GDPI "CO-CREATION" FOCUS GROUPS: SUMMARY REPORT

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KEY POINTS:

- Three focus group meetings were convened between 9-12 November 2020, gathering input from more than 70 civil society actors and community networks on the development of a new composite index, named the Global Drug Policy Index (GDPI)
- The participants agreed that the GDPI will be an important tool to facilitate progressive change in drug policies globally, and that the Index should aim to become the reference point for what a successful drug policy looks like
- A tool that gathers, analyses, scores and presents robust data on individual countries' drug policies was recognised as an important instrument for the advocacy and research projects of civil society organisations
- Overall, participants argued for strong civil society components in the Index, which should be reflected in the indicators and the data collection activities of the GDPI
- Additionally, participants argued the involvement of local communities was also key, as this helps set the standard for community involvement in the formulation and implementation of new drug policies
- Credibility, transparency, robustness and reliability were some of the key
 words that emerged from the focus group discussions. Participants argued
 that the GDPI needs to address each of these areas to ensure it is successful in
 becoming a global reference tool for policy makers, scholars and
 practitioners
- In relation to the presentation of the Index results, participants argued for an
 easily accessible tool with a high level of transparency and a number of
 features that would help them in their advocacy projects
- Such features included printable scorecards, maps and country reports, with participants raising several ideas for how to 'humanise' the index results by including stories based on the lived experiences of affected communities

Introduction

Project Overview

In 2020, the Harm Reduction Consortium¹ was awarded funding by the Robert Carr Fund (RCF) to deliver a new project titled: 'The Global Drug Policy Index (GDPI): A bold new approach to improve policies, harm reduction funding, and the lives of people who use drugs'.

This project aims to develop and implement a new composite index (the GDPI) to document, measure and compare government policies related to illicit drugs. The Consortium believes that existing policies around the world, founded in a "war on drugs" narrative, exacerbate harms and lead to widespread human rights violations. The role of the Consortium is to document and promote policy reforms in favour of more humane responses – including harm reduction services and approaches – as captured in the new UN System Common Position on Drugs.²

Drug policy debates and policy-making processes are inherently complex, politically charged, multi-faceted and lacking in transparency. Utilising data from governments, the UN and other sources, the Consortium is seeking to develop a robust methodology for the construction of a transparent index that allows for longitudinal assessment of a single state over time as well as comparison of performance between states at a given time – looking at a breadth of areas from public health, human rights, security and access to justice.

In order to move this project forward, three "co-creation" focus groups were organised on the 9th, 11th, and 12th November 2020 as part of a multi-stage process to develop the index idea, frame and structure. The purpose of these focus group discussions was to seek inputs from a wide range of "end-users" of the index (mainly colleagues from civil society or community networks) on the potential focus, content, design and data sources/indicators for the GDPI. These meetings represented an opportunity to propose

ideas and bring different perspectives to the table for consideration.

Participants and Methodology

Overall, a total of 71 participants from 34 countries were involved in the focus groups. Each focus group subsequently divided into three breakout groups (for a total of 9 breakout groups in total). All discussions

Figure 1. Participation statistics from the GDPI "co-creation" focus groups

3 Focus Group Discussions
9 Breakout Groups
7 1 Participants
3 4 Countries - all regions represented
3 7 men / 3 4 women

¹ For the purposes of this project, the **Harm Reduction Consortium** comprises: International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC) as the lead partner, Harm Reduction International (HRI), Youth RISE, Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN), Middle East and North Africa Harm Reduction Association (MENAHRA), European Network of People who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD), Global Drug Policy Observatory at Swansea University (GDPO), Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs (ENPUD), and West Africa Drug Policy Network (WADPN) – with the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) as an additional, non-financial partner.

² http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/UN-Common-Position-Briefing-Paper.pdf

were recorded through Zoom and then transcribed using Otter.ai. One of the breakout group discussions was held in Spanish and transcribed into English by Paulina Reichenbach.³ The transcripts from the breakout groups were subsequently coded using NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software) to identify key themes, linkages and issues of interest.

