

How to Trace Results of Democracy Support

There is widespread agreement that democratic governance is both an important means for people to influence and improve their living conditions, and an end in itself. Strengthened democracy and human rights (D/HR) are thus vital ingredients of current development co-operation policy. Yet the knowledge of results in this particular field is limited. If decision-makers, donor agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other practitioners in this field would improve their use of indicators and tailor them to a wider range of democracy objectives and aggregation levels, we would know much more about effects of development cooperation.

THE ROLE PLAYED BY INDICATORS

Indicators are measures of inputs, outputs, processes, outcomes and effects of development cooperation. They should enable comparison between a situation with and without development interventions. It is important that those conditions that are studied are measured at different points in time throughout the development process and at different levels of aggregation. However, the indicators that are used tend to focus on short-term or intermediate results either at the project level or the national level. This makes it difficult to link specific contributions to results over time and to impacts on different levels of society. For example, if we support CSOs with the assumption that they contribute to stronger HR, we cannot merely count new laws that align to HR conventions. We also need information about how development interventions relate to these kinds of results. In the case referred to such links could be identified by

studying CSO activity in public debate and their participation in parliamentary meetings. We could also benefit from a qualitative measure of how CSOs view the willingness of public institutions to engage in dialogue. Briefly, if we are to understand democratisation in terms of processes consisting of numerous formal and informal practices, we need to monitor different aspects of such processes over time, perhaps even decades. One has to ensure that indicators really measure change, both positive and negative. It is just as useful to know what did not work, as knowing what did.

A. HOW TO ACCURATELY MEASURE THE 'RIGHT THING'

- Ensure that indicators actually reflect outcomes and goals
- Use realistic indicators, tailored in accordance with the level of political development and contextual characteristics
- Consider the time lag for an expected result to occur – tailor

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'...discussions about how to measure results help focusing interventions towards shared goals...'

different indicators for different stages and according to the magnitude of the intervention

- Make sure that indicators also measure negative effects
- Develop different indicators for different levels of aggregation (e.g. individual, community, national)
- Combine qualitative, quantitative, objectivist and subjectivist indicators
- Scrutinise objectives and goals carefully

That indicators should reflect objectives is obvious. However finding accurate measures of goals is often difficult. For instance ‘the number of political parties’ is sometimes used to measure the development of a democratic culture, although most would agree that this poorly reflects what we understand to be a democratic culture. “Attitudes in support for political freedom and civil rights among the citizenry” is a more valid indicator, if such data is only available. By being measurable and clearly reflecting objectives, indicators help decide if goals are realistic, and assist in tracking results.

As many as possible of the stakeholders involved in the decision-making, implementation and follow-up of development activities, including the beneficiaries, should have a say in the selection of indicators. This also applies to overall objectives in the goal hierarchy. First, discussions about how to measure results help focusing interventions towards shared goals. This is especially important with regard to the promotion of D/HR as it entails working with highly ambiguous concepts open to contextual interpretations. Secondly, if decision-makers, implementing agencies and beneficiaries share their expertise they will most likely choose more realistic indicators.

B. HOW TO CHOOSE INDICATORS THAT ARE REALISTIC IN PRACTICE: AVAILABILITY AND AGREEMENT

- Choose measurable indicators
- Limit the number of indicators used
- Elaborate indicators through participatory and interactive processes

- Carefully consider the resources available for evaluation

Too many indicators can render results-based decision-making unmanageable. One must therefore make an informed choice and focus on a few strategically selected indicators. A number of practical concerns need to be considered by the planning stage, particularly data availability.

C. HOW TO EFFECTIVELY GATHER AND USE EXISTING DATA

- Existing data should be thoroughly examined
- Select samples wisely – do it small and strategically
- Try to find low-cost alternatives that give indications of change

Evaluation does not only require data on conditions after an intervention, but entails comparison – normally over time (before, during, after). The common problem of scarce baseline data calls for more innovative use of alternative reference points. Are there similar policy areas, regions, groups of people etc not targeted by the intervention, who nevertheless share important characteristics with the target group? These reference points can serve as proxies for baseline conditions against which to compare results.

D. HOW TO ENSURE THAT CONCLUSIONS ABOUT RESULTS CAN BE DRAWN

- Make sure that indicators measure trends
- Be explicit about what you mean by change
- Define rating criteria for positive and negative trends
- Consider possible unusual exogenous effects
- Make conclusions at the appropriate level
- Relate the impact of your contribution to the impact of other factors with an effect on the issues at stake

Finding a causal relationship between your intervention and the changes observed requires indicators that measure the effects of your contribution. Indicators should not include target values such as “a 20 percent increase” (e.g. when measuring female voter turnout), since

we are interested in measuring trends. Do not confuse formulations of indicators with those of objectives, and remember that negative results are also interesting. It is important though that stakeholders agree on target values to facilitate evaluations at later stages. Attribution is one of the most difficult and integral parts in the analysis of effects of D/HR support. To ensure realistic and nuanced results-analysis we need to ask ourselves: a) what would the situation have been like without the development intervention? and, b) what is the impact of other factors in relation to those caused by the development intervention in question?

