

# The Process for Regional Human Development Reports

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## Audience

The Asia Pacific Regional Human Development Report enables UNDP to engage with wide external and internal audiences on issues of critical policy relevance to the region. The report is not an internal planning or programming tool. It helps UNDP bring to the table for larger audiences issues that are of a long-term nature, even when they cannot be immediately included in programming.

## Independence

The APHDR is an independent report developed through a regional participatory process of consultations and research. It is not driven by donor or corporate agendas. A good regional HDR goes beyond restating known positions and aims to promote constructive debate. This gives it credibility and buy-in from different stakeholders, who, sometimes may be on opposite sides: governments, media and civil society. Independence also has other advantages. It can help UNDP respond to political sensitivities as sometimes arise. It also allows countries to be selective in endorsing messages.

## RHDR Theme

The selection of the theme for a regional Report also involves a process. The theme is selected through consultations that include participants within and outside UNDP. COs and HQ are closely involved as are other stakeholders. Typically, for a regional HDR, a theme should satisfy as many of the following criteria as possible:

- Be of a *long-term* nature
- Have *cross-border* dimensions
- Be of relevance to *several countries* in the region
- Have *sensitivities* that are better addressed at regional rather than national levels.

The management board with the Regional Bureau Director provides the final endorsement.

## Consultations

Two types of consultations are held:

- Internal consultations - brainstorming and technical committee meetings
- External consultations – engaging multiple stakeholders

*Internal consultations.* The process of preparing an Asia Pacific HDR starts with the organisation of a **brainstorming-cum-scoping meeting**. These preliminary brainstorming meetings (one or two) help in shaping the broad contours of the theme

for the RHDR. Participants are internal form UNDP and can sometimes have an invited expert as well as colleagues from UN sister agencies.

The brainstorming sessions aim to:

- Discuss the aims and major thrust of the RHDR as an advocacy document at the regional level and identify a first cut of what should be “in” and what should be “out”
- Exchange information, research, views and experiences from the ongoing work on the theme at the regional/sub-regional levels and country level
- Identify and prioritise existing challenges in the region
- Identify stakeholders, experts, reviewers, institutions to work with in different capacity
- Discuss the creation and composition of an APHDR Technical Committee which serves as an advisory panel.

The Technical Committee has membership depending upon the theme. The Tech Comm guides the overall shape of the RHDR, including handling possible political sensitivities. Around three meetings of the Tech Comm are planned during the lifecycle of work on the RHDR.

*External stakeholder consultations.* These consultations have five aims: (a) hear stakeholders perspectives and experiences relating to the theme, (b) consider the broad contours identified, sharpen and guide the direction and scope on specific issues, (c) provide validation for the particular position that the RHDR is to take, (d) promote buy-in and capacity building among the stakeholders, and, (e) initiate early advocacy.

Participants include government officials, researchers, academicians, CSOs, the media and UNDP (CO as well as others with expertise). The UNDP Country Offices also help in identifying participants from their respective countries.

Stakeholder meetings help in sharpening focus of the Report. Depending upon diversity of the region in respect of the theme, two to three such consultations are planned. The work is guided by substantive and diverse inputs from governments, civil society, academia, research institutions, the media, the private sector and others. UNDP country office colleagues have made some very useful contributions to the consultations.

Regional experts are also identified during the consultations to work on different aspects of the report – background research, special contributions, boxes, peer reviewing, etc. Government, CSO and media participants provide their perspectives – for policy and for advocacy.

For these stakeholder consultations background materials are carefully prepared by HDRU. Prior to each workshop the participants receive the agenda, the concept note for the workshop, a background note on the RHDR, guidance notes for the breakout groups, selected research material and the logistical note. At the end of the workshop, participants are requested to evaluate the quality of the stakeholder consultations. This feedback is essential to continuously attempt to improve the quality of work. The stakeholder workshops have proved to be important in shaping the priorities and the storyline of the RHDR. They have also been very valuable in promoting early buy-in and capacity development around the theme. (Reports of the consultations for the APHDR on gender may be seen at ([http://www2.undprcc.lk/resource\\_centre/pub\\_pdfs/P1095.pdf](http://www2.undprcc.lk/resource_centre/pub_pdfs/P1095.pdf) and [http://www2.undprcc.lk/resource\\_centre/pub\\_pdfs/P1096.pdf](http://www2.undprcc.lk/resource_centre/pub_pdfs/P1096.pdf) respectively for the Asia and Pacific stakeholders consultations). From the reports, one can also see the

composition of the stakeholder-types: how many people from academia, governments, CSOs, UNDP have attended.

## **Research**

*External expertise.* Technical background papers are prepared by eminent experts drawn largely from the Region. Working with local experts ensures that there possible allegations of 'external / donor' agendas being pushed are minimised. It also helps contribute to regional debate, capacity building and buy-in. The HDRU team is intensively engaged with the experts right from ToRs, to outline, zero drafts, peer reviewing, revisions and finalisation. An established peer review process contributes to quality and impartiality.

*Internal research.* The HDRU team undertakes some of the research internally, does gap filling and works with the external experts. There is an identified focal point for each sub-theme and expert.

Much of the statistical work is done internally. The RHDR has two parts – the text and the tables. The latter work is internally done. No new data is created. Available international data sets are used. The selection and organisation of the statistical tables is guided by the RHDR theme.

