ISSUE BRIEF

United Nations Development Programme

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Many of the shortcomings in implementing the sustainable development principles agreed upon at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro reflect weaknesses in global, national, and local governance mechanisms. The zero draft of the 'Rio+20' outcome document recognizes that governance is critical for advancing sustainable development (paragraphs 22, 44). Dealing with the challenges of socio-economic inequalities and environmental injustices requires more and better institutional capacity for inclusive governance.

Back to basics—Normative values and principles

'Rio+20' presents an opportunity to more closely link sustainable development to the values and principles—human rights, gender equity, integrity—that are at the heart of the United Nations' work. Responsive and participatory governance and the rule of law are needed for the implementation of policies that are economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. By contrast, development processes that are not aligned with these values threaten prospects for sustainable development. For instance, unclear definitions of property rights and ineffective land tenure can exclude indigenous and forest-dependent communities from the potential benefits associated with the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation initiative. Together with other UN agencies, UNDP helps national institutions to include poor and marginalized groups in the economic, social, and environmental decisions affecting them.

Gaps in governance and implementation capacities remain a challenge

Both the zero draft of the 'Rio+20' outcome document and assessments of the implementation of global conventions and commitments acknowledge the practical shortcomings of attempts to integrate the three strands (economic, social,

UNDP's focus areas in Democratic Governance:

- Fostering inclusive participation;
- Strengthening responsive governing institutions;
- Aligning national governance institutions and policies with international principles.

environmental) of sustainable development. Prospects for improving this implementation record often hinge on improvements in institutional capacity and the quality of governance. A functioning, responsive, accountable public sector is needed to translate integrated policies into integrated development results. South-south cooperation and support for capacity development are needed to help developing countries absorb the best practices and innovative technologies needed to avoid carbon-heavy development paths, while also reducing poverty and inequality.

Governance is not an esoteric concept: it is something that people experience in their daily interactions with local officials and service providers. Decentralization, participation, and local engagement are needed to empower citizens to 'think globally and act locally'. UNDP promotes these values in supporting grass-roots, country-driven sustainable development processes.

Experience from implementing national strategies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and reduce poverty shows that citizen monitoring of services, budgets and infrastructure can accelerate progress towards sustainable development. Good governance—particularly in terms of enhanced accountability and transparency in service delivery—is often essential in improving access to basic services. UNDP works with over 100 countries to develop the institutional capacities that local governments and communities need to better manage local service delivery. It also helps improve public procurement systems and strengthen integrity and law enforcement institutions.

From the MDGs to the SDGs

In designing and implementing the sustainable development goals (SDGs), a focus on developing institutional capacities in programme countries will be needed to ensure—particularly in light of the economic, social, political, and cultural rights and freedoms that are promised in UN conventions. 'Rio+20' can help articulate the principles that can guide the delineation of the SDGs. To the extent possible, the SDGs should seek to monitor progress towards the universal values expressed in the UN Charter—human rights, justice, peace, security—as reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration.

Building a broader consensus for 'Rio+20'

Implementing sustainable development principles requires broad-based participation, in terms of active engagement from all three branches (legislative, judiciary, executive) of government, as well as with non-state actors (civil society and private sector). For example, when setting up voluntary national review mechanisms for sustainable development, parliamentary and civil society representatives should be included, to ensure the reviews' legitimacy and effectiveness.

'Rio+20' should also respond to the needs of vulnerable groups such as youth, women, minorities, and people with disabilities. Fostering inclusive participation and civic engagement can help shape informed opinion, influence the political agenda and discourse, and hold elected officials accountable. Toward this end UNDP helps countries to strengthen electoral laws, institutions and processes, as well as providing access to information, e-governance, and an independent media for greater civic engagement.

The private sector—via its investments, innovations, and managerial expertise—has a key role to play in promoting national transitions to sustainable development. Business environments that promote the rule of law, via clear regulations and transparency and predictability in policy making, are needed to unleash the private sector's full development potential. Carefully designed and implemented public-private partnership arrangements can help extend services to marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Global governance for sustainable development

National weaknesses in implementing sustainable development principles are often matched by deficiencies in global governance systems—as has been shown by the ongoing economic and financial crisis. 'Rio+20' should therefore help to improve development outcomes, in line with the Paris Declaration's mutual accountability principle. The monitoring mechanisms put forward in the 'Rio+20' outcome document's zero draft can help increase voluntary compliance with sustainable development commitments.

Environmental Justice in the Philippines

In 2008, UNDP and the Supreme Court recognized that, while environmental protection programmes were on-going on the Philippines, there were few avenues to ensure accountability for effective resource management, to enforce environmental laws, or to prevent environmental damage. The Supreme Court, in partnership with UNDP, therefore implemented the *Enhancing Access to the Pillars of Justice* project which included a major environmental justice component.

Under this initiative, a Forum on Environmental Justice was convened, bringing together over 600 participants to discuss the enforcement of environmental legislation. The Rules of Procedure for Environmental Cases, which were promulgated in 2011 with the Forum's support, are helping to protect the environmental rights specified in the Philippine constitution and in global conventions to which the government of the Philippines is a signatory. Specific examples of environmental protection that have been made possible by these changes include the following:

- The country's first environmental injunction was issued by the Supreme Court, in order to force the companies involved to clean up a major oil pipeline leak.

- The Supreme Court has issued a writ requiring the rehabilitation of Manila Bay, and has formed an advisory committee to monitor compliance with the writ.

- Environmental protection orders have been issued in a mining case in Surigao, and vis-à-vis coal-fired power plants in Cebu.

These decisions are helping to improve public health and environmental quality in local communities.

Examples of review processes that are accepted by Member States and serve as peer-to-peer learning mechanisms include the Universal Periodic Review, the United Nations' Convention against Corruption implementation review mechanism, and the African Peer Review Mechanism. Voluntary review mechanisms for better resource management include the Extractive Industries' Transparency Initiative and the Kimberly Process.

Tried and effective governance mechanisms to support national transitions to sustainable development exist. UNDP stands ready to help governments, companies, and civil society organizations to more effectively apply them.

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