News from the Interface of Statistics and Human Rights:
The Metagora Project Ends, but the Montreaux Process Continues

by Jana Asher

Over the past three decades, statisticians have increasingly made an impact on the monitoring and attainment of human rights through the development and transition of statistical techniques to the human rights community. Only recently, however, have official statisticians—that is, statisticians working in governmental agencies—begun to consider issues of human rights in their work, and official human rights practitioners—that is, members of national human rights institutions—begun to consider how statistics can improve human rights monitoring. Over the past decade, the largest concrete effort to bring those statisticians and human rights practitioners together has been the Metagora project, a project in which the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program has been significantly involved and which has resulted in strong contributions to statistical methodology for enhancing and attaining human rights in countries around the world.

Raul Suarez, General Co-ordinator of Metagora, addresses attendees at the Metagora Concluding Forum. Photo by Jana Asher.

The seeds of the Metagora project were planted at an international conference held in Montreux, Switzerland, in September 2000, titled "Statistics, Development and Human Rights." That conference, sponsored by the International Association for Official Statistics (IAOS), allowed three separate communities of experts—statisticians, human rights practitioners, and development specialists—to interact formally for the first time and discuss the possibility of ongoing monitoring of governance and human rights as a world-wide initiative. From that conference, an international network of experts and organizations arose, united by a common commitment to developing tools and indicators of governance and human rights. The "Montreux Process" – or continued development of the ideas first discussed at the IAOS conference in Montreux—developed over the course of additional consultations and workshops, leading to the creation of a project proposal to develop and test concrete tools and indicators for measuring governance and human rights. That proposal was accepted and funded by the European Commission, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development agreed to house the fledgling project within its Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st

Century (PARIS 21) program. Thus, the "Measuring Democracy, Human Rights and Good Governance" (METAGORA) project was born.

Over the next four years, the Metagora project funded, in whole or in part, six initiatives. Three initiatives involved random sample surveys—addressing ill-treatment by police in Mexico City, Mexico; the effect of the Land Reform policies in South Africa; and the land rights of indigenous peoples in the Philippines. Additional efforts included the collection of information on human rights abuses in Sri Lanka, the development of a database of indicators on the right to education in Palestine, and the addition of a governance module to existing official surveys in the Andean Community of South America, and Francophone Africa. In each case, local partners developed the project proposal and completed the work, but also participated in the Metagora community via forums and meetings. Outside experts, including those provided by the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, interacted with the local partners to assist in their efforts. In each case, a tangible product was produced, most frequently a pair of reports explaining the results of the initiatives and making policy recommendations based on those results.

Two additional outputs were created via Metagora. The first was a survey of projects across the globe that involved the measurement of governance and/or human rights. The results of the survey were preserved in a database titled the "Inventory of Initiatives" and made available via the Metagora web site (www.metagora.org/html/aboutus/about_inventory.html). The second was a set of Training Materials, designed to capture the lessons learned during the development and implementation of the six key Metagora initiatives. Those Training Materials are also mounted on the Metagora web site (www.metagora.org/training), and include guidelines on developing indicators and statistics measuring governance and human rights, as well as an encyclopedia of terms, case study, and set of tools used within the key initiatives.

In all of its activities, Metagora maintained several philosophical tenets. The first was a "bottom-up" approach, in that statistics and indicators were developed by or in cooperation with key stakeholders and focused on locally-relevant governance and human rights issues. Tools and procedures were developed for or adapted to the local context and culture, and the resulting statistics and indicators were therefore highly relevant for local policy decisions. The second was a "North/South" partnership that emphasized the expertise within and needs of the Global South over the desires of the Global North. Finally, Metagora emphasized a "cross-fertilization" method during which members of country-specific initiatives interacted with each other to share knowledge and ideas.

The AAAS Science and Human Rights Program was involved in the Metagora project from its inception. Former Program director, Audrey Chapman, contributed both

documents and expertise based on her work on indicators of social, economic and cultural rights. Jana Asher, former Program Associate, took on multiple roles within the Metagora community. She was primarily responsible for the development of the Metagora Training Materials, and also served as an adviser to multiple Metagora activities, including surveys in Mexico, South Africa, and the Philippines. She led a training seminar for the Palestinian initiative, and served as the keynote speaker during a conference sponsored by the Sri Lanka initiative.

Audrey Chapman joins the conference via teleconferencing technology. Photo by Jana Asher.

The Metagora Concluding Forum, in which Chapman, Asher and Mona Younis, the current Program director, participated, was convened for the purpose of formally bringing to a close the Metagora project, but also as a venue for exploring new initiatives that arose out of the Metagora project and determining next steps within the "Montreux Process." Several new initiatives were discussed, including an expanded survey effort to measure indigenous peoples' rights within the Philippines and New Zealand, an expanded survey to measure police force behavior in Queretaro City, Mexico, and new surveys in Palestine, Vietnam, and Ecuador, among other countries.

Some of the initial participants in the Montreux conference, as well as experts such as Miron Straf of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, discussed more generally what remains to be done within the Montreux process, including the importance of translating the tangible products of Metagora into languages other than English, and clarifying the vision that will carry the Montreux process forward. Specifically, Straf Identified three main needs to be addressed in the future: to put greater emphasis on developing measures for impact evaluation and less emphasis on process measures and country-level indicators; to develop disaggregated statistics and indicators not just along demographic lines but also along sectoral lines (i.e., education, health, etc.); and to institutionalize data collection and indicator creation specific to governance and human rights, much like data collection and indicator creation related to economics and trade have been institutionalized in the activities of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

Attendees of the Metagora Concluding Forum included several heads of statistical agencies and chairs of national human rights committees, along with UN staff members, members of NGOs, and expert consultants. Photo by Jana Asher.

On the second day of the Metagora Concluding Forum, a panel of officials from national statistical offices discussed their hopes for future efforts to measure governance and human rights, and representatives of several national human rights institutions discussed their commitment to evidence-based policy decisions within their organizations. Finally, members of the Global Programme on Capacity Development for Democratic Governance Assessments and Measurements, housed at the Oslo Governance Centre of the United Nations Development Programme, discussed their future plans, which include maintenance of the outputs of the Metagora project, namely the Training Materials and Inventory of Initiatives.

Although the exact future of the "Montreux Process" is not certain, what is clear is the commitment of the participants in the Metagora Concluding Forum to continuing the work started eight years ago in Montreux. Now that Metagora has proven that the measurement of governance and human rights is attainable, the tools and methods needed to do so will continue to be developed and improved. And as these new tools, methods, and indicators become available, the Science and Human Rights Program is committed to disseminating them to the human rights community as quickly and effectively as possible.

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