THE "NEXT ACT" FOR OPERA?

This paper shares insights gathered through a consultative research project which aimed to help CESR strengthen its approaches to supporting activists using OPERA, CESR's economic and social rights monitoring framework.

What tools do human rights activists need to better understand, and, more importantly, tackle, the unjust socioeconomic structures that cause so many of the world's human rights violations? How has the OPERA framework, developed by the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR), helped activists to address structural injustices and what can be done to enhance its usefulness? This discussion paper shares insights on these questions, gathered through consultation undertaken within the economic and social rights community. The goal of the project was to help CESR review and, where necessary, rethink the approaches we employ to support activists using OPERA.

As described further below, OPERA is an analytical framework designed by CESR and developed over the past twenty years in close collaboration with partners across and beyond the human rights movement. OPERA aims to support robust research that can provide a basis for creative, compelling advocacy on entrenched violations of economic and social rights, such as preventable maternal death, chronic malnutrition or extreme poverty. Achieving that goal means making resources on OPERA—and its related methodological tools—more accessible for a broader audience and more responsive to the diversity of activities being undertaken by civil society groups working at the local, national, regional, and international levels. It also means building stronger relationships of support, solidarity, and learning among activists using OPERA.

Between May and October 2018, CESR undertook a range of collaborative activities in order to deepen our understanding of who, beyond our immediate circle of partners, is currently using OPERA, or its related tools, and how. We found that despite the diversity of users and uses, there were some common challenges in adapting the generic model to a specific issue or local context. These included gathering and interpreting data and understanding how economics impacts on rights. After a short overview of the background and rationale for these activities, these insights are discussed in further detail in the following sections. The paper ends with a short summary of conclusions and recommendations about next steps.

CESR is extremely grateful to everyone who collaborated with us on this project. The generous spirit in which people gave their time and shared their views is deeply appreciated.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Diverse range of users and uses. The global community of OPERA users is rich and vibrant. It includes national NGOs, grassroots activists and human rights defenders, international human rights advocates, policy analysts, academics and legal professionals. Importantly, not all users—especially those in the development field—frame their work in human rights terms. So they won't necessarily be familiar with the relevant norms that OPERA seeks to measure, or necessarily see the links between economic injustices and human rights. This diversity of users and uses underscores the need for a collaborative approach to designing future resources on OPERA.

Adaptability is key. OPERA is seen as standardized, comprehensive, holistic, and evidence-driven, on the one hand. But, it is also seen by some as complex and technical, making it somewhat inaccessible, on the other. Many praised its versatility. However, the process of adapting the OPERA framework to fit a specific issue or a particular local context is one area where people expressed a need for more support.

Numbers are (not) just numbers. Quantitative data, a method frequently used with some steps of OPERA, can have strategic value in supporting advocacy. But it also presents several challenges. Overwhelmingly, these challenges relate to the interpretation of data. In other words, what does the data signify *in human rights terms*? Interpretive tools include indicators and benchmarks. But many people described their use of these tools as ad hoc or unsystematic. Overall, there was appetite for more "standardization" on how to approach indicators and benchmarks.

Tackling the economics of economic, social and cultural rights. Budget analysis, which underpins the "R" in OPERA, was the method fewest people had used in their work. There were split opinions about how much to prioritize it. This suggests capacity building on budgets is not just about teaching "number crunching" skills. Understanding economic policy, and its impact on how resources are invested in rights, is still quite limited. So more basic "demystifying" is needed, to strengthen economic literacy and build up confidence discussing economic issues.

Case studies are a crucial resource for building familiarity. Many people suggested that case studies would be an effective way to make OPERA and its related methods more accessible and user friendly for different groups. Case studies show, concretely, "this is where it's been done and this is what happened," which helps build familiarity with OPERA and solidarity with other users. In response to the question of formalizing a community of practice on OPERA, there were several suggestions to develop a database or platform that people can tap into and connect with others as needed.

Rethinking how we measure OPERA's impact. The pathways between sharing OPERA, its uptake and application in research and advocacy, and achieving wider social change are often contributory, rather than direct. Due to the multifaceted and relational nature of CESR's OPERA-related activities (including contributing to the work of "boundary partners"), an outcome mapping framework, combined with participatory data collection methods, would be a rigorous, yet flexible, way to systematize tracking information about applications of OPERA.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

CESR has been at the forefront of efforts to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches into human rights research for over twenty-five years. In our own projects, we've applied cutting edge methods to uncover deep-rooted, structural rights violations across a range of topics. These include the consequences of oil exploitation in Ecuador; the role unjust fiscal policies play in fueling malnutrition, maternal death, and low school completion in Guatemala; and how economic policy in Egypt stymied hopes for human rights progress after the Arab Spring.