## **Network discussions**

The work is enriched by a time-bound and tightly moderated net discussion on the **Asia Pacific Human Development Network** (AP-HDNet). The AP-HDNet comprises members from the Region and beyond. Within the overarching framework of the Report, sub-themes are discussed to explore some fundamental debates, identify and propose strategic policy-oriented actions. Issues discussed are as close to the evolving chapters as possible. Some of the network contributions are 'near research' quality and are good enough to be quoted / referred to. Thus there is knowledge creation. It also generates debate, allows a freer voice on sensitive issues, helps advocacy and strengthens buy-in of the final product.

The discussion on the APHDR on "gender" could be followed at [http://www2.undprcc.lk/ext/HDRU/e\\_discussion\\_gender.php](http://www2.undprcc.lk/ext/HDRU/e_discussion_gender.php)

## **Preparing the RHDR draft**

Conceptualizing the structure of the integrated report involves considering a few options for chapters and their sequencing. Depending upon how much thought this has already received, the TBPs, notes, briefs can be fairly tailored to fit a preliminary structure. Getting a good idea of which TBP will contribute to a given chapter is important. But, equally, many of the TBPs can contribute to more than one chapter. Some of the background research may eventually not be used at all. It is crucial to emphasize that no TBP automatically constitutes a chapter – they are the building blocks from which the APHDR is constructed. Drawing from this all this rich material the Report is prepared by the Human Development Report Unit team.

There is a two-way iterative process between the regional Communications Team and the HDRU. The Communications team plays an important role in identifying and sharpening messages. Messages guide the revisions of the draft just as much as the draft leads to the report's messages.

The draft APHDR itself undergoes extensive review and a full revision before it is sent to the Technical Committee, selected Resident Representatives and HQ for review, political reading and feedback.

Extracts specific to individual countries are shared with the respective UNDP Country Offices to review possible sensitivities, accuracy and updating of the information. This also helps the COs be prepared in advance for any issues to be handled during later launch and dissemination.

The HDRU team assesses all feedback and takes decisions about what to incorporate / revise / update / add / remove. The team works with a good editor to assess to prepare a publishable draft.

### **Production**

The process continues with the production phase, working with an internationally recognised publisher. This allows the possibility of continuing marketing outside of UNDP – so people have other options to access the report without contacting a UNDP office. Staff change, programs and budgets change – there may be no one available to respond regarding queries on copies.

Cover design and final title are carefully finalised. Both are extremely important – no less than what is between the covers.

### **Dissemination and advocacy**

Advocacy is already initiated as part of the consultative process with the stakeholder engagement. The RHDR is disseminated widely, helping to promote dialogue and debate around the theme from a people's perspective rather than as a thematic technical issue.

Planning for launch and wider dissemination happens in parallel with the work of preparation of the report. Preparation of a communications strategy with main messages, the main press release, FAQs, website, identification of launch venue, planning the event, embargoed media briefings before the launch, etc., takes place. The regional communications team supports the HDRU in this effort. Just as the evolving storyline informs the shaping of the main messages, the messages, in turn, help to sharpen the RHDR draft and its revisions. A common orientation meeting and Q&A session with Communications Officers from UNDP Country Offices on the main messages and storyline based on an advanced draft of the report helps country offices gear up for the actual launch and customise media strategy for country circumstances.

Apart from the main launch, media briefings and country level dissemination events, the findings of the RHDR are presented at national / international fora. For example, the findings of the APHDR *Tackling Corruption, Transforming Lives* were discussed by an expert panel during the international anti-corruption dialogue at the 13<sup>th</sup> International Anti-Corruption Conference (Athens, November 2008) well after the launch.

### **Lessons learnt**

External stakeholder consultations should be well planned and taken seriously. The feedback obtained from various stakeholders from the region is essential to define the focus and messages of the report, in order for the work to be seen as “for” and “of” the people of the region. Its effectiveness is reduced if it is seen as an internal UNDP document setting out corporate positions, or is seen as driven by donor or other

agendas external to countries. As the main aim is to engage with a wider external audience, especially those that can influence policies, credibility and technical soundness should not be compromised.

Internal stakeholders are also very important – share and seek inputs. Use UNDP work. Check out what is available with BDP. Seek material from relevant UN sister agencies. Include them in the Tech Comm. One may not always get very much as colleagues have their own workloads and priorities. However, when one does, it can be very useful. COs are excellent partners for feedback, dissemination and ongoing advocacy.

Global/Regional reports take up inherently sensitive issues, and the best ones have elements that may be a little bit controversial. The balance between credibility and buy-in has to be carefully managed, given their highly visible nature. HDRs should not appear to avoid difficult or sensitive issues – they are not meant to get the popular vote to win elections. Too much ‘sanitization’ can result in saying nothing or generate another type of controversy from CSOs / media. It is best to follow the evidence that is credible.

In the case of country references, naming private companies and governments, care should be exercised. For example, countries have expressed their concerns on the interpretation and analysis (just as much as they have appreciated the messages and recommendations) when there is something not flattering, even if small. Such a response is testament to how carefully the reports are read and how much store countries set by them. It is important to ensure that sources used are credible and analysis is balanced and solution oriented – which is the best argument.

Country extracts need to be shared with UNDP COs to ensure accuracy, incorporate updates and be aware of local sensitivity without losing credibility.

The whole exercise is an ongoing tight-rope walk which can be immensely satisfying. It helps to be prepared for the pressure.

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