

## **Concept Note on Indicators and Measurement: Demonstrating and Improving the Impact of Access to Information**

Jamie Horsley

Within the last decade, approximately 40 countries have adopted access to information (ATI) laws, with varying goals and expectations, bringing the total of such laws worldwide to close to 70. Despite this “bandwagon” effect, to date not much has been done to evaluate whether ATI laws are in fact accomplishing their stated and unstated policy objectives. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, for a variety of reasons, many ATI laws are in fact not being implemented in the way their drafters envisioned. Clearly, just passing an ATI law is not enough to ensure the intended results. Even some countries with well-established ATI regimes have experienced political backlash, allegedly in the interests of national security or for other reasons. Is the ATI movement in danger of losing steam? Have our expectations for ATI been unrealistic?

A threshold issue for our discussion is how we should define “success” for a transparency regime. Some ATI laws identify various policy objectives in their “purposes” clause, whereas others simply refer to guaranteeing access to information or a “right to know.” Should we even attempt to assess how ATI laws are operating in practice and what their various impacts have been? What if we are not measuring the right impacts, or not capturing positive impacts other than those originally identified? Some ATI proponents argue that, because access to information is a basic human right, there is no need to measure its impact or evaluate its “success” and that attempts to do so may undermine the general acceptance of this principle. If studies indicate that ATI laws are in fact not (yet) showing an impact on anti-corruption, for example, might this finding undercut efforts to further improve ATI systems? On the other hand, even if one accepts that providing access to information of itself constitutes “success,” if we do not undertake some sort of assessment, how do we know that ATI laws are in fact delivering on their promise of access to information? If we agree that certain broader policy objectives of ATI are also important and should be part of any definition of “success,” how do we counter complaints that ATI regimes are costly, resource-intensive and complicated to administer if we cannot demonstrate that the benefits justify and even outweigh the costs in a democratic society?

In sum, given the diversity of possible objectives for an ATI law, can we identify a shared definition or understanding of what constitutes a “successful” ATI regime? Specifically, what are the objectives that ATI is expected to promote? Do we need to demonstrate the actual impact of ATI?

If we conclude that some sort of assessment makes sense, what are useful indicators and measurement techniques for assessing impact? What are the potential audiences for such an exercise? Should there be different measures, and expectations, for short-term and long-term success?

We do not yet have much data on the success of ATI regimes, however defined and measured. A fascinating study conducted by the Open Society Justice Initiative in 2004, analyzing 1,900 coordinated and standardized test requests in 14 selected countries, found that requests for information yielded information more often in countries with freedom of information laws than in countries without such laws, leading to the conclusion that “freedom of information laws have had a significant positive impact in the countries studied.”<sup>1</sup> While obtaining requested information is surely one kind of success, is it a sufficient measure of the impact of ATI laws? Did the researchers’ experience replicate that of the citizens who are actually using (or not) their ATI syse

process, better protect individual rights and interests, etc.; the government that adopted the ATI law, spends human and fiscal resources to establish and implement the ATI institutions and hopes to curb corruption and promote more effective, evidence-based decision-making; domestic and international investors that seek reliable information about the economic and policy environment in which they operate; domestic and international donors that have supported development of ATI regimes and other programs in-country to achieve certain objectives; the media; academics; others? Is it possible to design an assessment that will satisfy all audiences, or does it make more sense to attempt to craft more targeted studies?

What are the relevant factors to examine? Are there concrete, observable measures or indicators for assessing implementation and impact of ATI laws? For example, are statistics compiled by government agencies on the amount of information proactively disclosed, the number of requests made, the number refused and the reasons therefore, the number of admi77657196117in-co0.0004 Tc -0.0004 Tww 12 0 0 12 302.62267 3329.5571961

Finally, how can we best utilize the results of assessments to improve the impact of ATI in different countries?

The subject of demonstrating and improving the impact of ATI systems clearly is an extremely complex one. We will try to come to a common understanding on some of these issues in order to offer recommendations to the entire groups of what should be done to enable us to assess impact and better achieve the objectives of access to information.



