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Resilient nations.*

**SUMMARY:**

# **EVALUATION**

OF THE ROLE OF UNDP IN SUPPORTING  
NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF THE

**MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

**Independent Evaluation Office**

United Nations Development Programme



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Full Report can be accessed at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/thematic/mdg.shtml>

**Summary: Evaluation of the Role of UNDP in Supporting National Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals**

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## FOREWORD



The year 2015 – recently proclaimed the “year of evaluation” by the General Assembly—is also the finish line for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Since their birth in year 2000, when they were proposed as part of the declaration emanating from the Millennium Summit, the MDGs have grown to represent a global frame of reference for development support, meant to focus attention and resources onto clear priorities. The effort to establish Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) builds on the momentum of the MDGs. As the United Nations embarks on this next global goal-setting effort, it is important that we consider and learn from past experience. It is in this spirit that we provide this evaluation of UNDP support to MDG achievement at country level.



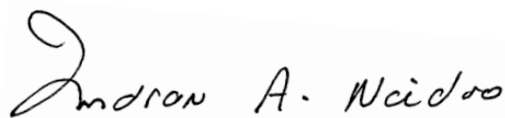
In 2001, the Secretary-General of the United Nations entrusted UNDP with a lead role to facilitate country-level monitoring of the MDGs and to campaign for the Goals on behalf of the United Nations. Since then, the MDGs have shaped the UNDP programming framework to a considerable extent, with consistent investment to monitor progress against MDG targets at the national and regional levels, to raise awareness and stakeholder buy-in through campaigns and MDG reports, to support the incorporation of the Goals in national development strategies and to help countries meet particular Goals.

The evaluation found that UNDP has generally delivered quality products and services to help translate the Goals into clear development results at the country level. As can be expected, implementation at country level varied in scope and quality. Key performance factors include: national ownership of the MDG agenda; national capacity for planning and statistics; presence or absence of disasters and crises; strength of UNDP’s leadership in country; and last but not least, availability of domestic and/or foreign resources.

The evaluation highlights a number of issues. One is that UNDP sometimes supported MDG-based planning processes that were lacking realistic means of implementation, e.g. without an identified funding source. Such overly-optimistic planning undermined the credibility of the MDG agenda in some countries, and raised expectations that UNDP was unable to fulfil. UNDP's insufficient internal monitoring of its own support programmes also merits improvement. Moreover, the technical knowledge, expertise and mandates of other UN agencies and funds could have been leveraged by UNDP to a greater extent during the MDG era. More coordination among UN agencies will be required to effectively support the highly technical post-2015 agenda.

Indeed, the SDGs are shaping up as markedly more complex than the MDGs. They will require a quantum leap in the capacity of developing nations and their development partners to collaborate in joint programmes and measure progress. UNDP appears well placed to champion, monitor and support the SDG agenda as a whole. However, the organization will need to clearly articulate its value-added proposition. As compared to 15 years ago, many more agencies are now lobbying for larger roles and greater visibility in support of the global development agenda.

I hope that the conclusions and recommendations from this evaluation will help enhance UNDP's contribution to the achievement of the next global development agenda and provide broader lessons that may be of relevance to all stakeholders. The world still needs a global partnership for development, and as the findings from the present evaluation show, UNDP can help.



**INDRAN A. NAIDOO**  
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## BACKGROUND

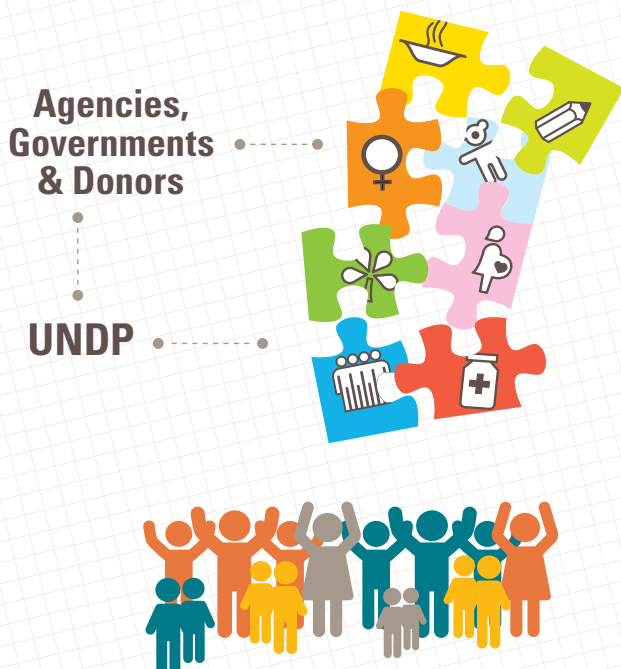
The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000, and associated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) constitute an internationally agreed set of quantifiable and time-bound goals to advance human development at the national and global levels. The Goals have shaped the UNDP programming framework to a considerable extent since 2000. Monitoring progress against their targets at national and regional levels through periodic reports has been a constant area of work over the period. In other areas of work, the extent of UNDP engagement has evolved over time. While the organization was initially focused on raising awareness and ensuring stakeholder buy-in for the Goals through a series of campaigns, after 2005 its focus moved to supporting the incorporation and mainstreaming of the Goals in national development strategies, including through estimating the cost of achieving them in specific countries, preparing macroeconomic frameworks that were consistent

with the Goals or aligning poverty reduction strategies (PRSs) with them. Since 2010, UNDP has concentrated on directly supporting specific countries to close gaps in meeting particular Goals through the MDGs Acceleration Framework (MAF).

The Board noted the high strategic importance of the **GOALS** and the potential to extract **LESSONS LEARNED** for the post-2015 Global Development Agenda.

