State of Local Democracy Assessment Framework

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Brechtje Kemp and Mélida Jiménez

The content of this Guide was generated through a collaborative process, whereby the International IDEA State of Democracy team actively engaged colleagues with different specialities in the concept and content development of the assessment framework. To this end, we would like to acknowledge the substantial input of the following people: Helena Bjuremalm, Jenny Hedström, Nana Kalandadze, Keboitse Machangana, Sarah Polek, Abdurashid Solijonov, Sam van der Staak, Catalina Uribe Burcher, Jorge Valladares Molleda and Lotta Westerberg.

Political Parties, Participation and Representation
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International IDEA
Strömsborg, SE-103 34 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 8 698 37 00, fax: +46 8 20 24 22
E-mail: info@idea.int, website: www.idea.int

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Graphic Design by: Santángelo Diseño
Cover Design by: Santángelo Diseño
Cover Illustration: © Alberto Ruggieri/Illustration Works/Corbis/TT Mediabyrån

Printed by: Trydells Tryckeri, Sweden

ISBN: 978-91-87729-08-9

Preface

The role of the citizen is fundamental for the continual improvement of the performance of democratic institutions, and, not least, for the very survival of democracy. In recent years, we have seen numerous examples of people-led movements across all continents. In the vast majority of cases, citizens are not protesting against democracy, but rather they are demanding *more* democracy and *higher quality* democracy.

The litany of demands varies between countries, but generally centres on the lack of responsiveness and accountability of representative political institutions. Frequently, citizens lament that their elected representatives only appear when they are campaigning for votes. Similarly, serious questions are often raised regarding the integrity of the electoral process and practices which erode the quality of elections, such as incumbent abuse of state resources, rampant increase in campaign spending, and domination by elites. This is exacerbated by declining levels of membership in political parties and the weak role of political parties in advocating alternative social platforms. The lack of equal representation of women and men in democratic institutions and processes also continues to present a challenge to democratic development.

Consequently, now, more than ever, sustainable democracy depends on paying attention and responding to the voice of the citizen. Efforts at building democracy and genuine social transformation require institutionalized mechanisms for capturing and structuring citizens' perspectives, aspirations and visions of their democracies. Citizen-led assessments make this possible.

International IDEA has been supporting citizen-led and -owned quality of democracy assessments in different parts of the world since 2000. This has yielded a body of work that includes: *State of Democracy* assessments in 23 countries; *State of Local Democracy*

assessments in 60 municipalities; and a new assessment framework focused specifically on Democratic Accountability in Service Delivery, which has been piloted in four countries.

The *State of Local Democracy* assessment framework, in particular, enables citizens to periodically monitor the health of their local democracy with a view to celebrating successes, while at the same time contributing to reform of identified democratic deficits. These assessments capture the voice of the citizen and can contribute immensely to strengthening local and national governments' responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of citizens.

The local level is often the entry point for people's political participation and representation. It is at this level where democratic culture is often formed in the mind of the citizen, and where citizens experience on a daily basis the practical outcomes of political choices and the impact of decision-making on their lives. It is important to recognize that the quality of democracy within one country may differ from one sub-national level to another, and from one municipality to another, and to appreciate a country's diversity in terms of democratic practices and experiences.

The ability of assessments to expose the particularities of democracy at the local level is important, not only for deepening democracy at the local level, but also for informing strategies for broadening and deepening democracy at the national level. In many contexts, there are significant gaps between the aspirations of the citizens at the normative level and the reality on the ground. Citizen assessments of local democracy can be essential in bridging that gap.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ICT	information and communications technology
IDP	internally displaced person
IULA	International Union of Local Authorities
NGO	non-governmental organization
SoD	State of Democracy (assessment framework)
SoLD	State of Local Democracy (assessment framework)

About this Guide

The State of Local Democracy assessment framework (SoLD) is developed by International IDEA in support of citizen-led and locally owned democracy assessments at the local level. The framework places citizens at the forefront of the assessment process with the aim to produce home-grown policy initiatives and internally driven reform agendas, thereby providing an opening for a more nuanced assessment of democracy at the local level.

The first State of Local Democracy assessment framework, *Leadership for Local Democracy: a Local Democracy Assessment Guide,* was developed in 2002 following the publication of International IDEA's Handbook *Democracy at the Local Level*.[1] SoLD was developed to supplement the State of Democracy (SoD) assessment framework, which primarily focuses on assessing the quality of democracy at the national level.[2]

This 2002 version of the SoLD assessment framework, titled *Leadership for Local Democracy: A Local Democracy Assessment Guide*,[3] focused specifically on assessing representative and participatory institutions and processes of democracy at the local level. In the decade that followed it has been applied in more than 60 municipalities in 11 countries. These assessment experiences provided invaluable opportunities to draw lessons from the application of the methodology in different contexts and a chance to further investigate the adequacy of the framework in assessing the quality of local democracy.

Findings highlighted the need for providing assessment teams with an improved guide, specifically one that:

- provides a clear conceptual framework;
- assesses local democracy beyond representation and participation;
- is universally applicable and can apply to both cities and rural communities;

- includes an updated questionnaire; and
- pays increased attention to issues of gender, diversity, and conflict and security.

This publication provides a revised and updated version of the State of Local Democracy assessment framework, which has been developed in response to practitioners' demands for improvement.

This new framework will be put to the test in practice over the next couple of years, and hence will be further improved over time. Just like democracy, it is meant to be ever-evolving and to be constantly improved.

This guide contains four parts. Chapter 1 is a general introduction to the SoLD assessment framework. Chapter 2 concentrates on the SoLD assessment framework itself, while Chapter 3 describes the process of conducting an assessment. Chapter 4 contains a more detailed version of the framework, including the assessment questions.

Chapter 1

Introducing the SoLD Assessment Framework

Introducing the SoLD Assessment Framework

The State of Local Democracy (SoLD) assessment framework is designed for assessing the quality of democracy at the local level. It provides a practical resource to municipal officials, local administrators, political parties at the local level, traditional and civic leaders, academia, civil society organizations, community groups, media and other key local actors as they conduct self-evaluations of democratic life in their locality, identify democratic strengths and weaknesses, and translate these into local reform and development priorities.

1.1. Local democracy

Democracy is a universal human aspiration and an experience that is pursued and lived in different ways around the world. Democracy is also a system of governance in which government is controlled by the people and in which citizens are considered equals in the exercise of that control. Beyond the basic tenets of citizens' choice and political equality, the critical choices are best made, and the quality of democracy best gauged, by those directly concerned: the citizens themselves. Therefore, the key leaders in democratic change are a country's citizens, and the starting point for reform is at the national and local level.[4]

In today's globalized world, there is growing emphasis on and recognition of the importance of the quality of democracy at the local level. The local level is the level closest to the citizens and the space where citizens experience the practice of democracy on a daily basis as they interact with democratic institutions and processes, try to earn a living and stay safe from harm, take care of their families and communities, and access basic services such as health care, housing and education. It is often the place where citizens first get acquainted with the political system of which they are a part. For both men and women, it is also the primary entry point for political participation and representation.

It cannot be overemphasized that democracy often involves transforming the power relations between women and men, by promoting an equal distribution of power and influence between and among them in order to shape sustainable democratic processes, institutions and outcomes. The way in which diversity is managed within a democratic context is also a good indicator of the health of a democracy. For instance, ending discrimination and promoting inclusion often plays out at the local level. In order to flourish, such a culture of plural popular participation and discourse must constantly be nurtured and sustained.

Democracy exists in multiple forms, and these forms are in constant evolution. There is no single and universally applicable model of democracy, and there is no end point in improving democracy.[5] There are, however, democratic values and principles that form the foundation of any democratic system. These fundamental values and principles shape and define democratic rights, institutions and processes. They form the lens through which practices on the ground can be analyzed, assessed and appreciated.

Well-functioning democratic institutions, processes and practices at the local level are important as active citizenship at the local level builds the foundation for strong and more enduring national-level democracy. Policies and politics at the national level shape practices and modes of operating at the local level, while experiences at the local level inform national policies and reforms. The local level also acts as a check for the feasibility of some policies adopted at the national level.

1.2. A citizen-led approach to assessing democracy

The citizen-led approach to assessing democracy at the local level is based on the conviction that citizens themselves are the best assessors of their own democracy.

"So, the first priority is to give ownership to the citizens in a country to assess the quality of their democracy because only they understand how their country works, only they know the culture in their country, only they know its history, only they know what their priorities are."

Professor Stuart Weir, Democratic Audit (2008)[6]

The SoLD is a comprehensive practical framework which citizens can use to assess the functioning of their local democracy. The SoLD adopts an approach whereby citizens are centrally engaged in the assessment and take part in a conversation amongst themselves about the quality of their local democracy. The assessments are aimed at raising public awareness, sparking discussions and helping identify areas for reform. Practicing democracy involves a shared learning process. With democracy deriving from citizen's plural and contradictory discourses, a broad and participatory process of assessment is in fact as important as the assessment results. Moreover, the assessment outcomes provide input for further action and debate, and are meant to serve as impulses for reform.

The assessment aims to engage both women and men from different segments of society in examining the state of their local democracy through a structured dialogue with the intent of raising awareness about people's opinions, perceptions and analysis of local democracy. This means that any local citizen or actor can take the lead in conducting a SoLD. It also implies that broad citizen participation is essential throughout the assessment process, and that data and findings should reflect the people's diverse voices. In view of this, it is essential that assessment teams are multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary in nature and are balanced in terms of the representation of women and men, and reflect diversity, most notably in terms of including minority and/or marginalized groups. Notwithstanding, the success of an assessment will be dependent on the right mix of knowledge, experiences and skills of the assessment team.

Moreover, SoLD assessments can help investigate the contributions of local democracy toward the further evolution and deepening of democracy within societies, because it is ultimately at the local level where democratic rights, institutions and processes are put into practice, and are expected to improve people's lives.

1.3. Universal framework with local application

The SoLD assessment framework is a universal assessment framework that can be used in a variety of local settings in different parts of the world. In the context of SoLD, local is used in a broad sense in order to do justice to the wide variety of ways in which people organize themselves at the local level, and the multiple terms that are used. The most common point of reference to define what is local is the level of government. As such, "local unit" is understood and used as an

umbrella term that is meant to include counties, communities,[7] and cities as well as towns, rural municipalities and villages[8] regardless of their size or geographic location.

Box 1.1. How to select the local unit? An example from Indonesia

The six towns used in the State of Local Democracy assessment in Indonesia[9] reflect the diversity in Indonesian local politics, including history, society, power relations, degrees of economic prosperity and demographic features such as population density.

The six assessment areas were selected using multiple criteria. The initial criterion was ranking in the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs 2011 scores based on the Annual Report of Accountability and Performance of Local Government. This data ranked local governments from the highest to the lowest performance. Based on this data, the assessment grouped the local governments into low, medium and high performance groups.

In the second step, the assessment looked at power distribution in those areas. They were categorized by characteristics of their power relationships as either monocentric (centralized power relationships) or polycentric (dispersed power relationships). Monocentric refers to the existence of a dominant political actor in an area, such as a bureaucracy, market or traditional leaders. Polycentric refers to multiple political actors in an area.

From each group of local governments, two areas were chosen—one with a monocentric power relationship and one with a polycentric power relationship—to represent the geographic areas of western, central and eastern Indonesia. The processes resulted in the inclusion of the following municipal districts—the third tier in the Indonesian government structure—in the assessment process:

- Surakarta, Central Java (high, polycentric);
- Jombang, East Java (high, monocentric);
- Aceh Besar, Aceh (medium, polycentric);
- Manokwari, West Papua (medium, monocentric);
- Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (medium-low, polycentric); and
- Parigi Moutong, Central Sulawesi (low, monocentric).

Despite its primary focus on the local level, the SoLD assessment framework can also be used to assess democracy at the sub-national

level, such as in regions, provinces or districts. However, this may require more significant contextualization and adding a layer of complexity to the analysis of local democracy, as it requires looking at both the regional level of government and the local government units. In a multi-level governance structure or federalist structure, for instance, assessment teams may find the SoLD insufficient and prefer to use (elements of) the State of Democracy (SoD) assessment framework, which focuses on the national level. Similarly, the SoD can be complemented with parts of the SoLD so that it better reflects the sub-national nature of democracy. The SoLD framework is intended for use in assessing the quality of any type of democracy, whether viewed as young, mature, fragile, stable, etc. It recognizes that each democracy is unique, should grow from within, and is ever-evolving. However, this primary focus on democracies does not preclude teams in transitional societies, for instance, from contextualizing and applying it in their contexts.

The framework is meant to be relevant during different stages of democratic development and/or deepening processes, and to serve as a contribution to democratic agenda-setting and debate from the bottom up. Consequently, it is a highly flexible framework that can be contextualized and, as a result, be effectively implemented in a variety of cultures and settings. This also means it is possible to focus on one specific part of the SoLD, so as to highlight and assess a particular aspect of local democracy.

Box 1.2. SoLD in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao

The State of Local Democracy in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (SoLD ARMM)[10] started its work in July 2011. It is the fifth in a series of Philippine citizen-led democracy assessments, and the first on the state of local democracy in the country using the SoLD assessment framework.

The SoLD ARMM has been carried out to encourage an informed dialogue about the quality of local democracy in the five provinces of the ARMM. It reflects on the relationship between the ARMM and the national government, issues surrounding local governance in the southern part of the Philippines, and the challenges of democracy in a predominantly Muslim society.

The assessment report was presented and launched on 2 September 2013 in the Philippines, in the hope it would serve as a substantive

Box *[cont.]*

contribution to discussion and societal reform at a time of ongoing peace talks and development in this volatile region.

The SoLD assessment framework draws its strength from its citizen-led and -owned approach, and the fact that it is reform and action oriented, in addition to being adaptable to different local contexts. There are also some additional characteristics that distinguish this updated version of the framework from the previous version and other assessments.

These characteristics, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, include the following:

- The framework is focused on the extent to which local democracy portrays and protects key democratic principles and values.
- The assessment always begins with conducting a local context analysis.
- The framework consists of an analysis of three focus areas or 'pillars':
  I. Equal rights and access to justice.
  II. Representative and accountable institutions and processes.
  III. Citizen initiative and participation.
- The pillars necessitate integration of a number of cross-cutting issues by:
  - incorporating a gender-sensitive assessment approach;
  - drawing attention to social cohesion and diversity issues;
  - recognizing challenges related to conflict and security at the local level; and
  - considering the important link between democracy and development.

Chapter 2

The SoLD Assessment Framework

The SoLD Assessment Framework

A general premise underlying the SoLD assessment framework is that it is a universal framework meant to assess the quality of democracy at the local level. By 'quality' is meant the extent to which the local institutions, processes and practices in place are based on and reflect key democratic principles and values; that is, the extent to which there is indeed popular control over decisions that (local) government makes and equality amongst citizens in the exercise of such control.[11]

These democratic principles and values inform the assessment of the quality of democracy at the local level. They should be enshrined and protected by law, be reflected in the way institutions and processes are functioning, and run through the concept and practice of citizen initiative and participation as a method to enhance the mediating values of representativeness, participation, authorization, legitimacy, responsiveness, accountability, transparency and solidarity in the locality (see section 2.1.).

Recognizing that no democracy is perfect and that each system has its own particular strengths and weaknesses depending on the local context, this framework is intended for use in assessing the quality of local democracy by looking at the functioning of the three fundamental pillars of local democracy.

