

IDEA's STATE OF DEMOCRACY ASSESSMENT
METHODOLOGY: WHAT WE HAVE CONTRIBUTED AND WHAT
WE HAVE LEARNT

Ozias Tungwarara¹

Paper prepared for: 20th IPSA World Congress, Fukuoka, 10-13 July, 2006
Session 271: State of Democracy 1
Main Theme 01
Convenor: Marian Sawyer

¹ Former IDEA Senior Programme Office for Democracy Assessment and Assistance, currently Deputy Director for Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project – AfriMAP)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The growing optimism about democratic change that characterized the 90's also gave rise to the need to assess the quality and achievements of democracy. Such optimism has also driven the search for universal measures of democracy. There is a growing realization that democracy is not a linear process – one that moves from tyranny to open and plural societies. Democracy remains a multi-dimensional and in certain circumstances a contested concept. The reality on the ground is that democratic transitions can be blocked, precluded, flawed or stunted for a whole range of reasons. It is therefore not an easy task to develop an assessment methodology that responds to the challenges associated with democracy, can be applied to any country in the world and be responsive to the diverse conceptual underpinnings of democracy.

The International Institute for Democracy Assistance (IDEA) developed a State of Democracy (SOD) methodology that was intended to assess the state of democracy in the world. The methodology is based on the UK Democratic Audit, developed by Profs Weir and Beetham, who have also been key partners in the SoD project. The project has been successful in that IDEA has made available in the public domain an assessment tool that is robust enough to be applied to different political environments and flexible enough to be adapted to a myriad of purposes. The process of developing the methodology and applying it has raised significant challenges regarding the whole enterprise of assessing democracy. More importantly however, IDEA has been able to harvest lessons learned that are being used to refine the methodology as well as enriching the discourse and debates about assessing democracy.

IDEA was founded in 1995 with the mandate to promote sustainable democracy worldwide by assisting countries in building the capacity to develop and strengthen their democratic institutions. The organization constitutes an essential interface between academia, policy makers and practitioners. IDEA is an inter-governmental organization

comprising 24 member states from all continents². The composition of member states balances democracies from the North and South and includes both established and new democracies. Values that underpin IDEA's approach to democracy building include: democratization is a long-term process that cannot be achieved through elections alone; democracy must be homegrown in order to be sustainable and not something that can be imposed from outside; there is no universal form of democracy that is applicable to all nations. Assessing democracy is considered an integral part of IDEA's democracy building programme.

IDEA's State of Democracy Methodology expanded the UK Democratic Audit's work to make it universal in application. The framework, agreed on by an international panel of experts, is designed to measure the condition of democracy in countries from all regions of the world. It is based on the assumption that democratization is a process that is never completed; the idea of democracy is a common one and that the best people to assess its progress are a country's own citizens. The SOD seeks qualitative answers to a set of search questions complemented by quantitative data where appropriate. It keeps the different aspects of a country's democratic life separate on the basis that some may be of greater concern than others and that they cannot simply be aggregated together. The framework is premised on a definition of democracy that emphasizes popular control of political decision making and political equality.

The methodology has been applied in different situations and for different purposes. Soon after the development of the framework IDEA pilot tested the methodology in eight countries from all continents. Subsequently the methodology has been used for different purposes that include educational and training, advocacy and dialogue, monitoring progress regarding democratization and good governance. The SOD methodology has influenced the development of other assessment tools such as United Nations Economic

² IDEA member states are: Australia; Barbados; Belgium; Botswana; Canada; Cape Verde; Chile; Costa Rica; Denmark; Finland; Germany; India; Mauritius; Mexico; Namibia; Netherlands; Norway; Peru; Portugal; South Africa; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Uruguay;

Commission for Africa (UNECA) Governance Assessment³. The UNDP Oslo Governance Centre has drawn from the SOD framework in developing pro-poor and gender sensitive governance indicators⁴. It has also been adapted and modified to meet specific needs such as assessing democracy at a local level and responding to country and culture specific needs. Its geographical scope has been very wide, traveling from Peru to Mongolia, Canada to Tanzania. More recently it has been adopted by the government of The Netherlands through its Ministry of Interior, who intends to measure the public opinion on the State of Democracy in the Netherlands through a web based tool⁵.

Application of the methodology has confirmed that a clear statement of democratic values and principles upfront is critical for the credibility of an assessment tool. Local ownership of the tool is vital for the legitimacy of the process. The SOD methodology has evoked the notion of democracy being a caravan traveling back and forth and not just in one direction. The search questions as currently formulated in the framework do not sufficiently direct attention to the distinctive traditions or culture of a country. There is need to refine the framework so that it is able to capture a dynamic as opposed to a static picture of the political system. This could be done through use of satellite⁶ indicators.

