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# Review of National Human Development Reports

A Background Paper

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# Review of National Human Development Reports

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## *Abbreviations*

GDI	Gender-related Development Index
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
HD	Human Development
HDI	Human Development Index
HDN	Human Development Network
HDRO	Human Development Report Office
HPI	Human Poverty Index
NGOs	
NHDRs	National Human Development Reports
RBAP	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

SHD  
M.P.

Sustainable human development  
Madhya Pradesh (Indian state)

## Preface

Since the publication of the first global Human Development Report (HDR) in 1990, more than 90 countries have published National Human Development Reports (NHDRs); and many more are in the process of doing so. Of the 24 countries in RBAP:

- • *Two* countries have published more than one NHDR. The UNDP office in Bangladesh has the distinction of publishing 6 in a row starting in 1993. Philippines has published 2 (1994 and 1997).
- • *Six* countries have published their first NHDRs: China, Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.
- • *Eleven* countries are in the process of finalizing their first NHDR: Bhutan, Indonesia, Iran, the Indian state of Gujarat, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
- • *Two* regional South Asia Regional Human Development Reports (1997 and 1998) have been prepared by the Human Development Centre in Islamabad, Pakistan; and a third one is under preparation. The Pacific Islands have released one HDR for the sub-region, and are in the process of preparing the second report.

The Administrator of UNDP in his communication of April 1998 has urged every Country Office to facilitate the production of a NHDR with regular periodicity. He states:

“National Human Development Reports have come to play an increasingly important role in UNDPs advocacy and programming for SHD...Given the importance of the National Human Development Reports, there is a need to build capacity at all levels to further improve their content.”

The effectiveness of the NHDRs, to a large extent, depends upon:

- • the substantive content and analysis
- • the preparation process adopted
- • the dissemination strategy (for the main messages); and,
- • the follow-up activities (monitoring and sustained advocacy)

This Review of the NHDRs explores some of the strategic considerations surrounding these issues. It attempts to:

- • present a comparative analysis of different aspects of NHDRs;
- • identify common issues for strengthening impact; and,
- • promote strategic thinking on improving effectiveness

This review should be useful to both UNDP and to authors of NHDRs. It is based on published and working drafts of NHDRs of the region. We have also read a few earlier reviews of NHDRs. In addition, discussions with a wide range of people within and outside UNDP have contributed to enriching the contents of this paper. Constructive suggestions received from participants at the Asia and Pacific region during the meeting in Seoul between 6-8 July have also been incorporated.

Ms. Deborah E. Murphy played a key role in the preparation of this Paper, reviewing and analyzing the NHDRs, offering several suggestions and sharpening the focus. Ms. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr of the HDRO and Ms. Saraswathi Menon of RBAP provided extremely valuable suggestions and comments on earlier versions. We have also benefited from discussions with other UNDP colleagues including Ove Bjerregaard, Hakan Bjorkman, Selim Jahan, Kirit Parikh and Nadia Rasheed.

## 1. Content Analysis of the NHDRs

In this Section, we have examined the NHDRs for their (1) objectives (2) treatment of the concept of human development, (3) description of the state of human development, and (4) use of data and human development indices.

### 1.1 Objectives of the NHDRs

In almost all cases, the principal objective of the first NHDR has been to provide a comprehensive picture of the state of human development (HD). Subsidiary objectives have been to:

- • introduce the concept and explain the importance of human development
- • advocate for shifts in policy
- • recommend public action that enhances human development, and
- • specify policy options.

Table 1: Illustrative list of stated objectives of NHDRs

NHDRs (year)	Objectives
Cambodia (1997)	(1) (1) provide a factual overview of HD to facilitate planning, programming, resource allocation; and thus fill a major lacuna (2) (2) focuses primarily on social sectors and poverty; reports will address other issues
China (1997)	(1) (1) give a comprehensive account of the status of HD (2) (2) explain how that status has come about by reference to particular conditions of China, and to the development strategies and policies followed by government over the years since the People's Republic was established in 1949, and especially since the transition from central planning to a market economy began in the late 1970s (3) (3) examine in some detail the issue of poverty as it pertains to China
Gujarat, India (1997) <i>Draft</i>	(1) (1) assess the pattern of economic growth in order to evaluate its sustainability and links to HD (2) (2) study the achievements of HD in the major sectors such as

	<p>health, education and the social sectors</p> <p>(3) (3) measure HD at the district level and to understand dynamics of inter-district variations</p> <p>(4) (4) draw inferences for future action and to expedite process HD</p> <p>(5) (5) examine existing data systems to measure HD, to identify critical gaps and to suggest measures to fill in these gaps</p>
Madhya Pradesh India (1995)	<p>(1) (1) present the state of HD in the districts of M.P.</p> <p>(2) (2) draw up a district wise HDI</p> <p>(3) (3) provide a database of outcomes to set HD goals and targets</p> <p>(4) (4) outline the social content of state government initiatives</p>
Mongolia (1997)	<p>(1) (1) assess Mongolia's state of HD</p> <p>(2) (2) identify changes, impact on people's well-being and challenges imposed by transition</p> <p>(3) (3) discuss potential pitfalls of neglecting HD</p>
Nepal (1998)	<p>(1) (1) provide delineate issues critical for promoting HD</p>
Republic of Korea (1998) <i>draft</i>	<p>(1) (1) provide policy advice and stimulate public discussion on sustainable human development issues</p> <p>(2) (2) analyze Korea's successful poverty alleviation strategies over the past 50 years</p>

### Considerations for second and subsequent NHDRs

It is however useful to separate the objectives of the first HDRs from those of the subsequent Reports. The global HDRs have opted for a different theme each year chosen carefully after much strategic discussion.

<b>Global HDRs:</b>	
<i>Year</i>	<i>Theme</i>
1990	1990 Concept and measurement of human development
1991	1991 Financing HD
1992	Global dimensions of HD
1993	People's participation
1994	New dimensions of human security
1995	Gender and HD
1996	Economic growth and HD
1997	HD to eradicate poverty

So far, only two countries in the region have prepared more than one NHDR. Bangladesh, with 6 published annual reports, visualized the NHDRs as a series “intended to contribute to a better understanding of the processes of change underlying sustainable HD as well as encourage broad public debate on key themes and topics.” Bangladesh HDRs discuss the following themes:

Bangladesh	
1992	Local action
1993	Decentralization for local action
1994	Environment
1996	Poverty
1997 and 1998	Sustainable livelihoods

In the Philippines, the NHDRs hope to “provide fresh impetus not only to the discussions regarding sustainable human development, but more importantly to the efforts toward that end by both government and NGOs at all levels. Thus it constitutes another major step towards achieving our twin objectives of stimulating interest in the use of HDI and related tools of analysis at all levels and encouraging every community to formulate strategies for expanding the opportunities to people.” The role of the 1997 Philippines NHDR was also to influence government programmes and the authors hope the findings and recommendations of the Report find their way into legislative and executive action.

Philippines	
1994	Governance
1997	Gender and human development

Selection of NHDR themes has enormous strategic relevance. It appears that themes are best identified locally and contextually. Several factors could influence the selection of themes. However, as countries proceed to prepare periodic NHDRs, it may be useful to select a theme or subject:

- • that has the “maximum” relevance to the country or region
- • that has been discussed in the global reports (as this offers an analytical framework)
- • over which UNDP and other collaborators can have a policy influence
- • that can be monitored

We would specifically like to emphasize the importance of the process adopted for selection of the theme itself as an critical factor influencing the outcome of the NHDRs. Discussions with a cross-section of opinion-makers to identify the theme

are useful. Involvement of these people helps to inform others as well of the preparation of the NHDR. It also helps with follow-up advocacy and monitoring after the report is released.

