

How to measure peace? For what? For whom?

Measuring peace is inherently political. There are multiple definitions of and perspectives on what peace is; it is perceived differently within and across countries and regions; different actors have different interests and would choose different things to monitor and measure. Above all data is not neutral in these environments.

If we are to measure peace, justice and strong institutions in conflict and fragility we will have to work together and build bridges between official government data and data collected by CSOs, Think Tanks, academia and the private sector. This would call for building trust but the bigger question is how can we do that?

In order to bring together the practitioners and academics, public and private sectors and the civil society and to build trust amongst them the [International Development Evaluation Association](#) [IDEAS] in partnership with the Latin American and Caribbean regional evaluation networks ReLAC, REDLACME and the University and State of Guanajuato organised a Joint Conference “Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals” in Guanajuato, Mexico, 4-8 December, 2017.

The Conference featured a variety of activities, such as keynote speeches, panels, workshops, individual presentations, poster exhibitions and specially designed activities and had a special focus on advancing progress on on the United Nation’s [Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\)](#) number 16.

The Goal 16 urges us to: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. It has the highest number of targets compared to other goals that require us to go beyond traditional evaluation methods and approaches.

I also see this opportunity to discuss some of the points raised at an event I went to in New York recently on [“How to Measure Peace? For What? For Whom?”](#) and to connect them with the [Joint Conference in Mexico](#). The event was co-organised by [the SDG 16 Data Initiative](#), [One Earth Future](#) and [International Peace Institute](#) as part of the Innovation in Partnerships series.

The discussion questions hovered around challenges and solutions for methods to measure peace and provided a unique platform for meaningful conversations to take place between civil society, UN diplomats, and the Directors of National Statistical Offices, thus serving to build partnerships and advance progress on SDG 16. Here are some key issues which the event highlighted.

Need for new indicators for peace

The SDG indicators provide a universal framework to measure peace. However, peace is dynamic and perceived differently within and across countries and regions.

Additional indicators may therefore be needed in order to address specific needs and priorities at national and local levels. Qualitative data on the definition and perception of peace should also be taken into account to get a more rigorous picture.

The importance of gathering and managing data well

Data collection can foster change, spread awareness of current challenges and gaps, and catalyze potential action and solutions. In many states, however, the institutions tasked with data collection and disaggregation currently lacks the necessary funding and expertise to make a significant impact.

Indeed, many national statistical offices lack the capacity, human capital, or technological resources to measure the full range of tier-one global indicators. Moreover, civil society in many countries also lacks the tools to provide independent assessments.

The need to connect official and non-official data sets

There is a need to build stronger bridges between official data from governments and data from civil society organizations. Building trust between the government, civil society, academia and the private sector remains a challenge that must be addressed, perhaps

by convening workshops and exploring mechanisms that help incorporate track-two data into official reporting.

Colombia's method of vetting and integrating civil society data into official sources serves as one example of how states can work with civil society while retaining data sovereignty.

All humans and institutions are biased in their own ways. We need data handling processes that help to redress bias and uphold dignity and rights. Oxfam has produced a [Responsible Data Policy](#) as part of our efforts to ensure we do this.

Sharing datasets on SDG indicators

Currently there are a number of international initiatives collecting and analyzing data on Goal 16. These initiatives vary in who is aware of them, their data sources, and whom they are working with.

Participants suggested an exercise to map existing mechanisms in order to avoid duplicative efforts, identify gaps, and increase communication between the different initiatives.

A platform for greater peer-to-peer learning should be established

Regional commissions can play a pivotal role in organizing working groups that share best practices and methodologies. Countries should also be encouraged to present comprehensive datasets on SDG 16, with both track-one and track-two sources, during their voluntary national reviews.

If we are to measure peace, justice and strong institutions in conflict and fragility we will have to work together and build bridges between official government data and data collected by CSOs, Think Tanks, academia and the private sector. This would call for building trust but the bigger question is how can we do that?

Hur Hassnain is a Board Member at the [International Development Evaluation Association](#) (IDEAS), Founder of [Pakistan Evaluation Association](#) (PEA) and Global Advisor Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning at Oxfam Great Britain.