

Access to Justice Indicators in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Introduction

The lack of access to justice and a low degree of social welfare inhibit the capacity of individuals to combat poverty and underdevelopment. While institutional mechanisms that render justice, as a social good may be present, accessing justice beyond its legal character may not always be in place. In this regard, a myriad of institutions and organizations have endeavored to assess the degree and quality of access to justice in developing and underdeveloped societies. Their efforts include the assessment of access to justice with the use of clear-cut indicators as tools for evaluation.

Through the years, access to justice advocacy has resonated in several parts of the world. The advocacy has been successful in raising the demands of substantive justice into deliberations that revolve around the legal system. Access to justice advocacy has covered a wide range of issues. Parker (1999) enumerates the issues to include the following:

- Accessibility of court processes for resolving disputes over mutual rights and responsibilities;
- Availability of adequate legal representation in criminal trials;
- Access to more informal legal processes such as small claims courts and administrative tribunals;
- Availability of legal advice;
- Public legal education

A broad reform movement that shares a common interest in making their national legal systems more accessible has adopted access to justice advocacy. In their view, existing legal processes do not necessarily lead to outcomes that are individually or socially just. Advocates of access to justice have struggled for substantive reforms of law and legal procedures to guarantee that the interests of the poor, minorities and diffuse public

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interests are articulated and recognized. In addition, the access to justice movement has diligently worked to promote alternative dispute resolution methods to avert legal processes altogether. The worldwide access to justice movement has grown into a collection of multinational, reform-oriented associations of legal workers, government reformers, and law and society scholars (Parker, 1999).

Diversity best characterizes the Asia-Pacific region. The diversity of the region elicits not only differences in cultural and political institutional arrangements but also in the incidence of development and poverty. Thus, there is an imperative to draw similarities in the strengths and weaknesses, the gains and challenges that permeate the region as regards the indicators of access to justice.

This paper reviews the indicators used to measure impacts and processes of access to justice and justice-related programs across the Asia-Pacific region and their limitations to assess improvements on access to justice by poor and disadvantaged groups. To this end the paper addresses the question: *how is access to justice evaluated by government agencies, civil society organizations, and development agencies in the Asia-Pacific Region?*

Rights-based approach to access to justice

Access to justice advocates has underscored the need to make legal and quasi-legal justice institutions accessible to all. From this perspective, legal institutions are fundamental to the practice of justice. Thus, some access to justice advocates have often “*concentrated on the citizen’s use of institutions of law as deliberative fora in which private and public dominations can be contested and debated.*” (Parker, 1999, p. 47) This institutional view of access to justice is premised on legal justice, which in turn, is “*concerned with the way in which law distributes penalties for wrongdoing, or allocates compensation in the case of injury or damage.*” (Heywood, 1999, p. 176) Hence, legal justice necessitates the creation and enforcement of a public set of rules – the law. From an institutional view, law is oftentimes defined as “the administration of justice.” (Pollock, 1998)

However, law should not be equated with justice, since laws may be just or unjust, as well as the court system through which they are administered. The ends of law and justice may be different, oftentimes contradictory. There are also critical limitations on the role that law can play in realizing justice (Heywood, 2000; Parker, 1999; Pollock, 1998). These limitations of the institutional perspective have resulted in the emergence of an alternative rights-based access to justice.

Access to justice, from a rights-based perspective, refers to “*the ability of people from disadvantaged groups to prevent and overcome human poverty by seeking and obtaining a remedy, through formal and informal justice systems, for grievances in accordance with human rights principles and standards.*” (UNDP, 2002, p. 8) This perception goes beyond the administrative character of justice, i.e. justice as a social good. It delves on the capacity of the poor and marginalized to address their grievances by obtaining effective remedies through the existing modes of justice systems. Justice here, therefore, is taken from the “access” perspective and not solely from the “distribution” perspective.

