

# Chapter 19

## In search of indicators of culture and development: progress and proposals

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### Introduction

Since the publication of *Our Creative Diversity* by the World Commission on Culture and Development and the issuing of UNESCO's first *World Culture Report*, increasing attention has been given to culture as a vital part of development. This has led to an exciting debate on indicators of culture. The *World Culture Report* published a number of interesting tables illustrating many aspects of culture in development, although research on cultural indicators is still in its infancy.

### Future of cultural indicators

This chapter sets out to present some ideas for future work on developing cultural indicators. It argues that indicators are a tool of policy dialogue and are not the same thing as statistical data. They should contain evaluative, and not merely descriptive, information. The methodology for developing indicators should start by defining a conceptual framework. The definitions of culture and development, and the relationship between the two, were set out clearly in *Our Creative Diversity*.

No single indicator alone can capture the complex reality of culture. Dimensions of culture should be identified in relation to two aspects of development, namely, outcomes and processes. As

regards the former, global ethics, cultural vitality and cultural diversity are proposed as key dimensions; and as regards the latter, we propose participation in creative activity, access to culture and respect for cultural identity. The indicators that appeared in the first issue of the *World Culture Report* were related mainly to material achievements of cultural creativity. Future work, however, should seek ways of quantifying other dimensions that were contained in the messages relayed in *Our Creative Diversity*.

### Indicators as a tool of policy dialogue

The current interest in developing cultural indicators stems from concern about the fact that development policies are neglecting culture as a factor to be taken

into account. It is time for quantitative indicators to contribute to inserting culture in the development policy dialogue. They can help focus the attention of busy policy-makers on the urgency of priority issues and the extent of improvements or setbacks in the field. Indicators are being used increasingly as a tool of policy dialogue through the provision of monitoring information. This is a new trend in the use of data. The conventional use of the latter is to provide material for research and analysis. And whereas data are used by economists and social scientists, indicators are used by politicians, the media and activists.

In launching the *Human Development Report*, Mahbub ul Haq set out deliberately to use indicators as advocacy tools. Going beyond unidimensional indicators, he realized that a composite index was needed to draw attention away from the preoccupation with the gross domestic product (GDP) as an indicator of development. In his special contribution to the report in 1999, Sen noted, 'By skilful use of the attracting power of the human development index (HDI), Mahbub got readers to take an involved interest in the large class of systematic tables and detailed critical analyses presented in [this report]'.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the HDI is central to public debate in many parts of the world when it is launched each year. The annual release of the new HDI ranking is a matter of widespread interest. It is indeed of some concern to many heads of state. Newspapers give prominence to the facts. The HDI ranking is the cause of widespread discussion and soul-searching in many countries. These in turn lead to the launching of national human development programmes. National human development reports in many countries publish disaggregated HDIs by region, municipality or ethnic group.

Recognizing that indicators are intended to stimulate policy dialogue has important implications for the creation of cultural indicators. Firstly, indicators should be designed for an evaluative rather than a descriptive purpose (Pattanaik, 1997). Thus they should track progress or recession in terms of specific goals. Secondly, they should be relevant, sending clear messages about issues of current concern and those that can be affected by policy response.

## Methodology: conceptual framework, key dimensions and a step-by-step procedure

No indicators can be expected to make sense without a clear conceptual framework. As stimulators of policy debate, they should be developed in such a way as to provide objective data on positive or negative trends. The following questions might be asked: What precisely is the reality to be measured? What is culture and how can it be defined as an aspect of development? How should we evaluate progress in culture and development? What are the key dimensions? Since most social and economic realities are complex and multi-dimensional, no single indicator can be expected to reflect them. Culture is no exception: it is a complex reality that needs to be broken down into key dimensions.

Next, indicators must be selected by asking questions such as these: Are the components quantifiable? Most development goals are complex and may not be so. If not, it is important to acknowledge that only partial indicators can be developed. If so, do measures exist, and if not, are there substitutes? What data are available for the indicators selected? Finally, a composite index should be considered.

