



United Nations Swaziland

PRESS STATEMENT

Swaziland research report cited for top global award

MBABANE – 8RD September 2009: A research report that suggests an investigation into ways of using the nation’s cultural values to lead the nation’s efforts in responding to the HIV epidemic has been nominated for an international prize.

In the message notifying UNDP in Swaziland of the selection, Julia Knittel of UNDP’s Human Development Report Office in New York Office said the 2008 Swaziland Human Development Report titled HIV and Culture has been cited for its excellence in participation and inclusiveness. The report will be included in the final selection for the final prize winner to be chosen at a gathering of more than 1000 development experts attending the 3rd OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy in Busan, Korea on the 27th - 30th October.

The UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Musinga T. Bandora paid tribute to the team of international and national experts who wrote the seminal work. He described the report as presenting important insights by articulating ways of effectively using the nation’s cultural values as entry-points for developing effective potential intervention against HIV.

“Without doubt Swaziland’s rich cultural values are an extremely valuable resource. Effective use of the nation’s heritage of customs and traditions is key to effective and sustainable response to the HIV pandemic. Indeed, the study alludes to the fact that the nation has often drawn inspiration from its social capital in warding off national challenges”.

The Human Development Report (HDR) is concerned with advancing the concept of Human Development as a way of going beyond merely measuring economic indicators to look at the actual improvement of people’s capabilities to expand their choices and opportunities for lives of value. The concept of human development considers three essential dimensions: having a long and healthy life; acquiring knowledge and becoming part of a world of information; and enjoying a decent standard of living. Other choices are however recognised as also being important for human development, including political, economic and social freedom, guaranteed human rights as well as the attainment of dignity, self-respect and a sense of belonging to the community.

The HDR is organized at two levels. At the global level, a report is written annually to discuss a specific dimension of human development. At the national level, reports are commissioned periodically. To date, UNDP Swaziland has commissioned three HDR’s to report on the status of human development in the country. The 1997 report focused on governance and human development and 2000 which was dedicated to economic growth with equity. The current HDR was written by a team of international and national experts as part of UNDP’s contribution to the development discourse to promote intellectual leadership focusing on a calamity that has been a permanent plague in the country for at least 20 years. The team of authors was

led by Professor James Ntozi of Makerere University in Uganda in collaboration with a team that included University of Swaziland Sociology Lecturer Thandi Khumalo and Rudolph Maziya, an authorities on culture and management of the HIV response in Swaziland.

Background

The 2008 report has four objectives. The first is to contribute to and inform the country's ongoing development process and plans. Swaziland has a new constitution and several important development frameworks, policies and plans are in place. These frameworks and plans include the national development strategy (NDS) based on Vision 2022 and the poverty reduction strategy and action programme (PRSAP) as well as the cabinet plan of action 2008-2013. The policies and sector strategic plans include the population policy, the decentralization policy, the draft gender policy, the HIV and AIDS policy and the HIV and AIDS strategic plan of 2006-2008. This report will contribute to the elaboration and implementation of these policies and plans by providing an update on the human development situation and discussing the current state of HIV and AIDS in Swaziland and policy and strategic options for the future.

The second objective is to support and contribute to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The report discusses the impact of HIV and AIDS on the MDGs and overall human development. The identified impacts can then be targeted by programmes to reduce the effects and promote the achievement of various MDGs.

Thirdly, the report also identifies cultural practices that can be used for scaling up and supporting the national response to HIV and AIDS. Swazi culture and the role of the culture in the pandemic as a major driver and a solution are discussed in detail. The identified cultural practices can then be used to upscale and support programmes of prevention, mitigation, care and support.

The fourth objective of the report is for it to be used as an advocacy tool for mobilising resources and changing sexual behaviour in the country. The fight against HIV and AIDS needs a great deal of human, material and financial resources from many stakeholders. The situational analysis of HIV and AIDS in the report will inform the stakeholders about the state of affairs and convince them to join the fight against the pandemic. The policy and strategic options are meant to be used by the stakeholders in formulating programmes and implementing them.

Status of the HIV epidemic

HIV which accounts for 31% of deaths in the key government ministries such as economic planning, finance, labour and health is clearly the most critical national development challenge. It has struck with devastation in all sectors of the country's development, increasing poverty levels, sickness and hunger; hurt the economy and reversed the country's economic growth gains and fanned the upsurge of a number of serious diseases including TB and cancer. Swaziland is the worst country affected by both HIV and TB. In the past 22 years since it was first reported in Swaziland, life expectancy has dropped from 56 in 1986 to 32.5 in 2003 and thankfully because of ARVs, is currently at 42, a level last recorded in the 1950s. Incidence of TB has multiplied by more than four, increasing from 2000 cases nationally in 1993 to 8330 in 2004/5. Other serious reversals of post independence gains have been noted in maternal and infant mortality which have increased to unacceptable levels. The march of the epidemic suggests new ways of understanding the spread of the virus are needed. Because of HIV, Swaziland is unlikely to meet several of the Millennium Development Goals.

UNDP's corporate mandate is in capacity development, and in Swaziland also leads UN efforts in promoting poverty reduction, good governance, and gender equality as well as in environment and disaster risk reduction. By leveraging its comparative advantage in access to expert and technical resources through its network that spans over 166 countries across the globe, UNDP positions knowledge as a driver of development.

In Swaziland UNDP has maintained an interest in a better understanding of the role of culture and its potential of some of its aspects as an entry-point for development. In this respect, UNDP continues to support initiatives to promote better understanding of customs and traditions. A study led by the Swazi National Council to record Swazi law and custom with a view to its eventual codification and alignment with the common law was recently completed. The objective was in part to remove ambiguity in the interpretation of Swazi law and custom, standardize its application, clarify overlaps between it and common law and bring both legal systems to parity.

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