

A CITIZENS' GLOBAL PROGRESS REPORT
ON POVERTY ERADICATION AND GENDER EQUITY



SOCIAL WATCH

R E P O R T 2 0 0 8

OVERVIEW

Rights is the answer

THE WORLD FACES A **GLOBAL EMERGENCY** CREATED BY THE CONFLUENCE OF AN UNPRECEDENTED **FINANCIAL CRISIS**, RISING **FOOD PRICES**, **CLIMATE CHANGE** AND GROWING **INEQUITIES**.

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS FROM AROUND THE WORLD SHOW IN THIS REPORT HOW HUMAN RIGHTS ARE BEING VIOLATED AS A DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF THE SAME GLOBAL ECONOMIC ORDER THAT CREATED THIS CHAOS.

AFTER THE FAILURE OF MAINSTREAM STRATEGIES, THE ABANDONED PRINCIPLES OF **SOCIAL JUSTICE** AND A **RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH** TO DEVELOPMENT ARE AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF ANY SOLUTION.



UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION
OF HUMAN
RIGHTS

Dignity and justice for all of us

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Rights in the time of crisis

This Social Watch report goes to print in the middle of October 2008 in a moment of unprecedented global crisis and uncertainties.

Sixty years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights solemnly proclaimed that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Article 1) and that “everyone (...) is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity” (Article 22).

The realization of this right to “dignity for all” has remained, however, an unmet aspiration. In 1995, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the leaders of the world met in Copenhagen and committed themselves publicly “to the goal of eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.” Five years after, the Millennium Summit in New York made a time bound target out of this commitment: “We resolve to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world’s people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or to afford safe drinking water.”

Together with other time-bound targets, those commitments were summarized by the UN in an 8-point list known as the Millennium Development Goals that has since gained universal political acceptance.

The MDGs were criticized when initially launched as being too modest. In fact, as one of the key participants in the technical formulation of the list later acknowledged, the different targets to be achieved by 2015 were devised basically projecting into the future the progress rates of the social indicators registered in the 1990s and 1980s. No additional effort or acceleration was actually requested; just keeping the momentum would be enough to achieve them.

Yet, the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) computed and published by Social Watch in 2008 as well as several other official and independent sources now largely acknowledge that meeting those goals will be impossible with a “business as usual attitude”.

The World Bank remained the only optimistic scorekeeper. In spite of all evidence cumulating, in August 2008 its official position was that the MDGs, and in particular the Goal number one on poverty reduction could be met, on global average, by 2015. That position was announced in a paper titled *The developing world is poorer than we thought*

but no less successful in the fight against poverty. But the authors of that paper (Martin Ravallion, director of the World Bank’s Development Research Group and senior World Bank statistician Shaohua Chen) had published already in May 2008 a study called *China is poorer than we thought but no less successful in the fight against poverty.*

It does not require much examination to conclude that the world average is being highly influenced by China’s performance and it is obvious that fast economic growth in China is reducing income poverty in that country. But what the global averaging done by the Bank hides is that poverty and inequalities are increasing everywhere else. And the 2005 data on which the Bank bases its optimistic view do not take into account the “food crisis” (a combination of food scarcity and sky rocketing prices) that has recently started and is submerging millions of people below the poverty line every week.

In fact during the last decade of the 20th century and the first years of this century, the rate of progress on all social indicators has slowed down and the targets that seemed easily achievable if only the previous trends had been kept are now harder and harder to reach.

What happened in the early 1990s that slowed down or reverted social progress all around the world? The answer is simple: deregulation of finances, privatization of social service delivery previously in the hands of governments, liberalization of international trade, opening up of the national economies to capital flows and investments. In one word: globalization.

Globalization – or at least some of its key economic components, like the deregulation of the banking sector and the lifting of all barriers to capital flows – is now being identified as the cause of the crisis that started in the financial sector of the US and is currently engulfing real economies around the world.

A failed architecture

Alan Greenspan, who was chairman of the Federal Reserve (US central bank) for 18 years until 2006, told the House Oversight Committee last October that his antiregulatory approach was “a mistake” and may have contributed to the crisis. “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself especially, are in a state of shocked disbelief,” Mr. Greenspan told committee members.

The specialists are still discussing if those words mean that he was taking at least part of the blame. The “nobody could possibly have foreseen the crisis” attitude, implicit

in the “shocked disbelief” of the neoliberal gurus was satirized by a cartoonist as “who could have predicted that mixing gasoline and matches would lead to a fire?” In fact, the Social Watch report 2006 on the global financial architecture stated in its introduction that “capital flight, tax evasion, fraudulent intra-firm trading and the very governance of the international financial institutions (...) form part of a package, an architecture that badly needs to be redesigned”. Social Watch called the financial architecture *impossible* “both in the sense of impractical and in the sense of intolerable”.

The collapse of that architecture – or the timing of that collapse – may have been a surprise, but the negative impact of globalized finances on the wellbeing of the people was already obvious two years ago for the national coalitions that authored Social Watch reports in 50 countries.

In the first days of December 2008 the world will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Doha, Qatar, the world leaders will gather for a Summit on Financing for Development. That coincidence gives us an opportunity to explore the relation between human rights, development, and the globalized economy.

Have the deregulation of the banking industry, the dismantling of the welfare state, the privatization of public services and the opening of the borders to an unrestricted flow of goods, services and capital had a positive effect on human rights and democracy, as prophesized two decades ago at the times of the fall of the Berlin Wall? Or was that rise to power of “market fundamentalism” (a term used in the last weeks by financier George Soros, Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman and even by John Williamson, the economist that coined the term “Washington consensus”) an obstacle for the consolidation of democracy, the strengthening of human rights and the realization of dignity for all?

Each national Social Watch coalition, looking at its own country, has found a variety of ways in which the macroeconomic frameworks affect human rights. Those findings are the heart of this report and they provide the bottom-up perspective of the people working with and from the grassroots.

This is not a commissioned report. Each national Social Watch chapter is made up by organizations and movements that are active year-round on social development issues. Their findings are not intended as pure research. They are used to draw the attention of the authorities to issues of concern and they thus help shape better pro-poor and pro-women policies.

Asked to explore the links between human rights and the economy, they decided on their own priorities and emphasis. To make the report possible, each group raises its own funds and defines its own ways to consult with the grassroots to gather evidence and validate their findings. They do not shy away from criticizing national authorities, policies, elites or governance systems whenever they feel it is necessary. And the voicing of critical views helps strengthen democratic processes. But even when the reports find that much can (and needs to) improve at home, they also point to international constraints that cannot be solved at the country level.

In October 2008, when the crisis hit the financial institutions and stock markets of the OECD member countries, their governments started a massive and unprecedented programme of government intervention, nationalizing banks, injecting massive subsidies into ailing institutions and re-regulating their financial sectors.

This response sits in direct contrast to the austere neoliberal policies pressed on developing countries by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and developed countries for the past 30 years. Governments in the South, as abundantly documented in this report, have been pushed to liberalize trade barriers, deregulate financial and labour markets, privatize national industries, abolish subsidies, and reduce social and economic spending. The State saw its role severely reduced.

This double standard is unacceptable. The international financial system, its architecture and its institutions have been completely overwhelmed by the scale of the current financial and economic crisis. The financial system, its architecture and its institutions must be completely rethought.

In recent weeks, leaders worldwide have recognized the deficiencies of the existing system and the need to meet to address a broader set of proposals to reform the global financial system and its institutions. It is of course imperative to agree on measures to address the crisis, and priority must be given to responses to the impacts on ordinary employees and workers, low-income households, pensioners and other extremely vulnerable sectors. But no lasting and viable solutions can come from meetings where only a few countries are represented, are carried out in a rushed and non-inclusive manner, and as a result, do not address the comprehensive range of changes needed, or fairly allocate the burden of responsibility.

Though the crisis originated in northern countries, as it grows and deepens the impacts are starting to be felt in developing countries. The crisis has jeopardised everything

HOW IS CHINA REALLY DOING?

The Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) 2008 includes 23 countries for which we know the current BCI values but lack the data to compute backwards a value for 2000 and thus establish a trend. China is one of these countries, and the total population of the countries without enough data is 1.6 billion people. Meanwhile, according to the new World Bank tables, China is the country that brings poverty figures down in the world, with 650 million less people in extreme poverty in 2005 than in 1980. Since those tables also say that the total number of extremely poor people in the world decreased by 600 million, in reality, according to the World Bank, the absolute number of the extremely poor (but not its proportion to the growing total population) actually increased in the rest of the world.

In fact, only one point in that evolution is known for China: the income poverty figures for 2005 and the previous values are estimates.

In fact, one of the conceptual weaknesses of the income poverty estimates is that, throughout the transition to a market economy,

income may grow without peoples' life changing. Think of the commune system where millions of peasants were self-sufficient. They now receive a salary and have an income, but they also have to pay for the food they used to get free.

Should Social Watch similarly attempt to provide a guess for the recent evolution of the Chinese BCI? We think not. On the one hand the reliability of our index is based on its data being verifiable against those published by trusted international sources. On the other, the index should be used to deduct a trend and not the other way around. It could be assumed that the recent economic growth in China has been followed by a similar improvement in education and health statistics. But in an historical perspective there is also evidence for the opposite: Chinese economic growth seems to have started AFTER a basic improvement in health and education for all had been achieved.

We will have to wait for reliable statistics to be compiled to be able to determine a recent trend for China.

the United Nations has done to help the world's poor, warned UN secretary general Ban Ki Moon at a meeting of the UN's top officials: "It threatens to undermine all our achievements and all our progress," he said. "Our progress in eradicating poverty and disease. Our efforts to fight climate change and promote development. To ensure that people have enough to eat (...) It could be the final blow that many of the poorest of the world's poor simply cannot survive."

The developing countries have been affected by the falling prices of their export commodities, the devaluation of their currencies against the dollar, the rising interest rates on their debts, outflow of foreign investments and lack of credit. If the world is plunging into a global recession the result will be unemployment and with it an erosion of the rights and the standard of living of workers everywhere. It also should be remembered that during the financial crises a decade ago in South East Asia and the Southern Cone of South America, women had to carry an even heavier burden, forced to accept lower quality jobs, obliged to compensate for the deteriorating public social services and suffering from a rise in domestic violence. Poverty doubled in a few weeks and it took years for it to recede to pre-crisis levels.

It is therefore critical that all countries have a say in the process to change the international financial architecture.

No equitable and sustainable solutions to transform the current system will come out of gatherings that are rapidly-prepared and exclude many developing countries as well as civil society. Such efforts are in fact more likely to further undermine public trust and confidence, and to further disenfranchise countries that are already opting for regional solutions over a stronger, more coherent and fairer international financial system.

Only an inclusive international conference convened by the UN to review the international financial and monetary architecture, its institutions and its governance, can be comprehensive in scope, and capable of tackling the full array of issues and institutions and transparent in its procedures. Many difficult issues will have to be addressed and agreed upon in the transition from the current system – which has fostered instability and inequity – towards a just, sustainable and accountable one, which yields benefits for the majority of the world's people. In such a system human rights must be the starting point and not some distant goal in the future, and a rights-based approach to development (with gender equality, decent work and human rights at its core) must be the main guiding principle. ■

ROBERTO BISSIO
Social Watch International Secretariat

THE MDGs, EASIER SAID THAN MEASURED

In September 2000, building upon a decade of major United Nations conferences and summits, world leaders came together at United Nations Headquarters in New York to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 and setting out a series of targets that were later organized in a list of eight Millennium Development Goals.

The MDGs:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has highlighted, as many others did before him that “the MDGs set time-bound targets, by which progress in reducing income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter and exclusion – while promoting gender equality, health, education and environmental sustainability – can be measured.”

The measurability of the MDGs is key to their success. Same as the Olympic Games (or any other tournament, for the matter) base their appeal in the simple notion that all players abide by the same rule and a set of impartial referees and scorekeepers guard the integrity of “fair play”, the MDGs derive their capacity to motivate decision-makers and mobilize public support in their being time-bound and measurable.

In order to monitor progress towards the MDGs at a global level and country by country, the goals were subdivided in 48 indicators, ranging from the proportion of the population below USD 1 a day (adjusted by the purchasing power parity of their income) to the percentage of internet users. Since January 15, 2008 the list of indicators has been officially expanded to more than 60, so as to be able to include data on issues like employment that were not counted before.

In real life, though, for most of the developing countries there are no accurate or updated data for many, if not most, of those 60 indicators, and the set is too complicated for non-experts. Thus, the World Bank defined poverty line of USD 1 a day became the de facto yardstick with which progress was being measured. In 2000 the figure of 1.2 billion people living in poverty was massively circulated and quoted indirectly by the heads of state themselves in the Millennium Declaration: “We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected.”

By October 2007 the number of people living in extreme poverty had been reduced substantially: “Nearly one billion people live on just USD 1 a day” said World Bank President Robert B. Zoelick in his address to the Board of Governors of his institution. “Globalization must not leave this ‘bottom billion’ behind”, he added. By June 2008, the draft Accra Action Agenda on aid, authored mainly by donor governments and the secretariats of the World Bank and the OECD stated that “progress has been made. Fifteen years ago, one of every three people

lived on less than one dollar a day; today, that figure has been reduced to one in five. Yet one billion people still live in extreme poverty”.

All of a sudden, in August 26, 2008 the World Bank announced that poverty estimates had been revised and the number of extremely poor people was actually 1.4 billion in 2005. An overnight increase of almost 50%! How does that leave the affirmation that “progress has been made” (and therefore some adjustments might be needed, but not a major change in course)? Do not worry, says the World Bank. According to Martin Ravallion, director of the Bank’s Development Research Group, “the developing world is poorer than we thought but no less successful in the fight against poverty”. In order to substantiate such an optimistic view, the team led by Ravallion and Shaohua Chen revised the poverty figures all the way back to 1981 in order to claim that previous estimates were mistaken and that the proportion of poor people has been cut to half in the last 25 years and can therefore still be reduced enough to meet the MDG number 1 by 2015.

It took the researchers of the Bank eight months since the publication of the new Purchasing Power Parity tables in December 2007 to compute the new total of the poor of the world and they did not reveal the new number until the whole series back to 1981 was recalculated. Why? Because the World Bank is not just a scorekeeper, responsible for producing the measures of how the fight against poverty is going but also the major player, an institution with a budget several times higher than that of the whole United Nations based on its claim to work “for a world free of poverty”. And in that regard, the **trend** is what ultimately matters. We can admit having produced dramatically wrong estimates in the past, so inaccurate in fact that the new tables decree that ten thousand academic papers on poverty produced in the last decade are wrong because they were based on false data. But we cannot admit an error in the trend, because the logical conclusion would then be that the course needs to be changed.

If a Central Bank realized that inflation forecasts had to be increased by 50%, say from 4 to 6%, drastic measures would be taken immediately. If the unemployment rates had been underestimated by 50%, a political scandal would ensue. But poverty estimates can be increased by 50% without any of the multiple multilateral organizations dealing with the problem calling for emergency measures, not even a reassessment of their policies.

Social Watch has argued repeatedly that the USD 1 a day indicator is the wrong indicator. But even if the concept behind that indicator had been right, we know now that the estimates were wrong. And even if the new estimates and their recalculated history are right, the trend of the last years is not a forecast of the future, among other things because, as the Bank itself recognizes, “the new estimates do not yet reflect the potentially large adverse effects on poor people of rising food and fuel prices since 2005”.

Using three simple indicators available for most countries in the world and averaging them in a way that any secondary school student can repeat, the national and international trends in the fight against poverty can easily and convincingly be assessed. The resulting picture is not rosy. Policy makers need to understand that the credibility of their commitments relies, like in the Olympic Games, in honest scorekeeping, independent referees and rules that do not change in the middle of the game. An adverse half time result might be bad news for the coach, but it allows to change strategies for the second half.

