

Social Watch



PRESS RELEASE – For immediate publication

Social Watch launches 2011 Basic Capabilities Index

The virtuous few: clean and dignified

What do Costa Rica, Uruguay and Georgia (the country in the Caucasus, not the American state) have in common? They all have achieved high positions in their social indicators while keeping their emissions of climate changing carbon dioxide at less than half of the global per capita average.

A couple dozen countries perform a little better than these three in the Basic Capabilities Index published today by the watchdog organization Social Watch, on the eve of the international days on hunger and poverty. One out of four countries of the world belong to the privileged group of those where less than one in a hundred children die before their fifth anniversary, no births are unattended by specialized health personnel and all girls and boys go to school, the three indicators that combine in the index. Yet most of them emit CO₂ from their consumption of fossil fuels at rates way over the world average of four and a half tons per capita per year. Emissions are roughly double for the European Union and four times as much for North America.

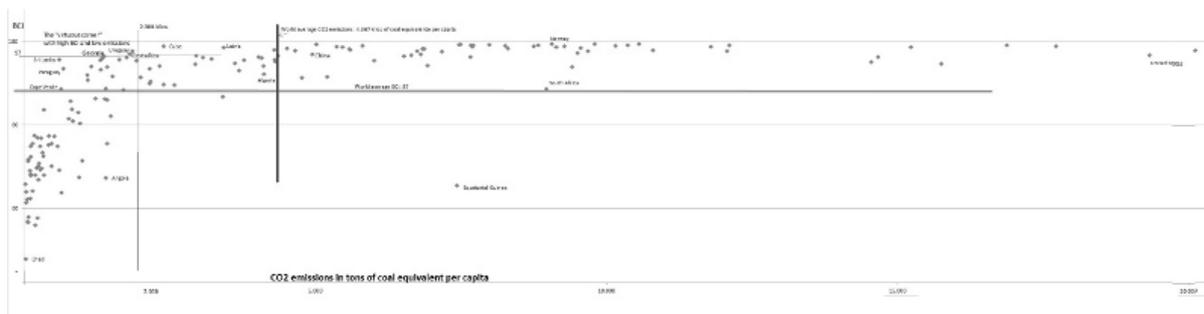
On the other end of the scale, some fifty countries survive without burning more than one ton of carbon equivalent per year, but their ranking in the social performance indicators puts them way below the minimum level of human dignity. “The fact remains that there are countries that have lowered their infant mortality to levels similar to those of the US with one tenth of the climate changing gas emissions,” said Roberto Bissio, coordinator of Social Watch. “And that means we should not believe that a better quality of life requires consumption and production patterns that destroy the environment.”

By combining in a graph the social indicators with the CO₂ emissions, Social Watch evidenced old problems under a new light: with the same level of emissions as Norway, South Africa has a set of social indicators similar to that of Indonesia, which consumes five times less fossil fuels.

“Between 1990 and 2000, the BCI improved five points (from 79 to 84), while the world per capita emissions of carbon dioxide actually decreased from 4.3 tons to 4.1,” explained Bissio. But in the first decade of the 21st century, world CO₂ emissions moved up to 4.6 tons per capita and social indicators only moved up three points. “Although the economic boom of the first decade of the century failed to boost social indicators, it did accelerate environmental destruction”, he summed up.

As an example of that trend, China doubled its CO2 emissions after 2000, reaching currently 5 tons per capita, but only progressed 2 points in the BCI scale. In the last decade of the XX century, China had moved up three points in its social indicators with less than 20% increase in carbon emissions.

Bissio recalled the statement made by the heads of State and government that met 20 years ago at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro: “The major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries (...) aggravating poverty and imbalances”. If some countries have managed to live in dignity while not suffocating the atmosphere, others can also do it. “Sustainable development and social justice are not luxuries we will have when we get rich. They are the way to living well without destroying the planet and life itself”, he concluded.