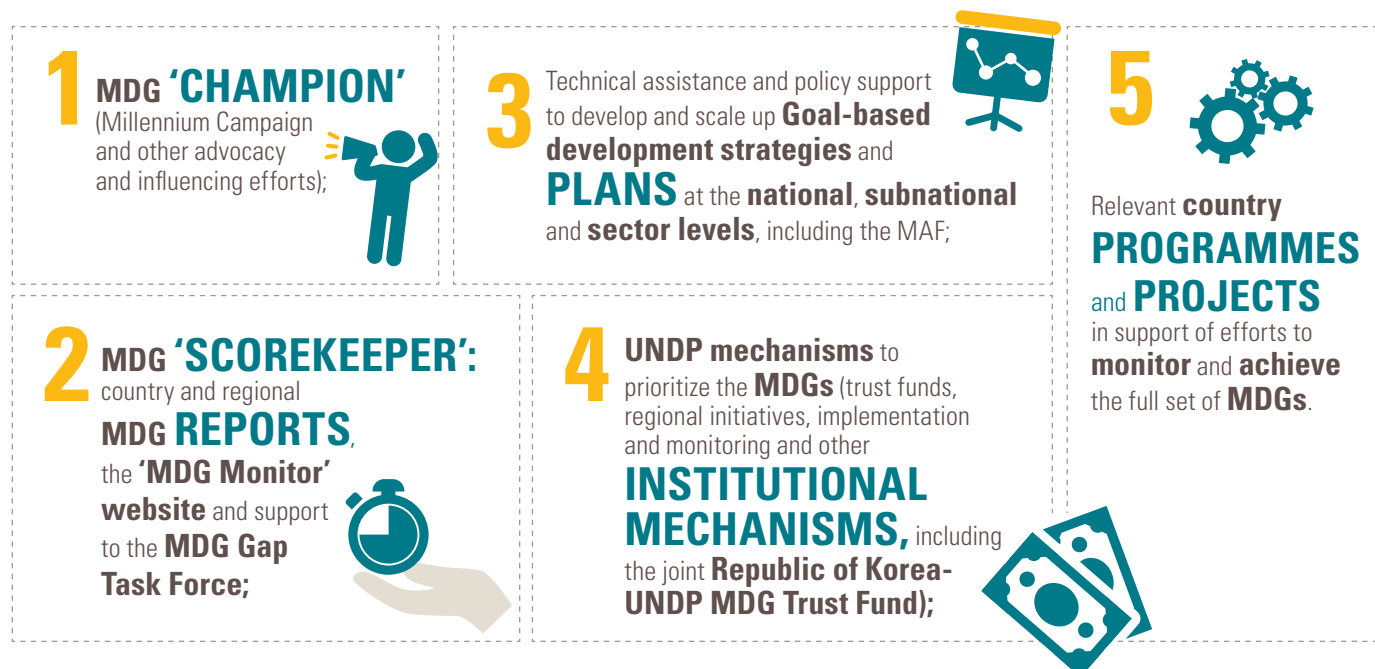
At its second regular session of 2013, the Executive Board agreed that the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) would carry out a thematic evaluation of the “role of UNDP in supporting national achievement of the MDGs.” The Board noted the high strategic importance of the Goals and the potential to extract lessons learned for the post-2015 global development agenda. The evaluation was carried out within the overall provisions of the UNDP Evaluation Policy.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are: (a) to assess the roles played and results achieved by UNDP in support of the achievement of the MDGs; (b) to identify the factors that have affected the contribution and performance of UNDP in supporting the achievement of the Goals: strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities, which decisions, strategies and approaches have worked and which ones have not; and (c) based on the above, to provide strategic recommendations for fine tuning the institutional strategy of support to the post-2015 agenda.



# WHAT DID WE EVALUATE?

The following 'roles' or aspects of UNDP work are covered by this evaluation:



The evaluation looked at the support provided by UNDP to the MDG agenda as a whole. Therefore, activities in support of one particular Goal or sector (e.g. environment projects such as the MDG Carbon Facility) were excluded from the scope. As a result, the present evaluation may under-evaluate the UNDP contribution to achievement of the Goals at the country level. Including sectoral projects within the evaluation scope would have amounted to evaluating almost everything that UNDP does.

The evaluation focused on both the upstream level, attempting to measure the impact of policy advice, advocacy, awareness-raising and monitoring of progress, and on the downstream level by reviewing

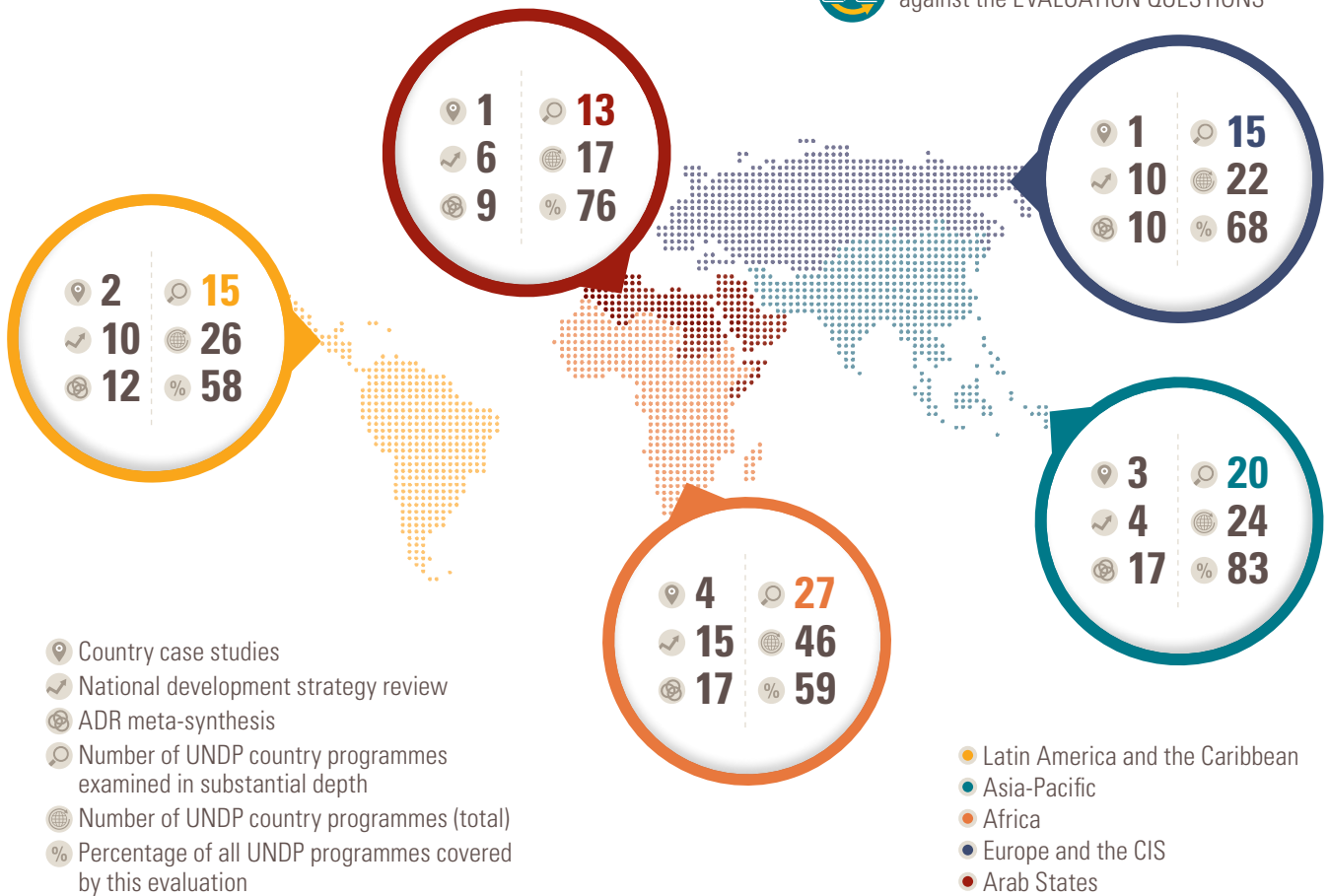
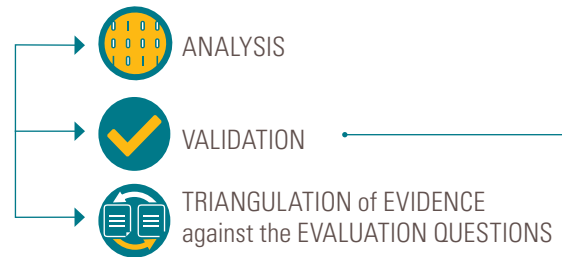
localization of the Goals at the subnational level. Likewise, some of the initiatives supported by the MAF and by the Republic of Korea-UNDP MDG Trust Fund focus on the upstream level, while others support subnational processes. The evaluation scope does not include the Millennium Villages as it was thought their assessment would require greater resources and time than were available. However, it occasionally drew on the findings of IEO-led Assessments of Development Results (ADRs, i.e. country programme evaluations) on the Millennium Villages, when reviewing the overall strategic positioning of UNDP.

