

# RESTRUCTURING THE GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS (GNH) –ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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## Abstract

*The essence of the philosophy of the Gross National Happiness is the peace and happiness of our people and security and the sovereignty of the nation. This paper concerns the operationalization of the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). It assumes that GNH is a uniquely Bhutanese approach to development. GNH may have applications beyond Bhutan, but that is central neither to its definition nor to its operationalization. The paper further assumes that GNH is a strategy for social and economic change in Bhutan and, therefore, must be operationalized in policy decisions and actions. To argue this, it places the concept of GNH in the context of Bhutanese history and of the general history of the concept of development.*

## Gross National Happiness

The term "gross national happiness" was coined in 1972 by Bhutan's fourth Dragon King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who has opened Bhutan to the age of modernization soon after the demise of his father, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. He used this phrase to signal his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique culture based on Buddhist spiritual values. At first offered as a casual, offhand remark, the concept was taken seriously, as the Centre for Bhutan Studies, under the leadership of Karma Ura, developed a sophisticated survey instrument to measure the population's general level of well-being. Two Canadians, Michael and Martha Pennock played a major role in developing the Bhutanese survey, which took a six to seven hour interview to complete. They developed a shorter international version of the survey which has been used in their home region of Victoria BC as well as in Brazil. The Pennocks also collaborated with Ura in the production of a policy lens which is used by the Bhutanese GNH Commission for anticipating the impact of policy initiatives upon the levels of GNH in Bhutan.

Like many psychological and social indicators, GNH is somewhat easier to state than to define with mathematical precision. Nonetheless, it serves as a unifying vision for Bhutan's five-year planning process and all the derived planning documents that guide the economic and development plans of the country. Proposed policies in Bhutan must pass a GNH review based on a GNH impact statement that is similar in nature to the Environmental Impact Statement required for development in the U.S.

The Bhutanese grounding in Buddhist ideals suggests that beneficial development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other. The four pillars of GNH

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are the promotion of sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance. At this level of generality, the concept of GNH is transcultural—a nation need not be Buddhist to value sustainable development, cultural integrity, ecosystem conservation, and good governance. Through collaboration with an international group of scholars and empirical researchers the Centre for Bhutan Studies further defined these four pillars with greater specificity into eight general contributors to happiness—physical, mental and spiritual health; time-balance; social and community vitality; cultural vitality; education; living standards; good governance; and ecological vitality. Although the GNH framework reflects its Buddhist origins, it is solidly based upon the empirical research literature of happiness, positive psychology and well-being.

***Fifth Platform*** Within an appropriate scientific framework i.e. the “fifth platform”, the further elaboration of *Gross National Happiness* as a tool towards good governance, creative policy development and international cooperation has great transformational potential. It can be very helpful as a platform of *integration* towards global transformation.

In general Gross National Happiness can be an effective tool to develop policies - with the help of indicators - aiming at maximizing the degree of services towards the common good with specific indicators at the four or five platforms mentioned in this paper; and to minimizing the degrees of oppression, social injustice and environmental destruction (with ‘unhappiness indicators’ to be developed). Happiness should not be understood as euphoria, excitement but rather as equanimity. This is a typical Buddhist connotation. Maybe one could say that it can be found in western scientific research as *flow* –effortless (with maximum energy but minimum stress) and successful engagement with increasingly difficult challenges. ‘For the new right, globalization is an opportunity; for the old left, a threat; for the new left, a challenge’.

GNH is based on the premise that the calculation of “wealth” should consider other aspects besides economic development: the preservation of the environment and the quality of life of the people. The goal of a society should be the integration of material development with psychological, cultural, and spiritual aspects- all in harmony with the Earth.

