

Human Rights Indicators across Institutional Regimes

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate what human rights indicators are, and what role they play within international organizations. In particular, this paper argues that human rights indicators, far from having similar structures and posing similar problems, are created and live within frameworks, through processes, and for purposes that might significantly diverge from indicator to indicator. The central claim is that the pluralism underlying the world of human rights indicators reflects, among other things, the variable structures, objectives and modes of operation of the international organizations inhabiting that world. This paper thus explores how the massive production and extensive use of human rights indicators in recent years has not only been influenced by, but has also shaped, the missions, internal structures and operational practices of the international organizations that produce and use them.

Keywords

International organizations – indicators – human rights

1. Introduction

Human rights indicators are indicators conveying information on a situation, activity or outcome evaluated from the perspective of human rights.¹ A new ‘market’ for human

¹ For some possible definitions of ‘human rights indicators’, *see* below Part 4. Needless to say, part of the difficulty in defining what human rights indicators are lies in the fact that many meanings are attached to the vague and all-inclusive notion of ‘human rights’. On the inherent ambiguity and plurivocality of that notion, *see*, among others, M. Bussani, *Il diritto dell’Occidente: Geopolitica delle regole globali* (Einaudi, Turin, 2010), esp. pp. 135–169; A. Sarat and T. R. Kearns, ‘The Unsettled

rights indicators has emerged in recent years, offering a variety of products, to a variety of users, from a variety of suppliers: international organizations, states, hybrid organizations, non-governmental entities, businesses and academics.²

While the first experiments with human rights indicators in the 1970s were mostly conducted by human rights activists and private associations, it is now international organizations that figure most prominently in that market as the primary producers, users, and, at least in some fields, standard-setters.³ Such a massive production and use of human rights indicators has been influenced by, and had many consequences for, the ways in which international organizations perform their functions and interact with other actors, shaping both international human rights regimes, and the roles that international organizations play within them.

Some literature has scrutinized how technologies of data processing affect international organizations' core functions,⁴ and has investigated the correlations between international organizations' modes of operation and the indicators they produce or use.⁵ However, little research has been done in the human rights field. This paper aims to start filling that gap by investigating what human rights indicators are, and what role they play within international organizations. We will see that human rights indicators, far from having similar structures and posing similar problems, might be very different creatures from one another.⁶ The claim here is that human rights indicators differ insofar as they are

Status of Human Rights: An Introduction', in A. Sarat and T. R. Kearns (eds.), *Human Rights: Concepts, Concerns, Contingencies* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2002) pp. 1–23.

² A. Rosga and M. L. Satterthwaite, 'The Trust in Indicators: Measuring Human Rights' (2009) 27 *Berkeley Journal of International Law* p. 253, at p. 255.

³ See below, Part 4.

⁴ See e.g. J. Shkabatur, 'A Global Panopticon? The Changing Role of International Organizations in the Information Age' (2011) 33 *Michigan Journal of International Law* pp. 159–214.

⁵ T. C. Halliday, 'Legal Yardsticks: International Financial Institutions as Diagnosticians and Designers of the Law of Nations', in K. E. Davis, A. Fisher, B. Kingsbury and S. Engle Merry (eds.), *Governance by Indicators. Global Power through Classification and Rankings* (OUP, Oxford, 2012), pp. 180–216 ("the use and form of indicators by any one International Financial Institution reflects the structure and dynamics of the ecology of international organizations in which it is embedded": p. 181). See also Michael Riegner's contribution to this special forum.

⁶ For similar observations, though with regard to global indicators in general, see K. E. Davis, Kingsbury and S. Engle Merry, 'Introduction: Global Governance by Indicators', in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 3–4, 6; S. Cassese and L. Casini, 'The Regulation of Global Indicators', in Davis et al., *supra*

created and live within frameworks, through processes, and for purposes that diverge significantly from each other. In other words, the inherent pluralism underlying the world of human rights indicators reflects, among other things, the variable structures, objectives and modes of operation of the international organizations inhabiting that world. Following the lines of enquiry outlined in the introduction to this special forum,⁷ and those followed by other contributions,⁸ this paper scrutinizes the varied landscape of human rights indicators, and explores how — through time — these indicators have simultaneously shaped, and been influenced by, the missions, internal structures and operational practices of the international organizations producing and using them.

For this purpose, notwithstanding the great number of human rights indicators on and with which non-governmental organizations and private individuals work, this paper will focus solely on those human rights indicators produced and used by international organizations. After recalling the brief history of human rights indicators, the literature, and the critiques that have arisen on the subject (in Part 2), the paper will survey the actual evidence that can be gathered about the changes that these indicators have managed to trigger (in Part 3). This overview will allow us to examine the standard accounts that are circulating on human rights indicators (in Part 4), and set them against the variety of forms that human rights indicators can take, and features that they can have (in Part 5). The paper will then show that some of the indicators' most distinctive characteristics can be related to the different structures, missions and practices of the international organizations participating in the indicator-making activities. To do so, it will focus, in particular, on the network of subjects involved in the indicators' production (in

note 5, pp. 465–466 D. Restrepo Amariles, 'Legal indicators, global law and legal pluralism: an introduction' (2015) 47 *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* p. 9, pp. 12-14. *See also* S. Engle Merry, 'Measuring the World: Indicators, Human Rights, and Global Governance' (2011) 52 *Current Anthropology* p. 83, at p. 88:

indicators differ significantly between those produced by a powerful organization, such as the World Bank, which scores and ranks countries, and more participatory processes, such as OHCHR human rights indicators, in which the experts provide a framework — but to a somewhat greater extent, the choice of indicators, methods, and data collection lies with the countries being measured.

⁷ *See* Rene Urueña's Introduction to this special forum.

⁸ *See esp.* the contributions from Siobhan Airey on the right to development and Michael Riegner on labour rights.

Part 6) and on the indicators' internal structuring (in Part 7). The concluding section (Part 8) will outline the possibilities to which such a research agenda can give rise.