## **1.2 Treatment of the HD concept**

The concept of human development (HD), first introduced in HDR 1990, has evolved over the years - and is still getting refined. A background note prepared by the Human Development Report Office states:

*“Human development is defined as a process of enlarging choices. Every day people make various choices, some pertaining to economic areas, some to political and some to social and cultural arenas. Some of these choices are basic to human life. The choice of a long and healthy life, the choice of being knowledgeable, and the choice of having a decent standard of living are fundamental for human beings. It does not mean that other choices are less important. The choice with regard to political participation, cultural diversities, human rights and freedoms are also very important aspects of human life. But the basic choices are critical because once they are met, they pave the way for other choices.”*

The same document goes on to explain the concept.

*“Human development is thus development of the people, for the people and by the people. Development of the people means enhancing human capabilities of human beings through education, training, better health care, shelter and nutrition. It is thus equivalent to human resources development. Development for the people implies that the development is not pursued for development’s sake only, the fruits of economic growth and development must be translated into the lives of people. The process is not automatic. It needs careful management of policies. Development by the people refers to the process in which people become not only beneficiaries of development but they take an active part in it. They participate in the decisions that affect their lives. Thus the nutrition of human development is a more holistic concept of development.”(contained in the folder circulated for the meeting), HD is a process of widening people’s choices and human capabilities. The most critical are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated, and to enjoy a decent standard of living. Additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self-respect. Income, in the HD framework, is an important means and is instrumentally significant for improving the quality of people’s lives.”*

More detailed elaboration on different dimensions of human development - equality, sustainability, empowerment, and participation - is available in the various HDRs.

The concept of human development is not entirely new. The notion has appeared in one form or the other in the writings of different philosophers and thinkers. But over the years, especially among economists, progress began to be perceived overwhelmingly as an expansion of incomes (or per capita GDP) rather than an expansion of human capabilities. As a result, greater attention has been paid to economic expansion (of incomes) than to improvements in people's lives. The human development approach attempts to bring back people into the centre-stage of development. Instead of people being woven around development, the approach calls for development being woven around people. The HD approach also pays special attention to (1) poverty and deprivations in human lives; (2) inequalities in the distribution of not only income and wealth, but also opportunities - economic, social, cultural and political; and (3) the inter-dependence between economic, historical, demographic, social, cultural and political developments. This has important implications for assessment of policy interventions. Success or failure of development policies is not evaluated in terms of income growth, but is assessed in terms of the improvements to people's lives.

One of the principal objectives of the NHDRs is to encourage countries to adopt the human development approach. Explaining what precisely this means is in itself a major function of the NHDRs. Even though the term "human development" has over the years acquired a distinctive meaning, the concept is still not completely well understood by many people. It therefore becomes necessary for the NHDRs to strongly reinforce the concept and approach.

Most NHDRs mention and discuss the concept of HD but the treatment varies enormously. Some are able to effectively convey the essence of the HD approach. Others merely mention HD without explaining what it means. In some other instances, the concept of HD is explained in a box. This may well be sufficient especially if the concept is then woven into the rest of the text. A few NHDRs have devoted several pages to a discussion of HD - the concept, its evolution, and even its limitations and critiques.

Reviewing the way the concept of HD is handled in the reports, we wish to highlight the following:

- • Reiterating the concept of HD in NHDRs is important. It is necessary to explicitly describe and explain what HD means, not only in the first NHDR but in subsequent reports as well. It may seem repetitive but then each year the Reports may also attract new readers.
- • It is important to adapt and relate dimensions of HD to the country-context; and not merely present extracts from the global HDRs. More effective reports tend to contextualize HD - making it relevant to the country situation and justifying the importance of adopting the HD approach. It is important not to restrict discussions of HD to only health, education and nutrition and to link the discussions to the prevailing political and economic situation.

- • In writing the report, authors need to be careful about use of terminology. Some of the most common mistakes are: (1) to confuse human development and human resource development; and (2) the failure to distinguish between economic, social and human development; (See background note prepared by HDRO).

### **1.3 Description of the state of human development**

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the NHDRs has been to present a comprehensive picture of the state of human development in the country. The NHDRs pull together data on different dimensions of human development seldom found in one place or in any one report. To a large extent, this is what makes the NHDRs unique. The range of topics covered in descriptions of the state of HD varies widely from country to country (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Illustrative list of topics covered under the State of Human Development in the NHDRs**

Health
Nutrition
Education
Income
Employment
Environment
Gender
Economic profile
Growth
Expenditure patterns
Income poverty
Human poverty
Descriptions of vulnerability
Disparities
Rural-urban
Female-male
Inter-state or province
District level
Ethnic
Culture
Polity
Decentralization
Participation
Democracy
Migration
Social institutions
Crime
Fertility
Population

Child labour  
Youth

A review of the nature and depth of information contained in the NHDRs reveal deficiencies in four areas:

- • Discussion and coverage of gender issues remains weak. There are exceptions however, particularly the thematic reports on gender by Bangladesh and the Philippines.
- • Discussion on environment similarly tends to be weak. Notable exceptions are the reports by ROK and the Indian state of Gujarat.
- • The NHDRs are generally “weak” in their discussion of economic issues - thereby reinforcing an erroneous impression that human development deals largely with health, education, and nutrition. Some Reports, such as the Myanmar HDR, however, do highlight “economic” issues as well.
- • Most NHDRs do not comment upon politically-sensitive topics such as border wars, issues of insurgency, problems of displacement of people, police excesses, crime, corruption, child prostitution, human rights violations, legal injustice, neglect of refugees, and communal disturbances. Omission of politically sensitive issues is often justified on the grounds of being tactical. If the NHDR has to be “accepted” by government, then it is perhaps prudent not to raise many such issues even though they may be extremely relevant.

We wish to point out however that:

- • It is certainly not necessary for all the topics to be covered under the description of the state of human development. Some selectivity is essential, as is creativity in presentation of the materials.
- • Inadequate treatment of subjects such as gender or environment could partly be a reflection of the paucity of relevant data. If this is the case, steps need to be taken to address the problem.
- • Many of the so-called “politically sensitive issues” may be among the central concerns affecting human security. To ignore them may therefore not be in the best interests of society. Over time, the NHDRs may have to find a way of including such topics in the discussion. One possibility is to take up discussion of such issues in a sub-regional or a regional report.

#### **1.4. Issues relating to use of HD data**

Countries in the region differ widely in terms of the availability of data on HD. Some countries have a rich and long tradition of systematic data collection on

different dimensions of human life. In other countries, the practice is relatively new; and national statistical systems are still evolving. Countries also tend to differ in terms of their ability to collect, process and analyze data. A review of the NHDRs brings out three common issues relating to the use of data on HD.

