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Rich world policies to help poor improve - study

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Source: Reuters

WASHINGTON, Aug 30 (Reuters) - Rich world policies to help impoverished nations have improved over the past three years but the world's largest economies -- the United States and Japan -- are still stingy when it comes to aid, according to the third annual Commitment to Development Index.

Conducted by the Washington-based Center for Global Development and Foreign Policy Magazine, the 2005 index ranks 21 of the wealthiest nations on how they help poor countries through foreign aid, and policies on trade, investment, migration, environment and security.

The Netherlands, Scandinavian countries -- Denmark, Sweden and Norway -- and Australia score the highest overall, while Japan scores the lowest.

"There has been a steady but slow improvement overall in rich country policies that affect developing countries," said David Roodman, a research fellow at the Center for Global Development (CGD) think tank.

CGD head Nancy Birdsall said the index highlights contradictions between what rich countries say about their support for poverty reduction and what they actually do.

"The small increase in the average overall score in the past three years is a cause for real concern," she said. "Despite the growing public interest in development driven by such events as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, last December's tsunami and the recent G-8 summit, rich countries overall have improved their policies toward development only a little."

Denmark scored the highest for its foreign aid spending, peacekeeping efforts and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Britain, Spain and Sweden showed the most improvement for increasing aid, while Japan and the United States gave the least relative to the size of their economies .

"This reflects the fact that (Japan) is still the most inward orientated country. It doesn't give much aid, it has the highest trade barriers and has fairly high barriers to immigration from developing countries and makes fairly small contributions to peacekeeping," Roodman told a conference call for reporters.

Roodman said that while the U.S. gives more aid than Denmark, it is far less relative to the size of its economy.

"The United States does poorly in areas where the government is involved but it does well in areas where the private sector is really central," Roodman said.

For example, private aid donations to developing countries is higher in the United States than in most countries at 10 cents per person per day, according to Roodman.

But even adding that to the 15 cents a day in government aid leaves the United States well short of donors such as Sweden and Denmark, who contribute 72 cents and 99 cents a day in government aid.

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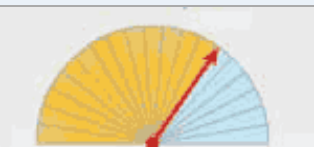
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