Establishing Performance Indicators for the International Criminal Court

NOVEMBER, 2015

During its 13th session the Assembly of States Parties requested the International Criminal Court to develop performance indicators and report back to the Assembly at its 14th session. While the notion of performance indicators is relatively simple, the process of developing them for the ICC may be rather complex. It is important that indicators cover a range of actions and perspectives that allow for a comprehensive assessment of the Court’s work. The ICC should consult and consider the views of external stakeholders, including civil society, when developing performance indicators. It is also imperative that the Court resolves a number of data collection issues before it sets out criteria and indicators.
Background

At the 13th session of the International Criminal Court’s (“ICC” or “Court”) Assembly of States Parties (“ASP” or “Assembly”), States Parties gave the following directions to the Court:

With regard to proceedings of the Court,

(a) invite[d] the Court to intensify its efforts to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of proceedings including by adopting further changes of practice; and

(b) request[ed] the Court to intensify its efforts to develop qualitative and quantitative indicators that would allow the Court to demonstrate better its achievements and needs, as well as allowing State Parties to assess the Court’s performance in a more strategic manner, bearing in mind existing recommendations and discussions, in particular in the context of the Study Group on Governance and the Committee on Budget and Finance;

(c) decide[d] to include a specific item on the efficiency and effectiveness of Court proceedings on the agenda of the fourteenth session of the Assembly with a view to strengthening the Rome Statute system.1

This request comes in the context of a growing demand to better understand the Court’s workings. States have been increasingly active in ASP Working Groups relating to governance and efficiencies. A range of other stakeholders, including regional blocks, civil society and affected communities, are also seeking a better understanding of the Court’s achievements and challenges.

Over the years, the ICC has faced criticism including accusations of partiality from African States in particular, which have in turn affected State cooperation, as well as a range of other complaints, including: that flawed prosecutorial strategies have tended to target the “small fish” while ignoring the more serious perpetrators of crimes; that the narrow scope of charges has impeded access to justice and reparations for many victims; that prosecutions that only target one side of a conflict present only a partial historical record of events; that there has been an absence of meaningful victim engagement both in the courtroom and through outreach processes; and over the delayed execution of arrest warrants. Indicators can help the ICC gain a clearer understanding of its achievements and constraints. Like other performance measuring tools, however, indicators have limitations and may therefore not address all of the challenges faced by the Court. Nonetheless, indicators would allow for a robust systemic self-assessment exercise extending beyond annual reports and strategic plans.

What are performance indicators?

Performance indicators (or benchmarks) measure progress toward high level criteria of excellence that are agreed at the outset. The role of indicators is to enable the institution to report on and improve its performance by measuring results rather than resources or level of effort. Indicators are not used to measure individual professional performance such as the number of decisions per judge, nor do they compare one institution or jurisdiction to another. They instead focus on the quality of the key outcomes and impacts of the institution.

Institutional performance indicators differ from project indicators that may apply to specific projects such as those carried out by civil society organizations in the framework of a grant application (referred to as “objectively verifiable indicators” by some donors). Such project indicators measure success in relation to specific objectives established by particular projects undertaken during a certain period of time. By contrast, the performance indicators of a judicial institution periodically measure the court’s overall performance in accordance with high level criteria. They reflect on the life of the institution and highlight the progress it makes toward achieving its overall goals.

Performance criteria and indicators can be designed to address many aspects of an institution’s functioning. Indicators are not used singly, but in baskets of three to five measures that reflect different facets of a criterion. They can be of a quantitative or qualitative nature. The duration of key proceedings and causes of delay are among the most common justice performance criteria and measures.

The following example illustrates the format that criteria and indicators may take: (This is neither comprehensive nor intended as a recommendation to the ICC.)

**Performance Criterion:** The Court is expeditious at every stage – from the decision to conduct a preliminary examination through final appeals and reparations, when awarded.

**Indicators:**

1. Median number of days between first appearance and the decision on confirmation of charges.

2. Percentage of scheduled proceedings that are re-scheduled.

3. Median number of days between filing of an interlocutory appeal and Appeals Chamber decisions.

4. ... (etc.)

The Court’s involvement in measuring impact indicators is fully within its mandate. Lack of understanding and integration of how the Court is perceived and how its actions impact affected countries and communities may significantly hinder the Court’s capacity to operate.
What should performance indicators measure?

The Justice Initiative has recommended that the Court look into three categories of indicators, namely operational indicators, Rome Statute system indicators, and impact indicators.