Table 2.1. The SoLD three-pillar structure

1. CITIZENSHIP, EQUAL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE	2. REPRESENTATIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES	3. CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND PARTICIPATION
1.1. Citizenship at the local level	**2.1.** Elections and mechanisms of direct democracy at the local level	**3.1.** Active citizen engagement
1.2. Civil and political rights	**2.2.** Local legislature	**3.2.** Media
1.3. Economic, social and cultural rights	**2.3.** Political parties	
1.4. Rule of law and access to justice	**2.4.** Local executive/governing bodies	
	2.5. Customary and traditional institutions	

Citizenship is understood as a set of equal rights and liberties, complemented by equal access to justice (Pillar 1), which are on the one hand bestowed and facilitated by representative and accountable institutions and processes (Pillar 2), and on the other hand claimed and realized through the agency and actions of people themselves (Pillar 3).[12]

In principle, assessors will start with identifying the civil, political and socio-economic rights which allow the citizens to live their lives and be active in their community, followed by an assessment of the democratic quality of the institutions and processes that are in place to facilitate these rights in the local unit. The next step for the assessors is then to identify how citizens make use of or claim these rights, focusing on the avenues of citizen engagement and media, thereby creating vibrant democratic life.

Even though the pillars are inalienable from one another, the framework can always be adapted to the local context, meaning that teams can decide to focus more on one area than another depending on the prevailing needs and resource considerations. For instance, in certain contexts the citizenship, rights and justice aspect might be particularly important to assess, while in others citizen initiative and participation may require emphasis.

The analysis should also always be based on and informed by the local context analysis, which gives perspective to evidence emerging from

the assessment. The principles and mediating values underpin the framework at all times, and are reflected in the assessment questions.

Figure 2.1. Visualizing the SoLD assessment framework

2.1. Democratic principles and mediating values

The SoLD assessment framework is based on a definition of democracy that is founded on two basic democratic principles: popular control of public decision-making and decision-makers, and political equality of those who exercise that control. The more the two principles of popular control and political equality are present in a society, the more democratic it can be considered to be.[13]

This means, among other things, that local policy development and decision-making should take into account the views, aspirations and will of the entire local population—both men and women. It also means that power should not be confined to local elites, but instead reflect the rule of the people, and that power holders work in the interest of everyone, regardless of their diversities in terms of ethnicity, age, religion, language, class or social position, etc. Local democracy will remain partial and flawed if it does not equally include men and women, or marginalizes certain groups in society, either as protagonists or as beneficiaries of change.

To consider the extent to which the principles of popular control and political equality shape and inform the institutions and procedures of representative government, it is necessary to examine the mediating values through which people seek to give effect to these principles in a local unit's institutional arrangements and practice.

These mediating values include representation, participation, authorization, accountability, responsiveness, transparency, legitimacy and solidarity,[14] and are the means through which popular control and political equality are realized in the day-to-day practice of democracy through democratic rights, institutions and processes. Democratic principles and values provide the standards by which these rights, institutions and processes at the local level are assessed, thus serving as a measuring rod to use for examining the quality of democracy at the local level.

A conception of democracy that is anchored in clear principles and values helps to provide a framework for a high quality democracy against which localities can evaluate and measure themselves. Using a common set of democratic principles and values is important throughout all phases of the SoLD assessment. It not only helps to contextualize the SoLD assessment framework (e.g. while formulating more detailed research and interview questions), but also to interpret the findings; the democratic principles and mediating values serve as a lens for looking at the facts and help guide the analysis and narrative. While the SoLD assessment framework itself is flexible and meant to be adapted to local contexts, the democratic principles and values must always feature prominently.

Table 2.2. Mediating values

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND MEDIATING VALUES
Basic democratic principles: • popular control over public decision-making and decision-makers • equality between citizens in the exercise of that control

MEDIATING VALUE[15]	DESCRIPTION
Representation	Representation, achieved through regional, provincial or local elections and political parties, is the *raison d'être* of democratic institutions and processes. Representation embodies the rule by the people and the different tendencies of public opinion.
Participation	Participation is a necessary condition for democracy and can be facilitated by both institutionalized and informal mechanisms. It is only through participation that citizens can elect and guide their representatives, and play a role in shaping local policies and practices.
Authorization[16]	Authorization is inherently linked to free and fair electoral choice. Local elections allow citizens to authorize public representatives and officials to represent their interests in a local legislature or other elected body, or as delegated to other public actors/authorities at the local level.
Legitimacy	Democratic legitimacy is the popular acceptance and recognition of the power and authority which elected local representatives exercise through their decisions and actions. It validates the acceptability of the rules and processes of democracy and confirms whether the rules and practices are indeed respected and recognized by the local population.
Responsiveness	Responsiveness reflects the way local governments respond to the needs, claims and policy preferences of citizens. It refers to the grounds for decision-making and the extent to which public policies and their implementation at the local level reflect the will of the people.
Accountability[17]	Accountability refers to the relationship between the local population and their representatives, and the mechanisms through which citizens can ensure that decision-makers are answerable for decisions made, such as in the area of public service delivery, and actions taken on the citizens' behalf. It has horizontal (separation of powers) and vertical (citizen-elite) dimensions.
Transparency[18]	Transparency refers to the level of openness, predictability and answerability of local representatives and institutions. Transparency is critical for citizens to engage in democratic processes, monitor public officials, and demand responsiveness and accountability.
Solidarity	Solidarity refers to the ties in a society that bind different people to one another, expressing social bonds rather than autonomous individual ties. Solidarity reflects the degree of social cohesion within a local unit and equality amongst individuals, as well as relationships between different levels of society, so that all who are living within the local unit can access and enjoy their rights.

2.2. Context analysis at the local level

The strength of any State of Local Democracy assessment lies in its ability to capture the particularities of each local unit. As each environment is unique, this requires first and foremost collecting basic data as well as information and stories that shape and define its nature.

An analysis of the local context is an essential starting point for building an appreciation of the quality of democracy at the local level, as it helps give perspective and informs interpretation of the findings of the assessment. A context analysis thus serves as the foundation for any SoLD assessment process. It allows assessors to better understand the historical trajectory of democracy and, as far as possible, define the nature of the local unit.

Important areas to include in the local context analysis include, but are not limited to, the following.

- *Historical, geographical, socio-economic and demographic data*
  Local democracy takes place in the specific context of the historic, geographic, social and economic setting of the local unit. Certain features related to these settings must either be protected and further developed in order for social integration and democracy to succeed, or dismantled because of divisive or obstructive effects. Factors such as age and gender, the cultural, religious and socio-economic background of the local population, income and employment opportunities, as well as settlement patterns and the demographic structure are important aspects as they affect and largely shape the democratic development of the local unit being assessed. Data related to these factors also tend to reveal political economy issues that are fundamental to democracy—for example, access to land, water or natural resources—which, when not well addressed, are often a source of distrust of local level democracy institutions and processes. Prevalent forms of gender-based roles and social norms or forms of social exclusion and marginalization based on sex and gender should be discussed and identified as part of the context analysis.

- *Local government influence*
  Local governments remain entities in a larger polity. They are not independent, but are politically and often economically dependent on the national government and enjoy limited rather than sovereign powers. The relationship between the national and local levels of government as framed in the country's constitutional and regulatory frameworks, as well as the way these are applied in practice, are major

enabling and/or constraining factors to local democracy. This is not least because a local government needs to be significantly distinct from the national government to have its own influence. In order to understand the different responsibilities, levels of power and authority of local units, it is important to explain the country's governance structure and/or decentralization framework, and its implementation in practice.

The explanation of central-local government relations also needs to be located in the historical process by which power sharing is gradually institutionalized, and this differs with context. Federal, confederal and unitary systems of government each develop in their own way, and have their own variations in sub-national democracy, for instance because rules are applied in different ways within the country. This creates unique local dynamics, both positive and negative. Potential contentious issues related to territorial arrangements can include fiscal and resource management, land rights or the position of marginalized communities, in particular indigenous and migrant communities. At the extreme, this may lead to violent conflicts. Therefore, the question of local government influence and how much autonomy the local authorities and communities have is an essential point of negotiation and a basic issue in democracy at the local level.

Box 2.1. Decentralization

Decentralization is a form of governance and a political and administrative reform measure that has spread worldwide, usually as a result of a variety of internal and external pressures for decentralization. The specific design of a country's decentralization framework and its relation to democracy at the local level is informed by a combination of the country's context, needs and incentives to decentralize. Consequently, decentralization frameworks differ from place to place.

Notwithstanding the different forms of decentralization frameworks that exist in a variety of contexts, there are widely accepted typologies that are useful for characterizing a country's decentralization framework. These common typologies either denote (a) a sector or (b) accountability and responsibility chains of decentralization. Generally, the sectoral types include administrative decentralization, political decentralization, fiscal decentralization, and economic or market decentralization; while the chain of accountability and responsibility types include deconcentration, devolution and delegation.

Box *[cont.]*

All these decentralization types concern the transfer of responsibilities and authority, mostly to different levels of government and actors, although in some instances such transfer might be made to (semi) private sector organizations.

Decentralization processes can have positive impact on local democracy, especially as they are seen to bring power closer to the people. However, decentralization does not automatically translate to popular control over government decision-making and to citizens' equal rights over such control, nor necessarily produce the outcomes of democracy. It should therefore be kept in mind that in practice, decentralization unfolds and influences local democracy differently according to context; local democracy can thrive outside of decentralization processes and vice versa.

- *Human safety and security*
  Human safety and security are necessary for establishing the minimal conditions under which formal democracy can be meaningfully practiced and peace secured.[19] A territory needs to offer physical and economic security for democracy to operate.

  Assessing local democracy requires a preliminary yet thorough consideration of the factors affecting peace and human security. Some of the most common challenges to human security and peace at the local level are related to conditions of poverty, inequality and unemployment; access to resources; natural hazards; exclusion of minority/marginalized groups; gender-based discrimination; violence by state or non-state armed actors and organized crime (e.g. associated with drugs or weapon trade, resource extraction or land confiscation). These are all very complex social situations that can seldom be directly linked to a single factor. Nonetheless, these conditions are certainly common grievances in conflict situations and often important contributors to violence and conflict.

Box 2.2. Do no harm

In certain polarized, fragile, or conflict-affected contexts this part of the context analysis may lead to the conclusion that conducting a democracy assessment will be either not possible, undesirable or even risk exacerbating existing tensions and/or conflicts. Under these circumstances the assessment needs to be designed in a way that is sensitive to this dimension. For instance, in case of

Box *[cont.]*

upcoming elections in a polarized context, it may be better to postpone the assessment until after elections. In contexts where the risks are deemed too high, it may even be wiser to postpone conducting a state of local democracy assessment. The SoLD, though sensitive to the conflict and security dimension, is at this point not designed to be used as a framework for conflict resolution or mitigation, although it has the potential to unite communities around assessing and reforming their democracies.

Guiding context questions

The section below presents areas and some key questions that need to be addressed in a local context analysis. The context analysis is meant to be used as a substantive starting point and to continuously inform the assessment of the SoLD pillars. However, while the focus areas listed are important context issues, assessment teams have the ultimate responsibility to make judgments about which topics might be relevant to understanding the particularities of the quality of democracy of the local unit being assessed.

Box 2.3. Local context analysis: Guiding questions

A local context analysis serves as the foundation of SoLD and helps provide perspective or context to the 'facts' of the assessment.

A. Historical, geographical, socio-economic and demographic data

Overarching Q: What are the main historical, geographical, socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the local unit that are important for understanding the state of democracy?

Assessment questions:

a. *What are the most important historical events that have shaped the local unit?*
b. *What are the key geographical features and boundaries of the local unit?*
c. *Are there any special territorial arrangements in place and, if so, how do these relate to indigenous or minority groups' self-rule?*
d. *On what resources or endeavours is the local economy based and who owns/oversees these?*
e. *To what extent does the existence and/or lack of natural resources affect the local unit?*

Box *[cont.]*

f. To what extent does the local unit experience negative environmental and socio-economic impacts due to climate change?
g. What social divisions and strata are created by local economic conditions?
h. Are there any cultural, religious, ethnic or linguistic groups of citizens that can be distinguished?
i. To what extent is there a presence of migrant populations in the local unit?
j. What is the demographic composition of the local unit in terms of sex and age?
k. How much consensus is there on the historical development, geographical boundaries and/or socio-economic and demographic arrangements of the local unit among different groups in society?

B. Local government's role and influence

Overarching Q: What is the local government's role and influence within the country's institutional framework?

Assessment questions:

a. How could one describe the institutional structures and relations between the national, regional/provincial, and local levels?
b. What are the key democratic (or political) institutions and processes established at the local level?
c. Has the country adopted a decentralization policy and framework?
d. If so, what type of decentralization system is it? Deconcentration, devolution and delegation, or a combination? What are its key characteristics and structures?
e. What powers and decision-making responsibilities does the institutional and policy framework for decentralization confer upon the local unit being assessed?
f. At what level of governance is public policy designed?
g. To what extent does the local unit have independence to generate and control its resources?
h. What vertical and horizontal accountability structures are formally in place?
i. Are there any traditional, customary or religious governance structures that play a role in the governance of the local unit?
j. What are influential external institutions or (illicit) power brokers within the local unit?

C. Human safety and security

Overarching Q: What is the general level of human safety and security in the local unit?

Box *[cont.]*

Assessment questions:

a. To what extent have natural disasters, hunger, drought or disease occurred in the recent past?
b. Have there been any (armed) conflicts, and which actors were associated with it?
c. To what extent have these threats to human safety and security affected people's lives and living conditions in the local unit?
d. What institutions/actors are expected to prevent and resolve these threats to human security and play a role in conflict prevention and resolution efforts?
e. How free is the local unit from the operation of organized criminal networks or gangs, illegal paramilitary forces, private armies or local warlords?
f. Are law enforcement agencies at the local level acting in a transparent way and are they duly supervised through democratic mechanisms?
g. In what way do the human safety and security challenges affect women and men differently?
h. To what extent do these challenges affect various groups of people within the local unit differently?

2.3. SoLD assessment pillars

The SoLD framework is intended to help to assess local democracy by looking at the functioning of three important pillars of local democracy:

1. citizenship, equal rights and justice;
2. representative and accountable processes and institutions; and
3. citizen initiative and participation.

Below follows a brief introduction to each of the pillars and important issues that apply to all of them.

Pillar 1: Citizenship, equal rights and justice

Democracy begins with the citizen. Consequently, the subject of the first pillar of the framework focuses on the position and rights of the citizen and the ability of local government to ensure equal rights and freedoms to all people living in the local unit. In a globalized world,

this starting point is made more complex in many countries by the presence of non-citizens—people who were not registered at birth, undocumented migrants, stateless people, refugees, asylum seekers—whose rights are often severely restricted or denied.

Universal concepts of rights and citizenship risk having little meaning in the daily lives of people if they are used to exclude rather than include poor and powerless people.[20] SoLD assessments, therefore, work with a broad, inclusive interpretation of the term citizenship, and pose the question of how citizenship at the local level is defined and experienced, both in theory and in practice. This includes looking at the legal, social, economic and spatial dimensions of citizenship, and such complex issues as social or economic exclusion, racial discrimination or the existence of ethnic ghettos and identity-based conflicts.

