Democracy Assessments

Keboitse Machangana[1]
IDEA

Tool summary

The State of Democracy (SoD) assessment methodology was developed by [International IDEA](#) in 2000. It is a quality of democracy assessment framework for use by citizens in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their democracies (in order to raise awareness about the state of their democracy and contribute to evidence-based advocacy for reform and contribute to the democratic reform of their country). The assessment should be undertaken by an inter-disciplinary assessment team accompanied by a multi-stakeholder consultative/reference team in order to ensure an inclusive assessment process and the subsequent utilisation of assessment findings. According to the methodology, preliminary assessment findings are subjected to public scrutiny, debate and validation through various avenues such as media, stakeholder workshops and seminars. The methodology is universal in application, and has been applied in both developing and developed country contexts. .

What is it?

SoD is a four pillar qualitative democracy assessment framework anchored on the principles of popular control over public decision making and decision makers and equality of respect and voice between citizens in the exercise of that control. This is in addition to seven mediating values viz. participation, authorization, representation, accountability, transparency, responsiveness and solidarity, against which democratic institutions and processes are assessed. Under the four pillars of the assessment framework is a total of 15 sub-pillars, 15 over-arching questions and 75 specific questions. The following is an overview of the assessment framework (For a detailed version, refer *[Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide, 2008):](#)*

1. Citizenship, Law & Rights	2. Representative & Accountable Government	3. Civil Society & Popular Participation	4. Democracy beyond the State
1.1 **Nationhood & Citizenship**: *Is there agreement on a common citizenship without discrimination?*	2.1 **Free & Fair elections**: *Do elections give the people control over governments & their policies?*	3.1 **The media in a democratic society:** Do the media operate in a way that sustains democratic values?	4.1 **External influences on the country's democracy**: Is the impact of external influences broadly supportive of the country's democracy?

---

[1] Head of Democracy Assessment and Analysis, International IDEA

1.2 The Rule of Law & Access to Justice: *Are state & society consistently subject to the law?*	**2.2 The democratic role of political parties**: *Does the party system assist the working of democracy?*	**3.2 Political Participation**: Is there full citizen participation in public life?	**4.2 The country's democratic impact abroad**: Do the country's international policies contribute to strengthening global democracy?
1.3 **Civil & Political Rights:** *Are civil & political rights equally guaranteed for all?*	**2.3 Effective & responsive government**: *Is government effective in serving the public & responsive to its concerns*	**3.3 Decentralisation:** Are decisions taken at the level of government which is most appropriate for the people affected?	
1.4 **Economic & Social Rights:** Are economic & social rights equally guaranteed for all?	**2.4 The democratic effectiveness of parliament**: *Does the parliament or legislature contribute effectively to the democratic process?* **2.5 Civilian control of military & Police**: *Are military & police under civilian control?* **2.6 Integrity in public life:** *Is integrity in the conduct of public life assured?*		

Source: Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide, 2008 p.26.

How is it done?

A SoD assessment is intended to be an inclusive process that contributes to the democratisation process of the country being assessed. It is also a flexible assessment framework that can be used in full or in part, focussing on those specific issues/aspects which are relevant to the country and its context at the time of the assessment. Broadly, there are five essential steps in the conduct of a SoD assessment (adapted from *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide, 2008):*

1. *Initial decisions & agenda setting*

- Define the purpose of the assessment such as for e.g. consciousness raising, influencing public debate, agenda setting for reform, programme evaluation etc.
- Define the content of the assessment: Depending on the purpose of the assessment, the needs and the context of a country, it might be necessary to select only a few areas of assessment or to expand the areas of assessment beyond those highlighted in the framework. The framework allows for that flexibility to ensure that the assessment is relevant and useful to the country.
- Establish benchmarks and comparators: The assessment will be meaningless without standards and benchmarks for comparison. Again, depending on the purpose of the assessment, one could use international Standards, regional standards or National standards and commitments.
- Selection of assessors: This is the stage when decisions are made about the members of the assessment team. An interdisciplinary and multi-stakeholder assessment team not only allows for diverse perspectives to enrich the assessment but also improves utility of the assessment findings.
- Identify as comprehensive a range as possible of potential information sources
- Stakeholder consultation: It is important to consult with stakeholders from the earliest planning stages – to gather inputs of the purpose, focus, content and overall design of the assessment.
- Prepare a publication & dissemination strategy.
- Establish a time-frame for the assessment.
- Prepare a draft budget and obtain necessary resources.

