

# TRACKING PROGRESS IN DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE AROUND THE WORLD: LESSONS AND METHODS

By

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## **I. Introduction**

There has been a growing consensus over the need to foster democracy and development through more dynamic and participatory approaches to governance in recent years. The evolving consensus is an outcome of discussions over the past decade at several regional and international conferences and other forums. This discussion continues for example, in the forthcoming Conference of ‘The Community of Democracies’ planned to take place in South Korea in November 2002 and the Fourth United Nations Conference on ‘New and Restored Democracies’ scheduled for Mongolia in 2003. The issues of democracy promotion and support for good governance are also prominent in major regional meetings of organizations as diverse as the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the Francophone, the G8, the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS), among others. International institutions among them the different United Nations agencies, bilateral and multilateral development agencies/institutions and many international, regional and national non-governmental organisations have all taken up issues of democracy promotion and good governance as top agenda items of development.

Concerted global effort toward democracy promotion is estimated to provide some US \$2 billion annually for democracy assistance and related programmes in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> Deepening democracy and promoting development, as well as to strengthening the capacity of developing countries to benefit from the rapid pace of globalisation have become key challenges of the international community and governments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Despite progress made by many countries in building democratic institutions and protecting human rights, democracy in some regions of the world is however still fragile and institutions too weak to ensure effective governance. Strengthening democratic institutions and fostering a participatory approach to governance are seen by many development practitioners as important tools to promote

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<sup>2</sup> Harald Mathisen and Lars Svåsand, Funding Political Parties in Emerging African Democracies: What role for Norway? Christian Michelsen Institute Report R: 2002:6, p. 2.

social and economic development and to enable a country to manage emerging global, national and local issues. In this context, the importance of promoting dialogue and partnerships between government, the private sector and civil society is gaining growing consensus.

It is appropriate, given the extent of global consensus that has been developing over the last decade of the twentieth century, and the amount of resources flowing into democracy assistance, to observe that the earlier questions of why and what type of democracy have increasingly taken backstage. Many regional organisations have taken a stand in favour of democracy. The EU, OAS, the African Union (AU) and the Commonwealth, for instance, have resolved not to admit any government amongst their rank that comes to power through undemocratic means. Different governments in developing countries have also crafted and adopted some of the world's best constitutions. These cover a wide range of issues on the Bill of Rights and entrenchment of important institutions such as political parties and local government. More and more governments are also establishing an array of oversight autonomous institutions, for example, independent election management bodies and the ombudsperson. These political developments show that the idea that democracy is the best form of government has become almost universally accepted. The challenge now, however, is how to translate constitutional provisions and institutional frameworks from law and public declarations into democratic culture and practice. This is a challenge that faces governments, civil society organizations, the democracy assistance/donor community and multi-lateral organisations at large.

But, the challenge posed by the 'how' question is a much more difficult one. The earlier questions of what and why were easier to answer on the basis of appalling record of governance and poor economic performance by states around the world which led to popular uprisings. The 'how' question however, is a question of methods and strategy of democracy progress and assistance. It requires carefully thought through techniques and their wide acceptance by a variety of stakeholders. This essay focuses on the efforts of different institutions to assist governments and democracy actors with tools and methods for monitoring and assessing progress in democracy and good governance in the third wave democracy countries. It begins with a review of trends and challenges of democracy transition and consolidation. It then provides a brief narrative of the actors and institutions in development of indicators. The larger sections dwell at length on the key issue of methods and techniques for assessment/evaluation of democracy and governance progress. The focus is on value-added of democracy assessment tools to democracy promotion and assistance at the country level.

## II. Overview of Progress in Democratisation and Governance

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and widespread adoption of a democratic form of government in the former Soviet Union countries, Africa and Asia and renewal of democratic rule in Latin America was greeted with a feeling of victory in the Western World. The historic moment or the ‘third wave’ as Huntington (1991) termed it marked a significant change in the world political map and at the same time appeared to give tribute to western practice. Liberal democracy and its economic associate – capitalism appeared to be the only and surest way to guarantee political stability and development. Austin (1995) so aptly captures this revolutionary moment of the early 1990s as follows:

That the tide of democracy is still running can be seen from several states in the non-western world. It is almost the only current of ideas publicly endorsed by Third World leaders and their opponents, with one exception – nationalism ... Military men are uneasy in office. Single party presidents are defensive. Revolutionary leaders are on the run. Theocracies still exist but emirs, ayatollahs and sheiks of the Middle East are not wholly at ease, even within the Islamic world; they, too, must be careful to court popular support. One must pause before the immensity of China where communist beliefs are still upheld, but the elderly leaders of Peking, at least to outsiders, look something of an anachronism, unwilling to change and fearful of survival.<sup>3</sup>

Some half a decade since Austin made these uncontroversial observations of the events and trends in the early 1990s, one can indeed add that military leaders have almost disappeared from the political scene with a few handful exceptions such as in Pakistan and Burma. Single party presidents no longer exist and the emirs, sheiks and ayatollahs are under even more pressure for reform than perhaps at any other time in the history of their societies. The post-September 11 political climate has further precipitated more pressure for democratisation in the Middle East. In China, too, the undercurrent for democracy seems to be growing with time. However, even in the early 1990s there were those scholars and policy advisers who were cautious of the chances of success that liberal democracy and capitalist development could make in non-western societies. They were fully aware that liberal democracy has a long complex and specific history of struggles and contestations not easily transferable to different historical settings.

Austin (1995) for instance, identified four key factors that posed serious constraints to the success of liberal democracy in non-western societies. These, he said, were political worries, the economic

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<sup>3</sup> Dennis Austin, (ed), *Liberal Democracy in Non-Western States*, Professors World Peace Academy, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA (1995), p2.

promise, the thread on political progress posed by social ills and the forces of nationalism found in varying degrees of intensity in new and restored democracies. By 'political worries' Austin referred to the unique political history of western liberal democracy and its kindred varieties in Australia, New Zealand and North America. He noted that this type of democracy was a product of a long historical process of struggles, trial and error and contestation. He doubted whether or not given this reality, the excitement of both western leaders and Third World leaders and their people on the chances of democracy taking root here were not unfounded. As he puts it:

“The danger, therefore, is to expect too much of what might be called political or constitutional engineering since, in reality, the success of democratic institutions has been organic not mechanical” (Austin, 1995:4).