2. Mainstream Accounts and Critiques

It was 1972 when a United States-based, non-governmental and non-profit organization, Freedom House, published the first edition of its annual publication on civil and political rights.⁹ In 1982, the American Statistical Association transformed its Ad Hoc Committee on Scientific Freedom and Human Rights, created after Carlos Noriega and Gabriela Mellibovski's disappearance in Argentina in the late 1970s, into a standing committee.¹⁰ One year later, the practice of human rights ranking was further developed by the British campaigner Charles Humana, who in 1983 published the first edition of his World Human Rights Guide, in which he assessed the condition of human rights in a number of countries.¹¹

Soon thereafter, the trend gained momentum at the international level, and international organizations readily stepped in. Since the 2000s, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has coordinated a research project on human rights indicators. The project resulted in the publication, in 2012, of a volume

⁹ See Freedom House, 'Our History', available at: <freedomhouse.org/content/our-history>. See also C. G. Bradley, 'International Organizations and the Production of Indicators: The Case of Freedom House', in S. Engle Merry, K. Davis and B. Kingsbury (eds.), *The Quiet Power of Indicators: Measuring Development, Corruption, and the Rule of Law* (CUP, Cambridge, 2015). For more on the historical emergence of human rights indicators from the 1970s onwards, see generally *inter alia* S. Engle Merry, 'The Problem of Human Rights Indicators', unpublished manuscript, pp. 4, 34 *et seq.*, <law.uvic.ca/demcon/2012_readings/Chapter_3_Problem_of_HR_indicators.pdf>; G. de Beco, 'Human Rights Indicators for Assessing State Compliance with International Human Rights' (2008) 77 *Nordic Journal of International Law* pp. 23, 25–26 (noting that "human rights indicators have a short history"); J.-L. Bodin, 'Foreword', in J. Asher, D. Banks & F. J. Scheuren (eds.), *Statistical Methods for Human Rights* (Springer, New York, 2008), p. vii; R. L. Barsh, 'Measuring Human Rights: Problems of Methodology and Purpose' (1993) 15 *Human Rights Quarterly* pp. 87–90.

¹⁰ Bodin, *supra* note 9, p. vii.

¹¹ C. Humana, *World Human Rights Guide* (Hutchinson, London, 1983).

entitled 'Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation',¹² the aim of which is to provide "a reference resource with operational tools ... to promote objective and comprehensive human rights assessments".¹³

Despite being relative newcomers to the stage of global indicators,¹⁴ human rights indicators have attracted a good deal of attention. Many institutions, activists and researchers have embraced with enthusiasm the move towards the 'indicatorization' of human rights concerns, sometimes establishing their own set of indicators.¹⁵ Beneath this enthusiasm lies the belief that human rights indicators come with many benefits. The exponential growth of human rights indicators is usually linked to the increasing reliance upon quantitative knowledge in local and global governance throughout the twentieth century,¹⁶ of which indicators are seen as both instruments and results.¹⁷ Indicators, it is stressed, have the capacity to transform complex information into numbers, make data easily intelligible and facilitate inter-temporal and inter-unit comparisons.¹⁸ Human rights indicators reduce the burden on policy-makers to process information in the course of decision-making, and help them to carry out diagnostic analysis and planning of human

¹² OHCHR, *Human Rights Indicators. A Guide to Measurement and Implementation* (United Nations, New York-Geneva, 2012) ('OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide'), available at: <ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Indicators/Pages/HRIndicatorsIndex.aspx>.

¹³ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 1.

¹⁴ De Beco, *supra* note 9, p. 25.

¹⁵ As to human rights indicators established by international organizations, *see* the examples provided below in the text, Parts 6 and 7. Among the many possible illustrations of human rights indicators made by non-governmental organizations, human rights activists and researchers, *see e.g.* those cited by L. Buchely, 'Indicators as a Form of Resistance —Colombian Community Mothers: An Example of the Global South's Use of Indicators as a Counter-Hegemonic Global Dominance Technique' (2014) 25 *Revista Colombiana de Derecho Internacional* pp. 225–266; and M. Infantino, 'The Law of Indicators on Women's Human Rights: Unmet Promises and Global Challenges' (2012) *IRPA Working Paper Series – GAL Series No. 9*, pp. 21–22.

¹⁶ A. Desrosières, *La politique des grands nombres: Histoire de la raison statistique* (2nd ed.) (La Découverte, Paris, 2000) pp. 26–59; T. M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995) pp. ix–xi; I. Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (CUP, Cambridge, 1990) p. 2.

¹⁷ Davis, *et al.*, *supra* note 6, pp. 3–28.

¹⁸ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 1.

rights programs.¹⁹ They outline visible occurrences, correlations and patterns that would otherwise go unperceived,²⁰ and in so doing both support victims' requests to duty-bearers,²¹ and also apply pressure for the increased accountability of States and non-State actors for human rights infringements.²² Further, especially from the point of view of human rights bodies, indicators provide a user-friendly tool to test states' performances against human rights standards, and ease international organizations' monitoring of States' compliance with their human rights commitments,²³ while furthering the articulation of universally applicable human rights standards.²⁴

Yet not everybody is enthusiastic about the spread of human rights indicators. Rapidly, human rights indicators have become the targets of many critiques. These critiques point out that the reliance upon numbers by human rights indicators transforms issues that are hardly measurable, such as human suffering, into simplified quantitative information. By dryly reporting the numbers of people with no food or shelter, raped

¹⁹ S. McInerney-Lankford and H.-O. Sano, *Human Rights Indicators in Development: An Introduction* (The World Bank, Washington, 2010) p. 1; J. V. Welling, 'International Indicators and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights' (2008) 30 *Human Rights Quarterly* p. 933, at p. 945.

²⁰ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 112; Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 83; Welling, *supra* note 19, pp. 945–946.

²¹ N. Thede, 'Human Rights and Statistics: Some Reflections on the No-Man's-Land Between Concept and Indicator' (2001) 18 *Statistical Journal of the UNECE* p. 259, at pp. 262–263.

²² E. Benko, 'How Human Rights Organizations Measure Human Rights', in Carr Center (ed.), *Measurement and Human Rights: Tracking Progress, Assessing Impact* (2005) p. 19, available at: <hks.harvard.edu/cchrp/mhr/publications/documents/Measurement_and_Human_Rights_Tracking_Progress_Assessing_Impac_Report_2005.pdf>; Welling, *supra* note 19, pp. 935, 945.