#### (i) Data gaps

There are countries where systematic data even on basic socioeconomic and demographic indicators are not readily available. To that extent, the seemingly incomplete description of the state of HD in some of the NHDRs could reflect the paucity of data on basic capabilities. However, we wish to make the following observations:

- • **National level data:** Typical sources of data that are used in the HD reports are: (1) Census reports, (2) Demographic and Health Surveys, (3) Household budget and socioeconomic surveys, (4) Expenditure analysis surveys (especially if the World Bank has made it a theme of the Country Economic Memorandum), and (5) UNICEF supported MICS surveys. However, not all countries have access to such historical and comprehensive data. Only in some countries, do we find more specialized data sources such as Agricultural Census Surveys, labour market surveys, health surveys, education surveys, etc. There are countries where data on HD, especially over time, are not readily available even at the national level. Such countries would include Bhutan, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Lao PDR where systematic data collection has started only recently. The nations of the Pacific face special problems arising out of their small population sizes.
- • **Disaggregated data:** Even where national level data are available, it is often difficult to obtain disaggregated data at the sub-national level to facilitate comparison across states and provinces, districts, rural and urban areas, ethnic communities, and ecological zones. In most countries, the problem is more acute at the sub-national levels where data are not regularly compiled, analyzed and presented as part of national reporting system.. As a result, some NHDRs are unable to discuss differentials in human achievements at the sub-national level. Again, disaggregating HD achievements by location (rural or urban, states and districts), class, race, or ethnicity becomes difficult
- • **Gender-related statistics:** The NHDRs reflect a serious shortage of gender-related data. Many times, even the basic indicators of health, education and nutrition are not available for men and women separately. Similarly, data on women's unemployment and employment patterns, wage rates, access to credit, patterns of land ownership, access to health services, etc. are not regularly reported. Only recently have some countries started giving the proportion of men and women in government jobs.
- • **Data on environment:** This is another area where there are serious gaps. Almost every NHDR notes the environmental damage being caused by rapid

urbanization or industrialization or some other phenomenon, but there is rarely any substantiation of such statements. This is largely because data are not systematically collected and reported on many critical aspects of environment that affect human lives.

- • **Data on poverty, vulnerability and inequality:** A thorough HD analysis requires that special attention be paid to poverty and inequality. Often, the only data that are available relate to income poverty - and that too only if a recent household budget survey has been conducted. Little data are available on patterns of asset holdings. Often times, even data on patterns of land holdings are not easily available. There is much less information to describe the nature of insecurity and vulnerability as well as to capture the coping strategies of the poor. Little attention is paid to human poverty; and to inequalities along other dimensions of human achievements.
- • **Data on political participation:** The HD approach gives as much importance to social and economic rights as it does to civil and political rights. However, data collection has tended to concentrate more on socioeconomic aspects of life. Typically, data that highlight achievements and deprivations in civil and political freedoms are not readily available.

## **(ii) Incomplete data**

Another dimension of data relates to its *incompleteness*. HD encompasses practically every aspect of human life. Data are needed to indicate opportunities, achievements and shortcomings along several dimensions of life - economic, social, cultural and political. The global HDRs present a wealth of information in the Statistical Appendices. An illustrative list of the Tables at the end of the global HDRs is given below:

*health and mortality*  
*education*  
*access to basic social services*  
*child survival and development*  
*women and capabilities*  
*political and economic participation*  
*food security*  
*communication*  
*employment*  
*wealth, income poverty and social investment*  
*resource flows*  
*military expenditures and resource use imbalances*  
*urbanization*  
*natural resources*  
*energy consumption*  
*national income accounts*  
*trends in economic performance*  
*violence and crime*  
*aid flows*  
*environment and pollution*  
*differentials in achievements - rural-urban, male-female, etc.*  
*social stress and social change*

The global HDRs, of course, neither use nor discuss all the data presented in these different tables in every report. The Reports are selective, and every year, they draw attention to particular data sets pertaining typically to the main theme. Nevertheless, the Tables at the end of the global HDRs are regularly presented - and are used frequently by people who want to make international comparisons.

It is useful to assess if countries can present such consolidated and comprehensive tables at the end of the NHDRs. This will require countries to re-assess their national data systems in order to identify gaps and initiate measures for improving data collection on HD. Such an exercise could also be done sub-regionally and regionally.

### **(iii) Inconsistency between global and national data**

A typical problem encountered in the use of data on HD by countries is the discrepancy between data presented in the global reports and those that are used at the national level. Such discrepancies arise due to several reasons. *First*, data used in the global HDRs are typically two years old. Thus the 1997 HDR will present the Human Development Index for 1995. More recent data are normally available at the country level, and so the computation of the Indices results in different Index values. This is a relatively minor problem; but it does affect rankings. *Second*, the UN often estimates values for indicators based on past trends or standard models. This is especially the case with demographic data and some socioeconomic data such as literacy rates. However, at times serious differences arise between the UN's estimates and those of the national governments. A case in point is Bhutan where the country has estimated its population to be around 650,000 at a time when the global HDR continues to report 1.8 million. Another area relates to estimates of maternal mortality. The global reports present estimates published by WHO-UNICEF, which in some cases are very different from national estimates. Reconciling such differences is often talked about, but the process is seldom followed through. *Third*, differences arise due to definitions that are not consistent. For example, many people in India and Bangladesh would question the accuracy of estimates showing 97% of the population in Bangladesh and 81% of the population in India as having access to safe drinking water. Similarly, many question the reliability of immunization coverage rates reported by government that seem to be at variance with coverage evaluation surveys that typically show much lower rates. Here too, the NHDRs could play a useful role in highlighting such discrepancies, or raising questions about the relevance of estimates that do not reflect ground realities.

### **Poor presentation:**

Quite apart from the absence of relevant and good quality data, many NHDRs pay insufficient attention to a proper presentation of data. Creative presentation of data is even less frequent. In several instances, we found that data sources are not mentioned, terms are not defined, and even the year to which the data pertain are not specified. Many NHDRs tend to present unprocessed data, often in tables, which only a very careful and interested reader will examine. Little attempt is made to link data to analysis and recommendations. Use of graphical and visual presentations is also limited.

### **1.5 Use of human development Indices**

The global HDRs have repeatedly emphasized that "the concept of human development is always larger than the indices used to measure it." To that extent,

human development indices do not give a comprehensive picture of the state of human development in any country. They need to be supplemented by other indicators and useful descriptions to get a broader picture of human development. It is therefore necessary to reiterate that:

- There is much more to the HDRs than the HDI itself. The richness of the Reports comes from the informational content, description, and analysis.
- The HDI is not a perfect or complete measure of HD. Several other indicators could be included, and many different statistical methods can be devised for its computation. However, if the NHDRs are to follow in the tradition of the global HDRs, then it may be best to follow the methodology used in the global reports.
- By ranking countries (or state and provinces within a country), the HDI assumes enormous political significance. The rankings show how much above or below a particular country is vis-a-vis its neighbours. And this is what pushes politicians, governments and the public to demand change.
- The HDI does not provide a sufficient measure of short-term progress or development effort.
- The HDI has to be complemented with data on other dimensions. Simple league tables ranking states or provinces are useful. It is not always necessary or useful to integrate them into an index.

The global HDRs have, over the years, introduced a number of indices to measure human development. The HDI itself, first introduced in 1990, has undergone several modifications. Again, some of the indices introduced in the global HDRs have been dropped (for example, the Human Freedom Index introduced in HDR 1991), and others have been superceded (for example, the Capability Poverty Measure introduced in HDR 1996 by the Human Poverty Index in 1997). A background note entitled "*Analytical Tools for Human Development*" prepared by the Human Development Report Office lists the core indices:

***The Human Development Index (HDI)***  
***The Human Poverty Index (HPI)***  
***The Gender-related Development Index (GDI)***  
***The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)***

In addition, the note also discusses the use of the following public expenditure ratios elaborated in HDR 1993:

***The public expenditure ratio***  
***The social allocation ratio***

***The social priority ratio***  
***The human expenditure ratio***

Similarly, the Note states that aid budgets, like government expenditures, can be examined through four ratios:

***The aid expenditure ratio***  
***The aid social-sector ratio***  
***The aid priority ratio***  
***The aid human expenditure ratio***

Apart from the global HDRs, the South Asia Human Development Report produced by the Human Development Centre, Islamabad has introduced two more indices.