The rapid rejection of post-independence pluralist institutions in Africa and Asia where the constitutions and institutions of democratic governance were rapidly replaced with autocratic structures and regimes constitute in Austin's view concrete evidence of why one needs to be cautious of political engineering of the nature that followed the third wave trends. The second constraint to democratisation noted by Austin (1995) and now extensively recognised and written about by other scholars; and now also widely acknowledged by leaders of newly democratising countries, was democracy's promise of delivering material wealth. It is increasingly demonstrated by events on the ground that democracy was desired in non-democratic societies not only for its intrinsic value - basic freedoms, rights and security – but also equally importantly for its instrumental value – material promise ( Sen, 1999). Democracy promised for those in non-western societies to deal with economic malfunctions in policy, to create opportunities for investment and growth, to provide more jobs and improve income and reduce poverty. Democracy promised to address the needs of the weak and disadvantaged members of society in a better way than its predecessor regimes.

After a decade of two concurrent processes of democratisation on the one hand and economic reform on the other neither democracy nor development appear to be reaching most of the people in new and restored democracies. The countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Former Soviet Union have in general and at least on the surface to have taken major political and economic reform measures. In many of these countries the economy has generally been liberalized, the private sector is encouraged and public sector reforms have created new openings for the private sector to play its role side by side with the public sector. However, economic growth is slow and in many of the countries growth rates are still at zero or negative levels. Unemployment, erosion of income, poverty and disease remain major threats to both political and economic stability in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the Former Soviet Union and other regions outside developed economies.

Social ills - disease, poverty, social exclusion, crime, corruption and violence combine with ultra-nationalist tendencies to make democratic progress difficult in developing countries. In some respects these problems represent the failures of the political system to respond and accommodate the political needs of their diverse populations. The electoral systems, constitutions and local government regimes in many of these countries still do not reach out to the political and social minorities. At another level, the problem of democratisation in developing countries and the former Soviet countries has a lot to do with the failure of development. African economies, for instance, are not delivering or are not yet doing so to the extent that will reduce poverty, create jobs to absorb young school leavers and contribute to better income distribution. Official unemployment figures in Africa range between 20% and 35%. The actual figures, which include underemployed rural producers, are well above 50% of the labour force and poverty levels are estimated between 35% and 70% of households in many of African countries.

Structural adjustments programmes undertaken by many African countries including privatisation of the main public utilities do not appear to have generated enough revenue for re-investment in the social sector. In the former Soviet Union countries loss of income, poverty and high levels of unemployment coupled with corruption of the leaders are contributing to negative perceptions of democracy and general disillusionment of the population. Similar trends are noticeable in Asia and Latin America where levels of poverty, inequality and corruption have generated a lot of public frustration and low confidence in the political system (IDEA, 2000).

The foregoing negative assessment of the development trends and their implications on political stability has a lot to do with several internal and external factors. Indeed many are beyond the capacity of individual states and part of both external policy exigencies and negative effects of globalisation. Nevertheless, the failure of democracy to take root in developing countries has much to do with the leadership of these states and the use they have made of what were originally democratic openings. To date, many of the 'third wave' countries have retained the democratic framework and institutions. For instance, a compilation of multi-party election results from around the world between 1945 and 2001 (IDEA, 2002) shows that Africa has held a total of 126 elections since 1945. A substantial number of these took place in the past ten years. Compared to other regions of the world, Africa comes fourth after Western Europe at 339. Central and South America has had 220 elections while North America has had 162. The frequency of elections has been lowest in The CIS and Central; and Eastern Europe, Asia, Oceania and The Middle East. The participatory level in elections is also reasonably high and internationally comparable. In Africa, for example, the turnout average is 64.5% for the 126 elections. Individual country averages differ much with some countries at 80% turnouts while others are in the range of 40% to 45% (IDEA, 2002). The numbers of political parties taking part in elections in these countries has been high ranging between six and 60 in some countries.

Two positive points can be made about elections in new democracies. First, they are evolving to become a new and an integral part of the political culture of these countries. Second, other conditions met, the regularity of elections has the potential to contribute toward the building of a democratic culture and institutions. The political parties as main organs of the electoral process could be expected to become permanently focused on election activity and related issues of effective representation and thereby improve their organization, programmes and links with the citizens. The quality of election would be expected to improve as the permanency and regularity of elections will lead to cumulative experience and professional management.

However elections in new democracies have also been a source of a number of negative trends. Holding regular elections does not make a country more democratic. Research on elections in new and restored democracies point to serious negative trends. Carothers (2002) among others has recently called for the “end of the transition paradigm” or the expectation that third wave countries are on their way toward strong and established democracies. According to him the majority of the countries dubbed to be in transition are in fact in a huge grey zone of non-democratic regimes. He argues that only a handful of countries in Central Eastern Europe and Asia including Hungary, Poland and Taiwan appear to be consolidating democracy. The majority of some 100 countries classified as candidates of the third wave are in fact in Carother’s two main clusters of **feckless pluralism** and **dominant-power politics**. The former refers to a category of countries whose political life is marked by significant amounts of political freedom, regular elections, and alternation of power between genuinely different political groupings. At the same time, these countries which include the likes of Nicaragua, Ecuador in Latin America, Bosnia, Moldova, Albania in the post-communist world, Bangladesh, Mongolia in Asia and Madagascar, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra-Leone in Africa have shallow and troubled democracies. Political participation is largely limited to elections, political parties here are seen as corrupt, self-interested and ineffective.<sup>4</sup> Dominant-power politics regimes are those countries with limited but real political space, some political contestation by opposition groups, and at least most of the basic institutional forms of democracy. Yet one of the political groupings dominates the system to the extent of making prospects of alternation of power difficult to foresee. Carothers picks as examples of regimes in this category countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Armenia, Georgia, Malaysia and Cambodia.<sup>5</sup>

Carothers’ sobering analysis and attempt to evaluate progress on the democratisation trends or lack of is a welcome effort. As it would have been expected it has generated a lot of debates and raised

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Carothers, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No 1, January 2002, pp 6 –21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.13

significant questions relating both to democracy assistance strategy and expectations. But equally important, it has raised the question of the need for systematic tools and methods for analysis and determining whether or not democracy is taking root in non-western countries. There is no doubt several questions regarding which countries belong where in Carothers categories and the objectivity of his indicators of the categorization. However, many analysts, practitioners and the democracy donors will be hard pressed to accept that time has come to seriously and systematically review democracy progress in newly democratising countries.