## Group Five

### International Norms: demonstrating and improving impact

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# Development Centre Studies

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by  
Christiane Arndt and Charles Oman



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FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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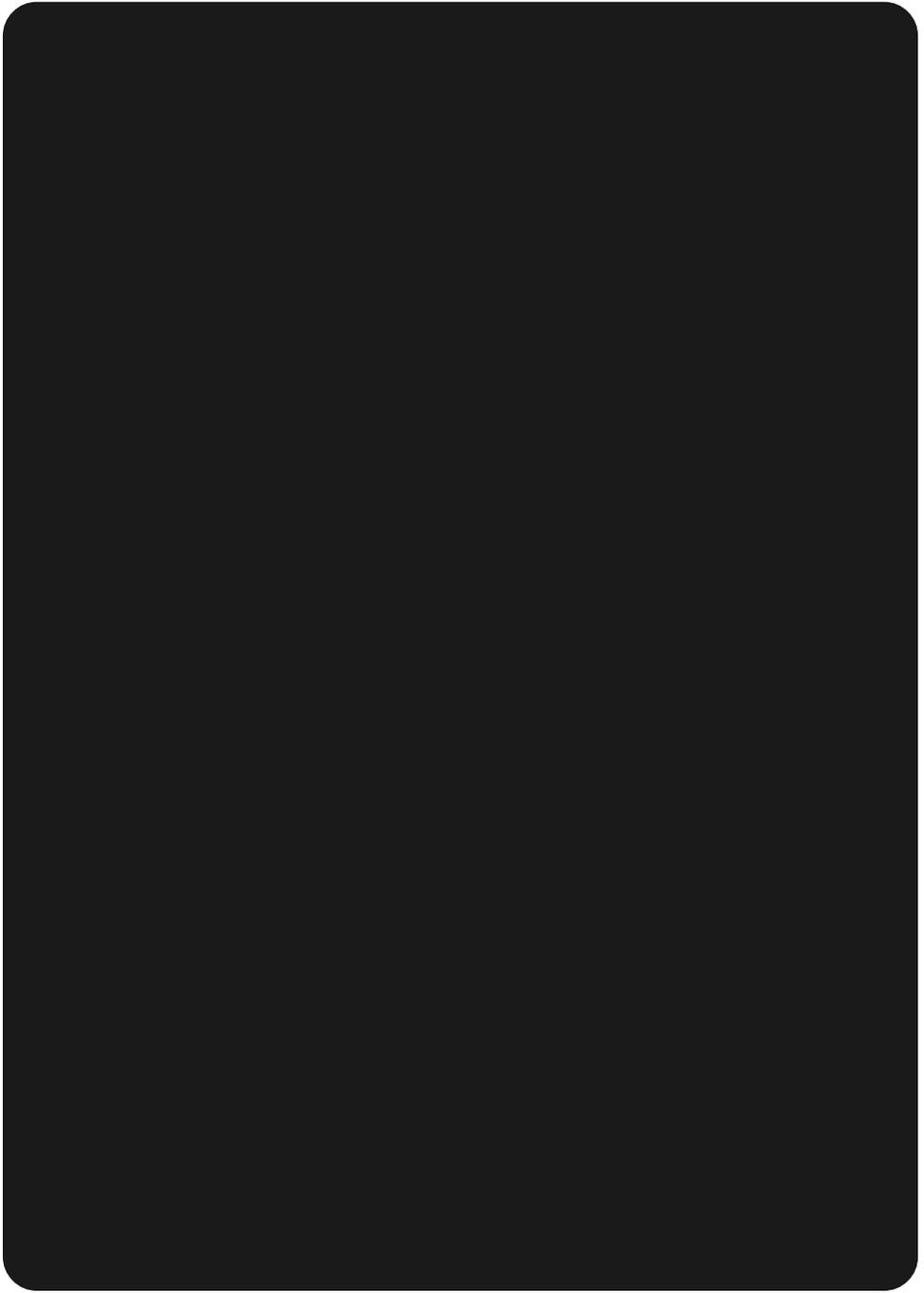
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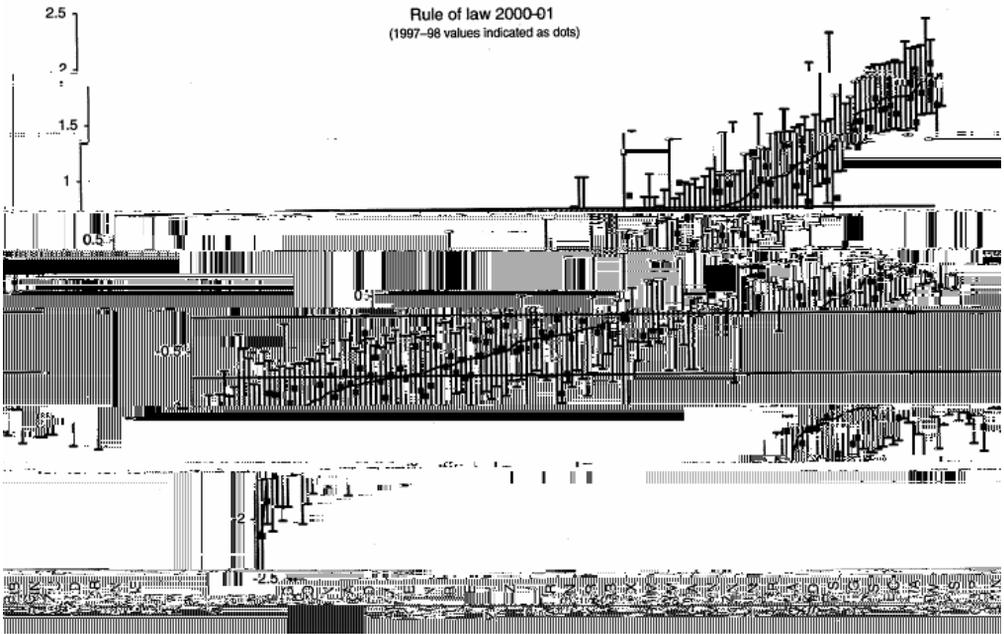






