercises and group discussion. The reviewer could then produce an evaluation based on a set of criteria such as: relevance to study programme; clear learning objectives; balance between context and teaching points; and method of delivery, group discussion, exercises and plenary sessions.

Where can I find more information?

- Sample case studies: <http://www.ssronline.org/keynotes.cfm>
- Topic guides: http://www.ssrnetwork.net/topic_guides/index.php
- DCAF Backgrounders: http://www.ssrnetwork.net/topic_guides/index.php
- Christensen C R (1981) Teaching and the Case Method; Text, Cases and Readings. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School
- Kreber C (2001) Learning Experientially through Case Studies? A Conceptual Analysis Teaching in Higher Education Vol. 6 No 2
- Kuntz S and Hesslar A (1998) Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice: Fostering Active Learning through the case method, Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges and Universities

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