Attempts to refine regimes around the third wave countries and the extent to which they are moving toward democracy have struck cord with many students of democratisation around the world. Along the lines of Carothers' work have among others the works of Diamond (2002) and Schedler (2002). The two writers focused their analysis on classification of regimes according to the free and fairness of their elections and Freedom House ratings.<sup>6</sup> Schedler (2002) for instance, develops a four-staged continuum of electoral ranking where countries are seen to move from **closed authoritarianism** to **electoral authoritarianism** to **electoral democracy** to **liberal democracy**. According to Schedler, the phenomenon of “electoral authoritarianism” is one where elections are characterised by systematic cheating by the incumbent regime. As he puts it: “While democracy is “a system in which parties lose elections”, electoral authoritarianism (EA) is a system in which *opposition* parties lose elections” (Schedler, 2002:47). Thus Schedler like others sees elections in new democracies as producing not democratic outcomes but aberrations which he and Diamond (2002) characterised as electoral authoritarian regimes. According to Schedler:

The percentage of countries hosting EA regimes runs as high as 87.5 percent in Central Asia, 54.2 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, and 52.2 percent in North Africa and the Middle East. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounts for nearly half (44.8 percent) of all EA regimes. The most even distribution is to be found in South, Southeast, and East Asia (Schedler, 2002:48).

There are several methodological questions that have to be raised concerning both the concepts used by Schedler and others in their most recent works and on over reliance on a single source of data such as the Freedom House. Many would argue for instance, that reports of election observers, other official and semi-official election monitoring reports as well as efforts of civil society and political parties would be much better sources of evidence on which to evaluate countries electoral records. Admittedly, attractive as the latter sources are, they are nevertheless hard to access. However, this argument is still not convincing as there are increasingly other empirical sources of data from opinion surveys and other institutional monitoring and evaluation programmes in the market. Limitations

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<sup>6</sup> See Larry Diamond and Andreas Schedler's separate articles in the Journal of Democracy, Vol.13, No.2, April, 2002.

notwithstanding, the fact that elections in the new and restored democracies are problematic is not in doubt. The evidence of electoral fraud and associated conflict abounds. For example, countries as diverse as Angola (1991), Lesotho (1998), Indonesia (1999), The Philippines (2000), Georgia, (2000), Azerbaijan (2001), Cote d' Ivoire (2001), Madagascar (2001), Zambia (2001) and Ukraine (2002) displayed these electoral problems in the most recent elections. The are problems that scholars mentioned here among others are pointing to. The problems of free and fair elections are exacerbated by the reality that in many of the countries in new and restored democracies political parties especially opposition parties remain organizationally and financially weak, fragmented and marginal in terms of their representation of the interest of their constituencies. One or two parties conduct national affairs often leaving out significant political minorities as if they do not exist. In many countries this practice has created conditions for extra-parliamentary actions and confrontational politics which threatens to destabilise the country – Lesotho (1998), Madagascar (2001), Tanzania (1995, 2000) and Zimbabwe (2001, 2002).

### **III. Democracy and Governance Assessment and Indicators: Towards Systematic Progress Evaluation and Targeted Assistance<sup>7</sup>**

With the widespread establishment or re-establishment of democratic forms of government in all regions in the 1990s has come a desire to assess how well they are doing, and how much progress has in fact been made. What are the key problems faced by recently established democracies? Can some aspects of the democratic process be more easily introduced and become rooted than others, and, if so, which? What are the distinctive features of democratic development in individual countries? Such questions are given added urgency by a common perception among electorates that their democratic arrangements have not delivered anything like what they have promised, and that the global triumph of democratic norms has not been matched by comparable changes in governmental practice.

A similar feeling of disillusionment with the political process has also been prevalent in longer established democracies, as evidenced by declining electoral turnouts, declining membership of political parties, and other indicators. Governments often appear to be more concerned with presentation than performance, and to be remote from citizens' daily concerns. In all countries people have come to feel that many of the decisions that matter for the quality of their lives are no longer within the competence of the elected government, but have escaped beyond the borders of the nation-state, to international organizations, transnational companies, or the imperatives of globalization and international markets. It is in this context of a general commitment to the norms of democracy, but of

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<sup>7</sup> A substantial part of this section draws from International IDEA's Handbook on Democracy Assessment (2001) edited by David Beetham, et al and published by Kluwer Law International, The Hague, The Netherlands.



worries about their practical realization, that the idea of democracy assessment should be located.

Apart from the citizens' own interest, there are several other reasons and interests in measuring and monitoring progress on democracy. Firstly, measuring democracy is useful for reasons of relevance to the needs of different countries and cultures. There is no uniform and universal definition of democracy. There are instead certain core values and principles that are generally accepted as indicative of human freedom and security. They include the rights and freedoms to belong, participate, live and associate with others as equal members of the community and society (see table 1). Others include freedom to speak freely, to form associations and organisations of private and collective interest. Still others relate to the rule of law and responsive government. Monitoring democracy provides both the specific definitions of and expectations from democracy by those embracing democracy on the one hand and those withdrawing from it on the other.

Secondly, measuring democracy is necessary for identifying the gaps and challenges in order to better support democracy. The past decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union has seen the development of what can best be called a "democracy promotion industry" (Carothers, 1999). Enormous amounts of financial and human resources are each year spend on supporting elections and electoral bodies, strengthening legislatures and local government; assisting civil society organisations and political parties. All bilateral and multi-lateral agencies/institutions have a budget line on democracy promotion or more popularly in the terminology of UNDP and the Bretton Woods institutions "good governance" (UNDP, 1996, World Bank, 1999). However, as Carothers (1999) so eloquently demonstrated the industry has major and serious pitfalls. The problems range from lack of strategy, poor co-ordination of efforts to misappropriation of the resources by the elite in some of the recipient countries as noted earlier in this essay.

