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multiple definitions of indicators exist today, they are generally understood to be:

[ex]statistical measures that are used to summarize complex data into a simple number or rank that is meaningful to policy makers and the public. They tend to ignore specificity and context in favor of superficial but standardized knowledge. An indicator presents clearly the most important features relevant to informed decision-making about one issue or question. [Merry, "Measuring the World," 2009]

This quote from a UN expert body as cited by the anthropologist Sally Engle Merry conveys the objective pretensions of indicators, while camouflaging the socio-political work that indicators actually perform and that goes into forming them. For indicators help construct norms of governance (citizen participation), generate new identities and realities (failed states) and reproduce hierarchies in country rankings. Indicators can also be contested and invested with different meanings by a range of actors.

These implications, among others, are of concern to a growing number of scholars. Such is the case with the interdisciplinary group of anthropologists and legal academics affiliated with the Indicators Project at New York University, some of whom are analyzing UN human rights indicators using a Foucauldian

governmentality framework (AnnJanette Rosga, Margaret Satterthwaite, Merry). There is also an emerging body of ethnographic work focused on measurements of corruption. Steven Sampson and Smoki Musaraj have done extended fieldwork in the Balkans that in part critiques corruption indices, while I have written about the strategic objectification of the TI CPI by Czech anti-corruption professionals.

One way people have addressed the propensity of technocratic indicators to universalism, abstraction and decontextualization is by promoting local, qualitative and participa-

tory modes of knowledge production. These approaches, however, should also be open to further investigation because they too have the potential to reify power differences between experts who produce and apply indicators and the populations that are governed by them. Donor agencies such as the UK Department for International Development, for instance, are at the vanguard in developing political economy or power analyses that situate governance reform and other development priorities within a country's social, historical and political contexts. In so doing, these qualitative reports aspire to help policymakers make more informed decisions. My organization Global Integrity fuses quantitative with narrative-based contextual evidence of the strengths and weaknesses of countries'

anti-corruption institutions and accountability mechanisms at the national, sub-national and sector levels via collaboration with local partner groups. Whether these and other comparable efforts gain traction remains to be seen, but they should not preclude our critical engagement. One can ask whether and how narrative indicators, despite their subjective reputation, can nevertheless be formalized, reified and decontextualized in a vein similar to their quantitative counterpart. Furthermore, the turn to more particularistic and participatory forms of indicator production, while welcome, does

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not necessarily eliminate the uncertainty over how these indicators will be used. More broadly and provocatively, these developments could lead us to ask whether designing alternative or improved indicators as a response to critiques of quantitative misrepresentation still leaves power asymmetries fundamentally intact, and that a more radical re-visioning of indicators may be needed.

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## Protecting Haiti's Children

### Disasters, Trafficking and Human Rights

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With a recorded magnitude of 7.3 and a death toll of over 200,000 people, the January 12, 2010 earthquake provoked Haiti's worst catastrophe in 200 years. The country was already the poorest in the Western hemisphere before this disaster. Long-term political strife, high population density and a severely depressed economy have been compounded in recent years by the effects of the global food crisis and particularly active hurricane seasons, resulting in height-

ened levels of environmental and social vulnerability. The situation is especially critical for children, who constitute more than half of a total population of 9.6 million inhabitants. According to UNICEF, Haiti had the highest rates of infant, under-five and maternal mortality in the region prior to the earthquake. School enrollment barely reached 50%, while less than 2% of those enrolled completed secondary school. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) estimates



**A young boy in post-earthquake Haiti smiles in spite of an uncertain future.** Photo courtesy Refugees International

**HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM**

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Even before the disaster, Haiti was reported to have had thousands of orphaned and abandoned children vulnerable to various kinds of abuse and exploitation. The Haitian government estimated that about 2,000 children were being trafficked out of Haiti each year—typically to the US and Canada—before the earthquake. A US State Department report on trafficking concluded that up to 300,000 Haitian children under the age of 14 were trafficked in 2008, either to work as domestic servants

or for sex trade purposes, both domestically and internationally. Complicating matters are competing views regarding the situation of so-called *restavek* children—a Haitian Creole word derived from the French "*rester avec*," or "to stay with," used in reference to children sent to live away from their biological parents.

A combination of cultural traditions of flexible household arrangements and extended family networks, crippling poverty, and unavailability of schooling has been used to explain the high number of *restaveks* in Haiti. Often

portrayed as an exploitative form of domestic child labor equated to trafficking by child advocacy groups, this practice may instead be viewed by parents and children alike as both a survival strategy and a valuable educational opportunity. Restavek children in Haiti live, and often work, in a complex cultural landscape that must be investigated contextually rather than summarily characterized as pathological. Experience from catastrophes worldwide, on the other hand, provides strong evidence that uprooted children from marginalized backgrounds are indeed more likely to suffer human rights violations in situations of disaster and displacement.