Human rights and the economic system

Roberto Bissio
Social Watch International Secretariat

What is the relation between human rights and the economic and financial architecture? When that question was formulated to the national Social Watch coalitions, the answers they provided were extremely rich and diverse. Approaching them with an open mind, the reader of this report will be challenged to think out of the box and perhaps be inspired to draw creative links between distant extremes.

Thus, for example, there is growing consensus that the catastrophe in the financial markets of the US and Europe that is pushing the entire world into recession, unemployment and social disintegration had its origins in the deregulation of the banks in the early nineties and the lack of governmental supervision over greedy actors armed with risky investment “vehicles”.

“The collapse of public institutions has battered the economy. The private sector initiatives and market mechanism struggle to survive without good governance. Bias and self-centred extremist ideology have prevented social political and economic progress”, says one of the analysis in this report. It might apply well to global finances, but the authors are talking about Somalia, one of the world poorest countries, where the local Social Watch coalition has seen the national state collapse in the early 1990s and as a result there is now generalized crime, piracy, war among factions that do not hesitate to recruit child soldiers, rape young girls and assassinate journalists and civil society activists so as to leave no witness of the ordeal.

The Swiss socialwatchers, reporting from one of the richest countries in the world, find it outrageous that “the country provides meagre development aid, does not take part in efforts to develop innovative global funding mechanisms and, while remaining a magnet for funds derived from tax evasion, it does not cooperate to formulate an international tax policy,” and is therefore not honouring its commitments to promote development and human rights. Meanwhile, in El Salvador, socialwatchers estimate that large corporations evaded taxes for a total of USD 2.6 billion in 2006, a sum roughly equal to the 2007 national budget. Tax evasion since 1990 is estimated at USD 25 billion. That sum would have wiped out the total external debt, the repayment of which drains one out of every four dollars of government revenue.

Since globalization strengthens daily these links between very distant realities, the German Social Watch coalition is demanding that its Government recognize “Germany has human rights obligations to people in other countries where the State, its citizens, or companies engage in activities”. This should explicitly include trade and investment policies, as

ARAB REGION

“Poor and politically weak Arab governments are presented with the choice of either honouring human rights accords or complying with the commands of international economic institutions. They often prefer to violate human rights and face complaints or, at worst, international investigation rather than being cut off of millions of dollars in aid in case they reject trade and economic agreements.”

BOLIVIA

“By now the country has vast experience in policies meant to harmonize aid for development. As an official of the Sub-Ministry of Public Investment and External Financing put it, Bolivia is the ‘laboratory mouse of international institutions that try out new modalities for combating poverty’. So far, none of the modalities have achieved their goal. Poverty remains pervasive.”

well as decisions taken in multilateral development banks. The Netherlands has moved in that direction, announcing that human rights will be the “point of departure” of Dutch foreign policy, advocating freedom of expression, abolition of the death penalty, a ban on torture and the promotion of women’s rights. The Government states that “where necessary it will be critical of its allies, and will be equally prepared to examine its own record”. Yet the local watchers observe that the Government is still reluctant to admit the authority of the international human rights treaty bodies, and its trade policy frequently contradicts development objectives and human rights promotion.

While the Somalis hope for restored calm and “a future democratic Government able to reduce poverty and inequality”, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the electoral process of 2006 challenges the Government to guarantee “that the social dividends of democracy are quickly apparent”. South-South cooperation and a revision of the terms of the concessions to extractive industries are among the strategies advocated by the Congolese civil society organizations. In Nepal, also among the poorest countries of the world, the overthrow of the monarchy and elections for a new Constituent Assembly provide grounds for hope for the local socialwatchers “that the long period of violent conflict is finally over”. Trade liberalization, as a result of Nepal joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2003, fuelled the conflict by allowing for massive food imports that ruined local farmers. Agriculture employs three quarters of the population, while the tasks of planting, harvesting and seed production are largely performed by women. The destruction of their livelihoods is a violation of their right to food security.

It is very easy to associate violent conflict with impoverishment and human rights violations, but the analysis of the causes of conflict is less obvious. In the Kenyan report the Social Watch coalition does that by looking at the issues of land, access to resources and power. Civil society proposes a new concept of “restorative justice” that preserves

the common good instead of the conventional “retributive adversarial justice” that has increased polarization. Lebanon is trying to prevent an unstable social and political situation from exploding in violent conflict. Yet the plans currently implemented by the Government and supported by international donors seem primarily designed to integrate the country into the international economy, rather than securing the basic socioeconomic rights of the Lebanese. In a study about community rights at the local level, the Social Watch Thailand report shows how violence can erupt when ecologically and culturally sustainable styles are disrupted.

Conflict is nowhere more dramatic than in Iraq, where “daily life has become a nightmare”. The Iraqi Al-Amal Association that was already reporting for Social Watch on the sufferings of the Iraqis under Saddam Hussein, years ago, focuses this year on the fate of the millions of Iraqis that have been forced to abandon their homes in search of safer areas within the country or abroad: the largest and fastest migration in modern history affecting around five million people. While the process is still going on, Iraqi civil society is already planning on how to mitigate their sufferings in a framework of conflict resolution.

On the other end of the migration issue, 600 thousand people arrive each year to Spain as migrants. “The root cause is systematic infringement of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” argues the Spanish Social Watch platform. “Despite legal advances over the last few years that have made it easier to obtain work permits, foreigners are often shunted to occupations with harsher working conditions and poor wages, while immigrant women face triple jeopardy, as immigrants, workers and women”. Yet, the Government of Spain is credited by its civil society organization with having substantially increased development assistance and promoting an international treaty for the control of the arms trade.

The fate of migrants is also a strong concern for the socialwatchers in South Korea, where they suffer

BURMA

“Forty-six years of military rule have ground Burma down into one of the poorest countries in the world. Rather than create an environment in which the people can fully participate in the decisions on how their country is run and enjoy growing prosperity, the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has imposed economic policies that enrich its supporters but impoverish most of the population. Around one-third of the country struggles to survive on less than USD 1 a day.”

CAMBODIA

“With the deregulation of investments and imports, aimed at encouraging foreign investment, Cambodia has moved fast into land concessions and speculation. While the elite has benefited, the sustainability of the country’s ethnic indigenous minority cultures, particularly in the northeast, is at risk. Rural land is being sold or appropriated to large businesses by powerful public officials, urban areas are rapidly growing and available land is exhausted, triggering large disparities between rich and poor.”

mistreatment and discrimination in spite of the fact that in 2001 a Constitutional Court sentenced that “foreigners are also entitled to human dignity, human rights and the right to pursue happiness as a human being”. In Cyprus, Social Watch argues for better education as a way to achieve social justice, particularly for the increasing percentage of children whose mother tongue is not Greek. In Malta an otherwise excellent record on human rights is tarnished by episodes of racism and bad conditions in four administrative detention centres for asylum seekers.

More than one million people, mostly women, migrate out of the Philippines each year. They sustain with their remittances the economic growth in the Philippines, while a substantial part of government revenue goes to debt repayment. Poverty is increasing and the consequent social unrest is being repressed using provisions on a new anti-terrorism law.

To change an economic regime is a bet that may or may not result in gains, but always has costs. And those costs are very frequently borne by the weakest and vulnerable sectors of society. In the case of Hungary, the Roma (disdainfully called gypsies) were among those most negatively affected by the transition to a market economy and, on top of that, they have become scapegoats, as the majority of Hungarians have experienced a severe decline in living standards. The situation of the Roma is also of concern for the Social Watch coalitions in Serbia, Slovakia, Romania and the Czech Republic, while in Latvia the Russian speaking minority (one third of the population) has its rights curtailed.

The right to housing is a cornerstone in the struggle for the realization of the ESC rights. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that the notion of home is intimately related with that of family, which deserves protection in all cultures and constitutions. On the other, a government has to exert some positive action (as opposed to just abstaining from doing the condemnable act, like censoring or torturing) to

guarantee housing for its population. In 2007, after a successful civil society campaign, France institutionalized the right to affordable housing, thereby making it an obligation of the State, which if not met can be subject to court action. However, given the paltry amount of resources allocated for housing in the budget, the State will only be able to guarantee the right to housing to about 10% of the three million people living in sub-standard housing or homeless. The report of the Argentine Social Watch platform concentrates this year on the right to housing, which is enshrined in the Constitution but left in the hands of the market. As a consequence, one fourth of households live in inadequate conditions.

In the United States, one of the larger human rights campaigns is the Living Wage Campaign, led by ACORN, demanding work for all, a fair minimum wage, as well as access to affordable housing. Gulf States, especially Mississippi and Louisiana, that were devastated by Hurricane Katrina, have become a battleground and a testing ground for a range of legal principles traditionally thought to belong in the international realm, ranging from the rights of internally displaced persons to the right to land and housing.

Sixty years after having actively campaigned for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the US has distanced itself from the UN system it helped to create – a trend which undermines the potential for collective solutions to the critical problems we face today, such as climate change, rising food shortages, poverty and war. Since World War II, the US Government has promoted deregulated markets as a means to reduce conflict and support policy goals, both within and outside of its borders. This includes privatizing public service provision and relaxing labour and environmental regulations to promote investment and increase trade.

Privatizations have been carried out with a one-size-fits-all approach, irrespective of local conditions, history and political processes. In an extreme

case, as reported by the Social Watch platform from Bahrain, the blueprint for reform of the whole economy of the country was drafted by the American private consultancy firm McKinsey & Co.

In Serbia, the Anti-corruption Council, a governmental advisory body, has denounced how the Law on Privatization, approved in 2001, has opened the door to extraordinary opportunities for “corruption and the creation of monopolies, money laundering and the ‘robbery’ of state-owned and socially-owned companies by ‘tycoons’ and ‘a group of powerful people’ who make laws to benefit their personal interests.”

Corruption undermines the rule of law and violates the principle of equality of access to resources and basic services. It is therefore a permanent threat to human rights and is mentioned as a major concern in the Social Watch reports from Vietnam, Mozambique and many others. What the Romanian report describes can be applied to many other countries: “Property rights, strongly promoted after 1989 as a cornerstone of the new ‘liberal democracy’ have been flagrantly violated by manipulators who gambled with the privatization process. Some of them grew rich through their former affiliation to the *nomenklatura* or *Securitate*. Others pulled strings in the judicial system and used blackmail and fraud to seize most of the properties nationalized by the Communist regime. Still others have made fortunes with the help of former comrades now in key public offices, gaining preferential access to State assets being privatized or to Government contracts.”

“Impunity for the powerful and connected is the single most important factor in the perpetuation of corruption, and indeed in all human rights violations.” Romania’s plight illustrates this perfectly.

Perhaps nowhere is the human rights impact of bad economic policies as dramatic as in the case of agriculture, where millions of people can be deprived almost overnight of their most basic right to food. In Bangladesh, where three fourths of the population live in rural areas, trade liberalization has resulted in a significant decline in food security. Succumbing to pressure from donors, who insisted that in a globalized economy any shortage of food grains could be made up for on the international market, Bangladesh ended its policy of building up large stockpiles. “This year the bill came due,” reports the local Social Watch platform. “Floods and cyclones caused significant crop losses and Bangladesh had to buy rice on the international market at a time when supplies were down and prices had soared.”

In Ghana, agriculture is hailed as the primary source of economic growth, yet a closer examination reveals a strong gender bias in this expansion. “Government investments have spurred a boom in export industries, primarily timber and cocoa production, where the workforce is predominantly male. At the same time, the Government has offered little

support to basic food industries that are traditionally women's responsibility. As a result, crops for domestic consumption, livestock and fishing have all stagnated." When the food crisis became evident, President John Kuffour announced in May 2008 a programme to "mitigate the hardships Ghanaians are facing as a result of escalating food and fuel prices" by reducing import duties on food products and waiving levies on some petroleum products. The Ghanaian socialwatchers expressed support for the initiative, while also noting that it "will not benefit small scale producers, mainly women, who produce 80% of food in Ghana".

Similarly in Yemen, one of the countries ranking lowest in the Gender Equity Index computed by Social Watch, poor women, employed mainly in agriculture and shepherding more acutely suffer the impacts of trade liberalization and the rise in wheat prices. Local socialwatchers report that "most independent research institutions and organizations are in agreement that the Government does not follow standard economic principles in formulating its strategy. Instead, it develops and implements policies haphazardly for the benefit of a corrupt minority. These wealthy few siphon off the money and resources of the State and compel the poor majority of the population to shoulder the burden of so-called "economic reforms" that provide no visible benefits."

Corruption and ill-designed policies are not exclusive to developing countries. In the Czech Republic, former president Václav Havel characterized the privatization process as "Mafioso capitalism" and the local socialwatchers remind us in a timely way in their report how "a large share of the losses from bankrupted banks and funds was recouped from taxpayers." The tax reform introduced in 2007 is described as "take from the poor, give to the rich". Similar words are used by the Canadian watchers:

INDONESIA

"Domestic violence, particularly assaults on wives by the husband or children by their parents, often erupts in times of growing economic stress. Adults, particularly men, who lose hope and are overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness, are much more likely to lash out against weak or vulnerable family members. At a time when the combined unemployment and underemployment rates have climbed above 39%, many more families are on the edge."

ITALY

"Although Italy committed to prioritize the goals of poverty reduction, achieving gender equality and the Millennium Development Goals within its development assistance policies, the quality and quantity of its funding to support universal access to health, water and education are still below European and international standards."

"Canada is among a small group of nations that has reduced taxation levels in such a way as to most benefit those who are already the most affluent." In Paraguay, where taxation is so unfair that income is not taxed at all, recent revenue reforms are recruiting new contributors from the middle and low sectors, while those with high income still do not make a significant contribution to the treasury. "Since those "who are taxed are those who have less (...) the expenses heighten inequality."

The "race to the bottom" in tax policy is a result of countries competing with each other to attract foreign investors. "Free trade zones" have been created exempt from national taxes (and sometimes also from laws and constitutional guarantees *à la Guantanamo*). In Morocco "duty-free zones are often accused of violating workers' economic and social rights" and in Uganda the situation of workers' rights in the flower and hotel industries is "serious and deteriorating".

The provision of essential social services (education, health, drinking water) is a key component

in any strategy to reduce poverty and realize ESC rights. Social Watch groups have been reporting on the quality of those services, and lately also studying how exactly they are being paid for and by whom. Studying the national budget in detail, Social Watch Brazil has come to the conclusion that "between indirect taxes, direct contributions to the social security system required for eligibility to its benefits and the diversion of some of that money to other purposes, the people who finance the programmes that promote ESC rights are the beneficiaries themselves." Or, in other words, there is no redistribution of wealth at all. In India, which together with Brazil is seen as one of the success stories in emerging economies, while the GDP climbs at a rate of 9% plus annually, "the question of whether the Government will provide basic services to the marginalized and vulnerable sectors of society remains unanswered."

By signing the North American Free Trade Agreement with the US and Canada, Mexico became the first developing country to enter into such kind of "partnership" with all the associated macroeconomic

CAMEROON AND CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES: MANY COMMITMENTS, FEW RESULTS

Federation of Civil Society Organizations of Cameroon (FOSCAM)¹

Sixty years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and nine after the declaration of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities, the rights of persons with disabilities are still being ignored in Cameroon.

The country has signed and adopted most international agreements with regard to peace, safety and development. However, when in 2006 the Convention concerning a programme for worldwide action

in favour of persons with disabilities, approved by the UN in 1981, was adopted, Cameroon did not sign the document, which came into force in April 2008.

In March 2000, a meeting of the National Steering Committee for the activities of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (ADPD 1999-2009) was organised in Cameroon, which resulted in the drafting of an Action Plan in 2002. A National Follow-Up Committee was announced for 2008 but it has not yet been formed. Nor are there any national strategies for putting the National Plan into practice.

Until now, in Cameroon the rights of persons with disabilities are, in the best of cases, only acknowledged on paper. Despite the international commitments which have been assumed, the absence of specific State policies reflects a lack of real commitment with regard to the rights of the people with disabilities. ■

1 ANACLAC, COSADER, UNAPHAC, Club UA-Cameroun, APICA, CIPI, IDF Bamenda, ADEID, CNJD, CANADEL, CAMNAFAW, CNJD, CIPI, CRADIF, APRIS, APSC, CERUT, CRADEC, DMJ and CGT-Libertés.