## METHODS USED

The evaluation relied on multiple data collection tools for analysis, validation and triangulation of evidence against the evaluation questions, including: semi-structured interviews with key informants; 11 country case studies for in-depth information on outcomes at the country level; a synthesis of evidence from prior ADRs and global, regional and outcome evaluations; a meta-analysis of 70 UNDP country

programmes covered by a recent ADR or by one of the 11 country case studies commissioned as part of the present evaluation; a desk review of national development strategies (NDS) in 50 countries; a questionnaire survey targeted at UNDP staff and consultants; and a critical analysis of the guidance notes issued by UNDP headquarters on the Goals.

### DATA COLLECTION METHODS





# WHAT WE FOUND

## Overview

The relevance of UNDP's support to the MDGs depended upon the relevance of the Goals themselves to a country's development context. The Goals call for the fulfilment of the most basic human needs, which made them most relevant for Low-income countries. Middle-income countries that had already achieved most of the targets at the national level have tended to consider them most relevant when applied at the local level, to highlight areas of deprivation. Thus, there was initially more interest in the Goals in Africa and Asia and the Pacific than in the Arab States, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Latin America and Caribbean regions.

UNDP had a positive normative influence on development policy by helping to conceptualize the MDGs at their onset, by mobilizing support behind them, and through its global strategy for their implementation. This established a wide consensus and a common basis on which

to work. Together with the work of the World Bank, the thought leadership of UNDP and the United Nations Millennium Project helped to make the case for a significant increase in ODA in countries that can absorb it.

Overall, the various areas of UNDP support to the MDGs were found to be well designed, coherent and mutually reinforcing. One problematic exception to this coherent offer of services concerns the various trust funds set up by UNDP to finance related activities, which were often disconnected from the mainstay of UNDP work related to the Goals. Admittedly, the more recent funds are better connected, such as the joint Republic of Korea-UNDP MDG Trust Fund. Its governance mechanism enables the funded projects to be aligned with the overall UNDP MDGs programmes in country and globally. Some earlier funds and initiatives, including the Millennium Campaign or the Millennium Villages, were set up and operated at arm's length from the regular UNDP structure, without a clear demonstrated advantage.



UNDP was able to quickly push its MDGs programmes and tools down to the country level through its Country Office network, but was less efficient in learning from the experiences of its Country Offices and national partners. There were intermittent attempts at capturing lessons, often in preparation of major global or regional conferences, but the present evaluation did not find much in terms of systematic monitoring of outputs, let alone of successes and failures at the outcome level.

### Impact of the MDGs

The MDGs themselves are generally seen as a success. They have improved the targeting and flow of aid and other investments, and presided over an era of increase in ODA levels. Their degree of achievement has been uneven, with persistently large inequalities between and within nations. Increased donor commitments to health and education were recorded after 2000. However, it is difficult to establish a cause-and-effect relationship since several independent initiatives in health and education have occurred before or in parallel with the Goals that have overlapping objectives. In particular, it is intrinsically difficult to distinguish the impact of the MDG framework from the impact of the strands of thinking that helped create the Goals in

the first place (e.g. the '20:20 Initiative' that stemmed from the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, or Education For All). The MDGs might best be viewed as reinforcing rather than driving the targeting of resources.

However, the Goals sometimes lent themselves to a 'drive for numbers' at the expense of quality and to an excessive preoccupation with readily measurable outcomes at the expense of areas that are harder to measure. The Goals may have resulted in a lower quality of social services in some countries when they expanded rapidly during the period, notably in primary education. A related concern is that the particular focus of the MDGs on certain diseases has led to the emergence of strongly-focused global funding initiatives for specific health measures and diseases (e.g. the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), which de-emphasized systemic support to health systems and capabilities. From this point of view, the MDG framework may have encouraged a focus on 'quick gains' and immediate health priorities at the expense of strengthening the competence of public health institutions to tackle new, emerging health threats, such as the current Ebola crisis in West Africa.

### Working with Partners

Partnerships were often critical to success, especially with the governments of developing countries, donors and other UN agencies. In contrast, relations with civil society, the media and the private sector were found to be insufficient.

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**PROGRAMMES and TOOLS**  
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Offices and national partners.

While UNDP played a facilitative role, the determining factor was in all cases the concerned government's pre-existing social development and anti-poverty priorities, and how well these priorities resonated with the MDGs. Moreover, a lack of domestic and/or external funding evidently imposes limits on the extent to which national partners can implement Goal-based plans. The staff survey conducted for this evaluation confirms this diagnostic. Most respondents (85 percent) selected high national ownership or commitment to the Goals as positively influencing the effectiveness of UNDP, followed by the availability of national resources (73 percent). In cases where domestic resources were lacking, the capacity of UNDP to reach out to donors was of critical importance. In this context, the need for the United Nations system to closely work with Bretton Woods institutions, notably the World Bank, was confirmed by the evaluation's finding.

The UNDP relation with UN specialized agencies was both strengthened and tested by the MDGs. The Goals helped the United Nations and UNDP to recapture some of the policy space previously lost to structural adjustment and a growth-centric view of development. However, the holistic, cross-sectorial nature of the Goals implies a tension with the sectorial agendas of specialized agencies, which often considered the Goals as simplistic. The involvement of other United Nations agencies in the preparation of country MDG reports (MDGRs) and MAFs was useful to peer review the MDGRs and to ensure that MAF action plans brought together stand-alone activities and benefited from sound technical inputs, but this involvement of other agencies was often found to be weaker than recommended in the relevant guideline documents.