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1.  $y(j,k) = \alpha(k) + \beta(k)(g(j) + \varepsilon(j,k))$

**List of Abbreviations and Indices**

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j	Country, $j = 1, 2, \dots, J$
k	Indicator (subcomponent of the composite indicator), $k = 1, 2, \dots, K$
$y(j,k)$	observed score on indicator k for country j
$g(j)$	Unobserved "true governance", in our example true Rule of Law. $g(j)$ is postulated to exist in the form of a normally distributed random variable with mean 0 and standard deviation 1.
$\varepsilon(j,k)$	Disturbance term also referred to as error term. It consists of not only perception and measurement error and sampling variation, but also the imperfect relationship between the particular



$$\alpha(j), \beta(j), \sigma(j)$$

$$2. L(y; \alpha, \beta, \sigma_\varepsilon^2(1), \dots, \sigma_\varepsilon^2(K)) = \prod_{j=1}^J (2 \cdot \pi)^{-J/2} |\Omega|^{-1/2} \cdot \exp\left(-\frac{1}{2} \cdot (y(j) - \alpha)' \Omega^{-1} (y(j) - \alpha)\right)$$

$$\begin{array}{ll} \alpha & \alpha \\ \beta & \beta \\ \Omega & \beta\beta' \quad \sigma_\varepsilon^2 \cdot \beta \end{array}$$

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5.  $sd[g(j)|y(j), \sigma_{\varepsilon}^2(1), \dots, \sigma_{\varepsilon}^2(K)] = \left[ 1 + \sum_{k=1}^{K(j)} \sigma_{\varepsilon}^2(k)^{-2} \right]^{-1/2}$



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### List of Variables

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Variable	Description and Source
Africa	Regional Dummy for Africa

Table A.II.1. Explained Variable: Growth of Per Capita GDP

Explanatory Variables	OLS (1)	IV (2)	IV (3)
Ln of GDP per capita 1970	-0.014 (0.002)	-0.029 (0.009)	-0.021 (0.006)
Rule of Law 1996	0.011 (0.002)	0.040 (0.017)	0.026 (0.010)
Average investment rate (gross capital formation) as % of GDP, wdi	0.128 (0.019)	0.106 (0.033)	0.115 (0.026)

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Table AII.2. Explained variable: Rule of Law 2002

Explanatory Variables	OLS (1)	OLS (2)	OLS (3)	OLS (4)	IV (5)	IV (6)	IV (7)	IV (8)
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Table A.II.3. **Rule of Law 2002**

Explanatory variables	IV (1)	IV (2)	IV (3)	IV (4)
Ln of GDP per capita 1970 (million 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars)	0.950 (0.191)	0.840 (0.140)	0.835 (0.158)	1.034 (0.134)
Ln of Settler mortality	-0.095 (0.095)	-0.144 (0.104)	-0.089 (0.095)	0.022 (0.094)
<b>Regional dummies</b> (Western countries base level)				
Africa	0.018 (0.402)		0.035 (0.331)	0.314 (0.303)
East Asia	0.269 (0.391)		0.079 (0.277)	0.127 (0.258)
Eastern Europe			-0.965 (	





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statistically significant differences, particularly among the majority of countries that fall in the center of the spectrum, make it difficult to confidently distinguish the countries. Nonetheless, aggregate governance indicators can be useful for translating various data sources into a coherent framework, and, although still imprecise, the aggregate indicators cover a larger sample and are more reliable than any one indicator alone. From their study, the authors conclude that governance matters: they show "empirical evidence of a strong causal relationship from governance to better development outcomes."