MOLDOVA

"There is no effective legal remedy against gender discrimination. Lack of gender sensitivity within courts and among law enforcement authorities denies women access to justice, particularly in cases involving gender-based violence."

PORTUGAL

"Eighteen per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. This figure becomes even starker when it is taken into account that Portugal's poverty line corresponds to about 52% of the value for all 25 EU members (EU-25) and to less than half the value for the original 15 (EU-15). Moreover, Portugal is also one of the most unequal countries in the EU: in 2006, the income of the richest 20% of the population was 6.8 higher than the income of the poorest 20%."

SLOVENIA

"Poverty among the elderly and children grew over the previous decade... NGOs working with marginalized groups and the Human Rights Ombudsman have condemned the social discrimination that leads to high levels of poverty and homelessness among the old, the ill, the Roma, mothers with young children and other social groups with minimal assets."

TANZANIA

"Globalization has turned Tanzania into a market for fake pharmaceutical drugs, including counterfeit versions of antibiotics, hormones, steroids, and anti-malaria, anti-cancer and anti-viral drugs. In 2005, sales of fake drugs worldwide exceeded USD 3.5 billion per year, and could reach USD 75 billion by 2010 if action is not taken. Anti-malaria drugs are particularly deadly: a million people die from this disease each year; an estimated one-fifth of these deaths could be avoided, according to the World Health Organization, if drugs used to treat them were genuine."

conditionalities. Mexico is officially committed to "guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and struggle for their promotion and defence" but the Mexican socialwatchers conclude that "the economic model that the State refuses to review does not promote real development, but creates social injustice, environmental depredation and diverse violations to the civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental human rights of the population."

In Costa Rica, a country where the state has traditionally guaranteed universal access to basic social services, the introduction of a Free Trade Agreement with the United States was a highly controversial issue. A referendum on the FTA was convened, but instead of stimulating a rational debate on the issues, the "freetraders" launched a campaign explicitly aimed at inducing "fear" among voters. The vice-president was forced to resign when multiple violations of the electoral laws were exposed, but the treaty remained in force, subsequently making the country more vulnerable to the impact of the crisis in late 2008 and creating a pending agenda of restoring faith in democratic institutions.

In Malaysia, meanwhile, the anti-FTA protests managed to ensure that the Malaysia-USA FTA was not signed before the expiration of fast-track authority in 2007. The local watchers argue that "the Government culture of secrecy must be loosened if the country is to create the openness, accountability and

transparency needed for broad public participation in economic development".

Those ingredients are necessary for public participation, but they may not be enough. In Poland, "decision makers show little evidence of capacity to respond constructively to human rights campaigns and proposals; and mobilizing broad human rights campaigns remains difficult. Citizens have little confidence that their activity could lead to progress and are extremely reluctant to become involved in civil society initiatives".

Lithuanians also feel very sceptical about their ability to defend their rights. Three quarters of respondents in a 2006 poll reported that their rights had been abused and they had not complained. Seventy-four per cent of respondents declared that they would not appeal to state institutions for redress, because they believed it would be futile. Even worse, Lithuanian socialwatchers report that "the public also seems to have given up on popular protests, which the authorities usually ignore".

Those findings contrast sharply with the experience of socialwatchers in Benin. Decentralization of government begun in 2003 in this African country, giving 77 communes (territorial communities) managerial and administrative autonomy to define their local priorities and the means necessary to respond to them. As a result, civil society organizations mobilized and pressed the State to increase

its financial support of the so-called intercommunal solidarity funds and channel various subsidies to the communes, where citizens closely control the Government. This funding increased from USD 1.6 million in 2003, to USD 4.9 million in 2008.

In Colombia, in spite of the political violence, the last years have seen the intensification of social mobilizations by the rural population, the indigenous peoples, the unions, Afro-descendants, women, the victims of crimes committed by the State, gays and lesbians and human rights activists, against the constant violation of rights, the need for a negotiated peace in the political and social armed conflict and the serious humanitarian crisis.

The socialwatchers from Zambia express a generalized feeling when they argue that "both the State and the international community have been guilty of 'crimes against humanity', including the world's lowest life expectancy for people under 40, high rates of morbidity and maternal mortality, increasing levels of illiteracy, gender-based violence and extreme levels of poverty."

In Senegal, "structural adjustment policies, including privatization of most basic services (water, energy, transport) have not achieved their stated goal of revitalizing the economy. In fact, these policies have de-industrialized the country, with disastrous social consequences: the loss of thousands of jobs, extremely high unemployment, and massive migration to urban centres". In that context, "official mechanisms to promote and protect human rights have become weaker rather than stronger" and public opposition is being curtailed by frequent bans on protests, harassment of journalists and impunity for individuals who commit political crimes, embezzlement of public funds or torture. In such a context violations of the rights of women and children (even when not clearly "politically motivated") are also reaching "disturbing proportions, marked by cases of sexual harassment and abuse, rape, murder, forced marriages, genital mutilation and paedophilia".

In Sri Lanka, political leaders won the elections in 1994 and 2005 promising to halt privatization and other policies demanded by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, once in power they blatantly violated their campaign promises and pursued the same policies they had denounced, attempting privatization of water, education and health, and allocating even more money to infrastructure investments designed to make the country attractive to foreign investors.

According to the national Social Watch platform, "preventing people from using their creativity to overcome hunger and poverty in order to please global economic powers that seek to extract the greatest possible profit is a violation of rights – the worst of all, since it is linked to violations of other rights, such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to social security, the right to organize and the right to live in security." ■

BASIC CAPABILITIES INDEX 2008

Alarming slow progress

At the current rate of progress, Sub-Saharan Africa would only reach the satisfaction of basic needs in 2353, Central Asia in 2042 and, except for Europe and North America, none of the other regions would reach the basic minimum level before 2022.

Poverty is and will continue to be the lack of access to goods and services which are basic to human welfare. Measuring it through monetary levels only provides an approximation to the phenomenon, the implication being that all of these needs can be satisfied by buying them on the open market. Poverty, therefore, becomes endogenous to the capitalist system itself, a system in which "money is all-powerful". Consequently, poverty continues, very conveniently, to be measured through the intermediation of money and not by means of the direct measurement of a person's welfare.

On the other hand, those of us who consider that poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and that many of the dimensions involved should be dealt with from a conceptual framework based on the rights of persons (and not on markets), also think that the welfare of a country's population can be assessed and monitored through observation of the levels of access to goods and services which these rights guarantee – independently of the means through which they are obtained.

Social Watch has been monitoring a major set of human welfare dimensions which are accessible through statistics available at international level. Although they are not all that we would wish, they do constitute a fairly comprehensive set. On the basis of the countries' situation in each and every one of these areas, it has been possible to determine levels and to monitor evolution.

The creation of the Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) has slightly simplified this task. This index, composed of basic indicators for which there is a

good deal of information in most countries, has enabled a closer follow-up of the performance of each country in connection with its citizens' minimum needs.

Reaching an acceptable BCI does not imply a high level of social development. It only means that a country has achieved universal coverage of those essential minimum needs indispensable for advancing towards greater welfare. As has been underlined since its inception, the maximum BCI level is a starting point and not the finishing line.

The BCI Tool

Social Watch has developed the BCI as a way to identify poverty not based on income.¹ The poverty-related indicators most widely used internationally are the World Bank estimates of the number of people living on less than one or two dollars a day, or the United Nations Development Programme ranking based on the Human Development Index, which combines income figures with health- and education-related indicators. The BCI is comparatively easier to construct and it is feasible to implement it at sub-national and municipal levels, without requiring expensive household surveys as income-based indices do. By not us-

ing income, the BCI is consistent with the definitions of poverty based on the deprivation of capabilities and the denial of human rights.

The BCI is based on three indicators: percentage of children who reach fifth grade, survival until the fifth year of age (based on mortality amongst children under five) and percentage of deliveries assisted by skilled health personnel. These indicators express different dimensions addressed by internationally agreed development goals (education, children's health and reproductive health). Likewise, research indicates that as a summary index, the BCI provides a general overview consistent with the health status and the basic educational performance of a given population.

The highest possible BCI score is reached when all women receive medical assistance during labour, no child leaves school before completing the fifth grade and infant mortality is reduced to its lowest possible level of less than five deaths for every thousand live births. These indicators are closely linked to the capabilities that members of society should have and which mutually reinforce one another to make it possible to achieve higher levels of individual and collective development. They focus especially on capabilities which incorporate the youngest members of society, thereby fostering future development.

The usefulness of the BCI lies in that it has proven to be closely correlated to measurements of other human capabilities related to the social development of countries. This index assigns a score to each country, thereby making it possible to compare it with other countries and to assess its evolution over time.

¹ The current formulation of the BCI was designed by the Social Watch Research Team, on the basis of an idea first developed as the "Quality of Life Index" by Action for Economic Reforms, for the Social Watch coalition in the Philippines. This, in turn, was inspired in the Capability Poverty Measure (CPM) proposed by Professor Amartya Sen and popularised by the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI).

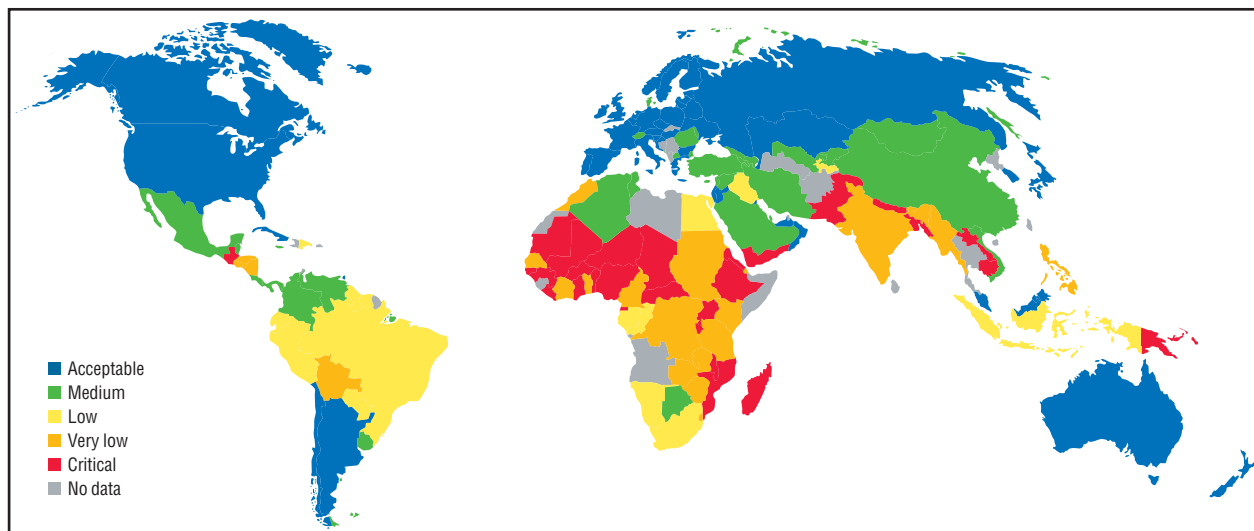


CHART 1. BCI and BCI evolution by countries' BCI level

CRITICAL LEVEL		VERY LOW LEVEL		LOW LEVEL		MEDIUM LEVEL		ACCEPTABLE LEVEL	
Country	BCI BCI Evolution	Country	BCI BCI Evolution	Country	BCI BCI Evolution	Country	BCI BCI Evolution	Country	BCI BCI Evolution
Chad	42 ←	Cameroon	70 ←	Zimbabwe	80 =	Vietnam	90 →	Denmark	98 ←
Afghanistan	52 ←	Gambia	70 →	Bolivia	80 →	Colombia	90 →	Sri Lanka	98
Niger	52 ←	Kenya	71 →	Guyana	81 ←	Cook Islands	90	Kazakhstan	98 →
Rwanda	53 →	Togo	71 =	Solomon Islands	82	China	90	Argentina	98 →
Ethiopia	54 →	Senegal	71 →	Sao Tome & Prin.	82	Panama	91 =	New Zealand	98 =
Bangladesh	57 =	India	71 →	Gabon	82 →	Singapore	92	St Lucia	98 =
Burundi	58 →	Lesotho	72 =	Ecuador	83 →	Iran	92 ←	Mauritius	98 =
Lao, PDR	58 →	Nicaragua	72 →	Iraq	83 →	Brazil	92 =	Kuwait	98 →
Equatorial G.	59 =	Zambia	73 →	Indonesia	84 →	Grenada	92 ←	Libya	98
Uganda	59 =	Tanzania	73 →	Tajikistan	85 =	Botswana	92 =	Russian Federation	98 →
Timor-Leste	60	Djibouti	75	Azerbaijan	85 ←	Turkey	92 →	Ukraine	98 →
Guinea-Bissau	61	Sudan	76 ←	Namibia	85 ←	Cape Verde	93 =	Bulgaria	99 →
Sierra Leone	61	Burma/Myanmar	76 →	Paraguay	85 →	Belize	93 →	Fiji	99+ →
Madagascar	61 =	Swaziland	77 =	Suriname	86 ←	St Vincent and Gren.	93 =	United Arab Em.	99+ =
Yemen	61 ←	Philippines	77 →	Peru	86 →	Marshall Islands	93	United States of Am.	99+ →
Angola	62	Honduras	78 →	Maldives	86 →	Syria	94 →	United Kingdom	99+ →
Malawi	62 ←	Bhutan	78 →	Vanuatu	87 ←	Algeria	94 =	Cuba	99+ =
Nigeria	63 =	Comoros	79 →	Dominican Rep.	88 =	Albania	94 ←	Belgium	99+ →
Pakistan	64 →	El Salvador	79 →	Kiribati	88 =	Mexico	94 →	Barbados	99+ →
Burkina Faso	64 →	Congo, Rep.	79	Egypt	88 →	Costa Rica	95 ←	Bahamas	99+
Cent. African R.	65	Côte d'Ivoire	79 →	Tuvalu	89 =	Venezuela	95 =	Belarus	99+ →
Liberia	65	Morocco	79 →	South Africa	89 →	Tonga	95 =	Oman	99+ →
Nepal	65 →			Georgia	89 ←	Trinidad and Tobago	95 ←	Bahrain	99+ =
Mozambique	66 →					Jamaica	95 →	Palau	99+
Mauritania	66 =					Kyrgyzstan	95 =	Latvia	99+ →
Guinea	66 =					St Kitts and Nevis	95 =	Malaysia	99+ =
Ghana	66 =					Tunisia	95 →	Lithuania	99+ →
Cambodia	66 →					Lebanon	95 →	Hungary	99+
Eritrea	67 →					Mongolia	96 =	Croatia	99+ →
Papua N. G.	68 →					Armenia	96 →	Canada	99+ →
Benin	68 ←					Romania	96 ←	Portugal	99+ →
Guatemala	68 →					Macedonia	96 =	France	99+ =
Mali	69 →					Moldova	96 =	Japan	99+ →
Congo, DR	69					Qatar	96 =	Slovenia	99+ →
						Thailand	96	Cyprus	99+ =
						Uruguay	96 =	Spain	99+ →
						Saudi Arabia	97 →	Czech Republic	99+ =
						Slovakia	97	Estonia	99+ =
						Switzerland	97 =	Australia	99+ →
						Samoa	97 =	Italy	99+ =
						Dominica	97 →	Korea. Rep.	99+ =
						Luxembourg	97 ←	Greece	99+ →
						Jordan	97 =	Poland	99+ =
								Brunei Darussalam	99+ →
								Malta	99+ =
								Chile	99+ =
								Netherlands	99+ =
								Finland	99+ =
								Israel	99+ =
								Ireland	99+ =
								Iceland	99+ =
								Sweden	99+ →
								Norway	99+ =
								Germany	99+ →

NOTE: Countries presenting a +99 value had already reached a BCI value of 99 by the year 2000.