²³ McInerney-Lankford and Sano, *supra* note 19, pp. 1, 14, 18–21; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, p. 257; A.-M. Fröberg and M. Scheinin, 'Report of Turku Expert Meeting on Human Rights Indicators' (2005) p. 1, available at: <web.abo.fi/institut/imr/research/seminars/indicators/>; R. Malhotra and N. Fasel, 'Quantitative Human Rights Indicators – A Survey of Major Initiatives' (2005), p. 1, note 3, available at: <web.abo.fi/institut/imr/research/seminars/indicators/>.

²⁴ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 104; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 280–281; OHCHR, 'Report on Preventable Maternal Mortality and Human Rights', UN Doc. A/HRC/14/39 (16 April 2010), para. 30 (explaining how indicators on maternal mortality have helped show that high rates of maternal mortality are strongly related to low rates of literacy and education among women, thus substantiating the claim that the deprivation of the right to education undermines women's enjoyment of their right to health).

women, and children starved to death, indicators inevitably de-humanise and 'normalise' real world tragedies, eschewing individual stories and emotions.²⁵ Too often, according to this view, human rights indicators inadequately consider legal layers and social groups that do not fit their drafters' assumptions about law and society.²⁶ Methodological choices, and implicit homeward and ethnocentric biases, it is further stressed, may taint all of the steps underlying the construction of indicators. As a technology mostly developed by people from, or educated in, the Global North, these biases can affect the quality of understanding of the Global South which is used when developing human rights indicators.²⁷ The result is that indicators often bring to the fore allegedly scientific data, the content of which may be highly debatable, and very difficult to unpack for their readers and users.²⁸ Behind and through their allegedly scientific basis, human rights indicators entail a silent but effective transfer of power from political elites to (officially) de-politicised, epistemic communities of bureaucrats.²⁹ In the hands of such communities,

²⁵ Davis, Kingsbury, Merry, *supra* note 9, p. 10; S. Kalantry, J. E. Getgen and S. Arrigg Koh, 'Enhancing Enforcement of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Using Indicators: A Focus on the Right to Education in the ICESCR' (2010) 32 *Human Rights Quarterly* p. 253, at p.289; M. Ignatieff and K. Desormeau, 'Measurement and Human Rights: Introduction' in Carr Center (ed.), *supra* note 22, pp. 3–4.

²⁶ C. Powell, 'Gender Indicators as Global Governance: This is Not Your Father's World Bank', in K. Jayasuriya (ed.), *Big Data, Big Challenges in Evidence-Based Policy Making* (West Academic Publishing, St. Paul, 2015) (forthcoming), pp. 6–12, available at: <ssrn.com/abstract=2429456>; OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, pp. 22–23, 30, 44; Merry, *supra* note 6; Thede, *supra* note 21, p. 264.

²⁷ On the Global North and Global South dynamics in the context of the indicators, *see* Buchely, *supra* note 15; S. Dadush, 'Impact Investment Indicators: A Critical Assessment', in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 432–434; M. A. Prada Uribe, 'Development through Data? A Case Study on the World Bank's Performance Indicators and their Impact on Development in the Global South' (2012) *IRPA Working Papers Series No. 5*.

²⁸ Even when the indicators' results can be unpacked, denouncing an indicator's flaws could prove a bad strategy for improving their rates in the short-term: N. K. Dutta, 'Accountability in the Generation of Governance Indicators' (2010) 22 *Florida Journal of International Law* pp. 401, 449–450.

²⁹ Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 88; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, p. 302.

indicators act as a 'technology of global governance':³⁰ that is, they more or less openly embody policy visions about existing problems and about how these problems have to be overcome.³¹ Think, for instance, of how effectively the visions on poverty and development enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals have permeated the global public debate.³² Last but not least, indicators' emphasis on measuring performance may have the effect of boosting 'rank-seeking' strategies by indicators' targets (most of the time, States), inducing them to pursue policies designed to improve their rank, rather than their actual behavior.³³ It has long been observed, for example, that indicators focusing on gender equality have in many countries contributed to worsening the condition of girls in primary education. This happens because indicators on gender equality in education usually count the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school. Such a measure, however, provides states with a built-in incentive to document enrolment of female students, and to put aside other long-term objectives, such as the elimination of sexual segregation, the improvement of girls' rates of school attendance, and the reduction of the gap between female and male drop-out rates.³⁴

3. Much Ado about Something

Apart from sporadic case studies showing how selected human rights indicators have entered into the global and local dynamics of policy change,³⁵ there is little evidence

³⁰ Merry, *supra* note 6, pp. 83–95; *see also* the contributions of R. Urueña, C. Stone, A. Rosga and M. L. Satterthwaite, A. T. Gallagher and J. Chuang, M. Zaloznaya and J. Hagan in Davis et al., *supra* note 5.

³¹ Ignatieff and Desormeau, *supra* note 25, p. 3; Barsh, *supra* note 9, pp. 100–102.

³² K. Rittich, 'Governing By Measuring: The Millennium Development Goals in Global Governance', in H. Ruiz Fabri, R. Wolfrum and J. Gogolin (eds.), *Select Proceedings of the European Society of International Law* (2nd ed.) (Hart, Oxford–Portland, 2010) pp. 463–487.

³³ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 93, Table 6; *see also* McInerney-Lankford and Sano, *supra* note 19, p. 16; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 285–286.

³⁴ Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 285–286.