Box 2.4. Inclusive interpretation of the term "citizen"

The issue of citizenship is at the core of democratic practice, and it is therefore important to analyze how the concept of citizen is defined as well as applied. Citizenship is often a highly contested term, with differing meanings ascribed by different cultures, interests, ideologies and legal systems. Despite these differences, aspirations for citizenship often entail common core values, including an impulse for social justice and self-determination, and a sense of horizontal solidarity. It is a multi-dimensional concept which includes the agency, identities and actions of people themselves.[21] From a narrow, legalistic perspective, a citizen is a person who meets the requirements set out in the constitution and any law enacted for the purpose of conferring nationality or citizenship. This definition is what often guides a government's action or inaction vis-à-vis various groups. However, when the term 'citizen' is primarily viewed from this legal perspective, it can exclude those who may also be residing in the local unit and should possess equal legitimacy to lead or otherwise be part of local democracy.

In the context of the SoLD assessment framework, the term 'citizen' is therefore used in a more inclusive fashion, in the sense that the assessment is meant to give equal consideration to issues, concerns and rights of all those who live in the local unit, regardless of their specific residence, registration or immigration status.

One of the primary challenges facing democratic states today is the full and effective inclusion of all people living within their boundaries

in the decision-making processes that affect them. Any assessment of the quality of democracy must therefore concern itself with the extent to which all persons living within the local unit are equally accepted as human beings and thereby entitled to human rights and liberties, whatever their nationality, age, residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, skin colour, religion, language or any other status. For instance, an assessment of the quality of local democracy should always review how (illegal) immigrants, refugees and internally displaced people are treated within the local unit.

Assessing equal rights in a democratic dispensation means paying attention to the ways both civil and political rights as well as the socio-economic rights of (groups of) citizens are realized, respected and protected. This includes understanding the extent to which governments face challenges in facilitating some of these rights, for example extending voting rights to marginalized communities living in their polity, such as indigenous/tribal communities, migrant, displaced and refugee populations. These challenges often relate to the extension of citizenship and residency permits, which requires the local government to have an appropriate level of administrative and judicial capacity and effective jurisdictional authority.[22]

People do—rightly—value and judge the quality of a democracy in terms of its ability to secure their civil and political rights as well as the economic, social and cultural rights on which a minimally decent human life depends.[23] Whereas the guarantee of equal civil and political rights and social, economic, and cultural rights is often enshrined in constitutional and legal frameworks at the national level, in practice, access to, realization and equal enjoyment of these rights, or lack thereof, plays out at the local level.

The guarantee of civil and political rights involves assessing the extent to which people can have opinions, speak, associate, assemble and organize, practice their religion, vote or run for elections. These rights are manifestly necessary for participation in the political process in association with others, and therefore an inherent part of democratic life.

The inclusion of economic, social and cultural rights in an assessment of democracy is as important, yet often contested, especially among those who see democracy as limited to institutions and processes of decision-making, rather than the outcomes produced by these institutions and processes. In reality, however, few people would dispute that economic, social and cultural rights, such as having the

right to an adequate standard of living, to education, to housing and to health are necessary for the actual enjoyment of civil liberties and political rights.

As local governments increasingly carry the mandate for provision of health care, education, water, sanitation and security (e.g. police), the local level provides an opportunity for local governments to realize social, economic and cultural rights in practice. Given that local governments are often highly dependent on national policies and resources and may as a result have insufficient resources to meet citizens' claims for social and economic rights, a SoLD assessment is meant to not only provide evidence about the relationship between the quality of local democracy and socio-economic rights, but more importantly to systematically identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of realizing these rights, for the purposes of informing the design of responsive policies and programmes on both the local and national levels.

In looking at how inclusive citizenship and equal rights are realized in practice, it is of particular importance to assess the extent to which all members of the local unit are consistently and equally subject to and protected by law, and have access to justice so that they can claim their rights, i.e. to assess the rule of law and people's access to justice.

Rule of law and access to justice are especially relevant in societies emerging from conflict or undergoing democratization, as they may face special challenges in addressing legacies of human rights violations. If considered not solely an instrument of the (local) government, but as a rule to which the entire society, including the government, is bound, the rule of law is fundamental in advancing democracy. Strengthening the rule of law and people's access to justice has to be approached not only by focusing on the application of norms and procedures. Emphasis needs to be placed on its fundamental role in protecting rights and advancing inclusiveness, thus framing the protection of rights within the broader discourse on human development.[24]

Rule of law and access to justice is one area where rights and the ability to practice those rights are often curtailed for women. Furthermore, people from different communities may face different conditions, with minority women, for instance, facing disproportionate barriers in rights protections. This makes it important to understand how gender differences arise and develop.

Pillar 2: *Representative and accountable processes and institutions*

The second assessment pillar focuses on the institutions and processes that fulfil important roles in safeguarding and promoting democratic life at the local level, and are needed for the provision of representative and accountable local institutions and processes. Any assessment of local democracy needs to take into account the extent to which these institutions and processes are able to effectively develop their communities and represent citizens in line with their mandate, as well as the extent to which local officials are held accountable through democratic means.

Processes

In a democratic system, elections are a fundamental process through which citizens choose their representatives for a specific, mandated period. Ideally, it is through elections that citizens are able to authorize their representatives to act on their behalf and also to control public policies and decision-makers. Elections, therefore, are the central platform through which citizens participate in democratic politics.

Local elections are often seen as more effective than national elections in bringing political representatives closer to the people, in allowing local representatives to understand the needs and concerns of their communities, and for channelling people's expectations and aspirations through the policy process. In reality, however, local elections may be more or less meaningful, depending on the extent to which political, fiscal and administrative powers have been decentralized to the local levels.

Electoral systems can also be more or less conducive to women's participation in politics. Given the slow rate at which the representation of women in decision-making bodies around the world is increasing, various positive action measures, such as electoral quotas, are often used to address gender imbalance in decision-making, including at the local level. Three types of gender quotas used in politics include reserved seats, legal candidate quotas (both constitutional and legislative) and political party quotas (mostly voluntary).[25]

Similarly, the extent to which the electoral system is sensitive to the needs of minorities and marginalized groups will have an impact, for instance, on the management of social cohesion and diversity at the local level. Electoral legislation that is also relevant for the local level may include minority party thresholds and affirmative actions.

In a democratic system, institutionalized citizen participation in processes such as policy formulation, development planning and implementation play an important role in allowing citizens to communicate their policy preferences. They also help citizens hold government officials accountable for their actions, so that officials provide public services that respond to their claims and needs. Such mechanisms can include consultative government planning and budgeting, direct democracy mechanisms[26] such as consultative referendums, recall or citizens' initiatives, as well as the relative new area of E-democracy—of growing importance in view of the fact that information and communications technology (ICT) developments have transformed local governance in the last decade. The government can, for example, use ICTs to gauge citizens' interests. Other forms of institutionalized citizen participation can include council hearings, committees for service delivery prioritization or participatory budgeting, or deliberative forums organized by the government.

Despite its importance, institutionalized citizen participation may not always be adequate in engaging the very public that is supposed to, or expected to, participate. For instance, formal government consultations and hearings may in practice only be attended by a small group of people, or only involve local organizations, not individuals (e.g. because of requirements of NGO participation). Moreover, not all citizens may be aware that these avenues exist, or they may prefer to organize informally outside the realm of local government (see Pillar 3).

Institutions

In most local contexts, political power is in the hands of local governing bodies, usually belonging to the executive, legislative or judicial branches of government.

At the regional and local level, political authorities will generally consist of the following institutions: at the executive (or administrative) level a state governor, provincial premier, prefect, mayor, or a more collective form of local government; and at the legislative level a state or provincial legislature, parliament or council.[27] Law enforcement bodies such as the local police or military units based in the area often also tend to fall under the executive branch. The mandates and responsibilities of these authorities are often outlined in laws and regulations, yet only practice shows the extent to which they are indeed representative and accountable, and live up to the expectations of the local population.

These political institutions are usually complemented by local courts and judges, and other dispute and conflict resolution bodies, which are meant to address criminal or violent acts and mitigate disputes and tensions at the local level in an independent, impartial manner (covered under the rule of law section of Pillar 1). Together with the mentioned legislative and executive bodies, they form key institutions for ensuring a local system of checks and balances. They are also created to ensure civilian control over the military and police forces active at the local level, for instance, so that they perform their jobs in line with their democratic mandate, and provide equal protection to citizens and non-citizens alike.

Well-functioning political parties are also indispensable to local democracy. Ideally, they aggregate the interests of citizens who share similar views, or have similar needs, and turn them into local policies and programmes which they present as alternative platforms for government. The parties' local branches regularly form the backbone of national political parties. They can campaign directly among voters in time of elections, nominate candidates, recruit members, train people to take part in government, and vote on and thus determine national and local electoral manifestoes. Centralized and decentralized parties tend to produce different opportunities for citizen engagement and governance outcomes and varied responsiveness to their constituencies.

In places where local political parties hardly exist or where they are weak, other forms of political organizations may emerge. These may be coalitions of political groups which are formally not political parties, but run a limited number of candidates on focused platforms.

The existence of strong local institutions does not automatically mean that they are run democratically or lead to democratic outcomes. Their ability to perform these roles in an effective manner is highly dependent on a broad variety of factors such as the political system, applicable electoral, decentralization and/or party laws and regulations, the internal procedures and capacities in place, available resources, levels of negative/positive outside influences, and measures such as gender quota systems or affirmative action for marginalized groups.

Personal relationships with one's constituency often make it easier for politicians to build trust with voters, as well as to sense their immediate concerns and needs. However, in some environments, personal contacts also allow more easily for patronage networks or inciting violence. The same concern applies to the ways in which

other institutions operate. Assessing the functioning of these institutions, therefore, also includes the functioning of the officials that make up the institutions, such as local council members, mayors, judges, police officials or party leaders. This is particularly relevant in relation to their integrity in fulfilling public responsibilities. Integrity of public life is closely related to issues of corruption, rent-seeking and patronage, and is crucial because trustworthiness of public officials is of central concern to well-functioning local democracy.[28]

Local government can be anchored in traditional as well as modern institutions. Another area of particular interest for local democracy is therefore the role and influence of traditional, customary or religious institutions, for instance as practiced by certain indigenous or conservative communities, or as part of a monarchical tradition. In some countries old institutions have been abolished, given a token role or are considered irrelevant within local democracy, while in others they have adapted and evolved, and remain influential power holders.

Traditional institutions can be informally organized, or be a formal part of government. The dividing line between modern and traditional governance can be blurred, for instance when traditional leaders play prominent roles in local government[29] or become politicians.

The tensions arising from blending modern and customary governance institutions is found in different forms and magnitude around the world. In some situations, uneasy linkages between modern and traditional institutions of governance can be a source of instability,[30] for example when traditional institutions are seen to be hampering local development, fostering ethnic strife, or excluding women and/or ethnic, racial or religious groups from political processes. Traditional authorities can also contribute in positive ways, for instance, when taking part in efforts to improve local service delivery, by serving as a citizen platform for information sharing, through mobilizing resources for local initiatives, or by contributing to conflict prevention and resolution.

For all institutions, whether modern or traditional, it is important to find out the extent to which men and women, youth and elderly and, for instance, religious, ethnic and/or marginalized groups are equally engaged, in terms of numbers, quality and level of influence.

Pillar 3: *Citizen initiative and participation*

The third pillar of the SoLD assessment framework is devoted to channels and mechanisms for active, informal citizen participation that takes place independently, outside the realm of established local institutions and processes. While the second SoLD pillar includes looking at the extent to which government processes and institutions can create mechanisms to involve citizens, this third pillar will primarily assess the extent to which citizens themselves take the initiative to participate in democratic life, and claim and exercise their rights and freedoms in practice.

Active citizenship requires, first and foremost, that the rights of citizens to organize around issues of concern and interest are guaranteed in institutional legal and policy frameworks, and are protected by a respected rule of law framework (as explored under Pillar 1). This is especially relevant for marginalized groups, which often find themselves unable to safely articulate their demands. Such guarantees for respect and protection of human rights are normally enshrined in a country's laws. The day-to-day protection and respect of such rights must find expression in people's daily interaction with their local governments and with each other; in other words in the dynamic vertical relations between the citizens and local government and the lively horizontal interactions between the citizens that make up the local population.

"At its core, democracy means that citizens participate in the government and that government treats citizens equally. Holding periodic elections is the established form of realizing each of these ideals. Deepening democracy then requires moving beyond regular elections to take further steps towards strengthening citizenship and democratizing the state."

Benjamin Goldfrank[31]

Citizens' active engagement in society is a central component for building a more vibrant local democracy, not least because democratic institutions depend as much on the guarantee and protection of citizens' rights as on an alert and active citizen body for their effective functioning.[32] As such, active citizen participation is important for its own sake, regardless of how influential it is.

In order to achieve meaningful and active citizen participation in local affairs, access to information, decision-makers and decision-making processes are key, as are having (informal) platforms and

opportunities for citizen action and deliberation. Nowadays, citizens can either meet in real life in public spaces such as city squares or parks, or make use of ICTs for (online) dialogue and discussion.

Some forms and expressions of active citizen participation include:

- voluntarism;
- civil society activities;
- street protests;
- complementary service delivery;
- deliberative non-governmental forums;
- Internet platforms;
- citizen movements;
- petitions; and
- public campaigns.

Critical enabling factors for these forms of civic engagement include freedoms of opinion and expression, association and assembly, as well as the right to protest publicly. They also require the presence of alternative actors (besides the formal political and administrative institutions) to collaborate with at the local level, such as civil society organizations, private sector and development partners.

A vigorous local network of voluntary associations of all kinds, including civil society organizations, contributes to the type of dynamic interrelationships through which citizens can act to manage their own affairs and influence local policy. The vigour of associational life is also an important condition for securing the responsiveness of local government policy, and ensuring that the delivery of public services meets the needs of the local population.[33]

The role of social/citizen movements deserves particular attention in this context, as they are often important vehicles for people's aggregation of interests at the local level. These movements in some respects may approximate political parties, and could be power holders reflecting dominant social forces such as land owners or farmer groups, business interests, powerful elites or families, tribal affinities or more 'bottom-up' local protest movements reflecting the voice of groups of concerned citizens or activist groups, e.g. coalitions between environmentalist groups.

Popular participation is the means through which citizens exert popular control over their leaders and the decisions that they make. However, people can only actively participate if they are fully informed. In a

democratic context, therefore, the extent to which citizens have the right to information and can actually access information is an important indicator of the quality of democracy.

Independent and pluralistic media in its various forms (including print, broadcast and online media) can serve as platforms for popular participation, information-sharing in communities and citizen mobilization. As the 'watchdogs of society' independent journalists are critical in holding the local government to account and in exposing democratic weaknesses, such as malfunctioning institutions, fraudulent elections or corruption. In reality, though, in many countries not all media is independent or accessible to all sections of society. Hence, it becomes important to know the extent to which local as well as (inter)national news and information is equally accessible to all sections of society and how far the media (can) act independently in the local context.

In recent years, the emergence of mobile technology in general, and social media in particular, has offered citizens the possibility to directly and immediately communicate their views. These tools are invaluable for citizens as they are transformed from being mere receivers of information to citizens who are more able to actively make demands. This is not to say that debates on social media platforms always impact the policy-making process, nor that they cannot also be used in some contexts to facilitate the spread of conflict. Social media have opened up new opportunities for citizens at the local level to express and organize themselves around their political interests[34], even beyond borders.

