

UNDP Corporate Policy on NHDRs

Human Development Report Office

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Foreward

The National Human Development Reports are growing into an extraordinary country-level movement for global change. From the bottom-up, they are breaking down the global targets for poverty reduction and human development into national benchmarks and action plans that enjoy increasing political attention, debate and mobilization.

Our challenge now, at the UNDP corporate level and with our partners in the wider UN system, is to retain this national political character while adding improved standards of quality and a greater emphasis on dissemination and promotion.

The NHDR Corporate Policy reinforces UNDP's commitment to the National Human Development Reports as the chief policy analysis and advocacy tools in the organization's field operations. It is also intended to inform the NHDR core teams and UNDP country offices of the high levels of excellence that can be achieved with the proper production strategies and support mechanisms.

Through a skilful combination of unapologetic scholarship and editorial independence that we must steadfastly uphold, the national and global Human Development Reports introduce strong policy recommendations for both national and international action. These reports must continue to spread alternative ideas on development that respond effectively to the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society.

Mark Malloch Brown
Administrator, UNDP

Introduction

UNDP's Business Plan, presented to the Executive Board in January 2000, confirms the status of the National Human Development Reports (NHDRs) as major pillars of the Programme's analytical and policy work. The principal objective of the reports is to raise public awareness and trigger action on critical human development concerns. The NDHRs also contribute significantly to strengthening national statistical and analytical capacity, and constitute a major vehicle for the realization of the goals set by the international community at the Millennium Summit.

Human development is the process of enlarging people's choices by expanding their capabilities to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have a decent standard of living and to participate actively in community life. This is truly development of, for and by the people. The NHDRs bring this message alive, duly reflecting specific country contexts, priorities and aspirations. They place solid analysis, from the perspective of people-centred development, at the forefront of national agendas, and they shape policies and programmes by providing options and broad recommendations on pertinent themes.

Since the first national report published in Bangladesh in 1992, the number of NHDRs has grown dramatically. Over 350 reports have now been published in some 135 countries. The NHDRs are national reports not only in the sense that they are country-based, but also because they are the culmination of inclusive consultations that help to build consensus among national stakeholders. The publication of the reports themselves is the centre-piece of a dynamic process that involves participatory preparation, extensive dissemination and advocacy, sustained follow-up and impact monitoring.

There is a two-way link between the NHDRs and the global Human Development Report (HDR). Through the NHDRs, UNDP brings to national policy debate many of the concepts and methodologies that have been tested in the global reports, as well as in national and subnational human development initiatives. Similarly, the analysis and recommendations of the NHDRs enrich the global debate championed by the HDR with practical local perspectives. Well-targeted subregional and regional HDRs can serve as a useful bridge between country initiatives and global advocacy.

Whereas a good number of NHDRs have achieved impressive results in terms of the quality of their analysis and the relevance of their recommendations, a significant number have fallen short of desirable standards. Inadequate attention to aspects of the NHDR process beyond the publication of the reports has limited their impact.

It is now argued that there is an urgent need to learn from the experience of the past decade and to address issues related to standards of analysis, coherence, visibility and, above all, impact. The primary objective of this corporate policy is to provide an organizational framework for promoting the quality and policy relevance of the NHDRs. It reaffirms the basic principles that have characterized effective and successful NHDRs, and it identifies actions needed to ensure that the highest professional standards and level of rigour characterize the preparation, dissemination and follow-up of all NHDRs.

Within this context, the corporate policy's specific objectives are to:

- Define the essential characteristics of successful NHDR processes and clarify the roles and responsibilities of major actors who support them.
- Establish corporate standards for content, analysis, participation, inter-country exchanges, peer reviews, dissemination, sharing of best practices, follow-up and impact monitoring.
- Mobilize enhanced capacities, broader substantive support and additional resources for NHDR processes.
- Establish appropriate links between NHDR analyses and UNDP/UN system operational work.
- Provide a solid platform for strengthening the position and impact of the NHDRs as effective applied policy instruments for human development.

