Note: Best print results are obtained using Acrobat version 5.0.

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD): Mid-Term Evaluation Commissioned by the UK Department for International Development

August 2002

Contents

1. Background

UNRISD was set up as an autonomous research institute within the United Nations system in 1963. The Institute's creation reflected dissatisfaction on the part of many development thinkers with the tendency to treat social issues as subsidiary to economic ones. The mandate of the Institute is to conduct policy-relevant research on pressing issues of social development. These issues encompass three distinct, but closely related, processes: improvement in social relations, improvement in social institutions for the management of collective concerns, and improvement in social welfare. Through its research, UNRISD aims to stimulate dialogue and contribute to policy debates within and outside the UN system.

UNRISD is not associated with any single specialised agency and hence its work is not subject to the bureaucratic or political constraints that frequently characterise many inter-governmental institutions. It draws its funding from a variety of sources, including UN agencies, various bilateral and multilateral donors, private foundations and non-governmental organisations. This financial support takes the form of core funding as well as project-related funding.

This ability to draw funds from a range of sources has helped the Institute to retain its autonomy in defining its research agenda, and to address issues that may be too controversial for other international organisations to tackle. It has also enabled the Institute to bring together different perspectives on social development, drawing from the academic, activist and policy communities in both the North and the South.

Over time, the Institute has established a solid track record in conducting challenging policy-relevant research on social development. Although at any moment in time, the range of its research interests is rather wide, it is possible to associate a particular emphasis to each decade of the Institute's existence (see *Annex A*). It is worth pointing out that the 40th session of the UN Commission for Social Development (February 2002) stressed the interdependence between social and economic policies to ensure sustainable development. This interdependence was at the basis of UNRISD's creation and has shaped its work since then.

1.1 Objectives

UNRISD is self-funded, in the sense that it is not supported from the UN general budget, but rather seeks funding in the form of core contributions and grants for specific research projects. The Institute has a small group of core donors who make their pledges on annual basis.[1] Additional (non-core) funding is sought for project support as required by annual research plans. DFID has been contributing to UNRISD core funding since 1999. DFID support aims to enable the Institute to carry out its mandate of pursuing path-breaking social development research needed within and for the UN system. This is part of DFID's overall effort to enhance research capacity in the UN and to improve dissemination of research findings to the relevant agencies (for the detailed Logical Framework for DFID's support to UNRISD, see *Annex B*).

DFID is committed to fund UNRISD until 2004. This funding requires a review of UNRISD's work since DFID funding commenced in 1999. The aim of the review is to assess progress towards the project objective of improving capacity for research and its dissemination within the UN system, to make judgements about the likely impact of the project, and to allow for mid-term changes if deemed necessary. DFID commissioned this evaluation to a team of fellows – Naila Kabeer, Cecilia Ugaz and Rachel Sabates-Wheeler – from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), University of Sussex.

---

[1] Governments of eight countries contribute to UNRISD's core funds: Denmark, Finland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

1.2 Methodology

The first stage of this evaluation was to construct an Output to Purpose Review matrix (OPR) of UNRISD activities to assess progress towards the objectives laid out in the UNRISD Logical Framework. The period covered in the OPR was 1999 through mid-2002. The second stage of the evaluation addresses more qualitative issues related to effectiveness of UNRISD in fulfilling its mandate, stimulating dialogue, and contributing to policy debates within and outside the UN system.

This report is the outcome of the second stage. A variety of methods have been used to complete this stage, including the assessment of a selection of UNRISD publications and reference to the evaluation of UNRISD work commissioned by the Institute's Nordic donors in 1996.[2] In addition, a sample of relevant "users" — senior UN officials familiar with the policy processes within the UN, and key members of the wider development community — were identified in order to ascertain their opinions on UNRISD work. Some of the users were interviewed personally, but the majority kindly agreed to express their views by means of filling up an electronic questionnaire.[3]

This report is organised according to the four main areas that the team endeavoured to assess: the extent to which UNRISD is perceived to fulfil its mandate; the quality and extent of its dissemination efforts; UNRISD engagement with the current development debate; and its role within the UN system.

2. The UNRISD Mandate

The Nordic evaluation recognised that, since its establishment, UNRISD has been a significant player in shaping the developmental debate. It had managed to generate "new thinking" on social development, often by researching and publishing on crucial issues well before their importance was widely established. The present evaluation confirms that UNRISD is fulfilling its mandate to undertake policy-relevant social development research. UNRISD work is perceived by the key informants "to complement the dominant development dialogue with a social and multidisciplinary perspective". In addition, UNRISD work is seen to stimulate debate and dialogue on pertinent development issues within and outside the UN system (see Table 1).