***Human Deprivation Measure (HDM in 1997)***  
***Poverty of Opportunities Index (POPI in 1998)***

The Philippines 1997 HDR has introduced a new index.

***Minimum Basic Needs index (MBNI)***

The Indian State of Gujarat (1998) has proposed four new indices:

***Human Development Measure - HDM 1***  
***Human Development Measure - HDM 2***  
***Gender Development Measure - GDM 1***  
***Gender Development Measure - GDM 2***

The following four observations are made on the basis of a review of the region's NHDRs.

***(i) Treatment of HDI:*** Most countries have computed and presented the HDI values - using either the global figure or modifying some of the indicators to reflect national estimates.

The problem, however, begins with disaggregation when data on the three basic components of the HDI are not readily available at the sub-national level. NHDRs have tried to overcome this problem by using alternate indicators. For example, infant and child mortality have often substituted life expectancy at birth; and estimates of functional literacy have substituted adult literacy estimates. Where reliable estimates of gross school enrolment rates are not available, these have been dropped altogether, or replaced by the mean years of schooling. Income is by far the most problematic when it comes to disaggregation. In one instance, quality of housing has been used to replace per capita income - as a measure of access to resources needed to ensure a decent standard of living.

**(ii) Treatment of GDI and GEM:** GDI has been much more commonly computed than the GEM. Obtaining relevant and reliable data on income remains a problem with the computation of GDI. In many cases, labour surveys are not available to highlight wage differentials. Very few countries have calculated GEM. Many find the data at the disaggregated level difficult to obtain. However, few NHDRs have discussed gender inequalities and issues beyond the computation of GDI values. The Philippines NHDR on gender (1997) is an exception. In many cases, data are incomplete as they pertain only to the government or public sector. Data on employment in the private and the informal sector are not readily available.

**(iii) Treatment of HPI:** Countries have started constructing the HPI, introduced in HDR 1997, but it is difficult to disaggregate the Index below the sub-national level. Of the 5 indicators needed to construct the Index, data on adult illiteracy alone are relatively easy to obtain at the sub-national level. Data on four other indicators are not readily available at the sub-national level. These include data on:

*probability of not surviving beyond the age of 40 years*  
*percentage of population with access to health services*  
*percentage of population with access to safe water (regarded as unreliable)*  
*percentage of children under 5 who are malnourished*

As a result, countries have had to select their own substitute (or surrogate) indicators and this is often not easy.

**(iv) Introduction of new indices:** There is a danger that over the next few years, there will be a large number of variants of the HDI, GDI, GEM and HPI, especially since the Indices seem to receive a lot of political and media attention. This is rather unfortunate. Apart from the danger of resulting in diminishing returns and declining public interest, indices tend to distract attention away from many of the key issues and ideas contained in the HDRs. This is something to bear in mind. It may become necessary, as discussed earlier, to modify (or adapt) the HDI measures. In some cases, reliable national and sub-national data for the construction of indices may not be available. On the other hand, it is possible that there are better indicators available at the local level to capture the same components of the HDI. In such cases, it may help to modify the indicators that go into measuring the components of the HDI - especially if the Index becomes more useful. In some cases, the country team may wish to “enlarge” or “expand” the HDI to include many more or even different components. In all cases, it is important to justify and discuss the changes quite comprehensively,

The development of locally appropriate measures of human development is to be welcomed especially (and perhaps only) if the modified index has greater relevance for policy and public action. Even here, it may be useful to compute the global HDI values just to be able to make international comparisons. The locally modified or expanded HDI could supplement the global HDI. The consideration in these endeavours ought to be not to distract, but to draw greater attention to

deprivations in HD. It may also not be necessary to incorporate many more dimensions into the HDI, but to use complementary indices that can facilitate analysis of HD and progress along related dimensions that are not fully captured by the HDI. In any case, all new indices and measures ought to be subject to careful scrutiny. It is critical to ensure that the new measure is in conformity with the “concept” of human development.

## **1.6 Some other considerations**

Over time, as countries begin to refine their HD database, it may be useful to keep the following considerations in mind:

**Ensuring accountability.** HD data can be used to ensure accountability across a wide cross-section of society including governments, aid agencies, development partners, political parties, the corporate sector, banks, the judiciary, and NGOs. The closest that NHDRs have come is in terms of analyzing public expenditures to track budgetary allocations to the social sectors. But this too is not done systematically and regularly.

**Monitoring trends:** NHDRs can help to monitor trends in HD. But survey data are often dated by the time they are published. As a result timely feedback is not always available - and this places a serious constraint on analysis that can go into the NHDRs. More innovative methods and timely results are needed to monitor performance and progress.

**Reviewing processes:** The low levels of achievements described in the NHDRs are often a reflection of weaknesses in the processes of implementation of development programmes. However, the NHDRs are generally weak when it comes to describing the processes underlying the phenomenon of poverty and deprivations. One reason for this is the absence of reliable data on process indicators - which makes drawing inferences on what works and what do not quite difficult. This is another area that deserves further attention.

**New indicators and measures:** There are several aspects of HD where standard quantification is difficult. Innovative measures need to be developed and different methods of data collection need to be institutionalized. For example, surveys may be necessary to capture people’s priorities and perceptions (like the Bangladesh study), or to assess changes in women’s empowerment, or even to capture changes in levels of people’s participation. At the family level, there could be several intra-family dimensions that are important to examine and monitor. It is important for social scientists and statisticians working on NHDRs to explore some of these dimensions more thoroughly in order to improve the richness of future NHDRs.

## 2. Strengthening analysis

Several reviews of NHDRs have pointed to the need for strengthening analysis. This should surely remain an aspirational goal at all times. Some readers of NHDRs, and especially those who are familiar with the country settings, react to the NHDRs by asking the following questions: So what? What is new? Why is the situation so bad? What can be done? To a large extent, such reactions reflect weaknesses in analysis.

Reviewing the NHDRs leads us to make the following observations:

- 1) 1) The relevance of the NHDRs can be improved if:
  - • data on human development are presented clearly and creatively
  - • opinions are backed by data and analysis
  - • evidence is presented on what works and what does not - and why
  - • the advantages and limitations of various options are discussed
  - • implications of choices are spelt out clearly
  - • the main messages are limited and expressed forcefully
  
- 2) 2) The quality of the NHDRs depends upon the availability of appropriate data on human development, the quality of data analysis, the type of description that accompanies the presentation of data and, the extent to which causal linkages are drawn and established. Most NHDRs present recent data on different aspects of HD. But, some of the NHDRs do not go beyond merely presenting data. They often fail to (1) examine historical trends in HD; (2) link the present state of HD to the economic or political context; (3) identify and establish causal inter-connections; and (4) prioritize or contextualize the main dimensions of HD.
  
- 3) 3) A “right” balance is needed between data and description. Many of the NHDRs are data driven. But it is equally important for good description to complement the data. Often the NHDRs fail to describe effectively the conditions of people, or capture the gravity of the situation within the country. The excessive focus on data also tends to over-shadow description of many dimensions of HD that cannot be quantified.

### How to strengthen analysis?

Part of the answer to strengthening analysis lies in addressing the shortcomings identified above. To reiterate the main points, data and description assume greater relevance when:

- • more and better information are presented on neglected dimensions of HD

- trends along key dimensions are analyzed especially for their impact on the poor; and on inequalities
- the description is contextualized - linked to current economic and political developments
- real examples and illustrations are provided to highlight the conditions
- causal linkages are identified and established pointing to areas where interventions are needed

But above all, the theme and analysis must have policy relevance.