This Summary Report provides an overview of the main findings that emerged from the analysis of the focus group discussions. A more detailed analysis of the findings can be found in the separate Detailed Analysis Report.

Focus Group Meeting Outline

The focus group meetings were organised as per Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Meeting Overview

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Description	Format/Lead/Tools
Opening and Welcome: - Overview of meeting agenda and purpose - Agreement of ground rules	Wanjiku Shelmerdine (Moderator)
Scene-Setting: - Introduction to the GDPI - What we have learned so far	Marie Nougier, IDPC Dave Bewley-Taylor, GDPO
 Session 1: Scope and Structure of the Index What do we want to achieve with this Index, and what does success look like? Does the Task Team Report include all topics which the GDPI should cover? Are the elements of the Task Team Report which the GDPI should not cover? Which indicators and data sources would work best? 	Participants divide into three breakout groups for facilitated discussion
 Session 2: Making the Index work for advocacy What should be the geographical scope? If it is not 'global', what are the selection criteria? How should the Index results be presented or shared? How could the GDPI best support your drug policy advocacy work as NGOs? What materials or resources are needed to maximise how useful the GDPI will be? 	Participants divide into three breakout groups for facilitated discussion

³ https://www.linkedin.com/in/paulina-reichenbach-57651238

Cross-Cutting Themes

The first finding that emerged from the analysis of the focus group transcripts was in relation to cross-cutting themes. The following five themes consistently emerged in relation to discussions around the foundation of the GDPI:

1. Purpose

The core purpose of the GDPI received extensive debate during the focus group meetings. Participants agreed that an index done well can be a powerful tool for positive policy change, and that such policy change was indeed one of the core purposes of the index. Participants also felt that the GDPI's purpose is to chart the way for a new international standard for drug policy, and to become a powerful advocacy tool to name and shame, and name and fame. That participants viewed the GDPI as a powerful value statement related to what a comprehensive drug policy should look like, including its key constituent building blocks, strongly emerged from the discussions.

Overall, participants agreed that the GDPI's core purpose centred around the following themes:

- A practical and transformative tool for policy change

 Participants noted that an index done well 'has the power to be transformative'.

- Being a measurement of what successful drug policy looks like

• The GDPI should be a reference point for what successful drug policy looks like, and further, showcase the key constituent building blocks of a successful drug policy.

An international standard/reference point for drug policy

 It was suggested that the purpose of the GDPI was to take that understanding of what a successful and holistic drug policy looks like and turn it into an international standard.

- A tool to name and fame, and name and shame

 Participants raised the importance of the GDPI as a tool to both name and fame countries that have taken positive steps towards a comprehensive and health-centred drug policy, and to name and shame those who fall short of doing such.

Being a shadow report/index

 Participants also raised the importance of the GDPI to become an alternative source of information to the reports and data published by states and international organisations.

- A tool that shows change over time

 Lastly, participants consistently highlighted the benefits of having a tool that tracks change over time, and underscored the importance of this in the core purpose of the GDPI.

Participants also raised a number of more 'challenging' purposes of the GDPI, such as being able to show to what degree policies result in outcomes (however, some participants noted that this would likely be impossible and that it would cause confusion related to causation).

2. Measure of Success

The measure of success of the GDPI was closely related to its purpose, specifically in being able to influence positive policy change in the drug policy sphere. To do such, participants noted that the index needs to be sustainable, useable for researchers and policy makers and that it needs to facilitate debate and achieve wide media uptake.

Five themes were identified related to what the GDPI's measure of success may be:

- Change

 At perhaps its most fundamental level, the key measure of success highlighted by participants was the ability of the GDPI to influence positive change in drug policy.

Sustainability

 Sustainability of the GDPI, including sustainability of its funding, was another common theme that emerged in relation to its measurements of success.

- Useability for researchers and governments

 To have a useable index that is engaged with by researchers and governments was another key measurement of success raised by participants.