**Operational indicators** measure the Court’s operations, including information such as case processing times, transparency, victim participation, level of outreach to affected communities, geographical distribution of members on the list of counsel, number of decisions issued by the Court, etc. While the information that can be shown through measurement of operational indicators is relevant, that information alone falls short of addressing the aims of the ICC as a whole, and, in particular, neglects fundamental questions such as “Is justice seen to be done?” which are of relevance to the Court’s main constituencies.

**Rome Statute system indicators** relate to the set-up of a global tool to fight impunity through the adoption of the ICC Statute and may measure, among other factors, the extent to which signatory States are fulfilling their commitments under the ICC Statute in the fight against impunity for grave crimes. This would include measuring, *inter alia*, States’ assistance to the Court through concrete acts of mandatory and voluntary cooperation and political support. It would also include assessing their will and capacity to conduct national investigations and prosecutions for the crimes under the jurisdiction of the Court, in accordance with the principle of complementarity and their obligations under international law.

**Impact indicators** seek to assess the Court’s perceived legitimacy and credibility. These indicators explore issues around genuine involvement, understanding and perceptions in situation/preliminary examination countries and among affected communities, as well as the Court’s legacy in the countries where it operates and beyond, including its deterrent effect. They allow for measurement of the Court’s effectiveness in global and meaningful terms, linking proceedings to their impact in affected communities and beyond.

Measuring these three categories presents differing levels of complexity. Selecting impact indicators, for example, may demand more creativity, including in certain cases a more qualitative and less data-focused approach. These three categories of indicators need not be developed as separate clusters; they interact with one another and can be combined in various ways.

What is relevant is that indicators cover a range of actions and perspectives that allow for a comprehensive assessment of the Court’s work. This includes actions by external actors who have an impact on the Court’s ability to implement its mandate, such as the readiness of States to execute cooperation requests. Any set of criteria and indicators must acknowledge that the ICC is a global justice system without enforcement powers, rather than a stand-alone judiciary or prosecution serving a single state.

What are some of the complexities involved in developing indicators for the ICC?

While the notion of performance indicators is relatively simple, the actual process of developing performance indicators may be rather complex. There are also specific complexities that relate to development of performance indicators for judicial institutions. Measuring the performance of such institutions differs from other organizations because the
“end product” is the criminal justice process itself. Excellence is therefore measured by the quality and integrity of each step, each action, from the first awareness of possible crimes through the final appeal following a trial and verdict. Justice may be done through a conviction or through a prosecutorial decision to decline prosecution for lack of evidence. In either case, it is the quality of the process that guarantees that the outcomes are right. Despite these challenges, national judicial institutions in several countries have been able to develop performance indicators. The ICC can draw inspiration and lessons from such experiences.

In addition, developing indicators for the ICC presents some unique challenges. In order to be meaningful and intelligible to outsiders and allow for accurate self-reflection by the ICC itself, indicators must reflect on the Court’s work as one institution (“court-wide indicators”). This may be difficult because the Court’s three organs (Presidency and Chambers, Office of the Prosecutor and Registry) have traditionally operated separately. While there have been efforts in recent years to implement a one-court principle that aims to bring the three organs together, the institutional culture of each organ operating as a separate entity may present challenges for the indicators project.

While the different organs may develop organ-specific performance indicators (for example, the Office of the Prosecutor has already presented a set of performance indicators in its strategic plan⁴), developing court-wide indicators goes beyond a mere merger of each organ’s indicators into one list. Each organ exercises unique and independent functions, and has differing goals which, in certain circumstances, may even be at odds with one another. For example, while the conviction rate may be a good indicator for the Office of the Prosecutor (“OTP” or “Office”), it will not necessarily be a good indicator for the Defense or the Court at large. In addition, identifying indicators that adequately reflect the multiple roles played by the Registry may be an uphill task. Having said that, developing court-wide indicators is worthwhile. Organ-specific indicators can provide only a narrow and fragmented picture of the Court’s work.

Another issue that has arisen in discussions on what should be measured is the question of the Court’s capacity to control certain activities. For example, when discussing OTP-specific indicators in its draft strategic plan, the OTP indicated that only areas that are “sufficiently within the Office’s control” can be reliable indicators of the Office’s performance.³ When carrying out an analysis of the elements it can control, critical reflection is required on the part of the Court. Care should be taken to avoid using lack of control as a scapegoat for failure to achieve certain results.

Perceived lack of control could be rooted in the use of certain processes or strategies that do not yield adequate results. For example, where the Court has been criticized for bringing relatively narrow charges in some cases, one explanation might be that OTP could only find evidence for those charges. However, given that looking for evidence is the OTP’s core business, low performance in relation to charges representing the whole spectrum of criminality may invite a reflection on investigation approaches and methodology. In other cases, lack of control may point to control by other actors, such as States’ obligations to execute arrest warrants. States may also be ultimately responsible, for example, when the OTP lacks resources to conduct investigations against two sides of the conflict (another criticism made to the OTP/ICC).

