

**National Human Development Reports and
Millennium Development Goal Reports:
Mutually Supportive Exercises**

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“The idea [for MDG Reports] derives in part from UNDP's very successful National Human Development Reports.”

Speech of Mark Malloch Brown, 3 June 2002

INTRODUCTION: How many reports can we handle?

The number of reports being produced by the United Nations at the national level is proliferating. In quite a few UNDP Country Offices, the same people are tasked with the responsibility of coordinating and/or contributing to the preparation of MDGRs, CCAs, UNDAFs, NHDRs and, in countries where they are required, PRSPs. This proliferation of reports is, in many cases, straining the capacity and resources of these offices. However, it is important to find the areas where these reports are complementary, where overlap can be eliminated and where the consultations, data collected or experiences gained in preparation for one can reinforce or even be used for the other. In the best of cases, synergies and strategic collaboration can result in improved products on all sides.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on two of these reports, MDGRs and NHDRs. The paper will discuss their principal purposes, identify areas of overlap and complementarity and look at ways in which each can reinforce and contribute to improving the other.

MDG REPORTS: Keeping the world's eyes on human poverty

The Millennium Development Goals are not new goals, but the universal political support they enjoy holds promise for forging a new spirit of commitment and greater global partnerships on measurable targets. MDG Reports, by tracking progress at the country level towards achieving the goals, are intended as **advocacy tools for raising awareness, building alliances and galvanizing commitment**. As such, their principal role is as a public advocacy document containing simple, non-technical language. Their target audiences are the media, top decision makers and the general public.

MDGRs CAN CONTRIBUTE TO:

- Renewed attention to human poverty issues in general by highlighting achievements and identifying gaps
- Supporting countries to define national goals and targets
- Identifying improved and/or new collection of indicators, harmonizing definitions of indicators, increasing ability to compare data over time
- Contributing towards building national capacity to benchmark and assess progress
- Mobilizing international support for human poverty reduction at the country level
- Mobilizing the UN Country Team around a common agenda
- Provoking in-depth analysis on human poverty reduction including costing of resources required to reach targets

NATIONAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS: Challenging priorities and defining solutions

NHDRs are intended as **policy advocacy documents with the principal objective of stimulating public debate and triggering policy action for human development.** NHDRs are a unique, nationally owned product that, through a process of consultation and research, build consensus on pressing development issues at the national level and present alternative people-centered policy responses on these issues. Their main audience varies from country to country, but ultimately it is policymakers at all levels and those who hold policymakers accountable for development progress.

NHDRs CAN CONTRIBUTE TO:

- Helping countries determine their own priorities and set long-term development agenda
- Promoting debate on alternative approaches to achieve national goals
- Bringing political attention to difficult but critical issues
- Situating national HD progress within the regional and international context
- Identifying underlying power relationships and structural issues that constrain HD progress, and proposing a more conducive institutional framework
- Presenting innovative and disaggregated data in terms of gender, regional, ethnicity, race-based and other disaggregations
- Building national capacity: to monitor and assess progress, to collect improved, and new quantitative data on human development and qualitative data reflecting people's opinions and aspirations.
- Costing a nation's long-term priorities and vision
- Examining the *quality* of progress on certain input indicators

MDGRs and NHDRs: Avoiding duplication, achieving synergy

In the attempt to measure something as complex as the human condition and the state of human development, a number of indicators have been selected by the Human Development Report. Although the indicators of the MDGs do not correspond directly to traditional HD indicators, they are nonetheless consistent with human development and are a very useful contribution to benchmarking human development towards 2015.

With regard to the relationship between these two reports, it is clear from the section above, that MDGRs and NHDRs are qualitatively different products that nonetheless address similar topics, draw on similar data and employ similar processes for national ownership. Many countries have seized upon these synergies and mutually-reinforcing processes to produce them. In order to monitor MDGs, the MDGRs are highly dependent on data presented in NHDRs, which in many cases are a critical depository of the latest, most innovative and disaggregated data at the country level.

The following are some areas for consideration for avoiding duplication and achieving synergy:

A) CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework used in the NHDRs is that of human development. MDGRs do not have a conceptual framework. They track progress of countries towards a group of time-bound goals. These goals reflect some aspects of human development in terms of enhancement of human capabilities, but they do not reflect a number of other dimensions of human development. For example, the MDGs do not contain goals related to human security or participation, essential elements related to human choices and thus to human development.

B) NATIONAL OWNERSHIP

A recent speech by the UNDP Administrator, quoted above, states that the idea for the MDG Reports came in part from the successful experience of NHDRs. While the content of these reports is different, there are two principles which they hold in common: national ownership and the outreach and communications effort necessary to bring them to life as advocacy tools – NHDRs for policy advocacy and MDGRs for awareness advocacy.

