

International Conference on Happiness and Public Policy

18-19 July 2007



Public Policy Development Office (PPDO)
United Nations Conference Centre
Bangkok -Thailand

How Happy are the People in Bhutan?

A study from the perspective of Quality of Life

Vijay Kumar Shrotryia, Reader
Department of Commerce
School of Economics, Management and Information Sciences
North Eastern Hill University (NEHU)
Shillong - Meghalaya - India
Email : vkshro@gmail.com or vkshrotria@nehu.ac.in



7/11/2007

VK Shrotryia, NEHU, Shillong, India

2

How Happy are the People in Bhutan?

A study from the perspective of Quality of Life

- Introduction
- Objective
- Method
- Results
 - Demographic Characteristics
 - Importance of different services & factors
 - Satisfaction level with different services
 - Major Findings
- Discussion
- Major Suggestions



Introduction

If we do not learn from history, we shall be compelled to relive it. True. But if we do not change the future, we shall be compelled to endure it. And that could be worse.

[Toffler 1972]



Introduction.

- Public Policy Objective is Development.
- Development should result in improving Well-Being and conditions of living.
- Indicators do not necessarily show the real *development*.
- Quality of Life (QOL) is an important component of Development, or Public Policy, or Welfare Economics...



Introduction..

- Happiness is the ultimate goal of human life.
- Happiness - *greatest human wealth*.
[Bracho 2004]
- Happiness - intrinsic element of development.
- Happiness - derived from Satisfaction.
- Satisfaction of people from different services & amenities provided.



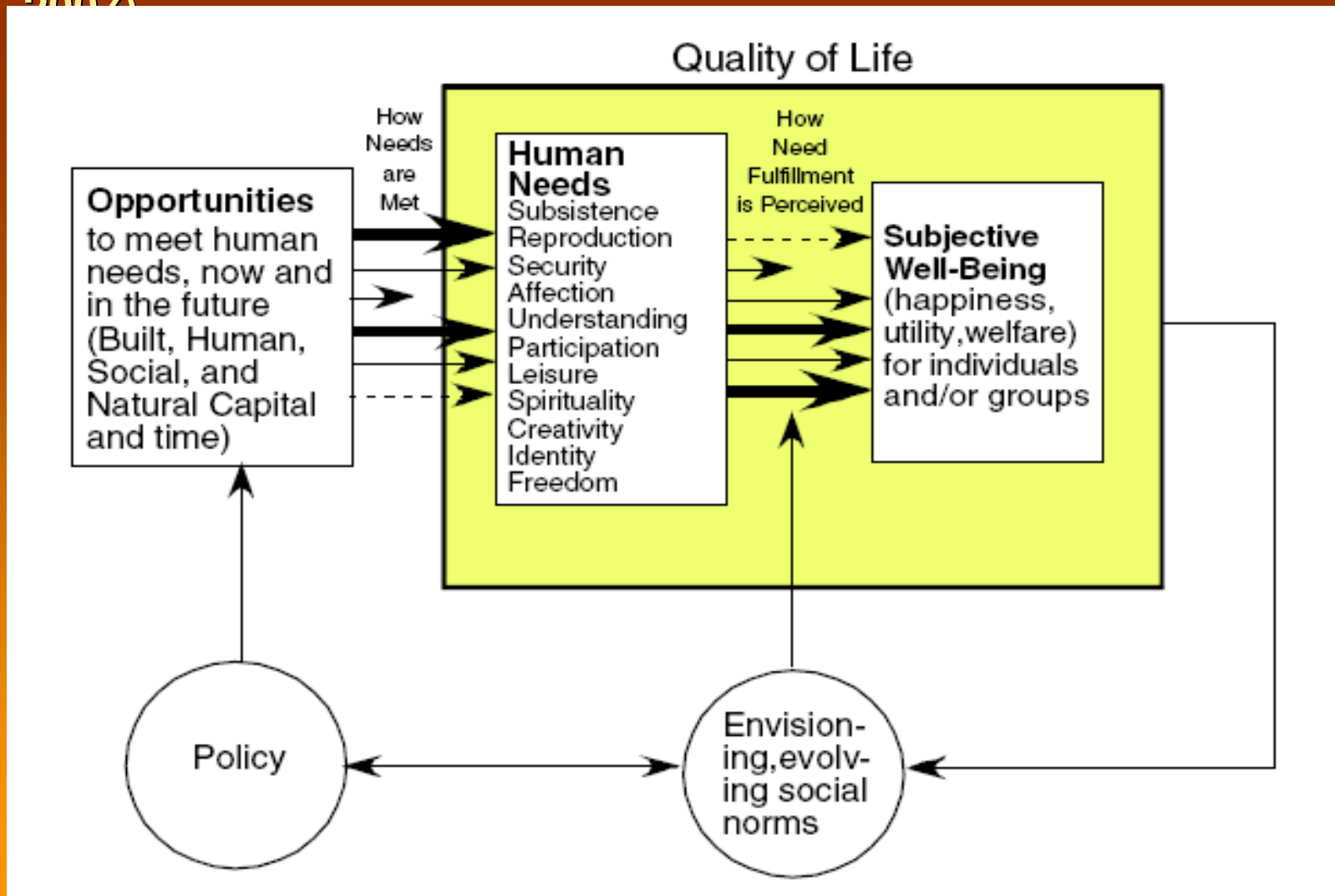
Introduction...

