The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies

Jon Hall
The World: 2009

• Around the world, societies are increasingly concerned with their quality of life and a consensus is growing around the need to develop a more comprehensive view of progress rather than focussing on the economic one (GDP)

• In an age of unprecedented, and overwhelming, information flows, the common understanding necessary for informed public discourse is often inadequate
Who Cares About Indicators?

“Statistical indicators are the structural DNA codes of nations. They reflect a society’s values and goals and become the key drivers of economic and technological choices”

Hazel Henderson
Who Cares About Indicators?

- We are what we measure
- We get what we measure
- We manage what we measure
Overview

- What and Why is the Global Project?
- Objective and Subjective Measures
- Frameworks for Indicators
Are We What We Measure?

- For 60 years Gross Domestic Product has been the dominant way in which the world has measured and understood progress. This approach has failed to explain many of the factors that impact most on people’s lives.

“We have to start measuring welfare, not just output”

Angel Gurria, OECD Secretary General, 2007
The Need for **New Measures**

“We Democrats have a very different measure of what constitutes progress in this country”

*Barack Obama*
Financial Crisis ??
Mid-life Crisis ??
Imagine a World ...

Where Citizens shared a common trusted information base about *whether life is getting better*?
Where policy-makes were held more accountable and focussed on the issues that really mattered
Where political discussion gave more focus to the ends a society wanted to achieve rather than the means to achieve them
Measuring Progress Means

• Providing key indicators on the position and progress/development of a community

• Looking at economic, social and environmental concerns side by side and the links between them

• Discussing where we have come from and where we are heading
Measuring Progress Can Help

- Redefine progress and development
- Help ensure that each society protects what is precious to them as they progress: if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it
- Reach agreement on the (political) ends we want to achieve – thereby focussing debate on the means to achieve them
- Promote accountability and the political economy of reform
Agreeing on the Outcomes We Seek

“We may not agree on abortion, but surely we can agree on reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies in this country.

...... Passions fly on immigration, but I don't know anyone who benefits when a mother is separated from her infant child or an employer undercuts American wages by hiring illegal workers. This, too, is part of America's promise, the promise of a democracy where we can find the strength and grace to bridge divides and unite in common effort.”

Barack Obama
Why a Global Project?

• The Global Project on aims to foster the development of sets of key economic, social and environmental indicators to provide a comprehensive picture of how the well-being of a society is evolving and seeks to encourage each society to consider in an informed way the crucial question: is life getting better?

• Brings together the large and growing movement that seeks to understand and measure progress.

• The Global Project is the first systematic global effort to go “beyond GDP” by enabling and promoting new ways to measure societal progress.
The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies

• Three main streams of work:
  – What to measure?
  – How to measure?
  – Ensure that measures are used

• Build a partnership with international national and local organisations, foundations, etc.

• Partners: WB, UNDP, UNICEF, IADB, AfDB, EC, INTOSAI, ESCWA, ESCAP, COE

• Associates: national and international organisations, NGOs, universities, etc.
A Growing Movement

- National initiatives: Australia, US, Ireland, South Africa, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Canada, Netherlands, etc.
- International Association of Supreme Auditors
- Local initiatives:
  - US: Community Indicators Consortium
  - EU: Council of Europe
  - UK: Young Foundation and the NEF
  - France: FAIR
  - Italy: Sbilanciamoci
  - Latin America: Como Vamos
- Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
- International Society for Quality of Life Studies
- World Women’s Forum
- WEF Global Council “Benchmarking the progress of societies”
Stiglitz Commission on “measurement of economic performance and social progress”

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<th>J. Stiglitz</th>
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<td>A. Sen</td>
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3 working groups
Report in September 2009
The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies

- Three main streams of work:
  - What to measure?
  - How to measure?
  - Ensure that measures are used
- Build a partnership with international national and local organisations, foundations, etc.
- Partners: WB, UNDP, UNICEF, IADB, AfDB, EC, INTOSAI, UNESCWA, UNESCAP
- Associates: national and international organisations, NGOs, universities, etc.
Events 2008

- **May**: Turning Statistics into Knowledge (Stockholm)
- **June**: OECD Committees on territorial policy and COE committee on social cohesion
- **September**: Summer School in Siena
- **September**: Conference on Measuring progress of Russia
- **October**: World Women’s Forum on Progress of Societies
- **October**: Conference in Rennes on “Building together local indicators for societal progress”
- **November**: WEF meeting on “Benchmarking the progress of societies”
- **November**: Forum on the progress of Australia
- **December**: Conference on local communities indicators (Strasbourg)
The second OECD World Forum on “Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies”

- In co-operation with EC, OIC, UN, World Bank
- 1200 participants from 130+ countries:
  - From multiple sectors and professions
  - From multiple countries at various level of development
- 200+ speakers from 50 countries and 15 IOs
- Webcasting of main sessions (available on the web site [www.oecd.org/oecdweforum](http://www.oecd.org/oecdweforum))
- Exhibition on new tools to communicate statistics
The Istanbul Declaration, 2007

- A culture of evidence-based decision making has to be promoted at all levels of government.