Using the rights-based approach to justice therefore requires an assessment of both claimholder and duty-bearer on three particular aspects, namely: *capacity*, *accountability* and *empowerment*. Capacity refers to the ability of both stakeholders to solve problems, perform functions and set and achieve objectives. Consequently, capacity development requires both the accountability and empowerment of both stakeholders. Claimholders need to strengthen their capacities to become accountable in the exercise of rights; duty-bearers often need to be empowered to be able to fulfill their obligations more effectively.

Assessing access to justice indicators

In assessing indicators of access to justice, two perspectives are deemed to be significant: those of the claimholders and the duty-bearers. Both stakeholders ultimately affect the level of access to justice. Furthermore, a rights-based approach to justice is also used in the assessment of access to justice indicators. Wanting levels of access to justice is a definitive aspect of poverty. Depriving citizens of access to information and awareness of mechanisms to provide remedies for their grievances inhibit their capacities to develop, relegating them in a state of destitution. The lack of access to justice, therefore, serves as a major

impediment to poverty eradication. Hence, there is a need to explicate the synergies between access to justice, poverty reduction and human development from a rights-based perspective.

Indicators are important as markers for evaluating results. It is primarily an instrument for determining how a project or program is proceeding. As a yardstick for measurement, it provides for monitoring desired levels of performance (e.g. success or failure) on a regular and sustainable basis. Indicators serve to identify problems, resolve and learn from them. In this regard, indicators monitor change on an ongoing basis (Kapoor, 1996). Indicators can set targets, projecting results based on specific objectives that are defined by a project document. They can also be utilized to ascertain the situation of an ongoing project or program (Sudarshan, 2003). Table 1 shows the various types of indicators that address different aspects of evaluation.

The provision of justice to citizens is an integral aspect of institutionalizing good governance, human rights and political development. Nonetheless, measuring justice performance may initially prove to be a difficult undertaking (Sudarshan, 2003). Despite the burgeoning literature on socio-economic indicators, the development of performance indicators for human rights and democratic development, in general, and access to justice, in particular, are at an incipient stage. This is drawn out of the essentially qualitative nature of human rights; democratic development and justice provision that “has tended to make analysts shy away from attempts to measure or quantify it.” (Kapoor, 1996, p. 1) *This study asserts that qualitative and quantitative measurements are far from being incompatible, and are in fact complementary in assessing access to justice.*

Table 1
Types of Indicators

| Indicators | Focus |
|------------|--|
| Input | ○ Measures the quantity/quality of resources provided for access to justice program activities |
| Output | ○ Measures the quantity/quality of outputs created through the use of inputs |
| Outcome | ○ Measures the quantity/quality of direct results achieved through outputs |
| Impact | ○ Measures the degree to which wider program goals are achieved through program outcomes |

Source: Adapted from Kapoor, 1996, p. 5.

Various institutional players employ some form of indicators to assess the level of access to justice in the Asia-Pacific region. They include *governmental agencies, civil society organizations* and *international development agencies*. Aside from presenting the indicators used by these players, the following discussion will include the nature of these organizations as it has some bearing on their measurement of access to justice.

Governmental agencies

Governmental agencies employ indicators that help augment adjudication practices as well as access to due process by poor and disadvantaged groups. Law enforcement, i.e. police and prison systems, is also another aspect that is crucial in enhancing justice delivery. These measurements of access to justice by governmental agencies are crucial since government functions as a purveyor of formal justice systems.

Both formal and informal institutional interrelated mechanisms serve to translate social preferences into public policies. Formal mechanisms revolve around the legal system as the “arena in which people can hold political leaders and public officials to account, protect themselves from exploitation by those with more power, and resolve conflicts that are individual or collective (Anderson, 2002, p.1).” On the other hand, improving the effectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms is a means by which social policies can be addressed through public policies within

the judicial domain (Buscaglia, 2001). Beyond institutional effectiveness, access to justice is integral not only in upholding constitutionally guaranteed rights, but also in addressing the broader goal of development and poverty reduction (Anderson, 2003). Hence, there is a marked distinction between “delivery of justice mechanisms” and “access to justice mechanisms.” The former refers to the institutional and administrative character of justice, while the latter pertains to the modalities by which the poor and marginalized can obtain effective remedies within the justice system.

