

No country treats its women the same as its men

The Gender Equity Index - a new perspective

When we compare a Gender Equity Index with a Basic Capabilities Index we find that some countries with major poverty problems have still made progress to eliminate inequity between women and men. Countries with higher income and less people living in poverty often do better in gender equity, but there is no nation in the world today in which women have the same opportunities as men, and while progress has been made in recent years, women are still disadvantaged in economic and political life around the world.

Social Watch Research Team¹

More than 60% of the world's poor are women.² Half a million women a year die from complications that arise in pregnancy and childbirth. The risk of death resulting from pregnancy is 180 times greater for a woman in Africa than for one in Western Europe. In developing countries only 50% of births are attended by trained personnel and the figure drops to just 2% in some regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Each year between 3 and 4 million women are the victims of violence worldwide. In the United States there is one physical attack on a woman every 15 seconds, and the perpetrator is usually her husband. In India between 18% and 45% of married men admit that they have mistreated their wives. Two thirds of the adults in the world who are illiterate are women. In some regions the rates for women in paid employment have hardly risen at all since 1990, and almost everywhere they are lower than the rates for men.³ In most of the regions of the world women are still seriously under-represented in national parliaments.

To achieve gender equity means to build a society in which there are equal opportunities, and in which relations between people are based on respect for differences. The concept of gender equity is complex and multi-faceted and therefore difficult to measure.

In order to contribute to the ongoing debate and to allow for consistent monitoring of the situation of women, Social Watch developed in 2004 a Gender Equity Index (GEI). The GEI allows countries to be ranked in function of relevant indicators of gender inequity, chosen among those for which information is available for enough countries to make comparisons.⁴

1 The members of the team are: Karina Batthyány (Coordinator), Mariana Sol Cabrera, Graciela Dede, Daniel Macadar and Ignacio Pardo.

2 The source of these and subsequent data can be found at <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/cinu/mujer/m19.htm> y <http://agendadelasmujeres.com.ar>

3 The regions with the highest participation are Latin America and the Caribbean (43%) and East Asia (40%). Only in the Nordic countries do women occupy 40% of the seats. In 14 countries they have 30% or more of the seats, while in North Africa, Southern and Western Asia and Oceania the figure is under 10%.

4 Details of the methodological construction of this index can be found in the section on methodology.

The GEI and other gender indexes

The Gender-related Development Index (GDI) was constructed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to measure development taking the gender dimension into account. The GDI takes the same areas or dimensions used in the Human Development Index (HDI) and incorporates the differences between men and women into each of the variables and dimensions that make it up: health, education and income.

The Gender Equity Index (GEI) developed by Social Watch is conceptually different in that it is designed to *measure the degree of gender equity* in different countries without any connection to the average level of socio-economic development of the population.

This difference in perspective means that a country's ranking on the GDI may be very different to where it appears on the GEI scale. For example, in the Social Watch GEI classification Moldova figures among the 25 countries with the least gender inequity and Ireland is one place below on the list, in the third group of countries. In contrast, in the UNDP calculation of GDI ranking Ireland comes 10th and Moldova 113th. What lies behind these differences?

On the GDI Moldova and Ireland are quite similar when compared in dimensions like life expectancy at birth, the adult literacy rate or the combined (primary, secondary and tertiary) net enrolment rate. However, when it comes to the

index of estimated income (purchasing power parity in dollars) there are big differences between men and women. In Moldova, annual average income is USD 1,168 for women and USD 1,788 for men, but the figures for Ireland are USD 21,056 and USD 52,008 respectively. It can be seen that in Ireland men's estimated income is more than twice that of women, but in Moldova the gap is considerably narrower.

Therefore, although there is greater gender inequity in Ireland, it ranks higher on the DGI scale than Moldova. This is because the higher average income in Ireland has considerable weight in the way this index is calculated by UNDP.

Another important factor is that the GEI focuses exclusively on gender equity, and one of the dimensions assessed is empowerment. But in the UNDP report this dimension is covered by a specific index which is separate: the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).