Box 2.5. Participatory democracy in the Municipality of Cap-Haïtien

The 2010 SoLD of the Northern Department of Haiti[35] describes the strengths and weaknesses of the participatory aspects of local democracy in the municipality of Cap-Haïtien as follows

WEAKNESSES	STRENGTHS
• No process of official consultation and in line with other key actors such as religious leaders, civil society, the private sector, etc. • No policy to promote access by women, young people and other marginalized groups to the decision-making process • Too much disunity in civil society • No formal and regular meetings between the different actors in the municipality • Manipulation of popular organizations to the benefit of political movements, especially in the period running up to an election, often bringing the city to a standstill • Interference from international organizations • Lack of openness and willingness to listen on the part of elected officials • Lack of participation by the opposition in the decision-making process (in the absence of the assemblies) • Mayor not readily available to citizens • Failure to publish accounts in an attempt to generate greater transparency • The Mayor's Office is cooperating slightly or not at all with the Departmental Delegate • Poor relations between the Mayor's Office and the Chamber of Commerce • No official system for hearing the grievances of citizens (apart from arranging a meeting with the mayors) • Few public–private partnerships, and the few that exist are poorly managed • No partnerships between the public and local NGOs; only between the public and international NGOs • Inability to mobilize citizens into a united force	• Vibrant and numerous civil society organizations • Strong involvement of churches in the development of the municipality and the mixed church-state committee • Very strong media presence in the municipality, very closely involved in covering local affairs • Media less controlled and less intimidated by the state and the political parties than before • Heavy influence of non-governmental groups in public affairs • Strong presence of foreign financial backers • Freedom of expression for the parties of the opposition, without the risk of intimidation • Information imparted to the citizens by the authorities through the media • Desire on the part of the authorities to increase transparency by setting up a website and issuing a report on their first 100 days in office • International NGOs attempting to promote dialogue between actors • Past experience used successfully in participatory planning and initiatives involving citizens • Great freedom of expression and of action for civil society

2.4. Cross-cutting issues

While the above pillars of analysis are the vertical building blocks of the SoLD assessment, there are also a number of important recurring issues that will always need to be taken into consideration, no matter the topic. These include:

- gender equality;
- social cohesion and diversity;
- conflict and security; and
- democracy and development.

Each of these will be briefly described below.

Gender equality

Equality between women and men[36] is indivisible from democracy at all levels, and is broadly recognized as a pre-condition for a truly representative and responsive local government. Inclusion and empowerment of people of all gender identities in decision-making at the local level is crucial; first, as a fundamental democratic right and, second, as a strategy for ensuring that local policies and programmes respond to their constituents in a gender-equal and equitable manner. An inclusive process, therefore, includes fostering a gender-sensitive assessment on all levels, examining women's and men's access to decision-making positions at the local level (e.g. as elected local councillors), as well as assessing the content of local policies and the impact of governance on women and men within local constituencies (e.g. as recipients of local health services).

Local governments are often thought to be a convenient entry point for women into politics, as some factors which traditionally inhibit their participation at the national level are considered to be of lower intensity at the local level, for example the monetary costs of campaigns, travel time away from home, necessary experience in political competition in general and competition within parties for nomination.[37] Yet there are also contexts in which challenges for women to participate effectively at the local level may be stronger due to a number of structural factors contributing to gender-based disparities. These factors include, among others:[38]

- general power imbalance between women and men;
- pervasive gender-based roles and stereotypes in private and public spaces;

- gender inequalities in socio-economic status and income;
- social immobility;
- a patriarchal organization of societies;
- asymmetry in formal rights and de facto opportunities;
- gender-based discrimination and/or violence;
- gender gaps in literacy and education;
- electoral practices which unequally affect women's and men's chances of electoral success;
- lack of level playing field between women and men within political parties;
- lack of access to financial and other tangible resources; and
- weak state mechanisms for promoting gender equality.

These challenges permeate private and public spaces and may be manifested in varying degrees through different forms of gender-based discrimination, exclusion and marginalization.

Box 2.6. Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government

The IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government,[39] adopted in 1998, underscored that "local government, as an integral part of the national structure of governance, is the level of government closest to the citizens and therefore in the best position both to involve women in the making of decisions concerning their living conditions, and to make use of their knowledge and capabilities in the promotion of sustainable development."

Social cohesion and diversity

Social cohesion and diversity are additional critical elements of local level democracy, especially in light of the reality that many local level environments today—particularly in mega-cities and border areas—have large populations of non-citizens.

Many of the world's new democracies have materialized out of inter- or intra-state strife or as a consequence of the fall of regimes, and consequently have diverse populations. Diversity can on the one hand refer to characteristic demographic variables such as religion, ethnicity, gender expression, language, sexual orientation, functionality, age, class and diverse geographical location, and on the other hand refer to different visions of the role of the local unit.

There is a large body of research pointing to the fact that diverse societies often face challenges not experienced by homogenous societies, such as being more susceptible to outbreaks of internal conflicts.[40] New and intensified migration patterns, informed by socio-economic and environmental concerns as much as political ones, and the impact of diaspora and refugee communities, resulting in changing demographics of nation states, also pose new challenges for the effective functioning of local level democratic practices.

To ensure the full and informed participation of a diverse population in decisions that affect citizens on the local level thus poses significant challenges. These challenges can be both administrative and ideological in nature, but are increasingly recognized as important in order for societies to not only mitigate against conflict, but also to adhere to the principles of a just and truly inclusive democratic society. The SoLD framework therefore emphasizes the idea of inclusive and multicultural citizenship and encourages the collection and presentation of disaggregated data, as far as relevant, to inform policies that are responsive to the needs and aspirations of different sections of society.

Box 2.7. Data disaggregation: A cautionary note

Having disaggregated data about factors such as ethnicity, caste and religion is useful as it allows identification of possible patterns of exclusion or discrimination that are based on these features. Often marginalized populations are made visible only through disaggregated data. Without this, subsequent policies and programmes run the risk of overlooking the interests and views of minority and/or marginalized groups. It is a double-edged sword, however, as these disaggregated data can also potentially be abused by power holders to reinforce a policy of discrimination and even worse. Policy-making based on ethnic, religious, tribal, etc. demographic data may be conducive to equal representation, but it may also lead to extreme "ethnicization" or "tribalization" of politics. Moreover, the people concerned also need to agree to be identified as belonging to externally pre-defined groups. It is legitimate to assume that there are individuals who do not wish to be categorized and who prefer to be identified as citizens. While assessors always need to be sensitive to the important issues of diversity, in deciding on the use of disaggregated data beyond the widely accepted features of gender and age, assessment teams should reflect on the ambiguity of data disaggregation and weigh the pros and cons in the context under assessment.

There are no easy answers to the question of how to reconcile unity and diversity, especially as each democracy will manage this tension differently. Most democracies have legislated policies that prohibit discrimination and promote inclusion in terms of access to full civic, political, social and economic rights. Still, much comes down to how these policies are interpreted, implemented and respected on the ground.

Conflict and security

As discussed before in Section 2.2., a territory needs to offer human safety and security in order for democracy to function. Assessing local democracy requires a thorough consideration and understanding of the factors that threaten and/or undermine human safety and security. This section serves as a reminder that conflict and security needs not only be taken into account in the context analysis, but also during the whole assessment, complex as they might be.

After having identified the factors that can threaten human safety and security (as part of the context analysis), it is important to understand how these impact the quality of local democracy. For instance, violence and organized crime form significant threats to the integrity of the democratic process and institutions, and often also to the very viability of local democracy. Illicit actors can threaten or put pressure on power holders, thereby influencing local policies or people's voting behaviours, undermining the autonomy of local officials and politicians, capturing government institutions, or preventing the law from being enforced, slowly eroding the rule of law.[41]

Democratic processes and institutions at the local level—if adequately equipped, mandated and functioning—are in theory well placed to manage violent outbursts and criminal interference in democratic life, and to provide the required conflict management and resolution mechanisms. The assessment, however, must try to unravel how this ideal is put into practice at the local level. Indeed, an adequate understanding of conflict and security needs to be sensitive to the local level structures of power and justice. In many countries, for example, traditional justice mechanisms play a key role in conflict and conflict management.

In reality, the relationship between security and democracy is much more complicated than described here and is difficult, if not impossible, to confine to the local unit or local level. At the same

time, any assessment needs to reflect the complex and sometimes ambiguous relationship between democracy, conflict and security.[42]

Democracy and development

In many contexts local constituencies tend to see democracy and development as inherently linked. Citizens support democracy not only because it is a desirable end in itself, but also because with democracy comes the expectation of a better quality of socio-economic and political life. Citizens expect their local governments to deliver public services in an efficient manner to meet their needs.

Consistent high levels of support for democracy around the world and the non-corresponding low levels of satisfaction with it demonstrate that citizens assess the quality of democracy not only on the basis of periodic opportunities to elect political representatives and leaders, but also on the basis of outcomes.[43]

The relationship between democracy and development is frequently mentioned as one of the most important challenges facing the world today. The lack of economic and social gains from democratic transitions is a core concern in many regions. At the same time, economic development processes and external drivers sometimes undermine or bypass democratic actors, weakening them even further. Democracy, while a value in itself, also draws its sustainability and strength from its capacity to meet citizens' expectations that it will deliver socially inclusive and sustainable development.[44]

Democratic political processes are expected to translate people's expectations and aspirations into development policies and programmes aimed at improving their daily lives. A failure of democratic institutions to deliver in the socio-economic field is likely to weaken democracy. Local governments therefore need real powers, resources and authority for leaders and representatives to make the political and socio-economic decisions that are relevant and responsive to the human rights claims, needs and realities of their communities. This also requires putting in place structural arrangements and practices that empower and facilitate local governments and communities to exercise not only the voting power in the choice of their local leadership and representatives, but also to have strong influence in the making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decisions that concern their socio-economic wellbeing and to constantly demand accountability from their local leadership.[45]

Chapter 3

How to Conduct an Assessment

How to Conduct an Assessment

The SoLD assessment framework places citizens at the forefront of the democracy assessment process, with the aim of supporting home-grown policy initiatives and internally driven reform agendas. Consequently, it is a reform-oriented assessment intended to be as much an exercise in assessing the quality of democracy as it is an opportunity for citizens to further develop and deepen their local democracies.

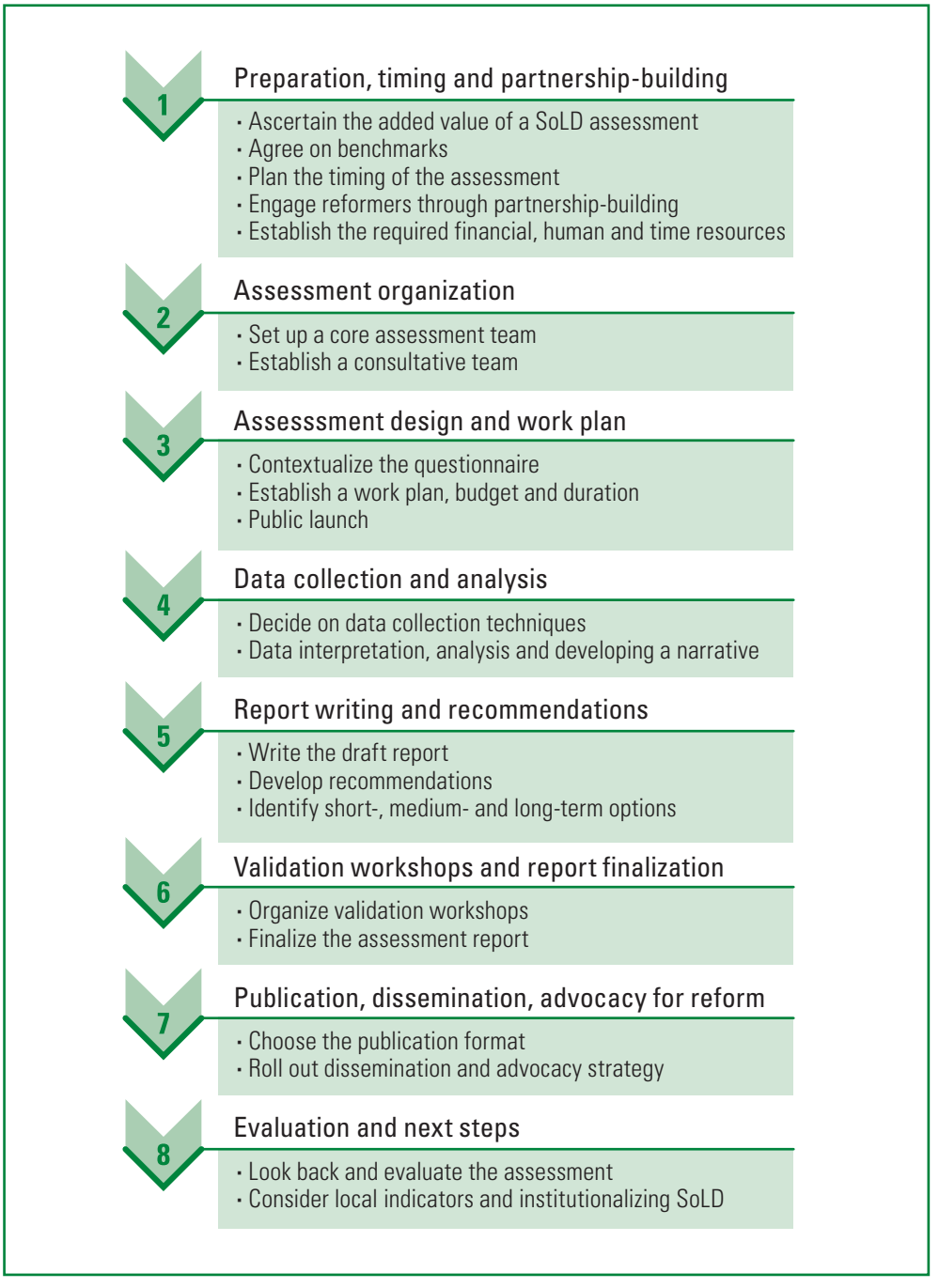
The assessment is a two-dimensional process, which combines research with inclusive dialogue and debate. Hence, the assessment must be professionally conducted according to internationally accepted social science research standards, while at the same time ensuring the active participation and contribution of local citizens, both men and women, at various stages of the process.

Any members of the public with an interest or stake in improving local democracy can initiate the assessment process, mobilize resources for it, and make use of the assessment framework. These initiators can range from academics, local council members, government officials, media and civil society organizations to local politicians, local activists and members of minority groups.

A broad level of participation is crucial for building ownership of the assessment and for maximizing possibilities for impacting reform processes in the local unit where the assessment is conducted. At the same time, this requires finding the right balance between conducting research in a professional and effective manner, and fostering active and inclusive participation of the diversity of local citizens.

The following is a summary of key steps and decisions, divided into eight consecutive steps. This is intended to ensure good preparation, implementation and follow-up to the assessment.

Figure 3.1. The steps of an assessment



3.1. Preparation, timing and partnership-building

The first step is the preparation stage of the assessment, during which the initiators will need to ascertain the need, purpose and added value of conducting a SoLD assessment, confirm whether the timing is right, and try to engage reformers from the onset through the building of local partnerships.