³ Ibid., para. 104.
Furthermore, unlike other judicial institutions, the ICC is relatively new and, in contrast to national judicial institutions, it deals with few cases - albeit of much greater complexity. In the absence of performance indicators so far, the Court and its staff have collected multiple individual narratives about the cases they have handled, as well as statistics on several aspects of the proceedings (e.g., duration of different phases, number of filings made by different parties and judicial decisions, number of witnesses called in individual cases, number of victims applying or accepted to participate, etc.). In order for such information to be used as valid indicators, it needs to be related to specific performance criteria and aggregated across cases to allow for comparison from one reporting period to the next.

Finally, another relevant issue that has to be considered in the development of indicators relates to the selection and definition of procedural stages for measurement. This decision may have a significant impact on the results obtained. For example, measuring expeditiousness from the preliminary examination stage, the investigation stage, the beginning of pre-trial proceedings, or the trial itself could yield very different results, because of the variations in each phase and the obstacles to timely completion.

**Why are indicators helpful?**

In addition to measuring the ICC’s performance, indicators can provide a better understanding of the background in which the Court operates and the challenges it faces. For example, a high number of witnesses accepted for protection may indicate a particularly risky environment for ICC investigations.

Furthermore, indicators can point to problems and lay the ground for improving the performance in areas on which the Court may be underachieving. For example, the Court could develop indicators that lead to identification of the causes of delays in proceedings or the rescheduling of hearings. These may include such things as a lack of sufficient cooperation, insufficient time provided to the Defense for preparation, or an underestimation of the time necessary for completion of certain proceedings by the Chamber. A comprehensive overview and understanding of these causes across cases may reveal information on the measures that may be implemented to reduce delays and/or the need to reschedule proceedings.

Conversely, adopting inappropriate indicators constitutes a risk because that could pose a danger that the ICC be measured by inadequate standards. This is why identifying the relevant criteria and indicators is crucial. It is also important that the criteria and indicators be kept under consideration after adoption and once the Court starts measuring. Experience in measurement may reveal the need for adjustments in indicator definitions.

The absence of indicators is also problematic, because there are no standards that different stakeholders, including States but also regional blocks and civil society, can refer to in order to better understand the Court’s performance. Without such a reference, each stakeholder or group of stakeholders uses their own criteria and any information that is available to them to draw their own conclusions on the Court’s performance.

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4 These statistics can be found in several documents, including judgments (e.g., ICC-01/04-01/07-3436, *Prosecutor v. Katanga*, Judgment pursuant to article 74 of the Statute, paras. 21–24), reports on the activities of the Court (e.g., ICC-ASP/13/37, Report on the Activities of the International Criminal Court, para. 5), and reports to the United Nations (e.g., UN Doc A/67/308, Report of the International Criminal Court, paras. 12, 15, 20, 25, 27, 32).
However, in order for the indicator development process to be worthwhile, it needs sufficient human and time investment from the Court and adequate external consultations with stakeholders. A process that lacks the required level of involvement and/or consultations, or that is done superficially, to comply with a mandate given by the ASP and without the required thoroughness is undesirable, because it cannot produce useful and sustainable performance measurement.

Who benefits from indicator development and who should be consulted?

Performance indicators would first and foremost help the Court itself to assess its own performance and challenges, not from the perspective of individual narratives of different cases held by different organs, units or staff members, but from a court-wide point of view. In this regard, and in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the Court's operations, it is important that both headquarters and field staff are consulted and involved in indicator development. External actors who are directly involved in proceedings, such as Defense and Victims Counsel would also certainly have valuable contributions to make.

As indicated above, performance indicators are a means for self-reflection and can contribute greatly towards identifying measures of improvement. In addition, States Parties as well as the Assembly and such sub-organs as the Committee for Budget and Finance will benefit from this process.

Furthermore, the Court should seek the views of actors who are directly affected by the Court's activities, such as situation country populations and civil society, and especially victims and affected communities. The views and perceptions of such stakeholders are crucial for the Court's success. It should be recalled that the ICC has a global mandate to fight against impunity for the most serious crimes of international concern. The indicator development process should therefore recognize that the Court’s constituencies go beyond States Parties and The Hague legal community.