The following procedure was used in developing the HDI. First, definitions were established:

- Human development was defined: extending choices to permit the kind of life that people wish to lead.
- The most important features were defined: while an individual may be faced with an infinite range of choices, focus should be on the most important ones, which should include leading a long and healthy life; being knowledgeable; enjoying a decent standard of living; enjoying personal security; participating in the life of a community; enjoying the respect of others.

Second, indicators were selected:

- A long and healthy life: life expectancy measures length of life, but not degree of health.
- Breadth of knowledge: this is difficult to measure against an objective, universal standard. None the less, being literate and attending school are important in acquiring kinds of knowledge that in today's world are

fundamental to giving people choices in life. Thus literacy and school enrolment rates are good indicators of knowledgeability.

- A decent standard of living: a complex concept that varies from one social context to another. However, having minimal access to resources is equivalent to enjoying a decent standard of living. Per capita income is a fair indication; however, this is adjusted (with diminishing marginal returns) to take account of the fact that achieving a decent standard of living does not call for unlimited income.
- Two further dimensions, personal security and participation, are not quantifiable. Moreover, it is difficult to find corresponding indicators for them that have reliable data for a large number of countries.

The key dimensions and indicators of human development were selected in the light of the foregoing and became the components of the HDI. It should be remembered that the concept of human development is far greater than the sum of its parts.

### Conceptual framework: unpacking a complex reality

The Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development entitled *Our Creative Diversity* breaks new ground in so far as it provides a solid conceptual foundation for developing cultural indicators.

In the first place, the report presents a conceptual framework which relates to culture and development. It does so by building on the anthropological concept of culture as the distinctive way of life of a people or society and on the concept of development as an extension of the choices that the individual can make to lead the life that he or she values.

Culture has everything to do with what we value most and the way in which we value living together. *Our Creative Diversity* introduces culture into the concept of human development, enriching and enlarging it. Development, seen in this perspective, is 'the opportunity to choose a full, satisfying, valuable and valued way of living together, the flourishing of human existence in all its forms and as a whole'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, culture is the social basis and context and indeed the very purpose of development. This perspective contrasts with the manner in which

culture has often been analysed merely as a means to development, with cultural norms and values being regarded as contributors or obstacles to economic growth.

Accordingly, this conception of culture and development is a departure from the more conventional approaches. Culture is defined as a way of living with norms and standards rather than material achievements of intellectual and artistic creativity such as paintings, books and so forth. Development is viewed as an expansion of the individual's choices rather than as growth of material production, and culture is seen as the purpose of development and its social basis, and not as a facilitator of or impediment to economic growth.

In the second place, *Our Creative Diversity* gives a vision of development against which progress may be evaluated. It is a vision in which 'respect for all cultures whose values are tolerant of others and that subscribe to a global ethics is the basic principle'.<sup>3</sup> Its principal tenets include: cultural freedom of both the community and the individual; respect for pluralism that extends beyond tolerance to rejoice in different ways of life and creative diversity; recognition that culture is not static but dynamic, building as it does on creativity which fosters evolution and progress; and the ethos of universalism and universal human rights. This vision therefore reflects unity in diversity – a common ethic in a world made up of 10,000 distinct societies, each with its distinct culture, in and across some 200 countries. The report projects culture as a key factor in current global trends such as growing inequality in economic growth, culture and globalization; ethnic conflict; democracy, environment, the rights of minorities and ethnic peoples; and values and gender.

