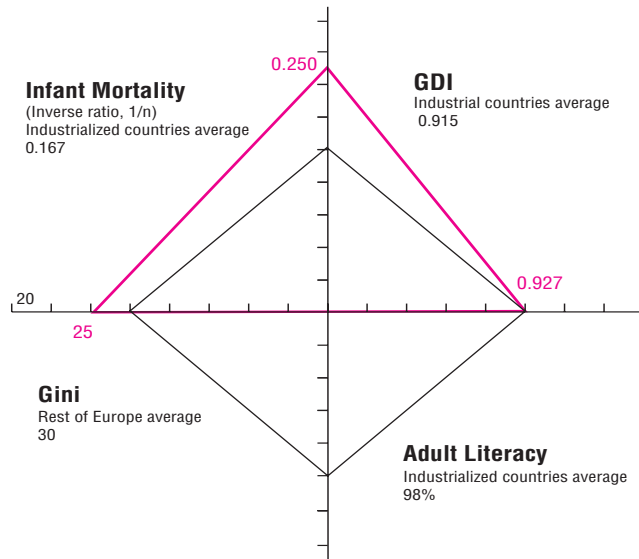


•BJORG SANDKJAER



*The Equity Diamond:* National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.  
*Source:* **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

## IMPROVEMENTS AND EXCLUSIONS

*its of share of overseas development assistance (ODA) from 1.13% to 0.86% of GNP, despite a booming national economy. Structural and economic reasons for inequality and inequitable distribution nationally and internationally are not addressed or discussed. While issues raised at both WSSD and the Beijing conference are being tackled, reference is rarely made to these conferences or to the commitments undertaken there.*

## EQUITABLE REDISTRIBUTION

The coalition government formed in 1997 by three centrist parties was the first government in recent times to acknowledge what NGOs have known and surveys shown: poverty exists in Norway. While the majority of people enjoy a booming economy, the growth in oil-based wealth has not been equitably distributed. The average income has increased, but the bulk of this increase has gone to the top income bracket. The government recognises this as a problem and published the «Equitable Redistribution White Paper» in 1999.

A major reform of the health system took place in the last few years. National-level care-giving institutions and «special schools» were dismantled, with the aim to provide care and education at the community level or at the lowest administrative level where adequate care can be given. A new, «user-oriented» and empowering approach has been adopted. The education system has been streamlined and a «life-long learning» scheme is being implemented. The reforms are, commendably, largely rights-based, and NGOs and other stakeholders have been consulted in the policy formulation process.

Employment is seen as the key to social inclusion, but it is not a magic bullet that lifts individuals and families out of chronic poverty. Poverty for certain groups is linked to exclusion from the labour market, but it remains to be seen whether the new measures will succeed where the well-developed Norwegian welfare state has failed—in reaching the pockets of chronic poverty among groups of pensioners, the disabled, immigrants,

*The late 1990s were years of reform in Norway. Education, affecting healthcare, redistribution and employment policies. The UN Conventions on Civil and Political Rights and Social, Economic and Cultural Rights were integrated into the Norwegian legal system. Despite these positive developments, domestic social inequalities persist. The country adopted a plan for cancellation of foreign debt it is owed, but Norway's moral fight to increase funding for poverty eradication and financing of the multilateral system suffered a major blow. In the last ten years, Norway significantly reduced*

long-term unemployed and families with small children. The growth-oriented economic framework into which these reforms are patched has not been conducive to equitable distribution, and this framework remains unchallenged. Inequalities in health associated with social exclusion are increasing despite the reforms. The difference in life expectancy between people living in poor and rich areas of the capital, Oslo, is now a shocking twelve years.

***With regard to gender equity, formally, through policies and laws, Norway has come a long way in achieving it. Despite these formal frameworks, only a small fraction of Norwegian company executives are women, men's average income is higher than theirs, and, while the majority of students in higher education are women, the vast majority of professors are men. This points to the continued existence of «glass ceilings».***

## SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Social integration is at the core of several government policies launched in the late 1990s. Especially targeted groups are immigrants and refugees, the disabled and people with mental health problems, and the long-term unemployed. Governmental plans of action for the disabled and for these last two groups. Through these, projects are being implemented to lower the barriers for full participation of these groups in social and economic life. People living with HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis are stigmatised, however. They meet with prejudice and ignorance from both health-care providers and the general population. To dissolve the stigma, more information is not enough. Work needs to be done to challenge the attitudes that prevent implementation of integration policies.

The 1990s saw wider recognition of the Sami people through institutions such as the Sami parliament and church council. The Sami are challenging the government on issues such as land rights, however, and they are calling for political action to ensure that their rights are granted and observed.

## MULTICULTURALISM

Norway has a relatively short history of immigration from countries outside Europe and North America. The national borders have been effectively closed to non-Nordic people since 1975, with the exception of labour migration from the European Union in the second half of the 1990s. Refugee and asylum policies have been, and continue to be, very restrictive. The government's use of detention, the slow processing of applications for asylum, and the treatment of under-aged asylum seekers, has been strongly criticised. The government has responded to some of these criticisms: it has admitted problems and is working to rectify them. The overall policy framework, however, remains restrictive.

With a growing number of foreign-born immigrants in Norway, the government, civil society and the society at large

face the challenge of working to ensure an environment of solidarity and multi-culturalism. This has not been an entirely smooth ride at an institutional level, but reports of racism within the police and other public sector institutions have been taken seriously. Measures have been introduced to combat them, but several citizen initiatives and NGOs point out that racism and discriminatory practices still exist. Ethnic minorities consistently have lower incomes, worse health, and inadequate housing. Exclusion is particularly prominent in the labour and housing markets, where the entry-point threshold is high for people with immigrant backgrounds. There seems to be a willingness to take action in the labour market, but the housing market remains barred. A non-discriminatory legal framework is essential to secure equal rights for all groups.

## SECURITY

Rethinking security, Norway and Canada have launched a «human security» initiative. As armed conflict creates social disruption, environmental degradation and human rights violations and diverts public money from spending on health, education and social services, security and peace issues are at the crux of creating an environment conducive to social development. The human security initiative is regrettably not reflected in domestic Norwegian military and defence policy.

## DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

Norwegian ODA targets the poorest of the poor and focusses on poverty alleviation, health and education. The bulk of countries receiving assistance from Norway are in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is also the main area where WSSD outcomes have been taken into account when formulating policy. In addition to implementing its own policies on these issues, Norway works through international fora for debt cancellation and for adoption of the 20/20 initiative, which would secure resources for social development.

While the country is doing commendable work in this field, Norwegian companies, some owned fully or in part by the state, have been involved in projects in several countries that were in direct conflict with the policies pursued through development assistance and international fora. The newly-established state Norwegian Petroleum Fund will secure social benefits to an ageing population, but only a tiny fraction (just under 0.5%) of the fund's investments have conditions attached and these are tied to environmental performance. No social or human rights conditions apply. This shows an unwillingness to address the present neo-liberal global economic framework, which benefits countries like Norway to the detriment of countries in the South. Norway has failed to address the aggressive policies of multinational

speculative capital and large corporations in multilateral fora, and thus failed to support vulnerable economies in the South. The country's foreign policy does not pay due attention to the anti-social effects of neo-liberalism and structural adjustment requirements. Through its role in the World Bank, World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund, Norway promotes the neo-liberal model in the Third World to an extent that would

be unacceptable within our own borders. Norwegian NGOs find this regrettable.

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