References: ← Major regression ← Regression = Stagnant → Slight progress → Significant progress

The BCI 2008 was calculated for 176 countries, which were then grouped into various categories. The most serious situations are to be found in countries with *critical* BCI scores (less than 70 points). In the *very low* BCI category (70 to 79 points) there are countries that also face very significant obstacles in achieving the well-being of the population. Countries with *low* BCI scores (80 to 89 points) are at an intermediate level as regards the satisfaction of basic needs and their performance varies in some of the aspects of development. The countries which have succeeded in satisfying most or all of their populations' basic capabilities have been placed in the two categories with the highest BCI values (*medium*, 90 to 97 points, and *acceptable*, 98 to 99+ points). As has already been pointed out, belonging to these last two groups does not imply a high level of development, but only the fulfilment of basic levels of well-being.

Recent evolution

The 2008 BCI presents the situation on the basis of the latest available indicators (which date from around 2005). Its evolution is determined by means of a comparison with the values of the 2004 BCI (from around 2000).

A country-by-country analysis of the situation shows that close to half of the countries (76 of 153) have made progress since 2000. Figures show that 15% (24 countries) have regressed whereas 37% (56 countries) have not experienced significant changes during the period analysed.

Some countries in East Asia and the Pacific and in Latin America and the Caribbean have suffered a setback with regard to their basic capabilities, but the countries which have most regressed in their BCI are mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Regression has been major (over 5% of the BCI value) in seven cases. This is particularly disturbing since these countries are regressing from what are already *low*, *very low* or even *critical* BCI levels. This means that in some countries regression is getting worse, thus increasing the existing gap with the rest of the world (Chart 2).

Regional disparities

Different regional realities may be observed both in the index levels obtained and in the differential evolution of these levels. Regions in which basic capabilities are almost satisfied and concerns regarding social development involve targets which transcend the minimum levels indispensable for survival, coexist with others which are very distant from the minimum satisfaction of needs.

The magnitude of the gap shown by the BCI, with levels close to 99 in more advanced countries in Europe and North America and close to 70 in less advanced countries (in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, is already, in strictly numerical terms, extremely distressing: these numbers refer, precisely and exclusively, to the coverage of basic needs which any human being should enjoy. However, the real situation behind these differences is even harsher: critical BCI levels indicate serious difficulties in every dimension of social development. As an example, and with regard only to index components (directly related to

TECHNICAL NOTES: BCI DESIGN BY COUNTRY

Indicators that make up the BCI:

- Percentage of children in the first grade who reach the fifth grade.
- Mortality amongst children under five.
- Percentage of births assisted by skilled health personnel.

To increase the number of countries with sufficient information to construct the index, values were assigned for the indicators where information was lacking. This was done by assigning the average value of that indicator for the group the country was in as defined by its current situation in the thematic area in question.

The BCI was calculated by using the non-weighted average of the original values of the three indicators in question (in the case of infant mortality a lineal transformation was previously applied to the indicator). To simplify the calculations all three indicators were given the same weight.

Child health is represented as I1 = (100 - M), survival rate up to 5 years of age, where M is the under-5 mortality rate (expressed as a percentage) or the probability of death in the first five years of life expressed as per 1,000 live births.

Education is represented as I2, where I2 is the rate of school retention or the percentage of children enrolled in the first grade who reach the fifth grade in the required number of years.

Reproductive health is shown as I3, where I3 is the percentage of births assisted by skilled health personnel (doctors, nurses or midwives).

The Basic Capabilities Index value for a particular country is obtained by taking a simple average of the three components:

$$BCI = (I1 + I2 + I3) / 3$$

CHART 2. Number of countries by present BCI level according to evolution since 2000

	Critical level	Very low level	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Major regression ←	2	1	4	0	0	7
Regression ←	3	1	2	8	0	14
Stagnation	8	4	4	18	22	56
Slight progress →	8	8	6	8	25	55
Significant progress →	5	8	3	4	1	21
Total	26	22	19	38	48	153

CHART 3. BCI change by region (%)

Region	BCI 2008	Change 2000-latest available data (%)
Sub-Saharan Africa	70	0.7
South Asia	71	6.6
East Asia & Pacific	88	1.9
Latin America & Caribbean	90	1.4
Middle East & North Africa	92	1.6
Central Asia	93	0.6
Europe	98	0.5
North America	99	3.1

all of the social development dimensions analysed by Social Watch), in some of these countries only 5% of births are assisted by skilled medical personnel or, every year, one in every four children under five dies and, with luck, a little over half of the children who start school will reach fifth grade.

Almost 20 points higher are East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, and Central Asia, with

values between 88 and 93, figures which, although higher, are still worrying. These regions have not yet achieved the satisfaction of minimum capabilities. The only regions which have achieved acceptable levels are Europe and North America.

An analysis of the evolution of these levels is even more discouraging: except for South Asia, which has recently evolved very favourably, all of the regions display very irregular patterns of growth.

South Asia started off from a very low level with regard to deficiencies in conditions of life as measured by the BCI and despite the accelerated evolution of the last few years, the regional situation is still extremely critical, barely above that of Sub-Saharan Africa (Chart 3).

Likewise, the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is already very low according to its 70 BCI, excludes any hope of short, medium or even long-term changes by displaying an average evolution of 0.7%.

A discouraging future

Targets were set in the 1990s in an attempt to improve all of the social development indicators (World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen); in 2000 some of these challenges were re-launched (even lowering some of the aspirations) during the Millennium Summit. Marketing operatives and campaigns launched to show the world that poverty is a concern have been successful; however, the steps which followed have proved disappointing. We reached the year 2000 without fulfilling what we had undertaken in 1990 and there is every indication that the goals will not be achieved by 2015. It is also reasonable to think that, once the failure to achieve

CHART 4. BCI forecasts per region							
FOR BCI 2008	BCI 2000	BCI 2008	BCI 2015	YEAR IN WHICH REGION WILL ACHIEVE BCI			
				BCI 70	BCI 80	BCI 90	BCI 98
Sub-Saharan Africa	69	70	70		2133	2256	2353
South Asia	64	71	85			2018	2022
Middle East & North Africa	90	92	93				2032
Latin America & the Caribbean	88	90	93				2027
East Asia & the Pacific	86	88	91				2031
Central Asia	92	93	94				2042
North America	96	99	99				
Europe	98	98	99				
	CRITICAL	VERY LOW	LOW		MEDIUM		ACCEPTABLE

the Millennium Goals is confirmed, we may witness, in 2014, the launching of an alternative campaign for 2015-2030. However, if substantial changes do not occur, current rates of progress will still not be enough. Chart 4 shows the BCI's forecasts for each region if current tendencies are maintained.

At the present rate of progress, Sub-Saharan Africa will only reach the starting point – the satisfaction of basic needs – towards the year 2353. The

scant progress registered during the last few years makes the date at which decent development may be achieved unthinkable – if not frankly ridiculous.

Central Asia, whose rate of progress is significantly higher, would be reaching that point 42 years after the Millennium Summit. And, except for Europe and North America, no other region will be able to reach that basic minimum level before 2022, if the current rate of progress does not improve. ■

◎ NATIONAL REPORT

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Sixty years and waiting



In 2008, the 60th anniversary year of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the US presidential election provides a window of opportunity to re-engage the country in the human rights framework and to find common agreements domestically and globally. US communities are bringing innovative approaches to advance human rights that should be expanded and strengthened so that they can influence the national debate.

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

Alexandra Spieldoch

Hunger Notes

Lane Vanderslice

Center of Concern

Aldo Calia

Action Aid USA

Karen Hansen Kuhn

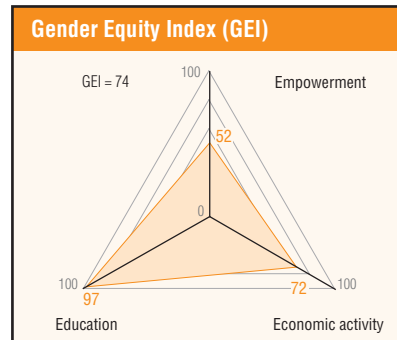
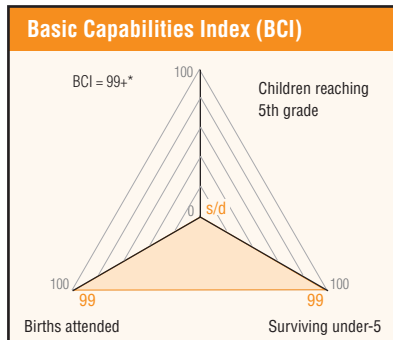
Global-Local Links Project

Tanya Dawkins

In 1948, the US was a noted leader in establishing the United Nations and Eleanor Roosevelt was working with other member countries for the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The country also took leadership in establishing the Bretton Woods Institutions, including the World Bank and the IMF and what was to have been the International Trade Organization, only one part of which, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (which later became the World Trade Organization) entered into force. Sixty years later, the US has distanced itself from the UN system it helped to create – a trend which undermines the potential for collective solutions to the critical problems we face today, such as climate change, rising food shortages, poverty and war. Since World War II, the US government has promoted deregulated markets as a means to reduce conflict and support policy goals, both within and outside of its borders. This includes privatizing public service provision and relaxing labor and environmental regulations to promote investment and increase trade.

The rigid government adherence to free market ideology as the final arbiter of national priorities has blocked the development of a policy and investment structure to support rights-based social and economic development in the country. There is a long tradition and broad public agreement on ‘negative’ obligations, or what the government cannot do, such as abridge free speech, or subject citizens to unreasonable search and seizure. These obligations fall in the category of civil and political rights. Yet, there is far less agreement or even discussion of the construct of ‘positive’ obligations, which concern government obligations regarding social and economic rights. This is in part due to the fact that civil and political rights are present in the US Constitution, while

* One of the BCI components was imputed based on data from countries of similar level.



economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs) are not. There are those who insist that ESCRs should remain outside of the Constitution, rejecting the legal obligations that would come with their ratification, especially in a context of declining funding for public services generally.

In terms of international law, the US has not ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, and does not recognize their provisions as rights. This makes it very difficult to develop a comprehensive national social and economic rights agenda.

The Right to Work

Although the US (perhaps more than anywhere else in the world) places great emphasis on productivity, efficiency and measurable outcomes associated with work, the ‘right to work’ ethos is understood differently in the US than it is elsewhere. The Universal Declaration states that “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” It adds that everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to just and favorable remuneration to ensure human dignity and social protection, and that everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions.

In the US, by contrast, the Right to Work has come to mean the ability to work regardless of whether protections and programs such as health-care, pension and unemployment provisions are in place. Because union membership is now at 12%,

the lowest it has been since the early 1930s,¹ it is difficult for workers to receive the labor protections for which unions have long fought.

The concept of favorable remuneration, or a living wage, although embraced by wide segments of the public, is opposed by many business and political leaders. Thus for example, it took nearly 10 years for the US Congress to agree to raise the minimum wage in stages, from USD 5.15 an hour in 2007 to USD 7.25 an hour in 2009.² Even the higher rate will not allow families to escape poverty, with the resulting USD 15,080 of income from a 40 hour week 52 weeks a year still being below the poverty line – which was USD 17,170 for a family of three in 2007.³ Most of those workers in the lowest paid category do not receive benefits such as paid sick days, vacation time, health insurance, or employer contributions to a private retirement fund (i.e. other than Social Security).

Unemployment compensation is available only to those who have been laid off rather than to those who may have left a job, no matter how justifiable the reason. Even when workers do receive unemployment compensation, it is limited to 26 weeks. Those who find work having been unemployed often receive less pay and less benefits, while those who want to work but cannot find employment after 26

1 Union Members Summary. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, <www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>. 25 January 2008.

2 L. Montgomery, “Congress Approves Minimum Wage Hike,” *Washington Post*, 25 May 2007.

3 US Department of Health and Human Services, “Prior HHS Poverty Guidelines and Federal Register References,” <aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/figures-fed-reg.shtml>. Accessed 25 February 2008.

weeks receive almost no support at all. This is due to a variety of factors, not the least of which is racial and gender discrimination.

The Right to Food

As with the Right to Work, the Right to Food is not widely promoted or discussed in the US. This is not to say, however, that issues related to food and hunger are ignored. The largest single budget item in the US Farm Bill is funding for food assistance to poor people ('food stamps') and school lunch programs, which together account for two-thirds of expenditure under the bill. Expenditures, however, have not kept pace with increasing needs. Due to higher food prices and low reserves, the U.S. is experiencing extreme food inflation,⁴ which means that even more people will lack access to food. By 2007, the number of children who are hungry or malnourished had grown to 12.6 million (17.2% of all children in the country).⁵ Additionally, there are what are called 'food deserts' throughout the country, where low-income families simply do not have access to affordable, fresh healthy food.

The current farm system has worsened the situation for farmers, workers and consumers. De-regulation in agriculture over the last several decades has led to overproduction in commodities and increased subsidies to agribusiness, changing the nature of food production. Surplus corn resulting from overproduction now supplies a key ingredient in processed foods of dubious nutritional value as well as the industrial feed market for pork, cattle and chicken. Fresh fruits and vegetables are notably more expensive for consumers. Numerous scientific studies and news articles highlight the problems of obesity, even among children, caused in part by the overabundance of cheap processed foods, especially starch and fat, in the US diet.⁶ Increased meat consumption is also contributing to long-term health problems among the public.⁷

Growing consumer demand for organic, locally produced food could contribute to more nutritious and safer food, but the fact that it is more expensive and less widely available also raises concerns. Patty Lovera of Food and Water Watch observed: "The growth in organic and local food is encouraging and means that many consumers are finding healthier options. But unless we fix our broken food safety system, many people without access to these markets are left out. If we don't strengthen minimum standards for food safety, we run the risk of creating a two-tiered food system: healthy food for middle and upper class consumers for those who can afford higher prices; and less healthy, less regulated food for everyone else."⁸

4 "Energy and Food Prices Push Up U.S. Inflation," Associated Press. 15 July 2008.

5 Food Research and Action Center, <www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/hunger_index.html>.

6 M. Pollan (2006). *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. New York: Penguin Books.

7 "High Meat Consumption Linked to Heightened Cancer Risk," *US News and World Report*, 11 December 2007.

8 Interview with Patty Lovera on 18 March 2008.

The Right to Health

Healthcare is one of the most explosive issues in the country today. And yet, the fact that the Right to Health rarely forms part of the national debate about whether and how to provide universal healthcare shows how strenuously this is opposed by the health industry and elected officials who depend on it for campaign contributions.

The US spends 16% of GDP on health, the highest ratio in the world.⁹ It also has the highest health spending per capita. However, its performance, as measured by many indicators, does not live up to the expectations that one might get from such figures.¹⁰ The US has fewer physicians and nurses per capita than in most other OECD countries; life expectancy is now 77.8 years, almost one year below the OECD average, and the infant mortality rate is 6.8 deaths per 1,000 live births, above the OECD average of 5.4.¹¹

Rising health care costs, accompanied by decreasing insurance coverage, are major hindrances to greater public access to healthcare.¹² The number of uninsured has gone from 10 million to 48 million in the last two decades. This means that currently one-seventh of the population is uninsured. Without health insurance, people are more likely to postpone doctor visits and more likely to go without needed medical care, including prescription medicines. According to one survey, almost all uninsured adults cited cost as the primary reason they did not receive care when they needed it. Only 29% of low-income adults have private insurance.¹³

A basic standard in the Right to Health is the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of income as well as race, gender, religion and other social markers. In the US, where these categories usually overlap, racial and ethnic minorities tend to be in lower income brackets and have less access to proper care. Nearly half (45%) of Hispanic adults, 41% of Asian-American adults, and 35% of African-American adults reported difficulty paying for medical care, compared to 26% of white adults. In 2004, 30% of African-Americans and 25% of Hispanics with chronic health conditions had to forgo prescription drug purchases due to the high cost; this compares to 17% among the white population.¹⁴

9 WHO (World Health Organization) (2006). *The world health report 2006 - working together for health*. Available at: <www.who.int/whr/2006/en/index.html>.