The World Economic Forum recently designed another index to measure gender inequity around the world, the Gender Gap Index (GGI). This seems an attractive idea because it takes a wider range of factors into consideration,⁵ but so far this greater descriptive capacity has meant that fewer countries can be assessed using the indicator. The GEI calculated by Social Watch can be applied to around 130 countries, whereas the GGI only provides information on 58. ■

Gender inequity in different regions

Not a single country in the world has achieved gender equity: nowhere do women receive the same treatment as men. What has definitely changed in the last two decades is that this inequity is now recognized as a problem in most countries.

Yet, methodologies to measure the different dimensions of gender inequities in society have only emerged relatively recently, and this is a challenge for researchers. More instruments are needed not just for purposes of evaluation but also to strengthen efforts in two crucial areas: designing active gender equity policies and monitoring how public policies in general affect gender equity. In both of these areas there must be an input

from dependable and easily applicable tools that show how the situation of women compares to that of men in different areas.

This is why the GEI developed by Social Watch is useful: it allows countries to be compared and yields a rating for the degree of progress or regression in each dimension covered: education, participation in the economy, and empowerment.

In the GEI ranking Australia, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden have the highest values. These are developed countries, and all but one are in

5 The GGI covers five dimensions: economic participation, economic opportunities, political empowerment, educational achievement, health and well-being.

TABLE 1. Countries with best and worst GEI performance

Best performance	Worst performance
<i>Value 12</i>	<i>Value 3</i>
Australia	Yemen
Finland	<i>Value 4</i>
Iceland	Pakistan
Norway	Côte d'Ivoire
Sweden	Togo
<i>Value 11</i>	<i>Value 5</i>
Bahamas	Egypt
Bulgaria	India
Canada	Nepal
Colombia	Turkey
Denmark	Guatemala
Slovakia	Syria
United States of America	Algeria
Estonia	Saudi Arabia
Russian Federation	Lebanon
Philippines	Sudan
France	
Hungary	
Latvia	
Lithuania	
Moldova	
Mongolia	
New Zealand	
Poland	
United Kingdom	

In the GEI system ranking depends on relative performance, therefore countries that have moved closer to equity are awarded a higher score.

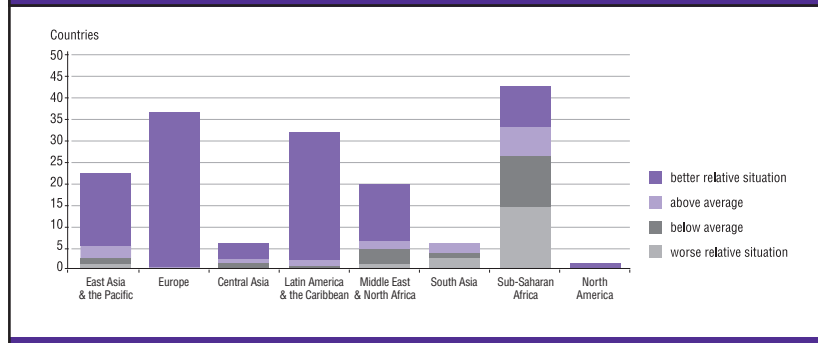
Europe. The Nordic countries are at the top of the list, probably because they started implementing active gender policies relatively early and these policies are now well-developed. Most of the countries in the second group are also European, including some from Eastern Europe like Moldova, Latvia and Lithuania.

The dimensions in the GEI

The GEI is made up of several different dimensions, and a separate rating is estimated for each of them.

The **education dimension** of gender equity is measured by indicators that show the literacy gap, and compared enrolment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education. In education, the high ranking countries form a heterogeneous group, covering different continents and levels of income, including for example, Japan, Iceland, Vanuatu and Bahrain. The countries in which gender inequity in

CHART 1. Gender equity situation (education dimension) of countries by geographical region



education is worst are all in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (see chart 1).

The **economic participation dimension** uses two indicators to detect inequity: the percentage of women in the total of paid jobs (excluding the agricultural sector), and the estimated income women/men ratio.

Globally, women have less access to the labour market and when they work their pay is lower. In 1990, the proportion of women in the global economically active population was only 39.5% as against a figure of 58% for men.

The worst economic inequities are in the Middle East, North Africa, and some countries in Latin America like Mexico, Peru and Chile.

The group that performs best in this respect is made up of 52 countries in which the average gap between men's and women's income is 0.65, and in which, on average, women account for nearly 50% of the total population with paid jobs (excluding agriculture).