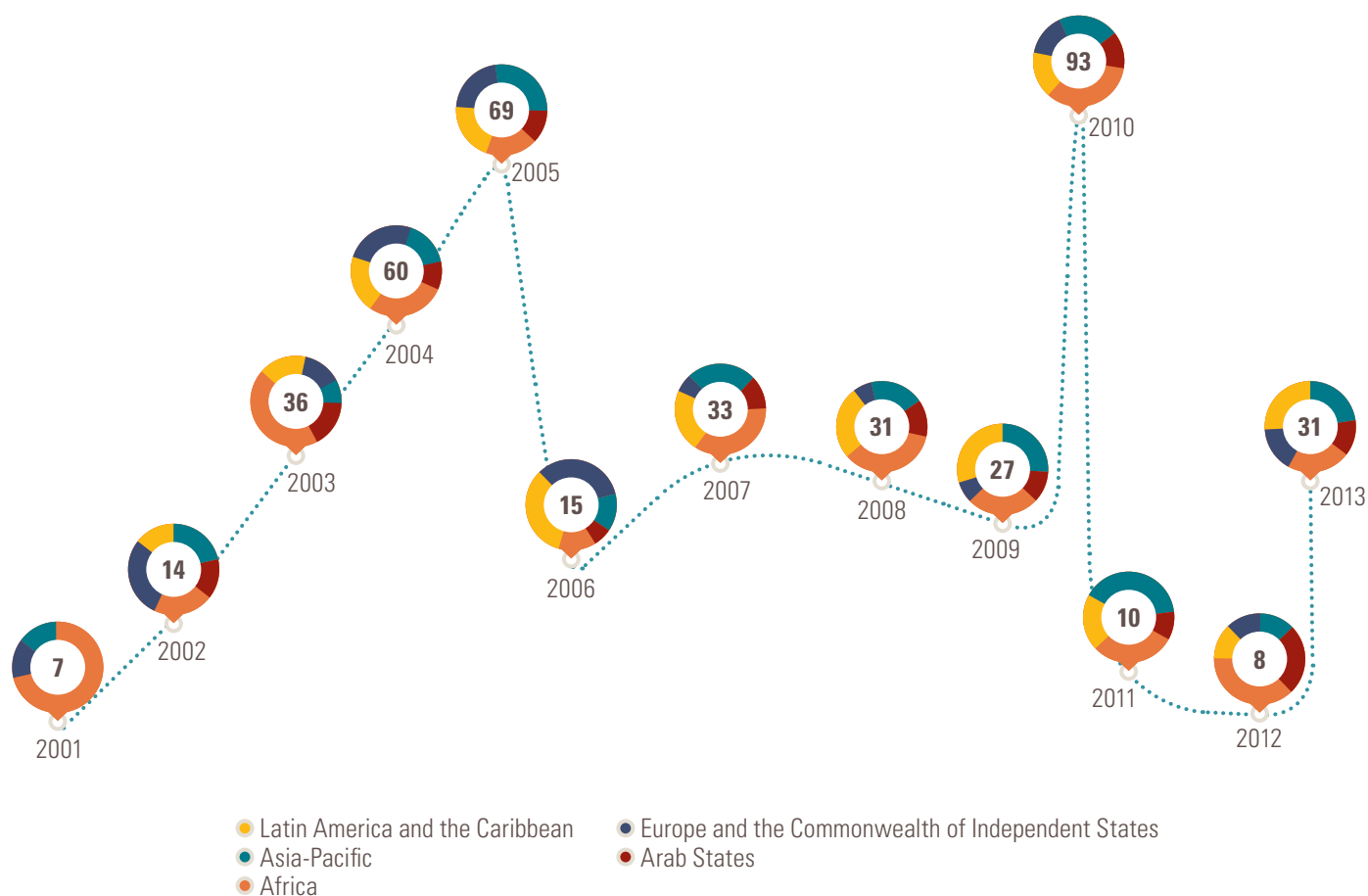
The UNDP **relation with UN specialized agencies** was **both strengthened and tested** by the MDGs. The Goals helped the United Nations and UNDP to recapture some of the **policy space** previously lost to structural adjustment and a growth-centric view of development.

### Detailed findings on specific MDG roles

**Campaigning** was most relevant in societies with a vibrant civil society. Through varied channels, e.g. the United Nations Millennium Campaign combined with Country Offices' own campaigning efforts and country MDGRs, UNDP has effectively ensured that the Goals were kept at the centre of the global, and in some cases national, development debate. However, the Millennium Campaign itself was targeted at a small number of countries. Its geographic coverage was therefore quite narrow and did not tap into the strong campaigning energy that appeared to have existed behind the Goals in Latin America. Among the Millennium Campaign's global initiatives, the Stand Up and Take Action against Poverty campaign had a large outreach to raise awareness of the Goals but lacked a clear link to policy outcomes.

**MDGRs** at country level, which UNDP supported in all programme countries, were relevant in most settings as reminders of governmental commitments and by providing a clear measure of progress. An estimated 450 reports were produced worldwide over the evaluated period. The general quality of the reports has improved over time. Initially, the reports used a score-card format but gradually became more

## Number of National MDGRs Produced by Year, 2001 - 2013



academic and lengthy. This tendency may at times have gone beyond what should be required of an MDGR.

National MDGRs played an important role in promoting the Goals, assessing progress towards them, contributing to a national debate on development and at times highlighting a development issue

However, development data remain rare, scattered, costly to collect and politically sensitive. Much remains to be done, especially if the new sustainable development goal **(SDG) TARGETS** are to be monitored transparently after 2015.

that had tended previously to be ignored or not monitored. The reports were regularly picked up by the media, in which they tended to be viewed as 'safe' to discuss, quotable and carrying legitimacy. The reports have also been used to inform development planning.

UNDP support to the collection and analysis of development data is relevant when it helps to fill a gap in development monitoring, and also in cases where data exist at the level of line ministries but are not well centralized by one central statistical office. UNDP support to statistical capacity and the MDGRs has led to improvements in the quality of Goal-related data and contributed to a more data-friendly environment.

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**Support to MDG planning at national and subnational levels** was most relevant in countries with a strong planning culture and apparatus. Planning at the subnational level was more relevant in middle-income countries with lagging geographical pockets and also in countries with a strong decentralization policy.

Over 80 percent of developing countries have adopted a subset or the totality of the MDGs in one or more of their development plans. The Goals have been used in national development policies and plans in different ways: as general, consensual objectives; as planned and monitored targets; or purely as a quote or reference. 'Referential use' of the Goals in plans and strategies, while initially frequent, tended to give way over time to more 'programmatic use' of the targets as planning and monitoring devices. However, not all Goals were equally likely to be included in national development strategies, with gender equality targets beyond primary education being the least used.

UNDP helped to align a generation of national plans and development strategies with the MDGs, including numerous Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), some of which led to debt relief and/or additional funding from donors. Over and beyond PRSPs, MDG-based national planning has been attempted in many countries but did not systematically translate into significant implementation.

A detailed meta-analysis of 70 UNDP country programmes covered by a recent ADR or by one of the 11 country case studies

commissioned as part of the present evaluation indicates that UNDP supported the integration of the Goals in national development strategies in 42 countries (60 percent of 70 sampled programme countries), out of which the support led to some implementation at national and/or subnational levels in 22 countries (i.e. approximately half of the 42 countries in which UNDP provided support). This is lower than the

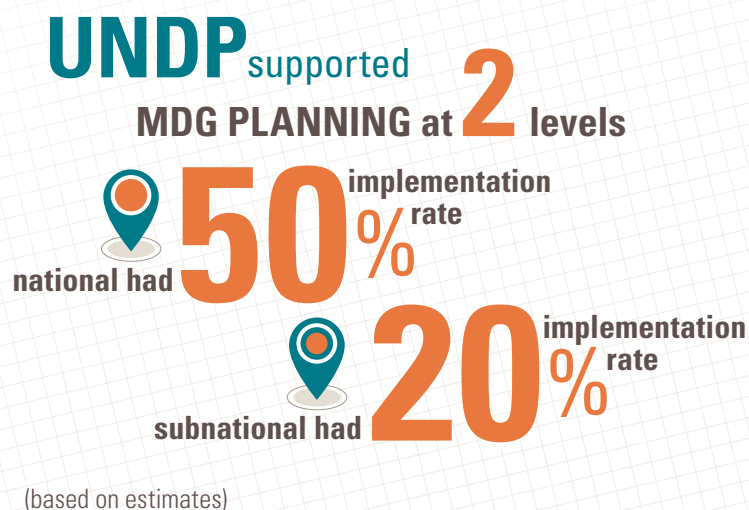
Not all **MDG TARGETS** were equally included in national development strategies, with gender equality targets beyond primary education being the least used.

target set in the relevant UNDP project document (which envisaged that "three-fourths of the support provided has been operationalized").