Following the 2004 tsunami in South Asia, for instance, widespread reports of child kidnapping and trafficking forced Indonesian officials to protect children by posting guards around disaster camps. The Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters were developed in response. Adopted by the Inter-Agency

Standing Committee in 2006, these guidelines offer a framework for implementing rights-based approaches to humanitarian action in disaster situations. Also relevant are the 2004 Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children, applicable when children become lost, orphaned or otherwise separated from their families during emergencies. More broadly, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement have been gaining increasing recognition as the key international framework for the protection of internally displaced persons. The extent to which these principles are actually guiding relief and reconstruction interventions, and helping protect children's rights in post-earthquake Haiti, remains unclear.

At present there is no legally-binding international convention on the rights of displaced people. A strong normative framework would lay a firmer foundation for the protection of the human rights of those displaced by disasters and other crises,

provided that implementation emphasizes the (re)establishment of sustainable durable solutions. Although the January 12 earthquake devastated Haiti's capital in a matter of seconds, promoting durable solutions for those displaced by the disaster will require years of sustained effort and massive investment. Human rights, reconstruction and development challenges will need to be effectively addressed if the protection and well-being of children and their families are to be ensured.



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## Being an Anthropologist in the Face of Disaster

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Any anthropologist who strives to help people devastated by a disaster—natural, human-made or both—becomes an applied anthropologist. Central to the ethical imperative of that role is: (1) helping give voice to those affected, (2) fostering empathic communication between the many groups involved, and (3) helping people rebuild their world, knowing that it will never be the same. The anthropologist knows that humane solutions are never entirely technical or technological, and tries to bridge mechanics, meanings, organizations and communities. The anthropologist also knows that disasters prompt new adaptive strategies and draw on earlier ones; that it is important to know what people do *with* disasters—not just what disasters do *to* them. What people bring to a disaster is as important to know as the disaster's putative effect on them. Moreover, so-called natural disasters are rarely purely natural, unshaped by human intentionality in the making of and response to them.

To determine which kinds of help are truly helpful, one must attend closely to the multiple points of view of those affected and their needs. There are many, often competing social constructions of a disaster. Although the people affected are not the only ones involved in adapting to and recovering from the disaster, they bring their own expertise in knowledge, methods, meanings and in identifying their own needs, solutions and priorities. All these should be recognized and included in planning.

One event is experienced quite differently by people in different roles and communities who bring different perspectives to the disaster. At one level there is shared group trauma,

and an identity is often built around it. For instance, Hurricanes Katrina and Ike affected millions of people. At another level the experience of trauma is local, even individual. For instance, at one medical center struck by the hurricane, physicians and nurses were not only overwhelmed by damage from the hurricane but also additionally devastated by the recent decision of health care executives to change the medical center's historic mission of caring largely for people unable to pay to a for-profit system. Human decisions and actions often worsen the effects of so-called natural disasters. The boundary between them is often quite permeable. The anthropologist also knows that

between the emic and etic communities. A common situation in disasters is that officially some people and groups are noticed and helped while others are not. It is the calling of anthropologists to be inclusive, to give voice to the voiceless, to attend to their stories and concerns and to advocate for their empowerment.

I did not set out to become a "disaster anthropologist," but events forced me to learn on the job. I was an informal consultant and group process facilitator in the wake of the April 19, 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and later in the aftermath of the May 3, 1999 tornadoes in central Oklahoma. I was also a speaker and consultant to the

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people have deep emotional wounds in the wake of disasters, and these should be addressed. The priorities, time perspectives, strengths and vulnerabilities of those affected need to be elicited, recognized and respected. Further, often an anthropologist who is already part of the local culture devastated by disaster must attend both to the trauma of others and one's own. Furthermore, what is called the "secondary traumatization" of responders and helpers after a disaster should be addressed by providing them safe havens to process their experiences.

Susan Allen writes (*AN* 51[4]:22) that anthropologists bring the big picture, the systemic view, the holistic eye and ear to helping others. This is as true for disasters as for more ordinary times. In both the dominant cultural tendency is to attend only to individual factors in the system as if they were isolated and to impose a linear view on helping and outcomes. Anthropologists can attend to and advocate for the emic system and serve as a translator or culture broker

Worcester (Massachusetts) Institute on Loss and Trauma following the Worcester Cold Storage Warehouse fire on December 3, 1999 that took the lives of six firefighters. In the mid-1990s I was asked to help "humanize" the "downsizing" (mass firing) of the University Hospitals in Oklahoma City. Around the same time I participated in a yearlong study of the experience of downsizing in a large urban hospital. In all these situations, I was stretched emotionally in my roles far more than I ever thought I was capable. I can only hope that I did good anthropology in these extreme circumstances.

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