Ascertain the added value of a SoLD assessment

Those with plans to initiate a local democracy assessment need to be aware of what others are doing or have already done in this field of work, and to clarify what the added value of a SoLD will be before they start the process. SoLDs should complement rather than duplicate the work of others. Such a reflection typically involves taking inventory of the following:

- What other democracy and governance assessments have been conducted in the local unit?
- Has any relevant academic research been conducted in the area?
- Has any relevant community-driven analysis taken place?
- What did they focus on?
- Who conducted them?
- For which purpose?
- What approaches were used in conducting them?
- How are they being used?
- What outcomes and results did they have?
- What substantive areas are left uncovered or are worth following up?

The primary goal of this reflection exercise is to determine the need, purpose and added value of a SoLD to the already existing body of evaluations and measurements, and to take a decision regarding if and how the SoLD assessment could add value in improving local democracy. The purpose of an assessment can include general awareness-raising among the local population, influencing the public debate or political agenda-setting for reform, as well as government programme or policy evaluation. Often, initiators of an assessment set out to achieve a combination of these goals.

Agree on benchmarks

A next step is to identify points of reference so as to put the assessment and its future findings into context. First of all, and rather easy to identify, is a time benchmark. This could be a locally important event, such as a shift of government, elections, enactment of a new constitution or decentralization framework, or newly gained local autonomy. The second is a substantive benchmark, which can be used as a baseline for the assessment's content. However, especially when no past democracy assessment has been conducted on the local level, finding a meaningful substantive benchmark can be challenging. Four sources of information in which relevant points of reference can be found are:

i. **Public perception surveys**, e.g. public opinion surveys on local democracy and/or governance performance.
- Upside: captures the local opinion and popular expectation of local democracy.
- Downside: survey can be deemed ambiguous; and resource intensive if not yet conducted.

ii. **Local standards**, e.g. policy statements and goals identified by the local government.
- Upside: provide legitimacy at the local level, easy and inexpensive to identify.
- Downside: does not always refer to the citizens' opinion or government opposition views.

iii. **Nationally derived standards**, e.g. public norms identified by a constitution or peace agreement.
- Upside: provides domestic legitimacy, easy and inexpensive to identify.
- Downside: only useful if accepted and endorsed by the local unit and its citizens.

iv. **International standards of good governance**, e.g. UN good governance principles.
- Upside: widely recognized and based on global good practices.
- Downside: the local unit and its citizens have to endorse these (external) standards.

Timing of the assessment

The reform-oriented nature of an assessment makes it important to think about the timing of assessment activities in view of political developments, and closely related to that, the will to improve local democracy among important local (and sometimes national) power holders.

Timing is important because processes such as elections or political reform could influence the assessment process, and vice versa. For instance, when elections are approaching and local politicians are in the middle of heated election campaigning, it may be better to wait to conduct the SoLD until after the elections when the situation has calmed down and it may be easier to bring different actors together. Similarly, in case of political transition, such as when constitutional reforms or decentralization are planned, it is worthwhile to plan the SoLD so that the findings can contribute to public and political debates and influence reform policies.

Engage reformers through partnership-building

While those conducting a SoLD assessment may not have the power to make change themselves, such as when dealing with national policies or laws, they may be able to inform advocacy processes or engage with those who do have power to effect democratic change and development. Involving reformers from the onset and creating broad partnerships among relevant local organizations and citizen groups are therefore early yet critical steps. The more government bodies, political parties, civil society organizations, local media outlets, community-based organizations, gender- and rights-based organizations, development and key private sector partners are on board from the very beginning of the assessment, the more local ownership and openness to change can be expected. Considering who to engage should therefore take into account the general reform objectives as well as the question. Who may be able to help in achieving them?

Informing, consulting and involving a variety of local actors in the SoLD assessment plans, and building partnerships at an early stage, may also have practical advantages. For instance, it may make it easier to identify and combine resources and capacities, to access a variety of data sources, and to engage experts and practitioners in specialized areas. One way to practically engage partners is to invite them to be part of the assessment's consultative team (see Section 3.2.).

Establish the required resources

This preparation process must be accompanied by establishing the level of financial, human and time resources required and potentially available. Knowing the amount of resources available is important for making informed decisions about the scope and depth of the assessment and for planning fundraising efforts.

Box 3.1. Fundraising

Funds can be derived from various sources, including support from local government associations, research grants, national government programmes or development funds from other (inter) national organizations. Local ownership of the assessments can only really happen if resources are generated in-country. Depending on the context, however, this may not always be possible or feasible. Deciding on funding sources must be accompanied by reflection on whether such sources of funds will allow for the kind of assessment approach proposed by this Guide.

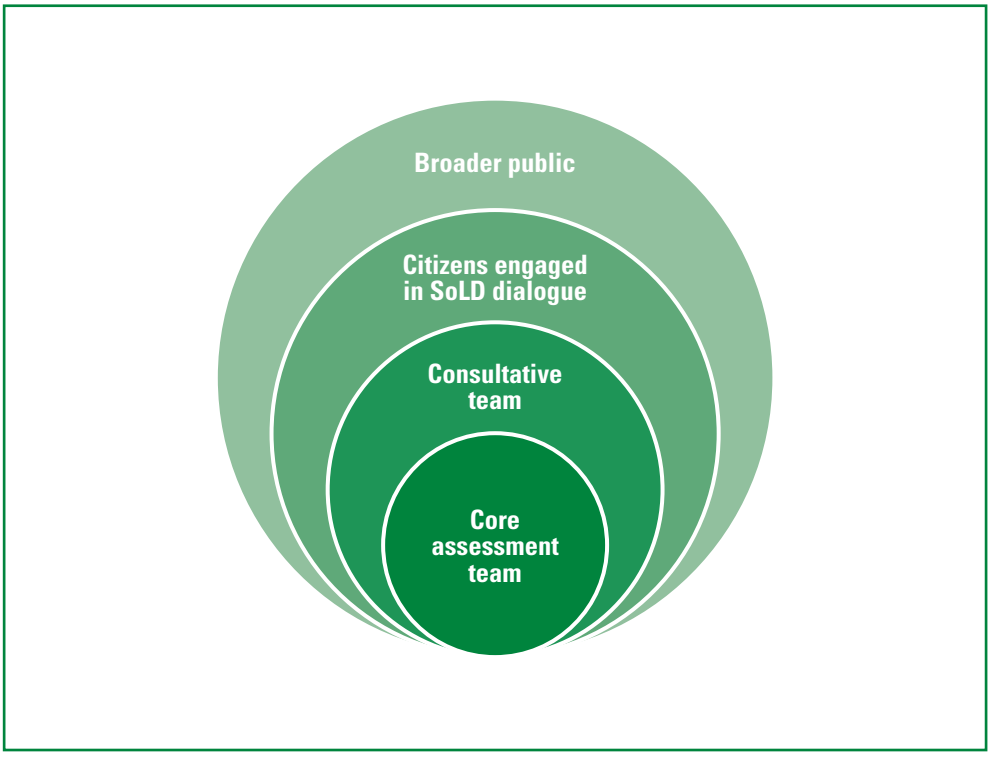
3.2. Assessment organization

Once a decision has been made to proceed with the assessment, the next stage is setting up organizational structures that can support and facilitate the assessment process. Such a structure must be able to sustain the essential balance between the research and inclusive dialogue dimensions of the assessment.

The assessment organization includes a management and coordination structure, which at a minimum should consist of (a) a core assessment team and (b) a consultative team. The function of the management or coordination structure is to ensure the day-to-day administration and management of the assessment project. This structure is even more crucial where the assessment project is a partnership between two or more organizations. Mandates, roles and responsibilities, commitments and reporting lines for each team, including for its members, must be clearly defined and agreed upon from the outset.

The assessment and consultative teams should have an equal representation of women and men with the required mix of professional skills and demonstrated experience.

Figure 3.2. Layers of citizen involvement



Core assessment team: Drivers of the SoLD

The core assessment team has primary responsibility for managing the assessment, undertaking the research, and for engaging the local population through dialogue and consultations at different stages of the assessment process. While the nature of the core assessment team will differ depending on the context, there are a few aspects to take into consideration when constituting an assessment team.

- **Team size and composition**
  The team usually consists of around five to seven citizens who are engaged on a full-time basis. The team should designate a project manager or team leader in charge of overseeing the project from a management point of view, and include researchers and substantive experts. It is important that the assessment team is not too large to manage. In case additional capacity is required, e.g. for data collection or dialogue facilitation, research assistants or facilitators can be hired on a short-term basis. The team should include equal numbers of women and men.

- **Multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder team**
  It is important that the assessment process benefits from a variety of disciplines, skills, knowledge and experiences. The knowledge, professional background and experience of the core assessment team ideally coincide to some degree with the areas to be covered in the assessment (e.g. rule of law; social, economic and cultural rights; decentralization or elections). It is also important to engage team members who can enrich the assessment with expertise in the areas of gender and diversity. Depending on the context, other types of knowledge might be needed as well, for example with regards to conflict and security issues or customary governance systems. Where it is not possible to incorporate all desired disciplines and to create an 'ideal' yet manageable team composition, it is advisable to make use of the capacities of the consultative team.

- **Research skills**
  Each assessment team should include team members with ample research experience, including statistical analysis. These members' role is to oversee the design and conduct of the research and to guarantee quality of the assessment report and findings from a research point of view. Their contribution is critical for safeguarding research standards, for quality assurance of each segment of the assessment, and for the overall validity and credibility of the assessment process, data analysis and final report.

- **Expertise on dialogue facilitation**
  Each assessment team should include or involve someone with solid knowledge of dialogue facilitation processes. The role of these members is to advise on and assure the quality of the citizen dialogue aspects of the assessment, so as to ensure that they are inclusive and serve the purpose of engaging diverse groups of people, both men and women, within the local unit. Citizen dialogue is a vital component of the assessment, and should be used at strategic points within the assessment process, including for data collection and validation purposes.

- **Division of labour and team commitment**
  Another aspect to take into consideration is how the work will be divided between the core assessment team members, and to decide who will be the team leader and what their roles and responsibilities will be. It is important to take into consideration the time that the core assessment team members are able to dedicate during the full duration of the assessment—and to confirm the different team members' availability and commitment to take part in all phases of assessment. A mitigating measure is to share leadership responsibilities, or work

with deputies to diminish the risk of dependency, and minimize negative impacts on the assessment process should the team leader not be able to continue to hold that role, for whatever reason, at any point during the assessment. In case certain tasks are outsourced, this needs to be done in the understanding that these tasks are part of a process, e.g. in case a gender expert is hired, this person will need to be engaged at the different stages of the assessment process.

Consultative team: Embodying a partnership for reform

Other than the core assessment team, it is also important to constitute a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder consultative team. The consultative team can be viewed as representative of the community and as a sounding board for both the technical content and social-political dimensions and implications of the assessment. The role of the consultative team is to guide the assessment, to review draft reports at different stages, and to provide feedback to the core assessment team.

- **Team size and composition**
  The consultative team should be composed of around ten to fifteen people from a broad spectrum of local society representing a variety of organizations, institutions and constituencies that have a stake in the assessment. These should include organizations and people with power to make recommendations likely to be listened to, experts with research skills, those expected to have a critical voice, reform-oriented people, as well as representatives from marginalized and minority groups. In constituting a consultative team, a balance should be made between those who will provide technical guidance to the assessment and those who will potentially assist in promotion of the findings of the assessment report and help link the assessment to reform. Conducting a stakeholder and audience mapping can be helpful in this regard. The consultative team should also include an equal number of women and men with the right mix of skills and expertise. Members should be committed to contributing meaningfully during all phases of the assessment process.

- **Multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary**
  The consultative team not only validates the data analysis and assessment report, but is also important for driving the follow-up of the report. Hence, the consultative team needs to include actors who are also potential users of the assessment findings, such as media, political groups, civil society organizations, NGOs, relevant

government institutions, and academia. It is therefore important to map the potential target groups and end users of the report and constitute the consultative team based on a stakeholder analysis. Involving people from various disciplines and sectors, levels and (geographical) areas of the local unit is the best way to ensure that the final report has broad ownership, legitimacy, and will be able to effectively contribute to reform.

Box 3.2. Good practice: Engaging council members

In order to ensure the councils' ownership of the assessment process and the assessment outcomes, the assessment team of the SoLD assessment in Tanzania (conducted in 2013) agreed at the start of the process that the local councils taking part in the assessment would appoint dedicated officers to become SoLD focal points and act as members of the consultative team. As such, they agreed to be involved in the planning as well as the implementation of the assessment. These council focal points were in charge of coordinating council discussions and consultations, and for arranging the validation of the findings and recommendations from the assessment.

- **Continuous and consistent engagement**
  While the consultative group does not need to directly take part in research activities, it is important that they are consistently engaged from the beginning of the process in order to ensure the broad ownership, quality assurance and utility of the assessment. This means that regular information-sharing and consultation meetings with the entire core assessment team are needed to keep the consultative team updated about the assessment and able to provide advice. The consultative team is also important in debate and dialogue activities, e.g. in providing technical support and visibility.

3.3. Assessment design and work plan

Assessment design is the stage when the assessment team begins to engage in a detailed discussion of the SoLD assessment framework and how to operationalize it. This usually takes place in the context of a series of meetings between members of the core assessment and consultative teams. Investing time, energy and resources in designing the assessment is a critical ingredient for success.

Box 3.3. Pointers for assessment design

Discussions on assessment design include, but are not limited to, the following elements:

- Discussing research methodology, data collection methods and data sources, including determining the different groups of research participants and respondents.
- Building a common understanding of concepts to be used and their meanings in specific contexts (in some cases different understandings should be acknowledged).
- Customizing the questionnaire, which includes reviewing and contextualizing the assessment questions and ensuring that any revised questions are still gender, diversity and conflict sensitive.
- Translating the questionnaire and other relevant documents into local language(s).
- Mapping the key stakeholders that need to be engaged at different phases of the assessment, including target users and audiences who can potentially endorse and follow-up on the SoLD findings.
- Agreeing on the approach, scope and intensity with regards to citizen dialogue and engagement.
- Designing the dialogue process so that it clarifies how and at what stages it contributes to the research, as well as how it fosters inclusive citizen engagement.
- Deciding on dialogue methods and facilitation arrangements.
- Deciding on the assessment report format(s) and language(s) and a dissemination strategy on the basis of the target users and audience identified.
- Agreeing on a public outreach and publicity strategy. Generally, this includes validation workshops at the draft report stage, the launching of the final report, and other dissemination and advocacy activities.
- Outlining preliminary implementation and advocacy strategy (e.g., identify, inform and engage strategic partners; foster commitment to use assessment outcomes for strengthening local regulatory and policy frameworks and democratic practices).
- Discussing how and to what extent local indicators can and will be developed, and whether conducting a local democracy assessment might become a regular practice.

Assessment design is a critical stage for ensuring that the assessment team members have a common understanding of the task ahead

of them and how that task is to be carried out. While assessment design should take place at the beginning of the assessment process, in reality, teams continually work on aspects of the design and meet regularly throughout the course of the assessment.

Box 3.4. Citizen dialogue: Weighing options and tools

The ways and extent to which citizen dialogue becomes part of the assessments process depends heavily on the context and overall scope of the SoLD assessment. In a small rural community, for example, inclusive citizen dialogue and consultation may be organized differently from dialogue in a large town or city, and dialogue sessions with a small group of 8–12 people would be organized differently from dialogue with a group of 100–200 people. Similarly, dialogue for data collection purposes may be organized in another way from dialogue for validation or dissemination purposes, or for dialogue meant to lead to collaborative action. Consequently, assessment teams need to be aware of and weigh different options for organizing dialogue sessions at the design stage of the assessment process. The *Democratic Dialogue Handbook* (2007)[46] is a useful resource in this respect and provides an array of processes and process tools for dialogue and deliberation to support the task of adaptation.