10 While the implementation of the right to health may imply various different roles for the state, it noteworthy that the US is the only OECD country where more health spending is done by the private than by the public sector.

11 OECD (2007). "Health Data 2007. How does the United States Compare".

12 Kaiser Commission, "How Trends in the Health Care System Affect Low-Income Adults: Identifying Access Problems and Financial Burdens," Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured. 2007.

13 Health Policy Institute of Ohio, "Understanding Health Policy Disparities", 2004. <www.healthpolicyohio.org/pdf/healthdisparities.pdf>.

14 *Ibid*.

The health crisis has been steadily growing and is now affecting the middle class as well as the poor, although not to the same extent. Once again it is a major issue in the 2008 presidential elections.

Taking a step forward

Despite opposition from powerful interests, new media campaigns and popular education initiatives are taking place across the country. Campaigns and strategies to build on-the-ground support for human rights are gaining momentum. There are some wonderful examples:

The Center for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has created a US network focused on the need to adopt and implement these rights. They have produced a primer and other materials that explain the importance of rights to health, food, work, housing, and so on in the US context.

In 2008, under the leadership of the US Human Rights Network, an unprecedented delegation of US youth, public interest lawyers, housing activists and workers traveled to Geneva to challenge the official US report under the International Convention to End All Forms of Racial Discrimination. This 'Shadow Report' Network was the result of a year-long national grassroots effort to help citizens hold their government accountable to international human rights norms by challenging the rhetoric of compliance vs. the reality on the ground.

In the absence of commitment at the national level, citizens are building awareness of international agreements and seeking enforcement at the local level. For example, a campaign in the City of San Francisco is pressing for the use of Human Rights Impact Statements that establish minimum standards across the municipality.

One of the larger human rights campaigns in the US is the Living Wage Campaign, led by ACORN,¹⁵ demanding work for all, a fair minimum wage, as well as access to affordable housing. Gulf States, especially Mississippi and Louisiana, that were devastated by Hurricane Katrina have become a battleground and a testing ground for a range of legal principles traditionally thought to belong in the international realm, ranging from the rights of internally displaced persons to the right to land and housing. And the US National Committee for World Food Day, a decentralized organization with representatives around the country and an office in Washington, D.C., organizes World Food Day events in different states every month of October.

These and other examples indicate that US communities are revitalizing efforts to advance economic and social rights within the country. Ensuring that these initiatives are expanded and strengthened is the challenge we all face; it is also our commitment to one another that is based in hope and partnership. ■

15 Living Wage Campaign web site: <www.livingwagecampaign.org/index.php?id=1959>.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

The more help, the more rights

TRENDS IN OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (% OF GNI) ^A										
Net Official Development Assistance from DAC Countries and Multilateral Organizations to Developing Countries										
	1989-1990 AVERAGE ^B	1994-1995 AVERAGE	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Australia	0.36	0.34	0.27	0.25	0.26	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.30	0.30
Austria	0.16	0.22	0.23	0.34	0.26	0.20	0.23	0.52	0.47	0.49
Belgium	0.46	0.35	0.36	0.37	0.43	0.60	0.41	0.53	0.50	0.43
Canada	0.44	0.40	0.25	0.22	0.28	0.24	0.27	0.34	0.29	0.28
Czech Republic			0.03	0.05	0.07	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.11
Denmark	0.94	0.99	1.06	1.03	0.96	0.84	0.85	0.81	0.80	0.81
Finland	0.64	0.31	0.31	0.32	0.35	0.35	0.37	0.46	0.40	0.40
France	0.60	0.58	0.30	0.31	0.37	0.40	0.41	0.47	0.47	0.39
Germany	0.42	0.32	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.28	0.28	0.36	0.36	0.37
Greece	—	—	0.20	0.17	0.21	0.21	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.16
Hungary	—	—	—	—	—	0.03	0.07	0.11	0.13	0.07
Iceland	—	—	0.10	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.27	0.25
Ireland	0.16	0.27	0.29	0.33	0.40	0.39	0.39	0.42	0.54	0.54
Italy	0.36	0.21	0.13	0.15	0.20	0.17	0.15	0.29	0.20	0.19
Japan	0.31	0.28	0.28	0.23	0.23	0.20	0.19	0.28	0.25	0.17
Korea, Rep.	—	—	0.04	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.10	0.05	0.07
Luxembourg	0.20	0.38	0.71	0.76	0.77	0.81	0.83	0.86	0.84	0.90
Netherlands	0.93	0.79	0.84	0.82	0.81	0.80	0.73	0.82	0.81	0.81
New Zealand	0.22	0.23	0.25	0.25	0.22	0.23	0.23	0.27	0.27	0.27
Norway	1.11	0.94	0.76	0.80	0.89	0.92	0.87	0.94	0.89	0.95
Poland	—	—	0.02	0.02	—	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.09
Portugal	0.24	0.29	0.26	0.25	0.27	0.22	0.63	0.21	0.21	0.19
Slovakia	—	—	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.07	0.12	0.10	0.09
Spain	0.17	0.26	0.22	0.30	0.26	0.23	0.24	0.27	0.32	0.41
Sweden	0.93	0.86	0.80	0.77	0.84	0.79	0.78	0.94	1.02	0.93
Switzerland	0.31	0.35	0.34	0.34	0.32	0.39	0.41	0.44	0.39	0.37
Thailand	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.04	—
Turkey	—	—	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.11	0.17	0.18	—
United Kingdom	0.29	0.30	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.34	0.36	0.47	0.51	0.36
United States of America	0.18	0.12	0.10	0.11	0.13	0.15	0.17	0.23	0.18	0.16
Total DAC	0.32	0.28	0.22	0.22	0.23	0.25	0.26	0.33	0.31	0.28

NOTES: A: Net disbursements at current prices and exchange rates. B: Including debt forgiveness of non-ODA claims in 1990, except for total DAC. **SOURCE:** OECD, Website Database (www.oecd.org); June 2008.

Official Development Assistance (% of GNI): Grants or loans to countries and territories on Part I of the DAC List of Aid Recipients (developing countries) which are: (a) undertaken by the official sector; (b) with promotion of economic development and welfare as the main objective; (c) at concessional financial terms (if a loan, having a Grant Element [q.v.] of at least 25%). In addition to financial flows, Technical Co-operation q.v. is included in aid. Grants, loans and credits for military purposes are excluded. Transfer payments to private individuals (e.g. pensions, reparations or insurance payouts) are in general not counted. Expressed as percentage of gross national income (GNI).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the equal and inalienable rights of each person, "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." The effective exercise of human rights must be guaranteed by the creation of economic, civil, political, social and cultural conditions that will foster them.

Economic and social development, however, show a very heterogeneous world, in which situations of great opulence coexist with manifestations of distressing poverty. International cooperation, one of the international instruments of human rights, is fundamental for the poorer countries in their quest for growth and development.

Since the 1970s, developed countries have committed themselves to allocating a fixed amount

to Official Development Assistance (ODA), a commitment ratified in the final declaration of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. AOD, as a percentage, was fixed at 0.7% of the gross national income (GNI) of donor countries in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Also, the Millennium Development Goals propose to foster a global partnership for development, with the commitment of financial assistance by the more developed countries and the responsibility of the recipients to allocate it to social development and to the reduction of poverty in particular.

However by 2007 international assistance was only 0.28% of donor countries' GNI, thus highlighting the downward trend in recent years and moving

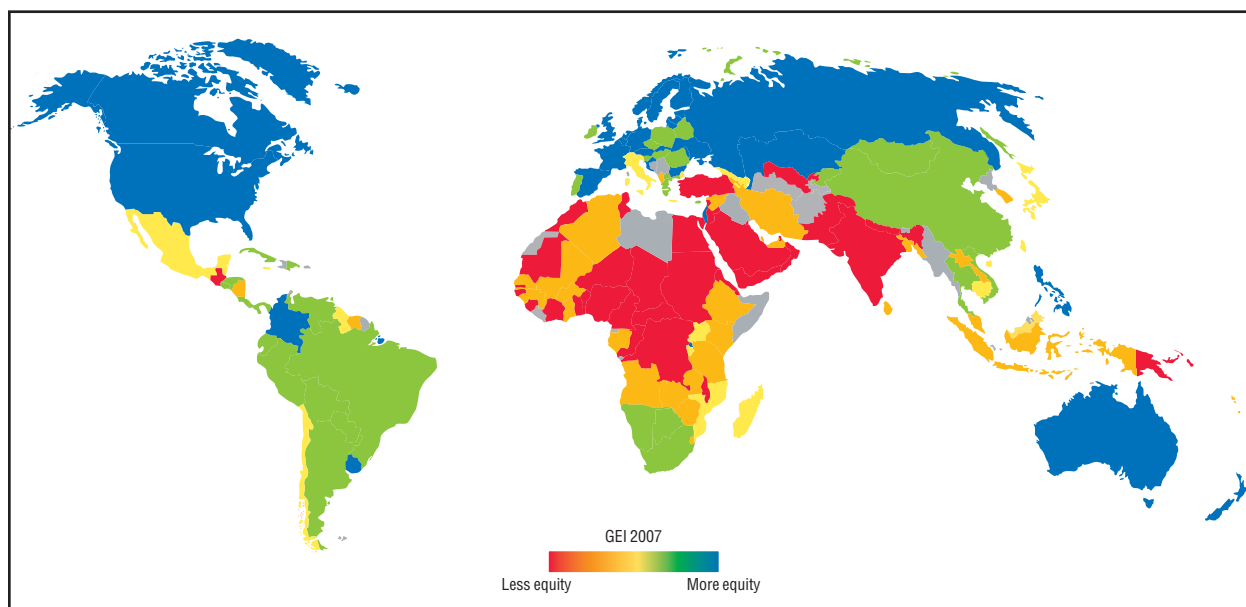
further away from the commitments undertaken. The only countries that complied with the UN goal, going over 0.7% of the GNI for ODA, were Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

At the same time, the assistance granted counts up sums allocated to public debt relief, so the flow of capital available for development programmes ends up being less than what the donor countries declare.

Recent ODA trends predict a disheartening scenario to which the ongoing financial crisis adds new concerns. While it is necessary to keep fighting to reach the sums committed for assistance and to improve the loans granted to developing countries, it is essential to understand ODA as a north-south 'horizontal' process in which it is the needs and priorities of recipient countries that channel assistance, free from the restrictive conditioning of donor countries. ■

GENDER EQUITY INDEX 2008

20th century debts, 21st century shame



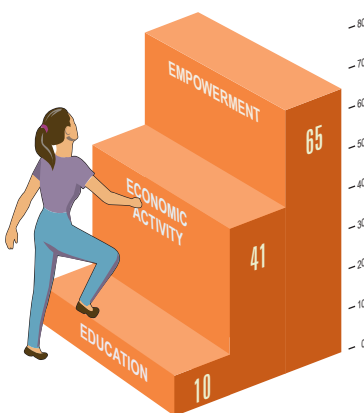
In order to contribute to the understanding of gender-based inequities and to monitor the status and its evolution, Social Watch has developed the Gender Equity Index (GEI). This index is based on internationally available comparable data and it makes it possible to position and classify countries according to a selection of indicators relevant to gender inequity in three different dimensions: education, participation in the economy and empowerment.

In 2008, the GEI ranks the present situation of 157 countries, based on the most recent statistics available, and is able to determine evolution trends in 133 countries by comparing their present index with that of five years ago. (See the detailed methodology references and complete listings in www.socialwatch.org).

The index has a maximum possible value of 100%, which would indicate no gender gap at all in each of the three dimensions. The GEI measures the gap between women and men, not their welfare. Thus, for example, a country where both boys and girls have equal access to university studies would rank 100 in this aspect, and a country where both boys and girls are equally unable to complete primary school would also rank 100. This is not to imply that the quality of the education should not be improved. It just says that boys and girls suffer from the same lack of quality.

Education is the only component in the index where many countries have actually reached parity level. When parity has been reached, obviously no further progress is possible. But beyond the fact that many countries do not progress, the GEI education component reveals that many of them are regress-

The stairway to gender equity



Big steps ahead

The step leading to gender equity in education in all countries of the world is not a very big one. Yet, more countries are regressing in education than those making progresses. A larger number of countries show significant progress in economic activity, but the number of those regressing is also considerable and the global trend is therefore unclear. Evolution in empowerment seems promising, since most countries are showing progress, yet this is by far the largest gap to overcome.

ing. In the two other dimensions, related to women's integration into economic and political life, no country shows complete parity yet.

Income alone does not generate equity

The GEI evidences that income differences between countries are no justification for gender-based inequities. Many poor countries have achieved a high level of equity, which is a positive achievement, even when that means an equitable distribution of poverty. In fact, the reverse is often true: many countries that have acceptable average figures in social indicators frequently hide behind those averages enormous disparities between men and women. The elimination of gender disparities can be achieved with active policies and does not require that countries improve their income levels in order to succeed.

Sweden, Finland and Norway continue to have the highest rankings in the 2008 GEI. Although the three countries do not lead in all the dimensions that make up the index (see gaps in Education, Empowerment and Economic Activity) they have good performances in all of them. Germany ranks fourth and Rwanda – one of the poorest countries in the world – takes the fifth place. In all these cases, the gender gap has been reduced through active policies, including gender quotas for political participation in elected bodies and pro-equity regulations in the labour market.

The GEI has been computed for 42 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 37 in Europe, 28 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 17 in the Middle East and North Africa, 18 in East Asia and the Pacific, 7 in Central Asia, 6 in South Asia and 2 in North America. Together these countries represent more than 94% of the world's population.

Progress and setbacks

More than half the women in the world live in countries that have made no progress in gender equity in recent years. This is the main conclusion of the Social Watch 2008 GEI which, for the first time, shows recent evolution and trends in bridging the gap between men and women in education, economic activity and empowerment.

The GEI 2008 illustrates that the greater equity levels to be found in education are not paralleled by acceptable levels in the economic field nor in the empowerment of women. Political empowerment is the area where most progress has been made in recent years as a result of active policies, yet economic equity shows disparate results, with as many countries regressing as those where there is progress. In education the gap is comparatively closer, but the trend for many countries is to regress.

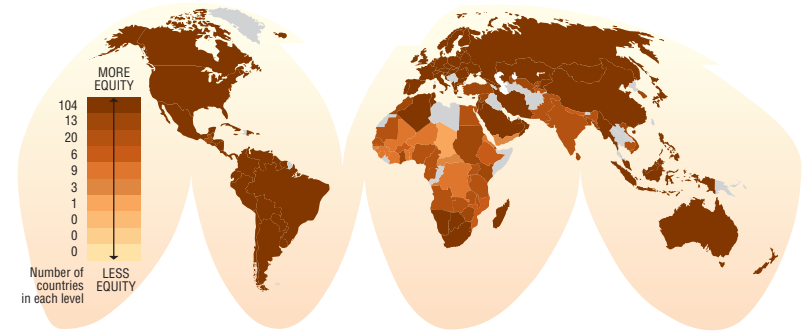
Difficulties in reaching equity cannot be justified by a lack of resources: the GEI mapping and that of each of its components show that – regardless of income levels – each country can reduce gender disparity through adequate policies. ■

GEI regional average by component

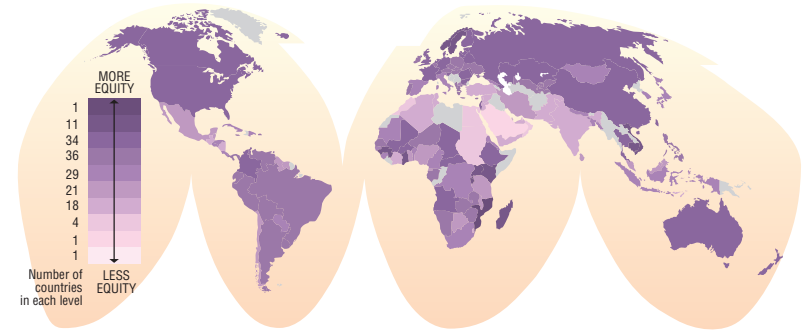
	Education	Economic activity	Empowerment
World*	90	59	35
Central Asia	92	65	30
East Asia	94	62	37
Europe	99	68	49
Latin America & Caribbean	99	57	45
Middle East & North Africa	90	35	19
North America	100	73	53
South Asia	80	47	20
Sub-Saharan Africa	73	61	24

* The size of the gap: Index points needed to achieve equity (100) globally in each dimension of the GEI.

