Description
The MDG Dashboard uses the United Nations Millennium Development Goals indicator database to portray the level of overall development of the UN countries. Its aim is to enable decision-makers and the general public to discuss the strong and weak points of a country in a transparent way. Its 60+ indicators can be visualised as colour-coded maps or index trees or as rankings showing the distribution of scores for the whole world or for selected country groups. For each indicator, correlations to other indicators and/or indices can be displayed, showing outliers and unexpected behaviour.
The MDG Dashboard is the latest child of a project that started in 1996 with IISD’s Consultative Group on Sustainable Development Indicators (CGSDI), and aimed at constructing a comprehensive Sustainable Development indicator. The original Dashboard of Sustainability used the UN CSD indicator set and its Agenda 12 model with four economic, social, environmental and institutional pillars. Since CSD abandoned this set, and new data are not available, and since the MDG process has gained political importance in recent years, it was decided to use the UN MDG database for visualising country performance.

Where to use the indicator
The complexity of policy-making in the 21st century requires a detailed and transparent information base. The MDG Dashboard enables decision-makers and the general public, especially in developing countries, to discuss priorities for action based on “policy performance” (in the widest sense) relative to countries in a similar situation. It also helps the donor community and a country’s Civil Society to form informed opinions.

Challenges and limitations
The MDG Dashboard relies on the UN MDG database (http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Data.aspx). None of the MDG indicators is taken away, none is added. This deliberate decision not to arbitrarily pick the “best” indicators, and to follow instead the MDG process started with the 2000 Millennium Summit, may
occasionally impact on the quality of the data used, and it may not be the ideal solution for the upper end of the income spectrum, i.e. OECD countries; however, the UN are working hard to improve the database, and the Dashboard software can be used to interpolate missing data as well as judging the consistency of the current data.

Perhaps the most important advantage of linking the MDG Dashboard to the UN MDG process is continuity: While many indicator initiatives disappear silently after some years (budget finished, main contributors moving on...), the MDG Dashboard has been online for more than five years now, and can be updated within one day if the UN release a new version of their database. It is thus guaranteed to create a consistent and reliable picture over time, and to help policy-makers and the media monitor the long-term impact of decisions.

Links to additional information
The home page of the MDG Database is hosted by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre, Ispra: http://esl.jrc.it/dc/

The download version (http://esl.jrc.it/dc/mdg_download.htm, Windows only, 32-bit or 64-bit in XP mode) features the complete UN MDG database with over 60 MDG indicators for ca. 200 countries and 19 years (1990-2009, including over 20,000 footnotes), in English, Spanish, French, Italian, German and Portuguese. A simplified browser version (interactive but limited to African countries and the most recent year for which data were available, i.e. 2009 or older) is available at http://esl.jrc.it/dc/mdg_unsd/

Over a dozen other indicator sets converted to the Dashboard format are available at the “Dashboard Collection”, http://esl.jrc.it/dc/dbgal_en.htm

And of course, searching the web for MDG Dashboard is a quick and easy way to get the latest info.