### **Kaufmann and Kraay, "Growth Without Governance" (2002)**

In a subsequent study entitled "Growth Without Governance," Kaufmann and Kraay looked specifically at a feature of corruption as it affected the governance indicator data, predominantly in Latin America and other transition economies: the phenomenon of state capture--which occurs "[i]f the fruits of income growth largely accrue to an elite that benefits from misgovernance, then any possible positive impact of income growth on governance could be offset by the effect of the elite's negative influence." The implications lie in matters of reform, and particularly in identifying and targeting of country-specific needs which, in the case of states where growth is inhibited by capture, require "much more emphasis must be placed on promoting mechanisms of external accountability, voice, participation, and transparency.

### **Kaufmann and Kraay, "Governance Matters III: New Indicators for 1996-2002 and Addressing Methodological Challenges"**

Kaufmann and Kraay updated their research in 2003 with "Governance Matters III: New Indicators for 1996-2002 and Addressing Methodological Challenges." The later reports greatly increase the number of data sources as well as the number of countries included in the study, including up to 199 countries for the 2002 data. By means of illustration, the 2003 paper looks at the U.S. Government policy on the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), which announced rules for allocation of funds according to governance-based factors, including the degree to which potential recipient countries "govern justly," "invest in people," and "promote economic freedom." Kaufmann and Kraay in their conclusions caution against attempting to group countries based on levels of governance rather than viewing them in relation to

economic information and the legal framework for access to information affects the quality of governance in a given state; she further examines how restrictions on information--particularly limitations on media freedom--can reduce the quality of governance. Building on scholarship examining the way in which



government policy, but rather "the real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals," and therefore reflects more broadly the interaction between governments and nongovernmental actors.

The methodology of Freedom in the World is largely based on established standards in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A team of regional experts and scholars evaluates a broad

Download the [Opacity Index 2004](#)

## Transparency International

**Transparency International (TI)** is a non-governmental organization dedicated to combating corruption on a global scale. Internationally, TI "raises awareness about the damaging effects of corruption, advocates policy reform, works towards the implementation of multilateral conventions and subsequently monitors compliance by governments, corporations and banks." The TI network also includes more than 85 national chapters around the world that monitor institutions and advocate reforms within countries.

In the 2003 version of its annual **Global Corruption Report**, Transparency International focused its analysis on the right of access to information as an integr8 58(tw)1120128(to- [he)8( strugs06 106 436106 60.180l0aC 217.98 12012 Tm (, )Tj 4o

laws, regulations, and pending measures that protect or restrict the right to access information; jurisprudence of tribunals allowing or denying access to information; campaigns to educate the public about the right to information; and systems for submitting requests for public information. Although the resulting report does not draw any subjective conclusions about the standing of access to information rights in the IAC countries, the objective data provides a valuable guide for using official sources to evaluate information freedoms.

Visit the [\*\*Inter-American Commission on Human Rights website\*\*](#)

### **Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism/ Southeast Asian Press Alliance**

*Access to Information in Southeast Asia* (Sheila Coronel, ed.)

[\*\*Buy the book\*\*](#)

In the book *Access to Information in Southeast Asia*, published in 2001, editor Sheila Coronel presents a survey of eight countries in Southeast Asia that indexes and compares the availability of public records in each country. The survey looks at the freedom of information laws and the accessibility of 45 different categories of public records in each country, and on this basis ranks the countries according to their openness. The appendices of the book include a cross-country comparison

20. Bank records of gov't officials
21. Election contributions & expenditures
22. Registration of other forms of property of gov't officials (aircraft, yachts, cars)
23. Financial disclosure reports that show assets and liabilities of gov't officials

25. Financial sta

# Human rights and statistics: Some reflections on the no-man's-land between concept and indicator

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**Abstract.** Indicators for implementation of human rights are essential for developing a strategy for the promotion and protection of those rights and, indeed for democratic development. The experience of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development with its analytical grid (using a series of human rights indicators) to assess democracy in specific countries leads us to make a series of observations on the current debate over indicators for human rights.