Through the SOD project IDEA set itself an ambitious objective to produce a global state of democracy report. That objective has not yet been attained. The SOD project has however made tangible and significant contribution to democracy dialogue and democratization through the development of a flexible democracy assessment tool that continues to gain currency in democracy building initiatives.

³ Striving for Good Governance in Africa, a 28 country governance survey commissioned conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)

⁴ UNDP, Measuring Democratic Governance: A Framework for selecting pro-poor and gender sensitive indicators, May 2006

⁵ at www.onzedemocratie.nl

⁶ Satellite indicators designed to measure specific or peculiar aspects of a country's democratic system. Core indicators on the other hand measure the core attributes of democracy and can be measured and compared across countries

INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) developed a methodology to assess the state of democracy in any country of the world. The State of Democracy (SOD) methodology was launched in 2001 in the form of *the International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment*⁷. The SOD project was conceived as an integral part of IDEA's democracy building programme that sought to respond to the popular desire for democracy that was evident across the world from the mid to late nineties. SOD was a response to the need to develop a methodology that would assess the state of democracy in any one country that would be genuinely sensitive to the differences between democracies as well as to the underlying principles of democracies themselves⁸.

The methodology has received widespread application in both new and established democracies and as a public good it has travelled well beyond the first set of countries where it was tested. This paper will examine the concept of democracy assessment and the contexts within which different methodologies have been developed. It will examine the key elements of IDEA's SOD methodology and its conceptual underpinnings. The paper will take a close look at how the methodology has been implemented and more importantly the lessons that can be extracted from its application.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

“We can no longer simply assume that every nation that has rejected tyranny and turned towards elections is in ‘transition’ to democracy We need far more sophisticated tools

⁷ IDEA SOD Framework

⁸ Bengt Save-Soderbergh, IDEA Secretary-General, 31 July 2001, Foreword to IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment, Kluwer Law International, 2002

for measuring the increasingly complex, varied and uncertain paths towards democracy that nations of the world are taking. The 'State of Democracy' project has developed a comprehensive assessment tool that the citizens of democracies in the world can use to assess the functioning of their own democratic systems we believe we have created a robust and universal way of measuring democracy that can provide the foundations for a world-wide survey”⁹

A good starting point is a discussion and clearer understanding of the notion of assessing democracy. In the past twelve or so years assessing the state or quality of democracy has been an area of growth. Assessments are carried out for varied purposes. Quite often assessments are carried out in order to ascertain progress in democratic achievements, to examine correlations between democracy and economic conditions and to identify likely recipients of development aid.

The discourse about assessing democracy has been dominated by the search for universally acceptable democracy indicators. Subsets of this debate have been about the appropriate use of quantitative measures and qualitative judgments in measuring democratic progress. At a conceptual level the issue is further complicated by the lack of agreement about the concept of democracy. Put another way, different elements of democracy can be emphasized at any given time depending on a country's history, culture and socio-economic development. *“On the globe this complicated, even the purest of principles must be diluted. Democracy is a form of government; it is not a ticket to some heavenly kingdom where all evil is vanquished and everyone agrees with us”¹⁰.*

The need for credible assessment methodologies has been largely driven by the democracy promotion industry led by western bilateral donors and international

⁹ Dr. Patrick Molutsi, the Director of Operations at IDEA, in a press statement on the launch of the SOD Handbook: http://archive.idea.int/press/pr20020314_sod.htm

¹⁰ Madeline Albright “Its time to look to Bush's successor, and reaffirm America's commitment to liberty”: Washington Post: Article reproduced in the South African Sunday Independent May 21, 2006

multilateral organizations. The sense that modern democracies are the only game in town has also fueled the need to have universally accepted frameworks for assessing democracy. The end of Cold War and the disintegration of communist Eastern Europe precipitated the internal loss of legitimacy of military regimes, single party systems and other forms of authoritarian rule. Western European and North American donors have invested heavily in democracy promotion initiatives aimed at consolidating the democratic gains of the early nineties. The euphoria that accompanied the dramatic democratic transitions of the late eighties to early nineties has waned bringing with it the need to objectively assess the level of democratic progress.