### **Why does analysis remain weak?**

It is difficult to read the NHDRs and surmise why some of the Reports lack sufficient analysis. There could be several reasons, some of which are listed below:

***Strategic considerations:*** In some countries, it may be a carefully thought-out strategic decision to limit the scope of the first NHDR to (a) conveying what is meant by HD and (b) describing (without being overly critical) the HD situation - highlighting aspects of poverty and inequality. The intention could be to make policy makers “demand” better analysis, and a more comprehensive report - once they have “bought” the concept and have come to accept the need for having periodic NHDRs. But this may not be always the case.

***Data availability:*** There are countries where lack of appropriate data seriously limits undertaking any kind of refined analysis. In such countries, the first NHDR can pull together whatever data are available. But the real challenge is to look ahead - at subsequent NHDRs and work out how to get more specialized data.

***Technical competence:*** Some countries may face the problem of limited technical competence in economic, demographic, statistical and policy analysis. At the same time, the analysts need to properly comprehend the HD approach and framework. Despite being introduced 10 years ago, HD still remains a new concept in many countries. So far, the responsibility for popularizing the HD concept and approach has fallen on HDRO and the UNDP Country Offices. If the NHDRs are not sufficiently HD sensitive or analytically HD oriented, it could well reflect the natural and obvious constraints that both HDRO and UNDP face in offering sufficient backstop technical assistance on HD.

***Process characteristics:*** Apparent “weaknesses of analysis” are also partly a reflection of the process adopted for the preparation of the NHDRs. The general case seems to be to identify a principal writer (or institute), assemble a national team, and set up an advisory group - all facilitated by

the UNDP Country Office. There seems to be an implicit tendency to make the teams (or advisory group) representative of “civil society” and even inter-disciplinary. In some cases, it becomes important to include “eminent” persons from government and NGOs as members of the Team in order to ensure the Report’s credibility and acceptability. Expertise in economic and statistical analysis, or even familiarity with the HD concept may not be the main consideration. The result is that most NHDRs tend to have a broad general appeal rather than a narrow technical relevance to a particular sector or issue.

In some cases, the analytical quality of the Reports is also affected by poor planning. For example, the NHDR is likely to be deficient if the authors and analysts are given insufficient time, if there are few opportunities for peer review, if there is inadequate coordination, and if sufficient support has not been built up for the preparation of the NHDRs.

### 3. Influencing policy

One of the most repeated expectations from the HDRs has been the goal of influencing policy. However, this is also one area of “weakness” that is most often cited.

#### 3.1 The global HDR’s dilemma

The global HDRs highlight how some countries have approached a policy issue, they describe conditions under which certain solutions work and others do not, and on this basis, “suggest” and not “prescribe” policy measures. For example, the 1996 global HDR under the heading “Policies for employment-creating growth” states:

*“There clearly is no universal recipe for combining growth with the expansion of opportunities in an “employment-friendly” growth strategy. Even so, lessons from successful countries show some of the major components that can be combined in such a strategy.”*

The Report lists and discusses briefly 8 components:

1. 1. *A clear political commitment to full employment*
2. 2. *Faster employment-led growth*
3. 3. *Sustained investments in people - to climb the ladder of skills, productivity and wages*
4. 4. *Pro-employment incentives and other interventions in the labour market*
5. 5. *Encouragement of the informal sector*
6. 6. *Equitable access to productive assets*
7. 7. *Equal access to social services*
8. 8. *Expanded opportunities for disadvantaged groups*

The Reports admit the limitations of getting into specific policy recommendations in a global report; and therefore there are no “policy prescriptions.” Some people may complain that the global HDRs contain policy recommendations that are far too general - and something that every country knows. However, the global HDRs rightly maintain that the specifics have to be worked out by the countries.

#### 3.2 Policy recommendations of the NHDRs

What happens, however, at the national level? How have the NHDRs addressed the question of making policy recommendations?

We present below excerpts from selected NHDRs as examples of the range of policy recommendations that are made by the Reports. The intention here is only to give a flavour of the type of policy discussions that the NHDRs contain. These excerpts are presented out of context, and therefore the reader needs to be careful while drawing conclusions.

Consider the following two excerpts from China and Mongolia.

### **Mongolia:**

In the Concluding Chapter on “Conclusions and Recommendations”, the Report lists and discusses briefly the following recommendations:

#### *Putting human development centre-stage*

- • Consistent twin strategy of human centred growth and growth-centred anti-poverty strategies
- • Constructive dialogue between the national poverty alleviation committee and the government
- • Reform process to achieve stable economic environment and to release productive potential of people through market deregulation...
- • Firming up commitments to human development targets (by government); foreign aid community to fill up gaps  
Implementing human development
- • focus: on reducing the burdens of macroeconomic reforms on the poor
- • human centred growth and growth-centred anti-poverty
- • supporting services
- • safety nets

#### *Realising human potential*

- • Reaffirming the purpose of Mongolia’s transition
- • Enabling participation
- • Civic empowerment

### **China:**

The NHDR for China contains a very comprehensive discussion on the need to choose between economic progress that is led by the rapid growth of a few regions, or one that is more equitable. Again, in the area of poverty alleviation, the Report raises the issue of having to choose between targeting poor areas, or targeting poorer communities. In the Concluding Chapter, the Report lists and discusses the following ideas:

#### *Promoting human development for the new millenium*

- • Economic growth, human development and environment
- • Dealing with growing inequality
- • Continuing the mission of eliminating poverty
- • Carrying through the two health care revolutions

- • Education: preparing for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- • Promoting full equality for women
- • Building a modern social insurance system
- • Facing the future

The tasks facing China are complex... where the government can and should act vigorously on behalf of human development objectives. Such areas include:

- • Meeting the education, health and nutrition needs of the population, concentrating on those parts of the rural population that are particularly under-served
- • Continuing progress towards elimination of absolute poverty
- • Formulation of effective policies to ameliorate excessive income inequality
- • Discouragement of discrimination that comprises the equal status of women and girls in society
- • Protection of the natural environment
- • Investment in infrastructure such as mass transit and waste water treatment facilities
- • Promotion of sustainable agricultural technologies that can feed the population while conserving China's precious soil and water resources over the long run
- • Establishment and adequate funding of social insurance and social security institutions
- • Enhancement of the independence and transparency of the emerging new legal system

These are useful recommendations, but are they specific enough? It is possible to get into more specific policy recommendations especially if the focus is on a particular sector.

Consider again the following recommendations relating to the **education** sector from three NHDRs:

-

- China

Excerpts from the China HDR are given below:

*“The challenge for China is to improve the relevance of rural education YAs China becomes increasingly integrated into the world economy, its norms of rapidly changing technologies and tastes will play a greater role throughout the country in determining employment and income earning opportunities. The most valuable characteristic of workers will be their capacity to adapt to*

*new conditions, master new technologies, think critically and solve problems. These are characteristics that are best imparted by general education rather than by narrower technical training. Therefore, while experimenting with curricula that better serve the practical needs of students, China should be sure to include as the core of its new approaches these vital aspects of a good general education.”*

*“Improving China’s education is a sine qua non for escaping poverty and competing in the modern world... It is essential to achieve the target of universal compulsory nine-year schooling.”*

*“The outstanding problem of inadequate resources devoted to education should be addressed forthrightly, in part by moving vigorously to obtain compliance with the government target of raising educational spending to 4 percent of GNP by the end of the century. China should also take steps to remove the excessive financial burden of schooling on families in poor areas, which is partly responsible for their lower enrollment rates.”*

*“Here, as in other areas of human development, success depends upon reversing the decentralization of the fiscal system and strengthening the government’s ability to address social welfare needs left unaddressed by the market. The argument that because of fiscal government fiscal stringency the bulk of new spending on education must come from higher tuition fees and student loans, illustrates the danger of examining each human development component in isolation. Such a solution inappropriately takes the current budget constraint as a given instead of strongly advocating its correction. Greater reliance on fee-for-service schooling would be bound to make education increasingly a vehicle for perpetuating and magnifying social and regional inequalities...”*

*“Although China has been putting increasing emphasis on developing technical and vocational education, there is a danger in over-emphasizing such specialized approaches and in giving insufficient attention to the importance of good general education in coping with the demands of the modern world.”*

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## **Nepal**

Nepal’s NHDR devotes 22 out of its 252 pages to a discussion on “Education and Human Development.” This Chapter ends with a section of “*Key Policy and Actions required.*” The following excerpts are meant to give a flavour of the recommendations.