- Causing debate, being an aspirational goal for governments

 Another related measurement of success would be the index causing debate, and to an extent attracting criticism and some controversy.

Media uptake

 Participants also noted that uptake in the media would be a key measurement of success.

3. Credibility of the GDPI

A further cross-cutting theme that emerged from the analysis was the credibility of the GDPI. The notion of 'credibility' featured prominently across all focus group discussions. As noted by a participant, credibility was considered of pivotal importance since 'you don't want to set this up to fail before the first stage'. Several key words were identified during the discussions of the credibility of the GDPI, such as; 'transparency', 'robustness', 'data', 'objectivity', 'subjectivity', 'justification', 'bias', and 'reliability'. It is clear that the index will have to work on addressing each of these domains in order to be regarded as a credible tool.

4. Task Team Report

Since one of the main proposals of the meeting related to building the index on the foundation of the UN Task Team report⁴ and/or the UN System Common Position on Drugs,⁵ this received extensive debate during the focus groups. While the lens of the Task Team report was discussed in relation to specific areas of the index as well (such as 'indicators' and 'topics'), it was considered a cross-cutting theme due to participants'

⁴https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/2019/Contributions/UN Entities/What we have lea rned over the last ten years - 14 March 2019 - w signature.pdf

⁵ http://fileserver.idpc.net/library/UN-Common-Position-Briefing-Paper.pdf

broader and mixed views related to the proposal of using it as a building block for the GDPI.

Four main themes emerged from the analysis of statements made in relation to using the Task Team report and/or the UN System Common Position on Drugs as a basis for the GDPI:

Positive views

 Participants with positive views noted that the Task Team report covered a lot of bases, represented a progressive and reform-oriented frame, provided credibility, allowed for the inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative indicators and provided a foundation or entry-point for the GDPI.

- Mixed views

 Participants with mixed views noted that there was a need to incorporate a bigger role for civil society, expand the alternative development section, prioritise other concepts and topics than only the ones listed in the Task Team report, and that there was a risk that the Task Team report would 'box-in' the GDPI.

- Challenges and concerns

 Participants that had concerns with this approach noted the lack of civil society engagement in the Task Team report, the report's weaknesses in cross-cutting areas, that it diverted attention away from regulatory reform and decriminalisation, and that it was not strong enough on the importance of harm reduction.

Other ideas

 Participants noted that other UN reports and literature could be drawn upon to provide an empirical foundation for the GDPI – such as the UN International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy.⁶

5. Challenges

The final cross-cutting theme related to the potential challenges faced by the GDPI. Five key themes emerged from these discussions, with further analysis available in the Detailed Analysis Report:

- Balance between simplicity and complexity
- Financial sustainability
- Viability within timeframe and budget
- Selection of indicators
- Achieving substantial uptake

 $^{^{6} \, \}underline{\text{https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/international-guidelines-on-human-rights-and-drug-policy.html}$

Scope and Purpose

In relation to the Scope and Focus of the GDPI, five main areas were discussed, namely data sources, geographical scope, topics, indicators and weighting.

1. Data Sources

Identifying appropriate sources of data for the index was considered an area of high importance by the participants. Selection of data sources was extensively linked to the credibility of the GDPI, its main purpose in terms of influencing policy change, and its measure of success in being a useable tool for end-users. Six themes emerged from the discussion related to data sources;

- Importance of robust data

• Participants noted that the index needed to be built on robust data, which in turn was linked to the overall credibility of the GDPI.

- GDPI as a place to locate data

 Participants raised the opportunities posed by the GDPI in terms of becoming a repository for data and information related to countries and their drug policies.

Lack of data, and data availability/access

 Participants argued that the GDPI needed to carefully balance the use of 'official data' in order not to perpetuate an image of a context that is not grounded in reality or nuance.

Using data from other indexes

• Participants raised ideas surrounding the use of data from pre-existing indexes (where relevant) for inclusion in the GDPI.

- Data collection

 How the data for the GDPI are to be collected was extensively debated by the meeting participants, and several ideas were raised such as working with local/regional partners and/or establishing an online tool for self-reported data from local communities and end-users.

