

## The freedom indices: were they tools for the times?

The human development index, launched in *Human Development Report 1990*, drew instant attention to how well countries were doing in achieving social and economic outcomes. But many asked why it missed out on political and civil freedoms, also inherent in the concept of human development. To balance the focus, the next two Reports proposed to complement the HDI with indices of civil and political freedoms.

*Human Development Report 1991* introduced the human freedom index, derived from 40 criteria rated in Professor Charles Humana's *World Human Rights Guide*. Following a critical review and debate of this source and method, *Human Development Report 1992* launched the political freedom index, which focused on five freedoms and drew on the judgements of a range of experts, scoring each country from 1 to 10. Why has neither of these indices been continued?

- The human freedom index and the political freedom index were based on

qualitative judgements, not quantifiable empirical data.

- Both indices were aimed at analysing complex issues with summary answers—either yes or no or a rating of 1–10. But because no data and examples were provided, the indices did not empower readers to understand the judgements.

- The HDI shows clearly where change is needed through data on its components. But neither the human freedom index nor the political freedom index could reveal why a country scored yes rather than no, or 4 rather than 5. So, the assessments could not be translated into policy advocacy.

Assessing human freedoms is inevitably contentious—all the more reason to make the method transparent and repeatable by others, to channel differences of opinion into debate rather than inflaming dispute. The lessons learned from the freedom indices must be a clear guide in creating indicators of human rights.

Source: Humana 1992; Human Development Report Office.