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ODS Monthly Digest

is a monthly brief issued by the Office of Development Studies (ODS), United Nations Development Programme. The publication takes on up-to-date topics in the area of development and shows them in a new light. It consists of a main feature titled "the current issue" and a number of mini features headed "facts at a glance".

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The Current Issue

The HDI at 20

By Romina Bandura

As the Human Development Index (HDI) prepares to turn 20, some proposals have been presented to make the index more "modern". First, the article summarizes the current HDI and it lays out some of the main criticisms to the HDI. Second, three proposals to revamp the HDI are presented. Finally, some take away remarks are presented, cautioning on the use of indices in general and the modification of the HDI, in particular.



Facts at a Glance

Mushrooming Composite Indices

By Romina Bandura

The number of composite indices assessing countries' performance have exploded in the last 20 years. What is the current landscape? What are some of the uses and misuses of these indices?

The Current Issue

The HDI at 20

By Romina Bandura

In 2010 the Human Development Index (HDI) will turn 20. The HDI has been highly influential but also hotly debated. Overtime, there have been proposals to modify it. This article briefly reviews some of these proposals.

The premise of the HDI is that human development is multidimensional and cannot be captured by a single indicator such as GDP. The Human Development approach arose in part as a criticism of the link between economic growth and the expansion of individual choices. According to this approach development is about expanding the choices people have to lead lives that they value. Fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities—the range of things that people can do or be in life. The most basic capabilities for human development are to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community.ⁱ

Following this approach, the HDI was introduced in 1990 by combining indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income into a single index (see Annex for the calculation of the HDI). Throughout the years, changes have been made to the original formulation of the HDI and other indices have been developed including the GDI - Gender-related Development Index; the GEM - Gender Empowerment Measure and the HPI - Human Poverty Index.

Criticisms to the HDI and responses

While the HDI was successful in shifting the focus from GDP to human development, the index has received numerous criticisms in terms of its structure and components, its degree of universalism, its weighting system and policy relevance.ⁱⁱ

Just like any other composite index, the HDI cannot capture comprehensively all aspects of human development in a single number. Moreover, it cannot capture short-term changes in human development, as two of its components (literacy rate and life expectancy at birth) do not respond to short term policy changes. The HDI does not take into account variations of human development within countries, for example in different regions, rural-urban or social groups.ⁱⁱⁱ

The HDI has many merits. It is a very simple index and has a transparent methodology. Moreover, it has shifted the debate on development away from GDP per capita as the main measure. Its focus on capabilities—relevant both to developing and industrial countries—makes it a universal tool. It has also motivated governments to take policy action, by comparing their performance vis-a-vis their neighbors.

Proposals to the HDI

In this note, we review the criticism to the HDI, related to components. The criticism focuses on the choice of the indicators: many important indicators are missing from the HDI, for example human rights, security, and environment.

Related to the above criticism of missing components, is the issue of universalism: “universalism is the recognition of a shared claim of every person to the elementary or basic capabilities required to lead a worthwhile life”.^{iv} Nobody denies that health, education and income are universal elementary capabilities but what critics challenge is the fact that other capabilities (such as human rights, security, and others) are excluded in the HDI. What proponents say is that ultimately universalism would require to discern the functional form of a well-being production function, which, in reality is unknown.

The proposals to revamp the HDI in this note center on broadening the components that are used in the index to describe development (e.g. human security, political freedom or right and the environment are some components that are being suggested apart from education, health and income).^v Three proposals are discussed: a) *adding new components*: Chhibber and Laajaj (2007)^{vi} add environment and security as key components of the HDI and create a Multi-Dimensional Development Index (MDI); b) *keeping the components but addressing the issue of inequality within components*: Hicks (1997) and Chatterjee (2005)^{vii} incorporate inequality amongst social groups, elaborating an alternative to HDI and c) *replacing the HDI with a different index*: Veenhoven (2005)^{viii} proposes a fundamentally different index: Happy-Life-Years (HLY).

a) Adding new components: Multi-Dimensional Development Index (MDI)

Chhibber and Laajaj (2007) create a broader Multi-Dimensional Development Index (MDI) which includes indicators on a) the environment and sustainability and, b) on security and lawlessness. Consistent with the idea that development must incorporate the expansion of human capabilities they argue that “it is not just the capabilities inherent in an individual but the overall environment for development that provides the freedom for individuals to develop that matters as well”. Environment and security are two key factors that affect the capabilities for individuals to develop. They develop three multidimensional indices: the MDI1, the MDI2 and the MDI3.