Contextualize the questionnaire

SoLD is set up as a broad methodological framework for conducting a quality analysis of local democracy. Therefore, the topics and guiding questions provided in Chapter 4 are intended as a starting point for assessing democratic life, and require assessment teams to extend and adjust questions to their local context as they deem necessary, yet without losing sight of the purpose, principles and values underpinning the SoLD assessment framework.

When contextualizing the questions, it is recommended to keep the following points in mind:

- Adjust language to the local context and use concepts that are locally understood.
- Adjust grammar and language so that questions remain gender sensitive.[47]
- Check if terms are acceptable and understood by different groups of society.

- Make sure that language and terminology are neutral and take into account local sensitivities.
- Ensure that the assessment questions continue to reflect the SoLD principles and values.

Interview questions are not the same as the assessment questions, as they often need to be more specific and adjusted to the interviewers' previous knowledge and awareness of certain democratic terms and principles. All questions and discussions should be formulated in a simple and clear manner, supported by a team willing and open to explain all doubts or queries that arise when conducting interviews and research for the SoLD assessment.

Establish a work plan, budget and duration

As with any project, a well-structured and realistic work plan and budget are determining factors for the success of a SoLD assessment. A well thought-out work plan is essential in order to avoid overlooking the time and resources needed for critical steps before, during and after the assessment, to anticipate political/social events such as local elections, and to avoid surprises which might compromise the entire project. In order to avoid this, the core assessment team should develop a detailed work plan for all steps of the assessments, including the activities planned in each stage of the assessment, an estimated budget and a corresponding time frame. The work plan should be developed with due consideration of the follow-up activities such as dissemination, advocacy and post-assessment dialogues with relevant stakeholders. Once a first work plan is developed, the core assessment team will share it with the consultative team for their advice and feedback.

Figure 3.3. Work plan essentials: Purpose, activities, timeline and budget

Name of the project: State of Local Democracy Assessment in Local Unit X			
Purpose of the assessment: Explains what the assessment is going to be used for, by whom, when, why and through which political process			
PHASE	**STEPS AND ACTIVITIES**	**DUE BY**	**TOTAL COST***
1. Preparation, timing and partnership-building	Desk review to ascertain need, added value, purpose and benchmarks of SoLD	*Prior to kick-off*	**Depends on local costs and context*
	Establish the required financial, human and time resources and raise funds		
	Meetings with stakeholders and potential local partners		
	Other activities: …		
2. Assessment organization	Set up management and coordination structure		
	Preliminary meetings with core assessment and consultative teams		
	Other activities: …		
3. Assessment design, work plan and launch	Conceptualize and agree on assessment design		
	Contextualize the questionnaire		
	Define work plan, budget and duration		
	Consultations/dialogue with relevant groups and institutions		
	Other activities: …		
	Public launch: Formal kick-off of the SoLD assessment	*Month 1*	
4. Data collection and analysis	Data collection through multiple methods (specify which methods)	*Month 1-3*	
	Meetings with the core and consultative assessment teams	*Month 1-5*	
	Consultations/dialogue with relevant local groups and institutions	*Month 2-5*	
	Data analysis, interpretation and development of narrative	*Month 4-5*	
	Other activities: …		

PHASE	STEPS AND ACTIVITIES	DUE BY	TOTAL COST*
5. Report writing and recommendations	Write the draft report(s)	*Month 5-6*	
	Meetings with core assessment and consultative teams	*Month 6*	
	Agree on short-/medium-/long-term recommendations	*Month 6*	
	Consultations/dialogues with relevant groups and institutions	*Month 6*	
	Other activities: …		
6. Validation workshops and dialogue	Validation of findings and dialogue in workshop(s) at the local level	*Month 7*	
	Validation of findings and dialogue in (sub) national level workshop(s)	*Month 7*	
	Incorporate feedback from validation and finalize report(s)	*Month 8*	
	Other activities: …		
7. Publication, dissemination and advocacy for reform	Develop user-friendly publications and information materials	*Month 9-12*	
	Public launch(es) of the assessment report	*Month 10*	
	Dissemination and targeted discussions of findings and recommendations	*Month 9-12*	
	Implement advocacy/action for reform strategy	*Month 9-12 and post-assessment*	
	Other activities: …		
8. Evaluation, developing local indicators and next steps	Evaluate assessment process and outcome	*Month 12 and post-assessment*	
	Identify local indicators		
	Consider/plan next SoLD and possible institutionalization		
	Other follow-up activities: …		

As regards the duration of the process, the experience that International IDEA has gained through previous SoLD assessments suggests that a full-time core assessment team of about five people, supported by research assistants, requires an average of twelve months to undertake a SoLD assessment. In case less time is available, the quality of the SoLD assessment is likely to be compromised and miss critical

components. This is not to say that the SoLD assessment framework could not be used to inspire the content of rapid assessments, e.g., quick scans or online citizen surveys. The exact duration always depends on such variables as human capacity, financial resources, geographic and substantive scope.

Costs and budgets differ significantly per assessment process, so whenever precise budget estimation is necessary, it is advisable to look at comparable experiences at the local level in order to fully grasp the needs and identify hidden costs. A realistic alignment with available human and financial resources is also important when selecting methods for researching primary and secondary sources. Major expense items may include people's time, data collection modalities—such as field trips or large-scale surveys—validation workshops, and publication and dissemination costs. Therefore, it is helpful to carefully consider these and other expenses.

How to keep costs low is an important question for many assessment teams. There are different options for doing so. Working in partnership with a variety of organizations and actors offers opportunities for pooling of resources and in-kind contributions. When councils are part of the assessment, for example, they can offer city halls as meeting or workshop venues. In terms of staffing, universities can ask students as (volunteer) research assistants to support experienced researchers, and local academia, governments or civil society organizations may offer the services of some staff members for the duration of the assessment. Changing workshop and meeting venues from hotels to more affordable places, such as local training centres, can also save a lot of money. In general it is recommended to always compare prices so as to find the best value for money spent.

Before completing the work plan, the assessment team must identify factors which could potentially increase costs, delay the assessment process and lengthen its duration, or prevent it from achieving its intended goals. This includes looking at relevant political developments. Early identification of potential risks allows the assessment drivers to find solutions or adjust implementation strategies.

As mentioned before, conducting a local context analysis is a vital component in any State of Local Democracy assessment, not only to place the assessment findings in the broader context, but also to establish a baseline for local democracy, which enables democratic progress to be tracked and monitored. One proven challenge for

a SoLD assessment team is to plan realistically and find the right balance between conducting a thorough context analysis and staying focused on data that are most essential for assessing the quality of local democracy. The main focus should be on the three assessment pillars, while the purpose of the context analysis is to provide the relevant background information.

Box 3.5. Tips for making the SoLD assessment more inclusive

Understanding the diversity of the local population: Analyze and reflect on how the assessment can best take into account the diversity of the population, and understand how demographic or identity markers, such as gender, occupation, socio-economic class, caste, religion, sexual identity, ethnicity, tribal, aboriginal or indigenous identity, impact the assessment process and findings.

Inclusive process: Ensure that people from marginalized groups are rendered visible and heard throughout the assessment process—from the initial formulation of the questions to the final formulation of recommendations—through targeted consultations.

Diverse team composition: The core assessment and consultative teams need to be gender balanced. To the extent possible, the consultative team should be diverse, and include members drawn from marginalized populations and from a cross-section of society, e.g., include people living with disabilities, youth and elders, representatives of different religious and ethnic, caste, tribal, aboriginal and/or indigenous groups.

Variety of methods: The assessment teams need to use a variety of methods to collect data and to ensure they capture the full experience of the population. For example, face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions might be needed to gather the views and experiences of those who are illiterate and/or left out of censuses and official databases (e.g. IDPs, migrants or undocumented citizens). This also requires a need to balance qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

Use and translate to local languages: People proficient in local languages and dialects need to be included in the assessment team and material needs to be translated and disseminated in these local languages and dialects. This means that sufficient funds must be budgeted for these purposes.

Box *[cont.]*

Address special needs: Certain groups may have special needs. For instance, in order to include people with disabilities, the assessment team should arrange wheelchair-adapted meeting places and use sign language interpreters.

Confidentiality: Engaging with various types of respondents, including interviews with groups such as undocumented or illegal migrants, should be done in accordance with existing standards for ensuring their right to privacy. It is the responsibility of assessment teams to respect and ensure their anonymity vis-à-vis external parties.

Relevant data disaggregation: Data disaggregation information based on gender is a must in any context. Data disaggregation based on other demographic or identity markers for the purpose of research and perhaps policy-making, however, is a serious matter and choice. Assessment groups should be well informed of both the benefits and the risks in order to make the right decision (see also cautionary note in Box 2.7.).

Public launch

A formal launch of the assessment process at the design stage is encouraged for the purpose of raising awareness about the assessment. This is often a public event attended by assessment team members, key stakeholders and involves press releases. The purpose of this formal launch is to raise broad citizen awareness about the assessment and to build alliances around it.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

This section concerns the core process of a democracy assessment, and offers basic considerations on data collection and analysis.[48]

Decide on data collection techniques

Local democracy assessments ideally employ both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Qualitative data on people's experiences and perceptions of democracy and areas in need of reform can be collected through a variety of means, including

in-depth interviews, participant observation, story-telling, focus groups, national reflective workshops and local conferences. Crowdsourcing, defined as obtaining information or input into a particular task or project by enlisting the services of a number of people, either paid or unpaid, through the Internet,[49] is increasingly used in research as a means of obtaining, transforming and analyzing data.

Quantitative data collection and analysis can complement the qualitative work, in which different indicators across the pillars of the framework can be collected to provide a descriptive mapping of democracy. The goal of combining qualitative and quantitative methods is to provide as rich and robust a portrait of the democratic experience as possible within the resource constraints of any assessment project.

Quantitative surveys are sometimes used as a complement to the qualitative approach. As part of SoLD assessments conducted in East and Southern Africa in 2002, mayors from 22 cities were surveyed on the governance challenges their cities were facing and the ways in which local democracy was being practiced in the governance process. The SoLD assessment in the ARMM involved a targeted survey of 4,000 residents, while in Egypt 500 citizens were surveyed. These surveys drew from some of the questions in the first version of the SoLD framework. As surveys can be quite costly, assessors have utilized existing survey data, found additional funding, or built the survey into existing events that brought stakeholders together.[50]

Box 3.6. State of Local Democracy in the Arab World: Some lessons from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen

In 2010 the *State of Local Democracy in the Arab World*[51] report was published, revealing a number of obstacles and challenges for the local assessment teams working on the ground.

Some teams experienced difficulties accessing and documenting data sources, either because data were unavailable or because they had not been compiled by the competent local authorities. Collecting information on financial and administrative corruption, for instance, proved difficult due to lack of transparency or weak information systems. As a result, some teams resorted to informal means to collect data and conducted field research, and often relied on estimates given by the local municipality research team.

Box *[cont.]*

Other challenges included administrative and security restrictions, or delays in responses from local councils and authorities to the issues raised by the assessment. There was also a lack of consensus in some communities on essential development priorities, that is, an inability to answer the question: 'What do we want?'

Despite these obstacles, throughout their implementation and during the subsequent national conferences, the assessments brought together a wide range of formal and informal stakeholders and decision-makers, who frequently expressed the need to use the findings of the assessment reports for the benefit of democratic reform programmes.

The SoLD does not prescribe one correct research method, and most assessors will develop their own approach to research. The core assessment team is responsible for making the final decision on methods of data collection, taking into account feedback from the consultative team.

With each data collection technique, however, one key objective is making the data collection process as participatory as possible. Furthermore, assessors need to be aware of the need for multiplicity of data collection methods, the need for triangulation of data collected through the various methods, and the importance of gender-sensitive data disaggregation. Awareness of different social categories such as age, income, religion, ethnicity, sexual identity, etc. is also crucial (see also Box 2.7.).

Box 3.7. Conducting a desk review

A desk review is useful for examining existing literature and data, including national audit reports, international/national statistics, ombudsman offices reports, reports from human rights institutions, peer review reports from professional societies, reports from think tanks, peer-reviewed academic research, concluding observations by treaty monitoring bodies, reports by Special Rapporteurs, election observation missions, citizen service monitoring initiatives, etc. In practice, however, it is often a challenge to find information about the local unit online; this underscores the importance of local and national sources and of a SoLD assessment.

Many relevant information and data resources can be found online, including on the State of Democracy website: <http://www.idea.int/>.

Data interpretation, analysis and developing a narrative

This stage may well overlap with the start of writing a draft text, since arranging material in order is part of the process of 'telling a story'. In data analysis and development of the narrative or story line, two issues are likely to emerge. The first is that there may well be inconsistencies, as well as duplication, between the different sources from which data have been collected, and further investigation will be needed to resolve possible contradictions. A second issue concerns continuing gaps in the evidence, for which further sources may still need to be identified.

- **Constructing a bibliography**
  The simplest way to compile a bibliography is to take each section of the SoLD assessment framework and conduct standard bibliographical searches. Academic books and articles are useful for their quality of analysis. Online sources from government departments, official statistical services, polling organizations, NGOs, news reports, etc. tend to be more current.

- **Identifying and sorting data**
  Experience shows that most sources will not be specific to one section of the framework, but are relevant to more than one question within it. It is recommended to proceed on a section-by-section basis, since most of the sources will contain material that is relevant to more than one question. The assessment team is responsible for selecting and using the most relevant sources, and for analysis and triangulation of the data.

- **Arranging and prioritizing the items**
  This is the stage of arranging the material collected so that it provides a clear picture, or tells a coherent story, even if it is a complex one. It is a good idea at this point to go back to the original question and the democratic values linked to the question. Then the items must be organized thematically, in order of significance or historical priority, according to what seems best in the light of the overall focus of the assessment. One way to think about an answer to the assessment questions is as a brief summarizing judgment, with the evidence arranged so that it supports, expands or explains the judgment in a systematic way.

- **Agreeing on the data, findings and narrative**
  In practice, agreeing on the data, findings and narrative can be difficult and even a cause for disagreement, which risks undermining

the cohesion of the assessment team. In those cases it is recommended to openly acknowledge and appreciate differences of opinion, and to present notable dissimilarities between different types of reports (e.g. government/independent sources); and to reflect the points of debate or contention in the context analysis and assessment report without it delaying the process.

Collecting information from multiple data sources, making use of the advisory role of the consultative team, as well as placing some of the contentious issues up for discussion in the workshops might help the core assessment team to make decisions in these situations.

3.5. Report writing and recommendations

After the above stages have been carried out, the actual writing of the report begins. This includes taking a (final) decision on the desired form, length and packaging of the report, so that it not only represents the assessment findings, but also appeals to the intended audience targeted during the preparatory stage as well as the wider public.

Writing the draft report

The assessment report is first and foremost meant to focus on the local unit that is being assessed. It can, however, also be structured in such a way that it covers a number of local units. In the latter case, specific shorter reports for each of the local units might be accompanied by a (sub)national, consolidated report. This not only sensitizes local actors to the findings and recommendations specific to their local unit, but also helps them identify common challenges and begin addressing those together with other local governments and players.

