

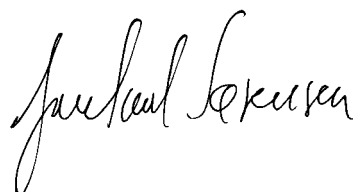
The purpose of the **Human Development Reports** (HDRs), which the UNDP has published since 1989, first with Global Human Development Reports, and subsequently with National HDRs, has been to stimulate public debate about important factors influencing the development process. The authors of these **Reports** thereby seek to influence policy – both at the global and national levels. The **Reports** have done so with a concept of development that goes beyond a simple economic perspective. This concept sets human development – defined as the enlargement of choices available to people – as the ultimate goal, and as the only true yardstick of development. The Human Development Index (HDI) that underpins this concept incorporates indices of economic achievement with indices measuring health and education. This Index has become a powerful tool – albeit imperfect and often controversial – for measuring the performance of individual countries over time, and for comparing the performance of individual countries in terms of the degree of attention that human development is being given in policy-making.

Thus, the five previous **Latvia Human Development Reports** have analysed the social costs and human dimension of Latvia's transition to a market economy. They have focussed on such issues as social protection, health, education and growing regional, ethnic and income disparities. While it may be difficult to prove a direct causal relationship, important legislative reforms and national programmes in Latvia can arguably be traced to the analysis of structural problems in Latvian society that was first brought out in these **Reports**, and to the subsequent public debate and awareness that the **Reports** helped to stimulate. The present, sixth, **Latvia Human Development Report** takes this analysis one step further by focussing on the public policy process in Latvia itself. In so doing, this **Report** focuses not just on whether the socio-economic conditions of Latvia today – and administrative policies at the State and local levels – are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the population, but also on the extent to which individuals and social groupings have opportunities to influence policies that effect them, and on whether they are being heard.

As a **Human Development Report** this is a ground-breaking publication, not just in Latvia, but in the World, because few are the countries in the

World today in which it would be possible – in a report by a United Nations agency – to gauge whether true and effective democracy has taken root and permeated the institutions, processes and practices of policy-making. Indeed, a report that asked similar questions could well be controversial even in countries with well-established democracies. The openness with which large numbers of decision-makers, *Saeima* deputies, senior government officials, representatives of the media, academia and NGOs have contributed to the analysis and recommendations of this **Report** is a sign of how far Latvia has come since regaining its independence, and augurs well for its desire to become an open, participatory democratic society.

Public policy process is a term that only makes sense in the context of a democratic society. As this **Report** shows, this process is in Latvia still conditioned by the effects of more than fifty years of totalitarian regimes that weakened civil society and created a gulf of distrust between the State and individuals, a gulf that the new democratic institutions are still trying to overcome. At the same time, the concentration of economic power and mass media and IT-technology in the new, market-based economy creates new conditions for influence and control over people's behaviour. This **Report** attempts to draw a balanced picture of the development of public policy making in independent Latvia by focussing sharply on areas that remain characterised by a lack of transparency and openness, and by undue concentration and influencing of policy-making processes. The **Report** also focuses on positive achievements and new opportunities that have enlarged the opportunities for dialogue and consultation between the State and civil society. I hope that the analyses and recommendations in this **Report** will contribute to further strengthening the public policy process as a dynamic that itself contributes to a more open and more people-centred society.



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