This document sets out broad policy principles and guidelines that will help NHDR teams and managers strive for the highest possible quality of output and process. The NHDR unit will also develop an additional set of complementary materials including a tool kit comprising checklists, guidelines, definitions, indicators and linkages with thematic areas that will provide practical guidance and quality assurance mechanisms. The kit will be regularly updated based on

new developments, best practices and feedback. These complementary materials will be readily available to all NHDR teams via the NHDR website.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr
Director, Human Development Report Office

Defining the NHDR Concept

The NHDRs present independent and objective analysis, statistics and other relevant data, applying the human development perspective to priority national concerns, emerging challenges and visions. They are powerful instruments for monitoring progress and setbacks, and they constitute a bridge between country realities and global human development concepts. As a tool for policy development, the NHDRs contribute to the identification and monitoring of national and subnational human development targets; the tracking of development gaps and their impact on constituent groups, especially the vulnerable; and the articulation and assessment of viable strategies for achieving development goals.

The NHDRs and their preparation and follow-up processes focus primarily on national policy formulation and consensus building among national stakeholders. They seek to inform decision-making in the management of national resources among the public, private and civil society sectors. By both contributing to the debate on alternative approaches and helping to develop shared visions, the reports identify new prospects for national development. When linked to development cooperation mechanisms, the NHDRs provide an analytical basis for the formulation of both national and donor support programmes that promote pro-poor change and advancement of human development.

The NHDRs are powerful instruments to address central aspects of poverty eradication and human development. As longer-term consensus-building processes at the national level, the NHDRs provide a strong platform for the articulation of development priorities and the means of sustainably addressing them. The reports are effective tools for the formulation of national development strategies and specific action plans and programmes, including those related to poverty reduction and development assistance. Furthermore, by analysing policy impacts and tracking development progress through the publication and monitoring of indicators, the NHDRs help focus attention on achieving international targets as reaffirmed in the Millennium Declaration.

The NHDRs represent a significant investment of UNDP's human and financial resources. Their preparation provides an excellent opportunity for capacity building in statistical methods, analytical skills and policy development. NHDR processes also offer a unique scope

for constituency building for human development and for UNDP.

Effective and sustainable NHDR initiatives have placed equal emphasis on the **quality of the product, the process of developing it and the follow-up.**

*The success of these NHDRs
has been underpinned by six
basic principles that include:*

- national ownership
- independence of analysis
- quality of analysis
- participatory and inclusive preparation
- flexibility and creativity in presentation
- sustained follow-up

Achieving Excellence Through Common Standards Six Basic Principles

National Ownership

The NHDRs must be country based and country driven. They must focus on country realities, and reflect well-defined national perspectives on human development in addressing priority national themes, emerging trends, opportunities and challenges. They must promote national policy dialogue, constructive expression of divergent views, and the identification and analysis of development alternatives. They should serve to build consensus and shared visions, and also explore aspects of the regional and global context that broaden or limit national choices.

Independence of Analysis

The NHDRs require full editorial independence. While countries maintain ownership of the NHDR and help to determine the overarching research priorities of the publication, the authors of the report must exercise full editorial independence and objective analysis. This ensures that the NHDRs present accurate and unbiased data and analysis, rather than serving to justify a UNDP position or a particular policy of a government or political party. Editorial ownership ultimately belongs to the team of authors, selected by UNDP and its principal national partners.

Quality of Analysis

The NHDRs must be about human development. They must adopt a people-centred approach and clearly present the key concepts and principles of the human development paradigm. The NHDRs should enhance the monitoring of advances and challenges in human development by providing data that are disaggregated to identify critical disparities between different geopolitical, religious, racial, ethnic, gender, economic and other social groups. Where appropriate, the NHDRs should highlight links to relevant information and analysis in the global and regional HDRs. All of the critical dimensions of human development (longevity, knowledge, a decent standard of living, security and participation) as well as the flagship human development index (HDI) should be reflected. It is desirable, although not mandatory, for the

NHDRs to address pertinent themes of the global HDR as a chapter or, where particularly relevant, as an overall theme.