The draft assessment report should, at this stage, synthesize the research findings, based on the disaggregated data and analysis, as well as contain preliminary conclusions and draft recommendations for reform that can be discussed at validation workshops. It makes for easier reading to avoid long, uninterrupted sections of text; to include tables, summaries, quotations, exemplary events or personal stories; and to complement the completed report with features such as an executive summary. It is important that the data in tables are presented in a disaggregated manner.

The report's introduction is meant to explain and justify the assessment process, to place it in the local and national context, and to link the report to recent processes of democratic development and relevant cultural and political traditions.

One of the purposes of a SoLD report is to identify a local democracy's strengths and weaknesses, and to develop evidence-based recommendations for improving the quality of local democracy. An executive summary can be useful for providing a synopsis of the report and for communicating the report's key findings and recommendations to a broader readership.

Develop recommendations

Below are tips for translating the findings of the assessment into recommendations for improvements in local democracy.[52]

1. Identify the most urgent priorities for making improvements in democracy and craft recommendations that can help address these issues from an immediate, medium-term and long-term perspective.

2. Identify those aspects of democracy which local authorities and administrators can address on their own and those that require the involvement of other stakeholders (such as national or regional officials).

3. Build on the strengths identified in the assessment rather than focusing only on the shortcomings that the evaluation has brought to the surface or highlighted.

4. Distinguish between problems that require major institutional change, those that involve personalities or individuals, and those than can be addressed through policy change.

5. Develop an approach to making recommendations that links systemic problems with an integrated effort to ameliorate them over time. That is, rather than developing a simple list of things that could be done to improve local-level democracy, participants are asked to think through a strategy that first addresses why the problems have occurred and then identifies a series of steps involving political leaders, civic actors and citizens.

6. Develop (policy) recommendations for the different levels of government (e.g., at the local, subnational or national level).

7. Sketch out a way in which these steps can unfold over a defined period of time (with the most critical concerns addressed immediately while at the same time developing a longer-term approach) and identify methods for monitoring progress on improving democracy.

Identify short-, medium- and long-term options

Local units will appreciate recommendations that are grounded in the findings of the assessment and practice-oriented in their application. Recommendations should be feasible, that is, they should be clearly defined in terms of duration, complexity, outputs and cost. In this regard, it may be helpful to organize the recommendations in the following way.

Short-term options
Steps or actions which are simple and low-cost, require few major policy or statutory changes, and are immediately feasible in the current context.

Medium-term options
Steps which may require reforms of existing policies and laws, that require major administrative changes, or for which substantial resources will need to be rallied.

Long-term options
Undertakings that require significant reform or restructuring of local institutions, significant cost, national approval, or major administrative or financing reforms.

It is important to note that before the draft report is subject to validation in multi-stakeholder workshops, it should have benefited from reviews and feedback from the consultative team.

Box 3.8. Recommendations from the municipality of Cap-Haïtien

The 2010 SoLD of the Northern Department of Haiti[53] examines the strengths and weaknesses of local democracy in the municipality of Cap-Haïtien. In the area of participatory democracy it offers recommendations at three levels:

In the short term

Transparency: Oblige local authorities to disclose their budgets to the population.

Box *[cont.]*

Openness: Establish a plan for management of the municipality, not influenced in any way by political affiliations, class, race, religion or other factors.

Listening to the people: Provide a monthly overview of major decisions by the local authorities (about projects, initiatives completed, income received, etc.) and government operations.

Mobilization: Organize civic education campaigns to promote awareness and to encourage citizens to become involved in the construction of a good system of local governance.

Responsibility: Pay taxes (licences, etc.) owed to the municipality.

In the medium term

Fairness: Create the basis for integration of disabled persons in the society and make space for them on the streets (traffic), in state institutions and at public activities.

Openness: Create a service within the Mayor's Office to establish dialogue and cooperation with the key actors in local democracy.

Transparency: Create a committee of citizens comprising volunteers from all sectors of society with a view to monitoring interventions or actions taken by the local authorities.

Mobilization: Integrate committees of citizens working on a voluntary basis on conflict management, the protection of the environment and the city's historical centre, as well as promoting tourism and social welfare for the underprivileged.

In the long term

Mobilization: The private sector should take steps to promote development and employment.

Mobilization: Civil society should implement concrete projects in partnership with local authorities.

3.6. Validation workshops and report finalization

At validation workshops the draft report is to be discussed and critically reviewed by key local stakeholders. The goal of these workshops is to validate the general analysis and main findings before they are finalized with representatives of the local unit. Feedback from

representatives from political and civil society, minority groups and media will increase the report's quality, significance and impact. It is beneficial to include a broad variety of stakeholders in the workshops; widening the audience also means widening the range and variety of perspectives, thereby increasing the SoLD report's legitimacy.

Organize validation workshops

Validation workshops are primarily organized at the local level. However, in addition to local actors, organizers are encouraged to invite relevant (sub)national actors, such as representatives of the Ministry of Local Government or neighbouring districts, the political parties' national leadership, the ombudsman office, etc. In some contexts a special national validation workshop may be necessary, for example when a number of local units are being assessed at the same time and a national picture of the state of local democracy is emerging.

Validation is intended to obtain feedback on the draft report, which can consist of corrections, requests for further elaboration, clarifications or even outright objection to claims or the methods on which they are grounded. In order to get the most out of validation meetings, these should be well structured with an agreed agenda; specific guiding questions; dynamic facilitation; an approach that is sensitive to gender, diversity and the political dynamics of the sector and the group; minute-taking (while respecting that some participants may not wish to be quoted); a venue conducive to informal discussions; etc. This is not to say that full consensus needs to be reached; yet any SoLD report should provide space for and acknowledge dissenting opinions and minority views.

Finalize the assessment report

On the basis of the feedback, critique and suggestions received from the validation workshops (often more than one are organized), the report is then finalized. This means that sufficient time is needed in between events to incorporate the results of the validation workshops into the final report.

3.7. Publication, dissemination and advocacy for reform

The SoLD is a reform- and action-oriented assessment framework. The assessment findings are not only supposed to inform people about issues affecting the quality of their local democracy, but are also meant to serve as a starting point for developing local democratic reform agendas and/or community action plans that are owned and developed within the local unit.

This means, first of all, that findings are meant to be published and presented in a format that is easily understood and accessed by broader groups of citizens and policymakers, and second, that the analysis and recommendations for improving democratic life are disseminated among the local population. However, to increase the chance for actual reform, dissemination needs to be accompanied by an advocacy strategy for improved policies and practices in areas needing improvement as indicated by the assessment report.

Choosing the publication format

The publication format is of critical importance in getting the information to the intended audience. Depending on the targeted audience, formats may include executive summaries, thematic reports and factsheets, press releases and popularized versions of the report. These publications should highlight the main findings of the assessment and be published in the various local languages so they are easily accessible and readily understood by different groups in society. This material should be made available in hard copy as well as published online.

Roll out dissemination and advocacy strategy

Following publication, it is good practice to organize public launches of the report in the localities covered by the assessments, as well as at the national level. The public launch of the report should ideally be covered by local media, in order to reach out to the citizens it concerns.

At this stage, targeted dissemination and advocacy activities, for example through media and action-oriented dialogues with community representatives, need to be arranged to share the report findings and lobby for the short-term, medium-term and long-term

recommendations named in the assessment report. This is important in order to have a chance to draw attention to the report and launch a more targeted engagement with local and national policymakers, and to be able to advocate for and influence reform processes.

By no means does dissemination and advocacy mean just a single public debate or nothing more than a printed publication; rather, it refers to a wide menu of options which may include:

- Targeted briefings with leaders and experts of the local branches of political parties, including any local youth wings, women's leagues and think tanks.
- Participation in open hearings by relevant council meetings or meetings with mayors, local councillors and government officials.
- Meetings with local researchers and policy experts; or local ombudsman offices or human rights organizations.
- Sharing the report with relevant national government agencies or inspectorates, e.g., the department responsible for decentralization or civic education.

The choice of dissemination and advocacy channels will be what best fits the local unit's practices, social events, political cycles and available resources. It is also highly dependent on the overall set-up, partners and goals of the SoLD. Dissemination and advocacy strategies and skills are often used to inform and influence local, regional and national decision-makers about the assessment outcome. However, advocacy skills are equally useful when representatives from institutions that took part in the SoLD need to share and advocate for the SoLD findings internally, e.g., with other local government departments, with other colleagues and/or constituents.

Particular efforts should be made to ensure that the findings of the final report are also shared with groups that tend to be disempowered by political and economic elites or have a marginalized position due to historical and structural factors.

Even the best dissemination and advocacy strategy cannot predict every change of political wind that will happen. Events change and new opportunities emerge, as do new challenges.[54] After some time it is therefore necessary to reflect on what has been achieved so far and see what was effective and what could be improved for a next time.

Box 3.9. How to advocate for reform?

Advocacy is the process of conveying a message more broadly to a mass audience on behalf of others. It seeks to draw attention to an important issue or problem and build support for acting on both the problem and the solution. The intended outcome of advocacy is a change of policies, positions or programmes of any type of institution.[55] Developing an advocacy plan typically includes the following six steps:[56]

Step One: Understand and define the issue
What are the main findings and recommendations of the SoLD?

Step Two: Define the target audiences
Who are important decision-makers and influencers?

Step Three: Develop a message
Why are changes or reforms needed and how can they improve democracy at the local level?

Step Four: Develop an action plan
Which media, public outreach and lobby activities are needed to get the message across?

Step Five: Engage partners and the local public
How can SoLD partners help to mobilize public support for the proposed reforms?

Step Six: Monitor and evaluate
What are successes and failures, and what has changed in the political and social context?

3.8. Evaluation and next steps

This stage involves a joint reflection exercise or evaluation of the assessment process. This exercise is meant to assess to what extent there has been observable impact on relevant debates and reform initiatives.

Look back and evaluate the assessment

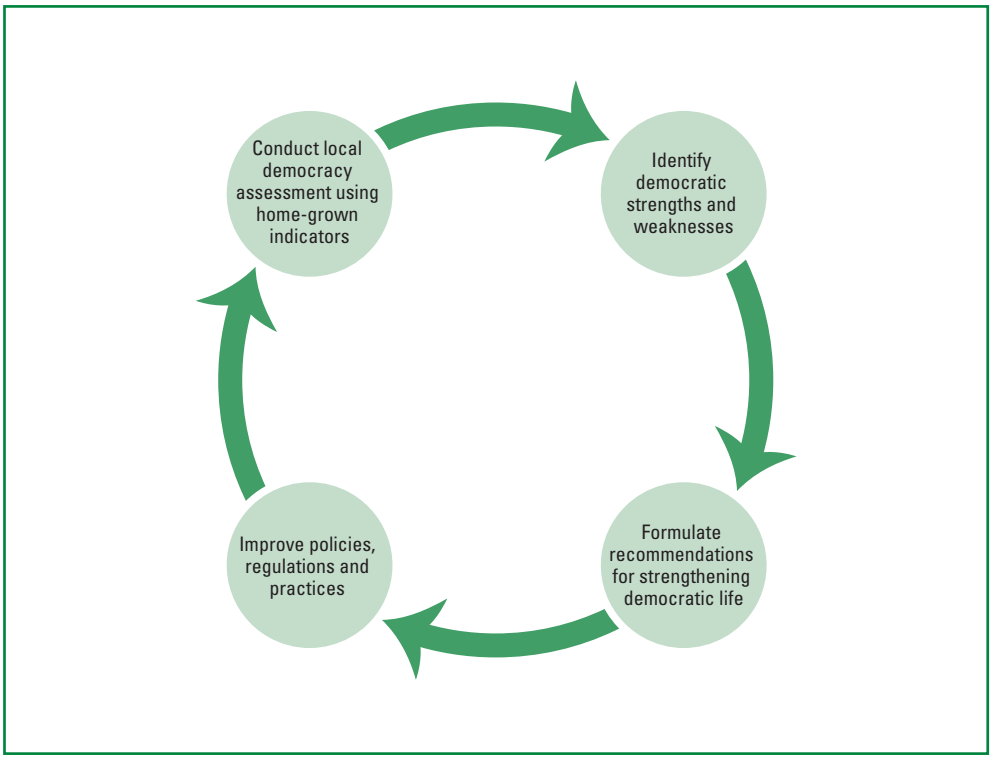
Evaluation of the entire SoLD process includes a meeting or debriefing within the core assessment and consultative teams about the overall assessment and implementation process. The purpose of such a meeting is to discuss what worked well and what could be improved, in order to learn lessons and develop recommendations for improvement that could be applied during a next assessment process.

Next steps involve looking back at the short-term, medium-term and long-term recommendations for reform that were identified in the assessment phase. As part of this reflection exercise, the lead organization may look at political developments that have taken place since the assessment was done, and see how dissemination and advocacy activities have been conducted and to what degree they have been successful. This also includes comparing the results of the research with other knowledge resources, and discussing various ways in which citizens can monitor the implementation of reform measures.

Consider local indicators and institutionalizing SoLD

The lead organization could, for instance, agree to continue a citizens' dialogue and to jointly monitor the recommendations that came out of the SoLD report in the period ahead. They may even go so far as to develop a set of local indicators that articulate strategic objectives for improving local democracy, together with an implementation plan, and explore whether institutionalizing the assessment (e.g., conducting a SoLD every fourth year) or extending it to more communities is desirable.

Figure 3.4. Reform cycle



Chapter 4

The SoLD Assessment Framework and Questions

The SoLD Assessment Framework and Questions

PRINCIPLES:
Popular control and equality

MEDIATING VALUES:
Representation - Participation - Authorization - Legitimacy - Responsiveness - Accountability - Transparency - Solidarity

Pillar 1: CITIZENSHIP, EQUAL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE	**Pillar 2: REPRESENTATIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES**	**Pillar 3: CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND PARTICIPATION**
1.1. Citizenship at the local level Overarching Q: How inclusive is the local unit of all people living within its boundaries and how inclusive are the decision-making processes that affect them? **1.2. Civil and political rights** Overarching Q: To what extent are civil and political rights and freedoms equally respected and upheld for every person living in the local unit?	**2.1. Elections and mechanisms of direct democracy at the local level** Overarching Q: To what degree do elections and direct democracy mechanisms[57] give citizens control over the local government and its policies? **2.2. Local legislature** Overarching Q: To what extent does the local legislature effectively fulfil its democratic mandate?	**3.1. Active citizen engagement** Overarching Q: To what extent is there full, active and regular citizen engagement in public life at the local level? **3.2. Media** Overarching Q: To what degree is the media effectively playing its role in sustaining democratic values in the local unit?

Pillar 1: CITIZENSHIP, EQUAL RIGHTS AND JUSTICE *[cont.]*	Pillar 2: REPRESENTATIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES *[cont.]*	Pillar 3: CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND PARTICIPATION
1.3. Economic, social, and cultural rights Overarching Q: To what degree are economic, social and cultural rights equally respected and upheld for every person living in the local unit? **1.4. Rule of law and access to justice** Overarching Q: To what extent are the local government and citizens equally subject to and protected by the law, and able to access justice?	**2.3. Political parties** Overarching Q: To what extent do political parties effectively play their democratic role at the local level? **2.4. Local executive/ governing bodies** Overarching Q: How accountable and responsive are local executive bodies in serving the local population? **2.5. Customary and traditional institutions** Overarching Q: To what degree do customary and traditional institutions and systems of governance influence the quality and functioning of democracy in the local unit?	