1. Indicators are useful to the extent that they provide a qualitative analysis (i.e.: address the scope and complexity of the

to physical integrity. Increasingly also, we have seen efforts to quantify economic and social rights (e.g. [10]). It is therefore difficult to generalise to the entire field of human rights. It can be argued though that each right has both an objective and a subjective aspect. Certain rights – and especially the objective aspects of certain rights – lend themselves more easily than others to quantitative measurement.

My concern in this paper is with political rights and, in particular, participation rights. These comprise, for instance, highly subjective rights such as freedom of expression. Such a right is not nearly as clear-cut as the right to freedom from arbitrary execution or freedom from torture. Each political right involves numerous facets and a complex interrelation amongst those various facets. This is particularly so with the right to participate, or the right to choose one's political representatives. This area has seen several attempts at quantification (e.g. [2,12]). Despite the fact that they have been severely criticised on the basis of serious methodological and conceptual flaws, they continue to be widely used and quoted. A similar phenomenon has occurred with respect to the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI). Considered by its creators to be the weakest part of the annual Human Development Reports, the HDI is nonetheless the most often quoted component of the Reports, and has acquired a status of autonomy with respect to its context (i.e., the Reports).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the problem is that once a quantitative measure is created, it will be used independently from the analysis that originally generated it. The underlying question we must face is ultimately: are some statistics (even faulty ones) better than no statistics at all?

This question must be addressed in the context of the several distinct tracks in the discussion of the application of statistical methods to human rights issues. One track concerns the effort to generate information on the national level that can orient policy development and programmes to address human rights abuse. A second track is related to the international attempt to ensure accountability for massive violations of human rights and crimes against humanity. The third track – and the one that most informs the analysis in this article – is the renewed debate surrounding the development of a human rights index, or even a democracy index.

This article addresses in particular the development and implementation of indicators for policy orientation in the field of democratic development. It begins with an overview of the experience of my institution, Rights & Democracy, in developing and implementing a series of indicators for democratic development based on human rights criteria. This experience has allowed us to identify a number of issues which caution against quick translation of political rights phenomena into quantitative measures. It will then examine the broader debate on human rights indicators, looking at the principal trends and attempting to identify the issues that need to be addressed in the construction of indicators. A third section will underline the expectations of practitioners with respect to human rights and democracy indicators. Finally, some conclusions and recommendations will be formulated on the basis of the preceding considerations.

## **2. The rights & democracy “democratic development framework”: Some lessons learned**

The International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development – now known as “Rights & Democracy” – is an institution created by the Parliament of Canada in 1988 with the mandate of promoting international human rights and the development of democracy around the world. Through

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- The effectivity of the *right to vote* is considered to be the fundamental indicator of freeness and fairness of elections, which in turn is the classic measure of the existence or not of a democratic system. It also is in most cases an indicator of the broader state of gDo5jh of the political institutions in general.
- The application of the *right to take part in government* provides an indication of the quality of political participation that goes beyond elections and the formal electoral process to allow us to assess the strength of civil society and its capacity to actively involve itself in significantly influencing the public policy agenda.
- The *freedoms of association and assembly* are essential for democratic participation. They indicate the quality of and even the potential for political expression of the unorganised as well as the organised sectors of society.
- The *freedoms of opinion and expression*, finally, are essential to the existence and development of a vigorous public sphere where all citizens, without distinction, can participate in debating society's political and social priorities.

It is interesting to note here the view expressed by Guillermo O'Donnell [22], to the effect that the core characteristics of a democratic regime are, on the one hand, an institutionalised system of fair elections and, on the other, a series of basic freedoms which stand in a *causal relationship* to democracy and which, moreover, are the condition for the generation of other rights. These rights he identifies as being the freedoms of expression, information, assembly and association.

## 2.2. Security

A climate of personal security, in addition to the moral imperative of respect for life and human dignity, is essential for the development of an active civil society that exercises its rights to democratic participation. The proxies we use here are again four:

- The first two – *extra-judicial killings and torture* – represent the most extreme forms of insecurity. When the right to life and freedom from torture are systematically violated, all other individual and group rights are at risk.
- *Arbitrary arrest and detention* allows us to assess whether or not a climate of repression exists, and offers an indicator of the direct involvement of the state and its agents in maintaining such a climate.
- The occurrence of *violence against women* – whether in the public or the private sphere<sup>3</sup> – constitutes an indication of the nature and extent of barriers to participation by women in the public sphere.