While most societies in the Asia-Pacific have institutionalized delivery of justice mechanisms in their judicial and legal systems, access to justice mechanisms have been unevenly distributed in the region. Apparently, access to justice has not featured prominently in the good governance agenda of some countries (Anderson, 2003). In other instances, most access to justice initiatives is subsumed under an integrated approach towards justice reform (UNDP, 2003).

The UNDP is most active in supporting and monitoring access to justice initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region. However, even majority of the UNDP’s activities tend to concentrate on the institutional and formal levels (See Figure 1). There is significant support for legal awareness, but there is a weaker involvement in the areas of customary norms, informal and traditional systems, enforcement and civil society oversight (UNDP, 2003).

Figure 1
Scope of UNDP Access to Justice Initiatives in Asia and the Pacific

| NORMATIVE PROTECTION OF RIGHTS | LEGAL EMPOWERMENT | CAPACITY TO PROVIDE EFFECTIVE REMEDIES |
|--|---|---|
| <p>By International and Constitutional Law</p> <p>FIJI SRI LANKA INDONESIA CHINA NEPAL MONGOLIA IRAN PRAJA</p> | <p>Legal awareness</p> <p>BANGLADESH FIJI NEPAL IRAN PHILIPPINES INDIA MONGOLIA PRAJA INDONESIA YEMEN</p> | <p>Accessible adjudication</p> <p><u>Judicial System</u></p> <p>CAMBODIA NEPAL FIJI IRAN INDONESIA PRAJA YEMEN PHILIPPINES</p> <p><u>Quasi-judicial bodies</u></p> <p>NEPAL INDONESIA BANGLADESH MONGOLIA SRI LANKA PHILIPPINES</p> <p><u>Indigenous/ traditional systems</u></p> <p>INDIA</p> |
| <p>By legal and regulatory frameworks</p> <p>INDONESIA BANGLADESH CHINA YEMEN NEPAL VIETNAM CAMBODIA PRAJA</p> | <p>Legal counsel</p> <p>BANGLADESH IRAN PHILIPPINES</p> | <p>Enforcement</p> <p><u>Police</u> <u>Prison System</u></p> <p>BANGLADESH INDIA PRAJA</p> |
| <p>By Customary Law</p> <p>INDIA</p> | <p>Capacity to access justice services</p> <p>INDIA IRAN PHILIPPINES INDONESIA</p> | <p>Civil Society Oversight</p> <p>SRI LANKA PHILIPPINES</p> |

Source: UNDP, 2003, p. 10.

Civil Society Organizations

The indicators employed by civil society organizations are critical for effective accountability, prevention of impunity and abuse of power by governmental agencies. Acting as watchdogs, civil society organizations enhances the accountability of duty-bearers at the same enhancing the participation of claimholders in formulating, implementing and enforcing laws and policies. Civil society organizations generate informal and alternative systems of justice. They also foment alternative means of access to justice.

Civil Society Organizations, in the form of non-governmental organizations, people's organization, trade unions, professional

associations, and other associations, have been in the forefront of the advocacy for access to justice in the region. Their initiatives are oftentimes related with the broader reform agenda of good governance, democratization and human rights. Indeed, the good governance agenda links democracy and human rights with responsive judicial processes as interlocking and mutually supporting phenomena. Substantive democracy includes some of the main prerequisites (separation of powers, judicial independence and effective access to justice) for the poor and marginalized to use judicial processes for protection and redress (Anderson, 2003).