***Universalizing literacy and primary education:*** ...requires the formulation and implementation of appropriate political, economic, financial, and cultural policies. Literacy and primary education must be constitutionally recognized as a fundamental right of all citizens. Enhanced

attention must be given to ensure social and regional equity, particularly in relation to girls and women, the poor and the lowest caste groups.

***Generating and investing additional resources:*** While appropriate use of political and cultural resources is germane in order to universalise literacy and primary education, generation and investment of larger financial resources are called for. Graduated and judiciously discriminating (in terms of ability-to-pay principle) user fees at non-primary levels can become an important revenue source. Broadening of the tax base, introduction of new tax measures and effective revenue administration can increase the overall level of revenues. Taxes on private schools and on foreign exchange facilities for students wishing to study abroad can add to such revenue. Reduction of large-scale inefficiencies is mandated as well.

***Devolving rights and responsibilities of school management:*** to ward committees, VDCs and municipalities. In order to raise the level of local stakeholding, such bodies must have the rights, among others, to modify within broad limits, local learning needs - and thus the syllabi, modes of instruction, the school calendar, as well the hiring and firing of teachers.

***Making administration more effective and efficient:*** ...Entrusting the DEOs with the full range of supervisory responsibilities...delegation of requisite authority to lower administrative levels and continuous monitoring of performance,,, Dismantling of the "project system" can also enhance information and reduce turf protection within the MOE.

***Raising the quality of schooling:*** ...by making available more and better non-textbook learning materials, and introducing modes of instruction which de-emphasize rote memory and emphasize activities which allow enhanced classroom participation amongst students... reduce overcrowding and combat absenteeism amongst teachers

***Reforming and learning from the private sector:*** MOE must create an environment in which mutual learning can take place...

## **Madhya Pradesh**

The Madhya Pradesh HDR devotes an entire Chapter to "Education for all: From Rhetoric to reality." This Chapter (21 pages out of the 139 page report) discusses different aspects of education: government's commitment, the present situation, literacy campaigns, disparities, alternative informal schooling, the barefoot teachers, the question of resources, the curriculum, new field-based initiatives, academic decentralization, textbooks, evaluation, teachers, teacher motivation, performance-related incentives, career advancement, recruitment and training, the school environment, the learning environment, the role of the community, and the special case of tribal education. The Chapter ends with a section on "*Recommendations for priority interventions*"

*“Clearly, the task is immense and complex, and requires some bold initiatives to reshape the existing system of education. This chapter of the MPHDR has critically looked at some broad areas and suggested possible measures. A few priority interventions are either reiterated or specially highlighted in his concluding section.”*

[In all there are 17 recommendations. An illustrative list is given below]

- • Textbooks should be made free for all children in primary schools and for girls upto Class VIII. All girls up to Class VIII must be provided free uniforms.
- • The mid-day meal scheme providing cooked meals to all children in primary schools must be introduced in all blocks of the state.
- • The educational administration must accord top priority to teaching among the various functions expected of a teacher.
- • Community control of primary schools and increased accountability of the system must be promoted.
- • Most importantly, the government will have to ensure higher allocation of budgeted funds for elementary education, especially the non-salaried component to be able to provide a better quality of education for all.
- • The government must continue to invite more field based initiatives for decentralized curriculum development, including preparation of teaching/learning materials
- • Performance related criteria for promotion of primary teachers need to be worked out; a channel for career advancement must allow motivated teachers to get selected as Head Teachers, BEOs (Block Education Officers), DIET (District Institute for Education and Training) faculty, and SCERT (State Council or Educational Training) faculty, etc.
- • A policy needs to be formulated to review the system of school inspection...
- • A school health scheme needs to be implemented which could innovatively try to involve older children to conduct an annual health check-up for the school.

### **3.3 Some observations**

If there is a feeling that the recommendations of the global HDR are far too general, then how does one react to recommendations by the NHDRs? Some of the policy recommendations are extremely specific whereas others are far too general.

There is an additional problem. The Reports often do not examine the full implications of the recommendations. For example, the Madhya Pradesh HDR recommends:

*Textbooks should be made free for all children in primary schools and for girls upto Class VIII. All girls up to Class VIII must be provided free uniforms.*

The financial implications of this recommendation are not examined. What are the opportunity costs of devoting part of the educational budget to the provisioning of uniforms? But even more seriously contested could be the inherent advocacy for school uniforms. Some could ask if there is any link between uniforms and learning achievements? Should this be a priority? Is the recommendation financially sustainable? Are the recommendations politically feasible? Is the recommendation administratively practical? In other words, while the recommendations may be relevant, they are not backed by detailed analysis.

Again, a policy maker could react by saying that the Reports are silent on how to go about the tasks listed. But one could ask: Is this the purpose of the NHDR? Should details be worked out in the NHDRs? If specific policy recommendations are not backed by detailed analysis, does it make the NHDRs less useful - or even useless?

### **3.4 Thinking about policy relevance**

The NHDRs are no doubt an important instrument for influencing policy. Policy, however, can be influenced at various levels and by affecting different stages (or functions). The common “stages” of policy formulation are:

- 1) 1) problem identification
- 2) 2) exploring solutions
- 3) 3) selecting the best option
- 4) 4) coalition and consensus building
- 5) 5) Implementation
- 6) 6) monitoring
- 7) 7) evaluation and assessment

The NHDR can make meaningful contributions at each stage. However, it is not necessary for every report to simultaneously influence all stages of policy for all

issues. By selecting a particular theme, the Report can help to identify the main problems, and bring neglected issues on to the public agenda. For example, the Namibia HDR draws considerable attention to AIDS by identifying and highlighting the implications of AIDS. The Philippines report with its focus on gender and discussion on violence, for instance, has helped to bring these critical issues to the centre-stage of policy discussion.

Apart from highlighting issues, the NHDRs can play an important role in exploring solutions. For instance, there can be a useful discussion of privatizing health care or primary education, supporting non-formal education in the name of cost-effectiveness, or the implications of charging user-fees. Generating a public dialogue around these issues can be a useful function of the NHDRs with policy relevance.

The NHDRs can also play a useful role in monitoring and evaluation - drawing lessons and highlighting what works and what does not. This can help to guide policy revisions.

So far, however, most NHDRs have succeeded in drawing attention to key problems, and advocating for urgent action to address the issues. But henceforth, should the NHDRs become more focussed and make detailed policy recommendations? Or should the function be to influence others (including government) to carry out more rigorous analysis?

The answer to this question will depend upon the strategic considerations and upon the availability of analytical capabilities within the country. It is possible to argue that keeping the NHDR as a broad advocacy instrument has its advantages. Making specific recommendations will require that experts be pulled together to examine in depth several issues relating to a particular sector. Also, it may be easier to enter into specifics through sectoral evaluations and carefully designed action-research studies than through the medium of NHDRs.