### **The Four Pillars of GNH**

- The promotion of equitable and sustainable socio-economic development
- The preservation and promotion of cultural values
- The conservation of the natural environment
- The establishment of good governance

### **Dimensions Of Gross National Happiness (GNH) :-**

The first GNH (Gross National Happiness) survey i.e. a second generation GNH concept, treating happiness as a socioeconomic development metric, is proposed by International Institute of Management. IIM proposes to call it Gross National Wellness (GNW) or second generation Gross National Happiness

(GNH).The metric measures socioeconomic development by tracking 7 development areas including the nation's mental and emotional health. A second generation GNH concept, treating happiness as a socioeconomic development metric, is proposed by International Institute of Management. IIM proposes to call it Gross National Wellness (GNW) or second generation Gross National Happiness (GNH).The metric measures socioeconomic development by tracking 7 development areas including the nation's mental and emotional health.GNH/GNW value is proposed to be an index function of the total average per capita of the following measures:

1. **Economic Wellness:** It includes the statistical measurement of economic metrics such as consumer debt, average income to consumer price index ratio and income distribution.
2. **Environmental Wellness:** It is the inclusion of environmental metrics such as pollution, noise and traffic.
3. **Physical Wellness:** It supports physical health metrics such as severe illnesses, overweight, etc.
4. **Mental Wellness:** It gives information about the mental health metrics such as usage of antidepressants and rise or decline of psychotherapy patients.
5. **Workplace Wellness:** It includes labor metrics such as jobless claims, job change, workplace complaints and lawsuits.
6. **Social Wellness:** It inculcates social metrics such as discrimination, safety, divorce rates, complaints of domestic conflicts and family lawsuits, public lawsuits, crime rates.
7. **Political Wellness:** It is the addition of the political metrics such as the quality of local democracy, individual freedom, and foreign conflicts.

Since then, the kingdom of Bhutan, with the support of UNDP (UN Development Program), began to put this concept into practice, and has attracted the attention of the rest of the world with its new formula to measure the progress of a community or nation. The Nine Dimensions of GNH are given as follows-

- 1). **Psychology Well-Being:-** Assesses the degree of satisfaction and optimism in individual life .The indicators analyze self- esteem, sense of competence, stress, spiritual activities, and the prevalence of positive and negative emotions.
- 2). **Health:-** Measures the effectiveness of health policies, with criteria such as self-rated health, disability, patterns of risk behavior, exercise, sleep, nutrition, etc.
- 3). **Use of Time:-** The use of time is one of the most significant factors in quality of life, especially time for recreation and socialization with family and friends. A balanced management of time is evaluated, including time spent in traffic jams, at work, in educational activities, etc.
- 4). **Community Vitality:-** Focuses on relationships and interactions in communities. Examines the level of confidence, the sense of belonging, the

vitality of affectionate relationships, safety at home and in the community, and the practice of giving and volunteering.

- 5). **Education :-** Takes into account several factors such as participation in formal and informal education, development of skills and capabilities, involvement in children's education, values education, environment education, etc.
- 6). **Culture:-** Evaluate local traditions, festivals, core values, participation in cultural events, opportunities to develop artistic skills, and discrimination due to religion, race or gender.
- 7). **Environment:-** Measures the perception of citizens about the quality of their water, air, soil, forest cover, biodiversity, etc. The indicators include access to green areas, system of waste management, etc.
- 8). **Governance:-** Assesses how the population views the government, the media, the judiciary, the electoral system, and the police, in terms of responsibility, honesty and transparency. It also measures involvement of citizens in community decisions and political processes.
- 9). **Standard of Living:-** Evaluates individual and family income, financial security, the level of debt, employment security, the quality of housing, etc.

#### **Other Areas :-**

- **Work:-** Equal opportunity is not truly equal until each and everyone has equal access to the same quality of education and equitable development programs. Government can institute new employment laws to promote life and work balance and to guarantee a healthy like mental and physical work environment. Contrary to what some managers think, this recommendation does not have to incur additional costs or liabilities to their businesses, instead it will improve working relationships and productivity and reduce employee turnover. A smart corporate policy will ensure the development of its management team to transform an alpha-dominating/intimidating leadership style into a coaching leadership style with better work and relationship ethics.
- **Media:-** Without controlling free speech and the commercial rights of media owners, government can fund public broadcasting to produce more educational and awareness programs to promote mental and emotional well-being, life management skills and social bonding. That will help change the public taste and demand for the type of information and commercial media programs.
- **Education:-** If one will go for the google "antidepressants" , then one must get easily more than six million pages. But if one do the same for "depression prevention", than hardly one can get less than 50 thousand. It means if one google "happiness education", then must get less than 500! Even when using different search phrases, the results are more focused on treatment than prevention. But reverse for the "depression prevention".

