

Executive Summary

National human development reports (NHDRs) are now produced or overseen by more than 130 UNDP country (and regional) offices. Since their inception in 1992, nearly 550 reports and a large number of disaggregated and supplementary human development indexes (HDIs) have been produced, reflecting national and local conditions as no other global instrument can.

In January 2000, the Business Plan of the UNDP Administrator identified the global *Human Development Report* (HDR) and its national counterparts as major pillars of the organization's analytic and policy work. That same year, a corporate policy was laid down to govern the production and dissemination of NHDRs.

The basic objectives of NHDRs include: 1) raising public awareness and triggering action on critical human development concerns; 2) strengthening national statistical and analytic capacity to assess and promote people-centred development; and 3) shaping policies and programmes by providing options and broad recommendations based on concrete analysis.

This evaluation assesses the strategic relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the NHDR system. It synthesizes the main findings of 16 studies carried out by the evaluation team to provide lessons and recommendations for NHDR teams in country offices around the world, and for UNDP managers and policy makers (located in the Bureau for Development Policy, *Human Development Report* Office, the Executive Office, the Operations Support Group, the regional bureaus and the regional centres).

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This evaluation exercise attempts to address the following four issues:

1. **Appropriateness:** Is the NHDR system the most suitable vehicle to promote human development approaches?
2. **Relevance:** How strategically relevant and necessary is the system of NHDRs to UNDP?
3. **Effectiveness:** Has the NHDR system made a difference? That is, has it been influential with regard to the country's environment and agenda? What worked and why?
4. **Sustainability:** Is the NHDR system sustainable?

The terms of reference for this evaluation were developed through a consultative process using professional networks of evaluators and human development experts worldwide. The methodology for the evaluation was developed by the team in an inception workshop with inputs from a Panel of Methodology Experts that was convened earlier. Special attention was given to finding practical ways to assess the often amorphous, diffuse and indirect influence and impact of an intellectual-political exercise such as the NHDR. The main variables selected to assess influence/impact include improvement of human development-related statistics, increasing awareness of the human development concept and related issues, expansion of policy dialogue, and policy changes in a pro-human development direction.

Seven countries—Albania, Armenia, Brazil, Egypt, India, Senegal and Zambia—were chosen for in-depth field studies that involved visits by the team. Given the wide variations in country contexts and NHDR production processes, and the limited resources and time, the aim was not to produce in-depth studies of a representative sample of countries producing NHDRs. Rather, countries were chosen to ensure

regional representation, as well as to provide valuable forward-looking lessons and ‘best/worst practices’. The goals were to better understand how NHDRs can influence policy-making and development planning and to identify best practices in producing and disseminating NHDRs that can be adopted elsewhere. Pilot exercises in Brazil and India were conducted through two-week missions; the other five studies were completed within one week (five working days).

To supplement this exercise, eight other country case studies—from Bolivia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Colombia, Kazakhstan, Slovakia, Ukraine and the United Republic of Tanzania—were conducted through desk research. The reviews were mainly based on documentary evidence and e-mail correspondence with select stakeholders. Finally, another study was conducted at UNDP Headquarters in New York to assess the policy frameworks and incentives around NHDRs. Information from these sixteen reports provided the basis for this evaluation report.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Influence of NHDRs

The NHDR system has been marked by significant achievements, given its relatively meagre resources, the short period of time it has existed, and the constraints that it has faced at both national and global levels. In virtually all the countries reviewed, the NHDR succeeded in spreading—and firmly establishing—the concept of human development in development discourse. In several countries, this accomplishment included new or improved production of human development-related statistics, including those needed to calculate the major HDIs. In most countries studied, NHDRs have made some progress in influencing policies; in some countries, they have even produced deeper analysis of socio-political obstacles to improving human development status and taken on

crucial issues that are often difficult to discuss because of their political sensitivity. A country-by-country summary is provided in chapter 3.

These findings support the argument that if one wishes to promote human development, then the NHDR is UNDP’s only instrument available for defining what the goal of human development entails at the national level and analysing obstacles to achieving it. The NHDR thus constitutes UNDP’s unique brand, for no other international organization is responsible for promoting human development in all its dimensions.

Although this evaluation finds that the NHDRs have contributed significantly to UNDP’s fulfilment of its mission, challenges, limitations and constraints within the NHDR process exist. Since no other instrument remain for analysing and propounding human development at the national level, identifying the chief obstacles to it and suggesting effective policies for overcoming such obstacles, UNDP Headquarters and country offices should support and strengthen the NHDR system. To this end, to the evaluation makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations for corporate decision-makers:

- 1. Recognize that the NHDR system is a core component of UNDP’s mission and provide stronger support.** If UNDP’s unique contribution among international organizations is its promotion of human development in all its dimensions, then the NHDR is the only holistic representation of that role at the national level. First and foremost, stronger support for the NHDR system should take the form of political support. UNDP Headquarters should make it clear that the NHDR system is a high priority, and should not allow it to be pushed aside by new initiatives that constantly appear on the agenda. Headquarters should formulate

a clear policy regarding the relationship between the NHDR, the Millennium Development Goals Report and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, as called for in Recommendation 2 below, and otherwise focus on solving the problem of competition among these programmes for scarce human resources that has developed in some countries, to the detriment of the NHDR.

In addition, the contributions of the NHDR system should be reflected in UNDP Headquarters and country offices by being incorporated within their business plans, programming activities, existing accountability mechanisms and incentive systems.

While Headquarters support for the NHDR system should be strengthened, measures taken to promote such support must in no way compromise the decentralized nature of the system or weaken the existing autonomy of country offices.