The development of OPERA was a significant milestone in this work. It was first launched in 2012, after several years of design and testing in a number of country-specific research projects, including Guatemala. OPERA is an analytical framework that groups together relevant human rights standards and principles into four dimensions: Outcomes, Policy Efforts, Resources and Assessment. As well as identifying what questions need to be answered to measure each dimension systematically, it also suggests various methodological tools for how to answer them. These include using indicators and benchmarks; gathering quantitative and qualitative data, from either primary or secondary sources; and conducing budget analysis. Importantly, these methods can be interchanged and adapted to different contexts.

Over the past five years, we've shared OPERA with hundreds of activists and practitioners from civil society organizations, national human rights institutions, United Nations mechanisms, and international NGOs. Through CESR's innovative collaboration model, which prioritizes mutual skills-sharing, sustained partnerships and joint research outputs, we've accompanied partners as they've used it. We've also developed training curricula and additional learning resources on OPERA, as well as the tools associated with it. CESR has played a central role in building up a community of practice among human rights activists committed to harnessing data and other innovative tools to monitor and demand accountability for denials of economic and social rights. We're also aware that many others beyond our immediate partners are now applying and referencing OPERA in their work.

Through this work, we've inspired, and been inspired by, our partners, who have used OPERA to tackle chronic and entrenched rights violations in a variety of contexts—from economic crises in Brazil and Spain to development planning and reconstruction in Kenya, Palestine and New Zealand. These types of rights violations pose a number of methodological challenges and grappling with them has shaped the way OPERA has evolved over the years.

We've observed a real collective appetite for approaching advocacy-oriented research more strategically. However, the knowledge and skills that this type of research demands is not, as a general rule, the focus of many resources and training programs developed for the human rights community. Feedback on those resources and programs that do exist suggest that they are often not needs-driven; are overly technical; are not applied; are dated; are written for a narrow audience; or don't respond to the diversity of activities being undertaken. For that reason, knowledge and skills often remain siloed between thematic or geographic experts.

Responding to this demand is the "call to action" that has inspired our work on OPERA and on tools for human rights claiming and accountability more generally. Despite this significant body of work, to date capacity constraints have limited CESR's ability to provide in-person training at scale. The

materials that we have produced on OPERA also remain somewhat fragmented; they have either had a more conceptual focus, or been written for a particular audience, or been formatted for a limited use, or, with some exceptions, been available in English only. In order to scale up our materials on OPERA, we need to have a more in-depth understanding of who is currently using them beyond our immediate circle of partners, and how.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of the project was to explore and test our assumptions about the capacities and constraints of current and potential users of OPERA and its related tools—in order to get a clearer picture of their needs and priorities. Our approach was consultative and inclusive, based on human-centered, co-design principles. The research methods we used encouraged collective brainstorming on open-ended questions, allowing us to learn directly from those OPERA ultimately serves.

As for many organizations within the human rights community, explicitly building "design thinking" principles into the research process was quite new for us. For that reason, we adopted an iterative approach to the project. Between May and October 2018 we undertook a series of collaborative activities. Combined, these created a process that was flexible, yet rigorous. These activities included various community mapping exercises, gathering stories, reflecting on existing resources, and strengthening our approach to learning and evaluation.

Mapping the community

The main mapping activity was an online survey, which we disseminated in English and Spanish. The survey included ten questions, both quantitative and qualitative. They asked about current engagement with OPERA and about skills-development priorities—in relation to economic and social rights analysis, generally, as well as about OPERA, specifically.

We received twenty responses from around the world; the majority were from human rights activists working for national NGOs, while others came from grassroots human rights defenders, international human rights advocates, academics and legal professionals. While this sample size is far too small to draw conclusions about the community as a whole, the feedback we received through it does flag a number of interesting areas for further research.