³⁵ *See, for instance*, A. Fisher, 'From Diagnosing Under-Immunization to Evaluating Health Care Systems: Immunization Coverage Indicators as a Technology of Global Governance', in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 217–247; R. Urueña, 'Internally Displaced Population in Colombia: A Case Study on the Domestic Aspects of Indicators as Technologies of Global Governance' in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 249–280; A. T. Gallagher and J. Chuang, 'The Use of Indicators to Measure Government

supporting either side of the above-mentioned debate. The impact that human rights indicators have actually had, including upon whom and in what fields they have exerted their influence, is largely unclear. It is certainly reasonable to assume that indicators have somehow shaped the behaviours of their targets and beneficiaries, reinforced technocratic communities dealing with human rights issues, and contributed to affirming human rights measurement in the vocabulary of policy-making.³⁶ Yet the traditionally low political visibility of human rights communities on the one hand, and governments' usual unwillingness to sustain projects aiming to comment on public action on the other,³⁷ might explain why the overall magnitude of human rights indicators' effects is quite hard to trace.³⁸ However, this does not mean that human rights indicators are totally without consequences. Among the few recognizable changes brought about by human rights indicators, among the most evident are the impacts they have had on the agenda, the strategies, and the working procedures of the institutions who make and use them, including international organizations.

The proliferation of indicators has led international organizations to strengthen their data-collecting and management capacities. Many international organizations currently devote substantial time, personnel, energy and resources to creating or participating in indicators that (for internal purposes or vis-à-vis third parties, such as member States and donors) keep track of their actions or measure human rights in a given

Responses to Human Trafficking' in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 317–343; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 285–286.

³⁶ Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 11.

³⁷ States are much more willing to support indicators aimed at sustaining requests for aid, as is often the case for development indicators, *see de Beco, supra* note 9, p. 28.

³⁸ Much less hard, by contrast, is finding such evidence for (at least some) indicators outside the human rights field. Think for instance of the educational restructuring carried out by states under the pressures of the PISA evaluation (*see* A. von Bogdandy and M. Goldmann, 'Taming and Framing Indicators: A Legal Reconstruction of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)', in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 53, 68–70), or of the many legal reforms and fierce reactions prompted by the publication of the World Bank's Doing Business Indicators. On the reforms, *see* A. Perry-Kessaris, 'Prepare your Indicators: Economics Imperialism on the Shores of Law and Development' (2011) 7 *International Journal of Law in Context* pp. 401–421; in relation to the reactions, *see* A.-J. Kerhuel and B. Fauvarque-Cosson, 'Is Law an Economic Contest? French Reactions to the Doing Business World Bank Reports and Economic Analysis of Law' (2009) 57 *American Journal of Comparative Law* pp. 811–830.

situation or context. In some cases, the production of, or the participation in the assessment against, indicators has become a core activity of international organizations, helping to generate visibility or attract funding. The recourse to indicators has thus created new competences, professions and fields of expertise, and has transformed the way in which international organizations manage and perform their daily work.³⁹

The proliferation of indicators has also been self-reinforcing. As mechanisms for empirical assessment that are steered by specific technocratic communities (so-to-speak), human rights indicators established by international organizations often work as a knowledge-building framework for analysis, as well as use by other organizations in the construction of their own indicators. In this way, human rights indicators tend to promote their own diffusion through mutual interconnections, linkages, spontaneous imitation, and processes of institutional isomorphism.⁴⁰ To give but one example: when dealing with issues on education, the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme ('UNDP'), the Millennium Development Goals Indicators of the Millennium Development Goals Gap Task Force, and the World Bank's World Development Indicators all make use of statistics and indicators prepared by UNESCO.⁴¹ Reliance on the complete and up-to-date data gathered by UNESCO enables the UNDP, the UN Statistics Division ('UNSD') and the World Bank to save time and resources, and to benefit from the authority enjoyed by UNESCO itself in the education field (and in turn enhance the legitimacy of their own indicators). At the same time, such reliance reinforces and strengthens

³⁹ M. Satterthwaite, 'Rights-Based Humanitarian Indicators in Post-Earthquake Haiti' in Davis et al., *supra* note 5, pp. 365 *et seq.*, esp. pp. 368–374; Ignatieff and Desormeau, *supra* note 25, p. 8. This is even more evident in the NGO sector, where the obligation to produce human rights indicators with program-monitoring purposes is often imposed on beneficiaries by donors and funders: see Buchely, *supra* note 15; L. Buchely, 'The NGOisation Dilemma: International Cooperation, Grassroots Relations and Government Action from an Accountability Perspective' (2013) 31 *Buffalo Public International Law Journal* pp. 63–117; Merry, *supra* note 6, pp. 84, 90.

⁴⁰ Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 86. Phenomena of such a mimetism are far from unusual in the global world: see B. Kingsbury, N. Krisch, R. B. Stewart, 'The Emergence of Global Administrative Law' (2005) 68 *Law & Contemporary Problems* pp. 15–61.

⁴¹ Cf *Human Development Report 2014: Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience* (UNDP, New York, 2014) p. 195; *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015* (United Nations, New York, 2015) p. 72; *World Development Indicators 2015* (World Bank, Washington D.C., 2015) pp. ix, 54.

UNESCO's role in setting *the* standard for the measurement of educational rights. Competition for resources and ascendancy has also given rise to other forms of linkages, agreed divisions of competences, and active collaborations between different organizations, allowing all players to enjoy the benefits of the game. For instance, since their publication in 2008, UNESCO's Media Development Indicators — a very successful initiative by UNESCO in the field of countries' media development — have gained such a widespread international recognition that both the United Nations and the Council of Europe have now set up a collaborative program with UNESCO for the elaboration of their own approach in the fields of communication development and good governance.⁴²

In summary, human rights indicators have an impact on how international organizations conceive of their missions, design their strategies, and perform their work. However, as the following pages aim to demonstrate, the reverse also holds true: international organizations' missions, strategies, and operational practices exert an influence upon the indicators in which these organizations participate. Before going further in that direction, though, it is necessary to be aware of what human rights indicators are, what their main features are, and what they have and do not have in common. In other words, it is necessary to plunge into the pluralism underlying the world of human rights indicators.