What indicators can denote the progress made towards achieving this vision? Any such image of culture and development is far too complex to be captured by a single indicator. An attempt has to be made to break this down to major areas or dimensions of culture and development. Can culture and development conceivably be reduced to a single perspective? It is clearly more feasible to consider the key recommendations of *Our Creative Diversity* and to identify

## Life expectancy as an integrating concept

Following some scholars' proposals for socio-economic accounting, an attempt could be made to trace life expectancy sequences of certain states for the average person in certain categories. Total life expectancy would be divided into segments: time spent at school, at work, at leisure, on vacation, in pensioned (happy) retirement or unpensioned (miserable) retirement. Another sequence might trace how long a new-born child could expect to spend in unemployment (in view of the unemployment rates of the year), and how long in undesirable states such as incapacitation, in hospital, on a psychiatrist's couch, in prison or in unpensioned retirement, based on current experience. It would be possible to trace how long a person is single, married, widowed, divorced; how long healthy, in hospital; how long free, in prison, on parole. For instance, an increase in the number of university students extends the expected time that a child born today will spend at a university, thus reducing his or her expectation of unemployment.

If desired, these periods could be summed into a single welfare (or 'illfare') index that would not be entirely meaningless, being expressed as a ratio of total life expectancy. This could be desegregated for males and females, rich and poor, rural and urban residents, ethnic or religious minorities. Age-specific rates for these states could also be calculated: hours per day or week or month or year spent sleeping, travelling to work, at leisure. One could include the number of children, the number of marriages, etc. Data could be

collected on accidents or arrests or burglaries. These would yield numbers over a lifetime.

Even income over average lifetime rather than per annum could combine economic and social (or human) indicators in a meaningful way. A problem with this factor is that, for example, \$4 million might show as the result of 80 years' work with an average annual income of \$100,000. This trade-off can be misleading: if we wish to build in an indicator of distribution, we should take the mode or the median of average lifetime income instead of the mean income, which would eliminate the skew at the upper end.

One may wish to trace the time spent on various cultural activities such as attending meetings, participating in amateur theatre, dancing, singing, painting, playing games, athletic activities or other cultural activities such as going to the theatre, opera and concert, reading books, visiting museums; possibly not watching television or films – but that is open to discussion. Of particular relevance to the concern of the *World Culture Report* would be research on the comparison of time spent on various cultural activities among different ethnic, language, religious and economic groups.

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areas of priority policy concern, bearing in mind that indicators have to send clear messages about policy-relevant trends of public concern.

The question has already been the subject of serious reflection. To begin with, an important UNESCO/UNRISD workshop held in 1996 identified three areas for study, namely, global ethics, cultural vitality, and cultural diversity:<sup>4</sup>

- Global ethics: a core set has been developed in the form of international standards of human rights. The observance of these human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – is a reliable reflection of a society's practice of global ethics.
- Cultural vitality: this can be measured using conventional cultural development indicators of literacy, media content, popular arts and crafts, preservation of cultural heritage, and access to and participation in cultural performances and activities.
- Cultural diversity: access, participation and equity, with special attention to minorities, including protection of minority rights and minority representation in political forums.

Three further issues were recently identified by Arizpe:<sup>5</sup> namely, participation in creative activity; access to culture; and repositioning cultures: conviviality.

- Participation in creative activity: is there equitable participation of all people in cultural expression? McKinley has explored this complex issue in his proposals for a 'cultural empowerment index';<sup>6</sup> it covers not only material creation by individuals, but group activities, creativity in ideas and science and non-institutionalized and non-marketed activities.
- Access to culture: does everyone have access to the creativity of others, and in particular of groups?
- Repositioning cultures: conviviality. Concern with diversity and respect for cultures is a real issue in today's globalizing world where ethnic conflicts are continually breaking out, very many communities live in fear of cultural imperialism and arguments are heard about the trends of cultural homogenization. Arizpe's notion of conviviality could be thought of as affording space for individuals to express their own cultural identity as a key variable in the development process. Identity as a concept is not directly amenable

to quantification and measurement. However, it would be possible to examine whether, in the process of development, efforts are being made to protect language, customs, values and other important aspects of cultural identity. A key question to ask is whether cultural rights are being protected or violated.

These six above-mentioned dimensions appear central to make the vision of the concept of culture and development as set out in *Our Creative Diversity* operational. It is important to note that the first three of these refer to development outcomes while the rest refer to development as processes; the former relate to the vision of culture as the end of development and the latter to culture as the social basis of development.

