

ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RIGHTS



Empowerment Initiative

Human rights advocates, researchers, students, and members of the general public joined us to celebrate the launch of the Economic and Social Rights Empowerment Initiative at NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge on May 13, 2011. The event explored the potential for project's Social and Economic Rights Fulfillment Index (SERF Index) to strengthen efforts to advance the progressive realization of social and economic rights. The Index offers a global ranking of national governments that takes into account the perspectives of both the rights-holding individual and the duty-bearing government, the first index to measure the extent to which governments meet their economic and social rights responsibilities. Panelists underscored the potential use of the SERF Index as a robust and credible tool for advocates to hold governments accountable to their obligations under international law.

Larry Cox, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA, put it this way:

“It is hard to overstate the importance of this index as an advocacy tool. This is a credible index that all activists need to use... The SERF Index has the potential to destroy counter-arguments from governments who aren't fulfilling their economic and social rights obligations.”

Margaret Satterthwaite, Director of NYU's Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, offered these comments:

“The SERF Index highlights the specific failures of states – effectively closing the so-called ‘escape hatch...’ Taking into account state capacity allows activists to focus where action is most needed, and helps them to look for examples in successes.”

Audience comments raised issues and questions that the Economic and Social Rights Initiative will address in refining the SERF Index and making it available to human rights advocates. One participant asked if measures other than GDP might provide a more sensitive indication of a government's capacity to fulfill its economic and social rights obligations. Another asked about the rationale behind using human rights language, rather than other concepts like human development, in the formulation of the Index. A third participant asked if the best-performing countries share common features that might suggest best practices for rights fulfillment. The Initiative will tackle these and similar pressing issues in the next phase of the Initiative's development.

For more information about the Economic and Social Rights Empowerment Initiative, and to access SERF Index data please visit:

<http://www.serfindex.org/>

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