Involving civil society in data collection/as a data source

 The most extensive discussion related to 'data sources' revolved around the involvement and participation of civil society in data collection and as a data source in itself.

2. Geographical Scope

Establishing the geographical scope of the GDPI in its pilot phase was an area in which many ideas and potential issues were raised. Participants strongly agreed that the ambition of the index needs to be made clear, in relation to it becoming a truly global index. However, it was simultaneously recognised that the pilot phase needs to make careful and balanced decisions surrounding the initial set of countries included in the index.

Several ideas were raised, and 10 key themes emerged from the analysis of the discussion related to the GDPI's geographical scope:

A global index: first iteration

 While participants agreed with the proposal of starting with a smaller selection of countries in the pilot phase, they wanted it to be made clear that the GDPI's goal is to become a truly global index.

- Using the list of 'CND members'

 One suggestion was to use the list of 53 states that are "full members" of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), spread across regions. However, the discussions highlighted both agreement and disagreement with this proposal.

- Using UNODC regions

 Rather than using the CND member list, several participants raised the possibility of using the 17 regional groupings used by the UNODC World Drug Report⁸ to select countries for the pilot phase of the index.

Credibility/justification of choice

 Participants were in general agreement that the selection of the initial countries for the pilot-phase needed to be carefully and clearly justified in the index.

Balance/representativeness of spread

 'Balance', 'Representativeness/Representation', and 'Diversity' were key words that emerged from the discussion related to the geographical scope of the GDPI.

Key topics guiding choice

 Another idea that emerged from this discussion, and which several participants agreed with, related to selecting pilot countries based on the overarching 'key topics' considered in the index.

- Data availability as an instrument for selecting countries and indicators

 Participants raised the possibility of using data availability as an instrument or selection criteria for the initial scoping countries.

- Using positive examples for the pilot

 An idea raised by a couple of participants was to initially focus on countries in the 'pilot' phase that represent positive examples for drug policy.

Selecting countries based on advocacy opportunities

 Several participants noted that the initial country selection could be made based on the presence of civil society actors, policy windows, and where government actors were willing to engage with the index to improve their score.

Challenge: states within states

 A key challenge raised in several focus groups related to how to accurately represent federal systems (countries that are composed of several states with varying levels of autonomous rule) in the GDPI.

3. Topics

Discussion related to the overarching *pillars* or topics, under which clusters of indicators will be added, also received extensive attention across the focus groups. Participants

⁷https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/Membership/MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION ON NARCOTIC DRUGS 1 January 2020 2.pdf

⁸ See, for example: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/WDR2012/Annex Glossary.pdf

raised a number of ideas of overarching topics, many of which centred around themes such as human rights, social justice, and sustainable development. Participants generally felt uncomfortable with the framing of 'alternative development' and 'effective law enforcement' as overarching areas, and suggested alternatives which can be found in the Detailed Analysis Report.

Five themes emerged from the discussion related to overarching topics or categories for the GDPI:

Defining key topics/issues

 The importance of defining key topics and issues was the most extensively debated area. Participants noted that topics and issues such as 'development', 'decriminalisation', and 'social justice' needed careful consideration and clear definition in the GDPI.

Current proposed topics

 Participants raised a number of points, including some concerns, in relation to the four overarching 'Topics' identified from the UN Task Team report (Figure 3).9 Among others, participants were uncomfortable with the framing around 'Alternative Development'.



- Civil society/affected communities as an overarching topic

 Participants noted that using civil society as an overarching or cross-cutting topic could serve to further reframe the drugs debate.

⁹https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/2019/Contributions/UN_Entities/What_we_have_learned_over_the_last_ten_years_- 14 March_2019_- w_signature.pdf

Picking from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN Task Team report

 Strong linkages emerged in relation to the opportunity of picking overarching topics from both the SDGs¹⁰ and the UN Task Team report.¹¹

- Issues with development framing

 Participants criticised the Task Team Report for being particularly weak on development framing, and highlighted several issues with Alternative Development (AD) as a concept and an approach.