## 4. Making the NHDRs more effective

In this Section, we draw attention to selective physical features of Human Development Reports that have a direct bearing on their “public” appeal and hence on their effectiveness.

Physical features of the NHDRs  
Clarity of messages  
Follow-up  
Ownership and responsibility

### 4.1 Physical features of the NHDRs

Discussed below are some aspects of the NHDRs relating to their physical characteristics:

#### What should be the ideal length of a NHDR?

The NHDRs vary widely in terms of length from a few pages of easy-to-read text to hundreds of pages of terse text.

#### Ranked from shortest to the longest:

Number of pages  
(excluding Appendices  
and Statistical Tables)

Mongolia	45 pages
Bangladesh (1998)	52 pages
Cambodia	65 pages
Pacific Islands	72 pages
China	128 pages
Madhya Pradesh (India)	139 pages
Philippines (1997)	152 pages
Gujarat (India)	212 pages
Nepal	252 pages

Surely it is difficult to establish any correlation between the length of a Report and its impact. What matter are the contents and the presentation. But the “ideal” length will have to be influenced by what the purpose of the Report is, and who the users of the Reports are likely to be.

The text in the Global HDRs (excluding Appendices and Statistical Tables) has been around 90-95 pages.

HDR 1990	95 pages
HDR 1991	84 pages
HDR 1992	90 pages
HDR 1993	99 pages
HDR 1994	101 pages
HDR 1995	103 pages
HDR 1996	105 pages
HDR 1997	107 pages

But the text of the global HDRs is well laid out, and also interspersed with interesting graphs, tables, and boxes - so that it is not always 90-odd pages of heavy reading.

After reading the NHDRs, it is obvious that prioritization and selectivity in use and presentation of materials are crucial. Excessively long reports tend to lose the reader's interest. And too short a report can seem incomplete. Perhaps, the ideal length is a minimum of 40 pages and a maximum of 90 pages.

### **Standardizing the Contents?**

The NHDRs all vary in their contents and presentation. Some common physical features of the NHDRs are listed below:

- • NHDRs often tend to contain text tables, figures and boxes. (Some unfortunately do not give the sources)
- • Some have maps. For instance, Madhya Pradesh has 11, Nepal 5, and Mongolia 2.
- • Some contain references at the end (as few as 6 listings to as many as 256).
- • Many contain very useful Statistical Tables giving the country profile - but some unfortunately do not give the source of the data.
- • Some contain technical materials including methodology for the construction of the Indices in the Report itself; others put them in the Appendix.

### ***Among the features we found most useful were:***

- • inclusion of an Overview or summary
- • inclusion of a country map showing states or provinces within the country

- • inclusion of a statistical profile (to present “country at a glance”) presenting trends
- • inclusion of a set of standardized statistical tables at the end - which will appear in every Report
- • inclusion of references and source materials
- • inclusion of a technical appendix that shows how the various indices have been computed
- • inclusion of definitions of indicators
- • inclusion of a note on data sources, availability and quality

It may be useful to “standardize” the Contents page of the Reports - so that over the years, readers will know at least what minimum to expect. Consider the following format for a standard Contents page:

Foreword
<i>Acknowledgements</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>
Overview (or Summary)
Chapters
List of Boxes
List of Tables
List of Figures
List of Maps
Appendices and Technical Notes
Statistical Tables
Data sources
Definition of indicators
References

-

***We would like to particularly stress the importance of including in every Report:***

- • a well written comprehensive Overview (or summary).
- • An elaboration of the concept of HD

- • a Chapter (preferably Chapter 2) on the state of human development;
- • and, detailed statistical Tables at the end of the Report.

The Overview (or summary) needs to briefly set out the purpose and theme of the Report, but at the same time, should be comprehensive. It is useful to remember that the Overview is often the only part of the Report that is read. And sometimes, it is more practical to widely distribute (and translate into local languages) the Overview than the entire Report.

The first NHDR typically has a detailed section on the concept of HD. But subsequent Reports must also contain similar descriptions of the concept. Apart from the fact that not everyone would have read the first NHDR, it is always useful to reiterate the concept as a way of getting the approach better understood. For the same reason, it is also useful to include in every Report a chapter on the state of human development in the country. It is true that the HD situation may not change dramatically from year to year, but the purpose of the Chapter is to make accessible to people a good description of living conditions, achievements and shortfalls. It would however require some creative thinking so that the same data are presented somewhat differently, or some key aspects are highlighted with additional data. This could also be the Chapter where greater emphasis is given to data on the particular theme of the Report.

The HDRs are data-driven, but it is difficult to include data on every aspect of HD in the body of the Report. It is therefore important to have a standardized set of Tables at the end of each Report. Over the years, people and researchers will come to know exactly where data on specific aspects of HD can be found.

## **NHDRs: A citizen's report?**

Even though the global HDR is prepared by social scientists (a majority of whom are economists), every attempt is made to make it a genuine "people's report." What makes these reports people-friendly is the language and presentation style. The HDRs contain something for everyone: graphs, statistical tables and even mathematical treatment (but in the Appendix!); easy language for the common person; interesting boxes that have a public appeal; and creative presentation of data that has an obviously strong visual appeal (without having to specify the value of the regression coefficient). You could give a copy of the global HDR to practically anyone - a local schoolteacher, a rural health worker, any government official, to even a high school student. You can share the Report with NGOs, with serious academics, policy makers and planners. It is only when the Report has such a wide readership that it can trigger "public action" for change.

HDRs have to be made easy-to-read and accessible to a wide majority of very different readers. This should become a primary consideration while writing the Report. Many NHDRs, however, do not qualify easily as "reader-friendly". They may be extremely comprehensive, and excellent academic contributions, or even very good consultant's reports, but they are just not people-friendly. Many simple things could make a Report easy-to-read for a wider audience. For instance, it would help to:

- • deal with technical details in the Appendices
- • avoid extensive footnoting
- • have detailed tables at the end where comprehensive data on HD are presented

Often we find that the Team put together for preparing the Reports does not have the necessary writing skills. Perhaps, providing for a substantive editor in the preparation of the NHDRs is something to consider. Some countries have included the editor or representative of a local newspaper as part of the Team preparing the Report - as a way of ensuring better coverage of the Report. If the Report's messages have to be owned by the "public", then wider dissemination in local languages may have to be an essential part of the preparation process.

### **Who is the principal reader of the NHDRs?**

It is important to think through strategically on who the primary audience is going to be, how the Report will be used, how the messages will be disseminated, and what action the Report is expected. Answers to these questions will depend upon the situation prevailing in the country. And this ought to influence the presentation style and language of the Report.

Deciding on the presentation style of the Report is extremely important. The suggestion that NHDRs should become “people’s reports” with a wide access to different groups is based on a premise that one of the purposes of the NHDRs is to create public awareness, build public alliances, and exert “public pressure” on governments and society for change. Wide readership and access help to generate public discussion, promote policy dialogue and necessitate policy reviews.

Another dominant viewpoint has been to argue that the best (and perhaps only) way to influence policy is to have the Report owned, accepted and understood by Government. Therefore, the NHDRs should appeal principally to government bureaucrats.

## **4.2 Clarity of messages**

The global HDRs contain a wealth of information, but they have tended to concentrate on 2 or 3 simple yet forceful messages every year. These messages are used to “advocate” for change and influence policy thinking.

In some NHDRs, it is difficult to capture the main messages - apart from a general sense that things are not going well for people. In the case of some others, the discussion on HD is so complex and detailed that the Reports tend to end up with a long list of messages and recommendations. In yet other NHDRs, the messages are not explicit; they need to be inferred.