The informants unanimously agreed that UNRISD research is very relevant to their work. As one of them put it, "the overall critical thrust of UNRISD work is refreshing and always stimulating". UNRISD work was also referred to as a very important part of one's intellectual input. Some areas of UNRISD work were considered of particular relevance; among them the recent work on globalisation, gender, poverty and governance. Some key informants from the UN system saw their own work on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), social exclusion and globalisation chiefly influenced by UNRISD reports. Another informant from the UN also felt that UNRISD work helps him to keep abreast of relevant development debates, and to interact with other UN partners working in the same area.

---

[2] A. Tostensen, Satu Huttunen, Thandika Mkandawire and Marcia Rivera with Marit Tjomsland. *No State of Disarray: An Evaluation of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Final Report.* Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, February 1997.

[3] Of the 35 people identified, 33 were sent questionnaires. 15 filled up the whole questionnaire and two provided feedback in the form of short email answers (see list of key informants in *Annex C*).

Table 1: Perceptions of interviewees regarding UNRISD's mandate

Mandate thought to be	Number of times mentioned
Policy-relevant research on issues of social development	9
Complement dominant development dialogue with social and multidisciplinary perspective	2
Independent, unbiased research on social development	1
Stimulate debate and dialogue within and outside the UN on pertinent development issues	2
Prescriptions and recommendations related to social development	2
Offer critical perspectives on social development	1
Research on social, political and economic processes	1
Dissemination of research	1

3. UNRISD and the Current Development Debate

3.1 To what extent does UNRISD research engage with wider contemporary development debates?

The majority of respondents praised UNRISD not only for its ability to engage with a wide set of contemporary development debates, but also for its ability to anticipate pertinent social development issues ahead of mainstream development debates. One response summarises the general feeling expressed by many respondents, that "UNRISD has a flare for homing in on emerging social issues in development". UNRISD is thus perceived to conduct cutting-edge research on topical and pertinent issues. Those highlighted were: the globalisation debate; work on ethnicity; political violence; post-conflict reconstruction; structural adjustment; gender mainstreaming; social exclusion; poverty; corporate social responsibility; food systems and society; environment and development; and land tenure. While affirming the contemporary relevance of UNRISD's research agenda in general, one respondent expressed disappointment with the latest effort on rethinking development economics. However, negative views on the worth of UNRISD research were limited to this one specific case.

The independence of UNRISD leads to the perception that it is able to provide an unbiased presentation of development issues. This was given as an explanation for why UNRISD is able to so successfully engage with wider development debates. Following this, some interviewees concluded that to retain policy relevance, UNRISD *must* maintain its position of independence vis-à-vis other UN agencies and constituencies.

UNRISD was seen to engage in the contemporary development debates, not only through its academic research, but also through its participation in conferences and seminars, and by being present at many intergovernmental and scholarly meetings. Specific forums/conferences mentioned were the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) and Geneva 2000: The Next Step in Social Development (the five-year follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, held in Geneva in 2000).

3.2 Does UNRISD conduct policy-relevant research?

UNRISD research was seen to be highly policy relevant by the majority of respondents. It was noted that the policy relevance of the research has increased under the new Director.

Some informants considered the "applied" focus of UNRISD research as a major strength, providing a facility and purpose beyond that provided by more strictly academic institutions. "The advantage of UNRISD over academia is its more applied orientation – while often academia does not connect with policy making." Others, however, valued the academic potential that UNRISD has, and expressed concern that an overemphasis on policy issues should not downgrade the high level (or "rigour") of academic research that UNRISD is so uniquely and well-placed to offer. "Over-emphasis on policy relevance can undermine the research and be less useful for policy in the longer run."

The issue of rigour came up again when another informant mentioned that while having "high regard for UNRISD choice of topics, innovativeness, dissemination, policy relevance and unbiased perspective", there was "sometimes a lack of academic rigour in its work". This lack of academic rigour "weakens its influence, but extends the areas it covers on very limited resources, so there is a trade-off".

Interesting also were contradictory opinions as to how the UNRISD research agenda should engage with the economic focus informing a substantial part of the current development agenda. Some interviewees viewed UNRISD's "social development" focus as a necessary and counter-balancing theme to the mainstream economics of development. To the question of the policy relevance of its research, many interviewees stressed that it was precisely the acquired comparative advantage in social development issues that afforded UNRISD such success in this regard. This point is well illustrated in the following statements:

> "Its emphasis on social policies becomes critically important during a time when pre-occupation with economic liberalisation often bypasses the issue. The recent focus of UNRISD on globalisation and equity is also timely and relevant in providing a human face to the macroeconomic framework."

> "UNRISD provides a useful counter-weight to agencies like the World Bank that tend to focus on economic and financial aspects of development policy."