Until they were able to organise and press for their right to vote, for better working conditions and pay, participate in employment and general decision making process of their countries, workers and women were systematically excluded from the democracies of developed countries. Most recently, struggles against authoritarian regimes in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the former Soviet Union have further proved that democracy is a contested arena. Particularly in the former colonies, evidence further shows that it is not enough to change the regime. The de-colonisation process led as it was in many countries, by workers and peasants ended up serving the interest of the elites who exploited and oppressed the primary actors in the liberation and de-colonisation struggles. From the above overview of democratisation trends it is clear that history might be repeating itself as the third wave begins to sideline its core advocates – the workers, women, youth and different social and ethnic minorities in different countries. The third reason for measuring democracy progress is therefore to help the countries to set target and review them from time to time. This indeed should be the main

reason as it builds consensus among the democracy actors within the country as well as defines the commonly agreed agenda, duties and responsibilities. Democracy is a contested arena.

#### **IV. Overview of Organizations/institutions and Tools and Techniques for Assessment and Governance Indicators**

Efforts to measure performance of political systems are not new. For decades scholars have attempted to evaluate the impact of political institutions on development and people's perceptions and behaviour. What is fairly recent are attempts to quantify the effects of political institutions on say decision making, perceptions and behaviours of citizens and business interests (Bollen and Paxton 2000, Kaufman, et al, 1999).

There are currently several methods and techniques being developed by different stakeholders interested in assessing democracy progress and governance performance for a variety of reasons. One category of old players in this area is that of specialised research institutions and organizations. Kaufman, Kraay and Zoido-Lobaton (1999) list at least 13 different institutions working in the area of monitoring political and economic situations around the world. These include Business Environment Risk Intelligence (BER), The Wall Street Journal Central European Economic Review (CEER), Standard and Poor's DRI/McGraw-Hill (DRI), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU), Freedom House (FHF, FHNT), Gallup International, World Economic Forum (GCS, GCSA), Heritage Foundation/Wall Street Journal (HFWSJ), Political Risk Services, International Country Risk Guide (PRS/ICRG), Political Economic Risk Consultancy (PERC), Institute Management Development (WCY) and World Bank/University of Basel (WDR). A number of these have been in the field for quite some time. Among the oldest is Freedom House established in 1941, the EIU in 1949, Gallup International in 1947 and WDR in 1945. These are centred in three locations in developed world USA, Switzerland and UK in that order.

This group of institutions monitor trends and measure them mainly in order to guide business investment interests. Their main objective is to guide business but not necessarily to help the country improve its performance in democracy. As a result and particularly because of their subjective and less transparent methods of assessment many of these organisations have been widely criticised and their rating and rankings of countries controversial.

The second group of actors is a fairly recent one in terms of their efforts in assessment and development of indicators. This group comprises of bilateral and multilateral development agencies and institutions. In particular, the World Bank Institute and the European Organization for Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s committee on Development Assistance Co-operation (OECD-

DAC) have in the past decade shown growing interest and have put a lot of effort in developing indicators for evaluating the utilization of development assistance and tracking governance reforms and performance in recipient countries. The work in this group has been directed toward generating quantitative measures of the reform progress in public sector and governance institutions in developing countries.

Closely related to the work of donor organizations, the World Bank and the IMF has been the independent but related efforts of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Since its groundbreaking work on the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990, the UNDP has over the past twelve years generated a number of indices for measuring poverty, gender empowerment, governance and political freedom. Some of these have been quite well received while others have been controversial and difficult to defend. On the whole, the UNDP has been a leader in the development of quantitative democracy related and governance indicators. Other branches of the UN system including regional Banks, the Economic Commissions and Regional Bureaux of the UNDP have followed suit in developing governance indicators specific to their regional and country needs. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for instance is current implementing a governance assessment programme in thirty countries across the continent. The ECA assessment covers extensive institutional analysis combined with opinion leaders' and public opinion surveys.

The fourth broad group of actors belongs universities and research institutions which monitor the democratisation trends in order to "...determine its extent and whether it has peaked, plateaued, or is starting to decline"(Bollen and Paxton, 2000:58). As Bollen and Paxton put it, scholars are more interested "...to understand the determinants and consequences of liberal democracy" (Bollen and Paxton, 2000:58). Although there are too many institutions and individual researchers in this group to list here, it is worth mentioning the most recent 'Global Governance Survey' of the UN University in Tokyo. The survey began in 1999 has covered a large number of countries in all the major continents and has generated a framework and data that might in the long run be useful to democracy promoters and other policy makers. Here too the direction is toward indexing and ranking of countries in the survey. There is also a growing body of opinion survey work evolving in the Former Soviet Union countries, Africa, Asia and Latin America under the name of barometers - Afrobarometer, Latinobarometer, etc. These too are generating some of the useful data that both researchers and democracy promoters need to notice and take into consideration in their work.

Finally, the non-governmental organizations at national, regional and international levels have in different ways picked up on the idea of indicators and monitoring of progress. Both Transparency International and CIVICUS have been grappling with techniques and tools for measuring corruption and the health of civil society across different countries.

Development and use of indicators has not been well received by the governments and others in developing countries. Some see them as tools for exclusion whereby donors and financiers might use the low rating of a country to justify denial of aid or set conditionality for any assistance to the country. Others have seen the use of indicators and ranking of countries as efforts to embarrass and undermine their efforts to promote democracy and good governance. The controversies relating to the relevance of indicators has often been heard in meetings of the EU-ACP group of countries, at the UN General Assembly and several conferences referred to at the opening of this essay. Clearly the discussion in this essay has shown that the primary use of indicators and assessments vary from one particular interest group and organization to another. However, the relevance of assessments as progress tracking and promotional tools for assisting democratization should be emphasized.