⁴² As to the UN, see *Media Development Indicators: A Framework for Assessing Media Development* (UNESCO, Paris, 2008), p. vi, available at: <unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001631/163102e.pdf>. As to the work with the Council of Europe, see 'UNESCO and Council of Europe Discuss the Safety of Journalists', available at: <unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/news-and-in-focus-articles/all-news/news/>. In some rare cases, pressure from peer organizations has even led to the suppression of an indicator. Recall that the WHO renounced its ranking of the world's healthcare systems after one of its major funders — the United States — reacted badly to the publication of the World Health Report 2000 (WHO, *The World Health Report 2000. Health Systems: Improving Performance* (WHO, Geneva, 2000), pp. 152–157), in which the United States placed 37th amongst the world's health systems. In 2009, the Doing Business team had to drop its sub-index 'employing workers' after the International Trade Unions Confederation and the International Labour Organization declared that the index encouraged a race-to-the-bottom in social standards (see M. Riegner, 'Measuring the Good Governance State: A Legal Reconstruction of the World Bank's "Country Policy and Institutional Assessment"' (2012) *IRPA Working Paper No. 6*, p. 4).

4. Sorting Out Human Rights Indicators

It is rather trite to observe that human rights indicators differ between one another because they have diverging scopes, objects, or approaches. In other words, it is quite uncontested that human rights indicators might be:

- (a) universal or regional, depending on the breadth of their geographical coverage; and
- (b) general or thematic, focusing on the entire spectrum of human rights or on specific issues, respectively.

Indicators might also be:

- (c) based on quantitative data (i.e., numbers) or on qualitative information converted into numbers; and/or
- (d) grounded in event-based data on human rights violations, censuses and statistics, opinion surveys, and/or expert judgments.

They might:

- (f) be focused on economic, social and cultural rights only, on civil and political rights only, or on both;
- (g) adopt a 'violation' approach (stressing states' failure to comply with international human rights law) or an 'enjoyment' approach (stressing the extent to which rights holders are actually enjoying their rights); or
- (h) be centered on structures, processes and outcomes. For present purposes, 'structures' means the ratification of legal instruments on human rights protection, 'processes' refers to policies to promote human rights, and 'outcomes' points to efforts made to advance the concerned populations' enjoyment of human rights.⁴³

⁴³ It is generally agreed that the distinctions outlined in the text are of limited value, and should be flexibly understood, because boundaries between different types of indicators are often blurred and difficult to draw: *see* de Beco, *supra* note 9, p. 32; Cassese and Casini, *supra* note 6, p. 469; Infantino, *supra* note 15, pp. 8–9.

There could be little doubt that the significance of these distinctions goes beyond pure classification, since many of the above-mentioned features account for and determine different modes of operating and thinking by the organizations that participate in human rights indicators' endeavours. But the pluralism to which we are referring runs deeper than these distinctions: it goes to the very heart of the debate about what a human rights indicator is.

At the extremes of the debate, one finds those who — according to their own assumptions about who should make human rights indicators, and how and for what goals human rights indicators should be made — would either enlarge or restrict the possible forms and functions of human rights indicators. For some, a human rights indicator is any tool suitable for measuring the enjoyment and/or fulfilment of human rights, and which can increase opportunities to collect data on human rights issues.⁴⁴ Those who support this standpoint see human rights indicators as indicators providing “specific information on the state or condition of an event, activity or outcome” relating to human rights, thus including, for instance, development indicators and rule of law indicators.⁴⁵ Other commentators adopt much less liberal views, emphasizing that a human rights indicator, to be qualified as such, should not only convey information related to human rights standards, but also address and reflect human rights principles and concerns, and be conceived to help the assessment and monitoring of implementation of human rights norms.⁴⁶ According to this position, development and rule of law indicators should be left out of the picture.

⁴⁴ Malhotra and Fasel, *supra* note 23, p. 2; Fröberg and Scheinin, *supra* note 23, p. 2; more recently, OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 16; UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, *Statistics and Indicators for the Post-2015 Development Agenda* (2013), pp. 34–35, available at: <un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/UNTT_MonitoringReport_WEB.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Malhotra and Fasel, *supra* note 23, p. 2.

⁴⁶ M. Green, ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Indicators: Current Approaches to Human Rights Measurement’ (2001) 23 *Human Rights Quarterly* pp. 1062, at p. 1065: “a human rights indicator is a piece of information used in measuring the extent to which a legal right is being fulfilled or enjoyed in a given situation”. *See also* de Beco, *supra* note 9, p. 24: “indicators that are linked to human rights treaty standards, and that measure the extent to which duty-bearers are fulfilling their obligations and rights-holders enjoying their rights”.

There are also positions in the middle, such as that embraced by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ('OHCHR') in its 2012 volume entitled 'Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation'.⁴⁷ At first sight, the OHCHR appears to stick to a narrow view of what human rights indicators are. According to the OHCHR,⁴⁸

a human rights indicator is specific information on the state or condition of an object, event, activity or outcome that can be related to human rights norms and standards; that addresses and reflects human rights principles and concerns; and that can be used to assess and monitor the promotion and implementation of human rights.

At the same time, however, the OHCHR recognizes that "there could be a large number of other indicators, such as commonly used socioeconomic statistics ... that could meet (at least implicitly) all the definitional requirements of human rights indicators as laid out here".⁴⁹ Again, the most common example is that of development indicators: despite conceptual differences between the notions of 'development' and 'human rights', development indicators often overlap with human rights ones, and in practice they are invariably used in the evaluation of countries' human rights scores.⁵⁰ Acknowledging this reality, the OHCHR admits: "it is helpful to consider them [ie, development indicators] as human rights indicators, to the extent that they relate to human rights standards and principles and could be used for human rights assessments".⁵¹

⁴⁷ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12.

⁴⁸ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Many acknowledge the often limited value of the distinction between development and human rights indicators: *see e.g.* S. Fukuda Parr, T. Lawson-Remer and S. Randolph, 'Measuring the Progressive Realization of Human Rights Obligations: An Index of Economic and Social Rights Fulfillment' (2008) *Economic Working Papers, Paper No. 200822*, p. 3, available at: <digitalcommons.uconn.edu/econ_wpapers>. Others propose to merge them, for instance opening up spaces for human rights considerations in development indicators: *see e.g.* UN System Task Team, *supra* note 44, pp. x, xii, 22, 27, 29, 34–35.

⁵¹ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 16.