### Indicators of culture: the way forward

Future research on indicators should concentrate on further refining these dimensions. Until now, most indicators have related to cultural vitality and especially to the level of achievement in producing cultural goods or engaging in cultural activities. This has had the unfortunate effect of emphasizing the material achievements of creative activities – the 'reification of culture' – and thereby of overlooking culture as a distinct way of living that is underpinned by values and social institutions.

Priority for further research should therefore focus on the other five dimensions, in other words, global ethics, cultural vitality, cultural diversity, participation in creative activity and access to culture and conviviality. The next steps should focus on asking if each of the six dimensions as identified is amenable to quantification and, if so, whether data are available. A good deal of useful data has already appeared in the first issue of the *World Culture Report*. The statistical tables and cultural indicators in that report relate *inter alia* to newspapers, libraries, books, radio, television, cinema, recorded music, performing arts and museums; cultural practices, including tourism and heritage sites; cultural trade and communications; communications and new technologies and cultural trends that focuses on material achievements as well as communications. These all focus on cultural commodities and communications; sixty-two indicators give information on the production or

consumption of cultural commodities or services, and nineteen on communications. Only one set of indicators focuses on values: nineteen indicators concern the ratification of human rights treaties.

However useful such indicators may be, they cover but a small part of the indicator requirements for evaluating culture and development.

- They focus on the material achievements of creative activity and expression, i.e. on cultural vitality and participation, thereby giving virtually no information on other dimensions.
- They are limited to capturing institutionalized and marketed commodities and services, thereby ignoring much of the creative achievements of people that are not in the market or in formal institutions.
- They focus on institutionalized and marketed commodities, thereby leading to a distinct wealth bias, as noted by Goldstone.<sup>7</sup>
- They give virtually no information about values, behaviour patterns and social arrangements that ensure respect for identity, participation, access, global ethics and cultural diversity. Only one set of indicators on the ratification of human rights treaties touch on these issues.

In future work on indicators, attention might well be shifted away from material expressions of creativity to focus instead on social arrangements, behaviour patterns and values. These are more central to the message of *Our Creative Diversity* which seeks progress towards respect for all cultures whose values are tolerant of others and that subscribe to a global ethics. Material culture is far removed from this. It may stand in for creativity and collective identity, but not quite adequately. Somewhat more relevant may be social arrangements – formal or informal institutions and policies – that encourage or discourage cultural vitality, cultural diversity, global ethics, participation in creative activity, access to culture and respect for cultural identity.

The debate on cultural indicators has come a long way. Much has already been accomplished under the guidance of the World Commission on Culture and Development and the *World Culture Report* in terms of defining the conceptual framework. The picture of what should constitute the key elements of

desirable trends is clearer now than ever before. The debate still has a great deal of ground to cover. The next steps should focus on finding innovative indicators and building tables of the six dimensions so far identified.

## Notes

1. A. K. Sen, in UNDP, *Human Development Report*, New York, OUP, 1999.
2. Pérez de Cuéllar, J. (ed.), *Our Creative Diversity*, Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, Paris, UNESCO, 1995.
3. World Commission on Culture and Development, op.cit.
4. UNESCO/UNRISD, *Towards a World Report on Culture and Development: Constructing Cultural Statistics and Indicators*, Paris, UNESCO/UNRISD, 1997. (Occasional Paper Series on Culture and Development, 1.)
5. Lourdes Arizpe, in conference at the World Bank/UNESCO/Italy Conference on Culture, Panel on measuring culture and development: prospects and limits of constructing cultural indicators.
6. T. McKinley, *Cultural Indicators of Development*, Paris, UNESCO/UNRISD, 1997. (Occasional Paper Series on Culture and Development, 4.)
7. L. Goldstone, 'Cultural Statistics and Poverty', in ECLAC, *Social Dimensions of Economic Development and Productivity*, LC/R.1873, December 1998.

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