

About WGA

Introduction

According to Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, "good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development." While most people agree governance matters, there is less understanding regarding what aspects matter most and how to improve governance. The main problem is the lack of reliable, valid and comparable data on key governance issues. Unfortunately, many developing countries simply do not have the capacity or experience to conduct rigorous governance assessments. This has left many unanswered questions regarding when, why and how governance makes a difference to the way countries develop. Current indicators also provide inadequate measures for assessing changes in governance or for use in formulating and implementing reforms in specific countries.

Phase I - Pilot

The project was initiated in 1999 by Julius Court when he served as Programme Officer at the United Nations University (UNU). Together with Goran Hyden, who was invited to serve as joint coordinator, they developed the World Governance Survey (WGS) project. The pilot phase was carried out from 2000 to 2002. The survey focused on three main questions: How can we best measure governance? How does governance performance differ across time and space? Which are the most critical issues of governance?

Using a comprehensive framework and questionnaire, governance assessments were undertaken in 16 developing and transitional societies, representing 51% of the world's population. A national coordinator selected a panel of experts to complete the assessment exercise in each country. The panel comprised of persons with extensive experience of the governance realm (e.g. parliamentarians, researchers, lawyers, bureaucrats, etc); around 35 people were interviewed per country. The pilot project represented an initiative to try to generate new systematic, comprehensive assessments of governance at the national level.

First, the project developed a comprehensive framework and process-oriented set of indicators for assessing governance. The framework disaggregated the governance realm into six arenas and identified indicators based on widely held "principles" of good governance: participation, fairness, decency, accountability, transparency and efficiency.

Second, the project developed and tested a new approach to collecting governance data at the national level. Respondents were asked to rank each answer on a scale from 5 to 1; the higher the score, the better their perception of the quality of governance. In addition, respondents were invited to provide qualitative comments; thus the approach also generated very rich qualitative data.

The findings from the pilot phase were reported in UNDP's Human Development Report 2002 on Strengthening Democracy in a Fragmented World and Transparency International's Global Corruption Report 2002. 'Making sense of governance: Empirical evidence from 16 developing countries' by Goran Hyden, Julius Court and Kenneth Mease was published by Lynne Rienner in 2004. It provides a comprehensive assessment of the pilot's approach and findings. [Details/order online](#).

Phase II

Phase 2 (2005-2007) built on learning from the pilot phase and assessed governance in 10 countries.

Phase 2 occurs at a time when governance has become a central concern in development policy debates and the number of assessment has been growing. WGA offers a unique, perceptions based take on the issues. It is widely recognised that without better governance development progress will not be possible in many countries. At the same time, governance is a broad term, comprising a range of capacities, 'rules of the game', policies and actual practices.

Donors have increasingly sought to assess the governance situation of countries to which they are

providing aid, for several reasons. One regards the question of allocating aid. As the Sachs report and other research suggest, aid is likely to be better used and development is more likely to happen in well governed countries. Another question of relevance to donors is how to 'tailor' their activities and support the specific situation of a country (what aid modalities? what kinds of activities?) Furthermore, recognising the importance of governance for developmental progress, donors have sought to support improvements in governance through specific activities, ranging from support for public administrations, to anti-corruption, to support for democratisation and the protection of human rights.

Governance assessments are a crucial input for these types of policies. There has been a recent proliferation of governance assessment tools and of governance-related indices. These use different approaches, but most are completely or largely external to the country for which the assessment is carried out. Furthermore, many governance indices and assessments are closely tied to (particular) donor agencies; this can present problems of credibility and legitimacy. It is clear that governance is an area where the Paris Declaration demand for greater country ownership of the development agenda is challenging to realise.

The WGA is different. It is a survey of 'well informed persons' (WIPs) in a country, systematically covering a number of relevant groups and led by a local researcher. The survey captures a wide range of indicators/specific questions related to the overall concept of governance, covering key arenas and issues.

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