

Measuring Trends and Inequality: Monitoring Country Progress in Asia

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Presenters

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Suzanne Polak:

Thank you and welcome again to our Summit. As Josie said I'm the new Regional Learning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Advisor at the USAID here in Bangkok. And I look forward to meeting with you more often, both formally and informally so we can share best practices and experiences in the region.

So today I'm going to be explaining an analytical monitoring systems that we use at USAID and its called Monitoring Country Progress or MCP. I'm happy to continue our discussion on indicators and measuring.

I will be presenting today a snapshot of an analysis based on this system that I did for the mission here in January as they were starting their development strategy. So before joining RDMA here in Bangkok, I actually worked in USAID Washington as a Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst on this MCP system.

So for this presentation I just have a few slides at the beginning where I'm going to talk about the background and a brief description of the system in general, the methodology behind it, and then talk about the idea of measuring trends and integrating that monitoring and evaluation and give you some practical applications of MCP here at AID, and then go into some specific examples from the Asia analysis.

What is Monitoring Country Progress? Well MCP is a system that gives us both macro and sector

level data to analyze country progress along these five dimensions: economic reforms, governing just and democratically, macroeconomic performance, investing in people, and peace and security. These also align with the State Department Strategic Framework.

For each of these dimensions we created an index. And that's composed of a separate set of indicators related to that sector. And so I will be showing you two of these indices in more detail in my presentation.

MCP was first developed in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau and then was expanded these past few years into a global data set, and we did it in support of the new strategy – you may have heard that already this morning, that country development cooperation strategy policy. Here we have a regional development cooperation strategy. So the methodology of MCP is we draw on publicly-available cross country data from a variety of sources such as the World Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank, WHO, we have various UN data sets that we use and also U.S. government data sets.

For each index we have primary data and they're converted on a 1 to 5 scale where the 1 represents worst country performance worldwide and the 5 represents best worldwide. We also have a kind of a complicated weighting scheme for each of our indices, and if you are interested we have a methodology that explains all of that as well as a description of all of our indicators. I have two websites at the end of the presentation and that's where you can find them.

A key to our system is using visual analytical tools, which is what my gap analysis is that I'll be showing you pieces of. And why we use this is we believe that it really assists in illustrating trends or gaps or inequalities in development or in countries or across regions that you may [audio break] for prioritizing potential development objectives for this strategy.

So when I presented the analysis visually it made it easier to track spots that you would want to continue the conversation about and want to explore these more. We had a few unexpected observations and some surprises that I'll be showing you. But before I go into the slide I just want to tell you that, at the request of the missions, this is how I grouped Asia, so we have ASEAN, Southeast Asia, LMI, East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific Islands. I want to note also that China and India are not included in any of the regional averages.

This is our first type of visualization and we call it our development profile chart. I don't know if you'll be able to see it back there. This is -- down here it's just telling you where this is from so you don't have to worry about the lines there. But those are four of our indices and these circles are all of our countries that I have in this analysis. And so we have an Asia average in the middle, you'll see that, the yellow line. The OEC is at the top there, the Latin America and Caribbean countries and sub-Saharan Africa. This is just giving us an overview. Here is Asia in our indices.

Then what I did is break the Asia average down into the regional averages. I now use the East Asia emerging as the best performer and we see South Asia and Southeast Asia now are kind of similar

and they're quite low in governing justly and democratically and align there with sub-Saharan Africa. That just gives us a different view of what might be going on in the Asia region.

This is what we call a radar or web chart; you might have seen these before. Again, the mission asked of me to divide ASEAN countries into the developing, which is the blue and the advanced, which is the red. And so these are our actual indicators for this specific reforms index and the four on the right side are from the World Bank and trade liberalization is from the Heritage Foundation.

Here you can see there's quite a bit of a difference, there's these gaps between the developing ASEAN region versus the advanced so that just also gives you a visualization. We also use -- it's just interesting, especially in Europe and Eurasia, for one country and tracking at a time because often they regress in Europe and Eurasia, especially in democratic reforms and economic reforms.

So this is the same economic reforms index but now I have it into a trend analysis, which is our third type of visualization. I have it down to 11 years here. So again I took out the Asia regions, East Asia is the top performer and now we have the LMI region as the poor performer. So this is where the graphs started to become interesting to the mission because I took out the LMI countries then and then put them on the graph and now we see a wide variation. So we see that even though LMI is grouped as a region they actually are not similar in this index at least for economic reforms. And we see that actually in Vietnam and Burma have improved, Cambodia and Laos have gone

down slightly; Thailand is up there but it hasn't progressed much.

So the levels of disparity within the LMI in a graph like this and also other ones that I had prepared, reconfirmed for the mission that they should prioritize these countries, but then also being aware of the differences within that region itself.

This is one of our other indicators from economic reforms; this is Doing Business -- World Bank's Doing Business. So again we see East Asia as the top performer, LMI is down there. When we break it out again we see this variation. So Thailand is up there and it's consistently a high performer, and then we have other countries down here. And we didn't have -- they didn't have information for Laos so we're not able to include it.

This is our second index, governing justly and democratically in Asia and it's also made up of five indicators. Again, this is the same idea where we have East Asia at the top and LMI at the bottom. What's interesting about this is that there hasn't really been -- at least according to these indicators there has not been a lot of progress over the past 11 years in governing justly and democratically; it's kind of just been stagnant. And similarly in the LMI its a consistently poor performer. And again, in a lot of countries now we see the variation you see after 2006 Thailand drops and hasn't really recovered. Also this is interesting because four of our indicators are from Freedom House. And Freedom House for this year said that the Asia Pacific region was progressing in governance so they gave it a plus. But when we look at it here it's not as apparent that that -- doesn't look like progress here. Probably statistically it came out

that things were progressing here but it doesn't really look like it when you look at this type of graph.