2. *Data collection, analysis and organisation*

- Constructing a bibliography: This involves identifying appropriate sources of data /information, and, compiling and coding of sources
- Identify & sorting data: This stage comprises the painstaking work of reading and, identifying relevant data or evidence and filing or recording it under the appropriate question.
- Arranging & prioritizing items for inclusion: 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.
- Confirming answers to search questions: One way of thinking of 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.
- Writing a draft report: Though the decision about the form and length of a finished draft may have been taken earlier, both may

need to be modified in the light of the material assembled. Care should be taken to avoid long unbroken chunks of texts.

- <u>Setting the report in context</u>: It is crucial to write an introduction that offers an intelligible justification of the need for and the methodology of the assessment. This information will almost certainly include a discursive summary of the country's recent process of democratic development, and of any features in the country's political traditions and culture that may have given the process its distinctive trajectory and help explain its current condition.

3. Convening a national workshop

The convening of a national workshop is a key point in the assessment process in order to discuss the draft report and its provisional findings and improve its content and presentation. The workshop is also helpful for drafting some resolutions on the way forward and linking the findings of the assessment to the reform agenda. Although this event could be confined to professional and academic experts, it will have much more impact if it is widened to include leading public figures, government and party officials, and representatives of human rights and other campaigning organizations, as well as media personnel and sympathetic figures from neighbouring countries.

4. Making the democracy assessment public

The final goal of a democracy assessment is to give a country's society at large a thorough analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of its democratic arrangements so that the citizens become aware and take appropriate actions. Therefore, the final report has to be widely disseminated and promoted to ensure that its findings are fully debated. Formulating effective and realistic strategies for dissemination is even more critical in countries with high level of illiteracy and where the state censorship of the media is repressive. Deciding the forms of publication of the report and engaging the media from the very outset prior to the commencement of assessment is a crucial component of the media strategy.

5. From assessment to reforms

A democracy assessment is not an end in itself but a means to assist a democratic reform process by providing the systematic evidence, argument and comparative data on which reforms might be based. It could well form the basis for a further and separate stage, which is that of working up specific reform proposals, perhaps in association with relevant campaigning groups and experts in key areas identified by the assessment. The potential for initiating, implementing and sustaining

significant democratic reforms, however, must be seen as a function of four larger factors that can act alone or in combination to affect the type of democratic reform possible, both in the short term and in the longer term. The four factors are: the contexts in which the assessments were carried out; the types of influence that the assessment made possible; the audience to which the assessment was directed; and the types of output that were produced.

Benefits

- SoD assessments provide an opportunity for a country to reflect on the quality of its democracy, and mount a reform agenda for their country that is not necessarily imposed by external actors.
- SoD assessment methodology is equally applicable in a diverse range of countries and equally applicable in generating concrete proposals for democratic reform
- Multi-stakeholder inclusion in the assessment process viz. academia, civil society organisations, political parties, parliament, the executive etc. not only inculcates a culture of dialogue and debate among various stakeholders, but ensures that democratic reform agendas are a result of collective reflection.
- Importantly, SoD assessments provide a benchmark/baseline upon which a country can assess itself over a period of time.

Challenges and lessons

- The SoD methodology places critical importance on both professional and political dimensions of the assessment process. It cannot be a "quick and dirty" exercise, and requires adequate human and financial resources, as well as commitment.
- The success of SoD relies heavily on the agents of the assessment and their ability to provide the broad conditions of ownership for key stake holders who have the capacity and opportunity to drive the reform process. Where the assessment enjoys the engagement of key stakeholders as for e.g. in the case of Mongolia, a reform agenda can be developed, implemented and monitored.
- Applying the whole framework provides an overall snap shot of the state of democracy at a given time, while a targeted application of the framework can allow for deeper exploration of specific priority issues.
- Experience of assessments has shown that achieving the effective inclusion of minorities and women's participation; equal access to justice and protection of the right to life, and meaningful intra-party democracy still remain rather precarious.
- The achievements that have proven relatively easier are: obtaining a broadly agreed constitution with a bill of rights; establishing some sort of office of ombudsmen and/or a public defender; holding free elections and establish universal suffrage; supporting the revival of local

government; and ensuring the protection of basic freedoms such as party association, press, speech and assembly.