Lastly there is the **empowerment dimension**. This is calculated from the percentage of women who are qualified for professional and technical jobs, those in high administrative and management positions, with seats in parliament and in decision-

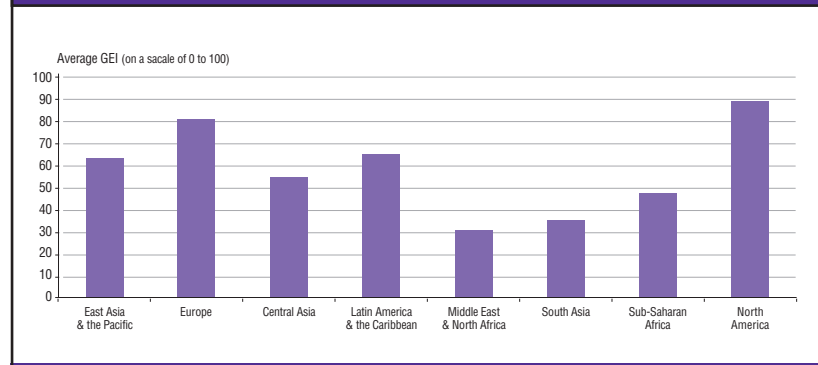
TABLE 2. Income gap (women/men) by geographical region

Region	Average
East Asia and the Pacific	0.59
Europe	0.57
Central Asia	0.63
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.43
Middle East and North Africa	0.33
Southern Asia	0.47
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.56
North America	0.63
Total	0.52

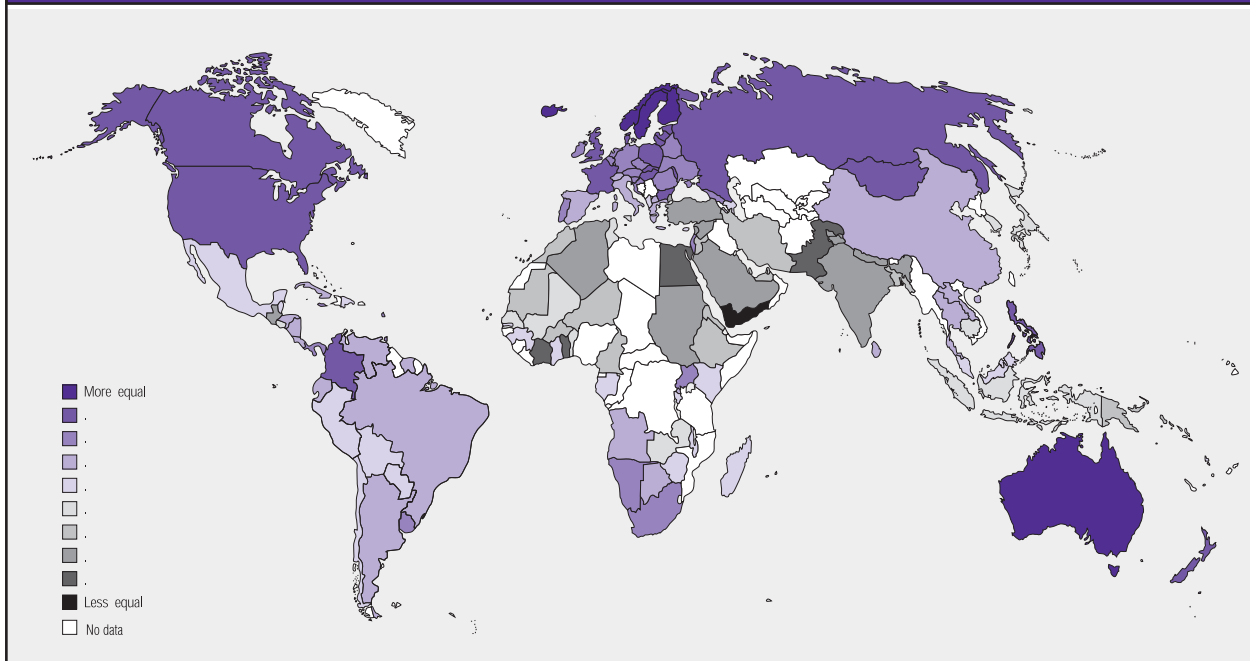
making posts at ministerial level.