Core values of democracy such as participation, representation, political contestation and rule of law continue to gain worldwide acceptance and application. Democracy has increasingly faced serious challenges associated with threats posed by terrorism and the West's response to terrorism. Promotion of democracy has been misused as a justification for military action that has not brought about democratic change. Some of the gains made regarding protection of basic rights such as freedoms of association, assembly, expression and prohibitions against torture, inhuman and degrading treatment have been seriously compromised. While the velvet and orange revolutions in former communist East European states have given optimism to democratic consolidation, democratic progress remains fragile at best and faltering in most new democracies. Most newly established democracies; especially in Africa and Latin America are faced with the challenges of growing inequalities and poverty. Serious questions have begun to be asked about the instrumental value of democracy in a world that is characterized by such global inequalities. The search for home grown models of democratic governance makes the task of developing common frameworks for assessing democracy that much more difficult. The context that prevailed in the 90's, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Apartheid, has significantly changed. Democratic transitions and consolidation are proving to be fairly complex processes whose progress cannot be captured by simplified indices and frameworks. Yet the need to assess persists and continues to drive the development of "universal indicators".

A major difficulty is the tension between received notions of democracy and indigenous ideological advances. This is the problem of universal vs. the particular. The former has a homogenizing tendency while the latter has the risk of being reduced to exceptionalism. Although the principles may be universal their routes of reaching the public imagination would be country specific. There is a need to strike a balance between the minimalist and maximalist conceptions of democracy¹¹ .

The definitional and conceptual challenges that continue to be associated with the concepts of democracy and democratization are also reflected in the different approaches that have been developed over time to try to assess democracy.

David Beetham describes three main types of democracy assessments¹². The first is the comparative and quantitative assessment of democracy by social scientists whose main purpose is scientific – to identify a causal link between democracy and various economic variables. Such assessments aggregate quantitative indicators to assess co-relation with economic performance in the form of a democracy index. The second which is also comparative and quantitative are the league tables of human rights and democracy. This approach assigns an overall score for a country's performance to chart its position relative to others. While the purposes for this type of assessment are often not spelt out they are used for a number of reasons that include as a guide to potential investors, a criterion for aid distribution or as a challenge to countries to improve their performance.

The limitations of quantitative methodologies have been widely debated. While

¹¹ State of Democracy in South Asia

¹²David Beetham: Towards a Universal Framework for Democracy Assessment: Democratization, Vol.11, No. 2, April 2004, pp. 1-7, Taylor and Francis Ltd.

acknowledging that there are areas of political life where quantification is both appropriate and necessary (e.g. voter turn-out, gender participation rates, etc), quantification conveys an illusory impression of objectivity and precision to what are essentially qualitative judgments. A third type of democracy assessment is what is usually conducted by international and government aid agencies in order to develop strategies for providing development assistance. While the last approach seeks qualitative answers to the state of democracy of a given country it shares with the first two the fact that they are often externally driven approaches.

IDEA'S ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK – KEY ELEMENTS

A prerequisite for a consensus on measurement tools and indicators is the identification of a clear conceptual framework that disentangles these ideas as much as possible in order to allow the development of agreed meaningful cross-national and time series indicators¹³. There are few uncontroversial tools of measurement¹⁴. IDEA's State of Democracy Methodology expanded the UK Democratic Audit's work¹⁵ to make it universal in application. The framework, agreed on by an international panel of experts, is designed to measure the condition of democracy in countries from all regions of the world. It is based on the assumption that democratization is a process that is never completed; the idea of democracy is a common one and that the best people to assess its progress are a country's own citizens.

¹³ Essex indicator map

¹⁴ UND, Human Development Report 2002, p36

¹⁵ UK Democratic Audit

The SOD seeks qualitative answers to a set of search questions complemented by quantitative data where appropriate. It keeps the different aspects of a country's democratic life separate on the basis that some may be of greater concern than others and that they cannot simply be aggregated together. The following are the key components of the framework:

Purpose

The SOD's primary purpose is to contribute to a country's democratization process. Democratization rarely occurs without conscious collective struggles. Defining the objectives of such struggles and identifying key obstacles is an important part of the process of democratization. The SOD attempts to make this contribution in a number of ways that include:

- Serving to raise public awareness about what democracy involves, and public debate about what standards of performance citizens should expect from their government
- Providing systematic evidence to substantiate citizens' concerns about how they are governed, and set these in perspective by identifying both strengths and weaknesses
- Contributing to public debate about ongoing reform and help identify priorities for a reform programme

- Providing an instrument for assessing how effectively reforms are working out in practice

Agency

The assessment should be conducted by citizens of the country being assessed and not by outsiders sitting in judgment upon it. This however does not exclude the role of outsiders as partners in the process. While the framework of questions has been common to all countries, their interpretation has been a matter for in-country assessors who have also had the responsibility for final judgments and mode of presentation. An important feature of the assessment process has been the involvement of citizens through a national conference to critique and debate the draft findings