CONTEXT

i. Historical, geographical, socio-economic and demographic data

Overarching Q: What are the main historical, geographical and socio-economic characteristics of the local unit that are important for understanding the state of democracy?

ii. Local government influence

Overarching Q: What is the local government's role and influence within the country's institutional framework?

iii. Human safety and security

Overarching Q: What is the general level of human safety and security in the local unit?

While the relationships between the mediating values and pillars of analysis are varied, they should come out most clearly in the way the assessment questions are posed.

In a universal framework intended to be contextualized for each setting, assessment questions cannot be too detailed. The aim of this guide is therefore to remain broad and leave room for teams to further contextualize the questions and reflect the particularities of their environment. In doing so, however, it is important to keep in mind the fact that there is an intrinsic logic in the assessment framework between pillars/democratic principles, mediating values and assessment questions.

- Principles and values should be directly or indirectly reflected through legislation and protected by the justice system in place.
- Principles and values define the democratic qualities of the institutions and processes and should be reflected in their functioning.
- Principles and values exist to be used and enjoyed by citizens at the local level and facilitate a vibrant democratic life.

Given the centrality of the overarching values defined in the SoLD framework, it is crucial that the assessment questions are formulated in a way that reflects these values. For example: "I am asking about political plurality in the council because it allows full representation (mediating value) and full representation is a pre-requisite for popular control and equality (principle)".

The table below can guide assessment teams' approach to answering the assessment questions. With each question it is recommended to first assess what laws, policies and/or local regulations are in place, and then compare this information with the actual practice on the ground in the local unit. In order to evaluate the initial findings it is useful to develop both positive and negative indicators. This not only provides an evidence base for answering the question, but can also serve as a starting point for developing 'home-grown' indicators, relevant to the local unit. These indicators could be used as qualitative benchmarks and to measure progress and setbacks over time in case another SoLD assessment is done.

Example: What to look for?			
Laws, policies and local regulations	**Practice**	**Negative indicators**	**Positive indicators**
Examine legal, policy and institutional frameworks that protect and ensure participation and representation of marginalized groups in formal institutions and processes.	*Examine how fairly and impartially these legal, policy and institutional frameworks are applied at the local level, and how this impacts the participation and representation of marginalized groups.*	*Investigate evidence of exclusion, malpractices, as well as indirect and direct violations of the law taking place both in and outside the control of the government.*	*Investigate information about the number of councillors, party members, judges and government officials that can be considered part of one or more marginalized groups.*

Pillar 1: CITIZENSHIP, EQUAL RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

1.1. Citizenship at the local level

Overarching Q: How inclusive is the local unit of all people living within its boundaries and how inclusive are the decision-making processes that affect them?

Assessment questions:

1.1.1. How inclusive is the local unit's definition or interpretation of citizenship?

1.1.2. To what extent are the concerns, interests and rights of all who live in the local unit equally considered?

1.1.3. To what extent are different groups of people living in the local unit free from discrimination and exclusion, regardless of their nationality, age, residence, gender, sexuality, national or ethnic origin, skin colour, religion, political beliefs, language or any other status?

1.1.4. To what extent are all people living in the local unit able to freely participate in public life without discrimination (e.g. those not registered at birth, undocumented migrants, stateless people, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, etc.)?

1.1.5. How far do women and men enjoy equality in citizenship and all opportunities and entitlements associated with it, such as ownership, parenthood, children's citizenship, participation and representation in public affairs?

1.1.6. To what extent are youth and the elderly living in the local unit equally included and accepted in all aspects of life?

1.1.7. How far are different languages, cultures, religions and belief systems locally recognized and accepted?

1.1.8. To what extent is the local unit free from identity-based conflict, societal divisions and/or polarization between different segments of society?

1.2. Civil and political rights

Overarching Q: To what extent are civil and political rights and freedoms equally respected and upheld for every person living in the local unit?

Assessment questions:

1.2.1. To what extent are civil and political rights and freedoms equally guaranteed for all by the national constitution, laws and local regulations?
1.2.2. How equal and effective is the protection of people's right to have opinions, speak, associate, assemble and organize?
1.2.3. How secure is the freedom for all to practice their own religion, language or culture?
1.2.4. To what extent can individuals effectively claim their civil and political rights and freedoms, and how free are they from societal norms or restrictions in doing so?
1.2.5. To what extent do women and men have equal opportunities to access and exercise these rights and freedoms?
1.2.6. How free from harassment and intimidation are those who exercise their rights and freedoms as a means of opposition to local authorities or the ruling elite?
1.2.7. To what extent is the local unit able to facilitate enjoyment of these rights and freedoms for marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as minorities, indigenous/tribal communities, migrant, displaced and refugee populations or other groups of people?

1.3. Economic, social and cultural rights

Overarching Q: To what degree are economic, social and cultural rights equally respected and upheld for every person living in the local unit?

Assessment questions:

1.3.1. To what extent are economic, social and cultural rights equally guaranteed for all by the national constitution, laws and local regulations?
1.3.2. How far is access to education, work or social security available to all, without discrimination?
1.3.3. To what extent are basic necessities in life such as adequate food, health care, housing and clean water guaranteed for all?

1.3.4. To what extent can individuals effectively claim these basic necessities, and how free are they from societal norms or restrictions in doing so?
1.3.5. To what extent do women and men have equal opportunities for accessing and exercising these rights and freedoms?
1.3.6. How satisfied is the local population with the way local authorities deliver on these rights?
1.3.7. To what extent is the local unit able to facilitate enjoyment of these rights and freedoms for marginalized groups, minorities, indigenous/tribal communities, migrant, displaced and refugee populations or other groups of people?

1.4. Rule of law and access to justice

Overarching Q: To what extent are the local government and citizens equally subject to and protected by the law, and able to access justice?

Assessment questions:

1.4.1. How far is the rule of law accepted and respected throughout the local unit?
1.4.2. To what extent are all local institutions and public officials subject to the law and to transparent rules in the performance of their functions?
1.4.3. How accessible is the justice system, including law enforcement agencies, courts and legal assistance, to all sections of society, men and women alike?
1.4.4. How equal and secure is individuals' access to justice, to due process and to redress?
1.4.5. How impartial is the judicial system and to what extent is it trusted by the different sections of the local population?
1.4.6. How free are the courts and law enforcement agencies from manipulation, corruption and interference by political, private, criminal or illicit actors?
1.4.7. To what extent are traditional or customary justice systems operational in the local unit, and are they seen as alternative avenues for accessing justice?
1.4.8. To what extent do these institutions observe due rules of impartial and equitable treatment in the way they are functioning?
1.4.9. How effective are formal and informal institutions and mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution in the local unit?

Pillar 2:
REPRESENTATIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

2.1. Elections and mechanisms of direct democracy at the local level

Overarching Q: To what degree do elections and mechanisms of direct democracy give citizens control over local government and its policies?

Assessment questions:

2.1.1. How effective is the electoral system in granting the electorate a range of competitive choices, ensuring that their votes count equally and produce elected bodies that closely reflect their choices?

2.1.2. To what extent does the electoral system produce an executive that is subordinate to the council?

2.1.3. To what extent are referendums, recall, citizens' and agenda initiatives and other types of consultations transparent and inclusive of topics and outcomes that reflect the views of all segments of society?

2.1.4. To what extent do women and men fully and equally participate in electoral processes as voters and as candidates for elective office?

2.1.5. How accessible are elections and election-related information to all eligible voters in the local unit, including people with disabilities, the illiterate, rural dwellers, etc.?

2.1.6. To what degree do the local legislature and executive reflect the social composition of the electorate?

2.1.7. How impartial and transparent are electoral procedures for voter, candidate and party registration?

2.1.8. To what extent is equal access to media guaranteed for all political parties?

2.1.9. How free from corruption, intimidation or outside interference are elections, and to what extent are disputes or allegations of election fraud peacefully addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned?

2.2. Local legislature

Overarching Q: To what extent does the local legislature effectively fulfil its democratic mandate?

Assessment questions:

2.2.1. How independent is the local legislature from the executive, and how free are its members to express their opinions and propose alternative policies?

2.2.2. How equal is the representation of women and men in the local legislature and other elected governing bodies?
2.2.3. To what extent does the composition of the legislature mirror the local population? Which groups are over/underrepresented and why?
2.2.4. How transparent and inclusive are council procedures for consulting the public, and how accessible are elected representatives to their constituents?
2.2.5. How extensive and effective are the powers of the local legislature to oversee the executive and hold it to account?
2.2.6. How transparent and rigorous are the legislature's decision-making powers and procedures for budget approval and oversight of taxation and public expenditures?
2.2.7. How effective are mechanisms for protecting the local legislature and its members from external interference, corruption and other forms of inducement?

2.3. Political parties

Overarching Q: To what extent do political parties effectively play their democratic role at the local level?

Assessment questions:

2.3.1. How far does the party system enable political parties to effectively perform their roles in terms of campaigning, candidate nomination, member recruitment, training of politicians and influencing party plans, programmes and electoral manifestos?
2.3.2. To what extent do the political parties' capacities, resources and internal procedures allow the parties to function effectively?
2.3.3. How involved and influential are party members in party policy development and candidate selection?
2.3.4. How balanced is the number of women and men within the party and party leadership, and to what extent do women and men participate on equal footing?
2.3.5. To what extent do political parties cross ethnic, religious and linguistic divisions and offer equal opportunities to all to become party members or candidates?
2.3.6. To what degree do parties and party leaders receive public funding and/or other financial contributions? How free are parties from crime and corruption?
2.3.7. How representative and trusted are political parties and politicians at the local level?

2.4. Local executive/governing bodies

Overarching Q: How accountable and responsive are local executive bodies in serving the local population?

Assessment questions:

2.4.1. What is the extent of the local executive's authority and control over matters that are important to people's lives and how well is it trusted, informed, organized and resourced to do so?
2.4.2. Through what mechanisms do local officials occupy their positions? Election or appointment? Based on merits or connections?
2.4.3. To what degree is the local government, including armed forces, police and security agencies, subject to oversight by the legislature, the media and watchdog groups?
2.4.4. To what extent does the executive make government information available and accessible to all sections of the local population?
2.4.5. How open and transparent are processes for government agenda-setting, policy-making, policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation?
2.4.6. How inclusive and systematic are mechanisms for citizen participation and public consultation?
2.4.7. How accessible and reliable are public services for all those who need them?
2.4.8. How accountable is the local government in delivering these services?
2.4.9. How balanced is the number of women and men working for the local government and to what extent are government polices gender sensitive?

2.5. Customary and traditional institutions

Overarching Q: To what degree do customary and traditional institutions and systems of governance influence the quality and functioning of democracy in the local unit?

Assessment questions:

2.5.1. How far do customary, traditional and/or religious institutions and systems of governance play a role in the public affairs of the local unit?
2.5.2. How transparent and accepted is their institutional mandate, and to what extent do they have the trust and confidence of the local population?
2.5.3. How influential are these institution in relation to the local executive, legislature and judiciary?

2.5.4. To what extent do these institutions contribute to or undermine the delivery of services in the local unit?
2.5.5. To what degree do the decision-making processes and operations of these institutions foster gender equality and diversity in the local unit?
2.5.6. How far does the leadership and composition of these institutions mirror the local unit population in terms of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, class, etc.?
2.5.7. To what extent is there harmony between modern and traditional institutions of governance and how far are these institutions considered a source of stability?

Pillar 3: CITIZEN INITIATIVE AND PARTICIPATION

3.1. Active citizen engagement

Overarching Q: To what extent is there full, active and regular citizen engagement in public life at the local level?

Assessment questions:

3.1.1. To what extent do citizens undertake individual and collective actions to address issues of public concern?
3.1.2. To what degree does the local population organize itself through social and political movements, civil society organizations and/or civic associations?
3.1.3. To what extent do popular public figures, civic leaders and/or activists engage politically?
3.1.4. How often are public spaces such as parks, public meeting venues or online platforms being used for public deliberation and action, and to what degree do rules, such as those governing public gatherings, protests, demonstrations, etc., stand in the way of these initiatives?
3.1.5. To what extent does the local population express a need for and interest in citizen deliberation and participation in issues that affect their quality of life?
3.1.6. How free from intimidation and oppression are those who claim their right to freely speak and express views, organize, associate and mobilize themselves?
3.1.7. How pluralistic are forums for citizen participation and deliberation, and what are the typical roles of women and men in these forums?
3.1.8. How effective are citizen initiatives in addressing issues of concern and for holding decision-makers to account, e.g. for service delivery?

3.1.9. To what extent do citizen initiatives, actions and/or protest give rise to tension or conflict, and are these conflicts mitigated and resolved peacefully?

3.2. Media

Overarching Q: To what degree is the media effectively playing its role in sustaining democratic values in the local unit?

Assessment questions:

3.2.1. How safe and enabling is the environment for the media, including journalists, media workers and associated personnel, to operate freely?

3.2.2. How plural are media ownership, outlets and platforms at the local level, and how independent are local media from national media?

3.2.3. How independent and impartial are the media in the local unit and how free from capture by political, business or other interests?

3.2.4. How effective are the media in scrutinizing and investigating local government and other power holders on issues that matter to the local population?

3.2.5. How accessible are the media for male and female opinion leaders, and to what extent do the media play a role in combating or perpetuating gender-based stereotypes?

3.2.6. How accessible are media outlets and the Internet to everyone living within the local unit and how does this improve or affect equal access to information?

3.2.7. How representative are media of different opinions and how inclusive of the views of the entire local population, including marginalized or minority groups?

Endnotes

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Acknowledgements

Many people and institutions have in various ways contributed to the development of this publication. We wish to acknowledge with great appreciation the many assessment teams who have conducted or otherwise contributed to the many successful State of Local Democracy (SoLD) assessments in different parts of the world in the past decade. Their experiences, insights and expertise have not only inspired this revision of the SoLD assessment framework, but have also served as guidance along the way.

We are also highly indebted to all previous work conducted in the development of the first State of Democracy assessment framework, the Local Democracy Assessment Guide and related publications, especially *Democracy at the Local Level*; *Handbook on Democracy Assessment*; *Democracy Assessments in Eight Nations Around the World* and *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide*.

The review of the *Local Democracy Assessment Guide* (2003), in particular, has benefited tremendously from a participatory review process that began in 2009 with a workshop in Amman, Jordan following SoLD assessments in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Yemen. This was followed by another workshop in Lusaka, Zambia, in 2011. These events provided space for local democracy assessment teams from different regions to come together and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the original assessment framework, and propose areas for improvement, which resulted in this publication.

Our special thanks and gratitude go to the following experts who reviewed and provided specific input to this particular publication:

- Edna Co, Professor at the National College of Public Administration and Governance University of the Philippines, Diliman

- Ramón Fernán III from the Philippine Democracy Assessment Team
- Abdul Gaffar Karim, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- Kelly McMann, Associate Professor of Political Science and Interim Director of International Studies, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland
- Timothy D. Sisk, Professor and Associate Dean at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver
- Goran Fejic, former senior adviser in the Strategy and Policy Unit at International IDEA

We also thank Nyla Prieto, Kgothatso Semela-Serote and Rumbidzai Kandawasvika-Nhundu, who served as internal reviewers for this publication, and all other colleagues from International IDEA's Global and Regional Programmes who contributed to discussions and review events.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Lisa Hagman, International IDEA's Publications Officer, for successfully coordinating and managing the production of this guide and David Rosén for his invaluable administrative support throughout its development and publication.

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