The MDI1 takes into account the HDI and an environmental component, all 4 components with equal weights. Also, in the health dimension, instead of life expectancy at birth (used in the HDI) they use “Health Adjusted Life Expectancy” (HALE) at birth.^{ix} The MDI1 extends HDI with an environmental component to ensure that the capabilities and freedoms acquired by a population are sustainable over time. There are two aspects to these environmental costs. The first is the damage inflicted by unsustainable development on own population. And the second is the costs imposed on other countries by development that leads to heavy pollution. In their environment index they assign half of the weight to *national public goods* and another half to *global public goods*.

The former is then divided into effects on present and future generations. To measure the performance of countries against environment as a *national good*, they propose two indicators: air quality and water scarcity. For air quality, sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions per km² is used. Other air pollutants lack reliable data and/or are difficult in aggregating different pollutants. For water scarcity, they introduce a measure of water withdrawal as a percentage of renewable water. To account for the costs borne by the production of *global environmental 'bads'*, they use two indicators: carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions per capita, and the production of renewable energy (hydropower and renewable energy as a percentage of total energy consumption).

In the MDI2, they use the ecological footprint of nations (EF) as the measure of the environmental component in order to compare results with the MDI1. The EF is equivalent to the number of hectares necessary to absorb human natural resource consumption and waste output given nature's renewable and regenerative capacity.

The MDI3 is basically MDI1 but adding a fifth component, security, with equal weights. For this component, they use data on the number of deaths caused by "intentional injuries" from the World Health Organization which include injuries from violence (either from crime or war), as well as self-inflicted injuries.

How do these new indices differ in terms of ranking with the HDI? As Table 1 shows, some countries make substantial progress while others suffer big setbacks when including dimensions such as the environment and security to the HDI. The usefulness of this expanded HDI, or MDI, is that it brings new dimensions that might not have been as relevant when the HDI was first introduced. It also gives policymakers a more holistic view as to where the country stands in the world.

Table 1: Changes Compared to HDI, Selected Countries

Country	MDI1	MDI2	MDI3
Paraguay	+35	+8	+36
Georgia	+21	+25	+30
Australia	-22	-16	-19
Saudi Arabia	-35	-24	-26
Kuwait	-46	-42	-32
UAE	-49	-60	-35

Source: Chhibber and Laajaj 2007 (pp.31-33).

b) Inequality Adjusted HDI

Another extension of the HDI is done by Hicks (1997) and Chatterjee (2005) who take the HDI with the same dimensions but add inequality in each component.

Hicks (1997) constructs Gini coefficients, for a set of 20 developing countries, measuring inequalities in annual income, educational attainment, and life-span attainment. These calculations are combined with data from the HDI to produce an Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index (IAHDI).

To recap, each dimension index (X_i) in the HDI is calculated as:

$$X_i = \frac{\text{Actual } x_i \text{ value} - \text{min } x_i \text{ value}}{\text{Max } x_i \text{ value} - \text{min } x_i \text{ value}}$$

In computing the IAHDI, the numerator is adjusted downward, or discounted, by a figure reflecting the inequalities for that dimension.

Each dimension index in the IAHDI is calculated as follows:

$$IAX_i = X_i * \lambda_i (1-G_i)$$

Where:

IAX_i is the inequality adjusted X_i

G_i is the Gini coefficient for each dimension i (i=1,2,3)

For each dimension i, λ_i is the weight given to the inequality-adjustment factor. For all i: (1/(1-G_i)) > λ_i > 0.

Thus, each dimensional index of the HDI is adjusted for inequality by a factor of λ_i * (1-G_i). This weighting, of course, does not change the fact that the dimensional indices comprising the HDI can be weighted differently than their present α, β, γ=1. Thus the IAHDI is calculated in an analogous fashion to the HDI:

$$IAHDI = \frac{IAX_1 + IAX_2 + IAX_3}{\alpha + \beta + \gamma}$$

The author uses a simple weighting system of α, β, γ, λ₁, λ₂, λ₃=1 to calculate the IAHDI. Table 2 shows the differences between the HDI and IAHDI results.