The NHDRs must be strategic. Their purpose and motivation should be clearly defined and key partners and target audiences identified. The human development perspective must be applied systematically to the selection and presentation of data and information, and it should underpin the analysis and the identification of main messages. The findings should be robust enough to serve as a sound basis for the formulation of policy options and recommendations. In some cases, particularly where urgent action is required or consensus is already emerging, implementation strategies and plans of action should accompany such recommendations. It is crucial that the NHDRs periodically review the impact of previous reports on policy within the country, and introduce policy-monitoring indicators that can be traced from year to year.

The NHDRs must be quality products. They must strive to achieve the highest possible standards in terms of the reliability of their data and the quality of their analysis. Special attention should be paid to the collection and presentation of data and the use of indicators in a manner that facilitates comparisons within and between countries and the analysis of changes over time. Key messages must be clearly underscored and disseminated to the widest possible audience. Conclusions arising from the data and the analysis should, when possible, be translated into policy options and broad recommendations that can be reviewed by policy-makers and the public at large.

The NHDRs must contain a detailed annex. This must comprise technical notes, definitions of statistical terms, and other references and materials that are relevant to the analysis and presentation of the report. The annex could also contain (if it does not appear elsewhere) a brief description on the report's preparation process and its methodology.

Participatory and Inclusive Preparation

The NHDRs must be quality processes. To have a strong impact, they must offer not only quality in analysis and presentation, but also excellence in all aspects of production and follow-up. Depending on the specific national context, a key element of the preparation should be making it as inclusive and participatory as possible. This approach recognizes that achieving human development goals depends on actions and resource allocations by a wide range of actors.

Government and government-sponsored institutions, as the main architects of public policy, are expected to engage fully in the process, although no one group should monopolize the work. The participation of other stakeholders academia, the private sector, labour, the media and the wider civil society including, where possible, local communities is equally important for the full consideration of policy options and the implementation of recommendations.

Flexibility and Creativity in Presentation

The NHDRs must be presented in a clear and user-friendly manner. They should combine techniques that have been tested through the global HDRs with approaches that are more closely attuned to local experience and expectations. National context should largely determine content, form and the analytical requirements of the chosen theme. Creativity is called for in preparing a product that is relevant and readily accessible to key target audiences. Tables, graphs, figures, boxes and pictures should complement the text and analysis. Strict editorial independence will ensure technical and factual accuracy.

The NHDRs should use terms and a style that are readily accessible to all audiences. They should be prepared in the main national working language. Key sections or summaries containing main messages, findings and recommendations should be translated into other local languages as well as into English

Sustained Follow-up

The NHDRs require extensive dissemination. A clear communications strategy that promotes the messages of the NHDR is the most effective way to reach as large an audience as possible. Elaborate media events and high—profile launch activities preferably involving representatives of government, policy makers, parliamentarians, the private sector and civil society should be followed by proactive dissemination, including through market mechanisms . The main messages of the report should reach critical segments of society such as educational and research institutions, development policy centres, development NGOs, the donor community and the public at large.

The NHDRs must be timely and produced at regular intervals. Placing all aspects of human development at the centre of national policy debates requires a high quality product

produced at regular intervals, with a sustained effort and adequate preparation time. A cycle of one to two years should become the norm, and should be accompanied by efforts to ensure that the NHDRs are produced and released on schedule.

The NHDRs must be monitored. An integral part of the NHDR process involves designing appropriate strategies and tools for the effective monitoring of the report's policy and operational impacts. Indicators established within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the corporate Strategic Results Framework (SRF) can measure some outcomes and provide competent feedback on areas requiring improvements. In addition, NHDR teams should systematically review their own previous editions as well as the global HDRs in terms of their impact on policy and the national development agenda and their contributions to progress made towards global development targets, including those set out by the Millennium Summit.