To encourage creative thinking about the motivations, behaviors and goals of different types of OPERA "users," the project team also developed "user personas." These were fictional characters, developed through a group brainstorming exercise, to help us see OPERA through the eyes of individuals using OPERA in a variety of different contexts. For each persona, we brainstormed how any why they use research, the skills needed for their work, and how they develop those skills.

Gathering stories

These mapping activities gave us a "big picture" sense of the OPERA community. To give us a more detailed view, we conducted eleven individual interviews. Interviewees were identified through

a mix of targeted outreach (with individuals from organizations we had already engaged with) and expressions of interest (from individuals who had completed the survey).

In these interviews, we focused on how organizations approach research and their experience of using different tools, including OPERA. We asked interviewees about what kinds of skills-building resources they currently use in their work. We also invited them to share ideas about what effective skills-building resources could look like.

Another way we gathered stories was to solicit short blogs written by our partners and allies, which reflected on lessons learned from applying OPERA, or its related tools, in a range of contexts. These included using OPERA:

- During a strategy session with Kenyan NGOs to develop indicators and benchmarks that can measure progress on implementing treaty body recommendations.
- In research identifying gaps in legislation, policy and data collection in relation to the right to food in the United Kingdom.
- To design a set of more than eighty indicators reflecting the state of social and economic progress in Egypt
- As a participatory "mapping" tool in multi-stakeholder workshops exploring various rights in the Scottish context.

Reflecting on existing resources

These interviews were supplemented by internal discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of our existing resources, as well as desk research to explore and draw inspiration from similar types of skill-building resources, including those designed specifically for human rights activists or more generally for social justice activists.

Strengthening our approach to learning and evaluation

Another dimension of the project was to explore how we could strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system we use for understanding the impacts of CESR's skill-building activities on OPERA. This involved reviewing a range of available monitoring and evaluation frameworks and approaches and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each according to their relevance, flexibility, effectiveness and appropriateness. This assessment provides the basis for the overall framework and a set of approaches that could constitute a robust evaluation system for OPERA, including suggested indicators and benchmarks.

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

Diverse range of users and uses

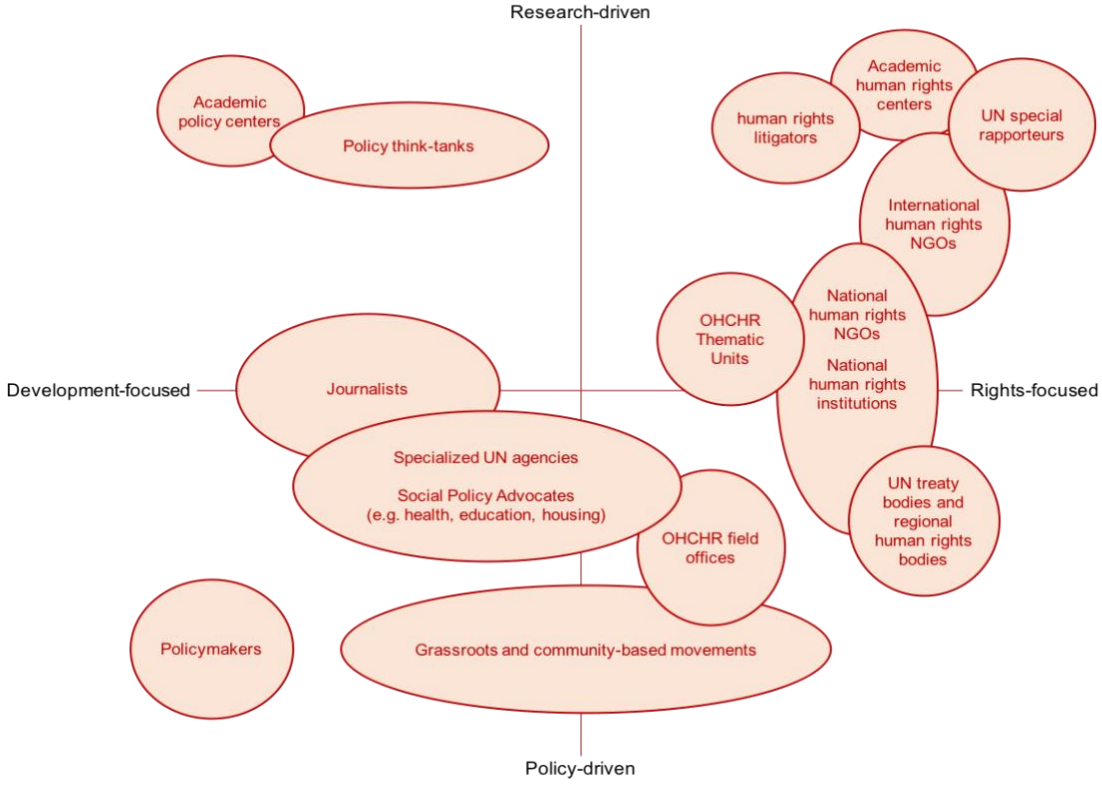
Figure 1 | Location of Survey Respondents