A couple of respondents thought that UNRISD should broaden its mandate to engage with economic perspectives on development debates, citing this as a way in which UNRISD could greatly strengthen the policy relevance of its research. One respondent recommended that UNRISD re-visit and re-open its earlier technical work on social indicators, and that it might consider looking at social accounting matrices in the context of poverty reduction strategies.

3.3 How can UNRISD strengthen the policy relevance of its research?

A few respondents felt that UNRISD research is sufficiently policy relevant, stressing that maintaining its independent, and thus visible, position within the UN family is essential to retaining the high level of policy relevance.

Many respondents provided suggestions for strengthening the policy application of UNRISD research. These suggestions included:

- Prioritise the improvement of dissemination strategies. One respondent suggested that UNRISD widen its dissemination network to include all major universities and research institute libraries, think tanks and relevant government ministries.
- Prepare policy briefs and summaries of main findings for government and donor agencies.

- Deepen research on specific topics. It was recommended that UNRISD build a knowledge and research base in specialised areas. A caution was given that UNRISD should not spread its research interests too thin.
- Build on country-level debates and dialogues on issues of social policies, and provide policy options to developing countries.
- Develop a Northern perspective in UNRISD research by looking at some of the social policy concerns of the developed world.
- Engage in interactive meetings with the secretariats of UN agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions.
- Bring more economic analysis into current research, and seek to achieve a multidisciplinary approach that embraces rather that excludes economics. It was suggested that UNRISD could be very instrumental in "rethinking development economics". (It should be noted that this represents a minority view).
- Implement a peer review process of UNRISD publications to increase academic rigour.
- One respondent was keen to stress that while UNRISD research has policy relevance, the Institute should consider complementing its traditional "macro-level" research "with participatory research that gives voice to the plural perspectives of local actors, and particularly to the poor and marginalised". By doing this it was thought that the contextual (or "local") focus would broaden and deepen the policy relevance of UNRISD's research.

A concern was expressed in relation to UNRISD's capacity-building strategy in developing countries. "UNRISD needs to make more clear its commitment to strengthening research capacities in developing countries as one of the legs upon which it stands." Few respondents were aware of UNRISD's activities in capacity building. The latter point, although undoubtedly important, does not take into consideration that capacity building in the South is not explicit in the UNRISD mandate. The Institute is neither well designed nor adequately funded and staffed to meet such demands. This point was stressed in the Nordic evaluation.

One respondent recommended "UNRISD should link up more actively with South-based research institutions within a shared global research project, and move away from the practice of obtaining the services of individual researchers and controlling the research from a centre that is based in the North". It was claimed that this type of programme strategy would address a further concern, namely, UNRISD research findings need not only be disseminated but UNRISD should also be engaged in discussions with the South if they are to have impact on policy formulation and analysis. Nevertheless, the Institute's interaction with researchers in the South is extensive. Recently, more efforts are being deployed to develop regional networks involving researchers in the South in a more systematic manner. In the current programme, approximately 61 percent of researchers and 54 percent of UNRISD conference participants are from the South.

Also, the Institute has long had an internship programme, which grants a small number of graduate students the opportunity to gain experience in an international research setting. During the period covered by the evaluation, students from 19 countries participated in the programme.

3.4 To what extent does UNRISD research influence policy debates within developing countries?

A clear general opinion did not emerge in answer to the above question. Many informants did not know about the influence of UNRISD research on policy debates in developing countries; some suspected that the research had little impact:

"I imagine that UNRISD work has not impacted developing country policy debate, due mainly to its non-economistic treatment of social issues and the foundational orientation of its research."

One interviewee felt that the impact of research is limited to the countries where individual researchers are working. A few interviewees knew of specific cases where UNRISD work has influenced policy debates in the South. These included debates around social and ecological impacts of the green revolution; aqua-culture and the poor; conservation debates; and the role of corporations in development.

In this connection, it was also recommended that UNRISD could improve dissemination by networking with researchers and institutes in developing countries. This should help to strengthen research capacity in these countries.

UNRISD focuses on global issues − it is better known at the international level than in specific countries. Better dissemination would help to get research results to the local level. This point may not necessarily be a criticism, however: there are plenty of other agencies working at the local level, and few with the capacity to comprehend and anticipate global events. UNRISD does not need to refocus its research on the local level; rather, a global focus is more appropriate for a UN institute. UNRISD should retain an impartial view on the global "public interest", not engage with specific, local vested interests.

To the question of whether UNRISD research reflects developing country concerns within the international development arena, the key informants responded positively. They cited work on land reform, conflict and ethnicity, racism and public policy, poverty and gender, etc., all of which reflect the concerns of developing countries. UNRISD was seen as having influenced international policy debates, notably those that took place around the World Summit for Social Development.

One of the interviewees mentioned that the Institute's effectiveness and focus could improve by striking an appropriate balance between academic rigour, historical depth and immediate practical relevance for policy makers. Also, another informant mentioned that a key challenge for UNRISD in the coming years would be to create more space for local voices, and to bring them up into the "expert-dominated" international development arena.