- **Environment:-** It includes the various institutes that may enforce better policies to promote a cleaner and safer environment like city planning, art, spaces, reduced pollution, noise, traffic, health, and so on.

## **Challenges**

The challenge of GNH is to design practical policies that achieve this objective. This must involve the redirection of resources to this purpose and, equally important, the development of education that self-consciously has the same purpose. It is indeed true that, for example, consumerism grows partly because of the introduction of TV and other forms of information technology. TV and IT cannot be removed once they are introduced, and any attempt to do so would probably be counterproductive in terms of the values of GNH. However, their presence must be accounted for in the development both of regulations controlling consumption and the development of an educational system that will strengthen or redirect the attention of the next generation away from consumerism and toward the values GNH is promoting.

## **Proposal for a GNH Directorate**

The operationalization of GNH requires an institutional framework for development and guidance. Without such a framework, GNH will remain a slogan and a hope but will not become a reality. This implies an administrative innovation: the creation of a GNH Directorate, as we shall call it here. This Directorate would be a small, highly efficient and mobile group whose mission would be the development and management of the GNH program. The GNH Directorate would have primary responsibility for developing the GNH plan and for ensuring the integration of economic planning and other activities into the overall GNH plan. The GNH Directorate will have primary responsibility for the evaluation of all social, economic, educational, and social programs of the government and the private-sector to determine their impact on the development of GNH and to recommend those changes, developments, innovations, etc., that would bring the programs into line with GNH. This would be something like a GNH audit or an environmental audit, and it would be carried out on a continuing basis. The GNH Directorate would be responsible for research in those fields that are deemed particularly significant for GNH. (See below "Research")

## **GNH Projects**

The boundaries of potential GNH projects, projects that constitute the core of GNH operationalization, are the same as Bhutan itself. There is no aspect of public or even private life in Bhutan that does not fall within the field of GNH concern and that does not suggest ways in which GNH can be operationalized on a very practical basis. We have suggested some areas of concern above. What follows here are only suggestions. Ultimately, the determination of priorities and the initiation of projects must be the responsibility of the proposed GNH Directorate or some similar body.

## **The Construction of a National Community and the National Consensus**

GNH rests upon, and must result in, the construction of a national community that itself participates in the GNH project. By National Community we

mean the community in which each citizen of the kingdom feels himself or herself to be a member of a common project that is Bhutan and the construction of the GNH community. The foundations for this community must be laid through education and through the conscious use of the decentralization process to incorporate people directly into the project. Given the nature of Bhutanese society with its strong hierarchical cast, it may be advisable to develop a core of facilitators whose function it would be to attend meetings at all levels in order to encourage participation by everyone in the national discourse. A small group of facilitators could be trained and given an institutional home in the GNH Directorate. For example they would attend GYT and DYT meetings to encourage truly open participation in discussions and to provide an independent report of opinions.

### **Sectoral Planning**

The operationalization of GNH will require the integration of sectoral planning in the course of the present and future five-year plans under the aegis of the GNH Directorate. Those responsible for sectoral planning and for overseeing the implementation of the five-year plan in each sector should be required to attend carefully planned GNH seminars in which not only are they encouraged to think of their activities in GNH terms but also to produce plans both for cooperation and for integration of their respective sectors into the larger GNH Project. The facilitators corps of the GNH Directorate could provide the framework for this activity. Furthermore, as the time approaches for planning the 10th five-year plan, those responsible for the overall plan should undertake to develop it within the GNH framework.