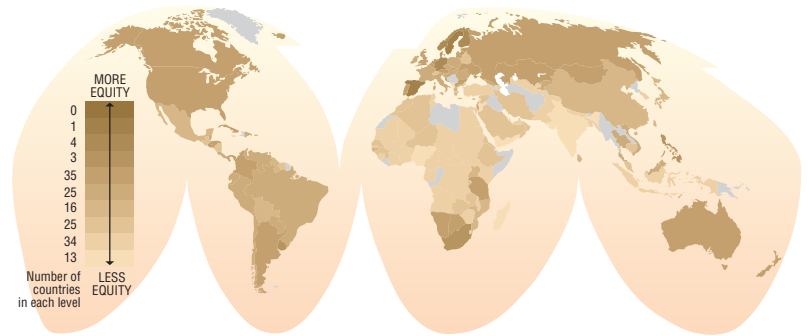
Education gap



Economic activity gap



Empowerment gap



GEI VALUES IN 2008 AND RECENT GEI TRENDS (2004-2008)								
Country	GEI 2008	Evolution (%) (2004-2008)	Country	GEI 2008	Evolution (%) (2004-2008)	Country	GEI 2008	Evolution (%) (2004-2008)
Sweden	89	5.8	Peru	69	22.6	Angola	53	-18.7
Finland	85	6.9	Honduras	69	11.7	Gabon	53	-2.7
Norway	84	11.4	Czech Republic	69	-2.5	Tajikistan	52	-6.9
Germany	80		China	69	9.9	Indonesia	52	-6.5
Rwanda	80	13.3	Cyprus	69	13.3	Ethiopia	52	9.7
Bahamas	80	9.7	Venezuela	68	11.1	Burkina Faso	52	-2.3
Denmark	80	-1.1	Macedonia	68	8.8	Nicaragua	52	-10.0
New Zealand	78	3.4	Costa Rica	68	4.2	Algeria	52	11.0
Iceland	78	4.9	Paraguay	67	14.6	Bangladesh	51	-5.2
Netherlands	78	7.7	El Salvador	67	9.3	Cape Verde	51	-6.8
Lithuania	77	3.4	Greece	66	7.0	United Arab Emirates	51	9.3
Spain	77	16.8	Bolivia	66	12.5	Syria	51	9.6
Barbados	77	3.6	Botswana	66	-6.0	Guinea	51	-7.1
Russian Federation	76	5.6	Belarus	66	4.8	Mali	50	-6.5
Australia	76	6.6	Dominican Republic	66	6.5	Samoa	50	
Philippines	76	4.9	Singapore	66	4.5	Swaziland	50	-2.3
Latvia	76	1.6	Italy	65	5.4	Qatar	50	1.0
Canada	76	-2.7	Uganda	64	3.3	Cameroon	49	-9.1
Colombia	75	11.8	Georgia	64	-0.4	Gambia	49	-20.4
Kazakhstan	75	19.0	Lesotho	64	15.8	Mauritania	49	3.1
United States of America	75	-2.9	Belize	64	15.5	Tunisia	49	-4.1
United Kingdom	75	6.4	Mozambique	64		Guatemala	49	5.0
Uruguay	75	9.2	Switzerland	63	-0.4	Guinea-Bissau	48	2.9
Slovakia	74	0.5	Brunei Darussalam	63	15.5	Oman	48	14.2
Bulgaria	74	1.5	Chile	62	6.1	Malawi	48	-22.5
Moldova	74	2.1	Maldives	62	-8.7	Lebanon	47	2.2
Ukraine	74	6.7	Azerbaijan	62	0.2	Saudi Arabia	47	13.2
Estonia	74	1.2	Burundi	62	2.2	Jordan	47	0.2
Croatia	74	7.1	Luxembourg	61	3.1	Sao Tome and Principe	47	
Belgium	73	10.1	Jamaica	61	-8.5	Niger	47	1.3
Austria	73	4.6	Japan	61	2.8	Bahrain	46	-1.0
France	73	15.0	Madagascar	61	-4.1	West Bank and Gaza	46	-2.6
Israel	73	9.2	Guyana	61	6.0	Djibouti	46	
Portugal	72	4.3	St Vincent and Grenadines	61		Turkey	46	-8.6
Hong Kong	72	2.1	Cambodia	60	-1.3	Equatorial Guinea	45	9.2
Romania	72	4.1	Mauritius	60	16.8	Eritrea	45	-26.1
Argentina	72	22.7	Mexico	60	2.6	Nepal	44	3.3
Kyrgyzstan	71	12.2	Kenya	59	-5.2	Morocco	43	
Poland	71	-2.3	Malta	59	25.3	Congo, Rep.	43	-3.5
Vietnam	71	7.7	Ghana	58	-6.4	Nigeria	43	-18.0
Panama	71	14.3	Tanzania	58		Central African Republic	42	-12.2
Slovenia	71	0.9	Malaysia	58	-7.9	Pakistan	42	-0.3
Ecuador	71	22.3	Zimbabwe	57	-3.4	Sudan	41	-11.5
Hungary	71	2.7	Uzbekistan	57	-10.2	Sierra Leone	41	-3.1
Namibia	71	3.2	Suriname	56	-11.1	Benin	41	-16.7
St Lucia	71		Vanuatu	56		Chad	41	-13.0
Mongolia	70	9.0	Albania	56	-8.1	India	40	-8.8
Ireland	70	10.2	Zambia	55	-2.4	Egypt	40	-20.0
South Africa	70	4.3	Timor-Leste	55		Togo	39	-5.5
Thailand	70	0.3	Senegal	55	-2.1	Côte d'Ivoire	37	-7.1
Trinidad and Tobago	70	2.5	Korea, Rep.	54	-4.5	Yemen	29	1.8
Cuba	70	6.4	Iran	54	18.6			
Brazil	69	10.5	Sri Lanka	53	-13.1			

STATUS OF RATIFICATIONS OF FUNDAMENTAL ILO CONVENTIONS

Up to July 2008

C87: Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948.

C98: Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949.

C100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951.

C105: Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957.

C111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958.

C138: Minimum Age Convention, 1973.

C182: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999.

Countries that have ratified all these conventions:

Albania; Algeria; Angola; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Armenia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Bahamas; Barbados; Belarus; Belgium; Belize; Benin; Bolivia; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Botswana; Bulgaria; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cambodia; Cameroon; Central African

Republic; Chad; Chile; Colombia; Comoros; Congo, DR; Congo, Rep.; Costa Rica; Côte d'Ivoire; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Djibouti; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Egypt; El Salvador; Equatorial Guinea; Estonia; Ethiopia; Fiji; Finland; France; Gambia; Georgia; Germany; Greece; Grenada; Guatemala; Guinea; Guyana; Honduras; Hungary; Iceland; Indonesia; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Jamaica; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Lesotho; Libya; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Macedonia; Madagascar; Malawi; Mali; Malta; Mauritania; Mauritius; Moldova; Mongolia; Montenegro; Mozambique; Netherlands; Nicaragua; Niger; Nigeria; Norway; Pakistan; Panama; Papua New Guinea; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russian Federation; Rwanda; San Marino; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Serbia; Seychelles; Slovakia; Slovenia; South Africa; Spain; Sri Lanka; St Kitts and Nevis; St Vincent and Grenadines; Swaziland; Sweden; Switzerland; Syria; Tajikistan; Tanzania; Togo; Trinidad and Tobago; Tunisia; Turkey; Uganda; Ukraine; United Kingdom; Uruguay; Venezuela; Yemen; Zambia; Zimbabwe.

	FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING		ELIMINATION OF FORCED AND COMPULSORY LABOUR	ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION IN RESPECT OF EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATION			ABOLITION OF CHILD LABOUR		FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING		ELIMINATION OF FORCED AND COMPULSORY LABOUR	ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION IN RESPECT OF EMPLOYMENT AND OCCUPATION			ABOLITION OF CHILD LABOUR
	C 87	C 98		C 100	C 111	C 138			C 182	C 87		C 98	C 105	C 100	
Afghanistan	□	□	■	■	■	□	□	Liberia	■	■	■	□	■	□	■
Australia	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	Malaysia	□	■	●	■	□	■	■
Bahrain	□	□	■	□	■	□	■	Mexico	■	□	■	■	■	□	■
Bangladesh	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	Morocco	□	■	■	■	■	■	■
Brazil	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	Namibia	■	■	■	□	■	■	■
Burma/Myanmar	■	□	□	□	□	□	□	Nepal	□	■	■	■	■	■	■
Canada	■	□	■	■	■	□	■	New Zealand	□	■	■	■	■	□	■
Cape Verde	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	Oman	□	□	■	□	□	■	■
China	□	□	□	■	■	■	■	Qatar	□	□	■	□	■	■	■
Cuba	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	Samoa	■	■	■	■	■	□	■
Eritrea	■	■	■	■	■	■	□	Saudi Arabia	□	□	■	■	■	□	■
Gabon	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	Sierra Leone	■	■	■	■	■	□	□
Ghana	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	Singapore	□	■	●	■	□	■	■
Guinea-Bissau	□	■	■	■	■	□	□	Solomon Islands	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Haiti	■	■	■	■	■	□	■	Somalia	□	□	■	□	■	□	□
India	□	□	■	■	■	□	□	St Lucia	■	■	■	■	■	□	■
Iran	□	□	■	■	■	□	■	Sudan	□	■	■	■	■	■	■
Iraq	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	Suriname	■	■	■	□	□	□	■
Japan	■	■	□	■	□	■	■	Thailand	□	□	■	■	□	■	■
Jordan	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	Timor-Leste	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Kenya	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	Turkmenistan	■	■	■	■	■	□	□
Kiribati	■	■	■	□	□	□	□	United Arab Emirates	□	□	■	■	■	■	■
Korea, Rep.	□	□	□	■	■	■	■	United States of America	□	□	■	□	□	□	■
Kuwait	■	■	■	□	■	■	■	Uzbekistan	□	■	■	■	■	□	■
Lao, PDR	□	□	□	■	■	■	■	Vanuatu	■	■	■	■	■	□	■
Lebanon	□	■	■	■	■	■	■	Vietnam	□	□	□	■	■	■	■

Source: ILOLEX. ILO website Database (www.ilo.org/).

- Convention ratified
- Convention not yet ratified
- Convention denounced

STATUS OF RATIFICATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

Up to July 2008

A: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), 1966. Entry into force: 3 January 1976.
B: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), 1966. Entry into force: 23 March 1976.
C: International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), 1965. Entry into force: 4 January 1969.
D: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979. Entry into force: 3 September 1981.
E: Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984. Entry into force: 26 June 1987.
F: Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989. Entry into force: 2 September 1990.
G: Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948. Entry into force: 12 January 1951.
H: Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951. Entry into force: 22 April 1954.
I: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (MWC), 1990. Entry into force: 1 July 2003.

	UN Member since	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I		UN Member since	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	
Afghanistan	1946	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Croatia	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Albania	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Cuba	1945	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Algeria	1962	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Cyprus	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Andorra	1993		●	●	●	●	●	●				Czech Republic	1993	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Angola	1976	●	●		●		●		●			Denmark	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Antigua and Barbuda	1981			●	●	●	●	●	●			Djibouti	1977	●	●	○	●	●	●		●	
Argentina	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Dominica	1978	●	●		●		●		●	
Armenia	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Dominican Republic	1945	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	●	
Australia	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Ecuador	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Austria	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Egypt	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Azerbaijan	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		El Salvador	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bahamas	1973			●	●		●	●	●			Equatorial Guinea	1968	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
Bahrain	1971	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Eritrea	1993	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Bangladesh	1974	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		○		Estonia	1991	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Barbados	1966	●	●	●	●		●	●				Ethiopia	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Belarus	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Fiji	1970			●	●		●	●	●	
Belgium	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Finland	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Belize	1981	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		France	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Benin	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	○		Gabon	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Bhutan	1971			○	●		●					Gambia	1965	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	
Bolivia	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Georgia	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Germany	1973	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Botswana	1966		●	●	●	●	●		●			Ghana	1957	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Brazil	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Greece	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Brunei Darussalam	1984				●		●					Grenada	1974	●	●	○	●		●			
Bulgaria	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Guatemala	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Burkina Faso	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Guinea	1958	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Burma/Myanmar	1948				●		●	●				Guinea-Bissau	1974	●	○	○	●	○	●		●	○
Burundi	1962	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Guyana	1966	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		○
Cambodia	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○		Haiti	1945		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Cameroon	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		Holly See			●		●	●	●	●		
Canada	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Honduras	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cape Verde	1975	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		Hungary	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Central African Republic	1960	●	●	●	●		●		●			Iceland	1946	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Chad	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●		●			India	1945	●	●	●	●	○	●	●		
Chile	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Indonesia	1950	●	●	●	●	●	●			○
China	1945	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Iran	1945	●	●	●			●	●	●	
Colombia	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Iraq	1945	●	●	●	●		●	●		
Comoros	1975			●	●	○	●	●		○		Ireland	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Congo, DR	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Israel	1949	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Congo, Rep.	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●		●			Italy	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Cook Islands					●		●					Jamaica	1962	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	
Costa Rica	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Japan	1956	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
Côte d'Ivoire	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Jordan	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	

	UN Member since	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I		UN Member since	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I			
Kazakhstan	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Qatar	1971			●		●	●						
Kenya	1963	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Romania	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Kiribati	1999				●		●				Russian Federation	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Korea, DPR	1991	●	●		●		●	●			Rwanda	1962	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●		
Korea, Rep.	1991	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Samoa	1976		●		●		●		●		●		
Kuwait	1963	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			San Marino	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●						
Kyrgyzstan	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Sao Tome and Principe	1975	○	○	○	●	○	●			●	○		
Lao, PDR	1955	●	○	●	●		●	●			Saud Arabia	1945			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Latvia	1991	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Senegal	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Lebanon	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			Serbia	2000	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	
Lesotho	1966	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Seychelles	1976	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Liberia	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	Sierra Leone	1961	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	
Libya	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	Singapore	1965				●		●	●	●				
Liechtenstein	1990	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Slovakia	1993	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Lithuania	1991	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Slovenia	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Luxembourg	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Solomon Islands	1978	●		●	●		●		●		●		
Macedonia	1993	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Somalia	1960	●	●	●		●	○			●			
Madagascar	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			South Africa	1945	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Malawi	1964	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		Spain	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Malaysia	1957				●		●	●			Sri Lanka	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Maldives	1965	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			St Kitts and Nevis	1983			●	●		●			●	●		
Mali	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	St Lucia	1979			●	●		●						
Malta	1964	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		St Vincent and Grenadines	1980	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Marshall Islands	1991				●		●				Sudan	1956	●	●	●		○	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Mauritania	1961	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	Suriname	1975	●	●	●	●		●			●		●	
Mauritius	1968	●	●	●	●	●	●				Swaziland	1968	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Mexico	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Sweden	1946	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Micronesia	1991				●		●				Switzerland	2002	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Moldova	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Syria	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Monaco	1993	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Tajikistan	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mongolia	1961	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			Tanzania	1961	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
Montenegro	2006	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	Thailand	1946	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Morocco	1956	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Timor-Leste	2002	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mozambique	1975		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Togo	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Namibia	1990	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Tonga	1999			●			●	●			●	●	
Nauru	1999		○	○		○	●				Trinidad and Tobago	1962	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Nepal	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			Tunisia	1956	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Netherlands	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Turkey	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
New Zealand	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Turkmenistan	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Nicaragua	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Tuvalu	2000				●		●			●	●		
Niger	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		Uganda	1962	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nigeria	1960	●	●	●	●	●	●		●		Ukraine	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Norway	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		United Arab Emirates	1971			●	●		●	●			●	●	
Oman	1971			●	●		●				United Kingdom	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pakistan	1947	●	○	●	●	○	●	●			United States of America	1945	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
Palau	1994						●				Uruguay	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panama	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Uzbekistan	1992	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Papua New Guinea	1975	●	●	●	●		●	●			Vanuatu	1981		○		●		●						
Paraguay	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	Venezuela	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Peru	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Vietnam	1977	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	
Philippines	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yemen	1947	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Poland	1945	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Zambia	1964	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Portugal	1955	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		Zimbabwe	1980	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Source: Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (www2.ohchr.org).