Key resources

Beetham, D. et.al (eds). *Assessing the Quality of Democracy: A Practical Guide*. International IDEA. (2008)
http://www.idea.int/publications/aqd/index.cfm
☞   This Practical Guide presents International IDEA's State of Democracy (SoD) assessment Framework. Developed for public use around the world, the SoD Framework has been applied in some 20 countries worldwide since its first launch in 2000.

Beetham, D (Ed). *The State of Democracy: Democracy Assessments in Eight Nations Around the World. Springer (2002)*
http://www.amazon.com/State-Democracy-Assessments-Nations-Around/dp/9041119310 (for purchase)
☞   This offline publication is the robust and sensitive study of democratization in eight very different countries at its varying stages viz. Bangladesh, El Salvador, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, New Zealand, Peru and South Korea. This unique comparative study presents the findings of in-country teams of experts in the eight countries on the state of democracy in their own country and concludes with an analysis and synthesis of their findings to suggest an overall general trajectory of the democratization process.

Council for Community of Democracies (CCD)
http://www.ccd21.org/
☞   CCD is the only nongovernmental organization in the world with an exclusive focus on the Community of Democracies. It believes that an effective way to consolidate the gains of democratic expansion is by strengthening that Community.

CCD: *Prospects for Democratic Transition in the Middle East and North Africa: Implications of the Central/EastEuropean and African Experiences.* A Conference report on the same theme organized in Budapest in 2007
http://ccd21.org/pdf/budapest_report.pdf
☞   The report contains several case studies of countries in democratic transition based on assessment of the quality of democracy

CHASS, University of Toronto: *Democracy Assessment Questionnaire*
http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/pol103y/pdf/Questionnaire.pdf
☞   The Democracy assessment questionnaire was developed as the key instrument for International IDEA's programme on the 'State of Democracy'. The framework of questions was agreed by an international panel of experts after exhaustive discussion and comparison of existing assessment frameworks and methodologies.

Democratic Audit: *Democracy Assessment Framework*
http://www.democraticaudit.com/auditing_democracy/
http://www.democraticaudit.com/auditing_democracy/assessmentframework.php

☞   Democratic Audit is a research organization, attached to the Human
       Rights Centre, University of Essex in U.K. It draws upon a wide range
       of collaborators from academia, journalism, the legal profession and
       elsewhere. They conduct original research into the quality of
       democracy and political freedom. The document listed in the link
       provides a framework for democracy assessments, an adaptation of
       the IDEA framework based on 14 principles.

Democracy Centre
http://www.democracyctr.org/about/

☞   Founded in San Francisco in 1992, The Democracy Center works
       globally to advance social justice through a combination of
       investigation and reporting, training citizens in the art of public
       advocacy, and organizing international citizen campaigns. Their
       website gives very useful links to organizations and other resources
       concerned with democracy assessments.

Democracy Digest
http://www.demdigest.net/blog/about
http://www.demdigest.net/blog/links

☞   Democracy Digest provides news, analysis and information on
       democracy assistance and related issues. The blog is a daily
       installment of the Democracy Digest e-bulletin and produced at the
       National Endowment for Democracy. The Network is affiliated with the
       World Movement for Democracy, a global network of democrats
       including activists, practitioners, academics, policy makers and
       funders, who have come together to cooperate in the promotion of
       democracy.

Democracy Reporting International (DRI)
http://www.democracy-reporting.org/e_assessments.html

☞   DRI is a non-partisan, independent and non-for-profit group of experts
       formed to promote political participation of citizens, accountability of
       state bodies and the development of democratic institutions world-
       wide. DRI offers democracy assessments outside elections to remedy
       the frequent lack of international attention to the political-electoral
       process between elections. These assessments analyze the
       implementation of recommendations resulting from previous elections
       and consider broader democratization issues.

DEMOCRACY INTERNATIONAL (DI)
http://democracyinternational.com/reports.html
☞ Democracy International, Inc. (DI) designs, implements, and evaluates democracy and governance programs worldwide. DI offers expertise in election processes and election monitoring, political party organizing, local government and decentralization, legislative strengthening, civil society development, strategic communications, and rule of law programming.

Freedom House
http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1
☞ Freedom House, a non-profit, nonpartisan organization, is a clear voice for democracy and freedom around the world. Through a vast array of international programs and publications, Freedom House is working to advance the remarkable worldwide expansion of political and economic freedom.