### **Research**

All GNH activities depend upon, and require, research aimed at establishing the real conditions at each level of attention; this is necessary to create the framework for determination of particular GNH projects and for the evaluation of GNH activities. Research is particularly important in the villages. The simple fact of the matter is that most or all planning ultimately takes place in Thimphu and is accomplished by individuals who are strongly oriented to the urban setting. While many Bhutanese living in Thimphu maintain close ties to their villages, their frame of reference for work remains Thimphu. Social science and economics research in the villages, along with opinion research, is a sine qua non for the operationalization of GNH. This means that there is a strong need for social science researchers who are seriously lacking in the Bhutanese environment. Nobody doubts the importance of trained specialists in the various fields of

### **Volunteer Corps**

Volunteerism needs to be encouraged in Bhutanese society. Indeed, we argue that volunteerism is an expression of the Buddhist ethos. The spirit of volunteerism needs to be inculcated throughout to the school system through both teaching and activities. Over time, the GNH Directorate can establish volunteer corps in a variety of fields: teaching in remote areas, primary medical care delivery in areas not yet reached by the medical system, community construction work, youth work,

etc. These corps would include programs for school leavers at various stages, training programs for a certain period of time, and maintenance income. The volunteers would learn skills as part of their volunteer activity which would improve their opportunities when they finished their volunteer work. The model for such GNH corps would be the Peace Corps, the Teach for America Corp., the Habitat Program, etc. It should be added that such an approach would also contribute alleviating certain potential problems, at least on a temporary basis, such as youth unemployment. An especially interesting project may be the development of a Village Youth Corps that would bring volunteers from urban centers to the villages during vacations, particularly students of the 9th to 12th year, and would bring young villagers from one region to another, to work with the village youth on a variety of projects. Such a volunteer effort would have the advantage of encouraging urban and village young people to interact and of giving an opportunity for young people from one region of the country to visit and interact with young people in other parts of the country, thus encouraging a greater consciousness of the variety of Bhutanese culture and, at the same time, building a sense of belonging to a national community. One very useful application of the idea of a Volunteer Corps would be the training of high school students in the use of tape recorders and the idea and techniques of recording folklore, the stories and songs of the villages, memories, oral local and family histories. For a minimal expense for the purchase of tape recorders and for training programs, Bhutan could use volunteers to build an important archive that would preserve for future generations the oral and musical culture of the country and that would become the raw material for many potential ventures in the creative arts.

This would be an important contribution to the process of involving young people in the national project and in the construction of the national community GNH should encourage.

### **Education**

One of the pillars upon which GNH must rest is education. The entire educational curriculum of Bhutanese schools needs to be infused with the GNH ethos. GNH values need to be taught at all levels of the school system. Textbooks and other training materials that specifically reflect Bhutanese and GNH values need to be written and used. In this way, GNH will become a reality for future generations. Alongside the introduction of general GNH values into the curriculum, three particular problems need to be addressed.

- First, given the fact that so large a percentage of Bhutanese live in villages, village life should become a central theme of education at all levels. The educational curriculum must help in developing the kind of mental attitudes that will make improvement of village life as well as continuation of village life attractive for young people. Of course, this must be accompanied by improvement in the real conditions of village life, which is also a necessary concomitant of GNH.
- Second, the quality of schools in rural areas needs to be improved to the point that people prefer to remain in the villages so that their children may attend local schools because their quality is preferable. (We have referred to

this idea above.) This may be accomplished, for example, by requiring all new graduates of teachers' training colleges to spend the first five years of their careers in village schools, thereby bringing to those schools the latest techniques they have learned in their training programs and the enthusiasm of their youth.

- Third, and this problem is crucial for Bhutan, the teaching of the Dzongkha language needs to be improved and modernized. A major objective of this must be the spread of literacy in Dzongkha, and that can only be accomplished by improving the quality of teaching in Dzongkha, but employment of modern teaching techniques, and by increasing the availability of Dzongkha reading materials for all age groups. While there is no question that English must be the required second language for all Bhutanese schools, the simple fact of the matter is that it is Dzongkha that has become the second language in reading and more especially in daily interactions in official life. The creation of a national ethos is strongly dependent on the growth and enrichment of the national language.

