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'Commitment to development index'  
**Denmark leads rich nations in spreading wealth**

By William C. Mann

WASHINGTON: Northern Europe, Australia and New Zealand lead the world's 21 richest nations in a measure of development aid that factors policies on trade, the environment and immigration alongside amounts of aid provided.

Denmark topped the list, as it has since the first "Commitment to Development Index" was computed in 2003.

"Still, even number one Denmark scores only about average in four of seven policy areas," wrote David Roodman, the survey's director. "All countries could do much more to spread global prosperity."

After Denmark, the top four in order were the Netherlands, Sweden and Australia. Norway and New Zealand tied for fifth. The United States, the largest aid donor in dollars but far below several other countries in per capita giving and other measures, was listed 12th.

The index, published by the Center for Global Development advocacy group, ranks the countries "based on their dedication to policies that benefit the five billion people living in poorer nations worldwide," the cen-ter's website says.

It grades countries on the basis of government policies, rewarding those judged to improve prospects of poor countries and punishing those that do not.

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On basic aid, for instance, it rewards countries that let taxpayers write off charitable contributions on the assumption that some of the contributions would go to international development charities such as Oxfam or CARE. It punishes countries that write contracts for their cash aid to require the recipient to spend it for goods or services in the giver's country.

"The differences between countries in raw aid quantity are dramatic, and as a result they heavily influence the overall aid scores," Roodman wrote. "But quality matters, too. Denmark earns its big lead on aid by eschewing small projects."

The US would score higher, he said, if it did not tie 70 percent of its aid to US spending and "gave less to autocrats in Russia, Jordan, Pakistan and other countries."

Peter Toumanoff of the Institute of Global Economic Affairs at Marquette University said the validity of such surveys depends on the weight given to each element being measured. Also, he said, "I guess the biggest problem with trying to measure the effectiveness of aid, or even an aid project, is that the only thing it measures is inputs, not outcomes."

In addition to the quantity and quality of aid, the commitment index grades countries on openness to imports from poor countries; policies that influence investment in poor countries; migration, environmental and security policies; and support for the spread of new technologies.

Of the elements judged, the United States did poorest in aid, 1.9, and did best in trade, 7.2. Its average was 5, the average for the group.

Among its poorest figures was 4 for environment. The only country that did worse was Japan.

"Britain and Germany top the environment standings, in no small part

because they cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 10 percent during 1993-2003," Roodman wrote.

"Japan finishes last as a heavy subsidizer of its fishing industry and a big importer of tropical timber," hardwood harvested largely in violation of laws in developing countries. Japan also lost points for being the only holdout of the 21 except for landlocked Switzerland against the UN Fisheries Agreement to limit overfishing in international waters.

"The US ratified that agreement but not the Kyoto Protocol, the most serious international effort yet to deal with climate change," Roodman wrote. "That gap, along with high greenhouse gas emissions and low gas taxes, left the US ahead of only Japan."

Rankings of the 21 countries: Denmark; Netherlands; Sweden; Australia; Norway, New Zealand (tie); Finland, Austria, Germany (tie); United Kingdom, Canada (tie); United States; Switzerland, Portugal (tie); France, Belgium (tie); Spain; Italy, Ireland (tie); Greece; Japan.♦

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