So these next few slides are also of interest for the governance group because we do not have an indicator here that measures civil society directly for the Asia region. We do it in Europe and Eurasia, but we decided to use this as one of our sector level indicators and it's kind of a proxy-level indicator for civil society. So you'll see here both the LMI countries and ASEAN score especially low in associational and organizational rights, and rule of law. And again, this is Freedom House again: freedom of the press and we have LMI and ASEAN higher because they're in the not free zone.

So these were also a bit of a surprised, these four, because there was an assumption that civil society in the LMI region was active. But in these slides the environment just doesn't seem to be conducive to sustainable civil society.

So this definition took a look more deeply into the civil society's role as a development partner and has also become part of their strategy. This is the last slide and we see that the LMI countries are all down -- Thailand is right at the border of the not free zone.

These are also -- this is a custom indicator. The mission was interested in mobile technology and they were considering that as a component of their strategy. So this slide shows impressive growth and this is just cellular subscriptions. I also have internet, but it's similar, especially after 2006 it's really taken off in the whole region.

Then when we break it down, we take out the LMI countries we see Vietnam is actually at the top with East Asia. And Burma, although it's at the bottom, it's showing a little bit of growth. So this is that they will continue -- they will use mobile technology -- have that in their strategy as well. This was an interesting slide to them and this is something that just didn't come out when you saw the table of numbers that cell phone subscriptions are increasing. This showed it in a way that wasn't -- you just didn't feel it when you read it.

This is our last visualization style, we call it a scatter plot. Because we have our indices that we rescale from 1 to 5 we then can compare them against each other. This one is generally these are regions and this is saying that this is economic reforms and democratic reforms and generally you can say the more advanced you are economically the more you are democratically. But that's just kind of a generalization, with the next slide. There I pulled out all the regions and it's not -- that doesn't always hold true; we see China over here, the economic reforms is doing well; they're not government justly and democratically then the Pacific Islands are a little bit different, democratically they're doing better but then economically there's more _____. And then we see Southeast Asia is kind of scattered all through there.

These are just a few examples I wanted to show you from our gap analysis to give you an idea of how and why we use monitoring for strategic planning and also why we use visualization of data. And I have some takeaways from this presentation. At the macro level we see the importance of integrating a robust and reliable monitoring system into our strategic planning. At the sector level we

need to remember that when looking at our own programs or doing some background research and analysis for our evaluations, that we need to remember to dig deeper when we see regional averages to find the disparities at the individual country level, and also at the opposite, if we are in the country, to take a step back and look at the larger picture.

On the micro level we see how visual presentation as gap analysis that you might otherwise miss and I know right now, especially monitoring and evaluation, that's a very big topic. We have all these fancy data sets now and all this wonderful information is how do you present it to have a compelling picture to show your values?

These two websites have most of our -- definitely has a methodology in our analysis. I don't have a full gap analysis for Asia on either of these but I'll try to get it on USAIDlearninglab.org which you have on your agenda at the bottom and there's where you'll find a lot of the presentations or just a lot of information from the Summit. And again I have three other indices so we have one other index that's all health indicators, and we have _____. This was just a snapshot to give you an idea of what we do and what we like them to find and how to use it. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you, Suzanne, that was really interesting and helpful. Do we have any questions from the audience for Suzanne?

Jeff Philips: Hi. Real quick. I'm Jeff Philips from IRI. Why did you exclude China and India from the study [crosstalk] was it at the request of the mission? If you were to include it, would that, I assume would really skew the data?

to be that meaningful if we just asked for statistics for all of the countries.

Suzanne Polak:

I have to say Jeff used to work on this system so I think I know what your question will be.

Jeff Swedberg:

I couldn't help myself; I have to ask Suzanne a question. I'm Jeff Swedberg, I work with QED. I did have the same job that Suzanne had with the Europe and Eurasia Bureau in 2007 to '10 I think. One of the things I thought was interesting was around 2008 or so a couple of _____ changed the indicators that went into the _____: human capital and economic performance. Ron Sprout, who was chief economist for the Europe and Eurasia Bureau thought that the index should be better designed. But what that did is you lost some of the ability to check changes through time; you kind of lost some of the longitudinal utility of the indices. I'm wondering have you changed these indices at all since then or have you sort of thought -- at a certain point just stop changing the indicators, just leave them where they are so we can track them over time for a longer period?

Suzanne:

Currently -- so the set you were working on was Europe and Eurasia, correct? So this is -- the global data set is slightly different. And that one we made sure that we could go back at least to the year 2000, and we're not planning to change it. It's different because as I mentioned in Europe and Eurasia we have a specific indicator for governance especially, measuring civil society and also Freedom House does Nations in Transit and it has a lot of information about what's going on there. So this global data set is actually new in the sense of, all the indicators. We made sure that they went back far enough so we could still do this trend analysis.

Moderator: Other questions or comments?

Male Speaker: I like _____ different indicators. I'd just like to know what is the data source of this indicator? Is it a commissioned research in government statistics? Or the contractors of projects implemented in the countries?

Suzanne: These, the ones I showed you, the economic reforms is the World Bank, a set of their indicators, and also Heritage Foundation, and democratic reforms is also World Bank indicators and Freedom House. But we make sure we use a high level and macro level indicator like the World Bank -- we do use country statistics but only if one country asks us -- the mission say. Like for example India wants us to do a gap analysis and they want us to use statistics from their institute there. Otherwise we can't keep it -- the data would be too different than what we've used from some of these other sources. Yeah, so this is quite macro level; you're not getting that deep. But at least it's consistent and that's what we were looking for.

Moderator: Other questions or comments?

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