Freedom House*: Freedom in the World*
http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15
☞ *Freedom in the World*, a flagship publication of Freedom House, is the standard-setting comparative assessment of global political rights and civil liberties. Published annually since 1972, the survey ratings and narrative reports on 193 countries and 15 related and disputed territories are used by policymakers, the media, international corporations, civic activists, and human rights defenders to monitor trends in democracy and track improvements and setbacks in freedom worldwide.

Freedom House*: Nations in Transit*
http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=17&year=2008
☞ *Nations in Transit* is the only comprehensive, comparative, and multidimensional study of reform in the former Communist states of Europe and Eurasia. *Nations in Transit* tracks the reform record of 29 countries and administrative areas and pinpointed for policymakers, researchers, journalists, and democracy advocates alike the greatest reform challenges and reform opportunities facing the countries and territories that make up this vast geographic space.

Galligan, Y & Clavero, S. *Assessing Gender Democracy in the European Union:*
A Methodological Framework. Reconstituting Democracy in Europe, European Union (RECON)
http://www.qub.ac.uk/cawp/Latest/RECON_wp_0816.pdf
http://www.reconproject.eu/projectweb/portalproject/AboutRECON.html
☞ RECON seeks to clarify whether democracy is possible under conditions of pluralism, diversity and complex multilevel governance. This paper presents a methodological framework for assessing the

quality of democracy in the European Union from a gender perspective. The methodology was developed in the context of a broader project that aims to derive a set of empirical indicators of democratic performance for the European Union, being undertaken within the EU funded project *Reconstituting Democracy in Europe* (RECON).

Hachhethu, K et al. *Nepal in Transition: A Study on the State of Democracy*. International IDEA (2008)
http://www.idea.int/publications/nepal_in_transition/index.cfm
☞ This report presents major findings of a survey conducted in April 2007 by the Nepal Chapter of the State of Democracy in South Asia and International IDEA. The findings indicate a shift in the people's perspective compared to an earlier survey conducted in 2004.

International Idea
http://www.idea.int/resources/
☞ The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide. It is a pioneer in democracy assessments. The publications and resources section of their website is a virtual treasure of information and reports on the state of democracy from a global perspective.

Landman, T & Dellepiane,S. *Democracy and Development.* An Issue Paper prepared for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
http://www.um.dk/NR/rdonlyres/2EE0B728-96A9-4A16-B490-5297DDA1C8A5/0/DemocracyandDevelopmentDenmarkEssexDraft2.pdf
☞ This issue paper contributes to a discussion on the sets of values and standards derived from democracy and human rights in the development of Denmark's approach to and support for the promotion of democracy and justice.

Mcmahon, E & Kornheiser, E: *Assessing the Assessors: Correlating Democracy Methodologies.* In "Social Indicators Research ".Springer, The Netherlands (2009)
http://www.springerlink.com/content/72442p204415hx29/
☞ This offline paper considers the question of how to "measure" democracy i.e. attach an objective, or at least standardized, quantitative value to a nation or polity's level of democracy. A number of instruments have been independently developed with this aim in mind. To what extent do they measure the same phenomenon, and how closely are their findings correlated? This study finds a significant variance between recent data from three democracy assessment instruments analyzed.

Rossbach, D. *Individual Assessments of Democracy in Post-Communist Europe and Support for the European Union.* A paper presented at the annual meeting of The Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, Illinois, Apr 07, 2005
http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/0/8/4/6/5/p84653_index.html
☞   This offline paper examines the effect that satisfaction with the progress of democratization in East Central Europe has on an individual's views towards joining the European Union.

The National Democratic Institute: *Democracy Assessment in Bosnia-Herzegovina*
http://www.ndi.org/
http://www.ndi.org/files/Bosnia_Assessment_Report.pdf
☞   The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. The report examines the post-conflict and post-communist legacies impeding Bosnia's democratic transition and presents recommendations on democracy assistance going forward.

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD)
http://www.nimd.org/page/about_nimd
http://www.nimd.org/page/nimd_publications
☞   The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is a democracy assistance organization for political parties in young democracies. NIMD is currently working with more than 150 political parties from 17 programme countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe. Their website offers a good list of resources on democracy-centric organizations

The State of Democracy in Asia Report, Oxford University Press (2007)
http://www.democracy-asia.org/index.htm
http://www.oup.co.in/search_detail.php?id=144394
☞   The *State of Democracy in South Asia* project is an attempt to answer the question: Is a South Asian imagination of Democracy available for reconstruction? It adopts an approach that integrates insights from several worlds that of the academic as well as that of the activist. The report is offline and can be purchased from the link above.