In the same meta-analysis, UNDP was found to have supported a subnational planning process aligned to the Goals in at least 28 of 70 sampled countries, which suggests that UNDP supported such subnational planning in approximately 40 percent of its programme countries. However, the support led to clear follow-up and implementation of the designed subnational plans in only six (or approximately one in five) of these 28 countries. Subnational plans that were aligned with the MDGs thanks to UNDP support tended to remain unfunded in poor countries that are dependent on official development assistance (ODA) but were often well-endowed in middle-income countries that funded them out of their national budgets.

Depending on the country, reasons for non-implementation of the drafted plans appeared to include a wide variety of con-





textual factors such as eruption of crisis, lack of sustained political will over the long term, poor financing and relations with donors, corruption and lack of a strong planning culture. The first reason listed above, eruption of crisis, concerns half of the countries in the sample that had no or weak follow-up to their national MDG planning.

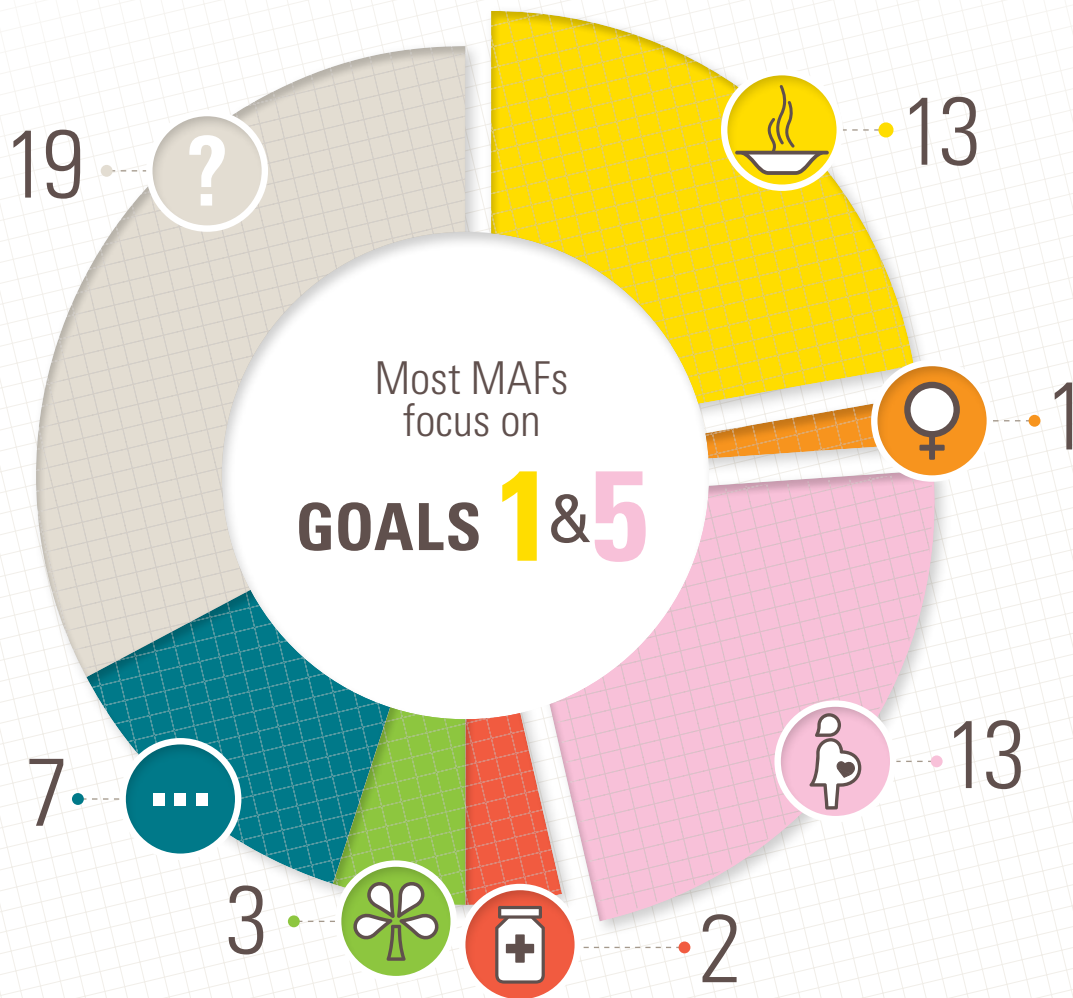
However, the non-implementation of MDG-based plans was compounded by factors within the control of UNDP. On a number of occasions, UNDP supported planning processes without taking into sufficient consideration the means of implementation that could realistically be made available. One case in point is the MDG planning exercises at the subnational level undertaken by UNDP in 2004–2006 in many countries with the help of the United Nations Volunteers programme, which were not linked to any clear funding prospect or mechanism and resulted in raising expectations that could

not be met. Plans to cooperate with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) on a more ambitious programme of support to local governments did not materialize. There was apparently more fruitful collaboration with the ART Global Initiative, notably in Latin America.

**The MDG Acceleration Framework**, developed by UNDP during preparations to the 2010 United Nations Summit on the MDGs (September 2010) and endorsed by the United Nations Development Group in December 2010, is potentially relevant anywhere. Using the results-based management feature of the Goals, the MAF can help any country to identify lagging indicators and bottlenecks to achieving the Goals, and has already been used in an ‘MDG+’ context (i.e. countries where the targets were made more ambitious than the globally agreed ones). To date, 59 programme countries have initiated a MAF.

However, UNDP is not the only United Nations organization to have developed such a tool. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization in particular have developed similar diagnostic tools, notably on maternal health, a lagging area in many countries. These other tools are sectoral in nature, while the comparative value of the MAF lies in its balancing of cross-sectoral and sectoral actions, focusing the fragmented efforts and resources of various actors and potentially engaging the entire United Nation country team (UNCT). In practice however, the MAF was often perceived as a UNDP-driven product and process.

## Number of countries with a MAF process per MDG



**Goal 1:** Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty



**Goal 3:** Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women



**Goal 5:** Improve Maternal Health



**Goal 6:** Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases



**Goal 7:** Ensure Environmental Sustainability



Mixed



To be determined

In a few middle-income countries with a decentralized governance policy, MAFs were widely replicated with national resources. However, in low-income countries, the funding upon which the utility of the MAF is contingent was often slow to materialize. The United Nations System

Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) provided an effective forum to showcase the MAF process as applied in varied countries and to mobilize support from the United Nations and the World Bank to the concerned action plans.