## 2.3. Well-being

This category purports to assess the material aspects of existence and touches principally on economic, social and environmental rights. In addition to the fact that these rights are important in terms of the quality of life of members of a given society, they also have an impact on the quality of democracy in that society. Clearly, extreme inequality of access to economic and social rights affects the quality

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<sup>3</sup>We define violence against women in the same manner as the United Nations' Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (A/48/629), as follows: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." In the terms of the Declaration also "women's opportunities to achieve legal, social, political and economic equality in society are limited . . . by and endemic violence."

of democracy by inhibiting the real exercise of democratic rights by the poorest segments of society. Furthermore, some empirical research suggests that extreme material inequality or the absence of public policies to redress such skewed distribution contributes to democratic decay [2]. In addition, the neo-liberal vilification of the role of the State in the economy and its consequent withdrawal from furnishing public goods undermines not only economic and social rights, but also threatens the entire family of rights [7].

The four proxies used in this category – education, health care, labour rights, environment – allow us to assess the broader category of fulfilment of basic human needs (which would include food, shelter, employment, etc.) from a strategic perspective. The justification for each is the following:

– *Education*

- The examination of the *rights of minority groups* provides insight into the degree of inclusiveness and tolerance of the democratic system. How minorities are defined and in what terms they are recognised is a measure of democratic participation as well as of formal inclusiveness.

## 2.6. Democratic institutions

This category is designed to give a clearer assessment of the role of the state in promoting and protecting human rights and democracy. The two sub-categories examined here are the political institutions of the state and the rule of law.

*Political institutions* must themselves be structured so as to ensure the permanence of democratic processes. The proxies we have chosen here are the following:

- free and fair elections (ensuring genuine expression of the popular will in the choice of political representatives);
- a competitive party system (ensuring the existence of a choice of political options);
- separation of powers (ensuring accountability of all branches of government);
- decentralisation of government (allowing for direct access to participation in the political process);
- civilian control of the military (ensuring subordination of the security forces to the democratic process).

*Rule of law*, understood as an independent and predictable legal framework and process, is essential to a society in which human rights violations are not tolerated and where democratic participation is enabled. The proxies we have selected here are:

- access to justice (as a measure of the availability and credibility of the court system for the entire population);
- fair trial (as a measure of the independence of the judiciary);
- a democratic constitution (as a fundamental guarantee of the institutionalisation of human rights, including the right to democracy).

## 2.7. Results

We have applied this analytical grid in seven countries to date (Kenya, Tanzania, El Salvador, Guatemala, Thailand, Peru and Pakistan). Even though the goal was not, from the outset, to establish a comparative index, our experiences of application have confirmed that view. We have seen that, despite the fact that we use a common methodology and series of categories and criteria, the results of each study vary vastly from one country situation to another. In large part, this appears to be due to the fact that the concrete situation in each country has a determining effect on the interpretation of the data.

A second major lesson of our experience with this set of indicators is that their interpretation is often highly contested. Despite the fact that a great deal of effort is put into identifying areas of common ground and consensual strategies amongst the various actors involved, especially between state and civil society, it is ultimately rare that consensus can be attained around the major conclusions of the studies. Human rights criteria may be characterised as universal, but they are not neutral in concrete country situations. On the contrary they are highly politically charged, their definition is the subject of acrimonious dispute, and their application affects the material and political interests of many (if not all) social actors. Human rights indicators cannot therefore be established as if they did not refer to subjects of conflicting interests. It isn't unreasonable as well that we consider that the idea of value-free measurable indicators is highly misleading, and all the more so if they purport to establish an "index". Human rights are values – they cannot be approached as value-free.

### **3. The debate on indicators: Issues and context**

There is a strange conundrum in the discussion surrounding indicators: despite the fact that a large number of analysts identify major conceptual and methodological problems in the definition and construction of indicators for human rights, very few of them wholly reject the use of indicators even though it is unclear whether the problems they identify will ever really be resolved. It is therefore important to examine some of the major trends and issues in the debate on indicators. It is also important to recognise that, given the variety and seriousness of the problems raised with creating indicators, in the words of the UNDP itself, none of the various proposed systems for classification and measurement of human rights “has so far gained universal, or even common, acceptance” [33, p. 19].

