

What is monitoring? Manuel Guzman, Bert Verstappen

6.4 The Indicators-Based Monitoring Methodology

An indicator is a tool that shows where something is, what direction it is leading to, and how far it is from that objective. It serves as a sign or symptom that tells what is wrong in a situation and helps in pointing out what needs to be done to fix the problem. Examples of indicators are:

- in the area of education: adult literacy rate
- in the area of health: infant mortality rate
- in the area of political participation: proportion of seats in Parliament held by women
- in the area of access to information: ratio of telephone lines to population

There are two kinds of indicators: result indicators and process indicators. A **result indicator** measures the outcome of efforts, or the lack of them, by the state to meet a particular obligation. It is therefore an indication of the current status of the enjoyment of a certain right. A **process indicator** on the other hand measures the degree to which the state is complying with its obligations.

For example, a state has the obligation to increase literacy among its citizens. A result indicator would be the literacy rate, while a process indicator would be the number of schools in the country. Another example concerns the obligation to reduce deaths among newly-borns. A result indicator would be the infant mortality rate, while a process indicator would be the proportion of children immunised against childhood diseases.

A **benchmark** is the level that is aimed to be met when using a certain indicator. An example of a benchmark, when using adult literacy rate as an indicator, is 75% literacy among adults nationwide.

There are many indicators already used by various IGOs such as the World Health Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme to measure the status of economic and social conditions within countries. These indicators can be used as they are or may need to be adapted for local use, at the same time that NGOs can develop their own indicators.

While indicators have been employed mainly in the field of economic, social and cultural rights, especially by development organisations, they are equally applicable in the area of civil and political rights. An example has been given above (proportion of seats in Parliament held by women). Another example would be the percentage of persons tortured among all those arrested.

Also, indicators can be used in both the “violations” and “progressive realisation” approaches. If a State Party failed to meet the minimum obligations to fulfil a certain right, it can right away be considered a violation. Also, if a benchmark is not met, or if a government does not set any target to be met to begin with, this can also be construed immediately as a violation on the part of the government. As for the “progressive realisation” approach, the findings over a period of time using both process and result indicators could show whether a state is meeting its various obligations.

Overall, indicators are very valuable in expressing the magnitude of the problems in a certain situation. However, their use cannot replace the “events” methodology, especially in addressing grave violations like killings, evictions and disappearances. Also, a main weakness of the indicators-based methodology lies in the fact that the focus is removed from the individual. In

human rights work, it is often necessary to know the details concerning victims, especially if direct assistance is to be given.

On the other hand, it must be recognised that with sufficient data gathering, and with the aid of tools and techniques for data analysis, the results of monitoring events can be transformed into indicators. For instance, if there are sufficient and well-chosen samples that show the proportion of tortured persons among all those arrested in local areas, a national projection can be made to give one indication of the state of police conduct in handling arrested persons.

In short, the combination of the “events” methodology and the indicators-based methodology should result in a comprehensive and detailed picture of a situation. This is especially needed in the field of early warning, where information on the magnitude and nature of violations as well as on economic and political realities is crucial to determine whether a situation is on the verge of plunging to conflict.