# OUR CONCLUSIONS

**1** Overall, the **MDGs** were a good idea



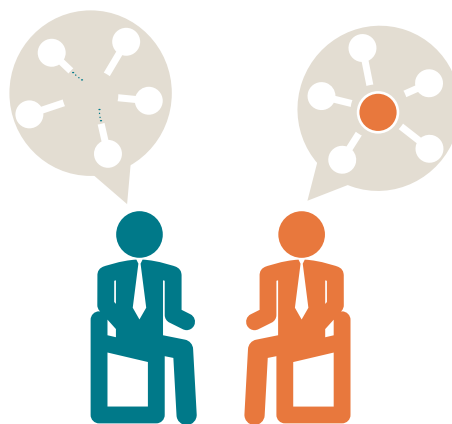
**2** UNDP supported the **MDGs** right from the **start**, with an **IMPRESSIVE SET OF TOOLS**



**3** UNDP could and should have **COLLABORATED** more with **OTHER UN agencies**



**4** UNDP often **SUPPORTED** MDG planning **WITHOUT** adequately considering **means of implementation**



**5**



**6** UNDP is well **positioned** for the **POST 2015 AGENDA** but needs to **redefine** its role in the **more CROWDED** environment





### Conclusion 1:

**The basic concept of the MDGs as well as the strategy and tools for United Nations support envisaged at the onset of the period by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, his office and the UNDP leadership have been largely validated by experience, as evidenced by the wide adoption of the Goals in national plans; the contribution of monitoring to maintaining interest; or the higher degree of collaboration observed at the global and country levels between United Nations agencies and international financial institutions.**

The fact that many countries, groups and individuals were keen to take part in the conversation about the post-2015 set of goals and targets that will succeed the MDGs is a tribute to the value of the Goals themselves. There is wide agreement among development actors that there is a need for a global development agenda such as the MDGs, and therefore that the Goals cannot be allowed to expire without being replaced by a new framework.



### Conclusion 2:

**UNDP has designed and rolled out an impressive set of diverse and complementary tools in support of MDG planning, monitoring and implementation. Generally speaking, the guidelines and products reviewed were of high quality and well timed. As can be expected, implementation in the field varied greatly in scope and quality.**

Maintaining commitment to the MDGs agenda throughout the period proved a challenge. Within UNDP, the momentum was slow to build with the initial four to five years of the 'MDG era' essentially devoted to campaigning and research. Momentum has also slowed somewhat in the last several years with the combined effects of the preparation for post-2015 discussions and the institutional restructuring of UNDP.



### Conclusion 3:

**The successful implementation of the MDGs required consensus and collaboration among all development actors, including among United Nations agencies. However, in its support for the Goals at country level, UNDP could have used the expertise of the specialized agencies to a greater extent. Their limited involvement emerged as a weakness in the preparation of national MDGRs, in the elaboration of the MAF and in efforts to localize the Goals.**

The MAF in many countries is perceived as a UNDP-led endeavour and product, despite the tool having been reviewed and endorsed by UNDG. Yet the most successful MAFs in the sample (e.g. Colombia, Ghana, Indonesia) were those being supported by a broader group of stakeholders, including of course the concerned government, but also the relevant technical UN agencies as well as international development banks. This practice brought about a measure of technical soundness and a critical mass of support and funding, which was reinforced by mechanisms such as the CEB reviews of MAFs at headquarters. Similarly, the involvement of UN specialized agencies in MDGRs is critical to screening the reported data and interpreting it correctly in their area of specialisation.

Working with others evidently takes more time, is more complex and can be more frustrating than working alone. Yet the MDGs were conceived as a United Nations-wide project and their successful implementation requires consensus and collaboration among development stakeholders, including United Nations agencies. This issue is not entirely the fault of any one UN agency, but UNDP is responsible for UN coordination in country and thus bears a unique responsibility compared to other agencies.



#### Conclusion 4:

**UNDP has often failed to translate its support into tangible development programmes and funding streams. More than half of the reviewed planning initiatives related to the MDGs at the national or local levels remained unfunded at the time of the evaluation. Something is amiss when there is excessive attention to planning at the expense of thinking through means of implementation in a realistic manner.**

Planning without taking into account means of implementation is poor planning at best, and at worst amounts to tokenism. Such tokenistic Goal-related planning potentially undermined the credibility of the MDG agenda, and locally it raised expectations of financial assistance which UNDP was unable to fulfil.

**UNDP depends on its partnership with governments and donors to translate any international agenda into reality at the local level. Making this partnership work in a realistic manner was the key to success during the Millennium Development Goal era.**

UNDP depends on its partnership with governments and donors to translate any international agenda into reality at the local level. Making this partnership work in a realistic manner was the key to success during the MDG era. The increased collaboration between the World Bank and the United Nations in country and at the level of the CEB augurs well for the new agenda. Partnerships with the private sector, which were weak during the Goals' era, will now be essential for success.



#### Conclusion 5:

**Where and when resources were available and used judiciously, some countries' drive to implement the MDG agenda through ambitious policies translated into a significant expansion of social services at field level, proving that aligning national development strategies with the Goals can contribute to their achievement even in the poorest countries. These successes led to further challenges, such as a deterioration in the quality of education outcomes that was clearly linked in some countries to a rapid expansion in primary school coverage.**

Beyond mere access, cost and quality of service are shaping up as major issues. Historically, service outreach efforts have naturally tended to focus on the easiest communities to access, and expanding coverage therefore leads to rising marginal costs to reach additional citizens (the 'last mile' problem). Similarly, rapid expansion of services has been associated with a deterioration in the quality of service in some countries. Educational outcomes in particular have declined in a number of countries reviewed in this evaluation as a direct result of efforts to provide universal primary education.





## Conclusion 6:

**UNDP is well positioned to approach the post-2015 era and help countries achieve the SDGs, but the emerging post-2015 agenda is significantly more comprehensive and complex than the MDG targets, and it will undoubtedly test the capacity of the United Nations to 'deliver as one'. Approaches similar to the MAF and national adaptation of the Goals will be increasingly required during the SDG era, in order to translate the all-encompassing SDG agenda into strong priorities at the local level.**

While the post-2015 agenda still needs to be negotiated, agreed to by governments and adopted by the General Assembly, enough is currently known to draw some conclusions. The SDG agenda will be much broader in terms of what is included, which will cover the unfinished basic human needs goals of the MDGs but also other dimensions of a broader sustainable development agenda (e.g. inequality, inclusive economic growth, urbanization, ecological sustainability), as well as the governance agenda (e.g. human rights, access to justice and rule of law, peace and conflict). This means a much longer list of goals, targets and indicators. In theory, a larger number of countries will find elements of the agenda relevant to their development needs, but to translate the lengthier SDG agenda into clear, measurable pro-poor outcomes at the country level will represent a serious challenge, requiring a quantum leap in terms of implementation and statistical capacity and costs, and thus a greater sense of focus than was called for by the MDGs.

In addition, monitoring of human rights and governance is fundamentally more political and requires a greater independence from governments than the monitoring of basic needs like access to water, health and education. As such, monitoring the SDGs will test the neutrality of the United Nations system.