Being accountable to a variety of constituencies inevitably comes with challenges and difficulties, but the challenges and difficulties will only be multiplied if that reality is not acknowledged. For example, understanding that victim communities may be disappointed at the Court’s action (e.g. because it has only targeted one side of the conflict, or because the charges are rather narrow) is crucial information. The ICC represents the ideals of justice for many and therefore must duly consider both positive and negative views of stakeholders with its processes in order to have a better understanding of the impact of those views on other critical questions, such as lack cooperation by local actors. Understanding the views of local stakeholders is also critical to build legacy for the work of the Court. Previous international criminal tribunals have struggled with ensuring that their work has long-term impact. Questions such as lack of reparations for victims and insufficient support for the tribunals’ work in divided societies have been obstacles to ensuring sufficient support and potentially lasting impact. Given the large human and financial investment that international criminal tribunals demand, considering the views of the constituencies and long-term impact in the communities they are mandated to serve is crucial. It is also in accordance with the ICC’s mandate as set out in the Rome Statute preamble.
The ICC does not operate in a vacuum. It is part of a broader accountability system and was created to provide justice for mass atrocities particularly where those affected by the crimes have no other recourse. Often affected communities may have unrealistic expectations of what the Court can achieve; but that is not a justification for the ICC to disregard their views. External stakeholders’ expectations and demands are a constant reminder of the Court’s goals and ambitions. For example, through their work monitoring the performance of the Court, civil society actors ensure that the Court lives up to the expectations of the Rome Statute’s framers. Institutional self-assessment has limitations that may be addressed by involving external stakeholders in the process.

How does data collection relate to indicator development?

From the outset, it is important to note that developing indicators is not the same as collecting data. As demonstrated through the format example above, indicators relate specific data to a criterion, allowing analysts and observers to draw conclusions on the Court’s performance in a relevant area. Data collection on the other hand is rather a step in the process of indicator development.

In this regard, the Justice Initiative has noted that the ICC faces a number of challenges in relation to data collection, which it must address before making decisions on the items to measure. In other words, prior to establishing criteria and indicators, the Court should ensure that it can produce reliable data necessary for measurement. This may present a number of challenges, including:

- Variations in data definitions: To develop accurate indicators, data definitions need to be clear and shared among organs. Current definitions may not be the same across organs and/or may need to be harmonized with what intends to be measured in indicators. For example, the definition of a “case” is intrinsic to court-wide indicators. When cases against more than one accused are joined at the ICC, they are normally considered one case for several purposes (hearing scheduling, record of the case, etc.). In practice, for the purpose of some indicators, such as those related to convictions/acquittals, sentencing, decisions on motions, and reparations, it may be useful for proceedings against each accused to be considered as separate cases.
- The ICC does not have an institutional tradition of sharing information across organs. In some cases, information may be withheld because of confidentiality issues. The problem highlighted above is aggravated when different organs (and sometimes sections or units within organs) use separate databases with diverse definitions. The ICC does not operate a common central database. Although the Court Management Section within the Registry holds very valuable information in its system, the data it contains is fragmented as it only covers aspects that are strictly related to hearings, filings and decisions, and does not feature other aspects of the Court’s activities. Indicator development may demand changes in the Court Management Section’s database to measure items that have hitherto not been considered. Among these could be such things as the reasons for delay of proceedings.

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5 According to Rule 15(2) of the Rules of Procedure and Evidence, “The Registrar shall maintain the [...] records of the Court.”
• While the ICC has collected a huge amount of data on its proceedings over the past 12 years, in most cases this data relates to individual cases or specific phases of the proceedings. Traditionally, the ICC has not aggregated data across cases. For example, it could produce data on the number of interlocutory appeals that were granted during pre-trial proceedings in one case, but it may not be able to automatically provide the number of interlocutory appeals that were granted during pre-trial proceedings in all cases. While that data could be produced manually, ideally the Court’s databases should be adapted to automatically yield this type of data.

• An observation of the Court’s multiple reports indicates that there is no standard reporting period. Some reports cover a calendar year, others cover the period from one session of the ASP to the next session (e.g., reports related to ASP mandates), and others cover selected periods such as September through August of the following year (e.g., reports to the United Nations General Assembly), or July through June of the following year (e.g., reports on budget performance). While the Court may still need to produce multiple reports, it will need to harmonize reporting periods for the purpose of indicators.

Finally, it is noted that data collection does not meet the transparency requirements established by the Rules of Procedure and Evidence. According to Rule 15(1),

The Registrar shall keep a database containing all the particulars of each case brought before the Court, subject to any order of a judge or Chamber providing for the non-disclosure of any document or information, and to the protection of sensitive personal data. Information on the database shall be available to the public in the working languages of the Court.