4. Indicators

Participants comprehensively discussed the guiding principles for choosing indicators for the GDPI in addition to raising ideas of specific indicators for inclusion (an overview of which can be found in the Detailed Analysis Report). Participants frequently linked the selection of indicators with the core purpose of the GDPI in terms of creating a holistic and alternative vision of what a successful drug policy looks like. In addition, the theme of supporting community and civil society engagement featured prominently throughout the discussions. Overall, participants strongly argued for the inclusion of civil society-specific indicators in the index, a reflection of the many challenges faced by community and advocacy groups due to the emergence of stringent propaganda laws.

Seven themes emerged from this discussion of indicators:

- Challenging pre-existing indicators

 Participants highlighted the importance of the GDPI in challenging pre-existing indicators for measuring the success of drug policies globally.

Developing complexity over time

 Participants generally agreed that the GDPI should focus on being 'useable' and 'simple' in its first iteration, while aiming to develop complexity including a larger number of indicators over time.

Disaggregated indicators

O Participants raised the need for disaggregated indicators, with gender/sexdisaggregated data and indicators being the most frequently highlighted area.

- Developing indicators under key topics

 Participants raised the idea of firstly deciding upon the key overarching 'topics' of the index, and subsequently populating these with a set of relevant indicators until the list of indicators is saturated.

Structural indicators vs outcome indicators

The most extensively debated topic under 'Indicators' was in relation to structure versus outcome indicators, specifically in relation to whether or not to solely measure the presence of certain policies (e.g. harm reduction services such as needle and syringe programmes, or decriminalisation approaches) and/or their outcomes and quality.

¹⁰ https://sdgs.un.org/goals

¹¹https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/2019/Contributions/UN_Entities/What_we_have_le arned over the last ten years - 14 March 2019 - w signature.pdf

Community/civil society engagement

In this discussion, key words centred around 'meaningful participation',
 'community involvement', 'community engagement', and 'self-organisation'.
 Overall, participants felt that civil society engagement was a key area missing from the Task Team report, 12 and which needed to be represented in the indicators.

Supporting advocacy

 Participants also discussed the choice of indicators in relation to supporting advocacy goals, and thus limiting the number of indicators based on the value statement of the GDPI.

5. Weighting

Lastly, participants considered the issue of how different indicators or overarching topics should be weighted in the GDPI. Participant linked weighting of indicators to the value statement made by the GDPI with regards to what a successful drug policy looks like. Participants generally argued that health-centred and human rights-oriented progressive drug policies should receive more positive weighting. Furthermore, participants discussed the opportunity of involving an 'expert group' in the weighting of indicators. Such a group could be composed of civil society organisations, local communities, academics, and other experts.

Overall, the following four themes emerged from the discussion:

- Weighting of key issues/topics

 Participants consistently made clear that there needed to be a prioritisation of key topics (e.g. health and human rights) that should have more positive weighting, and negative policies (e.g. the death penalty, coerced treatment, and propaganda laws) that should receive substantially negative weighting.

- Penalising bad policies

 Participants asked whether the presence of bad policies would be penalised, and if so how they would be weighted.

Bias and transparency

 Participants highlighted the need for the GDPI to make its 'bias' in relation to the weighting of indicators and topics clear and transparent.

- Involving 'expert community' in weighting

 An idea raised by participants in relation to weighting was to involve an 'expert community' in identifying and weighting the most important topics and variables for the index.

Value and Strength

The second part of the focus group discussions centred around the Value and Strength of the GDPI. The discussion centred around two overarching topics, namely how the index results should be presented, and how the GDPI could best support advocacy initiatives.

1. Presentation of Index Results

The discussion related to how index results should be presented highlighted a range of creative ideas raised by participants. From how scoring is presented through to ensuring the GDPI makes data accessible and useable, such as through producing printable country scorecards and reports, participants covered a broad range of issues and ideas. Overall, 11 themes emerged from this discussion:

- Presenting scoring

 Participants were in general agreement of countries having an overall score and that end-users should be able to see the breakdown of scores within the overarching topics/categories of the index.