The global community of OPERA users is rich and vibrant. Of the survey responses received, the majority were from human rights activists working for national NGOs. Others came from grassroots human rights defenders, international human rights advocates, academics and legal professionals. Survey respondents were spread out geographically, as shown in the map on the right. We sought out similar professional and geographic diversity in our interviewees.

Overall, around one third of survey respondents and interviewees had applied OPERA in their work. It was used to develop indicators and metrics; set program priorities; plan projects; and structure research. It was encouraging to hear the creative array of different topics addressed using OPERA. These included taxation; the right to food; the allocation of resources for disability rights; adequate housing for Indigenous peoples; the rights of internally displace people in transitional justice processes; forced evictions; health financing; and the rights to water and sanitation.

Interestingly, some respondents noted that they focused more on certain steps of OPERA than others. This is something to explore further. As discussed below, it raises broader questions about how OPERA is adapted and applied to specific issues and contexts.

Figure 2 | Rough schematic of OPERA user types



Brainstorming “user personas” helped to position these responses within a broader ecosystem of current and potential OPERA users. It also helped to identify those we are already reaching, as well as those we are not. As shown in the graphic above, the work of different groups varies widely in terms of how general or issue-specific it is; how it uses facts and evidence; how it seeks to influence decisionmakers; and whether it is framed in human rights terms or not.

An important insight from this exercise, which was raised by a number of interviewees as well, is that people using OPERA don’t always frame their work in economic, social and cultural rights terms. So, they may not necessarily be familiar with the relevant norms that OPERA seeks to measure, nor see the links between economic injustices and human rights. To engage these users, educational materials that make the case for the importance of human rights norms, and illustrate how they can be practically applied, would be useful.

One particular group flagged in interviews is development NGOs. As one interviewee stressed, the questions touched on by OPERA are also touched on by development NGOs, so if development NGOs could use OPERA more in their work, this could bring development and human rights NGOs closer together. Specifically, using OPERA could be a way to advance a rights-based approach to development policy. Further engagement with different types of organizations working on development to hear their feedback on OPERA would be worthwhile.

The mapping of users and uses of OPERA raises critical questions. Are there potential users among these groups who should be considered a priority in terms of the relevance of OPERA to their work and the contributions they in turn could make to the framework? Is there an integrated way to address all of their needs? Or should each type of user be targeted? The diversity of users and uses underscores the need for a collaborative approach to designing future resources on OPERA.

Adaptability is key

When queried about OPERA’s perceived strengths and weaknesses, there were clear parallels between those who had applied OPERA and those who had not yet done so. Respondents and interviewees agreed that OPERA’s strengths were in its standardized, comprehensive and evidence-driven nature. It was characterized as a holistic “one-stop-shop” that could facilitate more consistent economic, social and cultural rights monitoring. Notably, it was praised as one of the only such frameworks to offer a systematic entry point for such purposes. One interviewee described feeling “much more empowered” to engage in policy debates when using OPERA. Another described it as helpful in “peeling back the bullshit” in government reports.

OPERA’s versatility was also seen as a strength. As one interviewee emphasized, it can support a range of different activities, including research, campaigning and policy influencing. By demonstrating how policy failures lead to rights violations, it can help human rights activists deepen their analysis in order to persuade broader audiences.

On weaknesses, OPERA was described by several respondents as complex and technical, making it somewhat inaccessible and not user-friendly for some. One interviewee described it as “cumbersome,” noting that populating the different steps with data “would take forever.” One of our

partners expressed concern that it may be too complicated for social movements and organized community groups to make use of quickly and easily—limiting its utility as a citizen engagement tool.

Language was highlighted as a particular barrier. Most OPERA materials are only available in English, although some have been translated into Spanish and Arabic for specific projects. Making OPERA more accessible, language-wise, isn't just a matter of translating it into different languages, however. It's also about making the concepts more intuitive. Each of the four steps of OPERA was flagged by some as needing more conceptual clarity.