Democratic Principles

While most democracy assessments are silent regarding the choice and justification of assessment criteria the SOD sets out a criteria from clearly defined democratic principles. The framework is based on the assumption that democratic principles cannot be realized without appropriate political institutions and practices. These in turn can only be deemed democratic to the extent that they embody or serve to realize the democratic principles. The framework is based on two fundamental principles – popular control of public decisions and decision makers and equality between the citizens in relation to those decisions. These basic principles have been modified in some cases. The Australian and

South Asian assessments have separated human rights so that it is not a subordinate principle and foregrounded deliberative democracy. The principles, especially in representative democracies are realized through a set of mediating norms i.e. participation, authorization, representativeness, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity. The relation between norms and practices provides the underlying logic to the assessment framework and methodology.

The Assessment Framework

The ‘framework’ is a list of institutions and practices to be assessed against given norms in a systematic and coherent order of treatment. The framework comprises 14 sections as follows:

Citizen rights: nationhood and citizenship; the rule of law and access to justice; civil and political rights; economic and social rights

Representative and accountable government: free and fair elections; democratic role of political parties; government effectiveness and accountability; civilian control of the military and police; minimizing corruption

Civil society and popular participation: the media in a democratic society; political participation; government responsiveness; decentralization

Democracy beyond the state: the international dimensions of democracy

The framework reflects some of the core values that underpin IDEA's democracy building agenda such as free and fair elections the existence and unfettered functioning of multiple political parties, respect for human rights and the independence of the media¹⁶. The framework is based on the assumption that the essential foundation for democratic political institutions is the guarantee of basic citizen rights and the rule of law, and that these political institutions only work democratically to the extent that there is a settled culture of citizen participation in public affairs.

Search Questions

Each of the sections outlined above contains a set of search questions which the assessment team will try to answer¹⁷. Each question provides the link between institutional practice and an appropriate democratic norm e.g. *How independent are the courts and the judiciary from the executive, and how free are they from all kinds of interference?* (question from the rule of law and access to justice section of the framework). Each question is cast in the comparative mode on the basis that democracy is a matter of degree and not an all or nothing affair. All the questions point in the same direction so that the more positively they are answered the more democratic the situation can be regarded as being. The framework is constructed with a certain level of flexibility that allows assessors to exercise their judgments regarding the seriousness and

¹⁶ Ten Years of Supporting Democracy Worldwide: IDEA 10th Anniversary Publication: pp86: IDEA 2005

¹⁷ Full list of search questions can be found in the IDEA SOD handbook pp 64-66

genuineness of tensions and conflicts between different democratic norms. The framework recognizes the fact that different democratic norms can not be maximized simultaneously but that there may have to be trade-offs between them. So for instance too much consultation and accountability may hamper a government's ability to deliver its electoral programme. In such instances the assessors will have to exercise their informed judgments based on the particular circumstances of a given country. What is important is that issues of this nature should be explicitly raised and openly debated in an assessment.

Setting standards

The framework does not prescribe a set of comparators against which performance can be judged. It is for the assessors to identify what they think is a good level of attainment. Comparators could be internal to a country, e.g. a particular moment in the political history of a country – the end of an authoritarian regime, from which progress can be charted. It could also be a target of attainment that the government has set itself to achieve. What the framework provides is a menu of best practices drawn from international treaties, international or regional codes of conduct, legislation and procedures of individual countries that assessors can use as standards where appropriate.

Implementation

No single mode of implementing the assessment is prescribed by the framework. The framework provides general guidance about some of the issues that should be taken into account in determining an implementation strategy¹⁸. A number of factors will influence the implementation strategies that will be adopted. Chief among the range of factors are resources available and timetable for conducting the assessment. Some of the possible options include concentrating on particular sections, having a rolling programme with different sections dealt with in different phases and to carry out the assessment under a central editorial direction. The eight country assessments that were carried out as part of pilot testing the methodology used the later methodology. Subsequent applications of the methodology have used a variety of strategies that are indicative of the flexibility and robustness of the methodology.

APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY

*“International IDEA intends to apply our processes of democracy assessment to an ambitious study of the strength and weaknesses of current democratic practices on a global scale. This will not be a once-and-for-all effort. We will build up our analysis country by country and region by region”*¹⁹. It is clear from the outset that IDEA intended to apply its methodology on a grand scale to produce a “democracy in the world” report. In the final analysis IDEA had to be content with having produced and made available in the public domain, a comprehensive, flexible and robust tool to assess democracy.

