

PROGRESS TOWARDS COMMITMENTS

The aims set out by the international community for social development and gender equity can be achieved. According to available data, half of the countries have already reached the recommended minimum targets for the year 2000 or are approaching them at a satisfactory rate. However, some 70 countries will not achieve these aims without extraordinary effort, progress is insignificant in another 20, and at least ten are worse off today than they were in 1990.

The panorama displayed in the progress chart is not devastating, but it is worrying. With few exceptions, those countries showing no progress or insufficient advances are also the poorest. Failure to achieve social development aims appears linked to international war or internal conflict, as is to be expected. However, these are also nations that have suffered most under structural adjustment and have not benefitted (or in fact have been damaged) by trade and financial liberalisation resulting from «globalisation».

A «PATCHWORK QUILT»

Non-governmental organisations participating in the United Nations summits and international conferences insisted that the governments adopt concrete, measurable targets and timetables for achievement of social development and gender equity aims. The tables published by «Social Watch» in this 1998 report sum up the results for 14 of these indicators and adds one extra indicator for the most developed nations: the commitment to solidarity with the poorest countries shown in the agreement to contribute 0.7% of their GNP to international development.

These indicators represent twelve big commitments by governments. For each indicator, «Social Watch» includes detailed tables and graphics. The commitment to mobilise the efforts of civil society and to implement policies for the eradication of poverty and gender equity democratically with the participation of all interested parties is evaluated separately in a table drawn up on the basis of reports from grassroots organisations.

The methodology used to formulate indicators for achievement of the commitments was developed in consultation with the fifty or so national «Social Watch» coalitions. These indicators were refined at an international workshop held in Montevideo.

The resulting table looks more like a «patchwork quilt» than the habitual numerical indices. This is due to the difficulty of the task itself: the construction of an index of social progress that measures the effort made by countries and the speed of advancement rather than the current state of affairs. Additional difficulties lie in the lack of data for many countries and the different criteria used in preparing statistics. The available data do not lend themselves to a single numerical index, but they do provide a revealing table.

To create this table, the advancement indicators from the 14 tables were regrouped into broad categories, ranging from backwardness to achievement of goals. These are represented by different colours in each cell. To rank the countries, values from zero (no progress) to four (goal achieved) were awarded for each of the indicators, with backsliding earning a negative point. The average of the resulting total was then taken for each country.

Where a «four» was awarded (goal achieved), further distinctions are indicated by colour: countries that had already

achieved the target in 1990 (eg. those with a life expectancy of more than seventy years); countries that reached the goal after starting from lower values; and countries that had already achieved the goal but registered backward movement.

We consider so politically important the commitment of developed nations to dedicate 0.7% of their GNP to official development aid that we doubled its weighting for the countries that have assumed it. Finally, countries that did not have at least four advancement indicators were left out of the table.

Encouraged by the spirit that the economy must serve the people and not the other way round, we include no economic indicators in the list. Many of the countries that appear in leading positions have, as would be expected, well developed or growing economies. However, there are several that achieved progress in the social indicators without showing spectacular gains on the economic front.

The resulting table, it must be reiterated, does not measure the same things as, for example, the Human Development Index (HDI) drawn up by the United Nations Development Programme. Rather, it shows progress made toward goals, which can differ from country to country. Thus, for example, Bangladesh registers a value of «goal achieved» in its commitment to reduce its under five mortality rate for having reached 57 per thousand (lower than the minimum of 70); Fiji, on the other hand, with an index of 23 per thousand, though far better than Bangladesh, is «penalised» with a value of -1 because the situation deteriorated in relation with 1990. Fiji moved further away from its proposed target for 2000 (which in this case is 20 for Fiji and 70 for Bangladesh) instead of closer.

In all cases, the target was deemed to have been hit if the country reached values close to it. Backsliding was only registered when there was a significant fall in the figures. The objection could be raised that judging a target as «fulfilled» when the actual rate was only close to it, would result in too many points being attributed to the developed countries. If Japan could reduce its infant mortality rate from 4.6 to 4, shouldn't Norway be penalised as a backslider when it moved from 6.9 to 7 instead of winning the «goal achieved» classification? No, because here they are both so close to the limits of what is physically possible that the relation between the effort made and the outcome is no longer linear. We would have to develop a specific instrument of analysis for these cases, which is beyond the possibilities of the «Social Watch» team and the objectives of this report.

Many of the leading positions in the table are in fact occupied by countries whose social development is the result of efforts made by past generations. These countries have not necessarily made advances since 1990 (and some even register slight backward movement). What is important to stress is that several countries usually considered «underdeveloped» have achieved their goals and hence appear among the top slots. This shows that they are neither utopian nor inviable.

The stress placed on the solidarity commitment in this table penalises those countries that, having obtained good results for their own citizens, and having the economic resources to do so, still refuse to direct a tiny amount of their income towards eradicating poverty in the rest of the world.

