

## **World social indicators show there must be a change of course in the fight against poverty**

*The more poor people there are in a country the greater the effort that country must make to overcome poverty. This is one of the conclusions of the 2009 Basic Capabilities Index (BCI), published this Wednesday by Social Watch, a network of some 400 citizens' coalitions in more than 60 countries, and launched in APU, Uruguay's Association of the Press.*

There is a huge gap between the conditions of life in the regions with high average BCI ratings (North America and Europe) and those in the regions with critical or very low levels (Sub-Saharan Africa). According to Gabriel Errandonea, coordinator of Uruguay's University of the Republic social sciences research team that processed the indicators and perfected the calculation methodology used by Social Watch, from 2004 to 2009 only one sixth of the countries in the world progressed significantly in term of their social indicators, and nearly a quarter of the countries considered regressed.

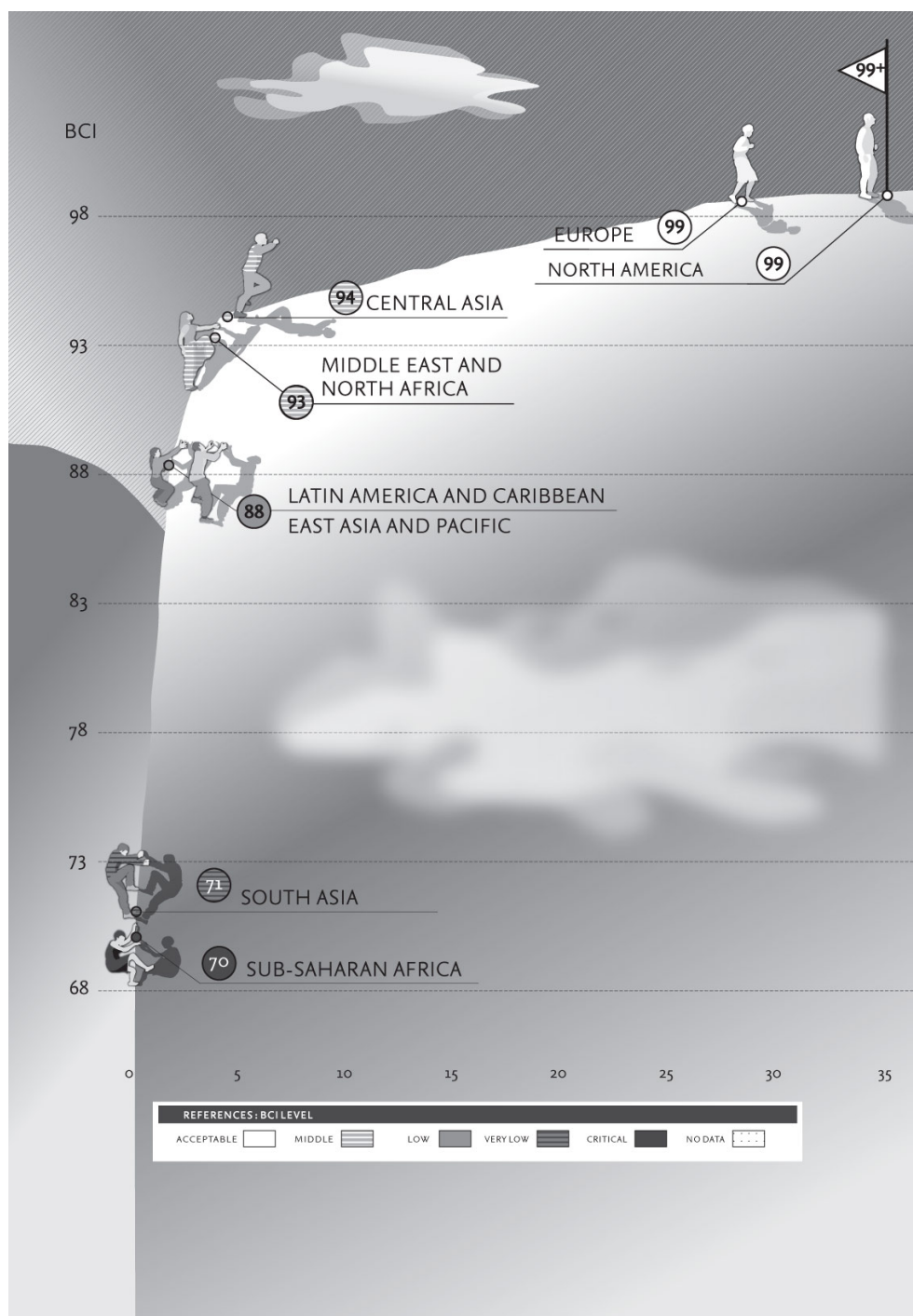
The BCI considers three basic indicators, the percentage of children that reach the fifth year in primary school, the under-five infant mortality rate and the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel. These three factors reflect the extent to which the most basic social rights in a country, which are education and health, are being met. Unlike other indicators, the BCI does not incorporate monetary income as one of its components.

In the last five years North America, the Middle East and North Africa have made significant progress, but these regions were already at relatively high levels. On the other hand, most of the countries that were in the critical BCI category five years ago has stagnated or even worsened.

According to Errandonea, the chart of the effort needed to reach the maximum BCI level of 100 points is like a mountain. Halfway up we find Latin America, the Caribbean, East Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia; Europe and the United States are near the peak and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are near the bottom.

On each part of the mountain the gradient is different. The regions that have the lowest BCI ratings are facing the steepest slope in that a greater effort is needed to achieve any kind of improvement. The going is easier for the countries in the medium and acceptable categories as they have a gentler slope to climb. As Roberto Bissio, the coordinator of Social Watch, says "It is very unfair that the poorest countries not only have a long way to go but are also facing the steepest gradient... These countries are sometimes criticised for their lack of progress, but this ignores the fact that the assistance and trade opportunities that they were promised have never materialised."

In a country in which 90% of the children go to school the distance from the education goal is only ten points, so to reduce the number of children without education by half the government only has to "increase the number of teachers and schools by 5%. But in a country in which only 20% of the children go to school the shortfall is 80%, and to reduce this by half the government would have to triple the number of schools that are currently in existence and recruit three times as many teachers as it already has." And even if the government managed to do this, some 40% of the children in the country would still be without education.



At the other end of the scale, about half the countries in the world already have medium or acceptable BCI ratings. From 2004 to 2009 there was a very considerable increase in the countries with acceptable BCI levels. In the low, very low and critical categories the percentages of countries remained almost the same, which shows that the trend is for the world to polarise in this respect.

If these trends continue, the Millennium Development Goals will not be reached by 2015. In the 2004 to 2009 period, Sub-Saharan Africa managed to rise from the critical to the very low level, but in 2015 it will still be the region that ranks lowest in the world on the BCI. By that date South Asia should have risen to join the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia at the medium level, while Latin America will have stagnated at the low level and the situation in Europe and North America will remain acceptable.

To consult or download supplementary material (graphs, statistics, photos, etc.) visit:  
[www.socialwatch.org/node/11404](http://www.socialwatch.org/node/11404)