¹⁸ International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment, pp 20-22

¹⁹ 2002, Bengt Save-Soderbergh – then IDEA Secretary-General, *The State of Democracy, Assessments in eight nations around the world*, Kluwer Law International, pp8

It is both interesting and important to examine IDEA's experience with applying the methodology as well as its use by other players. Having developed a research framework and method for systematic assessment of any country's democracy, the democracy assessment was pilot tested in eight countries²⁰ from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America.

A key hypothesis tested by the eight pilot country assessments is the utility of assessing both developed and developing democracies according to a common framework. The pilot assessments enabled the drawing of useful conclusions about democratization processes in general and not so much about the position of individual countries relative to others. From the pilot assessment of developing countries it is evident that some aspects of democracy such as a broadly agreed constitution with a bill of rights, oversight institutions such as office of Ombudsman or public protector, free elections under universal suffrage, free press, etc. can be introduced quite quickly and fairly successfully. Other aspects of democratization are much more difficult to address and require much longer processes. These are also the same areas that developed democracies are struggling with. Aspects such as inclusion of minorities, providing equal access to justice, protection of fundamental human rights, intra-party democracy, lessening influence of money in politics, reducing corruption in public life, minimizing undue dominance of the executive over the legislature, increasing women's participation in

²⁰ The eight countries were Bangladesh, El Salvador, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, New Zealand, Peru and South Korea

public office and maintaining consistent support for international law are much more difficult to address.

An important lesson from the pilot assessment was that the methodology produces a qualitative and discursive report that is more nuanced than simple comparisons of which country is more democratic than the other. It is difficult to say which among the eight pilot countries is most democratic and which is the least. What is very clear is that each country has its strengths and weaknesses and that the more useful analysis is that which looks at the historical and social dynamics at work in each state. The pilot assessments also confirmed that complex conclusions about elements of a country's democratic life need to be properly nuanced. An example in the rule of law area is the possibility of having a judiciary that is genuinely independent of the executive but citizens do not have access to justice. Another example is that of electoral arrangements that are considered "free and fair" by international standards but the electoral system discriminates against certain parties and candidates. The framework has enabled these complexities to be captured in the individual country assessments.

LESSONS LEARNED

Following the pilot assessments IDEA brought together key stakeholders²¹ that included experts who had been involved in the development of the methodology, those who had carried out the pilot assessments and those who had implemented the framework in one form or another, in order to harvest lessons learned. The workshop confirmed and

²¹ IDEA State of Democracy Experts Meeting, London, June 25-26

deliberated over some of the methodological, conceptual and implementation challenges that the framework has had to deal with.

Democratic Values

The strength of the SoD methodology was its starting point in a clear statement of democratic principles and values, and the way these systematically guided the assessment of institutions and practices. If values were not made explicit, they would be smuggled into assessment indicators implicitly, in a way that would be more difficult to debate or challenge. Between them the Australian and South Asian teams had felt it necessary to expand the original statement of principles to include, respectively, civil and human rights and deliberative democracy, and protection against tyranny whether from a majority or the state itself. All of these were already present in the framework (with two sections devoted to rights), and contained in the broad principles of popular control and political equality; yet it was felt desirable to flag them up specially. These additions provoked a wide-ranging discussion about the way the different values of democracy might conflict with one another, and therefore require a complex trade-off between different positive indicators, which could not all be maximized simultaneously. Such complexities could be best explored in a qualitative and discursive democracy assessment, whereas quantitative methodologies merely obscured or glossed over them. Among substantive issues discussed here were gender and democracy, the treatment of minorities and the trend towards populist majoritarianism. The conclusion reached with regard to these issues is that the framework is flexible enough to be adapted to respond to

specific issues according to context. So rather than change the framework its application will vary and it will be adapted to suit different contexts.

The assessment methodology

A number of the significant advantages that have always been recognized about the SoD assessment methodology have been confirmed through its implementation. It is comprehensive; it is flexible, in being usable in part or as a whole; it requires in-country ownership, but can also be used comparatively; it brings established and recent democracies under a common purview; and so on. The image of the caravan of democracy traveling back and forth, and not just in one direction from North to South, is engaging, since it emphasizes the fact that democratization involves a mutual learning process. In different ways the user participants have shown how the original framework and methodology can be adapted for a great variety of specific contexts, audiences and purposes. One way in which the use of the framework should be developed is in presenting clearly how receptive the methodology is to concerns and issues that are not as yet flagged up and to identify 'entry points' for assessment and the potential for other uses.