Trends over time

 Several participants raised the need – after several iterations of the index – to be able to track the progress of countries over time.

- Country comparisons

 Several participants noted that enabling users to compare countries against each other in the GDPI would be a very valuable tool, with several ideas raised in this area.

Accessibility and simplicity

 Accessibility and simplicity were key words that emerged from the discussion surrounding how to present the index results.

- Ensuring transparency and credibility

 Transparency and credibility were two further key words identified from the discussion on presenting the index results. Clear links and notes in terms of where data has been sourced from was regarded as having significant importance.

- Drawing inspiration from pre-existing indexes

 Participants noted that inspiration should be drawn from pre-existing indexes in the design of the GDPI, particularly in displaying its scoring and results.

Breaking down data

 Participants argued that enabling end-users to view scoring for specific indicators and components was of high importance.

- Interactive maps

 An extensively debated area was in relation to interactive maps. Several other indexes use interactive maps to visualise data, and several ideas were presented.

- Scorecards and country reports

 Another extensively debated area was in relation to enabling the index to produce easily accessible 'scorecards' and 'country reports'. Participants argued that this would be extremely useful for their advocacy activities.

Making data and the index accessible in other languages

Making the data as accessible as possible was noted as an important feature.
 This included making the data and index available in other languages.

- Reflecting lived stories

 Participants discussed how the GDPI would be able to reflect the 'lived stories' or 'lived experiences' of people impacted on by drug policies. Several participants noted that this would give the index a more 'humanised narrative'.

2. Supporting Advocacy

Lastly, participants were asked how the GDPI could best support advocacy. Participants raised specific ideas related to, for example, establishing local or regional networks and focal points, lining-up communications, advocacy and/or media campaigns, and suggestions for how scorecards could be used as part of a global GDPI-day campaign. During this discussion, eight overarching themes were identified:

- Data supporting advocacy

 Participants noted that the GDPI could become a repository of data for advocacy.

League tables: showcasing examples

 Producing league tables in the GDPI was noted by several participants as useful for advocacy efforts.

- Involving the community in development and implementation of the GDPI

 Thinking about ways to include community groups in the development and implementation of the GDPI was agreed upon by a number of participants as being of high importance for advocacy efforts.

- Scorecards/infographics

 Participants extensively discussed the importance of scorecards and easily accessible and downloadable material for their advocacy efforts.

Establishing local networks/focal points

 Establishing local and regional networks within the GDPI was highlighted as an important way to support advocacy efforts.

Proactively engaging with governments

 Proactively engaging with relevant government officials before, during, and after the launch of the GDPI was raised as a key issue of importance to support advocacy.

Guiding future research and funding

 Participants highlighted that the GDPI should highlight specific policy areas where individual countries needed improvement, to help global funders to direct resources more accurately and to support researchers in developing new research agendas on understudied areas.

- Lining-up communications, advocacy and/or media campaigns

 Participants noted that a carefully designed advocacy and communications campaign would be needed for the launch of the index, and that such campaigns should seek to involve as many local civil society organisations as possible.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The three focus group discussions were successful in engaging a wide range of "end users" and partners, and showed how important the GDPI can potentially be in promoting progressive drug policy change globally. Participants agreed that a tool like the GDPI is currently missing, and that such an index could be highly beneficial in their projects. Participants raised a wealth of actionable ideas and raised thoughtful comments and questions that will be addressed as the development of the index progresses. For the full analysis of the focus group meetings including the wealth of ideas and comments raised by participants, see the Detailed Analysis Report.

The next stage of the development of the GDPI will entail setting up a communications working group (see Figure 4) to discuss how the index should be launched and the advocacy, communications and media campaigns that will follow. The following Phase of the GDPI's development (see Figure 5) will be the Index Design.

Figure 4: Co-Creation, Phase 1 of GDPI Development



Figure 5: GDPI Development Phases