TIME IS LIFE

The reduction of illiteracy to half the 1990 values is another of the goals agreed for year 2000.

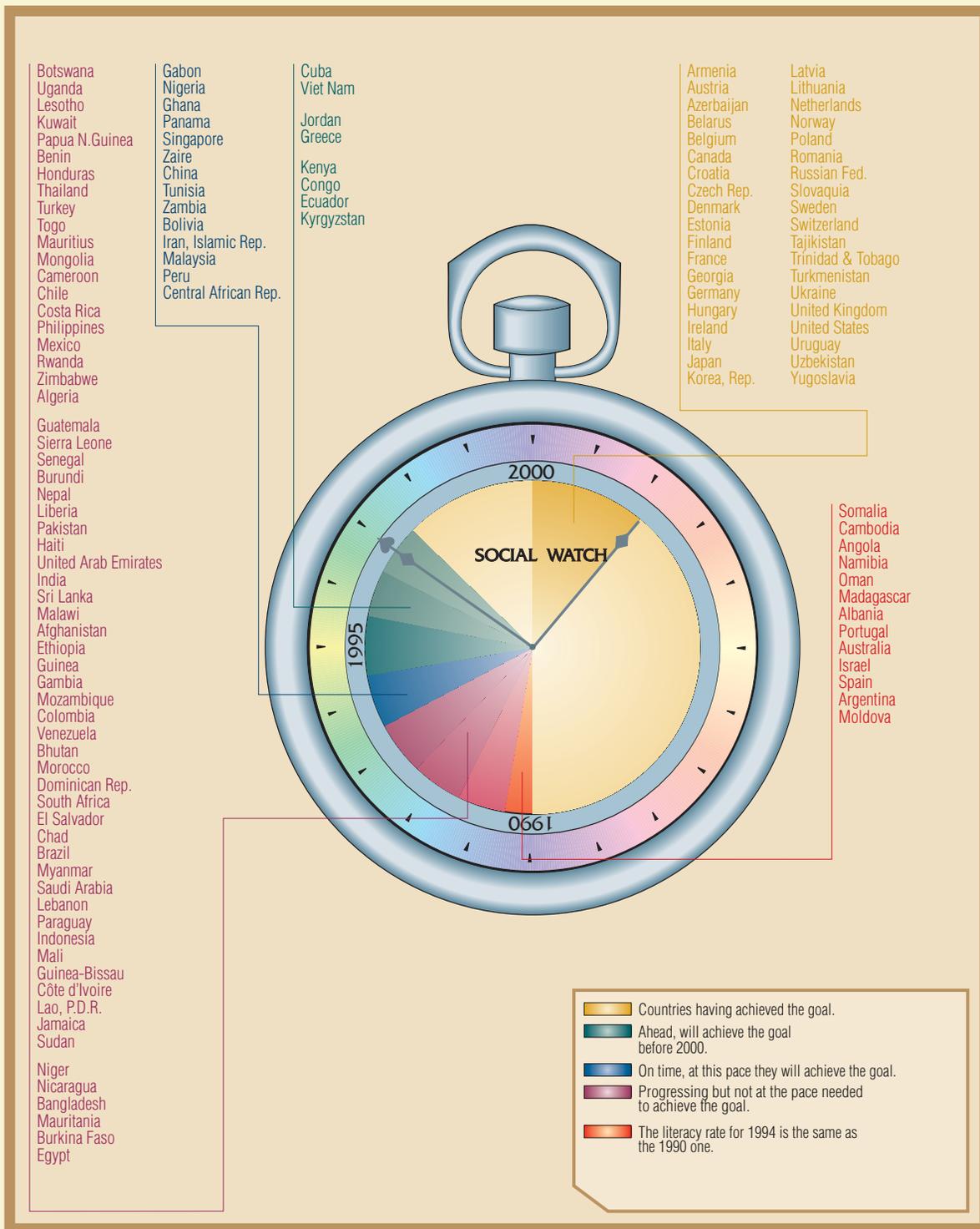
This year the Social Watch stopwatch has chosen to estimate progress made towards this reduction starting off from data available for 1994. As shown in the illustration, countries placed in the 1994 position are those which are on time and -if they go on at the same pace- will achieve the goal by the agreed deadline.

Those who have done ever better, or are ahead of schedule in reducing the rate, are placed between 1995 and 2000.

Countries which maintain for 1994 the same rates they had in 1990, are placed under this last year, because there has been no achievement. Lastly, countries listed to the right of 2000 have already achieved the goal.

THE LITERACY STOPWATCH
 HOW ARE COUNTRIES PROGRESSING TOWARDS THE GOAL OF REDUCING ADULT ILLITERACY
 BY THE YEAR 2000 TO HALF OF THE 1990 RATE?

12



«Social Watch» calculations on literacy. Source: UNICEF, 1997.