The citizen-led democracy assessment approach

Lessons that Mongolia offers for the post-2015 development agenda

Democracy and governance can be assessed and measured. Doing so through citizen-led\(^1\) and owned democracy and democratic accountability assessment approaches builds country ownership of such measurements and assessments.

Since the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that followed the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, a variety of global data sets for measuring democracy and governance have been established. During the same period, citizen-led and owned approaches to democracy and democratic accountability assessments, such as International IDEA’s State of Democracy (SoD), State of Local Democracy (SoLD) and Democratic Accountability in service delivery assessment frameworks, were developed, tried and tested in a number of countries. Such approaches use both universal and context-specific indicators to enable comparative analysis while at the same time illuminating the uniqueness of a particular country’s democracy.

These assessments are led and become owned by the assessment countries themselves. This is an important attribute that sets them apart from other assessments.

Mongolia’s experience in applying the citizen-led approach to democracy and governance assessment offers valuable lessons for establishing country owned accountability mechanisms for inter-governmental processes such as the post-2015 development agenda.

In September 2003, Mongolia hosted the Fifth UN International Conference of New and Restored Democracies (ICNRD-5) that adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action, therein committing governments to draw and implement plans to strengthen democracy and ‘develop nationally-owned democratic governance’ indicators in order to monitor progress. In implementing its follow up actions to ICNRD-5, Mongolia chose International IDEA’s SoD

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\(^{1}\) Citizen-led in this case refers to ‘people led and owned’ and ‘people centred.’ ‘The people’ refers to women and men in all sections of society.
Based on the democratic governance indicators used by the assessment and the country information, we were able to formulate a national programme of action to consolidate democracy in Mongolia.

assessment, Mongolia developed democratic governance indicators (DGIs) which have since been used to periodically monitor the MDG-9. The SoD assessment framework provides universal indicators of democracy and democratic governance while enabling the development and inclusion of context-specific indicators that capture this dimension of each country’s democracy and democratic governance. In the case of Mongolia for instance, a total of 117 ‘core’ indicators (universal indicators of democracy) and 14 ‘satellite’ indicators (context-specific indicators) were developed to capture both the universal values and context-specific dimensions of Mongolian democracy respectively. By enabling the inclusion of universal and context-specific indicators, the SoD assessment framework is consistent with the principles of the post-2015 development agenda of respecting national priorities and taking national context into account.

Third, on the basis of the DGIs, Mongolia institutionalized and monitored democracy and democratic governance within a national monitoring and evaluation mechanism. The Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law (the lead Mongolian agency in researching and developing the DGIs) partnered with the National Statistics Office in this endeavour, resulting in the DGI becoming part of Mongolia’s national monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

In this regard, citizen-led and owned democracy assessment in Mongolia played a critical role in raising awareness about the state of Mongolian democracy, building in-country capacity for the conduct of SoD assessments and development of DGIs and galvanizing a nation around the domestic outcome of an inter-governmental process. Most importantly though, the SoD made it possible to develop a reform agenda that enjoys broad in-country ownership.

It is important to note that the SoD assessment process in Mongolia also enjoyed ample support from the international community, demonstrating that while any sustainable reform process is first and foremost dependent upon leadership and ownership by a country and its citizens, such processes can benefit immensely from the experience and support of the international community.

The Mongolia experience provides a solid example of how it is possible to assess progress in achieving democracy and democratic governance goals. It illustrates how citizen-led and owned approaches can provide a platform for implementing and monitoring the whole set of new goals that will be embodied in the post-2015 framework.

In conclusion, the citizen-led and owned assessment process is a mechanism that can translate and channel peoples’ everyday experiences, conversations and aspirations for their democracy, governance and development into the policymaking process.

• The process ignites a dynamic but structured engagement among a variety of in-country stakeholders;
• It raises awareness about the state of democracy and governance, builds the demand side and;
• It motivates political will for broadening and deepening the quality of democracy and governance.

Adopting and adapting such an approach for implementing and monitoring a global development agenda will provide further credence and assurance that indeed; the post-2015 development agenda embodies the principles of ‘inclusion and a people centred approach’ as well as one of a ‘people-led and owned’ process.
Recommendations

1. **The citizen-led approach should be used to implement, monitor and establish country owned accountability mechanisms for the post-2015 development agenda.** International IDEA’s State of Democracy, State of Local Democracy and Democratic Accountability assessment framework (developed as global public goods) already offer a basis for designing such a framework for the purpose of the post-2015 development framework. The citizen-led approach however, is as applicable and relevant for other development goals. Adopting it more widely will ensure that the ‘inclusive and people centred’ approach to developing the post-2015 development agenda permeates through its implementation and monitoring.

2. **The monitoring framework for the post-2015 development goals and targets should adopt universal and context-specific indicators.** This is critical for country ownership of the post-2015 development agenda. It would ensure that even in its implementation and monitoring, the global development framework remains ‘universal in nature, while taking account of differing national circumstances and respecting national policies and priorities.’ Again, International IDEA’s citizen-led assessment frameworks and the Mongolian experience provide an illustration of how this may be achieved.

“Putting the question, ‘what does democracy mean in your ordinary life,’ to herders in the countryside of Mongolia, triggered a whole exercise about democratic values, how democracy should function, in any country, and particularly, in Mongolia.


For more information on the topic of citizen-led approaches, see *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide*, which introduces the framework, its fundamental democratic principles, mediating values and examples of its application around the world. Further information relating to the State of Democracy (SOD) citizen-led assessment approach can be found at [http://www.idea.int/sod/](http://www.idea.int/sod/).