## **Religion**

At the present time, it can be argued that the members of the Monk Body are not fully participant in the national project. Many believe that the members of the Monk Body need not become active members of this project; their purpose is to do what they are doing. On the other hand, experience suggests that many members of the dharma community could play a very significant role in bringing a higher level of consciousness of Buddhist and GNH values to the villages, particularly to the village children. Teaching is a significant activity in Buddhism, and perhaps a certain social responsibility is also part of the commitment to this lifestyle. The GNH Directorate should undertake to explore ways in which members of the dharma community may become active in social affairs. There are many examples of this in the present-day Buddhist world.

## **Culture**

The promotion of Bhutanese culture is a vital aspect of GNH. There are many vehicles to accomplish this purpose. The traditional culture of the villages, expressed in the form of festivals, arts and crafts, stories and songs, etc., needs to be nourished and further and protected to the extent possible. There needs to be research and conversation about the ways and means in which the cultural life of the villages can be protected from the consequences of increased tourism while not being denied the economic advantages that come from tourism. As tourism increases in Bhutan, particular attention must be paid to this matter by those responsible for the tourist industry. The GNH Directorate should take an active role in this. Modern technologies of communication, particularly television, are powerful instruments for change, for renewal, and for preservation. The recording of material from traditional performances, stories, and songs, rebroadcast through television to the countryside as that medium spreads, will enhance the sense of self-respect the villagers have for their own culture in the face of the attractions of modern urban and foreign culture. There is ample evidence from other cultures that the modern media may strengthen,



rather than weaken, "traditional" cultures. Careful attention needs to be paid to the way in which programming on radio and television can be used for this purpose. The GNH Directorate should make a study of this matter and report. At the same time, if people are to be encouraged to stay in the villages, attention has to be paid to the enrichment of daily life in the countryside. Literature and the arts can be used for this purpose. A carefully planned system of traveling performances that would both entertain and convey GNH values to the villages would be extremely useful in this regard. At the same time, attention has to be paid to the development of culture in the urban centers. As the attractions of modern urban and foreign culture become stronger, means of expression of modern sentiments in terms of Bhutanese culture should be explored. The GNH Directorate should consider the possibility of encouraging not only traditional arts but also expression in modern styles, particularly among young people. Conferences of young people who want to write or perform should be held to encourage creativity. Another modern avenue of cultural creativity that already has foothold in Bhutan is the film. The amount of Bhutanese cultural material that can be used in film to develop national identity and GNH consciousness is very great indeed. Folklore material, stories from Bhutanese history, Buddhist stories, and the like, can be adapted to the film medium with great benefit. Cartoons can be used effectively. film medium is easily and inexpensively portable throughout the country and has great potential in every respect.

### **Village Life**

The improvement of village life and of employment opportunities in the countryside is absolutely crucial if attempts to encourage people to remain in the villages are to have any hope of success and if migration to urban centers is to be discouraged. This means, among other things, improvement of income wherever possible. One technique that has proven successful in other parts of South Asia and beyond has been the development of a system of micro-loans with low interest rates and guaranteed not by collateral but by the communal action of the village. This system can be introduced into Bhutan, based on experience elsewhere. Bhutanese banks have significant liquidity, and this would be an important use of those funds. It is an excellent example a GNH program. An extremely important avenue of approach would be to identify arts and crafts in particular villages, to use micro-investment to organize production cooperatives in these arts and crafts among the people in the villages, and to provide a mechanism for purchasing the arts and crafts from the villages and marketing them in Thimphu and, eventually, abroad. There are foreign markets, particularly the high-end Christmas market that can be developed for this purpose. This technique has been used very successfully in India, Indonesia, and Latin America and has contributed both to villagers' income and to the maintenance and development of arts and crafts at the village level.