4. UNRISD Output and Dissemination: The Quest for Relevance

UNRISD's Director and researchers, who are extensively exposed to international developmental debates, are shaping the ideas and proposals for research. This exposure is facilitated by various consultation and co-ordination mechanisms, such as international and regional meetings and workshops. These gatherings sustain the Institute's interaction with its wide network and help to integrate the concerns of national and international research communities into the UNRISD agenda. Other UN agencies, national governments, and NGOs have an opportunity to provide inputs to the development of UNRISD research projects through these and other channels of consultation. Furthermore, on-going research is reinforced and ideas are fed to the Institute through its participation in the UN global summits and conferences.[4] Finally, UNRISD's Board of Advisors, consisting of prominent academics, activists, ambassadors and private sector representatives, is responsible for approving the Institute's activities and projects.

---

[4] Among the recent ones are Geneva 2000: The Next Step in Social Development (the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development), Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century (the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women), the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and the Second World Assembly on Ageing.

The Nordic evaluation saw the merits of UNRISD's work in drawing the attention of international policy makers to issues that are the focus of intellectual and political concerns nationally. At the same time, it was recognised that such research was not very original, and was not necessarily at the cutting edge in strict scientific terms.[5] However, as pointed out by one of the informants contacted for the present evaluation:

> "A lot of UNRISD research is not completely new/unknown to development practitioners (e.g. different development theories, distributional impacts of policies), but what UNRISD is doing very correctly is reshaping it in the light of current events and showing its present relevance. This is critically important in a globalising world that seems easily forgetful about alternative approaches (e.g. neo-liberalism is expanding)".

The processes of elaborating the Institute's *Vision* for the period 2000–2005 – an exercise carried out in 1998–1999 – led UNRISD to organize its new research programme under five thematic areas (see *Annex D*). Given the shortage of resources, sharpening of UNRISD's research focus and putting together a comprehensive research programme consistent with the Institute's *Vision* was a major expectation of UNRISD's core donors.

One very important issue about research and impact is dissemination. As stated in the Nordic evaluation, "If communication between the researchers and the potential users is poor then the research (even relevant research) does not produce any utility". The reformulation of UNRISD's outreach was also part of the Institute's *Vision*. In that document, it was acknowledged, "more must be done to intensify and systematise traditional contacts, cultivate new audiences and raise the profile of the Institute within the UN system and beyond." (UNRISD, 2000b, page 19). The Institute publishes two newsletters, *Conference News* and *UNRISD News*, with worldwide distribution.[6] In 2000, the general UNRISD Discussion Paper series was replaced by Programme Papers in each of the Institute's five programme areas. Programme Papers aim at providing more coherence in the output of each area, making it easier to reach groups with special interests while maintaining contact with the Institute's traditional academic audience. Dissemination of UNRISD Programme Papers to targeted conferences has become an on-going activity. In addition to that, research results are widely disseminated in books (both "in-house" and co-published, some with publishing houses in the South), occasional papers and, since 1996, in the form of electronic publications. It is useful to point out that many UNRISD publications are non-commercial in nature, as the Institute attaches great importance to ensuring the availability of its publications to national and regional policy-making and research circles, especially in the South.

The Nordic evaluation noted that a constraint on the design of an effective dissemination strategy is that potential users of UNRISD research are a diffuse category. At the time of that evaluation (1996), the bulk of research work remained without a specific user group. Thus, it was difficult to assert whether UNRISD output was used or not, because it did not have a specific target audience. Moreover, direct interaction with users is exceptional because UNRISD engages to a limited extent in commissioned and consultancy work. Its principal channels of dissemination are publications, the UNRISD Web site, and the organization of and participation in conferences and seminars.

---

[5] The Nordic evaluation team applied a two-dimensional approach to assess scientific quality of UNRISD's output. On one hand, the team considered such attributes as validity, innovation, analytical rigour, scientific relevance, breadth or scope, depth, and productivity. On the other hand, it looked at problem definition, choice and application of methods, theoretical approach, scientific argument, results, style of writing and presentation.

[6] Between 1999 and 2001, six issues of *Conference News* and five issues of *UNRISD News* were released. The latter, with a combined circulation of 13,600 copies per issue in English, French and Spanish, is published twice a year. For further details please refer to the *OPR: Part 1 DFID's Core Support to UNRISD for the Period 1999-2000*.

In this respect, the key informants contacted for the present evaluation were asked who they perceived to be the target audience or main user groups of UNRISD work. The majority of respondents thought that the academic and research community was the main target audience. International organisations, development practitioners, national governments, public officials and policy makers came in second place. Our reading of these answers is that UNRISD is maintaining links with its traditional audience of academics and researchers, while it is increasingly perceived to be reaching a wider spectrum of actors in the development community (see Table 2).