The breadth of the definition is not the only core issue subject to debate. Amongst other problems,⁵² another unresolved (though largely theoretical) controversy is whether the potential use of each indicator as a means of rating and comparing countries should be listed as a characteristic of human rights indicators. We will see later (in Part 7) that such potential use is a core structural characteristic of many human rights indicators. For the majority of experts and commentators, the objectives of human rights indicators necessarily include comparative assessments and rankings.⁵³ Yet others fiercely disagree, stressing that human rights indicators are not a structurally viable means for making comparisons between countries, because indicators must be adjusted to the uniqueness of the contexts to which they refer.⁵⁴

5. Human Rights Indicators' Pluralism

The claim made by this article is that the different interpretations just mentioned can be reconciled if one takes seriously the pluralism of human rights indicators. This pluralism can be traced back to the variety of frameworks, processes and purposes, within, through and for which international organizations (among many other actors) make and use human rights indicators. Rather than causing us to struggle to identify the features that are common to all types of human rights indicators, this approach invites us to acknowledge that different actors, pursuing different policies through different strategies, produce and use human rights indicators in different ways. This approach also calls for the drawing of correlations between the many forms and functions of human rights indicators, on the one hand, and the varying institutional, policy and practical arrangements of the international organizations that produce and use them, on the other hand. A study of such correlations would imply, among other things, exploring how international organizations — which often bundle together individual participants whose ideology and ethos may diverge from those of other participants — perform their roles

⁵² Under debate, for instance, is also whether or not mere statistics would qualify as a human rights indicator: *see* Infantino, *supra* note 15, p. 7.

⁵³ Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 280-281; Fukuda Parr, Lawson-Remer, Randolph, *supra* note 50, p. 1; Welling, *supra* note 19, pp. 941, 945.

⁵⁴ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 29; de Beco, *supra* note 9, p. 46; Fröberg and Scheinin, *supra* note 23, pp. 7-8.

through time, and how these conflicting ideologies and ethea within ostensibly homogenous organizations combine and coexist in indicator-related activities.⁵⁵

What the remaining pages of this article will try to do, therefore, is to shed light on how the diversity of human rights indicators reflects differences in the postures, missions and strategies embraced by the international organizations making, using or participating in them. To illustrate that the interaction between human rights indicators and international organizations has multiple dimensions, we will consider further the two major issues upon which commentators are divided: the scope of human rights indicators; and whether they are structured (or are not being structured) so as to facilitate the ranking of countries. As will be demonstrated, the debates on those issues reflect the actual plurality of views, with attendant practices, on what human rights indicators are and do, on the role of international organizations, and on the best strategies international organization might resort to to fulfil those roles.

6. Scopes and Networks

Just like many other indicators, human rights indicators are rarely made by a single subject. Usually, there is a complex network of actors behind the institution that establishes or publishes a human rights indicator, who more or less actively participate in the indicator's making.⁵⁶ In the case of indicators made by international organizations, both the network's composition and the distribution of work among its participants seem to depend on, and at the same time strengthen, the diverse visions about what indicators (and those who produce them) are about and for.

To illustrate: human rights indicators are often not prepared by the international organization establishing them. Rather, the organization drafts a framework for the preparation of the indicator, and then lets States concretely prepare and publish it.⁵⁷ Such a division of labour runs against the established practice in the field of indicators in

⁵⁵ Halliday, *supra* note 5, pp. 210–1 (on international financial institutions); Restrepo Amariles, *supra* note 6, pp. 11–14 (advocating a 'legal pluralistic' approach to global indicators); *see also* G. A. Sarfaty, 'Why Culture Matters in International Institutions: The Marginality of Human Rights at the World Bank' (2009) 103 *American Journal of International Law* p. 647, at pp. 667–676 (on the World Bank's many organizational sub-cultures).

⁵⁶ Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 88.

⁵⁷ *See* the illustrations offered below in the text, particularly at notes 60–64.

general, where the indicator's drafter is usually an organization or an institution largely independent from those who are under scrutiny.⁵⁸ In the case of human rights, the direct involvement of the indicators' target in its very making is said to help produce a balance between the desirability of having indicators that are universally applicable and the necessity of considering human rights in context. Above all, the involvement of States is meant to promote the development of a culture of compliance with human rights norms, fostering a climate of collaboration between States and requesting institutions.⁵⁹

Indicators of this type are often fostered by human rights bodies and, more generally, by international organizations charged with monitoring human rights standards, the latter tending to resort to indicators as a means for supervising and socializing the behaviour of their members (which, most of the time, are States). For instance, in the 2000s the UN treaty bodies invited the OHCHR to prepare guidelines for States to produce their own indicators (rather than set up a global human rights indicator for monitoring States' respect for human rights). The UN treaty bodies thus transformed themselves from enforcement agencies into audit-like authorities, on the assumption that such a transformation might fortify a collaborative relationship with States, and create an environment of voluntary compliance with human rights obligations.⁶⁰ The indicators on the right to development proposed by the Human Rights Council's High Level Task Force on the Implementation of the Right to Development⁶¹ are "designed to assess the extent to which states are individually and collectively taking steps to establish, promote and sustain national and international arrangements that create an enabling environment for the realization of the right to development".⁶² The High-Level Task Force neither established the indicators itself, nor envisaged that the Human Rights Council or other international organizations would do that. Rather, it left to States the task of fleshing out

⁵⁸ Davis, Kingsbury, Merry, *supra* note 6, pp. 3 *et seq.*

⁵⁹ Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 280–281; Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 88; Carr Center, *supra* note 22, pp. 25, 26; Welling, *supra* note 19, pp. 937, 957.

⁶⁰ Merry, *supra* note 6, p. 88; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, pp. 280–281.

⁶¹ See High-Level Task Force on the Implementation of the Right to Development, *Report of the High-Level Task Force on the Implementation of the Right to Development on its Sixth Session*, Addendum 2, 'Right to Development Criteria and Sub-Criteria', UN Doc. A/HRC/15/WG.2/TF/2/Add.2 (14–22 January 2010). For a comment, see Siobhan Airey's contribution to this special forum.

⁶² High-Level Task Force, *supra* note 61, p. 8.

and publishing the indicators. Thus, the indicators are not only a measure States' commitment to development: they are also a sort of development exercise in themselves.