In most cases, the incorporation of human rights concepts into law has increased the responsiveness of judicial system and enhanced the ability of litigants and courts to restrain abuses by public officials and political leaders. It is insufficient, however, for human rights to be bestowed “from above” by the state. *It is essential that human rights should be claimed “from below” by active individuals and civil society organizations.* Human rights discourse can be a very potent tool for political mobilization. The language of rights clearly crystallizes popular understanding, mobilizes political movements and brings forth a “rights revolution.” Rights revolution “refers to patterns of governance in which constitutional or human rights become an important vehicle for political struggle on the part of groups seeking more egalitarian outcomes (Anderson, 2003, p. 22).”

Compared to democratic development and access to justice, the development of performance indicators for human rights is far more advanced. The literature, however, is mostly restricted to monitoring national trends and human rights treaty violations, instead of monitoring project/program performance. Nonetheless, initial efforts to incorporate a rights-based approach with access to justice initiatives have been undertaken by several organizations.

The UNDP Asia-Pacific Rights and Justice Initiative reconfigures its definition of justice from the perspective of respect for fundamental human rights guarantee. It identifies human rights problems as immediate causes preventing access to justice by the poor and marginalized sectors of society. These problems include the “lack of normative protection guaranteeing the existence of a remedy for grievances, as well as the

incapacity to seek such remedies even where they formally exist, or the incapacity to provide them when sought (UNDP, 2003, p. 7).”

Similarly, the Asian Development Bank Law and Policy Reform (ADB LPR) program has expanded its scope from the originally strong focus on training and retraining of legal professionals to support for legal and judicial reform in Asia using the concept of legal empowerment. The 2001 ADB LPR Report entitled “*Legal Empowerment: Advancing Good Governance and Poverty Reduction*” asserts “legal empowerment flourishes in a vibrant civil society environment (ADB LPR, 2001, p. 86).” The report also considers the length of time that development-oriented civil society groups have been allowed freely to address citizen rights and responsibilities as an important variable for determining the effectiveness of civil society intervention on behalf of legal empowerment.

International development agencies

In spheres of development cooperation, international development agencies are increasingly utilizing indicators of access to justice mainly to ascertain the link between justice and development. These agencies relate access to justice as an important factor to realize improvements in the quality of life of individuals. However, there are also differences as regards the practice of justice in relation to the pursuit of development. The World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), three of the more prominent international development organizations, view the relationship between justice and development quite differently. The nature of these organizations affects their take on justice and its impact on development.

The World Bank sees justice and the access to a functioning justice sector as important factors in catalyzing economic growth. Much of the Bank’s programs often cater to commercial and civil matters, indicating that its tendencies are geared more towards the institutional approach to justice. For instance, the Bank’s on-line database¹ on justice and legal reform provides useful information on the institutional background of judicial systems of various countries around the world. Indeed, the main

¹ This database on justice can be viewed by visiting their site: www.worldbank.org/legal/database/Justice.

thrust of the Bank's justice and justice-related programs are directed to strengthening the capacities of legal and judicial institutions. If these institutions are able to absorb the demands of and render judicial services to their constituents, then improvements in the quality of life can take place. Economic growth is therefore affected by a sound and functioning judicial system. In this regard, measuring access to justice is tantamount to measuring the capacity of institutions to render habitual judicial services as a means to spur economic growth.

On the other hand, UNDP views justice as closely related to poverty eradication. Poverty here is taken beyond mere insufficiencies in income, monetary or otherwise. Human poverty is brought about by inability to overcome an individual's state of destitution. Limitations in choices and access deter individuals to determine their path toward improvements in the quality of life. The lack of access to justice, therefore, is not only a defining feature of poverty, but is also an impediment to level-off power inequalities and prevent human poverty. UNDP takes a rights-based approach in order to address this problem. A rights-based approach involves the creation of an environment that is most conducive for any person to have enough choices and access to overcome poverty. The indicators of access to justice used in this perspective emphasize on the capacity of individuals to access justice and justice related-programs. Consequently, these indicators interpret justice as social (substantive) justice.