This may stem from the explicit recognition in the Institute's *Vision* that "the policy community extends far beyond the limits of the multilateral system". In this respect, the advisory work carried out by UNRISD management and staff has increased since 1999. Besides the UN, other multilateral organisations, bilateral agencies, national governments, NGOs and research institutes in collaboration with universities are the principal beneficiaries of this advisory work.

Table 2: Who do interviewees perceive to be the target audience/main user group of UNRISD work?

Target/user group	Number of times mentioned
National governments/public service	7
NGOs	5
Academic/research community	9
Aid community	1
International organisations/policy makers	7
Development practitioners	7
General public/civil society	5
Those with no voice	1
Member countries/governments of the UN	5

Undoubtedly, one important way of increasing outreach is through the organisation of and participation in conferences and seminars. This was also recognised in the Institute's *Vision*. Although selective, conferences and seminars have a multiplier effect through the individuals who attend. Between 1999 and mid-2002, 22 public conferences, workshops and planning meetings were organised by UNRISD. They involved a total of 520 speakers and commentators, plus the audience. Among the main conferences were Taking Responsibility for Social Development (in contribution to Geneva 2000: The Next Step in Social Development, the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development), Gender Justice, Development and Rights (in contribution to Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century, the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women), Racism and Public Policy (in contribution to the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance), and Ageing, Development and Social Protection (in contribution to the Second World Assembly on Ageing). Once again, besides the conferences themselves many publication and dissemination activities also took place. In particular, to support Geneva 2000, UNRISD published a book, *Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development*, and devoted to the subject two issues of *UNRISD News* and 10 occasional papers. An on-line Virtual Forum of Initiatives was launched linked to the conference. In total, over 20,000 documents related to the conference were disseminated to 54 events on the subject across 29 countries. On-line conference registration was also implemented and interfaced with project databases to build

mailing lists for particular projects. The latter is also a way to identify users and have a better idea of who the recipients of UNRISD work are. This facilitates the targeting of output to specific audiences.

4.1 Are you familiar with UNRISD publications? Which ones?

All our respondents were familiar with UNRISD publications. This is not surprising, since they had been collaborating with the Institute in different capacities for many years. In that sense, our respondents form a biased sample. However, for the same reason, they have also been able to notice recent changes in how outputs are disseminated. Several of the respondents praised the UNRISD Web site and mentioned that it was a major source of information to keep them up-to-date on the Institute's publications, as well as wider development debates. Only one respondent was not sure about being aware of the whole range of publications, despite receiving many from the Institute. This person also suggested that targeting of UNRISD publications (e.g. making sure they reached relevant actors) could be improved.

Respondents become aware of UNRISD publications by different means: hard copies being mailed to them, libraries, the Web site, and newsletters were mentioned. Many also welcomed the introduction of email notifications.

4.2 Is UNRISD proactive in disseminating its output?

Interviewees were asked whether they felt that UNRISD is proactive in disseminating its output, and whether it should be more proactive. Respondents recognised that UNRISD has become much more proactive in recent years, and noted that the Web site and email notifications have enhanced the process of dissemination.[7] In particular, improvements in the Web site were pointed out as an excellent example of being proactive. As one of the respondents mentioned, the Web site enables quick access and offers an integrated vision of the Institute's work. Another respondent also pointed out that over recent years, UNRISD has made an effort to produce more user-friendly and accessible materials.

However, respondents were also keen to highlight that there is always room for improvement. The Institute's depository library initiative appears to be very useful, but could be extended.[8] A revision of the distribution policy was suggested, with the goal of reaching new audiences – major universities around the world, think tanks and government ministries.

Some of the interviewees suggested a more aggressive campaign for disseminating its publications. Another one suggested that UNRISD try new media outlets – working with television, for instance. However, as one of the interviewees pointed out:

> "... send out thousands of copies free to governments, civil society organisations and universities; extend the email list by about 5,000, to [include] all major media outlets in developing and developed countries. This would require a budget increase of between $100,000 and 200,000 – and where would that money come from?"

One key informant provided an interesting list of suggestions to improve UNRISD dissemination activities:

---

[7] The email distribution list increased from 450 in 1999 (date of inauguration) to over 4,100 at the time this evaluation was performed.