The approach just described is not adopted by all international organizations when drafting human rights indicators. Some international organizations consider that their role, and the role of their indicators, is to propel change by raising the compliance pressure on a State through its peers, civil society and market forces (as opposed to through the naturalization of States within the human rights discourse). Such an approach suggests a different articulation of the institutional network underlying the indicator. For instance, in the case of UNESCO's Media Development Indicators (a very successful initiative), UNESCO prepared guidelines for assessing countries' media development. UNESCO's aim, in doing so, was to provide the indicators' intended users (journalists, news organizations, and citizens' groups) with a tool to promote media freedom at the local level.⁶³ The indicators in question have been drafted, under UNESCO's supervision, by different sets of stakeholders, with regard to the specific context under examination. In some cases, UNESCO has entrusted the drafting of the responses to a well-respected national organization; in other cases, the drafting team has included a number of different local experts; in yet other cases, for reasons of urgency or lack of capacity, one individual only has been charged with the entire process of preparing the indicator.⁶⁴ Other organizations adopt a more centralized division of labour. To give but one example, the International Trade Union Confederation ('ITUC') publishes its 'Global Rights Index' — an index ranking countries according to their level of protection of workers' rights — on the basis of data derived from the answers that ITUC's affiliates provide to a questionnaire drafted by ITUC itself. Although States are the targets of the Global Rights Index, they do not participate in the making of the Global Rights Index, which is supposed to foster change and promote national reforms by 'naming and shaming', or, more rarely, 'naming and praising' the countries involved in the study.

In other cases, the limited involvement of member states in the making of the indicator produced by an international organization seems to be related to the indicator having another function, namely accomplishing (or proving the accomplishment of) the international organization's mission. When human rights indicators are assigned this aim, the institution establishing the indicator is often the one that collects the data and

⁶³ Media Development Indicators, *supra* note 42, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Mendel, *supra* note 54, p. 3.

publishes the results.⁶⁵ For instance, WHO's 'Health Indicators' on life expectancy at birth were established and are compiled by the WHO itself.⁶⁶ Although data is occasionally drawn from information furnished by States, for a large part the indicator is produced without State involvement.⁶⁷ One explanation for this choice is that the neutral assessment of the health of its member States' populations is conceived by the organization as an essential feature of its core mandate. The top-down structure of the indicators allows the WHO to fulfil its task, and to preserve its commitment to objectivity and knowledge-building. The same pattern is followed by those indicators that are meant to measure the performance of the organization concerned, in addition to that of its member States. Think for instance of the use by the United Nations Children's Fund ('UNICEF') of self-established indicators to measure the improvement of children's rights, both as a way of testing States' behavior, and also the success of the organization's campaigns.⁶⁸

The list of the possible networks underlying human rights indicators does not end here. Yet the above survey suffices to highlight that, in the making of human rights indicators, sites of power with respect to the production and use of human rights indicators are distributed throughout a web of actors that may come together in different forms. These forms are determined by various factors, an undoubtedly important part being played by the different roles that international organizations envisage for their indicators and for themselves, as well as by the strategies and policies undertaken to fulfil them.

7. To Rank or Not To Rank?

Of the many choices that an international organization has to make in establishing an indicator, one of the most important, especially in the human rights field, is whether or not

⁶⁵ Human rights indicators in donor relationships have a similar structure. Bargains between donors and their beneficiaries often require the latter to report to the former about the problems that the funding was expected to address; in these cases, we have an indicator which is requested by a subject and yet is prepared by another one. *See* Ignatieff and Desormeau, *supra* note 25, p. 8.

⁶⁶ WHO, *World Health Statistics 2015* (WHO, Geneva, 2015), available at: <who.int/gho/publications/world_health_statistic/2015/en>, p. 52 *et seq.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 52.

⁶⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, *Annex: Supporting Document to the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017*, UN Doc. E/ICEF/2013/21/Add.1 (3-6 September 2013), p. 3.

to rank the States (or, much more rarely, the other actors) that are the object of the indicator.

Outside the human rights realm, indicators usually take the form of global rankings of a massive number of States.⁶⁹ The mainstream structure of non-human rights indicators is thus the following: a global ranking of countries, drafted by an international organization which collects and reports information about other actors (most often States) for the use of States themselves or third parties (such as domestic constituencies, investors, or donors). Yet this structure is far less common for human rights indicators, which are often country-specific and which provide no rankings. As we will now see, the variety of designs of human rights indicators can be seen as the result of specific diverging understandings about the mission entrusted to the international organization establishing them, and the role that they play within that mission.

It is well known, for instance, that in its 2000 World Health Report the WHO engaged in producing a global ranking of all the world's healthcare systems. The rankings were based on five factors, according to which countries were ranked from the ones that had the most responsive and efficient health system to those that had the least.⁷⁰ In conformity with WHO's tradition, the index was drafted by the organization with no or minimal participation by the States involved, and was then imposed in a 'top-down' manner on the latter as part of the organization's mission to conduct research and provide information in the field of health.⁷¹ However, in a sector in which the capacity and resources available for health programs — amongst other things — vary greatly from one State to the other, the WHO's endeavour attracted more criticism than enthusiasm. Objections to the selection of criteria of performance, the reliability of the data collected, and the reasonableness of interpretations drawn from them, led the WHO to withdraw the index from its following reports.⁷²

International organizations that, within the global human rights discourse, subscribe to the view that human rights indicators are tools for socializing states (rather

⁶⁹ See Davis, Kingsbury, Merry, *supra* note 5, p. 3 *et seq*; see also M. Infantino, 'Global Indicators', in S. Cassese (ed.), *Global Administrative Law: A Research Handbook* (Elgar, Cheltenham, 2015) (forthcoming).

⁷⁰ WHO, *supra* note 42, pp. 152–157.

⁷¹ WHO Constitution, Art. 2(n) and (q).