The NHDRs must make use of quality data. As part of a broader process of supporting national debate on policy, the preparation of the NHDRs contributes to the strengthening of the quantity and quality of national human development statistics. In their analysis and use of statistics and data, NHDR processes help to identify gaps in statistics, review the reliability of data, revisit questionable data, generate demand for new indicators and strengthen statistics that can be fed into the global HDR. UNDP programme resources can help enlarge the capacity of national statistical institutions for the collection and analysis of data.

Providing Effective Support to NHDR Processes

Mechanisms for Raising Quality

National ownership and broad public participation should ensure that the NHDRs respond to local needs and expectations. At the same time, UNDP must encourage and facilitate the attainment of the highest standards of excellence in terms of data and analysis. Appropriate quality control measures are complemented by:

- **Briefing and training** of country teams, early in the preparation process, through participatory workshops and courses on human development concepts, principles and instruments. Involving all key stakeholders, these sessions should be combined with brainstorming on the application of human development approaches to the specific themes selected for the NHDR. The core programmes of the UNDP-sponsored Virtual Development Academy should contribute directly to the understanding and application of human development methodologies.
- **Sharing of experiences** through the global NHDR network. The Knowledge Network of the Subregional Resource Facility (SURF) system within the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP) is being expanded to include the coordinators and principal authors of the NHDRs. Regional and national networks, linked to the global hub, are encouraged to facilitate exchanges in cooperation with Country Offices, the BDP SURF network and Regional Bureaux, and to engage in discussions on emerging themes and critical process issues. Smaller groups can focus on shared human development challenges, such as those arising from conflict, complex emergencies, political and economic transition, high debt burdens or special geographical situations.
- **Identification and dissemination of best practices.** This is a primary function of the HDRO, through its strengthened Corporate NHDR Unit. The Unit is expanding incentives, such as the NHDR excellence awards scheme introduced in 2000, to recognize the outstanding achievements of NHDR country teams and Country Offices in all practices, including monitoring and policy impact. Guidelines, toolkits and best

practices are available through publications and a website.

- **Peer review** between members of national core teams and UNDP Country Offices, both within and between regions. This offers a unique opportunity for those maintaining an understanding of the human development approach in one country to contribute to NHDR processes in other nations.
- **Independent review.** An international resource and referral group, drawn from among leading development experts, will ensure that quality national analysis benefits fully from an international perspective and relevant experience elsewhere. This process will also provide independent advice to national teams on specific subjects.

There are several sources of support for these mechanisms, including national and regional centres, regional programmes, the BDP and the HDRO. Existing links between the HDRO, the BDP and Regional Bureaux are being strengthened to maximize coordinated assistance for Country Offices and NHDR teams.

Core NHDR Teams and UNDP Country Offices

Quality NHDR products and processes depend on the initiative, commitment and capacity of **national core teams** to relate human development concepts and principles to local conditions. The core teams should reflect the highest substantive and analytical capacity and feature broad representation from among stakeholders. Comprising the advisory board, steering committee members, researchers, analysts, drafters, reviewers and editors, the teams are at the centre of efforts to strengthen the NHDR process.

National human development networks, bringing together a wide spectrum of development practitioners from government and civil society, are particularly effective in ensuring broad participation and national ownership. These networks serve as mechanisms for sustained advocacy of policy recommendations and for impact monitoring. They also help to generate public interest and mobilize action. The establishment of such networks is being encouraged in all countries, along with regional networks that can foster exchanges across regions.

In close collaboration with national government, academic and/or non-governmental partners, **UNDP Country Offices** are responsible for UNDP's contribution to the production, dissemination, follow-up and financing of the NHDRs. Based on regular consultations with national, UN and international partners, Country Offices also identify issues relevant to the local situation and determine the content and frequency of publication. They select the mode of production, advise on appropriate measures to ensure editorial independence, and initiate policy debates and dialogues. Country Offices monitor the impact of the NHDRs on policy, advocacy, development planning, partnerships between civil society organizations and government, public debate and media coverage.