Tungwarara, O. *Evaluating Democratic Progress in Africa.* in *Democracy at Large, Volume 3.* The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
http://www.democracyatlarge.org/vol3_no1/vol3_no1_Tungwarara.htm
☞   The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) is an independent, non-governmental organization providing professional support to electoral democracy. D*emocracy at large* is an online journal of IFES designed to reflect the varied interests and concerns of democracy professionals. The article shows how using continental standards of democratic governance, AfriMAP is helping African researchers measure progress towards democracy and identify obstacles to further democratic growth

UNDP: *Governance Assessment Portal (GAP)*
http://gap.itsyn.com/areas-of-governance/democracy
☞   The Governance Assessment Portal aims to be a hub of information and resources and a valuable entry-point on democratic governance assessments.

USAID Office of Democracy & Governance (DG): *Strategic Assessment*
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/technical_areas/dg_office/assess.html
☞   This link provides information and reports of DG Office's work that mostly relates to assessment of the state of democracy in aid-recipient countries.

Case studies

The Mongolia democracy assessment

The Mongolia democracy assessment was the first government-led SoD assessment. The assessment benefited a lot from multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder participation. The Mongolia SoD assessment was motivated by that country's role as chair of the International Conference of New & Restored Democracies (ICNRD) and it's commitment to develop democratic governance indicators were in accordance with the ICNRD-5 outcome document. It is important to note that in using the IDEA assessment framework, Mongolia contextualised it by introducing "satellite indicators" which captured Mongolia's peculiarities and context, while maintaining the universal or "core indicators" of democratic governance which would allow for comparative analysis. Mongolia also used other research methods and tools to complement the SoD assessment framework. In the words of Ambassador Ochir Enkhtsetseg, Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations, the Mongolia assessment process was a highly participative process achieved through dialogues, debates and various conferences which were organised to communicate both the process and the findings of the assessment. The assessment process is also said to have raised awareness among members of the public about the state of democracy in Mongolia.

As a result of the democracy assessment, Mongolia identified a 9th Millennium Development Goal for itself, in order to address priority issues emerging from the assessment. The MDG 9 focuses on human rights, democratic governance and corruption. This is an example of how an assessment can be useful in identifying priorities for reform.

Through partnership with UNDP, Mongolia developed democratic governance indicators (DGI) which are now being used to monitor progress in addressing identified priority areas for reform. These democratic governance indicators have been institutionalised as part of the National Indicator and Monitoring system implemented by the National Statistics Office. Ambassador Ochir further acknowledged the capacity built through the assessment. She noted that the assessment team was trained in the assessment methodology and they have now acquired knowledge and skills for applying and SoD. Therefore, SoD assessments are also valuable in building in-country capacity for, defining indicators of democracy, and monitoring and evaluating them from the point of view of the citizens of the country. For further information listen to Ambassador Ochir on: http://www.idea.int/sod/ochir_enkhtset_interview.cfm

Democracy assessment and reforms in The Philippines

The Philippines is an example of a country where the SoD assessment framework was applied in a targeted manner. The Philippines assessment team, led by Professor Edna Co of the University of the Philippines has now conducted a total of four assessments focussing on specific topics within the assessment framework. The first assessment conducted in 2005 focussed on "Free and Fair Elections and the Democratic Role of Political Parties". The second assessment conducted in 2007 focussed on "Corruption". The third assessment conducted in 2007 focussed on "Social & Economic Rights". The fourth assessment that is currently ongoing focuses on "Rule of Law & Access to Justice in the Philippines". All these assessments have been hailed as invaluable resources for institutions such as the Philippines Electoral Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman in the Philippines and the Human Rights Commission of the Philippines.

The Philippines SoD assessment teams are often constituted by a mix of academics and representatives of civil society organisations. The Philippines case provides a good example of how, when resources are not available to apply the whole assessment framework at once, the assessment can be applied in a targeted manner focussing critical issues of importance to the country at a specific point in time. For more information listen to Prof. Edna Co. on: http://www.idea.int/sod/sod_in_the_philippines.cfm