### **The Law**

Bhutan is in the process of developing and enacting legislation creating a modern structure of Western-style law. This will contribute significantly to the creation of a legal environment that will be conducive both to economic development and to good governance. However, the development of a Western-style legal system

may have the consequence of creating a discontinuity between the developed, largely urban, population and the villages, with their own processes of conflict resolution and ways of dealing with the issue of crime and punishment. The ethos of GNH suggests the usefulness of strengthening the “traditional” community systems of handling conflicts and crimes as a means of integrating villagers into the process of change and development in terms that are supportive of village life and Bhutanese culture. In other societies, discontent among villagers has become a social and even a political problem when insufficient attention has been paid to this important area of village culture. Bhutan need not follow a path that could lead to similar problems. Measures that can be taken in this regard are straightforward. First, regional and village legal and conflict resolution practices need to be studied and recorded. Second, Bhutanese legal specialists and social scientists need to begin developing techniques for the strengthening of these processes. The first step would be to carry out a national inventory of knowledge about these matters, and inventory of people in Thimphu and in the various Dzongdags and Geogs who can serve as informants.

### **Lessons Learnt**

A policy of pursuing economic growth through ICT can enhance GNH if married to appropriate social policies. There is little doubt that economic growth can provide an economic boon of jobs and wealth, enhancing both societal and individual economic well-being. Further, economic growth such as this can contribute to government taxation revenues through personal and company taxation, thus working towards the policy aim of self-reliance. The Indian example also demonstrates that it is difficult to avoid disparities in incomes when one sector of a developing economy grows rapidly. This suggests that appropriate social policies need to be in place to counter the tendency towards disparities in incomes. This is reinforced by the critics. Castells comments that “left to market forces, there is an undeniable tendency toward a polarized social structure” between countries and within countries. Similarly, the increased efficiency that ICT can bring to existing business operations may serve to further benefit the proprietors of those businesses. The social impact of unevenly distributed economic benefit from this growth and increased efficiency, which has been less well studied, may well be significant.

### **Conclusion**

This paper illustrated the operationalization of GNH, and its primary focus is the practical implementation of GNH through institutionalization and the development of specific GNH projects. The contextualization of GNH was considered necessary to lay the groundwork for a discussion of ways to operationalize the concept. Therefore, we have discussed such subjects as the history of the Bhutanese State in the perspective of GNH, the concept of GNH in the context of the history and ideology of economic development, the idea of a GNH State, and the relationship between Bhutanese Buddhism and GNH. By way of conclusion we want to reiterate some points we consider to be vital to the success of the GNH project. Certain preconditions have to exist, have to be created, to achieve the objectives of GNH. Among these are: The construction of a national community and a national consensus around the concepts of Bhutan and of Gross National Happiness

central to the future of Bhutan as an independent and sovereign nation. The national community and the national consensus have to be built through, and be based on, a national ideology that incorporates both national and social objectives and that makes the advantages of GNH clear to the people. The success of GNH will rest on the construction of a system of good governance, which is already underway. Public discussion of GNH must be conducted, whatever the medium, in a language that is clearly understood by all levels of Bhutanese society. GNH must be institutionalized in an organization that will provide leadership, research, planning, and evaluation of the operationalization of GNH. The educational system must take responsibility for the creation of GNH values in succeeding generations. Mechanisms must be developed for the inclusion of people from all walks of life in the discussion of GNH. This is important for both GNH and for good governance. The GNH state must develop those areas of expertise that serve the purposes of GNH, including the social sciences and humanities, just as Bhutan has developed a cadre of experts in engineering, education, medicine and commerce. We are fully aware that objections will be raised concerning the costs of these recommendations, and it cannot be denied that this will be an issue. Nevertheless, we believe that a modest beginning on the project of GNH will attract both worldwide attention and investment. The proposed GNH Directorate, or its equivalent, must have the responsibility for designing and taking the initial steps. This suggests that the very first step must be the creation of an institutional framework. Redirecting or channeling the energies and activities of existing agencies in such a way that they reflect and exhibit the values of GNH can accomplish a considerable amount. They will become, then, examples for others to follow. This is particularly the case in the field of education. Finally, careful and reflective planning can take place with a relatively small investment in order to lay the groundwork for the operationalization of GNH.

In India, it is quite likely that the impact of the ICT industry an essential element towards universal applicability of the concept of Gross National Happiness. ***Bhutan could become the Mother base for an international network of study centers facilitating research & development urgently needed at this 'fifth platform'***. Criteria to select tourists to Bhutan could be formulated in terms of degrees of commitment to contribute – at all levels – towards this educational & research mission.

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