For example, the Scottish Human Rights Commission noted that distinguishing between questions about outcomes, policy efforts, resources and assessment was a bit confusing if you were coming to it for the first time—e.g. outcomes are usually thought of as what you are trying to achieve rather than people's experiences and enjoyment of human rights; assessment implies taking all the points from O, PE and R and using this to review the State's responsibility, but it actually also looks at the effect of outside factors on the State and its human rights obligations.

Survey respondents and interviewees offered several constructive recommendations that would help to break down the questions to be asked for each of the steps of OPERA and to explain how these can be answered practically. One suggestion was to zoom in on one or two specific issues that a community has identified as a priority within a broader topic—for example, looking at access to antenatal care as a reproductive health issue. Another was to embed OPERA in a discussion about using particular accountability options (such as launching a campaign or writing a submission to parliament). This could put the framework in a more helpful context that would clarify the reasons citizens and civil society might want to engage with OPERA.

Again, these responses raise the broader question: what does the actual act of applying OPERA look like and what types of support do partners and allies need to do it? This process of adapting the OPERA framework to fit an issue-specific or local context is one area where respondents felt in need of more support. OPERA aims to facilitate local analysis of political, social, and economic dynamics, to enable activists to define their own needs and priorities. But, more than half of the survey respondents who hadn't used OPERA indicated they were uncertain about how OPERA applied in practice to their area of work. A short, simple "how-to" guide may be a way to help bridge that gap.

As one interviewee emphasized, incorporating OPERA may require a significant shift in organizational culture. Different organizations work in different ways. For some organizations, using OPERA could help to expand beyond a predominantly legalistic approach. However, this would require more than one-off training. Options for more sustained support could include periodic mentoring or accompaniment on specific projects.

Numbers are (not) just numbers

A key insight from the interviews was that it is important to think about the strategic value of quantitative data in supporting advocacy. This will determine whether and how to use it in research. This point came up in different ways in a number of interviews:

- For one interviewee, the impact of measurement undertaken by communities themselves is huge because “it gets a reaction; it gets movement.” Being able to show empirical evidence helps redress the power imbalance between communities and decisionmakers.

- Another shared an experience of holding social dialogues between researchers and communities, where they’ve presented data relevant to those that are directly affected. The response was, “what do we do now?”. They’d similarly found their research made decision-makers uncomfortable, because “they’re not sure what to do with it.” Information needs to be actionable.

- Another noted that they “don’t actively prioritize quantitative data, unless there is something that would get in the news headlines.” Their partners aren’t interested in quantitative data unless it has an impact on their advocacy.

Similarly, when we asked our survey respondents to rate their priorities in further developing skills and capacities to analyze economic and social rights, the top two answers were using human rights standards and principles to design research questions and communication and advocacy on research findings.

All interviewees used quantitative data in a variety of different ways, in order to create the “strongest evidence base” possible. Some used government data, because it was more difficult to challenge. Others relied on development statistics from UN databases (e.g. ILO, WHO) on health, education, employment etc. One emphasized the importance of Google given capacity and time constraints. One used community-led surveys to gather primary data, stressing that quantitative data “doesn’t have to be sophisticated.” In fact, “the more complex, the less people engage.”

There was also consensus that qualitative and quantitative data are complementary. As one explained, “It’s not just enough to state just numbers – because these are not always objective and impartial—and you need nuance that is provided by qualitative data.” Quantitative data can “only be a snapshot,” another observed. Qualitative data helps “speak to subjective enjoyment of rights,” emphasized another.

Interviewees raised several challenges related to data. Data availability was a notable frustration. This came up again and again. One interviewee suggested that OPERA may be a useful tool for mapping where data gaps exist, in order to support advocacy on improving data collection. Other challenges flagged included determining whether a source was reliable or not; knowing whether a particular measure is an appropriate proxy for the issue being assessed; and a “general fear of numbers and Excel.”
Overwhelmingly, however, the challenges that interviewees raised related to the interpretation of data, in terms of what the data signifies in human rights impacts. You need to “dive down to understand what numbers are showing,” as one interviewee put it. Interpretive tools include indicators and benchmarks. Many interviewees described their use of these tools as ad hoc or unsystematic.

