

Presentation by

Director, Independent Evaluation Office, Mr. Indran Naidoo, 5 June 2015

## EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE GLOBAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORTS TO PUBLIC POLICY PROCESSES

Distinguished members of the Board and colleagues, this afternoon I have the pleasure of introducing two thematic evaluations that the Independent Evaluation office has completed this year. These evaluations focus on UNDPs support to countries on the Millennium Development Goals, and on the global and regional Human Development Reports.

The timing for these two evaluations is strategic. The global and regional HDR evaluation comes after a quarter of a century of the reports, and the MDG evaluation comes just in time for UNDP to extract lessons as we transition into the SDGs.

In this introductory statement I will highlight the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of both evaluations, starting with the Human Development Report.

In 1990, UNDP launched the first global Human Development Report. Since then, 23 of these UNDP flagship reports have been produced. Regional Human Development Reports began in 1994 and so far, 33 have been

produced. Our evaluation focused on just the last 10 years of this HDR history, during which time, UNDP has spent \$130 million on them.

The evaluation found that for a quarter century, the global Human Development Reports have made major contributions to shaping the global development debate. More specifically, they have made an important contribution by mainstreaming the concept of human development within international development policy. A strength of the reports is their power of repetition—by annually focusing attention on the same important aspects of human development it keeps these issues on the agenda, and the different lenses helps focus on contemporary issues.

The evaluation noted that the global development environment has changed significantly since the global Human Development Reports were first published. Today there is considerably less polarization of ideological positions on development. Also, the sources of information and analysis on international development policy have increased exponentially. Traditional policy and academic institutions now jostle for attention with philanthropic organisations and social entrepreneurs, journalists and bloggers and this blizzard of analysis and opinion is mostly free and globally available.

The global Human Development Reports have not kept up with emerging development issues and lag behind the quickly evolving and expanding global knowledge space. This represents a risk to the relevance of the Global Human Development Reports, given that up to date information and analysis on

global poverty, inequality, economic growth, and other social and economic indicators is easily obtainable.

Moreover, the sheer number of indices produced by the global Human Development Reports have weakened their overall usefulness for human development discourse and influence in public policy processes. The public discourse concerning UNDPs global Human Development Reports is increasingly focused on how countries stack up on the indices, not on the bold ideas and creative solutions that should be put forward in the main text of the reports. At the same time, the main composite index – the human development index - is steadily losing its relevance and should be revisited.

The time is opportune to reinvigorate the concept of human development, as a critical counterpoint to strategies focused just on economic-growth, and as a vehicle for helping UNDP regain the intellectual space in the global development discourse that it once commanded. UNDP can recapture a distinctive niche through thought-provoking reports on human development, that provide clear, strong messages disseminated through multiple platforms and formats.

Turning to the regional human development reports, the evaluation found that they have yet to distinguish themselves as being substantially different from other UNDP regional publications. A set of standards for the quality and content of analysis in regional human development reports has yet to be fully adopted and internalized. This is necessary in order to carve out a distinct

space and to ensure consistent high quality. A better appreciation of the needs of the potential audiences is also essential, so as to customise approaches and ensure relevance. In an attempt to attract a wider array of development actors at the regional and national levels, many of the regional reports have diluted their message.

UNDP should revisit the purpose of the regional Human Development Reports and find ways to strengthen their contribution to regional and national policy debates.

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Distinguished Board members and colleagues, let me turn now to the second thematic evaluation submitted for your consideration at this Board session, focused on the role of UNDP in supporting national achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

UNDP was mandated by the United Nations Secretary General to play a coordinating role within the UN system for the MDGs, including providing support to governments in their preparation of national MDG reports and assisting with development planning aligned with the MDGs.

Key Findings, conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation can be distilled into the following overarching messages:

The basic concept, strategy and tools for UN support to the MDGs have been largely validated by experience. The MDGs served as a consensual, simple

metric for development, helping countries negotiate and orient their priorities, and generating an increase in development, most notably in support of health and education services.

With UNDP support, a majority of developing countries have adopted the MDGs in their development plans, either as a general reference, or increasingly as planned and monitored targets. Some UNDP-supported MDG planning initiatives were unrealistic in terms of available resources and other constraints. As a result, some MDG planning initiatives supported by UNDP remain unfunded. Not surprisingly, when sufficient resources were provided for MDG-aligned development plans, the corresponding national efforts to implement the MDGs typically led to significant improvements in social service delivery.

UNDP designed and rolled out a large set of complementary tools backing MDG planning, monitoring and implementation. These were of high quality and well timed. Of particular note, the MDG Acceleration Framework helped identify bottlenecks and improve coordination across fragmented efforts and resources of the various national and international actors.

The experience and achievements of UNDP in support of MDG fulfilment suggest that it is well positioned to play similar roles in fulfilment of the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals. Lessons learned from the MDG Acceleration Framework and MDG national adaptation and localization efforts

should be applied when engaging with the markedly more complex SDG agenda.

This concludes my introductory statement on the HDR and MDG evaluations. I appreciate very much the Board's consideration of the findings, conclusions and recommendations from these reports, and trust that the information provided will help to inform and strengthen the continuing work of UNDP in these areas.