(Click over image to download) - <http://www.socialwatch.org/varios/CO2-BCIhw.gif>

More information:

The Basic Capabilities Index 2011 (in xls format):

http://www.socialwatch.org/sites/default/files/BCI_country_en.xls

The Basic Capabilities Index 2011 (in pdf format):

http://www.socialwatch.org/sites/default/files/BCI2011_eng.pdf

A lost decade in the fight against poverty: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/13749>

BCI trends, 1990 to 2011 – Slowing down: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/13754>

See the ICB in a interactive map: <http://www.socialwatch.org/sites/default/map/map>

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How the BCI is measured

All the indicators making up the BCI are expressed in percentages and they range from 0 to 100. Under-five mortality, which is usually expressed in number of deaths per thousand children born alive, is expressed as 100 minus that value. So that, for example, a value of 20 deaths per thousand becomes 2% and, when deducted from 100, yields a basic indicator value of 98. Thus, the theoretical maximum value in infant mortality is 100, which would mean that all children born alive survive until they are five years old. Reproductive health takes the maximum value of 100 when all women giving

birth are attended by skilled health personnel. Similarly, the education indicator registers 100 when all the adults know to read and to write, and all school age children are enrolled in education and they all attain five years of schooling. These three indicators are then averaged, so the total value of the index will vary between 0% and 100%.

BCI values for 2011 were computed for 167 countries where data are available, i.e. the vast majority among the 193 member states of the United Nations.

Countries with a *basic* BCI level (98 points and over) have reached a reasonable human development level and most likely have met the Millennium Development Goals way ahead the 2015 deadline. Countries with a *medium* BCI level (91 to 97 points) have achieved a certain level of momentum to address key human development concerns and have a fair chance of meeting the MDGs by 2015. Countries with a *low* BCI (81 to 90 points) are still struggling to provide basic services for their citizens and will more likely miss the MDGs by 2015.

Countries with *very low* (71 to 80 points) and *critical* (below 70) BCI levels will certainly miss MDGs. Most of these countries, particularly those in a critical situation, are experiencing severe economic difficulties, social unrest or wars. Some have just emerged from armed conflict and are still transitioning to normalize government operations and public services.

Basic Data

—Chad is ranked at the bottom of the list, in 2011, along with Sierra Leone, Niger, Somalia and Guinea Bissau. Countries with the lowest BCI values are mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Afghanistan had the lowest ranking in 2000 and the are not reliable data to make an assessment for 2011.

— Japan, Norway, Netherlands, Switzerland and Iceland are the countries holding the top positions in the NCI list according.

—The global BCI has progressed slower between 1990 and 2011 than between 1990 and 2000. In 1990, the average BCI value (population weighted) for countries with available data was 79.4. In 2000, BCI increased by 4.9 points to 84.3. BCI further increased to 87.1 by 2011, an increment of 2.8 points, lower than the improvement posted in the previous decade.

—Between 1990 and 2011, more countries have achieved basic and medium BCI levels. During the same period, the number of countries with critical BCI level has decreased from 42 in 1990 to only 28 by 2011. Some of these countries advanced to the next level while a few have actually moved two levels higher.

—The number of countries with medium BCI levels increased from 44 in 1990 to 52 in 2011. Countries that have scaled up their BCI levels from low/very low to medium include the following: Algeria, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia (Middle East and North Africa); Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Maldives and Vietnam (Asia); and Belize, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Suriname (Latin America). El Salvador registered the highest increase in BCI in this group accounting for a 17 point increase between 1990 and 2011. In contrast, countries such as Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Thailand have moved down from basic BCI to medium level.

— Nineteen countries registered low BCI levels in 2011. Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua (in Latin America), and Cape Verde, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland (Sub-Saharan Africa region), among others, improved their standing from very low/critical BCI level to low. Within this group of countries that registered low BCI levels, Bhutan in South Asia recorded the highest increase of 28 points, climbing up from critical to low BCI level.

— The number of countries in the critical BCI list has declined to 28 in 2011. Countries that moved up from their previous critical BCI levels include Cameroon, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Togo (in Sub-Saharan Africa); Guatemala (Latin America); Djibouti, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen (Middle East and North Africa); Laos and Myanmar (East Asia); and Bhutan and India (South Asia).

— Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where progress in social indicators has accelerated since 2000. In Latin America, East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, the improvement in BCI slowed down during the period 2000 to 2011, compared to the previous decade.