Complete gender equity would require equal representation of women in all decision-making processes. Yet, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), on average only 15% of seats in parliaments are occupied by women. The fact that there are relatively few women in government positions makes it inevitable that national, regional and local priorities are defined with hardly any contribution from women and without the female point of view being taken into account. But women's

CHART 2. GEI average by geographical region



MAP 1. GEI average by geographical region



experience of life and their perspective could make a big difference to the ways that the community's needs, concerns and priorities are perceived. Decision-making is one of the areas where inequity is most obvious.

The exclusion of women from politics is very visible. Women make up more than half the population of the planet but they hold a mere 6% of the positions in government cabinets. Only in countries like Norway, Sweden and Finland do women fill more than 40% of ministerial posts. In fact, in 1995, half the members of the Swedish cabinet were women, something that had never happened before in the history of the world. International studies show that if women are to exercise any real influence on political processes they will have to hold at least 30% of political positions, but women exceed this rate in only four countries, and they are all Scandinavian: Finland and Norway (39%), Sweden (34%) and Denmark (33%).

However women are not necessarily in a better situation just because they live in rich societies. In some developing countries like South Africa, Cuba, and China women's share of political positions is above 20%, while in relatively rich countries like Greece, Kuwait, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Singapore they are limited to 5% or less.

National decision-makers (maybe because of the exclusion of women from their groups) tend to be reluctant when having to deal with issues that concern women: 47 countries in the United Nations

have not signed or ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and other 43 countries have only done so with reservations.

There are only a score of countries in the top group of the empowerment dimension of the GEI rankings, and these are mostly in Europe, Grenada from the Caribbean and Uganda, Seychelles and South Africa from sub-Saharan Africa are among them.

Table 3. Countries with worse GEI performance and corresponding region

Country	Region
Yemen	Middle East and North Africa
Pakistan	South Asia
Côte d'Ivoire	Sub-Saharan Africa
Togo	Sub-Saharan Africa
Egypt	Middle East and North Africa
India	South Asia
Nepal	South Asia
Turkey	Central Asia
Guatemala	Latin America and the Caribbean
Syria	Middle East and North Africa
Algeria	Middle East and North Africa
Saudi Arabia	Middle East and North Africa
Lebanon	Middle East and North Africa
Sudan	Sub-Saharan Africa

Gender inequity by regions and by countries' income

When the results of the GEI are shown on a world map we can see how different regions perform in terms of gender equity.

All the countries that score best on the GEI scale (except for Australia) are European. Those on the second level are mostly European as well, a few from East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. Most of the Latin American countries are in middle or higher positions on the list. On the other hand the countries in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are mostly in middle or low positions in the ranking, which indicates that gender inequity is worse in those areas.

When the GEI is analyzed by national levels of income the picture that emerges is fairly heterogeneous. For example, among the low income countries we find the likes of Moldova and Mongolia, which rank high as regards gender equity, but there are also a large number of poor countries (Yemen, Côte d'Ivoire, Pakistan, Togo) at the bottom of the gender equity ranking.

While the countries that perform best as regards gender equity are in the richest group, not all rich countries rate high in this respect. This confirms that there is no direct relation between degree of gender equity and level of wealth. The fact that a country has a high level of income does not

automatically guarantee that it will be in a better situation as regards gender equity. China, for example, has only one fifth of the income of Saudi Arabia but Chinese women are treated somewhat better. Thailand ranks higher than Spain in gender equity but has only half the income.

Basic capabilities and gender equity: a comparative perspective

A good way to suggest or confirm hypotheses about the relation between gender equity and degree of development is to study the GEI⁶ and Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) together (see the map included on the inserted poster). Countries with the same BCI have very different gender equity rankings (see charts 3 to 6).

In the group of nations where there is no significant lack of basic capabilities (so their BCI rating more than 98) GEI values are highest in Norway, Sweden and New Zealand, but this group also includes countries such as Japan and Chile whose GEI values are much lower. The Netherlands, Portugal and Germany fall between these two extremes, their BCI rating is close to 100 and their GEI rating is below 80.

