

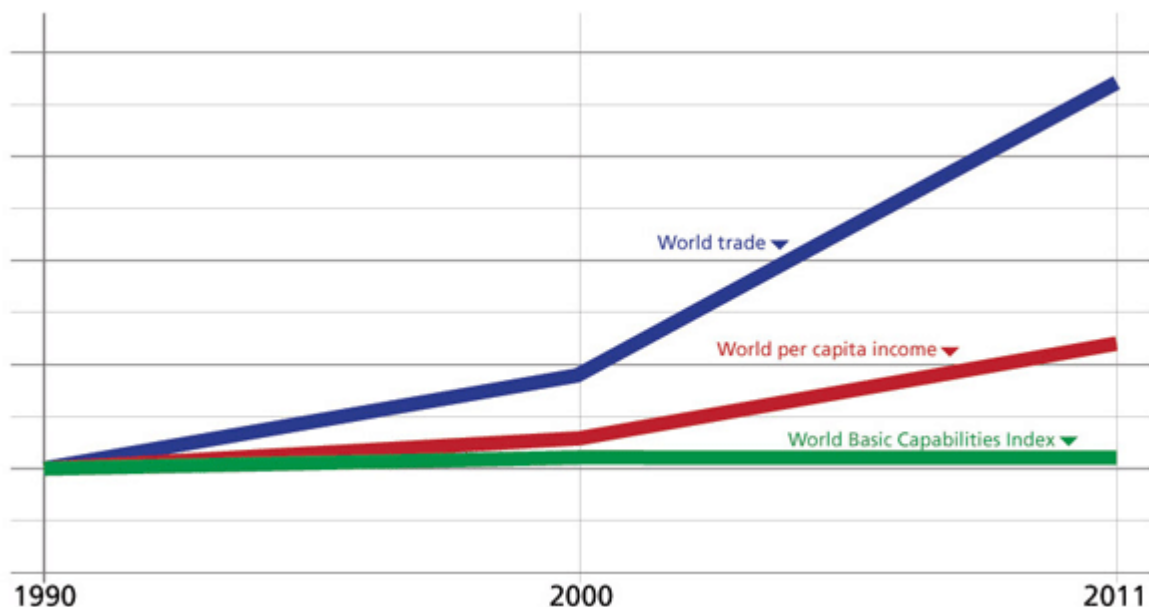
Social Watch



PRESS RELEASE – For immediate publication

Social Watch launches 2011 Basic Capabilities Index

The boom and the busted



“The hard numbers have proved that prosperity does not trickle down,” said Roberto Bissio, coordinator of Social Watch, at the launch of the Basic Capabilities Index computed by this non-governmental watchdog organization. “It used to be common sense that a growing economy benefits the poor, that a rising tide will lift all boats, big or small, or that the pie has to grow first before we can share it,” he added, but the figures published by Social Watch on the eve of the international days on hunger and poverty seem to show the opposite.

Progress on education, health and nutrition was slower after the year 2000, when global economies were booming than in the previous decade. “And now the most vulnerable people and countries will suffer disproportionately from global economic stagnation,” Bissio explained at the launch of the index in the Netherlands. The Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) is a composite measurement developed by Social Watch to assess poverty according to social performance, without using income as a yardstick.

The average world per capita income more than doubled between 1990 and 2011 and the World Bank claims that the percentage of persons living with under one dollar per day (or \$1.25 when adjusted for inflation) was cut to half between 1980 and 2005. But the basic indicators of child mortality, attended births and primary education measured by the BCI showed slower progress during the prosperity that followed the year 2000 than in the previous decade.

Since social indicators are gathered and published much later than the economic numbers, the BCI 2011 does not assess yet the whole impact of the economic and financial crisis that started in 2008. Yet, Social Watch member organizations are reporting that austerity measures being put in place as a response to the crisis are affecting disproportionately the most vulnerable sectors.

“Economic inequality explains why the gains are appropriated by a few during the boom,” says Bissio, “and the concentration of power that results from this inequity ensures that the losses are socialized during the crisis, thus widening the gap even more.”

The countries holding the top positions in the list according to BCI values this year are Japan, Norway, Netherlands, Switzerland and Iceland. The countries that rank worse in the BCI 2011 are all African: Chad, Sierra Leone, Niger, Somalia and Guinea Bissau. In 2000 the worse positioned was Afghanistan but due to lack of reliable data no ranking is provided for this worn-torn country this year.

By region, the figures for Latin America, East Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, show a significant slowing down when comparing the first decade of the 21st century to the previous one. Only marginal change has been registered for Europe and North America, but the index in those regions is already very close to the theoretical maximum of 100 per cent.

On a positive note, Sub-Saharan Africa, departing from very low levels, registered slightly higher increments in BCI levels in the period 2000-2011 compared to the previous decade.

Between 1990 and 2011, the number of countries with a BCI level considered “critical” decreased from 42 to 28. Benin, 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) have moved up from “critical” to “very low”.

The number of countries with medium BCI levels increased from 44 in 1990 to 52 in 2011. Countries that have moved one level higher are, among others: Algeria, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia (Middle East and North Africa); Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Maldives and Vietnam (Central, South and East 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: 17 points during this period. 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 (in Sub-Saharan Africa), among others, improved their standing from very low/critical to low BCI level. Within this group of countries with low BCI levels, Bhutan in South Asia recorded the highest increase of 28 points, climbing up from critical to low BCI level.

BCI is based on key capabilities that are essential for survival and human dignity. It is made up of basic indicators that are used to measure the United Nations Millennium Development Goals: mortality among children under five, proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel, and a combination of enrolment in primary education, the proportion of children reaching fifth grade and the adult literacy rate.

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>

For more information, contact:

Roberto Bissio

Social Watch Coordinator

Mobile: +336 1111 3971

E-mail: socwatch@socialwatch.org

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.