- Ratification, accession, approval, notification or succession, acceptance, consent to be bound or definitive signature.
- Signature not yet followed by ratification.

Waking up to the true story of tax

Nicholas Shaxson
John Christensen
Tax Justice Network

In November and December 2008 heads of State and of government from around the world will attend a United Nations-sponsored conference in Doha, Qatar, to discuss financing for development. Tax is the big new issue. Powerful financial interests, notably from Britain and the United States, are lobbying against reforms in international taxation. Non-governmental organizations and individuals concerned with poverty around the world must engage fast, and decisively, to help ensure success.

Historical background

Near the end of the Second World War the economists John Maynard Keynes from Britain and Harry Dexter White from the United States sketched how the world's financial architecture would emerge from the ashes of conflict. Their work led to the Bretton Woods agreements in July 1944, and the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Keynes and White were especially worried about capital flight out of Europe: if wealth was drained out of these countries, it would further destabilize the shattered European nations and possibly turn them towards the Soviet bloc. They knew well how difficult it would be to control capital flows across national borders, and they addressed this with a further proposal: transparency. They wanted the governments of countries receiving flight capital (such as the United States) to share information automatically with those European (and other) governments suffering the capital flight, so that the sending countries could "see" the wealth their citizens had sent abroad. This would not only allow weak countries to tax their citizens' income appropriately, but it would also remove one of the great incentives for capital flight. Secrecy lets wealthy citizens and corporations shift their wealth outside the reach of taxation and escape their responsibilities to the democratic societies from which their wealth is derived.

The US financial community lobbied hard against transparency, and in the final IMF Articles of Agreement, Keynes' and White's proposals were watered down. International co-operation between countries was now no longer "required", but merely "permitted". The impact of this successful lobbying went far beyond Europe, and it has since had

nothing less than catastrophic consequences for ordinary people around the world, both in rich and poor countries.

Today very few countries benefit from information exchange treaties, and the limited number that do exchange information do it only "on request". The World Bank reports that USD 1-1.6 *trillion* of illicit money crosses borders each year, about *half* (USD 500-800 billion) from developing and transitional economies. That compares to just USD 100 billion in foreign aid provided annually by all the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries to the world's poorest nations. Secrecy and low (or zero) taxes are the central incentives prompting illicit capital flows. International transparency in cross-border financial flows is clearly one of the most important global issues of our time. It is remarkable that the international development community has paid so little attention to these issues for so long.

If secrecy were removed, and capital taxed properly, it would transform the economies and public finances of developing (and rich) nations, and go a long way towards preventing elites from enriching themselves at the expense of ordinary citizens.

The road to Doha

There are currently no global, multilateral agreements or bodies that let developing countries know what income their residents' overseas assets earn in places like the United States, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Singapore or anywhere else, and that help them recover the taxes owed on that income.

The Doha conference from 29 November to 2 December 2008 (not to be confused with the Doha negotiations for a global trade deal under the auspices of the World Trade Organization) has the potential to lay the groundwork for putting right what Keynes and White were prevented from achieving – notably automatic exchange of tax and other information between countries, on a global, multilateral basis.

This is certainly not impossible: such a scheme already exists on a regional level within Europe: countries within the EU scheme automatically exchange information between each other regarding the incomes of each others' residents, allowing proper taxes to be paid.

Country-by-country reporting is necessary since international regulations and accounting standards currently do not require multinationals to break down and publish their payments, profits and taxes for each jurisdiction they operate. Instead, they are allowed to scoop up data from

several countries and put them into one number reflecting, say, a region ("Africa", for example). This makes it impossible for outsiders – be it individuals wishing to hold their rulers accountable for secretive payments from multinationals, or national tax authorities wanting to know if they are being cheated – to unpick the data for each country. We need rules that make multinationals publish this data automatically.

We can no longer focus so strongly on aid, without bringing tax into the core of the debate. Aid provides benefits, but perhaps its biggest drawback is that it makes governments and other recipients accountable to (and dependent on) donors, not citizens. ■

The EU's legal and financial structure: implications for basic human rights

Mirjam van Reisen

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The objective of the European Commission's development policy is poverty eradication. Since 1992, respect for democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law have been included as essential elements in all agreements with third countries or regional groupings. At the same time, the global trend towards liberalisation and deregulation, which is also at the centre of the Union's development cooperation, is not evaluated in terms of its impact on poverty eradication. This results in aid to social sectors and basic human rights – such as education, health and women's empowerment – being neglected and underfunded.

There is a lack of consistency between the approach used and the stated objective: with its focus on the promotion of European competitiveness abroad, the European Union (EU) is using aid to support a trend towards liberalisation and deregulation. This may be at the root of negative trends in poverty: recent reports show that despite high economic growth in most of the 49 Least Developed Countries, the number of people living in poverty is increasing.

The budget, the priorities and the instruments used by the EU for its development assistance all have an impact on the promotion of human rights – directly or indirectly. When assessing the EC's different budget instruments, it becomes apparent that they fail to promote basic human rights in a number of areas.

The EC currently manages around one fifth of the EU's Official Development Assistance (ODA). At present, three main legal instruments provide the basis for the EU's funding of its cooperation with developing countries: the European Development Fund (EDF), the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

The EDF constitutes the principal funding instrument for the EU's development cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. It provides the resources for the Cotonou Agreement and covers development cooperation, political dia-

logue and trade. The EDF is not part of the EU's regular budget and is financed separately by direct payments from the EU's Member States. For the period 2008-2013, the 10th EDF amounts to approximately EUR 22.6 billion.

The ENPI is the financial instrument for countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP is responsible for the EU's cooperation with neighbouring countries to the south and east.

The DCI, created in 2006, covers developing countries not included in the other two instruments – principally countries in Asia and Latin America. The DCI also covers the financing of a set of thematic programmes applicable to developing countries in all parts of the world.

One of the key objectives in the establishment of the DCI in 2007 was to implant the EU's development policy as the principal policy framework for the EU's cooperation with all developing countries. The provisions of the Union's Treaties set out the broad objectives for this policy, the principal being the eradication of poverty. Addressing gender inequality is stated to be fundamental to achieving this objective. An emphasis is also given to prioritising investment in the provision of social services as a fundamental basis for development. This was underlined with the inclusion of a requirement for at least 20% of the EC's aid to be used for this purpose. Over the period 2007-2013 approximately EUR 16.9 billion will be disbursed under the DCI.

The Treaty of Lisbon: the way forward

When, as part of the preparations for the current financial perspectives, the legal instruments governing the use of the EU's funding were revised, significant moves were made towards ensuring that the EU's development cooperation was implemented as part of a global development policy.

NGOs that have followed the initiatives to amend the EU Treaties since the Council's 2002 launch of the process that ended up in the Lisbon Treaty have consistently argued that the EU's development policy and its objectives should define the framework for the EU's relations with all developing countries (as defined by the OECD/DAC), without any regional discrimination.

The EU's development policy has become central to the regulations covering the use of EU development funds in Asia and Latin America in particular, and to a lesser extent in countries of the southern Mediterranean, southern Caucasus and Eastern

Europe covered by the ENP. As a result, there has been an increased consistency in the implementation of EU development policy towards all parts of the developing world.

To advance on the provisions in the new Treaty – which still needs to be ratified – it is seen as vital that the EDF should also be brought within the framework of the EU's overall budget. This will allow for proper democratic scrutiny, and will ensure a policy focused on poverty eradication without regional discrimination. In its role as one of the co-legislators for establishing the revised legal instruments, the European Parliament (EP) ensures that the funds provided through the DCI must finance legitimate development activities. The EP's powers should be extended to cover the ACP regions, to ensure full democratic scrutiny and the identification of any gaps in the EU's promotion of the right not to live in poverty. ■

¹ The authors are grateful to Ann-Charlotte Sallmann for her collaboration.

Liberalization curtails social and economic rights in the Arab region

Kinda Mohamadieh¹
Arab NGO Network for Development

The Arab region has been trying to cope with the rules of global governance, currently moulded by economic globalization and the trade liberalization model. Arab countries face the dilemma of responding either to economic and social rights or to political and civil rights, disregarding the fact that both sets of rights are entangled. Furthermore, while the sponsors of liberalization argue that freer trade leads to democratization, the opposite is happening in this region: liberalization thwarts democracy.

Both the contemporary global economic architecture and the global governance frameworks have significantly influenced social and economic policymaking processes and institution building in the Arab region. The region combines a strong state role, dominating political spheres and limiting the space for civil society, with a relatively weak role of the small and medium private sector and an intensifying economic reform process – led according to the dominant global economic approaches and recipes.

The economic reforms and policy approaches that Arab countries are currently adopting do not provide for increased political choices; on the contrary, they increase political tensions and misrepresentation: they enhance procedural rather than substantive democracy. In fact, the citizens of several Arab countries have been living under emergency law for decades; other states still violate human rights on a daily basis. Contrary to the alleged defence of democracy advocated by foreign players, in reality they seem to favour authoritarian rule in the region in order to have the aggressive neoliberal agenda of changes implemented, while marginalizing the rights of the people. This, in turn, seems to validate the theory asserting that authoritarian governments are more capable of initiating and sustaining major economic reforms.²

The region lacks clear and transparent national socio-economic reform agendas. Often, the political challenges are used as excuses to marshal laws interrupting the national political processes. The regimes in power have failed to address the pressing socio-economic problems that the region faces and the economic reforms implemented mainly respond to requirements by major international institutions and developed partner countries that not necessarily serve the local needs and priorities.

Also, the international trade system, which came to represent the engine of current economic globalization, has been instituting new forms of legislation and relations in and among states through institutions, policies, and legal agreements developed at the multilateral, regional, and bilateral levels. These agreements reach beyond trade in goods, into areas that have a direct impact on peoples' rights, living standards and cultural norms. These accords are boosting the role of markets and profit-oriented policies in shaping the world and the way people live. Accordingly, as they bring about new power systems, they require new spaces for democratic participation, both at the national and global level.

Arab governments are being tied to a set of global rules that often violate human rights, pressed forward by institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), multilateral and bilateral free trade agreements, and international financial institutions. Today, the region sees development paralyzed. The socio-economic crisis includes lack of growth, unemployment, imbalance among productive sectors, and deteriorated indices of income and wealth distribution. The economic structures suffer from low productivity, lack of diversity, and scarcity of investments in productive sectors. The situation is further aggravated by the unbalanced distribution of wealth among the region's countries: some are among the richest countries of the world (such as the United Arab Emirates) and some (Somalia, for instance) among the poorest.

The Alexandria Declaration

The Alexandria Declaration, one of the leading declarations on reform in the region, and the only comprehensive civil society initiative for reform, resulted from the conference of Arab civil society held in Alexandria, Egypt, in March 2004. The Declaration asserts that key aspects for any reform process to be undertaken in the region are not being taken into account, such as the controversies regarding the orientation of the economic system, the new defini-

tion of role of the State, the relationship between the State and the market and the social dimensions of development.

As stressed in the Declaration, there is a necessity to address poverty in its comprehensive and multiple dimensions, including social and political marginalization, lack of participation, and constrained opportunities for upward mobility. The signatories of the declaration believe that economic growth alone is not a sufficient instrument for poverty reduction. Therefore, they call for the adoption of a closer implementation timeframe to fight poverty in conformity with the United Nations' Millennium Declaration.

In addition, employment represents a major problem. The declaration proposes enhancing the development of medium and small enterprises funding programmes, empowering women to participate in the national work force, and reviewing the current economic policies from a full-employment perspective. Creating jobs and reducing unemployment remains the main development challenge the region faces. The unemployment rate has been increasing since the mid 1980s, and now averages over 15% of the labour force, by official figures. Actual unemployment is probably much higher.

For that reason, it is imperative to review the economic and social policies in the region and its inter-relation with political and civil rights and well-being. Arab civil society and private (business) sector institutions can make significant contributions to the economic reform. These contributions must be achieved through participation in priority setting and by working in implementation hand in hand with governments. ■

1 Kinda Mohamadieh is Programme Manager at the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND: <www.annd.org>). The paper has benefited from extensive feedback and input from ANND's Executive Director, Mr. Ziad Abdel Samad.

2 Milner, Helen and Kubota, Keiko (2005). "Why the Move to Free Trade? Democracy and Trade Policy in the Developing Countries" in *International Organization*, Vol. 59, issue 01.

Social Watch: promoting accountability

Social Watch, a network that today has members in over 60 countries around the world, was created in 1995 as a “meeting place for non-governmental organizations concerned with social development and gender discrimination” responding to the need to promote the political will required for making the United Nations promises come true. Since then, this network, which is continually growing both qualitatively and quantitatively, has published 13 yearly reports on progress and setbacks in the struggle against poverty and for gender equality, which have been used as tools for advocacy on a local, regional, and international level.

From its number 0, published in 1996, to this present issue, the 13th, the *Social Watch Report* has brought into light more than 550 reports from civil society organizations, all of them sharing the aim of reminding governments of their commitments and tracking their implementation, both country by country and at the international level.

The present issue, featuring contributions from 59 national organizations - a record figure so far - sustains the flame that brought the network into existence in 1995: the need to generate tools and strategies to rectify the lack of accountability mechanisms and ensure compliance with international commitments related to social policies and development goals.

In the decade Social Watch was created, a series of high-level United Nations conferences, starting with the ‘Children’s Summit’ in 1990 and ending with the Millennium Summit in 2000, redefined the global social agenda. In 1995, the Social Summit (Copenhagen) and the Women’s Conference (Beijing) defined, for the first time, the eradication of poverty and gender equality as common universal objectives, setting concrete targets and timelines to achieve the goal vaguely formulated in 1946 in the UN Charter as “dignity for all”. To promote the political will needed for those promises to become a reality, the Social Watch network was created as a “meeting place for non-governmental organizations concerned with

social development and gender discrimination” (*Social Watch No. 0*, 1996), by a group of civil society organizations.

Thus, the *Social Watch Report* was formulated as a powerful tool for the presentation of internationally available statistical information and for reporting on qualitative aspects of the issues addressed through analyses by social organizations working at a national level. A yearly publication, the Report is devoted to progress and setbacks in the struggle against poverty and for gender equality, two largely overlapping objectives, since the absolute majority of the persons living in poverty are women.

The Social Watch yearly reports, while adding an international dimension to local efforts and campaigns, became the first sustained monitoring initiative on social development and gender equity at a national level, and the first to combine both in one international overview.

The report No. 0, published in 1996, featured contributions from 13 organizations; since then, the network has been steadily rising. Currently, Social Watch has members (‘watchers’) in over 60 countries around the world, and membership grows each year.