A general improvement in dealing with basic capabilities in a country is not in itself a factor that generates greater gender equity, and nor does a high BCI rating mean a better position in this respect. Gender equity is an independent phenomenon: it does not come about simply because a country meets the basic needs of its population in line with a social development policy.

This can be confirmed by looking at the group whose BCI rating is 99. Here we find some countries with very high GEI ratings (greater relative equity) like the United States, which scores 99, or Canada, the United Kingdom or France with values of just below 90. On the other hand there are also countries like Malta and Bahrain which rate high on the BCI but perform atrociously on the GEI, with values of just over 30.

The rest of the data confirm that a high BCI rating does not in itself constitute a determinant factor in better gender equity. There are a very few cases like the Philippines and Rwanda in which GEI values are higher than BCI values, but as a general rule countries tend to perform better at covering basic needs than in the sphere of gender equity.

This also applies to countries that rank lowest on the BCI scale. There are some, like Rwanda, with a BCI rating of around 50 whose GEI rating is the same or higher, but there are others like Niger and Ethiopia whose GEI values are only around 20.

6 The data were adapted so the GEI, like the BCI, would give a rating between 0 and 100, so the two indexes could be compared.

CHART 3. BCI and GEI for countries with high BCI ratings

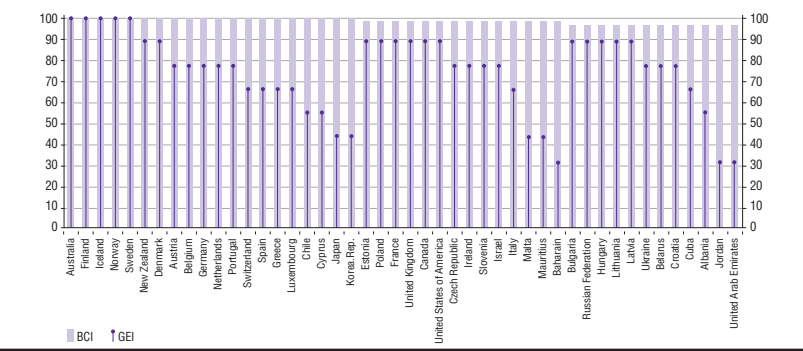


CHART 4. BCI and GEI for countries with medium BCI ratings

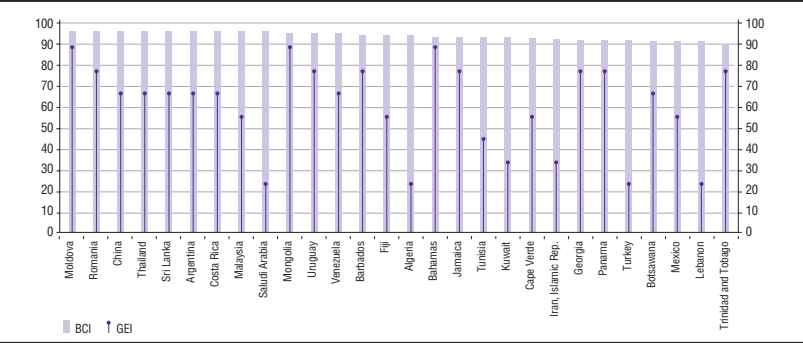


CHART 5. BCI and GEI for countries with low BCI ratings

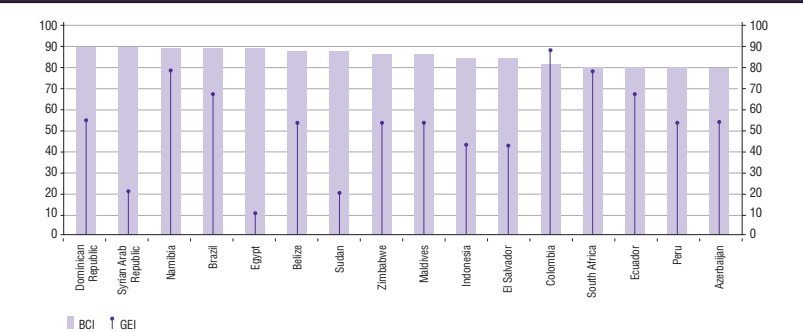


CHART 6. BCI and GEI for countries with very low and critical BCI ratings

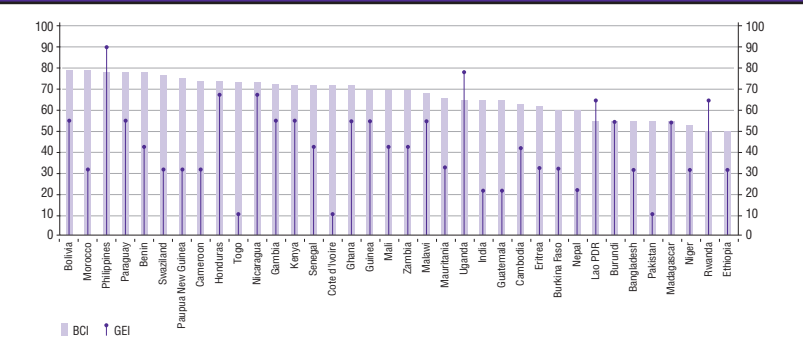


Table 4. Basic Capabilities Index (by ranking)

Number of countries		%
CRITICAL (up to 69 points)	34	20.9
VERY LOW (70 to 79)	20	12.3
LOW (80 to 89)	20	12.3
MEDIUM (90 to 97)	42	25.8
HIGH (98 to 99+)	47	28.8
TOTAL	163	100.0

