Improving measurement for fiscal governance

Organizations in the field of governance carry out diverse work – including research, capacity building, and advocacy – that contributes to essential outcomes like greater openness, accountability and equity. However, the complexity of the challenges that organizations are trying to overcome are inherently difficult to measure. As a result, organizations that are doing powerful and critical work may not be able to see their progress, leverage their achievements in advocacy and further activities, or change course when they are not achieving their intended outcomes.

While the complexity, scale, and unpredictability of the outcomes that many organizations are seeking to influence does mean that they are difficult to measure, this is not the same as being undefinable and unbeholden to measurability. There are myriad lessons to be learned from other fields and arenas that have successfully developed means (including proxy indicators) to measure sophisticated, political, and messy work outcomes like maternal mortality, women's role in growing the world's food, and child marriage.

While macro-level governance indicators exist, few vetted approaches exist that organizations can use to systematically track the outcomes of their individual work, particularly around short- and medium-term change and progress along the pathway toward macro-level change. As a consequence, organizations working in governance are attempting to both identify and develop successful proxy measures – a lengthy and expensive process which many organizations can't and shouldn't undertake alone.

The Opportunity

In an attempt to address this gap, the Open Society Foundations launched an initiative designed to contribute to the improvement of measurement in the field of governance, including in areas such as anti-corruption, extractives transparency, and fiscal transparency. Results for Development (R4D) was tasked to lead this initiative, with the goal that this work might identify existing resources and produce a set of new proxy indicators to measure the performance of organizational activities and programs.

This work has taken place over several phases. As a first step, R4D carried out background research to map existing indicators and tools, their strengths and weaknesses, and identify potential areas for the development of new indicators. In a second phase in close consultation with practitioners and technical advisors in the field, the project team sought to develop and revise high-priority indicators and tools and related guidance for their use. Following the design phase, tools and related materials outlining their use are being piloted in a number of sites and revised based on findings. Finally, R4D is working with partners to carry out a number of training and dissemination activities to ensure that the tools are accessible to practitioners and that further measurement development efforts are spurred.

> *Defining Tools, Indicators, and Indices.* Measurement can take many different forms, and for the purposes of this initiative, we did not limit our review and research to a specific form of measurement. In describing the outputs of this work, we use the following definitions for different forms of measurement:
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> - Indicator – a measure that produces a single value/estimate for an output or outcome.
> - Tool/toolkit – a method for measuring an output/outcome(s) that may estimates the value of that output/outcome(s) but may include multiple values.
> - Index/Indices – a measure that aggregates a set of related output(s)/outcome(s) into a single value

Measuring Governance, Advocacy, and Power – a guide to existing indicators and tools

In the project's formative research phase, R4D conducted an extensive landscaping exercise to map existing indicators, tools, and indices available to help practitioners measure outcomes in the areas of governance, advocacy, and power. Our research involved searching hundreds of websites and resources for publicly available indicators and tools relevant to priority focus outcome areas for practitioners working on governance, advocacy and power. While we intended to look primarily at indicators, we found that for a subset of outcome areas few indicators – if any at all – could be found. For this reason, we expanded our search to include tools and methodologies organizations might use to measure their work. We also considered global assessments and indices that measure outcomes at the national level because they may have the potential to be adapted for use by organizations.

While the gaps in measurement are significant, we uncovered more resources that we expected. Unfortunately, these resources are scattered across websites, many of which might not be consulted by governance practitioners. For this reason, we decided to develop a resource, entitled *[Measuring Governance, Advocacy, and Power](#)*, that brings together existing indicators, tools, and indices that may be useful to practitioners responsible for the measurement of outcomes in the field of governance, advocacy, and power in an easily accessible and filterable format.

New Tools for analyzing key characteristics of civil society, government, and advocacy campaigns

In a second phase, based on the review of available resources and extensive consultations with practitioners, we identified priority areas for improved measurement. Interestingly, the areas that were identified by our partners were quite broad and multidimensional and unfortunately not conducive to the development of proxy indicators. These outcome areas were (1) civil society

ecosystem strength; (2) government capacity, incentives, relationships and influence; and (3) the outcome of messaging campaigns. We decided to follow demand and pivoted away from the creation of proxy indicators to the development of toolkits to help practitioners measure these complex areas. The design of these toolkits was carried out leveraging existing resources and literature and in close consultation with the Steering Committee and other practitioners[1]. Our objective with these toolkits was to create a set of resources for measurement that provided valid assessments of key outcomes that could still be easily taken up and adapted by organizations that have a range of resource availability and evaluation expertise on staff.

The toolkits and corresponding guidance materials are being piloted in a number of sites by partner organizations with the goal of assessing their performance across a number of criteria including ease of data collection and analysis, cost of implementation, adaptability, ability to track changes over time, ease of incorporating into existing data collection, and validity. The tools are being continually updated and finetuned to address findings from the piloting process. The most recent versions of these tools will be available here upon completion of piloting.

Dissemination and Uptake

In the final stage of the project, R4D and its partners are working to carry out a number of training and dissemination activities. The goal of this phase is to make the tools accessible to practitioners, to encourage further testing and refinement, and to spur further measurement development efforts. These materials will all be available on the project website when available: https://www.r4d.org/projects/developing-fiscal-governance-indicators/

Next Steps

While the project's efforts have been met with enthusiasm, much work remains to be done to strengthen measurement in the field of governance, advocacy, and power. Some potential next steps include conducting additional pilots to further test and validate our tools, working to develop proxy indicators for narrower outcomes, and developing more user-friendly, lower-cost tools to help organizations assess the effectiveness of their work including their contribution to change and the quality of the change achieved.

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[1] The Steering Committee for this project includes Andrea Azevedo (Open Society Foundations), Megan Colnar (Open Society Foundations), Munyema Hasan (Open Government Partnership), Suvarna Hulawale (International Budget Partnership), Kamyar Jarahzadeh (Natural Resource Governance Institute), Caroline Laroche (formerly Natural Resource Governance Institute), Jay Locke (Open Society Foundations), Alison Miranda (Transparency and Accountability Initiative), and Paul Omondi (Tax Justice Network Africa).