What is the value-added in analyzing an adjusted HDI to account for inequalities? Most Latin American countries fall in rank when inequality is factored into development, which is consistent as it is a region with severe income distribution problems. Another issue is that this framework allows taking into account inequalities in education and health, not only in income. Moreover, just as the HDI moved the discussion away from GDP to other dimensions (health and education) the IAHDI incorporates distributional concerns more explicitly into policy-making discourse.

Table 2: HDI Versus IAHDI Rankings

Country	HDI	IAHDI	Change in ranks
Hong Kong	1	1	0
Costa Rica	2	3	-1
Korea (Rep.)	3	2	1
Chile	4	4	0
Venezuela	5	7	-2
Panama	6	8	-2
Mexico	7	10	-3
Colombia	8	9	-1
Thailand	9	5	4
Malaysia	10	6	4
Brazil	11	12	-1
Peru	12	14	-2
Dom. Rep.	13	15	-2
Sri Lanka	14	11	3
Philippines	15	13	2
Nicaragua	16	16	0
Guatemala	17	19	-2
Honduras	18	17	1
Zimbabwe	19	18	1
Bangladesh	20	20	0

Source: Hicks 1997 (p.1293).

In the same light, Chatterjee (2005) corrects the HDI for inequality, proposing an “Alternative Human Development Index” that would be sensitive to changes in both the general level and the degree of inequality (or in other words, equality) of the values of each of the three basic components of development over the members of the population. The author proposes a joint measure of location-cum-concentration (called an “index of up tilt”) that would increase as the location of the distribution (i.e. the general level of the values in the population) rises and/or the concentration of the distribution (i.e. the degree of equality of the values in the population) increases.

c) Replacing the HDI: Happy-Life-Years (HLY)

Veenhoven (2005) takes a different approach. He proposes an alternative index to the HDI, Happy-Life-Years. He argues that quality-of-life in nations can be measured by how long and happy people live. This is assessed by combining data on life expectancy drawn from civil registration with survey data on subjective enjoyment of life as a whole.

According to this author, there are two ways to assess how well people live. One is to consider to what extent the country provides conditions deemed essential for a good life. In this approach the emphasis is on societal *input*. As there is little certainty about what people really need, he calls this 'presumed' quality-of-life. The other approach is to assess how well people thrive. In this approach the emphasis is on societal *output*. He calls this 'apparent' quality of life, which could be a good alternative to current indices of 'assumed' quality-of-life such as the Human Development Index (Table 3).

Table 3: Approaches to Measurement of Quality of Life

Variants	Assumed	Apparent
Observable manifestations	Presence of conditions deemed essential for a good life, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Economic affluence ● Political freedom ● Social equality ● Access to knowledge 	Flourishing of citizens as apparent in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Good health (physical and mental) ● Happiness
Comprehensive Indicators	Various sum-scores: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HDI ● Index of Social Progress 	Happy Life Years

Source: Veenhoven 2005 (p.64).

The number of years citizens live happily in a country can be measured by combining information about length of life from civil registrations of birth and death with data on overall appreciation of life as assessed in surveys. The following simple formula can be applied:

$$\text{Happy-Life-Years} = \text{Life-expectancy at birth} \times 0-1 \text{ happiness}$$

Suppose that life expectancy in a country is 50 years, and that the average score on a 0 to 10-step happiness scale is 5. Converted to a 0-1 scale, the happiness score is then 0.5. The product of 50 and 0.5 is 25. So the number of happy life years is 25 in this country. If life expectancy is 80 years and average happiness 8, the number of happy life years is 64 (80 x 0.8). Table 4 offers some numbers for select countries.

Table 4: Happy-Life-Years in the 1990s, Selected Countries

Top > 58 years	Middle +/- 41 years	Bottom < 30 years
Switzerland 63.0	Philippines 43.7	Georgia 29.7
Iceland 61.8	Greece 41.4	Russia 27.8
Denmark 59.9	Turkey 40.4	Armenia 26.2
Sweden 59.9	Hungary 38.5	Ukraine 22.5
Ireland 58.4	Bolivia 37.5	Moldova 20.5

Source: Veenhoven 2005 (p.71).