In relation to indicators, one interviewee commented that they "probably are using them but don't know it." They felt that indicators are a hard concept to understand and apply. Another, whose work is more community-based, said they avoided the term altogether, and instead spoke about measurements or measures, that tell us "where we're at and where we want to get."

Regardless of the terminology, several interviewees stressed that it is important to ground indicators in international standards, because that's what gives them legitimacy. But, doing so can be a challenge. In particular, focusing on rights-based standards can make the analysis "overly legalistic," which only speaks to a narrow audience.

For those interviewees that use benchmarks, country comparisons are common. Recommendations from specialized agencies are another source. But, as one interviewee pointed out, these can be difficult to access, as there's no single compilation. Governments' own targets are another. But, these are often not normatively grounded.

Overall, there was appetite for more "standardization" on how to approach indicators and benchmarks. Resources interviewees thought would be helpful include lists of key indicators, compilations of recommendations from specialized agencies, and methodological guidelines that suggest how to approach benchmarks (e.g. that outline multiple sources of benchmarks and detail the pros and cons of each).

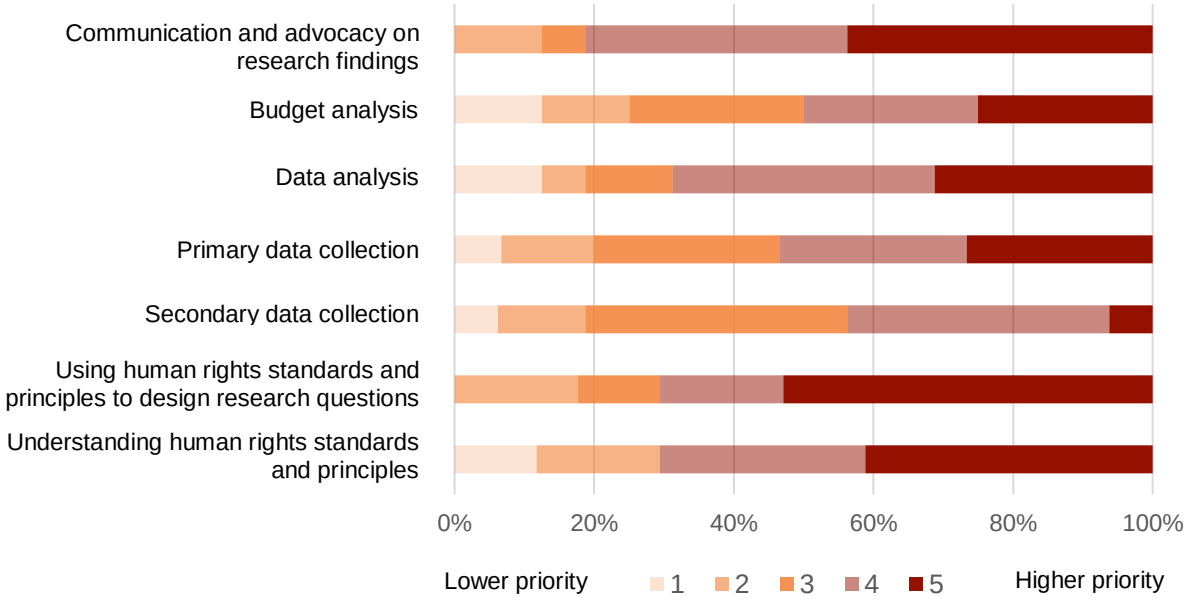
Tackling the economics of economic, social and cultural rights

Budget analysis, with underpins the "R" of OPERA, was the method fewest people had used in their work. Only three of our interviewees had undertaken detailed budget analyses, addressing issues such as tax benefits, conditionalities of international financial institutions, illicit financial flows, and health spending. Others had "dabbled" in the method in various ways, but described their work on budgets as "underdeveloped." A number of interviewees flagged decentralization as an issue that complicated budget analysis. Others talked about the challenge of going beyond budgetary allocations, to look at how resources are governed and actually spent (which raises complex issues such as corruption).

Nevertheless, they also saw growing demand for rights-based budget analysis. One interviewee concluded that while it may be the most difficult method to incorporate into human rights analysis, it is "also the most important." Another stressed that judging the legitimacy of spending trade-offs was critical in determining whether governments were meeting their human rights obligations.