The UNDP System

Both the core country teams and the Country Offices must be able to count on relevant units at UNDP headquarters and in regional offices to provide readily accessible and substantive backstopping.

The **Corporate NHDR Unit**, located within the HDRO, is being strengthened in order to implement the Corporate NHDR Policy. The unit is charged with convening the global NHDR network, facilitating the exchange of information through an extended website and documenting best practices. The unit also sets guidelines; suggests new measurement tools; backstops peer reviews; conducts training workshops at global, regional and local levels; manages the NHDR awards scheme; publishes an NHDR brochure; and prepares, updates and disseminates toolkits, checklists, statistical templates and other complimentary materials.

Both **BDP** and the **Regional Bureaux** advise on process management, provide operational support and facilitate regional support groups. BDP can offer policy expertise, particularly through field-based policy specialists. The Regional Bureaux can help with tasks such as mobilizing resources, providing assistance with regional programmes and ensuring the independence of the NHDRs. Coordination of this support can strengthen the alignment of analysis, policy and advocacy.

The **BDP SURF and the Human Development Resource Centres (HDRCs)** established in several regions provide substantive support to the NHDRs; this is being further enhanced. As the BDP SURF network expands, the capacity to apply human development

concepts and methodologies will be viewed as a core competency of candidates selected as new staff. All members of the network's decentralized thematic teams must be able to: contribute to **briefing, brainstorming and training sessions** with NHDR core teams and Country Offices; provide substantive support to the NHDRs in their areas of specialization; and advise on the scope for inter-country exchanges and comparisons. Resident Representatives of each subregion must ensure that NHDR processes receive appropriate priority in BDP SURF work plans. The Knowledge Network provides additional support through an extended website, databases and substantive discussions.

As central elements in the advocacy and policy dialogue functions of UNDP, the NHDRs will be considered **core components of the corporate business plan**, the Results Oriented Annual Report (ROAR) and SRF, country office profiles, impact monitoring, resource mobilization campaigns, etc. Country Offices should draw fully on NHDR data and analysis to prepare ROARs, and to contribute to Common Country Assessments (CCAs) and country-specific UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs). A mechanism is being established, under the leadership of the Corporate NHDR Unit, to **monitor the implementation of corporate policy on the NHDRs**.

Linking the NHDRs to UNDP and UN System Plans and Programmes

The participatory nature of the NHDR process represents a major opportunity for contributors to offer input to UN system-wide programming. Although the NHDRs are not specifically designed to guide UN cooperation programmes, they are instruments for strategic partnership. The analysis and policy options provided in the reports can contribute to the analytical underpinnings of the operational programmes of UNDP (including UNDP-administered funds) and other development partners.

At all stages of NHDR preparations, starting with the identification of the theme, UNDP will actively consult with the UN system on the specific contributions the reports can make to the common purposes defined in the Millennium Declaration, the CCAs, country-specific UNDAFs and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP).

In particular, there are two key mutually reinforcing links between the NHDRs and the CCAs/UNDAFs:

- The NHDRs' analysis and indicators provide critical inputs into the preparation of the CCA/UNDAF instruments; and
- The priorities set out in the CCA/UNDAF provide a strong basis for subsequent NHDRs to monitor the impact of options, strategies and interventions, and to report on results achieved.

To ensure appropriate synergy between the NHDRs and UN/UNDP programming processes, core members of NHDR teams and/or national human development networks should be associated in a consultative capacity with UNDP or the UN system. This kind of association can also be explored with national and regional programmes benefiting from international cooperation. In return, these programmes would provide substantive support to the NHDR process by contributing to capacity enhancement in the critical areas of human development programming, statistical assessments and policy analysis.

UNDP's Regional Bureaux, BDP policy advisers, the SURF network and the Corporate NHDR Unit play important roles in supporting both the Country Offices and national core teams in translating the findings of the NHDRs into tangible recommendations for UNDP and the UN.