## **V. What is distinctive about International IDEA's assessment framework and method?**

The Democracy Assessment developed by IDEA is distinctive in the following different ways. First, its main purpose and focus is on a systematic assessment by its own citizens of a country's political life in order to answer the question: how democratic is it in practice? Where is it satisfactory from a democratic point of view, and what features should be a cause for concern? How far have we progressed, and what remains still to be done? How can we improve on what we have already achieved? Such an assessment can serve a number of purposes. From the perspective of a country's citizens the product of the assessment is geared to serve one or more of the following promotional goals:

- Serve to raise public awareness about what democracy involves, and public debate about what standards of performance people should expect from their government;
- Provide systematic evidence to substantiate popular concerns about how they are governed, and set these in perspective by identifying both strengths and weaknesses;
- Contribute to public debate about ongoing reform, and help to identify priorities for a reform programme;
- Provide an instrument for assessing how effectively reforms are working out in practice.

In all these ways a democracy assessment through its publication and dissemination can make a contribution to a country's democratic advance, whether in developed, developing or transitional democracies.

The second feature of the IDEA's assessment that uses a standardized framework is that it can provide a comparative perspective. Democracy assessments can:

- Serve to highlight common problems shared by a number of countries;
- Help identify what is distinctive about a given country's situation or democratic institutions, by comparison with others;

The third strength of the IDEA assessment tool is that it is mainly qualitative in emphasis and approach. Although the data can be quantified as shown in figure 1, this is only a secondary and side function. The main objective is to measure performance in terms of 'how much' not 'how many'. The focus is also on comparing a country's performance with itself over time and not on ranking countries.

International IDEA's assessment framework and method has aroused widespread interest because of a number of distinctive features, which are summarized below as:

- **clarity of principles:** rather than offering an arbitrary checklist of items, the method derives the institutions and criteria for assessment in a systematic manner from basic democratic principles and values.
- **comprehensiveness of framework:** the framework provides the most comprehensive overview of the essential features of democracy, while encouraging a differentiated assessment of strengths and weaknesses in each area, rather than aggregating them into a single conclusion or numerical 'score'.
- **flexibility of assessment:** within a common framework of analysis, country assessors are able to determine their own standards and comparators for assessing progress or the lack of it, and their own selection of appropriate evidence, according to their country's specific situation.
- **country ownership of the assessment process:** a basic assumption is that the right people to assess a country's democracy are its own citizens, rather than outsiders sitting in judgement upon it; and that any assessment should facilitate wider public involvement and debate.
- **range of use:** old as well as new democracies can and should be subject to a similar framework and method of assessment.

### *Democratic Principles and Mediating Values*

Democracy is usually defined as a set of governmental institutions or processes, but people rarely stop to think what it is that makes these institutions democratic. Thus when these institutions are used, as they frequently are, for undemocratic purposes, the automatic association of them with democracy simply results in democracy itself being given a bad name. The assessment framework being used here starts from the proposition that democracy should be defined in the first instance by its basic principles or values. It is these that make particular institutional arrangements democratic, and they provide the litmus test of how democratic they are in practice.

What are these principles? They are twofold: popular control over public decision making and decision makers; and equality between citizens in the exercise of that control. Insofar as these principles are embodied in governing arrangements we can call them 'democratic'. These are the principles that democrats in all times and places have struggled for: to make popular control over public decisions both more effective and more inclusive; to remove an elite monopoly over decision making and its benefits; and to overcome obstacles such as those of gender, ethnicity, religion, language, class, wealth, etc., to the equal exercise of citizenship rights. Democracy is thus not an all-or-nothing affair, but a matter of degree - of the degree to which the people can exercise a controlling influence over public policy and policy makers, enjoy equal treatment at their hands, and have their voices heard equally.

These principles are broad and strong ones, but they require to be specified more precisely in the context of a system of representative government, in which the people assign to others the right to decide public policy on their behalf. So we need to identify a set of mediating values, through which these two principles are realized in practice. These are the values of participation, authorization, representative-ness, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity. It is from these values that the familiar institutions of representative government derive their democratic character, and it is these values that can be used in turn to assess how democratically they actually work in practice. So, for example, it is through their participation in the electoral process that the people authorize politicians to act on their behalf, and that they choose a representative assembly which they can hold accountable through the sanction of future electoral dismissal. These values are what make elections democratic. Yet we also need to ask of any given electoral system or process: How much popular participation does it actually encourage? How directly and effectively does it authorize government? How representative an assembly of the citizen body does it produce and how equally are votes treated in practice? How credible is the accountability of an elected government to the people through the sanction of future dismissal?

It is this two-way relationship between values and institutions that give the democracy assessment process its intellectual foundation and validity. The relationship is illustrated diagrammatically in table 1. The first column of the table lists the main mediating values that derive from our two democratic principles. The second column sets out what is required for these values to be made effective. The third column lists the typical institutions through which these requirements can be met in a system of representative government. Together they build up the main features of what is to be assessed and the criteria by which that assessment is to be made.