Interestingly, survey respondents were fairly split in terms of how much they prioritized building up skills on budget analysis, as shown in the graph below. The insights shared by our interviews suggests a number of reasons for this. Many pointed to the division between economists and human rights lawyers—and the difficulty of having conversations across these two fields—as a reason budget analysis is seen as "a separate domain" from human rights analysis. Treasury "only talks numbers" one interviewee observed. For those working closer to grassroots activists, the perceived technicality of economics has meant budget analysis is seen to be less participatory as a tool, and therefore less of a priority.

Figure 3 | Skill development priorities among survey respondents



This indicates that capacity building on budgets is not just about teaching "number crunching" skills. Understanding economic policy and its impact on the availability of resources for the fulfilment of rights is still quite limited in the human rights field. So more basic "demystifying" of key concepts is needed, as part of a broader effort to strengthen economic literacy and build up confidence discussing economic issues. Within the economics field, there are a number of recent initiatives seeking to "democratize" knowledge of economics, such as the Rethinking Economics movement. Building synergies with these initiatives is one avenue to explore.

At the same time, several interviewees felt that the jurisprudence on governments' budget-related human rights obligations is "not there yet." One flagged extra-territorial obligations in particular. So guidance that unpacks the various normative dimensions of the duty to take steps to 'the maximum of available resources" to realize rights would also be helpful.

Case studies are a crucial resource for building familiarity

We asked about the types of resources that would be helpful in making OPERA and its related methods more accessible and user friendly for different groups. One suggestion that came up again and again in interviews was publishing case studies. As one interviewee explained, the starting point should always be "this is where it's been done and this is what happened." Starting a conversation with practical examples of "how groups have stood up to power" is important. It helps others "feel that what they have to say has dignity and that there is solidarity behind it." Another spoke of the value of having "real time" examples that can be accessible when activists need them. Another suggested including more about the rights that we are talking about in a case study – meaning more information on the normative content of the right, because "by repeating it, you are building capacity."

These interesting perspectives on the value of case studies raise important questions about what makes for an effective case study and which are worth exploring further. Case studies are stories.

Like stories, some are more engaging than others. For example, case studies that are more descriptive than analytical, or that lack relevant details about the context of the case, or, conversely, that dive into too much contextually-specific detail, are typically less effective at revealing more broadly relevant and thought-provoking lessons for others.

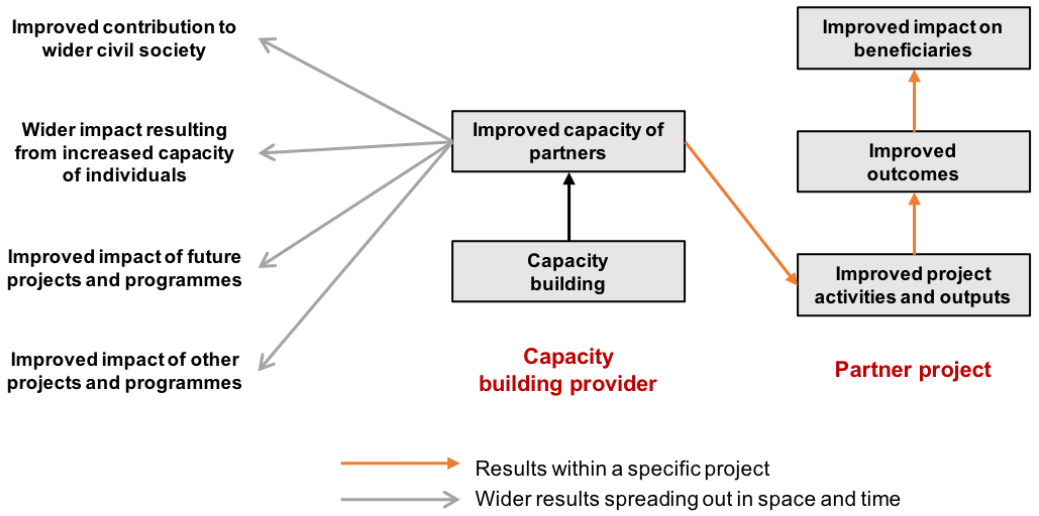
When asked about whether there might be value in formalizing a community of practice on OPERA, one interviewee noted that networks raise a lot of questions about what should they do, how big or small should they be, how participatory etc. Further, plugging into network activities such as webinars or email discussions is time consuming. This makes it less attractive when day-to-day work is so fast-paced. Another interviewee emphasized that the key to building communities of practice is building momentum; once people see others are engaging they're more likely to as well. So we should start small and build out.