Going forward, any modifications to the HDI will suffer similar problems to the original formulation. First is the issue of data availability. Some of the components that are proposed lack suitable indicators and series for a large group of countries, making an expanded HDI difficult to compute. Another fundamental problem is capturing precisely what development is, going back to the issue of universalism and weights. Should “human development” be the same for all countries and regions? If they use the same components, should they all be weighted the same, or should some countries weigh some aspects (for example health in Africa) more than others (environment in high income OECD countries)? This point raises another issue: index comparability. If we start constructing different HDIs, how comparable will they be across countries? What happens to the original series, which has so much historical information?

There are no easy answers to these questions but it is clear that momentum is building to revamp the HDI. What new components are chosen will depend on the definition of development, and this, in turn, opens up the discussion of universalism. ^x

Endnotes

- ⁱ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev>
- ⁱⁱ See Sumner, Andrew. 2006. “Economic Well-being and Non-economic Well-being.” In Mark McGillivray and Matthew Clarke, eds. *Understanding Human Well-Being*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan. Stanton, Elizabeth A. 2007. “The Human Development Index: A History.” Political Economy Research Institute Working Paper No. 127, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, Mass.
- ⁱⁱⁱ UNDP. 2007. *Measuring Human Development: A Primer*. New York.
- ^{iv} McGillivray, Mark and Farhad Noorbakhsh. 2007. “Composite Indices of Human Well-being: Past, Present, and Future.” In Mark McGillivray, ed. *Human Well-being: Concept and Measurement*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. (p.116), citing Anand and Sen.
- ^v See McGillivray and Noorbakhsh (2007).
- ^{vi} Chhibber, Ajay and Rachid Laajaj. 2007. “A Multi-Dimensional Development Index: Extending the Human Development Index with Environmental Sustainability and Security.” Mimeo. September.
- ^{vii} Hicks, Douglas A. 1997. “The inequality-Adjusted human Development Index: A Constructive Approach.” *World Development* 25 (8): 283-1298. Chatterjee, Shoutir Kishore. 2005. “Measurement of Human Development: An Alternative Approach.” *Journal of Human Development* 6(1):31-44.

viii Veenhoven, Ruut. 2005. "Apparent Quality of Life in Nations". *Social Indicators Research* 71(1-3): 61-68.

ix HALE includes an adjustment for time spent in poor health. HALE is the equivalent number of years in full health that a newborn can expect to live based on current rates of ill-health and mortality. It is important to consider not only the duration of life but also its quality in terms of health because poor health considerably limits the capabilities of an individual.

x McGillivray and Noorbakhsh (2007, p.128).

Annex

The HDI sets a minimum and a maximum for each dimension, called "goalposts" (Table A), and then shows where each country stands in relation to these goalposts, expressed as a value between 0 and 1, by applying the following formula:

$$\text{Dimension index} = \frac{\text{Actual value} - \text{min value}}{\text{Max value} - \text{min value}}$$

Table A: Goalposts for Calculating the HDI

Indicator	Max value	Min value
Life expectancy at birth (years)	85	25
Adult literacy rate (%)*	100	0
Combined gross enrolment ratio (%)	100	0
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	40,000	100

* The goalpost for calculating adult literacy implies the maximum literacy rate is 100 percent. In practice, the HDI is calculated using an upper bound of 99 percent.

Source: http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_tech_note_1.pdf

The HDI is calculated as a simple average of the three dimensions indices:

$$\text{HDI} = 1/3 (\text{life expectancy index}) + 1/3 (\text{education index}) + 1/3 (\text{wealth index})$$

The **educational** index of the HDI is comprised of adult literacy rates and the combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schooling, weighted to give adult literacy more significance in the statistic. Since the minimum adult literacy rate is 0 percent and the maximum is 100 percent, the literacy component of knowledge for a country where the literacy rate is 75 percent would be 0.75. The statistic for combined gross enrolment is calculated in an analogous manner.

The **life expectancy** index of the HDI is calculated using a minimum value for life expectancy of 25 years and maximum value of 85 years, so the longevity component for a country where life expectancy is 55 years would be 0.5.

For the **wealth** index, the goalpost for minimum income is \$100 (PPP) and the maximum is \$40,000 (PPP). The HDI uses the logarithm of income, to reflect the diminishing importance of income with increasing GDP.