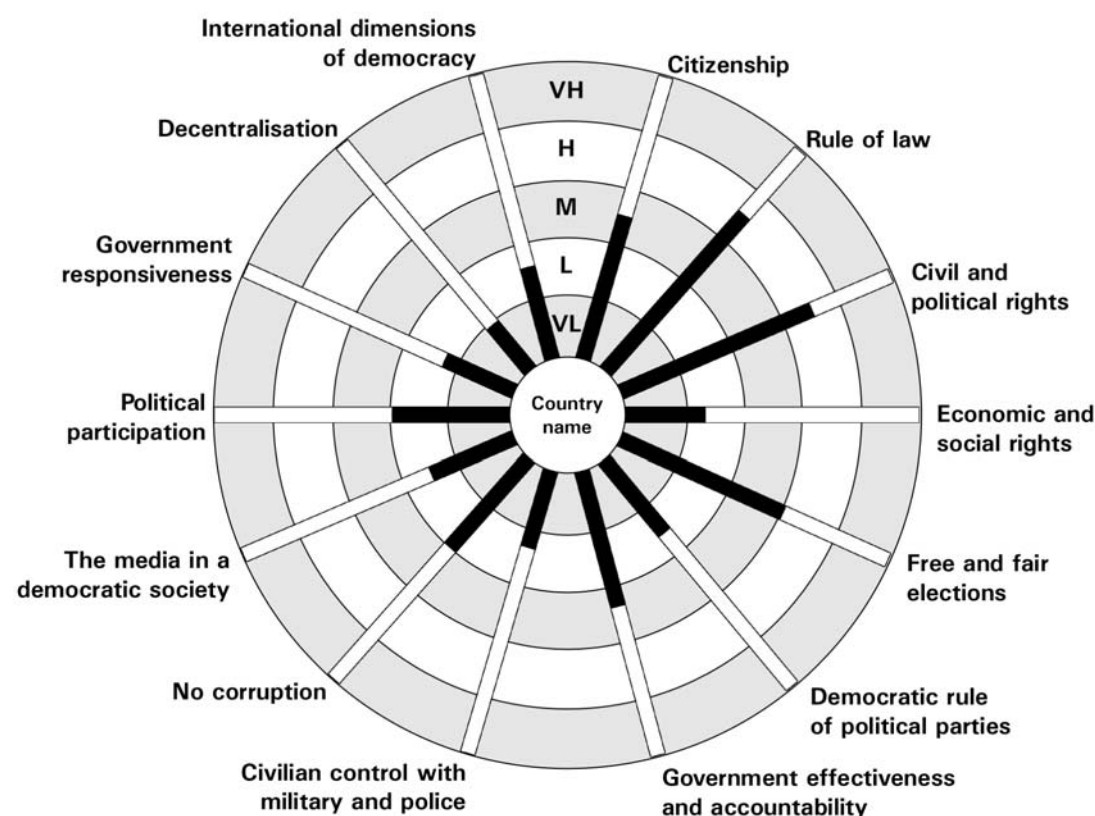
Table 1

**Basic principles and mediating values:**

***popular control***      over public decision making and decision makers  
***equality***              of respect and voice between citizens in the exercise of that control

Mediating values	Requirements	Institutional means of realization
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rights to participate</li> <li>• capacities/resources to participate</li> <li>• agencies for participation</li> <li>• participatory culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civil and political rights system</li> <li>• economic and social rights</li> <li>• elections, parties, NGOs</li> <li>• education for citizenship</li> </ul>
Authorization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• validation of constitution</li> <li>• choice of office holders/programmes</li> <li>• control of elected over non-elected executive personnel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• referenda</li> <li>• free and fair elections</li> <li>• systems of subordination to elected officials</li> </ul>
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• legislature representative of main currents of popular opinion</li> <li>• all public institutions representative of social composition of electorate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• electoral and party system</li> <li>• anti-discrimination laws</li> <li>• affirmative action policies</li> </ul>
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear lines of accountability, legal, financial, political, to ensure effective and honest performance civil service and judicial integrity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rule of law, sep. of powers</li> <li>• independent auditing process</li> <li>• legally enforceable standards</li> <li>• strong parliament. Scrutiny powers</li> </ul>
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• government open to legislative and public scrutiny</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• freedom of info. Legislation</li> <li>• independent media</li> </ul>
Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accessibility of government to electors and different sections of public opinion in policy formation, implementation and service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• systematic and open procedures of public consultation</li> <li>• effective legal redress</li> <li>• local govt. close to people</li> </ul>
Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tolerance of diversity at home</li> <li>• support for democratic govts. and popular democratic struggles abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• civic &amp; human rights education</li> <li>• international human rights law</li> <li>• UN and other agencies</li> <li>• International NGOs</li> </ul>

Figure 1 graphically presents the broad categories of the search questions. The full assessment framework with its search questions covering every aspect of democracy is presented in Appendix 1. It begins with the rights of the citizen, then deals with the representative-ness and accountability of government and the different aspects of civil society, and concludes with the international dimensions of democracy. The questions for investigation are all framed in the comparative mode (How much? How far? etc.), in line with our conviction that democracy is a question of degree, not an all-or-nothing situation which a country has or don't have.



**Figure 1**

The assessment is normally done through careful research by experts and actors based in the country concerned. However, even ordinary citizens can rate their country's performance in the different components of democracy using the following example of a section of assessment framework.

#### *Democracy Assessment Questionnaire: An Example*

To answer all the questions fully would require a panel of assessors with a wide range of expertise, such as we have drawn on in each of the countries surveyed in the International IDEA pilot study. However, a simpler 'do it yourself' method is to answer the questions section by section according to a grid format in which you are invited to grade your answers by degree. Even this simpler format



assumes a certain level of political interest and information. Consulting with some basic sources such as legal and political texts, reports from domestic human rights organizations and ombudspersons, main newspaper archives, etc., is also recommended. You will find that all the questions are framed in such a way that, the higher the score, the better the situation is presumed to be from a democratic point of view.

*The rule of law and access to justice*

- 2.1 How far is the rule of law operative throughout the territory?
- 2.2 To what extent are all public officials subject to the rule of law and to transparent rules in the performance of their functions?
- 2.3 How independent are the courts and the judiciary from the executive, and how free are they from all kinds of interference?
- 2.4 How equal and secure is the access of citizens to justice, to due process and to redress in the event of mal-administration?
- 2.5 How far do the criminal justice and penal systems observe due rules of impartial and equitable treatment in their operations?
- 2.6 How much confidence do people have in the legal system to deliver fair and effective justice?

Best feature.....

Most serious problem.....

Suggested improvement.....

You are invited to tick one of the boxes in answer to each question in the accompanying list. The classifications are:

VH = very high

H = high

M = middling or ambiguous

L = low

VL = very low

As an example, under question 2.1, if you consider that there are serious abrogations of the rule of law – for example, the existence of areas or groups above or beyond the reach of the law, or outside its protection in your country - then you might tick “L” or “low” for your assessment of the degree to which the rule of law is operative.

The numbering of the boxes corresponds to the relevant questions on the lists. For each section, you are then asked to specify what you consider a) the best feature, and b) the most serious problem in your country from a democratic point of view; then c) to suggest what you think might be done to improve this problem.

The example covers section 2 of the framework only, but you can repeat the exercise for each of the sections in turn.

	VH	H	M	L	VL
2.1					
2.2					
2.3					
2.4					
2.5					
2.6					

## **VII. Summary of Application of the Assessment and Uses**

The democracy assessment framework used by International IDEA has been piloted in eight different countries over the past three years. Its first form (democratic audit) was first used in the United Kingdom, Sweden and Austria. In each of these countries the results generated debates both in the public arena and in the legislature where some reforms were conceived. Since its review and modification by an international team of scholars commissioned by IDEA, the methodology of democracy assessment has been applied to Bangladesh, El Salvador, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, New Zealand, Peru and South Korea. In each country a carefully selected team of scholars and researchers did the assessment. The country report was exposed to extensive internal discussions with politicians, public sector actors, private sector and civil society both as separate sectors and in a workshop with all of them.