In both the ownership and the advocacy, the experience of producing NHDRs over the years have sharpened UNDP's skills in these areas, and in some cases, contributed to structures and experiences which can be drawn upon for the MDGRs. The ability to do this will vary from country to country, depending on the process already established by NHDRs. But UNDP is encouraged to share expertise gained, with the MDGR team.

Another area of synergy is the role each report plays in contributing to development agenda-setting. With so many different processes ongoing, many of which contribute to discussion, monitoring or prioritizing of national goals, (and even contribute to competing pressures and ideologies), there will inevitably be overlap. In order to harmonize priorities for human poverty reduction, UNDP is in a key role to actively connect these processes and promote joint reflection to avoid confusion and uncoordinated priorities.

There is also a new element in the process of MDGRs, the involvement of the UN Country Team. This new element can, in turn, contribute to the NHDR process in some countries. If human development is to grow in influence as an ideal and an approach, it must not be overly constrained by the exigencies of agency "branding". NHDR scholarship in a number of countries has benefited significantly from the surveys and data, experiences and knowledge contained within other UN agencies, and MDG processes can offer an opportunity to draw more profoundly on this wealth of resources. In some countries, such as in Namibia several years ago, the NHDR has also been produced by the UN Country Team.

C) DATA

The momentum being generated by MDGs is, in a number of countries, resulting in greater attention to and resources for the collection and analysis of data needed for HD policymaking. This presents a huge opportunity for NHDRs. Every effort must be made to take advantage of new or improved data sets and new skills and tools for monitoring and analyzing these data. This must be done through coordination and dialogue between MDGR and NHDR teams. It is also an opportunity for NHDR teams to advocate with national statistics offices and others, for the type of statistics needed for strong HD analysis—not all of which are among the set required for an MDGR. This

can include, among many others, indicators which assess not just *quantity* (i.e. school enrolment rates), but also *quality* (standardized test scores, dropout rates, etc.)

NHDRs, in turn, are a vital complement to MDG indicators. Too much is hiding behind national averages. Indeed, there is even a danger in some countries that the haste to reach MDG targets will be achieved through the strategy of helping those closest to the target (the “low hanging fruit”), leaving behind the most vulnerable and difficult to reach. As so many NHDRs have illustrated, disaggregating national averages by gender, ethnic group, age cohort, etc., enables an analysis of the causes of deprivation and poverty and the formulation of far more effective strategies. Disaggregations also reveal systemic discrimination and other serious deprivations.

D) POLICY STRATEGIES AND ANALYSIS:

MDGRs show the unfinished path in human poverty. An NHDR provides recommendations on how a country can walk that path.

MDGRs call attention to a country’s progress with respect to a set of national goals. This opens space for discussion of the strategies required to reach these goals, generating renewed interest in the type of debate, analysis and ideas that are part of the NHDR process. Increasingly NHDRs are addressing one sector or theme in-depth. This analysis enables a country to move from the very general set of goals that form the MDGRs, to policy priorities in key sectors that can contribute to achievement of these goals.

Another area of synergy is in the need to situate the MDGs within a broader context than just the country level. While Millennium Development goal #8 does acknowledge issues of debt, quotas and subsidies, a far more thorough discussion of these issues is needed to understand the international context within which a country is seeking to reach national targets. This context is often understated in MDGRs. How will debt servicing constrain a country’s ability to reach the MDGs? What affect will changes in agricultural and textile quotas or subsidies in industrialized countries have on a country’s exports? What long term strategies should be adopted nationally to position a country in our globalized world? These issues and more should be raised in MDGRs, and can be tackled in-depth in NHDRs.

E) OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY:

Both reports are meant to trigger debate and stimulate action. Therefore, a UNDP office must consider carefully timing for launching and promoting messages of each Report, especially when they are both available in the same time period. In some cases, joint campaigns may be effective. In others, it may be best to have two opportunities to draw attention to human development and poverty reduction. Whichever path is chosen, the experience gained by UNDP in launching and advocating for human development through NHDRs, are a valuable resource for the MDG Campaign. Through their participatory process, NHDRs have built networks of individuals and institutions deeply committed to the process of enlarging human choices, and to acting as advocates for this philosophy. UNDP should draw on these experiences and networks for its MDG promotion and campaign role.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that in some cases, new and old report processes are straining already thinly-stretched resources within UNDP. The above is an attempt to clarify differences, identify complementarity and build on existing strengths.