2. Clarify NHDR's relationship to other instruments and exercises.

- *Clarify the NHDR's relationship to other UNDP programmes.* A clear UN corporate policy on the exact relationship between the NHDR, the Millennium Development Goals Report and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper is needed. The complementarities and differences in purpose among these instruments should be fully recognized. The competitive relationship for time, attention, resources, and political capital must be better managed so as to ensure an enabling environment for the NHDR system. The independence of the NHDR system must be protected.

To promote the use of NHDRs in UN-wide efforts to achieve development goals, UNDP should promote greater involvement of the UN Country Teams in the process of report preparation.

- *Promote a more productive two-way interaction between the global HDR and the NHDR.* The upward influence of the NHDR on the global HDR has been smaller and less productive than it should be. The value of NHDRs should receive closer attention at UNDP Headquarters, and the *Human Development Report Office* should implement its plans to conduct mission exchanges as well as joint outreach and advocacy efforts.

3. **Encourage the transfer of international expertise on the NHDR through more regional workshops and bilateral exchanges.** The most effective tools for transferring international expertise for the preparation and dissemination of NHDRs have been workshops organized by the *Human Development Report Office* and UNDP regional bureaus as well as bilateral exchanges (some of them inter-continental). These initiatives should be introduced where absent and strengthened where practised.

Recommendations for UNDP country offices:

4. **Emphasize national ownership of the NHDR.** National ownership of the NHDR—which is distinct from government ownership—should be increased as much as possible, while also ensuring political independence and analytic quality.
5. **Clarify and productively utilize the NHDR's relationship with many other exercises.** Such exercises include the Common Country Assessment (CCA), the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Country Programme Documents (CPD), as well as civil society organization and private sector reports and national development planning documents, which overlap in various ways. NHDRs may benefit from the data and analyses contained in such exercises and may also influence them. Potential synergies and conflict should be recognized and, where possible, used productively in the preparation of NHDRs.

6. **Move from introducing human development to a deeper analysis of the challenges it faces.** Since NHDRs and human development concepts have gained acceptance, the NHDR should deepen and sharpen analysis of impediments to human development and the means to overcoming them. Usually this will mean taking on politically and/or socially sensitive issues. Experience suggests that analytical excellence, combined with appropriate tact and skill, can make it easier to deal frankly with sensitive topics.
7. **Revisit themes.** There is value in taking a second and even third look at certain issues. Precisely because the NHDRs have taken up basic and general topics in their early years—such as poverty, inequality and gender—there is often the need to use subsequent reports to check progress in light of changed circumstances. There is also the possibility of going deeper into the analysis of a particular topic and using a more creative approach. In doing so, NHDRs should always take advantage of the opportunities for complementing the Millennium Development Goal Reports (the latter, by design, avoid critical analysis of policies affecting the MDGs—a job that the NHDRs can take on.)
8. **Disaggregate statistics to cover sensitive issues.** Disaggregating human development-related indexes has proved useful for many countries, particularly those with high (geographic, social and economic) inequalities. Initially, disaggregation has taken geographic form, since this is usually less controversial and may also have obvious political ‘champions’, such as mayors and governors. It is important, however, to progress to more controversial kinds of disaggregation, based on race, gender or caste, for example—factors that are generally more important than geography in determining human development outcomes.
9. **Avoid both report ‘fatigue’ and long gaps between reports.** Both report fatigue from excessive frequency and policy irrelevance from long gaps between reports are to be avoided. The optimal gap between the issuance of successive reports is probably two years, possibly three if circumstances warrant. Cogency and relevance to policy are the crucial criteria of success, and frequency should be determined with these criteria in mind, in light of other country-specific considerations.
10. **Improve monitoring of NHDR impact.** Systematic monitoring of the results of past NHDRs is a weak link in the NHDR system. UNDP country offices should build such systematic monitoring into their NHDR system and make the results publicly available.
11. **Improve the monitoring and evaluation of policies.** Systematic evaluation of policy results and performance is a crucial but weak facet of public policy in many countries. A potentially useful contribution of future NHDRs would be to help develop practical methods for monitoring and evaluating policies and programmes, especially with respect to their human development content and impact.
12. **Strengthen outreach efforts.**
 - *Knowledge produced in the course of the NHDR process should be made public.* UNDP country offices should make it clear that all knowledge generated in the process of preparing the NHDR is in the public domain. Clear guidelines on this matter from UNDP Headquarters would be useful. UNDP should also make background papers available on an accessible website.
 - *Produce different versions of the reports to suit different groups.* The impact of the NHDR is enhanced when different versions of it are available to suit the needs and abilities of different population

groups. Potentially useful versions are shorter versions for time-strapped policy makers, simpler versions for public consumption and, where applicable, versions in vernacular languages.

- *Make access to the NHDR easier.* NHDR availability has been a problem in some countries. Copies should be distributed widely and readily available in the public domain. All UNDP country offices should post their NHDRs on their website, which has not been done in a surprising number of countries. Currently, the *Human Development Report Office* is promoting efforts to have new reports available online. Since online access to information is becoming increasingly important, UNDP should find, develop and utilize the most effective and user-friendly software for exploiting this enormous potential.
- *Introduce human development material into university and school curricula.* Getting materials into the educational system can be an effective way of spreading human development ideas over the long term. Some countries have already had success in promoting human development materials in university and even school curricula, but other countries have yet to attempt this. Such efforts should be encouraged.
- *Conduct activities to strengthen society's capacity to absorb human development ideas through better education programmes.* NHDRs are more effective when society has the ability to understand and debate basic human development-related ideas. Such capacity can be enhanced through education and information programmes targeted at different groups, including academics, policy makers, journalists, students and the general public.