[8] The depository library system, outlined in the Institute's *Vision*, was an element of UNRISD's six-point strategy to improve outreach. One suitable institution was identified in each developing country, and in larger countries two or three were chosen. At the time this evaluation was performed, there were 224 depository libraries, mainly in developing countries. Each library received approximately 25 UNRISD publications during the year 2000. For further details please refer to *OPR: Part 1 DFID's Core Support to UNRISD for the Period 1999-2000.*

- Use the press more effectively: For instance, using press conferences more aggressively may increase the visibility of issues at hand. This will require some "challenging" way of presenting views to call for public attention (e.g. "UNRISD states that..." "UNRISD shows...").
- Present ideas for brief news/documentaries/interviews to international media (e.g. BBC, CNN).
- When travelling in developing countries, have presentations and call local media and press. This was acknowledged to be expensive, but could be compensated by properly developing international press conferences (e.g. calling major media news distributing agencies such as Reuters or Bloomberg).
- Have presentations at other development institutions (e.g. multilateral banks).
- Try to get summary reports to the G-8 to be discussed at their summits (e.g. the Asian Development Bank (ADB) does this with the Global Poverty Report, available on the ADB Web site).
- Create an email distribution list and send weekly summaries with very applied subject titles– as most policy makers have no time to read. A brief and concise weekly summary is the most one can expect them to absorb.

5. The UNRISD Role in the UN System

UNRISD is the sole agency within the UN system to engage exclusively in research on social development. Since its creation nearly forty years ago, UNRISD has been a pioneer in developing social indicators and broadening the developmental debate, while emphasising its two core values: a right of human beings to decent livelihood, and equal access of people to participation in decision making that affects their lives. As the Institute's information brochure states, "the challenge for research is not only to reinforce and help operationalize these values, but also to expose the extent to which they are ignored" (UNRISD 2000a, page 1).

UNRISD is aware that the UN voice in the international development debate has weakened over recent decades. Since the early 1980s, with the Third World debt crisis, the international financial institutions have acquired strategic importance vis-à-vis the UN, in spite of the latter's much broader mandate, and its stronger consultative capacity. Thus, UNRISD is also engaged in devising initiatives to reinforce the collective capacity of UN agencies to influence the development agenda.

As the Nordic evaluation pointed out, the relations between the UN and UNRISD had evolved in an ad hoc manner. Rather than relying on UNRISD inputs, many UN agencies had created their own research units. In recent years, however, UNRISD management has made efforts to change the relations of the Institute with other UN agencies. The contribution of UNRISD to their activities has grown since 1999, as has the advisory work carried by UNRISD staff for them.

UNRISD has also initiated a programme of annual retreats for high-level UN officials working in the field of social development: Improving Knowledge on Social Development in International Organisations. The aim of this initiative is to encourage dialogue and joint planning, in an informal setting, among a small group of officials concerned with research on social development. Representatives of 12 UN agencies and regional commissions were involved in the last meeting, held in May 2002. One of the key informants contacted for the present evaluation is a participant on the programme and expressed the following views:

> "This programme is excellent and has provided a major opportunity for networking and clarifying what different agencies are doing and what their position is on key issues is".

5.1 Do UNRISD research and activities fit into the UN development agenda? If so, how? Could this be strengthened? Can a better fit be achieved?

To the question of whether UNRISD research activities fit into the UN development agenda, the key informants answered positively. As one person expressed it:

> "There has been a more active attempt to relate UNRISD work to the UN during the last three or four years. The activities organised during the Geneva, Madrid, and Durban events were major intellectual contributions to those forums. The meetings of senior UN officials working on social development are also valuable opportunities to strengthen collaboration and lift [the] intellectual quality of work within the system. The leadership of the new Director and contribution of his staff to many forums and conferences has been remarkable by its extent and quality."

However, there was another, more critical, view about the capability of UNRISD to influence the UN debates on development concerns. "UNRISD responds well to the UN development agenda and produces some excellent policy analysis. The problem is diffusion. I see it electronically, but like many others (I don't) have time to read the papers and I don't hear much reference to them in meetings. I don't see many UNRISD people in key meetings."

Most of the UN informants would clearly favour more active involvement of UNRISD in research relating to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As another person pointed out, some areas of UNRISD concern – such as globalisation with equity, and social exclusion – are related to the UN development agenda, and UNRISD should explore how it can better contribute to policy discussions on the achievement of the MDGs.

Another respondent suggested "with the UN development agenda so focused on the MDGs, it is necessary that some UN agency reflect on the history of goal-setting in the UN system, how these goals have worked and how these goals can be made better". Another suggested that UNRISD could explore how to contribute to the policy discussions on the achievement of the MDGs, and also study why progress toward achieving the MDGs decelerated in the 1990s across all developing regions when the global economy witnessed unprecedented prosperity and technological innovation.

Finally, there were some suggestions about how to improve UNRISD engagement with the UN development agenda:

- Collaborate further with other UN agencies and UN regional commissions.
- Strengthen information exchange on work in progress; share networks of experts, researchers, etc.
- Better target relevant users within the UN system.
- Participate more actively in key UN meetings.
- Sharpen the triangulation between UNRISD-UNCTAD-UNDP in the direction of an institutional counterpoint to the IMF-WB-WTO.