⁷² See C. Normand and S. Thomas, 'Health Care Financing and the Health System', in G. Carrin (ed.), *Health Systems Policy, Finance, and Organization* (Elsevier, San Diego, 2010) pp. 149, 158.

than instruments for neutrally documenting human rights-related situations or events) often deviate from the model sketched out above.⁷³ Since these organizations prefer to avoid any measurement exercise which might frustrate the targeted State's willingness to participate in the game, they tend to emphasize the importance of considering the indicators against each country's context, and refuse any engagement in rankings or comparisons of countries or involve the indicators' targets in the drafting of the indicators themselves.⁷⁴

In its 2012 Guidelines for Human Rights Indicators, for instance, the OHCHR stressed that "the indicators and methods described in this Guide are primarily meant to inform more comprehensive assessments and are neither designed nor suitable for ranking the human rights performance of states".⁷⁵ The same Guidelines repeatedly remind the reader that the aim of human rights indicators is to help States assess their compliance with human rights obligations, especially for the purpose of reviews before UN treaty bodies.⁷⁶ The structure and contents of the human rights indicators envisaged by the Guidelines are therefore instrumental to this goal. The indicators' contents should be tailored to the contextual needs of the targeted country;⁷⁷ proxies and benchmarks should be negotiated with States;⁷⁸ there should be no ranking; and the inclusion of any information which may be politically sensitive or may run counter to their participation should be carefully avoided.⁷⁹

The same structure is shared by UNESCO's Media Development Indicators ('MDIs'), which are designed to provide an assessment framework for an individual State, and to involve, in the process of collecting data relevant to the indicator, any stakeholder who may have an interest in participating in the making of the indicator itself.⁸⁰ Raising

⁷³ Albeit not in these precise terms, *see* OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, pp. 3, 21.

⁷⁴ *See e.g.* De Beco, *supra* note 9, pp. 28–31.

⁷⁵ OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. III.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 22.

⁸⁰ T. Mendel, 'Applying UNESCO's Media Development Indicators: A Practical Guidebook to Assist Researchers', pp. 1, 3, a copy of which is available from the UNESCO website at: <unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/IPDC/guidelines_mdi_final.pdf>.

awareness and prompting domestic reforms are the expected outcomes of the MDIs. As emphasized by the commentary to the MDIs, the MDIs “are not intended as a tool to rank a country’s level of media development against that of others. Rather, they provide an assessment of the various gaps and weaknesses in the media development framework, against which progress can then be mapped”.⁸¹ From their establishment to their impact, the MDIs’ dynamics are thus entirely internal to the targeted states: a matter of indirect collaboration and directed learning between UNESCO and States themselves.

Other routes are available to international organizations. A middle ground solution between the option of setting up global rankings and that of producing individual studies on each country is adopted by those organizations that assess countries together, and then rank them in clusters, rather than in hierarchical order. For instance, ITUC’s ‘Global Rights Index’, mentioned above, ranks countries’ respect for fundamental rights at work. The Index relies upon the data provided by ITUC’s affiliates (with no or little participation of the ranked States), and subsequently assigns to each State a rating ranging from 1 to 5+ (where 1 is the top of the scale and 5+ is a State in which rule of law has completely broken down).⁸² In this way, the indicator still provides a comparative assessment and ranking, yet there is no State that performs best or worst: rather, there are groups of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ States, each categorized for its own reason. A table for each State gives detailed information about the reason(s) for that State’s final score. ITUC thus performs its ‘blaming and shaming’ role in a soft manner, avoiding the harshness of a global ranking that could dissatisfy many States and render them uncooperative.

8. Conclusions

Though neither definitive nor complete, the observations above show how indicators have become one of the tools through which international organizations dealing with human rights perform their tasks, define their strategies, shape their relationships with their members and with third parties, and contribute to the determination of global priorities, visions, values, and actions. It would be a productive exercise to explore in greater depth the changes that this turn to indicators has brought to international organizations devoted

⁸¹ Mendel, *supra* note 54, p. 1.

⁸² ITUC, *Global Rights Index* (ITUC, Brussels, 2015), p. 18, a copy of which is available at: <ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/survey_global_rights_index_2015_en.pdf>.

to human rights protection. Such research could add further layers to our current understanding of the modern spread of human rights indicators, their makers and their audiences, and the meanings that can be assigned to the ambiguous and multifaceted notion of 'human rights' in different institutional contexts. It could also illuminate the ways in which human rights indicators provide international organizations with additional techniques for defining and furthering their objectives, and novel platforms to compete for resources and power. Further research could also alleviate some of the misplaced concerns about human rights indicators by shedding light on those indicators' most concrete advantages, and by pre-emptively identifying problems that could arise during the drafting of new indicators. It might also help determine whether certain assumptions about the relationship between human rights indicators and international organizations (for example, that global international organizations foster universal, rather than country-specific, human rights indicator initiatives, or produce indicators that are more objective and reliable than those drafted by other actors) are as reasonable as they appear at first sight.⁸³

Moreover, studying the varying features and configurations of the indicators established, used and contested by international organizations can improve our assessment of the benefits and drawbacks usually associated with indicators in general. Nobody can deny that one of the most commonly praised values of indicators, that they provide 'neutral' and 'objective' assessments of the situations described, is misplaced in the case of a country-specific indicator produced by a State under the guidance of an international organization for the purpose of human rights monitoring. Since the State is both the indicator's main drafter and its target, it is ostensibly affected by an internal conflict of interest, undermining the 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' of the information gathered. However, the fact that these indicators are drafted by subjects who are in close contact with the situations examined somewhat reduces one of the major risks underlying indicators' endeavours, that of misinterpreting and decontextualizing the data gathered.

What has been outlined in this article offers only a preliminary sketch of the insights that further research into the features of human rights indicators may give access

⁸³ It is generally assumed that the less compliant with human rights norms the state is, the less likely it is that the state will provide complete and reliable data: OHCHR Human Rights Indicators Guide, *supra* note 12, p. 38; Shkabatur, *supra* note 4, pp. 167, 177–178; Rosga and Satterthwaite, *supra* note 2, p. 268; Barsh, *supra* note 9, pp. 99, 105, 115.

to. Further analysis is needed. The entire ever-growing world of human rights indicators is out there waiting to be studied.