In all the countries the analysis have pointed out the gaps and problems that will require attention before democracy can advance further. For instance, the findings of all the countries show the continued problems of difficulties of social exclusion meted out to indigenous groups. From the Roma, the Maori to people of Indian origins in Peru and El Salvador to the Masai in Kenya, the citizenship rights of the indigenous people are limited by difficulties related to access to land, development services and other opportunities in society. The problem of social exclusion and related physical and human security of these groups are indeed much more prominent but not exclusive to new democracies. The Roma in Italy and Maori in New Zealand are respectively grappling with issues of social exclusion which manifest themselves in land ownership and impaired access to other resources as well.

The other common areas of concern highlighted in the democracy assessment of the pilot countries related to manipulation of elections, political corruption, weak political opposition, poverty, centralized political and decision-making power and still very limited participation of women in the political life of their countries. These were all systematically detailed and analyzed in each country report. These problems are of course not unknown as the discussion on electoral authoritarianism discussed above showed. Three things make these problems different in the context of democracy assessment technique interesting. Firstly, they were identified with a comprehensive framework of analysis and they are therefore put in a fuller context of what is overall happening in terms of the democratic process of the country. Secondly, the researchers have consulted more closely with the stakeholders to understand the sources and magnitude of each problem. And thirdly, these are not just a litany of problems but windows of both opportunities and threats. They are opportunities because they point to areas where more attention should be paid and hence the need for all those interested to start working on. They are also threats in that if ignored they will over time create even more problems for the country's democratization programme.

Understood in the foregoing context the democracy assessment report is a form of needs assessment that creates an opportunity for dialogue. The stages thereafter require more focus and willingness for stakeholders to move on to improve their performance in the identified areas of weakness. In a few countries, such as Malawi and Kenya the reports have been used for public education and contributed to ongoing national reforms. However, much more effort and resources will be required to move the value of the assessment to its logical purpose - deepened democracy at country level.

## **Conclusion**

This essay has shown that democracy and good governance have become accepted globally as forms of managing a society and running a government. This type of political system is expected to deliver both intrinsic values of human security and freedom and create an environment for equitable development in young democratising countries. It is therefore important that governments and other local and international actors continue the efforts to consolidate democracy and entrench good governance. After a decade however, progress on democratisation in new and restored democracies show less prospects than initially expected. Research shows stagnation and distortion in elections, political parties and the general management of new regimes show less democracy but stronger elements of electoral authoritarianism and dominant-power politics.

At another level economic prospects remain gloomy. Economic growth rates in developing countries remain generally low. Although there has been widespread economic reform resulting in liberalisation of the economy, many countries still attract much less private sector investment. Low foreign direct investment and aid, growing unemployment and associated poverty, inequality coupled by corruption threaten both political and economic stability of democratising countries. This situation calls for more efforts to support both democratisation and economic development.

The issues of inclusiveness, participation and partnership, sustainability and process orientation are critical for a successful process of democratisation. While these are complex and demanding issues it is clear that systematic assessment of where we are and where we might be going with democracy is done. In this regard, the need for tools to systematically assess progress and guide future interventions cannot be over emphasised. This essay has discussed the different potential uses of democracy assessment tools. It has shown that comprehensive review of progress or lack of, are essential elements of improving performance and justifying further investment in a country's democratic governance. What is most required in new and restored democracies today is more dialogue between leaders and their people and indeed with other stakeholders. Only dialogue will translate the constitutional provisions and institutional frameworks of democracy into culture and practice.

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## APPENDIX 1

### *Assessment Framework: The Full List of Search Questions*

#### I. Citizenship, Law and Rights

##### **1.0 Nationhood and citizenship**

*Is there public agreement on a common citizenship without discrimination?*

- 1.1 How inclusive is the political nation and state citizenship of all who live within the territory?
- 1.2 How far are cultural differences acknowledged, and how well are minorities protected?
- 1.3 How much consensus is there on state boundaries and constitutional arrangements?
- 1.4 How far do constitutional and political arrangements enable major societal divisions to be moderated or reconciled?
- 1.5 How impartial and inclusive are the procedures for amending the constitution?
- 1.6 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

##### **2.0 The rule of law and access to justice**

*Are state and society consistently subject to the law?*

- 2.1 How far is the rule of law operative throughout the territory?
- 2.2 To what extent are all public officials subject to the rule of law and to transparent rules in the performance of their functions?
- 2.3 How independent are the courts and the judiciary from the executive, and how free are they from all kinds of interference?
- 2.4 How equal and secure is the access of citizens to justice, to due process and to redress in the event of mal-administration?
- 2.5 How far do the criminal justice and penal systems observe due rules of impartial and equitable treatment in their operations?
- 2.6 How much confidence do people have in the legal system to deliver fair and effective justice?
- 2.7 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

##### **3.0 Civil and political rights**

*Are civil and political rights equally guaranteed for all?*

- 3.1 How free are all people from physical violation of their person, and from fear of it?
- 3.2 How effective and equal is the protection of the freedoms of movement, expression, association and assembly?

- 3.3 How secure is the freedom for all to practise their own religion, language or culture?
- 3.4 How free from harassment and intimidation are individuals and groups working to improve human rights?
- 3.5 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?
- 4.0 Economic and social rights**  
*Are economic and social rights equally guaranteed for all?*
- 4.1 How far is access to work or social security available to all, without discrimination?
- 4.2 How effectively are the basic necessities of life guaranteed, including adequate food, shelter and clean water?
- 4.3 To what extent is the health of the population protected, in all spheres and stages of life?
- 4.4 How extensive and inclusive is the right to education, including education in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?
- 4.5 How free are trade unions and other work-related associations to organise and represent their members' interests?
- 4.6 How rigorous and transparent are the rules on corporate governance, and how effectively are corporations regulated in the public interest?
- 4.7 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

## II. Representative and Accountable Government

- 5.0 Free and Fair elections**  
*Do elections give the people control over governments and their policies?*
- 5.1 How far is appointment to governmental and legislative office determined by popular competitive election, and how frequently do elections lead to change in the governing parties or personnel?
- 5.2 How inclusive and accessible for all citizens are the registration and voting procedures, how independent are they of government and party control, and how free from intimidation and abuse?
- 5.3 How fair are the procedures for the registration of candidates and parties, and how far is there fair access for them to the media and other means of communication with the voters?
- 5.4 How effective a range of choice does the electoral and party system allow the voters, how equally do their votes count, and how closely does the composition of the legislature and the selection of the executive reflect the choices they make?
- 5.5 How far does the legislature reflect the social composition of the electorate?