Having few, forceful, well-articulated messages are extremely important for advocacy, especially if the Report has to become part of the “public” domain. Keeping this in mind is critical while writing the Report - or at least the Overview.

## **4.3 Follow-up action**

Public action begins, and not ends, with the NHDR. The effectiveness of the NHDRs will depend upon who undertakes the follow-up to the recommendations. This has not yet become an issue in the Region as most countries have released only their first NHDR. But as the Reports begin to come out with regular periodicity, the question of follow-up and monitoring will become important. This consideration in turn will influence both the messages as well as the recommendations of the NHDRs. It would be strategically important to think through the nature of follow-up action, and build elements that will strengthen it into the process of NHDR preparation itself.

## **4.4 Ownership and responsibility**

Discussion of follow-up action raises issues of “ownership” and “responsibility.” Examining the process of NHDR preparation points to some possibilities - of coalition building and advocacy even as the Report is prepared. The process of consultation, with government and non-governmental agencies, meetings with key opinion leaders, setting up of advisory groups, and peer review can contribute to ensuring wider ownership and acceptability of the Report. The launch and dissemination also affect the nature of follow-up action.

Wider ownership of the Report becomes important in order to ensure continued advocacy. At the same time, however, “public advocacy” of the Report ought to be the responsibility of some group or agency. So far, the UNDP has been the strongest advocate of HD - even though this is not made an explicit responsibility. But if NHDRs are to increasingly become local Reports, who will continue to be its principal advocate? May be there are useful lessons from the Philippines where a HD Network outside the government has been established - to prepare the Reports, undertake follow-up, and act as a pressure group to bring about policy change (see Box on following page).

On the whole, the “impact” of the NHDRs will depend, upon:

- • the clarity of objectives
- • the quality and usefulness of analysis
- • the nature of policy recommendations
- • the ability to influence public thinking
- • the nature and quality of follow-up action
- • identification of responsibilities for advocacy and monitoring

Philippine's Human Development Network  
The alternative mode for research and advocacy

How can the NHDRs be viewed as objective documents? How can the Reports bring about policy change? Who should be responsible for report preparation and for advocacy? Who can monitor and undertake the follow-up? How can the credibility of the NHDRs be ensured? These are indeed critical questions that every country needs to consider. The Philippines has come up with the Human Development Network (HDN) as an answer.

The Human Development Network (HDN) started as an informal group of individuals who took responsibility for preparing the first NHDR. In 1996, the network was formally registered, and today, has a membership of around 30 "development practitioners. Most members are "high profile" and prominent beginning with the HDN President herself. Others include staff of government agencies, international organizations, university professors, administrators, academicians, heads and staff of research institutes, and persons closely associated with the community of POs and NGOs. They represent different disciplines - economics, political science, sociology, public administration, education and social work. The main aim and interest of the group is to develop and propagate the concept of "human development" through research and advocacy.

The principal task is the preparation of the NHDRs. The launching of the Philippines HDR itself is converted into a high profile event – the President graced the first two occasions – and is attended by prominent government officials. This helps to reinforce the credibility of the group's research and findings among the bureaucracy. It also provides an opportunity for the government to interact respond directly to a wider audience. Apart from the preparation of the NHDRs, the HDN organizes periodic briefings, workshops and training sessions relating to human development concepts and measures. The audiences vary: planning and statistical staff of the executive local governments, legislative staff, and people's organizations.

Three elements seem crucial to the success of the HDN. First is the reputation for independence and high research standards of the members. Second is the nature of UNDP support - to underwrite the efforts of the HDN rather than "commission" a HDR, leaving the HDN autonomy and freedom to write. The third and most important element is the member's goodwill towards each other and the ability to work together as equals.

The HDN has emerged as the monitoring group in the Philippines, monitoring commitments by government, urging them to bring about changes, and engaging the government in dialogue and discussions. Such high quality research, sustained advocacy and public action are best undertaken by local organizations that have a strong commitment to the human development concept.



## 5. Conclusions

There is no doubt that the NHDRs serve a very useful purpose in drawing attention to a number of critical human development concerns. They play a particularly important role at a time when the priorities of economic reform (especially for countries facing a financial crisis or undergoing transition) tend to focus largely on structural adjustment and fiscal packages. In such a political and economic climate, the NHDR points to how policies and programs affect the lives of people in general, and the poor in particular. The Report fulfils an extremely useful advocacy function. At the same time, it also serves a number of other purposes. The data, description and analysis contained in the NHDRs can potentially influence policy thinking and public action.

In the earlier sections of this Report, we explored ways of improving the usefulness and effectiveness of the NHDRs. Several ideas were discussed for improving the quality of the NHDRs, for stimulating strategic thinking and for initiating action. We will not recapitulate all the suggestions once again in this concluding section. However, there seems to be a consensus that the actual steps needed to strengthen the NHDRs will be defined by the local context in every country.

It is important to strengthen content, analysis, and the process of NHDR preparation. But more is required. For the NHDRs to become effective, there is need to influence the broader context in which the NHDRs are prepared and released. From this perspective, we make the following four observations:

- • The “real” work begins after the release of the NHDRs. Therefore, follow-up and sustained advocacy become critical. Not all countries today are clear as to how the follow-up is to be done, who will do it, and who will fund it. To an extent, this issue is linked to questions of financing, ownership and acceptance of the NHDRs. Someone has to take responsibility for follow-up. Much of course will depend upon the country-context and the capacity of local institutions. The Government may not be ideally situated to do so. Similarly, many of the researchers or research institutions assisting in the preparation of the NHDRs may not be the best to undertake such an activity. In some instances, the UNDP Field Office could support follow-up activities, but again this may not always be practical, feasible or even advisable. The Human Development Network started in the Philippines seems to be one route to take. More thinking along similar lines is urgently needed.
- • Follow-up action should not be viewed narrowly as more effective dissemination of the Report itself, but more broadly, as a dissemination of the human development approach. The audience is not just policy makers, but members of civil society at large. The concept of HD must reach a wider audience - school children, college students, teachers, health workers, lawyers, and others. This requires undertaking activities that go beyond the preparation and release of the Report. Such activities could include, for instance, revisiting the educational curriculum in schools and colleges, influencing training programmes, motivating the publication of newsletters and articles, organizing panel discussions and seminars for NGO workers, teachers and lecturers (and even UN staff members), arranging public meetings, etc. A broad coalition and network need to be gradually built-up in every country.

- • Collective action is urgently needed for improving the quality of data on human development. Apart from quality problems, there are far too many gaps. NHDRs need to go beyond merely acknowledging that data are not available. The potential for improving data on human development exists locally as well as sub-regionally and regionally. Systematic efforts are needed to address this issue. It must become a priority.
- • Even as thinking on HD continues to evolve, it is important to refine and adapt the HD framework to the local context. Some of the intellectual back-up is provided by the HDRO, but there are also other branches of UNDP that support research to look at different aspects of HD. A mechanism needs to be devised so that country offices and those in the human development network have regular access to these reports and studies. This will also absolve, at least partially, the HDRO of having to be solely responsible for developing many of the new ideas and innovative suggestions contained in the global HDRs. Greater interaction and exchange between the country HD networks and the HDRO could enrich the global HDRs as well.

The NHDR should be not be viewed as just another Report on the state of the economy, but as a “*strategic report*” intended to trigger policy debate and initiate public action. Steps are therefore needed both to (1) improve the quality and policy relevance of the NHDRs, and (2) influence the overall environment in which the Reports are discussed.