Areas for improvement

A number of points have been identified where the original methodology could be further developed. The following are some of the significant issues that have been raised:

- The framework questions as they stand do not sufficiently direct attention to the distinctive traditions or culture of a country, its informal political or legal processes, or the character of its citizen population. The internal dynamic of democracy always changes as it ‘travels’ from one country to the next. Although assessors could always find an appropriate place to bring these aspects in, they were not sufficiently flagged up by the framework.
- The somewhat disjointed character of the search questions could hamper getting a rounded view of a political system, its processes and key agents, whether for promoting change or obstructing it. Such a view was particularly important for influencing the process of democratic reform.
- The methodologies used in both the UNECA²² and the South Asia assessments had gone considerably beyond the original pilot project in adding a household survey and elite questionnaire to the research-based assessment, and in experimenting with further instruments, such as dialogues and case-studies. These considerably enriched any assessment, though resource constraints have to be taken into account. The framework may need to make specific reference to other types of assessments that could be added to it such as household surveys, opinion polls, dialogues, case studies, etc.
- The assessment of federal systems enabled a new comparative dimension to be included in the methodology, through the evaluation of different state jurisdictions within a common polity. The territorial dimensions of democracy merited more

²² Refer to note 3

attention; in particular local government, where most service delivery was effected, might be made a more explicit ‘entry point’.

- The selection of members of the assessment team is a key issue. In the pilot studies, for reasons of time and cost, these had been drawn largely from the academic and research communities, though preliminary findings had been tested against a much wider group of stakeholders. Later assessments had followed much more closely the recommendations in the *Handbook*, to involve potential users in the assessment process from the outset, including NGOs, journalists, human rights lawyers and other members of civil society and government.

Contribution to democratic practice, reform and assistance

The purpose of individual country assessments by in-country assessors has always been to make a contribution to the democratisation process itself, the effectiveness of the SoD project in this regard provides a significant test of its value. A number of important lessons have emerged regarding the short-term and long-term effects of the methodology. Because of its qualitative and discursive nature the SOD methodology can contribute to public debate or discourse about democracy; enriching civic education within and without the academy; developing consensus around a reform agenda; and influencing specific reforms or reform agents, and evaluating the effectiveness of such reforms. In evaluating this contribution, it is worth making a distinction between the pilot studies, or what might be called the ‘first generation’ of SoD assessments, and the ‘second generation’ that followed after.

First generation assessments

The first generation assessments that pilot tested the methodology have been more successful in the longer-term advocacy role than in influencing shorter term policy outcomes. They have made a significant contribution to enhancing public debate and awareness about democracy issues, especially among the urban based political class and within academia. Important to achieving this influence was the domestic *legitimacy* of the assessments, which came from a number of sources: the international reputation and independence of IDEA, the country ownership of the assessment process, the thoroughness with which the draft findings had been exposed to critique and peer review at national workshops, the cogency of the assessment methodology itself.

Other significant effects include the enhancement of capacity within the assessment group itself, which has proved a resource for other types of assessment and analysis, and could be called on in any repeat of the pilot studies. The development of an international network of assessment practitioners is another important outcome of the original SoD project. In relation to this network, it can be pointed out that any sharp contrast between the worlds of academia and political practice is misconceived, since most of the academic contributors see themselves as ‘public intellectuals’, who have a foot in the world of public policy and have developed their own political, administrative and media skills and contacts. Finding ways of providing greater continuity and support to this international network is an important issue for the future development of the SoD project.

Second generation assessments

Since being made available in the public domain, the framework has been used in a number of different contexts. In some instances it has been significantly modified and adapted to respond to particular needs²³. In other cases new assessment tools have been developed that draw heavily from the SOD methodology²⁴.

It is possible to see a distinct learning process taking place between the first and second generation of assessments, which gives the latter a better prospect of influencing short-run policy outcomes, as well as the broader public debate. Significant in this context is the way in which potential user groups and agencies from both government and civil society have been involved in the assessment process from an early stage. Here the flexibility of the framework has proved an advantage, since individual sections can be tailored for different kinds of policy issues and different potential audiences and users; and discrete policy papers and analyses can be published in advance of a major country assessment to which they will eventually contribute. This enhancement of the methodology in practice is in part a result of the network established during the first phase of SoD assessments.

One of the major challenges for the SOD project has been how to keep track of the different uses that the methodology has been put to. Soon after the framework was

²³ Examples are the UNECA and South Asia assessment.

²⁴ E.g. the AfriMAP questionnaires

launched an abbreviated version of the framework was put on the IDEA website with an encouragement to citizens to assess the state of democracy in their respective countries. While use of the web based framework has not been overwhelming, individual citizens have carried out assessments in countries such as Egypt, Kenya, Venezuela, South Korea, Canada and Taiwan.