Meanwhile, ADB believes that the existence of a legal environment conducive to development is essential for all developing countries. Thus, the activities and programs that it implements in the field of legal and judicial reform promote the rule of law through a pro-poor legal and institutional framework for economic development. Legal reform as part of the development process means a great deal more than simply the drafting of laws that are accessible, comprehensible and usable. The legal system cannot operate without institutions that make these rules realized through effective and dynamic interpretation and enforcement. Similar to the previous two development agencies, ADB also makes a different interpretation as regards the link between justice and development. In order to establish the relationship between justice and development, there must be an adequate level of legal empowerment. Legal empowerment is

defined both as a process and as a goal.² As a process, legal empowerment involves the use of law to increase disadvantaged population's control over their lives through a combination of both education and action. As a goal, legal empowerment refers to the actual achievement by the disadvantaged of increased control of their lives through the use of law. The difference between these two lies in the actual control of disadvantaged groups and peoples using the law. Legal empowerment therefore serves as an indicator of access to justice. Furthermore, legal empowerment acts as a link to realize the synergy between governance, justice and poverty eradication.

Assessment of access to justice indicators

This paper presented various efforts of several formal and informal players to measure the level of access to justice. These players include governmental agencies, civil society organizations and international development agencies. This study collated these indicators using the rights-based framework of the UNDP. The following will assess these indicators in terms of: (a) cost effectiveness in data gathering, (b) sustainability, and (c) adequacy to assess access to justice by the poor and disadvantaged groups.

Cost-effectiveness

Given limited available resources, there is a need to maximize the utilization of funds for assessing access to justice programs in the region. The quantity and quality of data often determines the scope and impact of access to justice evaluations. The institutional and non-institutional players must recognize the data-gathering advantages inherent in their access to justice activities.

Government agencies, in this regard, have the advantage given the vast amount of primary data and statistics it gathers everyday. These data are useful in monitoring and evaluating "delivery of justice" programs in the region. Government agencies must invest on a well-organized system that can maximize the collection and evaluation of institutional information.

² This definition of the legal empowerment was adapted from the definition of ADB. For a complete discussion, see ADB, 2001, p. 7.

Civil Society Organizations are in the best position to gather primary information from the basic sectors themselves. In dealing with the poor and the marginalized sectors, the CSOs can ascertain the impact of “access to justice” programs and mechanisms. Just like government agencies, CSOs should also take effort in developing systems that will properly collate, evaluate and maintain the important data gathered from the field.

International Development Agencies have invested much in its various legal and judicial reform projects in the region. Through its vast resources and wide network, it has generated baseline data from the region. Information emanating from its development assistance is useful for evaluating “delivery of justice” and “access to justice” programs in the region.

Sustainability

The continuous monitoring and evaluation of access to justice initiatives is important to assure its successful implementation. However, several factors hinder the sustainability of the efforts undertaken by access to justice advocates in the region. Greater efforts must be made to address such obstacles in order to assure the continuity of reform efforts.

The sustainability of legal and judicial reforms efforts, including application of access to justice performance indicators, of governmental agencies is highly contingent on the priority of government and the availability of funds. Given the multitude of problems facing governments in the region, particularly those in the developing countries, efforts at monitoring performance indicators of access to justice are often compromised.

Most CSOs are hampered by their inability to generate internal and domestic funding for their access to justice initiatives. Hence, there is a tendency for most CSOs to become “donor-driven” or dependent on the funding of external international development agencies. Given the realities in underdeveloped and developing countries, it would be difficult to expect most CSOs to immediately transform themselves into financially self-supporting organizations. Thus, it would be more appropriate to measure the sustainability of the impact of access to justice initiatives,

rather than expect the sustainability of the organizations advocating judicial reforms.