6. Conclusions: How could knowledge be better translated into policy?

Assessing UNRISD's performance is a difficult exercise given the mandate of the organisation. This evaluation report gathers the opinions of a group of key informants in four particular areas: to what extent UNRISD is perceived to fulfil its mandate; the quality and extent of its dissemination efforts; UNRISD engagement with the current development debate, and its role within the UN system.

- The Institute is perceived nearly unanimously by interviewees to fulfil its mandate of conducting policy-relevant research on pressing issues of social development. UNRISD research is considered to be a complement to the dominant development paradigm pursued by the Bretton Woods institutions. Two salient features of UNRISD's work on development were highlighted by the informants: its multidisciplinary approach, which provides a useful counter-point to the economistic approach prevailing in the BWIs; and its capacity to draw the attention of international policy makers to issues that are the focus of intellectual and political concerns at the national level.

- Given its autonomous status, UNRISD is ideally placed to inject new ideas and thinking on how to tackle pressing issues of social development both within and outside the UN system. UNRISD is perceived as engaging successfully in global development debates, but the extent to which UNRISD research influences policy debates within developing countries could not be clearly ascertained. How could UNRISD knowledge find its way into policy in developing countries? Is it just a problem of dissemination? As mentioned in the Nordic evaluation, "Much of UNRISD research, being critical in nature, has been running against major currents challenging established 'truths'. By virtue of that fact, research findings may have been dismissed by prevailing knowledge regimes embedded in power structures" (Tostensen et al. 1997, page 43). Therefore, increasing the policy relevance of research would probably require more than increased efforts of dissemination. It would require an explicit recognition that policy changes are the outcome of the interaction of different groups with different political interests. Nonetheless, a clear recognition of the actors involved in policy making, and better understanding of the underlying power structures, could help to devise outreach strategies that target powerful actors in particular. .

- Something that is easily forgotten is that research relevance depends on the users themselves – their ability to define research problems, and their readiness or availability to absorb results and tailor them to their needs. "Unfortunately, decision makers in agencies are not inclined to read that much, especially not books..." In this respect, the effort of UNRISD to distil research findings in brief publications was praised by several interviewees. However, UNRISD should try to use different means of communication, and mass media in particular, in order to broaden its outreach and improve visibility.

- UNRISD is increasingly perceived as trying to link up more systematically with other UN bodies and as helping to build capacity on social development issues within the UN system. However, it was also recognised that a lot more could be done in terms of targeting relevant UN users. As one interviewee mentioned, UNRISD could do more to help shape the UN development agenda together with other UN institutes. Knowledge and policy allegedly interact at different points and at different levels within a bureaucracy (Keeley and Scoones, 1999). The UN system may not be an exception. It would be important to identify those levels and entry points – workshops, conferences and meetings – at which UNRISD has to be present in order to influence the content of the official UN agenda.

7. References

Keeley, J. and I. Scoones (1999). *Understanding Environmental Policy Processes: A Review*. IDS Working Paper # 89.

Tostensen, A., Satu Huttunen, Thandika Mkandawire, Marcia Rivera with Marit Tjomsland (1997). *No State of Disarray: An Evaluation of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Final Report*. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, February.

UNRISD (2000a). *About the Institute*, UNRISD, Geneva.

UNRISD (2000b). *UNRISD 2000+: A Vision for the Future of the Institute*, Geneva, April.

UNRISD (2002a). *Policy and Resources Plan*, Geneva, May.

Annex A: Advancing Development Debates – The UNRISD Timeline

Decade	Emphasis on	Major research areas
2000+	**Taking Global Responsibility for Social Development**	- Civil Society and Social Movements - Democracy, Governance and Human Rights - Identities, Conflict and Cohesion - Social Policy and Development - Technology, Business and Society
1990s	**Anticipating the Social Effects of Globalisation**	- Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change - Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development - Ethnic Conflict and Development - Integrating Gender into Development Policy - Political Violence and Social Movements - Rebuilding War-torn Societies - Socio-Economic Impact of the Production, Trade and Use of Illicit Drugs
1980s	**Promoting a Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approach to Social Development**	- Measurement and social Indicators - Popular Participation - Refugees, Returnees and Local Societies
1970s	**Debating the Social and Political Dynamics of Modernization**	- Agricultural Co-operatives - Food Systems and Society - Green Revolution - UN "Unified Approach to Development"
1960s	**Pioneering Social and Human Indicators of Development**	- Exploring the Potential and Limits of Planning and Technology - Measuring Social Development - Rural Co-operatives and Regional Development

Source: UNRISD (2000a).

ANNEX B: UNRISD LOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND PROJECT HEADER SHEET

The following LogFrame is a revised version of the original LogFrame used for our core support to UNRISD. The amendments are included in italics for ease of reference.

