Alarmingly 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 slighty 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.
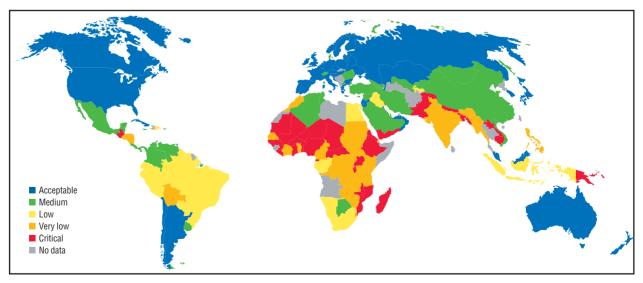
The BCI Tool

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.

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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).

- ■ Acceptable
- ■ Medium
- ■ Low
- ■ Very low
- ■ Critical
- ■ No data

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-saharian Afric 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

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.

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

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. ■