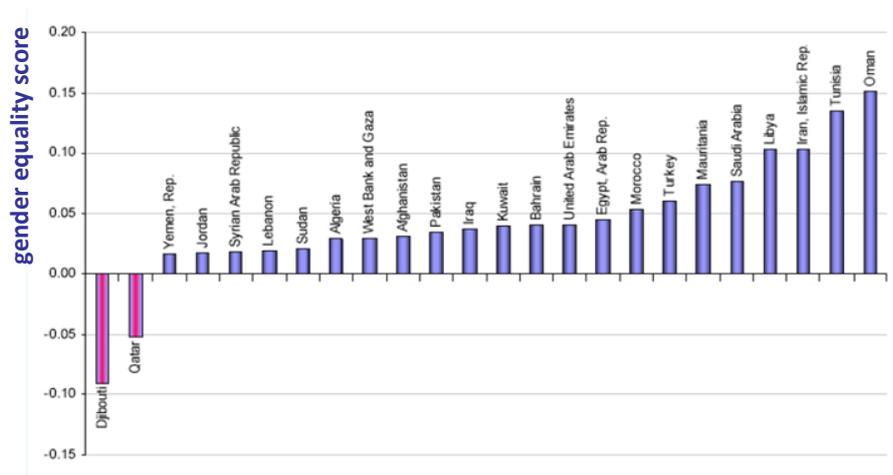




Social development is about putting people at the center of development. Since the 1990s there has been growing recognition that social development is critical for broader development outcomes, including inclusive economic growth. But until now, data limitations have hindered international comparative research capable of showing weaknesses and strengths across countries, as well as the links between social development and other development outcomes. The Indices of Social Development (ISD) hosted by the ISS has the potential to change this. ISD offers policy makers independent, scientific and verifiable input for regional differentiation and country specific strategies and policy mixes.

The results so far reveal the achievements and challenges facing societies across the world: from the richness of community life in Sub-Saharan Africa, to the high levels of personal safety and security in the Persian Gulf, to violence in the Caribbean. And we can monitor trends over time, including linking social developments with GDP: the growth of civic engagement in Eastern Europe, gender empowerment in the Middle East, or inclusion of minorities in Southern Africa.

Rising Gender Equality in the Middle East, 1990-2007

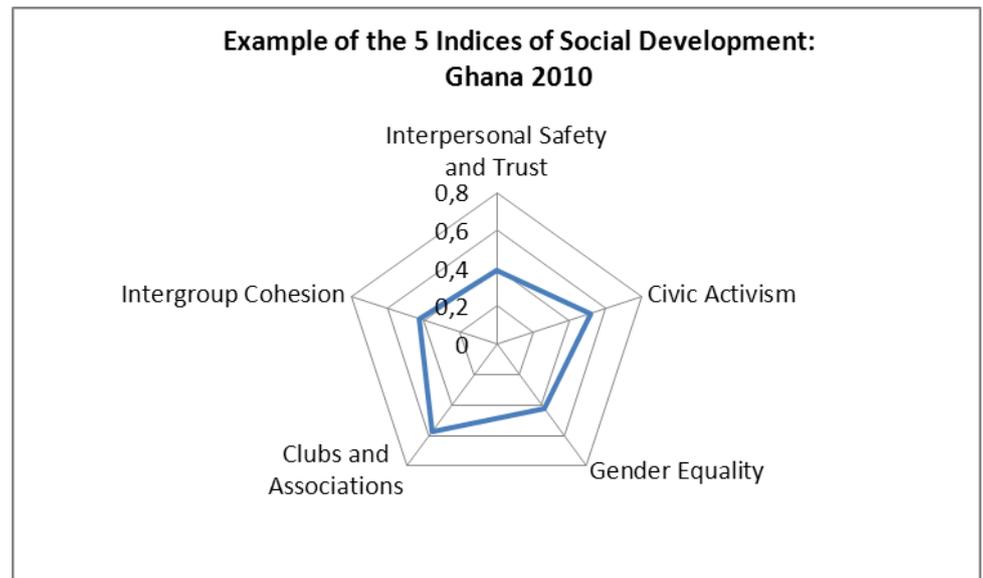


The indicators show that while economic and social development are closely correlated, many high income societies continue to face problems of discrimination and exclusion, while some developing countries have overcome these challenges.



While there have been many country- or region-specific studies that explore relationships between social development indicators and other development outcomes, there has been less empirical analysis that tests these relationships at the international level. This is largely due to data limitations: few reliable, globally-representative data sources exist that can provide a basis for cross-country comparison of social norms and practice, social trust and community engagement. The Indices of Social Development (ISD) is unique in overcoming this data constraint. ISD brings together 200 indicators, synthesizing them into five distinct dimensions of social development: Civic Activism, Clubs and Associations, Intergroup Cohesion, Interpersonal Safety and Trust, and Gender Equality. The indices are composed from 25 reputable data sources for 193 countries, over the period from 1990 to 2010, and are updated as new data becomes available.

ISD clearly fills a knowledge gap by providing better aggregate measures of social development than are currently available. The launch of www.IndSocDev.org on 16 March 2011 (<http://www.indsocdev.org/launch.html>) has already generated exciting debates and discussions about the opportunities for both academic and development communities in exploring innovative approaches to measuring social development.



ISD Project Leader:
Prof. dr. Irene van Staveren
staveren@iss.nl

ISD wants to make use of its full potential by broadening its use to policy makers and policy-oriented researchers. It offers them an unique basis for setting policy priorities, can help focus on areas where a concentrated development policy can add true value, and it offers an excellent tailor made tool for monitoring development policy efforts over time. For this purpose ISD is currently investigating the development of a 6th Index, which reflects inter-group disparities, that highlights the extent of discrimination and disparities between social groups.

ISD Database Manager:
Ellen Webbink
webbink@iss.nl

All data, indices and the underlying indicators are open for all users, ensuring the broadest possible access and applications. ISD is now working on disseminating the database through conferences, seminars and working papers and construction of a more advanced website tool to enhance attractiveness for policy makers and researchers. An international research conference is planned for the end of 2011.

www.indsocdev.org

isd@iss.nl

Established in 1952 and part of Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) since 2009, the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) has gained a worldwide reputation as one of the leading institutes in Europe and globally on research, teaching and public service in the field of development studies and international cooperation. With an academic team of 56 full-time staff with extensive field experience, through its six-decade track record in capacity building and its extensive alumni, ISS possesses a unique network of policy makers and researchers across all regions of the developing world. ISS researchers participate in a wide variety of research schools and associations, such as EADI and the UK DSA; they serve on the boards of many leading journals; they have partnered in a variety of EU, UK and international research programmes; and they have obtained research funding from the World Bank, UN organisations, and national funding bodies across Europe and internationally. The ISS also houses two leading journals in development studies, both with ISI rating: *Development and Change*, and *Journal of Peasant Studies*.