The non automatical correspondence between the high values of BCI and GEI indexes can be seen more clearly when ratings on these two indexes are considered in the context of geographical regions. In Europe BCI values are higher than 90 but the gender equity situation is quite varied, ranging from the countries that have the highest gender equity values (Sweden, Iceland, Finland) to others which only have values of around 60 (Cyprus, Greece, Italy).

It is also very revealing to compare the BCI and GEI ratings when countries are grouped by income. The richest nations have the highest BCI values, but as was seen above, their GEI ratings vary a great deal.

In high income countries that are not members of the OECD, GEI values are extremely low. Some Arab nations like Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait figure in this group. (Chart 9).

In the countries with middle high, middle low and low income there is a wide range of different situations, and they can be summed up as follows: the higher a country's income the higher its BCI value, but GEI values are very varied.

Conclusions

With conclusive and irrefutable data, the GEI shows that:

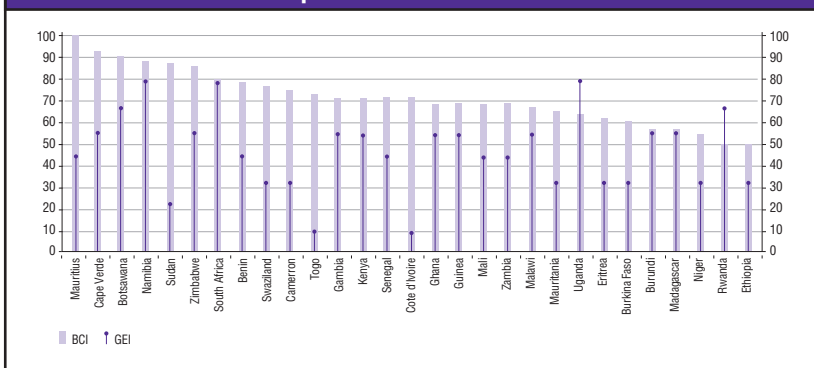
- There is no country in the world where women enjoy the same opportunities as men.
- To eliminate gender inequities a country does not have to have a high level of income.
- While the situation of women has improved in certain respects over the years, it is clear that their economic and political prospects are still limited.

An index like the GEI makes it possible for the problem of inequalities between women and men to be put on the development agenda. It is

CHART 7. Europe: BCI and GEI performance of countries



CHART 8. Africa: BCI and GEI performance of countries



useful for political, social and economic actors to study composite indexes of this type - both for their own countries and for others - so they will be able to draw political conclusions about critical deficiencies in what women are able or allowed to do, and about what should be given priority in plans for action.

The GEI places 134 countries in a global ranking and allows to compare women's situation in different countries. Scandinavia ranks at the top, which is not surprising, since these nations have adopted explicit national policies for achieving gender equality and for increasing women's power and participation. ■

CHART 9. Non-OECD high income countries: BCI and GEI performance