In the same light, international development agencies are prone to “donor-fatigue” due to diminishing financial and logistic sources. Ford Foundation, for example, has closed some of its offices in the region in order to cut back on operational expenses. International Development Agencies are more circumspect in the types of projects it would extend financial support. This will definitely have some impact on access to justice initiatives in the region.

Adequacy

The efforts by government agencies, civil society organizations and international development agencies to develop performance indicators to assess and measure the degree of access to justice in the region and the world are commendable. The fruits of their initiatives have, thus far, been adequate in generating primary information. However, these indicators reflect particular orientations based on how the institutional and non-institutional players intend to utilize them.

Indicators mostly used by government agencies are oriented toward institutional approaches. The utility of these types of indicators lie in the evaluation and planning for legal development and institution-building. The information culled by civil society organizations, on the other hand, are very useful for issue advocacy and lobbying. The information that emerged from the various studies supported by international development agencies is adequate as baseline data for enhancing institutional development of access to justice mechanisms. These data can also prove helpful in the issue advocacy of civil society organizations in their respective countries and in the region.

Summary and recommendations

The provision of justice is an important prerequisite for enhancing the protection of human rights and the institutionalization of good governance. In recent years, access to justice initiatives has been undertaken by governmental, non-governmental and international development organizations. There is a need to track the progress of these

initiatives through the application of access to justice indicators to draw important lessons in the delivery of justice in the Asia-Pacific region.

Indicators are important social scientific tools to measure and monitor desired levels of performance of a project or program. Indicators may ascertain quantitative and qualitative changes that contribute to success or failure of a particular initiative. However, in the development of indicators to measure the performance of access to justice initiatives, the following issues should be taken into account:

- The cultural context of the provision of justice services. There is no holistic objective theory or model for assessing access to justice in the Asia-Pacific region. Caution should be taken in appropriating theories or models that emerged out of the historical experiences of the West.
- The provision of justice services involves complex human and institutional processes that may be difficult to be captured by a handful of indicators.
- The development of political institutions takes a long incremental process. This makes the formulation of indicators more difficult, since it is easier and expedient to assess performance in the short term.

The aforementioned issues underscore the challenges involve in the development of access to justice indicators. Nonetheless, these issues can be addressed by undertaking the following:

- Indicators should be adapted according to appropriate levels of institutional and political development.
- Recognizing that various cultures may share common ethical standards that may allow for a common understanding of the principles of justice. This may be reflected in the international treaties and instruments that are signed by the countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Providing indirect or proxy indicators if direct results are difficult or too costly to measure.

This paper is an initial attempt to provide a cursory view of access to justice indicators collated from an array of sources that include governmental, civil society, and international development organizations. The paper utilized the rights-based approach framework developed by the **UNDP Asia-Pacific Justice Initiative** as dimensions for the categorization of these indicators. These dimensions include: 1) existence of remedy; 2) capacity to seek remedy; and, 3) capacity to seek effective remedy.

The specific indicators identified in this paper are by no means exhaustive, but are illustrative in its attempt to formulate a comprehensive tool for monitoring and evaluating access to justice initiatives. In developing and enhancing access to justice indicators, this paper recommends the following:

- Qualitative and quantitative measurements, utilized in tandem, are important tools in assessing access to justice. There is a need to further identify access to justice areas and categories that can be subjected to quantitative and qualitative treatment within the rights-based framework of the UNDP. This background paper can serve as a jump-off point for a larger study with the objective of developing an access to justice index.
- Assessing access to justice is best accomplished through participatory processes that bring together all stakeholders. The parameters, benchmarks and indicators identified in this paper can be enhanced by the participatory development of access to justice indicators through a series of workshops.
- Undertake a field study of selected case countries in the Asia-Pacific region to pretest the parameters, benchmarks and indicators identified in this background paper.
- Based on the knowledge and experience identified from quantitative, qualitative, and participatory measurements, a manual of access to justice indicators should be finalized and disseminated.

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