There were several suggestions to develop a database or platform that people can tap into or refer to as needed. A number of interviewees noted that they pursued professional development primarily through their own reading. Others described interactions with colleagues such as workshops and project reviews as important professional development opportunities. The fact that resources on OPERA are "always there when you need to find them," was cited as a strength by one interviewee.

Rethinking how we measure OPERA's impact

The pathways between sharing OPERA, its uptake and application in research and advocacy, and achieving wider social change are often contributory, rather than direct. This means they're not always clear. In order for OPERA to bring about impact, it must be *applied in practice* in some form. Each application of OPERA helps to solidify skills, contributes to the broader body of knowledge and experience of the OPERA community, and raises the profile of OPERA among other human rights researchers. In this way, activities related to OPERA often fit the model of a capacity building "provider" interacting with "boundary partners," in order to achieve wider societal impacts, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 4 | Pathways of change in capacity building projects



Source: Simister and Smith (2010)

For this reason, evaluating the skill-building impact of OPERA will ultimately require tracking the short-term outcomes that are in the direct sphere of influence of CESR as a capacity building provider, as well as those longer-term outcomes that depend on partners.

To date, we've been more focused on the former. For example, over the course of our trainings, we collect information on the skill-building change that occurs for participants through pre- and post-workshop self-assessment surveys. Beyond the scope of the workshops, however, formal follow-up processes to engage participants and to track the subsequent impacts of these skill-building workshops have been quite limited. Tracking information about applications of OPERA in practice has, to date, remained fairly ad hoc. There are several examples where we've come across case studies by chance that have drawn on OPERA, for example.

In the next phase of resources on OPERA, we have an opportunity to build a more systematic approach. An outcome mapping framework would be a rigorous, yet flexible, way to identify impact indicators. Due to the relational nature of achieving outcomes by contributing to the work of partners, participatory methods are critical to understanding this work and understanding which strategies will be most effective. Participatory data collection methods would therefore be an appropriate way to measure change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

By undertaking various community mapping exercises, gathering stories, reflecting on existing resources, and strengthening our approach to learning and evaluation, we were able to explore and test our assumptions about the capacities and constraints of current and potential users of OPERA, and its related methodological tools. These activities helped identify a number of key elements for future resources, including:

- Educational materials that make the case for assessing public policies against human rights norms, and illustrate how these norms can be practically applied, in particular the duty to take steps to "the maximum of available resources" to realize rights.

- A short, simple “how-to” guide that breaks down the questions to be asked for each of the steps of OPERA and explains how they can be answered practically.
- Lists of key indicators, compilations of recommendations from specialized agencies, and methodological guidelines that suggest how to approach benchmarks (e.g. that outline multiple sources of benchmarks and detail the pros and cons of each).
- Basic “demystifying” of key economic concepts, as part of a broader effort to strengthen economic literacy and build up confidence discussing economic issues and their human rights implications.

There was a wide range of views about what form potential resources on OPERA should take and what characteristics they should prioritize. These are questions that demand more in-depth and contextual dialogue with users, as well as internal reflection taking into account CESR’s competencies and capacities. This underscores the importance of adopting a collaborative approach to co-designing future resources. In particular, further engagement—possibly through accompaniment on specific projects—would help deepen its relevance to the realities facing different types of organizations working on development including social movements (e.g. Indigenous, feminist, disability rights activists).

Nevertheless, there was an overarching emphasis on practical guidance, as well as on creative models for sustained support. It is clear that future resources on OPERA should: build strategic, as well as technical skills; support users to tailor and adapt OPERA to specific contexts; and empower experimentation with OPERA and facilitate sharing of learning, to enrich the framework by drawing on users’ experience and expertise.

CESR will draw on this rich feedback as we plan the next phase of its work on OPERA, which is a core part of our broader strategy to help meet the demands of the economic, social and cultural rights community for support building capacity to strengthen rights-claiming.

More information about OPERA, as well as a range of downloadable resources related to OPERA, can be found at CESR’s website at: http://cesr.org/opera-landing.

Further comments, critiques, or reflections on the findings of this project are very welcome and can be sent to opera@cesr.org.