- 5.6 What proportion of the electorate votes, and how far are the election results accepted by all political forces in the country and outside?
- 5.7 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?
- 6.0 **Democratic role of political parties**  
*Does the party system assist the working of democracy?*
- 6.1 How freely are parties able to form, recruit members and campaign for office?
- 6.2 How effective is the party system in forming and sustaining governments in office?
- 6.3 How free are opposition or non-governing parties to organise within the legislature, and how effectively do they contribute to government accountability?
- 6.4 How fair and effective are the rules governing party discipline in the legislature?
- 6.5 How far are parties effective as membership organisations, and how far are members able to influence party policy and candidate selection?
- 6.6 How far does the system of party financing prevent the subordination of parties to special interests?
- 6.7 To what extent do parties cross ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions?
- 6.8 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?
- 7.0 **Government effectiveness and accountability**  
*Is government accountable to the people and their representatives?*
- 7.1 How far is the elected government able to influence or control those matters that are important to the lives of its people, and how well is it informed, organised and resourced to do so?
- 7.2 How much public confidence is there in the effectiveness of government and its political leadership?
- 7.3 How effective and open to scrutiny is the control exercised by elected leaders and their ministers over their administrative staff and other executive agencies?
- 7.4 How extensive and effective are the powers of the legislature to initiate, scrutinise and amend legislation?
- 7.5 How extensive and effective are the powers of the legislature to scrutinise the executive and hold it to account?
- 7.6 How rigorous are the procedures for approval and supervision of taxation and public expenditure?
- 7.7 How comprehensive and effective is legislation giving citizens the right of access to government information?



- 7.8 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

**8.0 Civilian control of the military and police**

*Are the military and police forces under civilian control?*

- 8.1 How effective is civilian control over the armed forces, and how free is political life from military involvement?
- 8.2 How publicly accountable are the police and security services for their activities?
- 8.3 How far does the composition of the army, police and security services reflect the social composition of society at large?
- 8.4 How free is the country from the operation of paramilitary units, private armies, warlordism and criminal mafias?
- 8.5 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

**9.0 Minimizing corruption**

*Are public officials free from corruption?*

- 9.1 How effective is the separation of public office, elected and non-elected, from party advantage and the personal business and family interests of office holders?
- 9.2 How effective are the arrangements for protecting office holders and the public from involvement in bribery?
- 9.3 How far do the rules and procedures for financing elections, candidates and elected representatives prevent their subordination to sectional interests?
- 9.4 How far is the influence of powerful corporations and business interests over public policy kept in check, and how free are they from involvement in corruption, including overseas?
- 9.5 How much confidence do people have that public officials and public services are free from corruption?
- 9.6 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

**III. Civil society and popular participation**

**10.0 The media in a democratic society**

*Do the media operate in a way that sustains democratic values?*

- 10.1 How independent are the media from government, how pluralistic is their ownership, and how free are they from subordination to foreign governments or multinational companies?
- 10.2 How representative are the media of different opinions and how accessible are they to different sections of society?

- 10.3 How effective are the media and other independent bodies in investigating government and powerful corporations?
- 10.4 How free are journalists from restrictive laws, harassment and intimidation?
- 10.5 How free are private citizens from intrusion and harassment by the media?
- 10.6 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

**11.0 Political participation**

*Is there full citizen participation in public life?*

- 11.1 How extensive is the range of voluntary associations, citizen groups, social movements etc. and how independent are they from government?
- 11.2 How extensive is citizen participation in voluntary associations and self-management organisations, and in other voluntary public activity?
- 11.3 How far do women participate in political life and public office at all levels?
- 11.4 How equal is access for all social groups to public office, and how fairly are they represented within it?
- 11.5 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

**12.0 Government responsiveness**

*Is government responsive to the concerns of its citizens?*

- 12.1 How open and systematic are the procedures for public consultation on government policy and legislation, and how equal is the access for relevant interests to government?
- 12.2 How accessible are elected representatives to their constituents?
- 12.3 How accessible and reliable are public services for those who need them, and how systematic is consultation with users over service delivery?
- 12.4 How much confidence do people have in the ability of government to solve the main problems confronting society, and in their own ability to influence it?
- 12.5 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?

**13.0 Decentralisation**

*Are decisions taken at the level of government most appropriate to the people affected?*

- 13.1 How independent are the sub-central tiers of government from the centre, and how far do they have the powers and resources to carry out their responsibilities?

- 13.2 How far are these levels of government subject to free and fair electoral authorisation, and to the criteria of openness, accountability and responsiveness in their operation?
- 13.3 How extensive is the co-operation of government at the most local level with relevant partners, associations and communities in the formation and implementation of policy, and in service provision?
- 13.4 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of priority and public support do they have?

#### IV. Democracy Beyond the State

##### **14.0 International dimensions of democracy**

*Are the country's external relations conducted in accordance with democratic norms, and is it itself free from external subordination?*

- 14.1 How free is the governance of the country from subordination to external agencies, economic, cultural or political?
- 14.2 How far are government relations with external donors based on principles of partnership and transparency?
- 14.3 How far does the government support UN human rights treaties and respect international law?
- 14.4 How far does the government respect its international obligations in its treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, and how free from arbitrary discrimination is its immigration policy?
- 14.5 How consistent is the government in its support for human rights and democracy abroad?
- 14.6 What measures, if any, are being taken to remedy publicly identified problems in this field, and what degree of political priority and public support do they have?