As for UNDP, the SDGs will better anchor its work on governance and resilience in the global development agenda. UNDP will also be well placed to continue supporting national and local authorities and

The emerging post-2015 agenda is significantly more

# COMPREHENSIVE

and complex than the MDG targets, and it will undoubtedly test the capacity of the United Nations to 'deliver as one'.

advance the post-2015 agenda on the basis of its experience with the MDGs, mandate and traditional comparative advantages in terms of its field presence, trust of governments, convening power, neutrality and coordination role. The set of tools that UNDP has supported at the country level—to monitor, report, plan, budget and programme about the MDGs—will remain broadly relevant after 2015 when applied to the SDGs.

As UNDP approaches the post-2015 era, it clearly needs to reflect on the tools, strategies and partnerships it will bring to bear in supporting achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, some unfinished MDG business remains.

# WAY

## Recommendation

1

**UNDP should organize a last round of MDG country reports (end-line reports) in 2016–2017 to measure progress over the entire period covered by the Goals, establish baselines for the SDG era and identify lessons learned and good practices. This will allow UNDP to establish programmes on a strong empirical basis about what forms of support worked during the ‘MDG era’ and what did not. UNDP should continue support to the ‘unfinished Goals’ even after 2015, by helping focus development efforts on the poorest countries as well as pockets of deprivation within middle- and high-income countries.**

The last round of reports will require funding to be made available to countries, as previously arranged for the MDGRs leading up to the MDG Summits in 2005 and 2010, and should be combined with an initial analysis of countries interest for the SDGs (recommendation 4).

The post-2015 agenda will widen the horizon, from the almost single-minded focus on poverty that was the defining characteristic of the MDGs, to a much richer agenda that hopefully will still include the eradication of extreme poverty along with many other goals. There is a risk that the fight against poverty, whether in low- or middle-income countries, will be de-emphasized by governments and development partners. UNDP must ensure that due attention and resources remain targeted to the poorest countries, and within a country to the poorest regions and households, even after 2015.

## Management Response



**UNDP management appreciates the recognition of past efforts and notes the need to capitalize on the experience of UNDP with the Goals, to recommit to closing the unfinished business and to facilitate a smooth transition from the MDGs to the sustainable development goals.**

# FORWARD

With UNDP support as part of its scorekeeping role, countries have reported regularly on progress. Over 450 national reports have been produced to date. Several reports were also produced at the subnational level. These generated the evidence base to inform policies within countries, while also helping to extract cross-country trends and empowering national delegations within regional and global forums. A concluding round of national reports is expected to be produced by some countries in 2015–2016 to present a final stocktaking, establish national baselines for the sustainable development goals/post-2015 development agenda and facilitate a smooth transition to implementation and monitoring for this successor development agenda. Headquarters, regional service centres and UNDP Country Offices are providing the technical support needed for the preparation of these reports, upon demand.

From the lessons learned and evidence base gathered from the implementation of the MDGs, the following actions are proposed to tackle the ‘unfinished business’:

- Bringing less visible Goals back in focus (e.g. gender equality and empowerment of women; universal access to reproductive health and family planning; access to sanitation);
- Sustaining gains already made and achieving remaining targets;
- Reaching the ‘last mile’ by extending Goal-related gains to the entire population; and
- Using disaggregated data to monitor development achievements.

## Recommendation

2

**UNDP should continue to provide Member States and UN organizations with guidance and thought leadership at the level of the entire SDG agenda on how to translate the post-2015 agenda at the national and subnational levels by establishing clear local priorities, while maintaining some degree of comprehensiveness and coherence with the global agenda.**

The present sectoral activities of UNDP in good governance, crisis and recovery, environment and poverty are well covered in the emerging post-2015 development agenda. UNDP could therefore opt to support only those specific SDGs that match its mandate and sectoral work, as specialized United Nations agencies probably will do. Over and beyond such sectoral contributions, the experience of UNDP in cross-sectoral work and its United Nations coordination mandate make a strong case for UNDP also to provide Member States and other organizations some guidance and thought leadership at the level of the entire SDG agenda, as it did for the MDGs.

Given the likely long 'menu' of future SDG targets and indicators, there is a risk that some countries may pick and choose a few SDGs reflecting their core national areas of interest, and drop the rest of the agenda. While recognizing the need for local adaptation and the responsibility of developing nations to set their own development agendas, UNDP can help maintain some coherence to the SDGs as a whole by researching and raising awareness about the links between different goals. In this capacity, UNDP thought leadership work potentially will provide added value, highlighting the trade-offs that are inherent to the concept of sustainable development and proposing pragmatic ways to negotiate these trade-offs between the different goals, using a 'whole of government' approach.

## Management Response



**UNDP welcomes this recommendation and agrees that 2015 provides an opportunity to leverage the experience and mandate of UNDP to successfully transition from the MDGs to the sustainable development goals. Products and services such as the MAF, guidelines for Goal monitoring at country level, the several tools to support the development of Goal-based national development strategies and the evidence base generated for successful negotiations and discussions related to the sustainable development goals can be suitably transformed to meet part of what is needed to guide the implementation of those goals beyond 2015. At the same time, the period leading up to the United Nations Summit to Adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda will be one of intense activity on the part of Member States and civil society, with a continuing demand for definitive analysis and evidence, until the global development agenda has been negotiated in detail. Knowledge about how implementation actually worked for the MDGs in different countries and at the subnational level will help to inform these discussions and localization of the sustainable development goals. UNDP will also strengthen its existing collaboration with United Nations regional commissions to support actions towards the achievement and monitoring of the sustainable development goals at the regional level.**

While the post-2015 global agenda presents new challenges, the roles UNDP played during the MDG era will remain useful and should be carried forward and enhanced for greater effectiveness, as follows:

3

## Recommendation

- (a) **Coordination:** A greater level of coordination among United Nations agencies and a more active engagement on behalf of UNCT members will be required to effectively support the highly technical SDG agenda. At the global level, the CEB should continue to review the implementation of the approved MAF action plans, as well as that of SDG plans and progress at the country level through a 'MAF successor' that would help prioritize areas of the SDGs;
- (b) **Campaigning:** A continuation of the Millennium Campaign will be necessary to promote an understanding of the SDGs worldwide, but with a better connection with UNDP regional bureaux and Country Offices to ensure a wider geographical coverage of the campaign. In spite of the participatory process through which the new goals were developed, the final collective global agreement will be somewhat different from what any individual country, institution or person wanted. With the core of SDGs defined, the time has come for the United Nations system to work collectively on a 're-education programme' to ensure that the new targets and indicators defined at the global level are understood in the country context. This should involve an orientation of senior UNDP leadership (Resident Representatives, Country Directors, Deputy Resident Representatives) on what the SDGs are and what their role will be;
- (c) **Scorekeeping:** UNDP should continue its coordinating role in country-level reporting and monitoring against the SDGs, and continue to invest in the quality of the data, in particular through more prolonged and in-depth technical engagement with the UNCT and the World Bank during report preparation. The SDGs will use much more comprehensive data sets, requiring a quantum leap in statistical capacity. UNDP will do well to maintain its current focus of coordinating the production of reports at the country level, drawing on its clear comparative advantage at this level, on the capacities already built and on the technical expertise of specialized agencies. It might also wish to consider a stronger role of the World Bank in the production of the SDG reports so as to bring to bear its greater capacity to produce, manage and interpret economic data. Each SDG report should include a transparent discussion of the quality and limitations of the data;





