

Press release// Social Watch presented the 2009 BCI

Bad news: no progress in the global fight against poverty

The countries in a critical situation are grouped in a band along the equator while to the North and South levels are acceptable

The countries and regions of the world are becoming increasingly polarised in spite of their international commitments to fight poverty. This is what emerges from the 2009 Basic Capabilities Index (BCI) launched this Wednesday in Montevideo, Uruguay, by Social Watch, an international network of citizens' organizations.

According to Roberto Bissio, coordinator of the Social Watch secretariat, "Most of the countries in the world are very far from reaching the social objectives they are committed to for 2015". "Some 42% of countries have low, very low or critical values", according to Gabriel Errandonea, coordinator of the University of the Republic social sciences research team that processed the indicators and perfected the calculation methodology used by Social Watch.

The Basic Capabilities Index is an annual monitoring report on the evolution of basic social development indicators. Three indicators are used to calculate the BCI, the percentage of children who reach the fifth year of primary school, the mortality rate among children under five years old and the percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel. Unlike other international development indices, the BCI does not incorporate monetary income as one of its components: human capabilities are measured directly.

The fight against poverty, as measured by the BCI, was already slowing down and stagnating before September 2008, when the global economic crisis struck. The social impacts of the crisis are not reflected in the 2009 index because social indicators are processed much more slowly than economic ones. As Bissio remarked, "The 2010 BCI will very probably show deterioration where today we have stagnation."

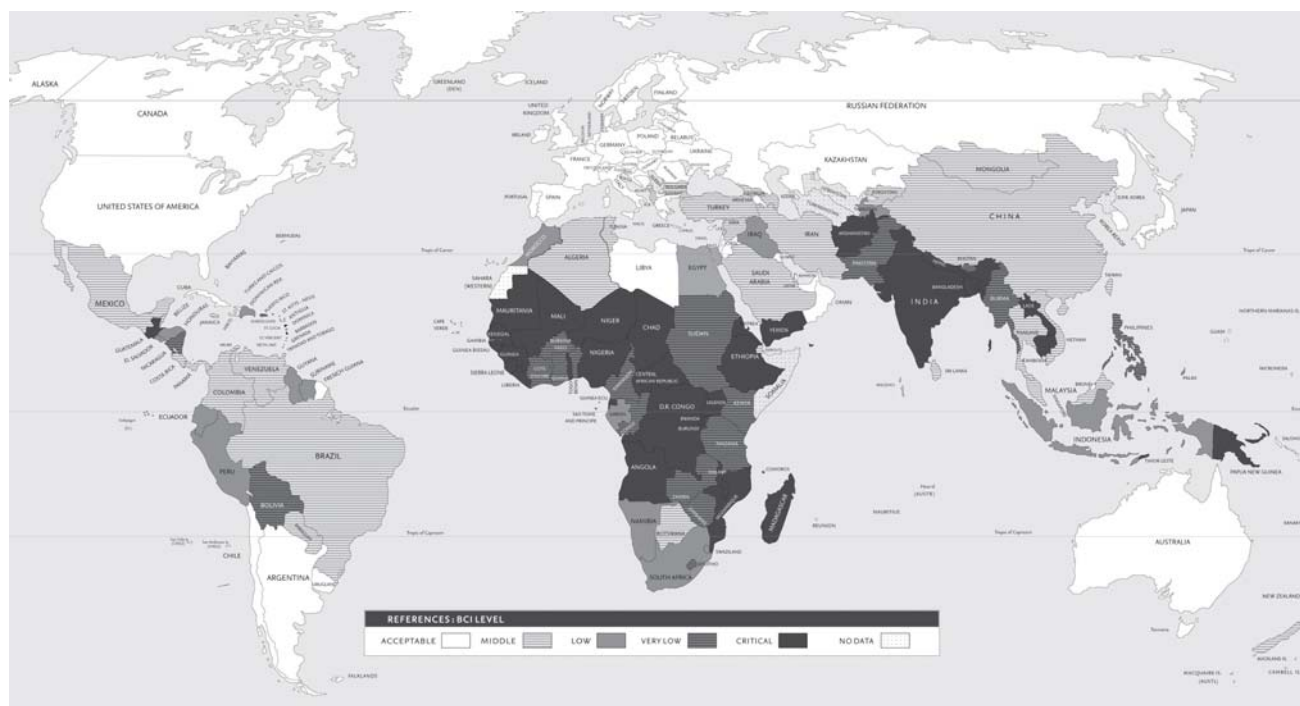
The 2009 BCI shows that the countries in the most critical situation are in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The ten countries with the lowest BCI ratings are Chad, Afghanistan, East Timor, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Niger, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Nepal and Equatorial Guinea.