The numerous problems raised with respect to the construction and use of indicators, even by the proponents of their use, revolve principally around the subjectivity of human rights per se, and the paucity and unreliability of data for various reasons. These problems include the following:

- developing adequate definitions of concepts in the human rights area [1,4,14];
- problems of data collection – and data collectors – which undermine the reliability and comprehensiveness of the data [6,11,14,21,32,33].

Above and beyond these immediate problems, however, we can identify a few overriding concerns which merit further attention. It appears to me that there is a tendency on the part of the proponents of statistical indicators and indices to brush off what they may perceive as “soft” issues, those of a conceptual nature. In my view, we ignore them at our peril. By refusing to deal with them, our efforts to construct indicators will be at best irrelevant, at worst misleading or even harmful. I will briefly explore several of these concerns now.

#### *3.1. Conceptualisation: Turning rights into indicators*

Statistics can be useful as an analytical tool, but – obviously – only if they are well constructed and appropriate to the problem to be addressed. The question we must ask is therefore under what conditions can statistical indicators for human rights be valid? Five major issues must be addressed in this discussion. They are: 1) how to conceptualise indicators for human rights purposes; 2) the complex nature of certain rights; 3) the need for interpretation and contextualisation; 4) the problem of mystification of statistics by users; and 5) the need for theory in order to link the concept to the indicator.

There appears to be no general agreement even on what an indicator is. The UN “Common Country Assessment” framework defines an indicator as “a variable or measurement, conveying information which may be qualitative or quantitative, but consistently measurable”.<sup>4</sup> In practice however, in the vast majority of proposals for “indicators” or “checklists”, including those of the CCA in many instances and of the UNDP’s proposed indices, and that of my own organisation, we find not measurable indicators at all but rather factors or phenomena that require rigorous unpacking in order to arrive at anything that could conceivably be consistently measurable. And even then, as Naila Kabeer rightly signals: “Indicators can be seen as highly compressed summaries of information, meanings and values. They combine explicit empirical information with implicit assumptions about the meaning of that information . . . indicators also embody certain values about the kinds of information that ‘count’ in capturing the phenomenon being measured” [18, p. 2].

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Indicators thus necessarily narrow the complexity of meaning(s) and facets of a right by selecting only a certain type and number of its characteristics for measurement. Barsh [5] maintains that this in itself makes the development of indicators untenable, since by so doing we distort the very meaning and intent of the right in question. This position merits serious consideration. Are we, under the pretext of promoting respect for human rights, creating indicators that will impoverish the very concepts human rights defenders have striven so long and hard to enrich? In addition, Caceres [8, p. 82] makes the point that, on a more global level, the increasing primacy of a quantitative, productivist approach to development ultimately undermines human rights.

At the very least, due consideration must be given to the manner in which a right is represented by one or more indicators. Lopez and Stohl [21, p. 224] make the disquieting affirmation that existing efforts at measurement of human rights have entirely bypassed the crucial phase of specifying and disaggregating the relevant dimensions of each human rights concept. Instead, they have leapt directly from the specific right to the operationalisation of an indicator for measurement. This observation is unfortunately still true, eight years after it was first made. It boils down, in essence, to accepting as valid indicators whatever readily measurable form of data exists. This is extremely problematic, since we need to be certain that the information we are collecting tells us not just “something about that right”, but “something significant about that right”. Each right needs to be problematised, to be understood in the fullness of its potential for human dignity, and on that basis its significant aspects should be identified and translated, if possible, into indicators. This is not being done.

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### *3.3. The need for interpretation and contextualisation*

Virtually all authors agree that indicators cannot, in and of themselves, provide an assessment. They must be interpreted in the light of knowledge and analysis of the context to which they are applied. This appears to me to be the single most forceful argument against the establishment of a rating system and a



and institutional) and with values. Presumably we all adhere to values of human rights and democracy. But even there, we may each subscribe to substantially different visions of what these mean. After all, almost every expert on democracy proposes his or her own definition of its basic characteristics. The very phenomena we are attempting to measure are also value-laden and, moreover, the specific values and the relative importance accorded to each of them may vary from one context to another. The very point about democracy is its quality: how can that be captured by quantitative measures? To attempt to ensure that our own values and standpoint do not interfere with the analysis, we cannot simply eradicate them – we can only make them as explicit and open to critical debate as possible.

