

HD INSIGHTS

HDR Networks May

2007 Issue 8



Evaluating the NHDR System

Carl Riskin, Distinguished Professor of Economics, Queens College, CUNY

The NHDR system

Over the last 15 years, more than 550 national human development reports (NHDRs) and sub-national reports have been produced in over 135 countries. Containing many disaggregated human development data available nowhere else, these reports have also delved more deeply into national and local human development conditions than would be possible for a global instrument. The first evaluation of the NHDR system as a whole was completed in 2006, by UNDP's Evaluation Office. The evaluation found that the programme had substantial achievements to its credit, even given its relatively short duration and the meager resources available to it. There were also some issues uncovered that called for further attention.

Have the NHDRs accomplished the objectives they set out to achieve?

Three basic objectives, listed in order of increasing difficulty of achievement, have motivated the production of NHDRs: 1) to raise public awareness and trigger action on critical human development concerns; 2) to strengthen national statistical and analytic capacity to assess and promote people-centred development; and 3) to shape policies and programmes by providing options and broad recommendations based on concrete analysis. The evaluation found that in virtually all countries reviewed, the first objective was achieved and the concept of human development had become firmly ensconced in national dialogue about development. In many countries, progress had been made with regard to the second objective, as well.

The third objective is the most difficult to achieve, because it requires ever deeper understanding of key political, economic and social barriers to human development in the national or sub national context, as well as skill and imagination in fashioning effective policy options to surmount these barriers. Yet even here significant progress has occurred, as NHDRs have moved from simply describing the national status of HD in the early years, to taking on intractable issues that loom large in their national circumstances. The need for such analysis is essentially unending, which is why the NHDR, uniquely suited to undertake it, will never lack a mission.

What are some of the key challenges the NHDR system faces?

Strengthening support for NHDRs. The centrality of the NHDR is not everywhere recognized. In some countries, with the proliferation within the UNDP country office of other instruments, reports, tasks, and programmes, NHDRs were put on a back burner once their initial novelty wore off. This is a problem whose solution begins with greater recognition both at UNDP headquarters and in the country office of the core importance of the NHDRs to the UNDP mission. In addition, the division of labour and the synergies between the NHDR and the myriad other instruments that UNDP deals with, such as the Millennium Development Goals Report and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, need to be identified and operationalized by HQ and within the country offices. NHDR teams should promote full involvement of the UN Country Teams in the process of report preparation. Finally, sufficient human and material resources should be made available to implement the NHDR programme on a regular basis.

Frequency. What does "regular basis" mean, in practical terms? In some countries, the attempt to produce NHDRs one after another has given rise to "report fatigue" while in others, many years have gone by between reports, which has greatly diminished their relevance to ongoing policy making. The evaluation team concluded that a report every two years, possibly every three, was optimal, depending on the circumstances of the country office.

National Ownership. Fullest possible involvement of each country's government, civil society organizations and people in the planning, production and dissemination of the NHDR is a key to its effectiveness and success. Yet UNDP must remain responsible for the quality, objectivity and independence of the Reports. The relationship between these two fundamental objectives can be a delicate one that requires sensitive and imaginative leadership by the country office.

Revisit themes. Many early NHDRs took up very basic topics in their early years-poverty, inequality and gender, for instance - and then went on to other things. There is value in taking a second and even third look at the most basic and important issues, in order to check progress in dealing with them in light of changed circumstances, deepen the analysis of a particular issue and/or develop a more creative approach to it.

Disaggregate statistics by important socioeconomic categories. Disaggregating HD statistics has proved an important tool for tracking inequalities. While the most common kind of disaggregation has been geographic, it is important to tackle statistically as well such issues as gender, class, race, caste or ethnicity, where these are important determinants of differential human development outcomes.

Improve monitoring. One naturally wants to know whether past treatment of important human development issues and their solutions has given rise to any positive change. Yet systematic monitoring of the results of past NHDRs is a weak link in the NHDR system. Country offices should build such systematic monitoring into their NHDR system and make the results publicly available.

Improve public access to the NHDRs. Public access to NHDRs has been a problem in some countries. Copies should be readily available in the public domain. UNDP country offices should post their NHDRs on their website, which has not been done in a surprising number of countries. The Human Development Report Office has been promoting efforts to make new reports available online, a locus of information that is becoming increasingly important.

The Way Forward

In response to this Evaluation, UNDP management has agreed on a number of steps for addressing the findings. These steps will be discussed with the HDR network during the coming months.

The NHDR is a vehicle for the deep penetration of human development issues at the national and sub-national levels. With substantial achievements already in hand, the NHDR system can be made even more effective in promoting the human development goal.

Some general sources:

1. Burd-Sharps, Sarah, Sharmila Kurukulasuriya and Elham Seyedsayamdost, 'HDR 2003 Discussion Series: MDGRs and NHDRs-Ensuring Complementarity and Avoiding Duplication' New York: UNDP

[Click here](#)

2. United Nations Development Programme, Evaluation of the National Human Development Report System 2006
New York: UNDP/EO

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3. United Nations Development Programme, UNDP Corporate Policy on NHDRs 2001 New York: UNDP/HDRO

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4. United Nations Development Programme, HDR Toolkit 2003 New York: UNDP/HDRO

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