At the other extreme there are some sixty countries (including Uruguay) that have reached values of more than 98 points on the scale, whose maximum value is 100. "If a country reaches this BCI value, which we call 'acceptable', this means that it is able to provide the minimum essential social care for the entire population. But this is only a starting point for social development, not the finish line".

The countries with values under 100 have, to a greater or lesser extent, situations of poverty that are an offence against human dignity.

The BCI distinguishes five levels: acceptable, medium, low, very low and critical. The higher levels

tend to be occupied by countries in the North and also in the South of the planet (such as the Southern Cone of Latin America and Australia,), while the countries in a band on either side of the equator have the lowest values. In Africa, whose average BCI is very low, this global pattern is repeated: the countries of the Maghreb like Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt, and those in the extreme south of the continent like South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland and Botswana, have the highest values.



As a region, Latin America and the Caribbean has a medium value, and in this region the countries in the lowest positions are Guatemala, Nicaragua, Bolivia, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. Those with the highest values are Chile, Cuba, the Bahamas and Barbados, followed by Argentina and Uruguay.

In the last five years Argentina has stagnated on the BCI, Venezuela and Costa Rica have regressed and Uruguay, Brazil and Mexico have progressed.

The regions with the lowest BCI ratings are South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Next, with a low average BCI level, come East Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. The Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia are in the medium category, and Europe and North America have the highest ratings.

If current trends continue, a large part of the world will not reach an acceptable level in terms of satisfying the basic needs of the population by 2015, the deadline for meeting the Millennium development Goals.

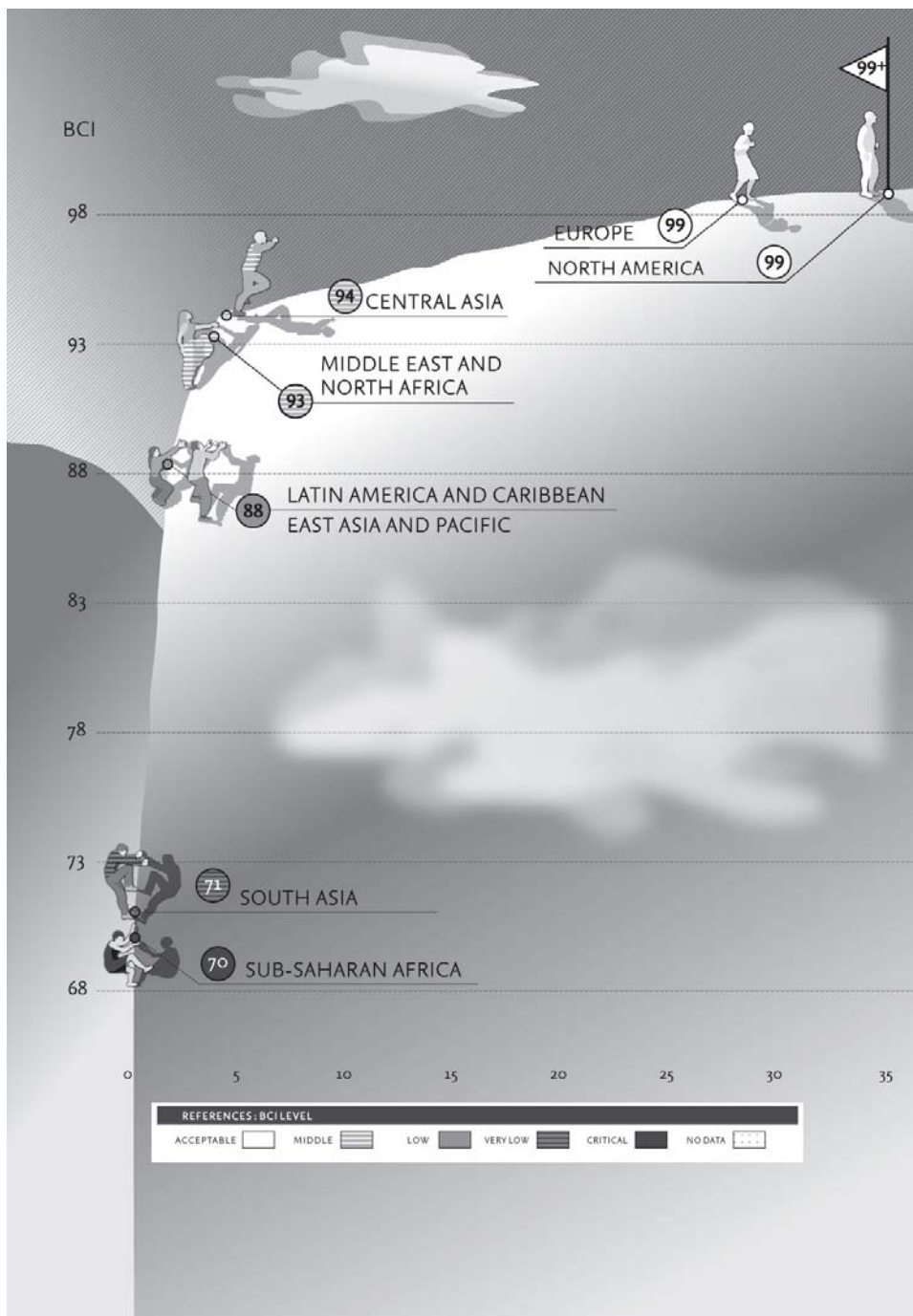
Change of course needed in the fight against poverty