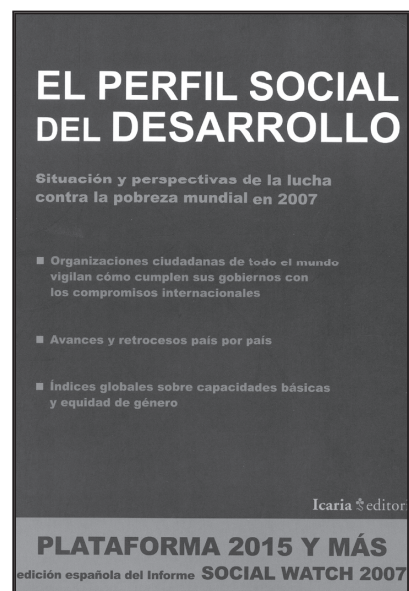
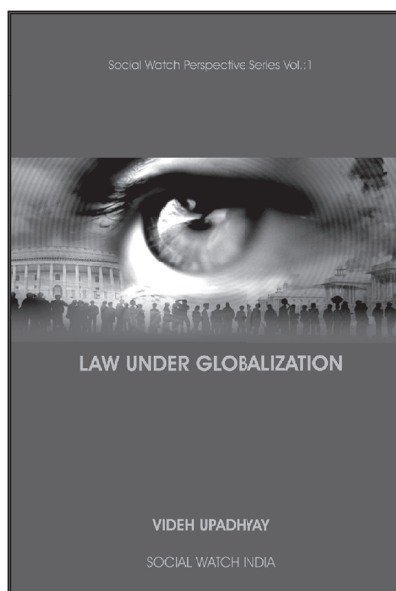
A flexible network

As the “meeting place” has grown, several aspects of it have evolved, but the founding ideas and objectives remain. In preparing for their participation in the Co-

penhagen Social Summit, civil society organizations adopted flexible and ad hoc ways of organizing as a network. No formal governing structure or steering committee was created and no stable coordinating group was established. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) preferred to inform each other and coordinate activities in horizontal open spaces, an approach that some analysts regard as a forerunner of the organizational format later adopted by the World Social Forum. Many of the NGOs that took part in the Social Summit later formed the backbone of Social Watch. As a result, the structure and functioning of the network preserves much of original flexibility and openness.

In addition to national coalitions, the network is structured around three bodies: the General Assembly, the Coordinating Committee and the International Secretariat. In recent years, some regional and sub-regional coordination structures were established as a space for articulation – not as a necessary intermediate body to link the national with the global.

The Social Watch network is not an incorporated entity and it did not start by drafting its governing bylaws. Instead, a short Memorandum of Understanding between national groups and the network became the basic framework establishing mutual expectations, respecting both the autonomy of national coalitions and democratic horizontal



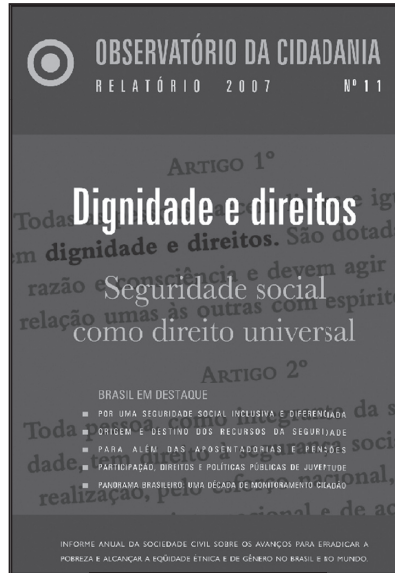
decision-making. A key principle that distinguishes Social Watch from other international civil society networks is that no central body provides funds for its members. These operational principles help avoid the tensions associated with donor/recipient relationships within the network – since there aren't any – and also the loss of energy that could result from lengthy discussions about money, budgeting and reporting, as well as procedural matters. It has also resulted in members' strong sense of tenure over the network.

National coalitions organize the way they want – or can – according to the conditions in each country. The membership of Social Watch coalitions is very diverse, including research institutes or centres, NGOs, grassroots organizations, trade unions, women's groups, rural organizations and others. Since the international Social Watch report can only devote a couple of pages to each country and is only available in English and Spanish, the local coalitions publish more extensive national reports in national languages in Benin, Brazil, Germany, India, Italy, the Philippines, and the Arab region.

General Assembly

The General Assembly is the Social Watch network's highest directive body. Policy discussion and medium- to long-term strategic planning happens in its realm, which serves as a decision-making forum. However, it is also a space for reinforcing the sense of belonging and strengthening the network's identity and unity. It takes place every three years and up to now has been held three times: in Rome 2000, Beirut 2003 and Sofia 2006.¹ In addition to setting medium- and long-term priorities and identifying potential alliances in advocacy strategy, the Assembly elects members of the Coordinating Committee to whom coordination and political leadership between assemblies are delegated.

¹ Final reports, working papers and other materials from these three Assemblies available at: <www.socialwatch.org>

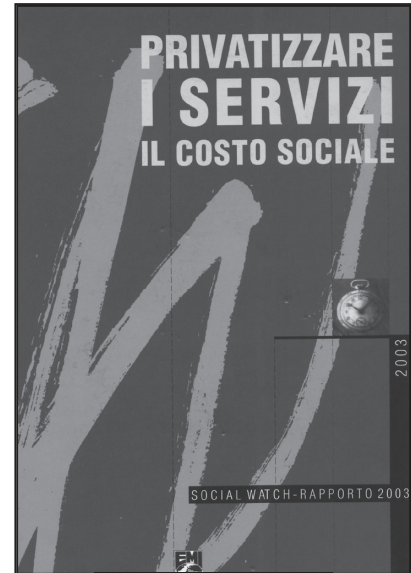


Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee (CC) is the key political body for the 'daily' work of the network, with an organizational structure which requires fluid communications, facilitated principally through an email list, plus biannual face-to-face meetings and regular telephone conferences to discuss specific issues.

As the CC's task is to "ensure the political visibility and participation of the network in relevant spaces and processes,"² its composition endeavours to represent a geographical and gender balance, as well as considering the contribution, in terms of experience and capabilities, that members can provide to the whole network. In general, the CC's decisions are adopted by consensus, and every

² The document describing the nature and mandate of the Coordinating Committee was agreed at the 2nd General Assembly, Beirut 2003. Available from: <www.socialwatch.org/en/acercaDe/beirut/documentos/SW_PrinciplesCC.doc>



single decision (and discussion) is communicated to the watchers in a timely manner. The constant participation of two Secretariat members as ad hoc members of the CC ensures coordination between the two bodies, the function of the Secretariat being to support and implement the strategic decisions made.

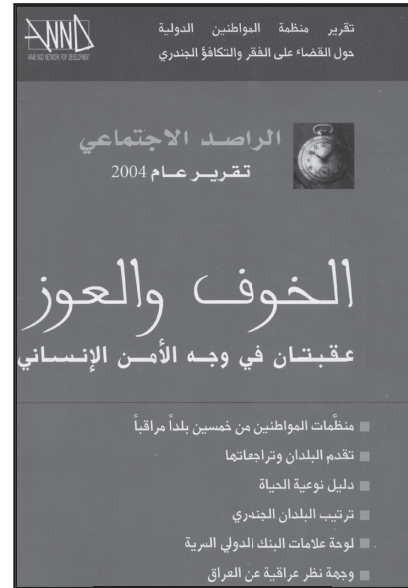
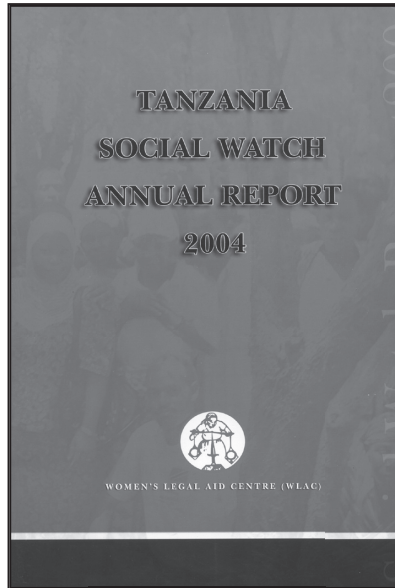
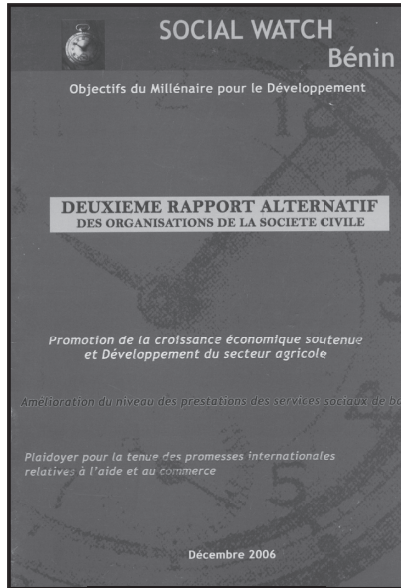
International Secretariat

The Secretariat is the main executive body of Social Watch. The first external evaluation of the network (1995-2000) noted that, "Of the various roles in the Social Watch network, that of the secretariat has changed the most" (Hessini and Nayar, 2000). Originally the Secretariat's function was limited to responsibility for the production of the Report, but due to the network's growth it has subsequently incorporated a series of new functions, including research, capacity building, promotion of the network and its representation in international forums.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN NATIONAL GROUPS AND THE SOCIAL WATCH NETWORK

- Coalitions must be based in the country and be active in social development issues in that country (not exclusively as academics or consultants).
- Their basic commitment to the international network is to provide a national report, with their own conclusions and determination of priorities, to be included in the annual publication.
- They are expected to use their national report and the global report in lobbying activities at a national level.
- They must be open to the incorporation of other organizations, work actively to broaden awareness of Social Watch and encourage the participation of other organizations.
- They are responsible for raising funds for their activities. National coalitions are not dependent for funds on, or financially accountable to, the Secretariat or any other international Social Watch entity.
- Each coalition determines its own organizational structure.
- Social Watch membership and the exercise of governmental functions are absolutely incompatible.
- Cooperation with other national platforms should be encouraged at sub-regional, regional and global levels.

NOTE: The Memorandum of Understanding was adopted during the 1st General Assembly, Rome, 2000. Available from: <www.socialwatch.org/en/acercaDe/asambleaRoma.htm>.



The local, the global and the Report

Every year Social Watch chooses to analyze a different subject in depth through its Report, usually focusing on topics under discussion on the international agenda that can be addressed from a local perspective. Experts from diverse origins and disciplines contribute alternative views on the issues through thematic articles. This international perspective is complemented with national and regional reports through which member organizations contribute a local perspective, reporting on the state of affairs in their countries in relation to each year's specific theme.

In addition, Social Watch has produced indexes and tables with comparable international information, presenting a macro-perspective of the situation related to certain dimensions of development while also providing national level readings. Social Watch has developed alternative indicators to measure progress or setbacks in gender equity and the meeting of basic human capacities, which are now used as reference points for both civil society and international institutions.

Although members use the document for advocacy work in diverse situations, Report launches are key opportunities for dissemination of its contents, taking place both in relevant spaces of international and national debate and decision-making. Launches are high-profile spaces for the local coalitions to address the media on national issues and to discuss their findings and alternative proposals with policy-makers.

Occasional Papers are published, mainly to help build the capacity of member coalitions,³ regional training workshops have been organized, and posi-

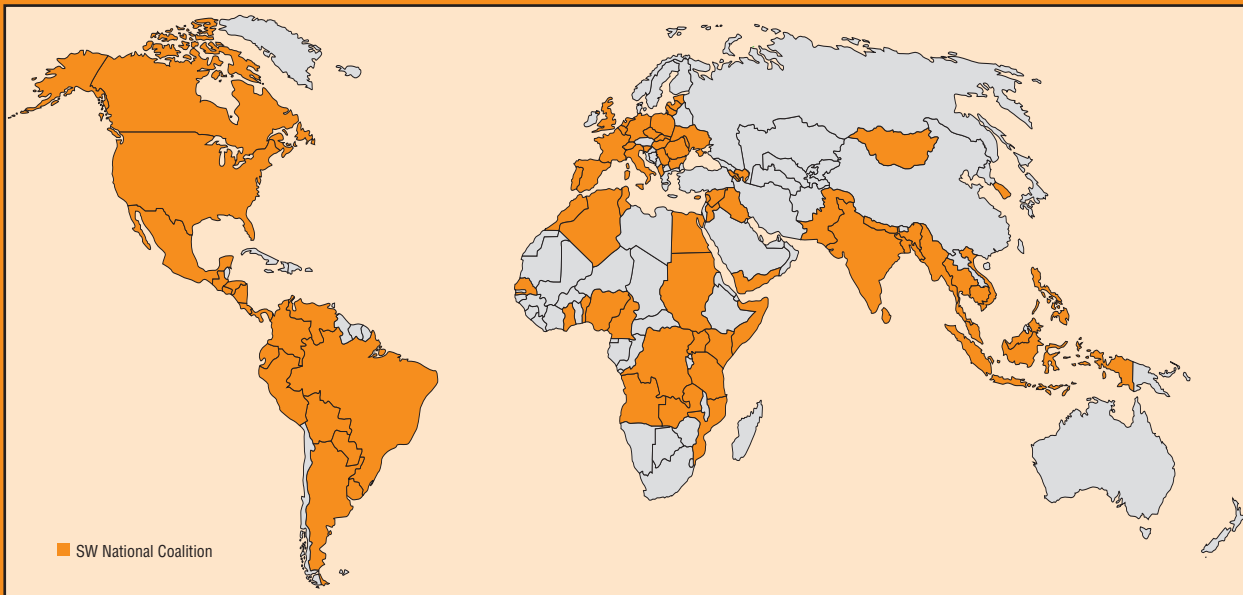
³ The first Occasional Paper by Mirjam Van Reisen, *The Lion's Teeth*, examines the political context in which Social Watch was created. The second, by Ana María Arteaga, *Control Ciudadano desde la base*, analyzes the democratization of international human rights instruments experience in Chile in 1997. The third, a compilation by Patricia Garcé and Roberto Bissio, introduces the experience of monitoring Copenhagen goals through the concrete example of Social Watch. Papers 4 and 5, coordinated by the Social Watch Social Sciences Research Team, address poverty and inequality in Latin America and the links between poverty and human rights. Occasional Papers available at: <www.socialwatch.org/en/informelmpreso/cuadernosOcasionales.htm>.

tion papers have been produced. On several occasions, Social Watch spokespersons have addressed the UN General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies on behalf of the network or wider civil society constituencies. ■

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Social Watch in the world



SOCIAL WATCH

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“It is therefore critical that all countries have a say in the process to change the international financial architecture. No equitable and sustainable solutions to transform the current system will come out of gatherings that are rapidly-prepared and exclude many developing countries as well as civil society (...) Only an inclusive international conference convened by the UN to review the international financial and monetary architecture, its institutions and its governance, can be comprehensive in scope, capable of tackling the full array of issues and institutions and transparent in its procedures. In the transition from the current system – which has fostered instability and inequity – towards a just, sustainable and accountable one, which yields benefits for the majority of the world’s people (...) human rights must be the starting point and not some distant goal in the future, and a rights-based approach to development (with gender equality, decent work and human rights at its core) must be the main guiding principle.”

Social Watch Report 2008

“Capital flight, tax evasion, fraudulent intra-firm trading and the very governance of the international financial institutions (...) form part of a package, an architecture that badly needs to be redesigned.”

Social Watch Report 2006

“As a result of their attempts to ‘beat the market,’ many prominent CEOs ended up in jail in 2002, while families that trusted them lost their retirement savings. In order for the same unrestricted and unregulated market operators not to beat the poor, both governments and corporations have to be more accountable to citizens everywhere.”

Social Watch Report 2003

“The almost total freedom given to international investors and speculators has wreaked financial and now economic and social chaos. The time has now come to regulate these big players.”

Social Watch Report 2000

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Social Watch is an international network of citizens’ organizations struggling to eradicate poverty and the causes of poverty, to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth and the realization of human rights. We are committed to social, economic and gender justice, and we emphasize the right of all people not to be poor.

Social Watch holds governments, the UN system and international organizations accountable for the fulfilment of national, regional and international commitments to eradicate poverty.