IDEA is establishing a SoD Network website which will be a "meeting place" for the SoD networks that developed in different regions of the world. The website will be a repository for assessment which have been conducted in different parts of the world, and will also make the SoD network accessible to those who might be interested in conducting assessments in their countries.

There have been a number of initiatives where the framework has been used for different purposes.

Educational and academic purposes

In Malawi findings from the SOD assessment have been included in civic education materials²⁵. The New Zealand assessment is a recommended textbook at the University of Canterbury. The assessment team at the National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines, has included its assessment in programmes in public administration and governance, law, political science and sociology. The

²⁵Report presented by Professor Wiseman Chirwa, Chancellor College, Malawi during the IDEA SOD London experts meeting

Framework has been used in a number of postgraduate courses in Australia, Canada and the UK, to encourage students to link theoretical reflection on democracy with empirical research. It has been successfully piloted as the basis of a foundation undergraduate course in political science at the University of Toronto. In Australia, the methodology is being applied in a major national research project led by the Australia National University (ANU) in the form of a democratic audit²⁶, examining such issues as the fairness of elections, internal democracy within political parties, government accountability to parliament, corruption and the difference federalism makes to democracy. The methodology is used for training purposes in the New Zealand Parliament and has been used for training members and officials of the Parliament of Zimbabwe.

Dialogue and Advocacy

A good example of how the methodology has been used as a tool for dialogue came from Peru. A coalition of civil society organizations; Citizens for Good Governance, has been established with the aim of carrying out policy reform advocacy. Using the State of Democracy methodology and building on the pilot assessment, the group is working on issues that relate to the exercise of political power in prioritizing public policies. They have made proposals to the government on participation mechanisms focusing on civil society, political parties and mass media. They plan to continue the dialogue regarding economic development with equity, decentralization and efficient public administration of state institutions.

²⁶ Australia Democratic Audit

Democracy at the local level

Under its Democracy at the Local Level activity, IDEA has developed a Local Democracy Mapping Guide drawing from the State of Democracy methodology. The guide is designed for elected officials, civil society leaders, the media, scholars and other public policy analysts, and international agencies to monitor democratic process at local / city level. It allows a user to identify and evaluate two principal elements of local democracy that are critically important to exploring the quality of rule by the people: representative democracy (parties and candidates, elected authorities, and elections); and participatory democracy (civil society, forging consensus, and civic engagement). The guide is being developed in collaboration with the African Union of Local Authorities (AULA) and the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa in response to a need to enhance citizen participation at the local level identified by mayors of cities in Eastern and Southern Africa. Pilot assessments have already been carried out in Gaborone (Botswana), Lusaka (Zambia), Mwanza (Tanzania) and Nairobi (Kenya)²⁷.

Continental level democracy and governance monitoring

An interesting adaptation of the methodology is its use in the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2005 African Governance Report²⁸. The UNECA survey was a major continent-wide study to measure progress towards good governance in Africa. The

²⁷ Democracy at the local level

²⁸ Refer to note 3

assessment used a three component research instrument:

- an opinion based study using a national Experts Panel comprising a representative group of national experts that looked at such issues as political representation; effectiveness and accountability; human rights and the rule of law; civil society organizations
- a stratified national sample survey through national household surveys to gauge perceptions of principal national problems and the accessibility, adequacy and efficiency of government services
- a desk study of factual information and hard data to supplement and complement the Expert panel perceptions and the national household surveys

While the UNECA study drew a lot from the SOD framework in developing its own framework, it went much further by adding a household survey. Its focus was also on governance as opposed to democracy and yet its questionnaires and indicators were significantly influenced by the SOD framework.

Another Africa-wide initiative that has been greatly influenced and benefited from the SOD framework is the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP) a project of the Open Society Institute (OSI)²⁹. AfriMAP seeks to monitor African governments' compliance with democracy, governance and human rights commitments made under African Union (AU) treaties, charters, declarations etc. in three sectors:

²⁹ For more details about AfriMAP and OSI see <http://www.afriMAP.org>

justice and rule of law; political participation and effective public service delivery. In designing the research instrument AfriMAP drew a lot both in terms of the format of questions and conceptualization of issues (especially in the political participation sector) from the SOD framework. The AfriMAP approach also emphasizes the fact that for an assessment to be legitimate it has to be carried out by nationals. The report is a fairly in-depth qualitative and discursive assessment of the state of play in a given sector.