Facts at a Glance: Mushrooming Composite Indices

By Romina Bandura

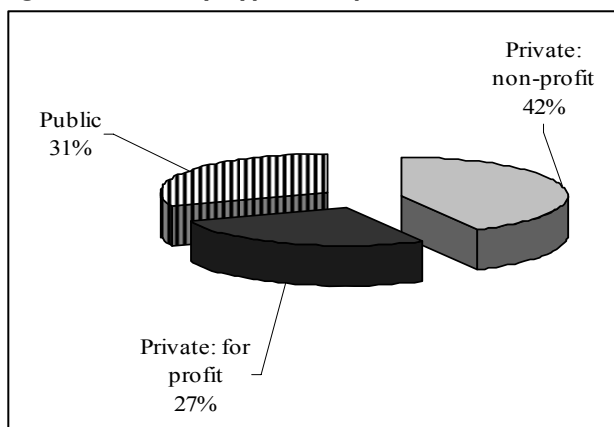
Composite indices assess country performance in a diverse set of issues including competitiveness, governance, social aspects, human rights, the environment, security and globalization, amongst others. Indices taken into consideration in this note cover either a particular set of countries or the world.ⁱ

Public and private institutions as well as individual scholars and private universities elaborate these indices (Figure 1). We define *public institutions* to include international governmental organizations (such as UNDP or the World Bank) or federal institutions such as national universities or government departments. *Private institutions (profit and non-profit)* include consultancy firms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and financial services firms. Individual scholars and research centers in private universities also elaborate their own indices, publishing them in a book, report or paper.

Indices are elaborated, either based on a single indicator, several indicators or sub-indices and then the country scores are used to either create a ranking, to show progress (or setbacks) or to simply present the data—without necessarily ranking the countries. Rankings are generally based on the following methods:

- An elaborate index is prepared, composed of *sub-indices* (e.g. the Commitment to Development Index or the Environmental Sustainability Index).
- A simple index is constructed based on a *subset of indicators* (e.g. the Human Development Index—HDI)
- A *single indicator* is used to rank the country (e.g. Under Five Mortality Rank (U5MR) or Ranking on Major Military Spenders).

Figure 1: Indices by Type of Responsible Institution



Source: Own elaboration.

The quantity of composite indices has been accelerating since 1990, with a greater number of institutions elaborating such indices. Moreover, the issues covered by the indices are growing and are varied in nature ranging from children’s health to a country’s business environment. Currently, the number of composite indi-

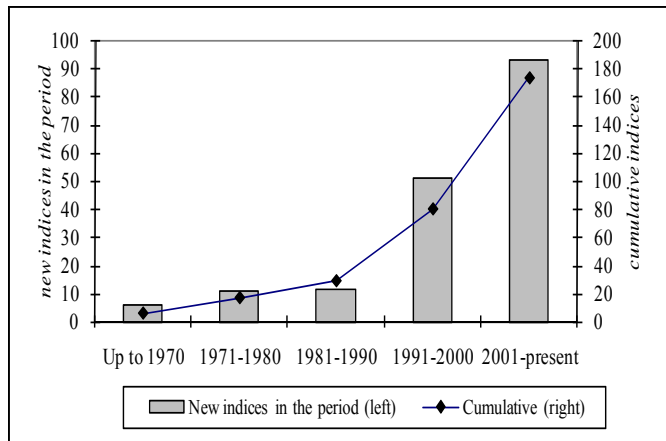
ces assessing countries in some aspect amount to 178 (Figure 2).ⁱⁱ

The first indices and ratings to come out were on sovereign risk and economic issues. However, throughout the years, the issues covered have broadened to include gender aspects, environmental performance, corruption, globalization and competitiveness measures including technological aspects and innovation capacity. Amongst these new issues, there are now four globalization indices—all created during the 2000-2008 period.

Several findings emerge from this landscape. First, the quantity of indices has surged in the past 15 years. Around 84 percent of the 178 indices found were created in the 1991-2008 period. Second, the number of institutions elaborating such indices has expanded with different institutions launching their own “signature” index (with the corresponding ranking or assessment). In some cases, one institution has developed several indices.ⁱⁱⁱ Third, the issues covered by the indices are expanding. The increasing availability of information together with new global issues arising and the growing demand for transparency from key constituencies may have been the propelling factors that explain such a rising trend. Finally, more than 70 percent of the indices remain active, that is, they are updated frequently (Figure 3).