Full compliance with Rule 15(1) would allow all of the Court’s internal and external stakeholders to appreciate its performance and challenges.

Where does the Court stand today in relation to indicator development?

Indicator development is an important process that needs to be undertaken and led by the Court itself. While it can present indicators to and have a dialogue with States Parties, it is the responsibility of the ICC and not States Parties to drive the process of setting indicators. Indicators should be performance related rather than budget related.

At the time of preparing this document, the Court has not yet produced any report on court-wide indicators for the 14th session of the Assembly. It is unclear whether such a report will contain indicators for proposed measurement as of January 2016, or whether it will simply report on the progress made in identification of criteria and indicators.

The Court is committed to indicator development. 2015 has been a particularly busy year for all three organs on the organizational and planning front: the Registry has been fully immersed in the ReVision project; the OTP drafted a new strategic plan for 2016-2018 as well as a proposed Basic Size for the Office (which could have consequences for other organs); the Chambers had six new judges sworn in in March and held their first retreat to discuss
measures to improve the efficiency of the criminal process in June 2015. The OTP has developed organ-specific indicators related solely to the work of the Office, which have been produced unilaterally by the OTP without input from other organs. The Registry and Chambers/Presidency may also produce organ-specific indicators. The Presidency has included development of court-wide performance indicators and judicial indicators among its projected achievements for 2016.

The work on indicator development will continue into 2016. Given the complexities involved in developing indicators, the Court may identify indicators that it can start measuring in the short-term and others that need to be crafted on the basis of more experience in indicator development and measurement. In 2015, the Presidency provided leadership to this process and senior staff from all three organs were involved in discussions. Going into next year, the Justice Initiative recommends the constitution of a court-wide working group composed of the Court’s principals, senior officials, and working-level staff, who can operationalize decisions, gather data, produce draft documents and tables, make recommendations, and coordinate the dialogue with stakeholders. Because of the complexities of this process and the need for all three organs to coordinate and work together, it would be important for the ICC to identify and designate a staff member that can be devoted nearly full-time to centralizing information on indicators and leading the process. The Justice Initiative also recommends that the Court prepares a plan for consultation with civil society at various levels, and affected communities.

Conclusions

The Court has unique stature as one of the leading global judicial institutions fighting against impunity despite numerous challenges. The request for it to develop indicators is timely at this point, past the decade mark. The process provides a golden opportunity for the Court to reflect on its performance over the years and propose a framework for how its performance should be assessed internally and externally in years to come. This exercise, albeit complex, is beneficial for the court and external stakeholders, including the States who invest resources in the Court and civil society groups closely following and monitoring its work.

The existence of indicators could expedite efforts to adopt long-term solutions to the Court’s challenges. Performance indicators would also provide a relevant accountability framework for determining the extent to which the Court is living up to the promises enunciated in the Rome Statute. However, indicators should not be viewed as a tool to hold the Court at ransom, but rather as one of the means to improve its performance.

Developing performance indicators for the ICC is a valuable effort, yet a complex exercise that necessitates sufficient consideration of the various factors influencing the Court’s work as well as the impact of the Court’s performance in the situations where it operates. The process of identifying criteria and indicators should be characterized by creativity and vision. It will require ICC self-reflection and self-criticism.

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7 ICC-ASP/14/10, Proposed Programme Budget for 2016, Table 9, p. 18.
Measuring performance and whether the ICC is a worthwhile endeavor for States Parties, civil society, and the international community as a whole, requires more than simply analyzing operational data on the Court’s day-to-day work. Rather, it calls for a comprehensive view of the complex system put in place by the Rome Statute, including the difference that the ICC has made for situation and preliminary examination countries, victims and affected communities and others who may be concerned by crimes under the jurisdiction of the Court. Developing indicators therefore has to be a consensual process extending beyond discussions at the ICC.

While the process of developing indicators must be driven by the Court, the ICC should seek and integrate external input, including experts who have worked in developing indicators for domestic institutions as well as those such as civil society actors who can provide a critical perspective on the impact of the Court’s activities. The Court may be reluctant to incorporate external perceptions. However, if it fails to account for criticism, it can only expect to engender more. It is a fact that the ICC is a public institution and external stakeholders are among those judging it. Their voices, too, must be heard in assessing the court’s performance and ultimate value.

Finally, performance indicator development requires data sharing and harmonization of data definitions. It requires agreements among the different organs as to performance criteria, and indicators - what to measure and how to measure it. In this regard, it may be useful for the Court to constitute a working group, and designate a staff member as focal point to carry the process forward.
Resources

The following are a few resources that can be consulted on indicator development for judicial institutions:


**Resources on performance indicators for prosecutors**


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