Narrative Summary	Objectively Verifiable Indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions/ Risks
Goal: Increase international commitment to International Development Targets, through enhancing the capacity of multilateral organisations			
Purpose: To enhance policy-relevant social development research capacity within the UN, and improve dissemination of research findings to relevant agencies *Includes analysis of role of social policy in development and poverty elimination*	**End of Project Impact Indicator** UNRISD capacity for research sustained and improved; increased capacity for dissemination of research within UN.	Project completion and evaluation reports; UNRISD Progress Report (annual); review of UNRISD database of professional staff members advisory roles in other UN and International agencies	Other donors continue support alongside DFID. UNRISD maintains its role as autonomous research organisation within the UN.
Outputs: Case study reports, overview papers, manuscripts	**Output level Indicators:** Number of published reports maintained	Annual reviews of projects in UNRISD Progress Report	Researchers of high quality can be attracted and kept at UNRISD.
Publications	Number of published research papers, monographs, and edited volumes maintained	UNRISD Progress Report (annual);	Ibid
	Quality of publications maintained.	Refereed publications, book reviews.	
Key publications on social policy	*Expanded publication record, on social policy*	*Ibid*	
Research planning and methodology meetings	Number of meetings held; geographic,	Meeting reports, participant lists, etc.	

16

Annex C: List of Key Informants

UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs:
Sergei Zelenev
Chief
Social Analysis and Policy Unit
Email: zelenev@un.org

UNDP:
Carlos Lopes,
Policy Support Co-ordinator,
Bureau for Development Policy
Email:carlos.lopes@undp.org

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr,
Director
Human development Report Office
Email:sakiko.fukuda-parr@undp.org

Jan Vandemoortele,
Group Leader
Social and Economic Development Group
Email:jan.vandemoortele@undp.org

UNCTAD:
Charles Gore
Senior Economic Affairs Officer
Least Development Countries
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
Email : charles.gore@unctad.org

ILO:
John Langmore
Director
ILO Liaison Office to the UN
Email: langmore@nycilo.org

ESCAP:

Ms. Lim Kim-lan
Director, Social Development Division
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Email: limk.unescap@un.org

Asian Development Bank:
Isabel Ortiz
Senior Economist
Poverty Reduction and Social Development Division
Asian Development Bank
Email: iortiz@adb.org

Academic/NGO respondents:

David Barkin
Professor of Economics
Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, Mexico
Email: barkin@cueyatl.uam.mx

Ha-joon Chang
Faculty of Economics
Cambridge University
Email: ha-joon.chang@econ.cam.ac.uk

Josefa Francisco
Regional Coordinator
DAWN
Women and Gender Institute (WAGI)
Miriam College, University of the Philippines
P.O. Box 110, Diliman
Quezon City, The Phillipines
Email: gigifran@skyinet.net

Professor Björn Hettne
Department of Peace & Development Research
Göteborg University
Email: b.hettne@padrigu.gu.se

George Larbi
Lecturer in Public Policy
International Development Department
School of Public Policy
University of Birmingham
Birmingham, UK.
Email: G.A.Larbi@bham.ac.uk

Michel Pimbert
Research Associate
IIED
London, England
Email: michel.pimbert@iied.org

Professor Frances Stewart
Director, International Development Centre
Queen Elizabeth House
University of Oxford
Email: frances.stewart@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Zenebeworke Tadesse
Forum for Social Studies
P.O. Box 3089
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Email: zentad@telecom.net.et

Michael Watts
Director, Institute of International Studies
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, California
Email: mwatts@socrates.berkeley.edu

Annex D: Programme of Research at June 2002

Major Programme Areas	Sub-themes
Social Policy and Development	• Social Policy in a Development Context • Globalization, Export-Oriented Development for Women and Social Policy • Agrarian Change, Gender and Land Rights • Neoliberalism and Institutional Reform in East Asia • HIV/AIDS and Development
Democracy, Governance and Human Rights	• Technocratic Policy Making and Democratization • Public Sector Reform and Crisis-Ridden States • Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector
Identities, Conflict and Cohesion	
Civil Society and Social Movements	• Grassroots Movements and Initiatives for Land Reform • Evolving Agricultural Structures and Civil Society in Transitional Countries: The Case of Central Asia
Technology, Business and Society	• Information Technology for Social Development • Business Responsibility for Sustainable Development
Special Events and Activities	• Racism and Public Policy (UNRISD contribution to the third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance) • Ageing, Development and Social Protection (UNRISD contribution to the Second World Assembly on Ageing) • The Political Economy of Sustainable Development: Environmental Conflict, Participation and Movements (UNRISD contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development) • Improving Knowledge on Social Development in International Organizations • The Need to Rethink Development Economics