**(d) MAF: As a matter of urgency, a new tool for bottleneck analysis will need to be developed with broad participation from United Nations agencies and the World Bank in order to sharpen the SDG focus at the national or subnational levels.** The post-2015 development agenda is meant to be universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development. Local customization of goals and targets may therefore happen at a much broader scale than was the case for the MDGs. A new tool will be necessary, developed and piloted as a joint United Nations effort, to make it more receptive to innovative thinking and to learn from similar tools developed by specialized agencies. Reaching a sharper focus at the country level is also the vocation of the common country assessment, which could use some MAF-inspired analysis techniques;

**(e) Policy and planning: UNDP must train its eye on the real goal: a change in the lives of the poor.** While it should continue to help align national development plans with international goals (cf. Recommendation 4 below), it should also work on financing and delivery mechanisms with a view to bring lofty strategies down to earth and deliver real services to real people. UNDP will also have to rely more on its core comparative advantage in the area of sustainable human development, since even within UNDP, many policymakers think of sustainable development as environmental management. Significant work will be required for them to understand the economic, social and ecological balancing required and what this means for policy and planning;

**(f) Initiatives at the decentralized level: SDG monitoring and planning at the subnational level will remain important, especially in the light of leaving nobody behind and addressing themes of social exclusion and inequality.** UNDP and UNCDF should sort their differences and combine their efforts in a more proactive way, recognizing that UNCDF brings its unique capacity and expertise on decentralization, while UNDP has better access to governments and donors at the upstream policy level. A continuation of the ART-Global Initiative beyond its scheduled termination at the end of 2015 would also appear desirable in view of the fact that UNCDF can invest only in least developed countries.

## Management Response



UNDP management appreciates the recognition of past efforts, and notes that UNDP will take further actions to ensure that institutional memory is preserved and that lessons learned are well documented to help countries deliver better. UNDP will undertake a comprehensive stocktaking and mapping of the activities it has supported during the MDG period to effectively codify lessons learned on 'what has worked and what has not' so as to inform its knowledge products, tools and services offered in the post-2015 period.

**UNDP support to countries and local governments in tailoring, planning and implementing the SDGs at the national and local levels should take into systematic consideration key local factors known to influence the effectiveness of goal-based development planning, so as to focus assistance on countries and regions with good prospects for implementing their SDG-based plans and policies.**

The capacity of UNDP to customize and adapt its products and services to the needs of specific countries is an important strength that will need to be further enhanced to develop a context-driven SDG support programme. This evaluation has found a series of factors that have negatively affected the likelihood of countries to implement their MDG-aligned plans. In order to target UNDP development planning support and resources on countries with good prospects for implementing their SDG-based plans and policies, the strategy of support to the SDGs should be rooted in an initial political economy analysis that maps interest in the SDGs at the national level, and assesses the prevalence of key factors known to influence the effectiveness of goal-based development planning. Where these key contributing factors are not yet in place, UNDP should try and advocate for them as a prerequisite to any meaningful SDG-based planning.

**UNDP takes note of this recommendation, but notes that action on the ground is primarily motivated by demand from countries.**

Over the transitional period 2015–2016, UNDP will continue to deliver on its mandate and commitments to support countries to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs, while also transitioning to the implementation of the successor agenda. The UNDP role in supporting countries to achieve the Goals encompasses three pillars, which will provide good experience and evidence for transitioning to the sustainable development goals. Specifically, UNDP will adopt a forward-looking strategy comprising:

- 1. Implementation:** Continue supporting countries in their efforts to develop and implement strategies and plans to achieve the unfinished business of the MDGs, including acceleration efforts and developing tools to localize the sustainable development goals;
- 2. Monitoring:** As ‘scorekeeper’ for the MDGs, assisting in monitoring progress at the country level and supporting countries to reflect on implications and pathways for achievement of the sustainable development goals. There is a need to embed prospective analysis and multisectoral perspectives in the next round of monitoring efforts; and
- 3. Advocacy and thought leadership:** Make available evidence-based advocacy and analysis supporting specific outcomes in multilateral and global forums.

## 4 Recommendation

### Management Response



## Recommendation

5

**In order to support country programmes and learn from field-level experiences in SDG implementation, UNDP should establish and maintain over time a cadre of dedicated advisers at headquarters and in regional hubs, able to support the SDG work of regional bureaux and Country Offices over the long term, bring coherence to the overall effort and maintain some institutional memory. UNDP should document the varied approaches that will be used at the country level in a more systematic and objective way than has been the case so far. Resource mobilization and the management of trust funds also need to be brought into a more coherent framework to support country-level activities.**


The Bureau for Policy and Programme Support needs to find ways to monitor consistently, systematically and over the entire SDG period: (a) its own advisory services in support of the SDGs; (b) the varied approaches used by UNDP Country Offices to support SDG implementation at the country level; and (c) SDG-related results across programme countries. Online forums, workshops and reviews have helped connect United Nations staff implementing the MDGs, but information needs to be distilled further in order to learn from different countries' experiences. UNDP should explore methods to incentivize staff to document failures as much as successes, since one can only learn from a consideration of both.

UNDP should continue to invest resources in initiatives directly targeting communities for sustainable development and achievement of the MDGs/SDGs, but should do so in coherence with its upstream work e.g. for instance via greater use of seed funding that could facilitate uptake and scaling up of innovations. The practice of setting up specific projects and units at arm's length from the regular UNDP structure (e.g. the Millennium Campaign and Millennium Project) did not yield significant benefits and should be avoided as it only translates into greater disconnect between different strands of work.

## Management Response



**The structural change at headquarters and regional levels is expected to produce a more functionally and geographically integrated organization to deliver on the current Strategic Plan. The restructuring is delivering an optimized regional presence with more advisory and support services moving to the regional level, to help Country Offices deliver quality results more efficiently, which will benefit the implementation of the sustainable development goals. With the establishment of the Bureau for Programme and Policy Support, all policy and programme support services are aggregated under a single bureau. At the same time, a new Crisis Response Unit was established in order to deploy staff with the relevant expertise on the ground more promptly and efficiently as crises develop. Combined with the rationalization of management support and a new accountability framework, the new structure will make UNDP a leaner and more transparent organization. UNDP will take further actions to ensure that institutional memory is preserved and that lessons learned are well documented to help countries deliver.**



## About the Independent Evaluation Office:

At UNDP, evaluation is critical in helping countries achieve the simultaneous eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion. By generating objective evidence, evaluation helps UNDP achieve greater accountability and facilitates improved learning from past experience. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) promotes accountability and learning by conducting independent evaluations at the country, regional, and global levels, as well as on thematic topics of particular importance to the organization. It also promotes development of evaluation capacity at the national level, and provides critical support to the work of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).





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