- We affirm our commitment to measuring and fostering the progress of societies in all their dimensions and to supporting initiatives at the country level.

- We urge statistical offices, public and private organisations, and academic experts to work alongside representatives of their communities to produce high-quality, fact-based information that can be used by all of society to form a shared view of societal well-being and its evolution over time.
Istanbul World Forum

- Istanbul Video
Events 2009

- **March**: Conference on “The use of evidence for policy processes” (Paris)
- **April-September**: regional conferences in preparation of the III World Forum
- **June**: Conference of the International Institute for Information Design on visualisation of statistics (Paris)
- **July**: Conference of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (Florence)
- **July-September**: Summer Schools
- **August**: Session at the conference of the International Statistical Institute
- **October**: 3rd OECD World Forum
Outputs for 2009

- Handbook on Measuring Progress in Practice
- Framework or Taxonomy for Progress
- Quality Framework for Sets of Indicators
- Lessons about Successful Sets of Indicators
- Training courses in Kyoto, Ottawa, Canberra, Durban, Florence...
The 3rd OECD World Forum
Charting Progress, Building Visions, Improving Life
Busan, Korea 27-30 October 2009

• 1500 participants from 140+ countries:
  – From multiple sectors and professions
  – From multiple countries at various level of development
• How is the world progressing?
• What do new paradigms for progress mean for policy makers?
• How can evidence promote social change?
• What institutions does the world need to take this forward?
Challenges for Statistics and Statisticians

• Maintaining relevance
Measurements that MATTER

That's exactly .0001 of a second off the world record...

That's somewhere between thirteen and thirty thousand Iraqi citizens killed in the invasion....

AGE, 13.5-2004
Challenges for Statistics and Statisticians

- Maintaining relevance
- Coming to terms with the fact that the art of counting is ‘political’ and we should manage the process or get involved earlier on
- Becoming more open to the world outside the NSO
- Better communication
Objective and Subjective Components

Objective components—longevity, income, air-quality

The stuff we can measure "precisely"
Subjective components
– fear, trust, happiness, life satisfaction

Must ask people how they feel

Business Confidence
Self assessed health
### Objective and Subjective Assessments Are Important

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<th>Objective Living Conditions</th>
<th>Subjective Wellbeing</th>
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<td>High</td>
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<td>High Wellbeing</td>
<td>High Dissonance</td>
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<td>Low Adaptation</td>
<td>Low Deprivation</td>
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**Objective and Subjective Assessments**

**Level of Subjective Wellbeing**

- **High**
- **Low**

**Objective Living Conditions**

- **High**
- **Low**

**Dissonance**

**Adaptation**

**Deprivation**
Feelings... Nothing More Than Feelings

- Increasing evidence that people’s ‘position’ in society influences their wellbeing and behaviour rather than absolute levels of “utility”
  - Unemployment
  - Car buying
Measuring Subjective Well-being

Arguments For

- Nice organising principle
- Public are interested – and becoming more interested
- Solid evidence that high subjective wellbeing correlates with other “hard” aspects of wellbeing e.g. health
Happiness and Health

The Nuns
Measuring Subjective Well-being

Arguments Against

• Difficult to measure

• Difficult to find policy relevance for measures (at least for generalised measures of life satisfaction)

• Doesn’t appear to change a great deal over time (though there is a life course effect)

• Not “appropriate” ground for a statistical office
The benefits

✓ for citizens
✓ for policy makers
✓ for countries
The benefits for Citizens

- Promote accountability and enhance citizen engagement... eg. school league tables

....improve citizens knowledge giving them the opportunity to improve their decision making and to become more aware of the risks and challenges of today’s world
The benefits for Policy Makers

- Policy makers can better assess the current situation, make more informed decisions, and measure progress over time and relative to other nations

- Better coordination in government

- Data to advocate necessary reforms and evaluate their impact on societal welfare
The benefits for Societies

- By highlighting the issues that genuinely matter to a society, a set of progress measures can help a country best meet the needs of its citizens by focusing attention on the key outcomes.

- ‘Sunshine is the best disinfectant’... transparency has the ability to reduce waste, prevent corruption, and shift resources where they’re truly needed.
Progress Measures can help to:

- Promote greater accountability
- Enhance the quality of public debate
- Help communities prioritize resource allocation
Progress Measures can help to:

Enhance democracy...

... enhance decision making...

... and so generate progress
“Statistics are people with the tears washed away”

Ruth Sidel