The more poor people there are in a country the greater the effort that country must make to overcome poverty. 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.

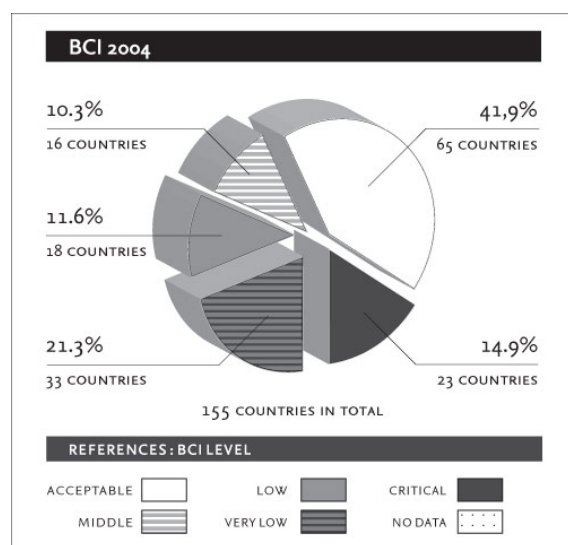
In the last five years North America, the Middle East and North Africa have made significant progress, but these regions were already at relatively high levels. On the other hand, most of the countries that were in the critical BCI category five years ago has stagnated or even worsened.

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

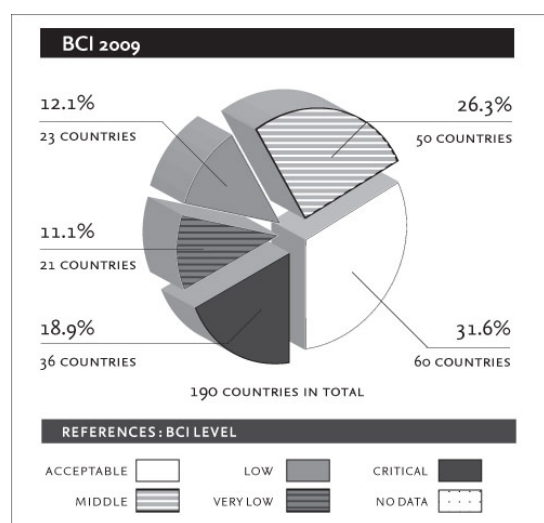
are facing the steepest slope in that a greater effort is needed to achieve any kind of improvement. The going is easier for the countries in the medium and acceptable categories as they have a gentler slope to climb. As Roberto Bissio, the coordinator of Social Watch, says “It is very unfair that the 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>