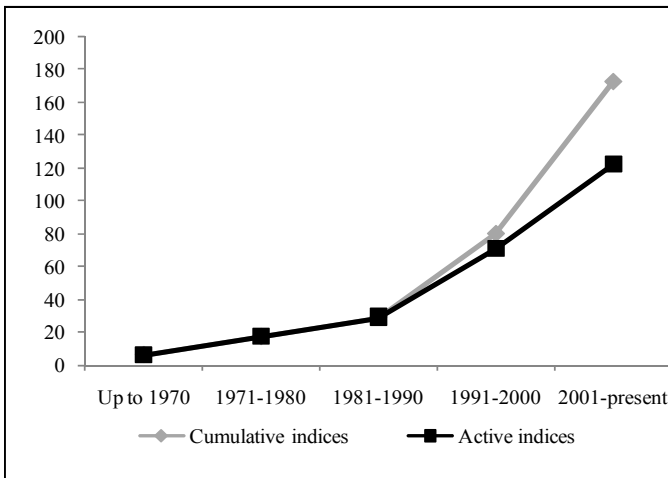
Figure 2: Growth in the Number of Indices

Source: Own elaboration.



As Figure 1 shows, the bulk of indices are elaborated by private, non-profit institutions, followed by public institutions such as international organizations. Moreover, out of the 125 institutions (and authors) that participated in the elaboration of these 178 indices, close to 22 percent are responsible for constructing 2 or more indices.

Figure 3: Cumulative versus Active Indices



Source: Own elaboration.

So, what are some of the uses of these indices? First, indices simplify complex topics, inform and show changes in rankings across time, for comparison purposes. Second, indices assess progress towards international commitments (such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Official Development Assistance (ODA) and social goals). Third, they inform domestic policymakers on country trends and possible gaps (e.g. the HDI). Fourth, they serve as policy decision tools (e.g. the World Bank’s Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) or the United States’ Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) ratings for allocating aid). Moreover, they can inform investors on country’s credit ratings or governance position (such as Moody’s and S&P’s sovereign credit ratings and World Bank’s Governance indicators). Indices also serve as tools for academics for empirical research. Finally, they serve as forward looking/forecasting tools (such as sovereign ratings and AT Kearney’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index – to cite some examples).

Although indices are useful information tools, there are many criticisms and caveats to be taken into account when confronting such measures. The most common criticisms of these indices are as follows: a) They tend to oversimplify a very complex reality that cannot be captured in a single measure, b) The methodologies used to construct these indices and assessments are not always disclosed, c) There are methodological faults such as the choice of indicators used, the issue of collinearity amongst indicators, the weights assigned to different categories and the quality of data used to construct the index. Moreover, criticism is also directed on the use of the same methodology for industrial and developing countries alike, d) Indices may be subject to manipulation and thus they are more “creative accounting” exercises than objective measures, iv e) They tend to “glorify” the same countries and they are used to “name and shame” others without adding any value, f) For those rankings that categorize countries into grouping such as “high”, “medium” and “low” or “good”, “worse” and “bad”, the point range used is very subjective, g) For forward-looking indices such as sovereign credit ratings, which aim at assessing the likelihood of default, they are criticized for failing to anticipate crises, downgrading the country too late in time.

Endnotes

ⁱ There exist indices elaborated for *one country* assessing the within-country regional units such as states or provinces and cities. Moreover, there exist indices for *institutions*, (i.e. Civil Society Organizations, private companies or international organizations) that assess and measure these organizations in different areas such as transparency, accountability, performance and the like. However, these are not included in this note.

ⁱⁱ For a listing of these indices please refer to, Bandura, Romina. 2008. “A Survey of Composite Indices Measuring Country Performance: 2008 Update.” UNDP/ODS Working Paper, New York.

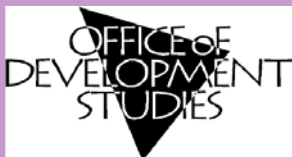
ⁱⁱⁱ For example indices elaborated by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), AT/Kearney, World Markets Research Centre (WMRC) and the World Economic Forum, to cite a few organizations.

^{iv} For example, some indices rely on expert opinions or other qualitative data and their methodologies might not be disclosed so the results can be biased.

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