Since standpoint is unavoidably present in social analysis, although often dissimulated by objectivist discourse, the best way of controlling for it is by theoretically grounding the standpoint adopted. In the words of Kabeer [18, p. 42], “the problem that this raises is not one of a normative standpoint per se . . . but in determining the extent to which this normative standpoint expresses values that are relevant to the reality it seeks to evaluate.”

#### **4. What practitioners want from indicators**

I cannot purport to speak from the point of view of practitioners in general, for they are as varied and their approaches as diverse as those of the producers of indicators. My institution is at one and the same time a modest producer and a practitioner, and we produce our analyses hand-in-hand with civil society practitioners in the countries where we work.

Based on those relationships, I think that it would be fair to say that, in general, such practitioners (principally human rights NGOs, democracy movements and research centres) consider that indicators can be useful tools for their work. The nature of the tool and the use to which it might be put vary from one context to another: some want to use indicators as a political tool, to bring national and international attention or pressure to bear on a government that is demonstrated to be violating rights and abusing democratic process. Others use indicators as a policy tool, to develop and advocate proposals to their own governments or to international institutions in order to address problems identified through the use of indicators. Still others see indicators principally as a tool for their own strategic planning and programming, as individual organisations or in coalition. In such cases, indicators are used to identify problem areas and to monitor the impact of activities designed to address them through the interventions of the NGOs themselves.

(e.g. [10]), and there is not yet what one might call a “culture of in23.8(or)” in the NGO community. Bisiy

monitor for their own purposes and the growing insistence by funding institutions that grantees develop "performance indicators". Those of us who are funders need to thoroughly and critically examine this bureaucratic trend which in many cases imposes superfluous reporting duties on already over-extended NGOs. But this has little to do with the issue of indicators on substantive rights and democracy issues.

Some NGOs have examined the question of indicators and have taken a clear decision not to use them. This is the case of Amnesty International and of Human Rights Watch. Certainly the quality of their work and their credibility is not affected by the fact that they do not use indicators. Many women's rights organisations, on the other hand, are calling for more and better statistics on violence against women. Aware that, for many reasons linked to lack of confidence on the part of women, fear of reprisals, lack of diligence on the part of public institutions, existing sources of statistical information (such as hospitals and police stations) are unreliable, women's organisations are developing their own research (see [28]) and at the same time pressing governments to commit to more systematic reporting processes. These organisations, although fully cognisant of the need for qualitative information, push for better statistical indicators as well because they find they have more impact when dealing with governments and the men who run them.

In short, there is no general consensus amongst NGO practitioners as to whether statistical indicators should be developed, nor how that might be done. What is clear, however, is that NGOs expect that indicators will be useful for their work, be that on the political, the policy or the programming level. It is also clear that, for those few who do use indicators and statistics now that they rely heavily on contextual analysis as a complement to statistics per se. Those NGOs that do possess expertise in the field of statistics and indicators are much more interested in developing and applying them in a flexible and participatory manner, always in close relation with the visions, priorities and needs of the communities with whom they work. They propose innovations such as the idea that indicators be applied at the sub-national (rather than national) level and that both quantitative and qualitative indicators be relativised [17, p. 24]; that specific combinations of indicators be used according to the specific problem to be addressed [3, p. 100]. Across the board, they emphasise a participatory approach not only to the application but also to the design of indicators, an approach that includes first and foremost the local

of the conceptual and methodological issues attendant upon the development of quantitative indicators for human rights and democracy must take it upon ourselves to broaden and deepen the debate as to what constitutes a well-founded indicator. The problems are not necessarily insurmountable, but they must be seriously addressed. To paraphrase a famous democrat: "Statistics are too important to be left to the statisticians!"

### *5.1. Some recommendations*

The underlying objective informing any work in the human rights field is ultimately to improve the respect and promotion of human rights in all countries. That being the case, two conclusions follow. First, most would agree that a common grid for assessing respect for human rights in all countries would be a useful tool. Second, however, it is equally clear that a comparative index of rights across countries is a conceptually risky operation and often a misleading one: what purpose therefore would it really

involving national and international NGOs, government policy-makers, academics, and international bodies to determine objectives and construct and test appropriate concepts and methodologies is without doubt a complex challenge, but the only way to arrive at an outcome that will effectively be used by those who have the most to gain from it.

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