INDICATORS OF 'DEMOCRATISATION THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY' – THE CASE OF MOZAMBIQUE

As mentioned, the indicators employed to follow up effects of democracy support commonly focus on formal results relating to public sector reforms. All the same, substantial amounts of Swedish aid go to CSOs with the assumption that they contribute to more democratic and pluralistic cultures, as well as to enhanced transparency and accountability. We thus need to develop indicators to better monitor developments in this particular area, not only at the project level but also against overall objectives. As an example, democratic governance through public sector reform and democratisation through civil society have both been important objectives of Swedish development cooperation with Mozambique, the second largest partner country in 2005. Democratisation through civil society is also an important ingredient in Swedish development cooperation with several other partner countries. In this context, acquiring a better understanding of how CSOs contribute to democratisation is important.

Increasing popular participation in civil society, enhancing the influence of civil society on policy-making processes and HR protection and reforming processes to strengthen HR are major democratisation objectives of Swedish development cooperation with Mozambique and several other partner countries. These are also objectives referred to in several national poverty reduction strategies (PRS), including that of Mozambique.

How may we then develop indicators to improve our understanding of trends in this field? The indicators below illustrate how one may develop measures of 'democratisation through civil society' according to the methodological guidelines in the previous section. For example, these indicators allow for comparison over time, measure processes (that are not unidirectional per se) and combine qualitative and quantitative data from varied sources (public, CSO, beneficiaries).

All indicators have their strengths and weaknesses. The indicators suggested below for the first objective of popular participation in civil society, have the advantage of measuring effective participation (in contrast to proxies frequently used for this objective such as number of CSOs or CSO membership levels) in specific CSOs as well as civil society as a whole. However, these indicators are less apt at capturing negative effects. They tell us nothing about what groups in society do not participate. They also depend heavily on CSO documentation.

1. INCREASED POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY

- Formal organisational mechanisms for influencing CSO leadership and policy
- Number of CSO activities involving the wider community
- Number of questions/proposals raised during CSO activities by persons other than project managers and staff
- Perceived influence over CSO activity amongst target groups
- Shares of urban and rural based CSOs with grass root participation - formal or informal

2. ENHANCED INFLUENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ON POLICY-MAKING PROCESSES

- CSO activity in major media fora
- Number of meetings with parliamentary committees/joint commissions/advocacy coalitions to which CSOs have access
- Diversity of CSOs represented at parliamentary committees/joint commissions/advocacy coalitions

- Number of policy changes consistent with CSO advocacy, in relation to number of CSO proposals for policy change
- Perception among CSOs/key observers and target groups of willingness of public institutions to engage in dialogue and give access to official information
- Percentage within different societal groups supportive of CSO advocacy and reform agenda

3. ENHANCED INFLUENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ON HR PROTECTION

- Number of policy changes consistent with CSO advocacy, related to number of CSO proposals regarding HR
- Percentage of CSOs/target HR groups involved in dialogue with public institutions

4. REFORM PROCESSES TO STRENGTHEN HR

- Percentage of target groups satisfied with public officials' responsiveness regarding HR
- Ways in which D/HR conventions are integrated into policy areas where the HR of the poor are weak (education-, health- etc)
- Volume of HR reporting by the state and CSOs to treaty bodies and/or international committees
- Number of and types of HR violations compiled by CSOs/public institutions and/or international organisations
- Percentage of reported violations of HR that are successfully prosecuted or investigated
- Media coverage of HR issues and/or CSO HR activities
- Reach of media covering HR issues
- Public service providers' conduct towards vulnerable groups

The proposals for the fourth objective, reform processes to strengthen HR, illustrate the feasibility of combining quantitative and qualitative measures: while official HR reporting indicates the weight given to HR by governments, the quality of pro-poor services is a measure of effects of HR conventions. The indicators suggested for civil society influence on policy-making processes reflect how objectivist indicators (here policy changes consistent with CSO advocacy) can be linked with subjectivist indicators (perceptions among CSOs of willingness of public institutions to engage in dialogue) to approach the difficult problem of attribution. However, like many indicators aiming at measuring overarching objectives on an aggregated level the suggested indicators also suffer from problems of causality/attribution. Further, several of these indicators require a great deal of management capacity or data collection resources. But by being aware of, and trying to tackle, the weaknesses of indicators, we may improve our use of indicators and enhance data collection.

WHY WE NEED BETTER INDICATORS

By encouraged use of indicators, designed by appropriate parties for short- medium- and long-term objectives and different levels of aggregation, we will gain more knowledge of the effects of development cooperation. The joint efforts of governments, donors, CSOs and other stakeholders to improve the use of indicators may increase the relevance of development interventions, and enable beneficiaries to evaluate results on their own.

SOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

This policy brief is based on: Dawidson Karin and Karolina Hultström (2006) Improving democracy and human rights support: Recommendations for the use of indicators based on the case of Mozambique, SADEV Report 2006:1. This and other SADEV publications are available at www.sadev.se.