The AfriMAP research is being carried out initially in five pilot countries³⁰ with a view to expanding the coverage to more African countries. AfriMAP reports will be used by civil society organizations at both national and regional levels to advocate for policy reforms in specific sectors. Already there are initiatives underway aimed at civil society advocacy at the AU on a number of issues ranging from access to information, meeting treaty reporting obligations, traditional authorities and democracy, weak institutions of governance, etc. AfriMAP reports will also complement the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) a voluntary government led peer assessment of governance as part of the AU's New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)³¹. The ultimate goal of the AfriMAP process is to establish a strong network of African civil society assessors that are collaborating across borders and contributing to African definitions of democracy.

Assessing the quality of democracy

³⁰ Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Senegal and South Africa

³¹ For more details on APRM and NEPAD see <http://www.nepad.org>

Further adaptations have been done in the context of the South Asia assessment³² modeled on the SOD framework and borrowed many of the SOD questions. The assessment of democracy is done at five levels of Promise, Design, Working, Outcome and Futures. Four domains of public-political activity are covered: state institutional domain; party political domain; non party political domain and economic, social and cultural domain. The assessment methodology comprises four components: a cross sectoral survey, qualitative assessment, dialogues and case studies. The assessment has generated a lot of interest among policy makers, the general public and politicians. It acknowledges the fragility of the state structures within which it has to operate. It has had to deal with cultural challenges that revisions to the SOD framework need to take into account.

The Open Society Foundation in Bosnia-Herzegovina supported the application of the framework in that country to assess the quality of democracy and progress made in democratization. This assessment is the first that has been done by nationals. Previous assessments were externally driven³³. The information generated by the assessment that has been placed in the public domain is particularly useful for a country that is going through post-conflict transition.

Improving a country's commitment to democratic governance – the case of Mongolia

A recent initiative that has seen application of the SOD framework in a different context

³² For the South Asia Assessment see more details on <http://www.lokniti.org>

³³ <http://www.soros.org.ba/en/novost.asp?id=61>

is work that is currently going on in Mongolia. The Mongolian government with technical assistance from UNDP is implementing a follow-up project to the fifth International Conference on New and Restored Democracies (ICNRD5)³⁴. The International Conference on New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) is an intergovernmental process that is open to all UN member States. Since the first Conference was held with the participation of 13 countries, the ICNRD has grown into a global event bringing together more than 100 countries from the developing and developed world. To date, a total of five International Conferences on New or Restored Democracies have been held in Manila, the Philippines, 1988; Managua, Nicaragua, 1994; Bucharest, Romania, 1997; Cotonou, Benin, 2000 and latest in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 2003. The next International Conference is to be hosted in Doha, Qatar 30 October- 1 November 2006.

As the host and current chair of ICNRD-5, Mongolia with the support of UNDP has developed an ICNRD-5 Follow-Up Project to implement a number of pioneering activities in line with the 2003 Conference recommendations. As improving the quality of democracy has become a political demand in both new or restored and mature democracies, there is a growing need to assess the progress in democratization. The ICNRD-5 outcome documents contain an explicit commitment by the governments of new or restored democracies along with their counterparts from mature democracies to develop assessment tools to be better able to monitor their progress in democratic and social development over time.

³⁴ See <http://www.icnrd5-mongolia.mn>

A desk study on the state of democracy in Mongolia was prepared by the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex within a cooperation framework with IDEA led by Professor Todd Landman and using the SOD framework. The framework was complemented by extant quantitative indicators on democratic governance. The Mongolian process is raising a number of interesting issues regarding democracy assessment methodologies. Such issues include: the importance of applying a multi-stakeholder approach; the need to incorporate the particularities of countries within the framework, possibly by using satellite indicators; the inclusion of cultural aspects of the country; the political legitimacy of the exercise can be affected by who leads the assessment, in this case it is an initiative of government.

The wide range of initiatives in which the SOD methodology and framework has been applied confirm its comprehensiveness, flexibility and robustness

CONCLUSION

This paper started off by making the point that as long as democracy remains a contested concept assessing democracy will continue to be an extremely challenging undertaking. IDEA developed the SOD methodology with the initial intention of producing a tool that could be applied to produce “a state of democracy in the world report”. The framework itself acknowledges the fact that democracy is not a linear process that moves from tyranny to open and plural societies. The framework has proved to be a global public good that has been used by quite varied users and in diverse political contexts. IDEA

has also been quite effective, in keeping with its tradition of being a learning institution, to harvest lessons learned and using them to keep the SOD framework a living instrument. The continued support for a network of experts represented by the IDEA/University of Essex partnership that continue to share experiences regarding the different applications of the methodology, its limitations and challenges as the concept of democracy continues to evolve, will remain a critical forum in which democracy methodologies will be refined.