‘A great deal of consistency exists between the Bhutanese concept of GNH and human development...The pursuit of GNH calls for a multi-dimensional approach to development that seeks to maintain harmony and balance between economic forces, environmental preservation, cultural and spiritual values and good governance.’

(BNHDR 2000 p 20)



Quality of Life (QOL) as the interaction of human needs and the subjective perception of their fulfillment, as mediated by the opportunities available to meet the needs. (Costanza, et al 2007)



Four Qualities of Life (Veenhoven 2000)

	<i>Outer qualities</i>	<i>Inner qualities</i>
<i>Life-chances</i>	Livability of environment	Life-ability of the person
<i>Life-results</i>	Utility of life	Satisfaction



Introduction.....

Keeping this background in mind this attempt is made to study satisfaction level of people, from the viewpoint of QOL and to further corroborate it with Happiness.



Objective of this Study

to find out the level of satisfaction of the people in Eastern Bhutan (Phongmey and Trashigang), with the services provided by the RGOB and to study their general perception about importance of certain services, utilities and social & development issues.





Source: Planning Commission of Bhutan's website
7/11/2007
VK Shrotryia, NEHU, Shillong, India



Methods –

Questionnaire Design & Collection of Data

- The data is collected through opinion survey conducted during December 2005-March 2006 at Phongmey & Trashigang.
- There were 25 items related to satisfaction and importance and respondents were from different individual characteristics.
- Individual characteristics such as gender, age, education, marital status, occupation and place of stay were included in the first part of the schedule.
- Apart from the 25 items, questions as to ‘whether they are aware of the development plan of the government, whether their lives are peaceful and comfortable, whether they think that they are happy family, were put towards the end.



Methods –

Questionnaire Design & Collection of Data

- A question regarding general life-satisfaction was put twice in the questionnaire, in the beginning and at the end; its average was calculated to make it reliable.
- 5 point Likert scale was followed, 1 being very satisfied/important and 5 being very dissatisfied/not important at all. Another option 6 was also there which was to be selected if they ‘did not know’ the answer.



Methods – Analysis of Data

- The data is analysed on the basis of Mean and Standard Deviation.
- Further, the satisfaction level is assessed by adding the option 1 (very satisfied/important) and 2 (satisfied/important), which indicates the percentage of people which were satisfied with the services and utilities.
- One question ‘How many days of the last week were happy days?’ was put to in the schedule with the options as 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 to find out their happiness level in the lines of Happy Life Years (Veenhoven 2004).



Results - Demographic/Individual

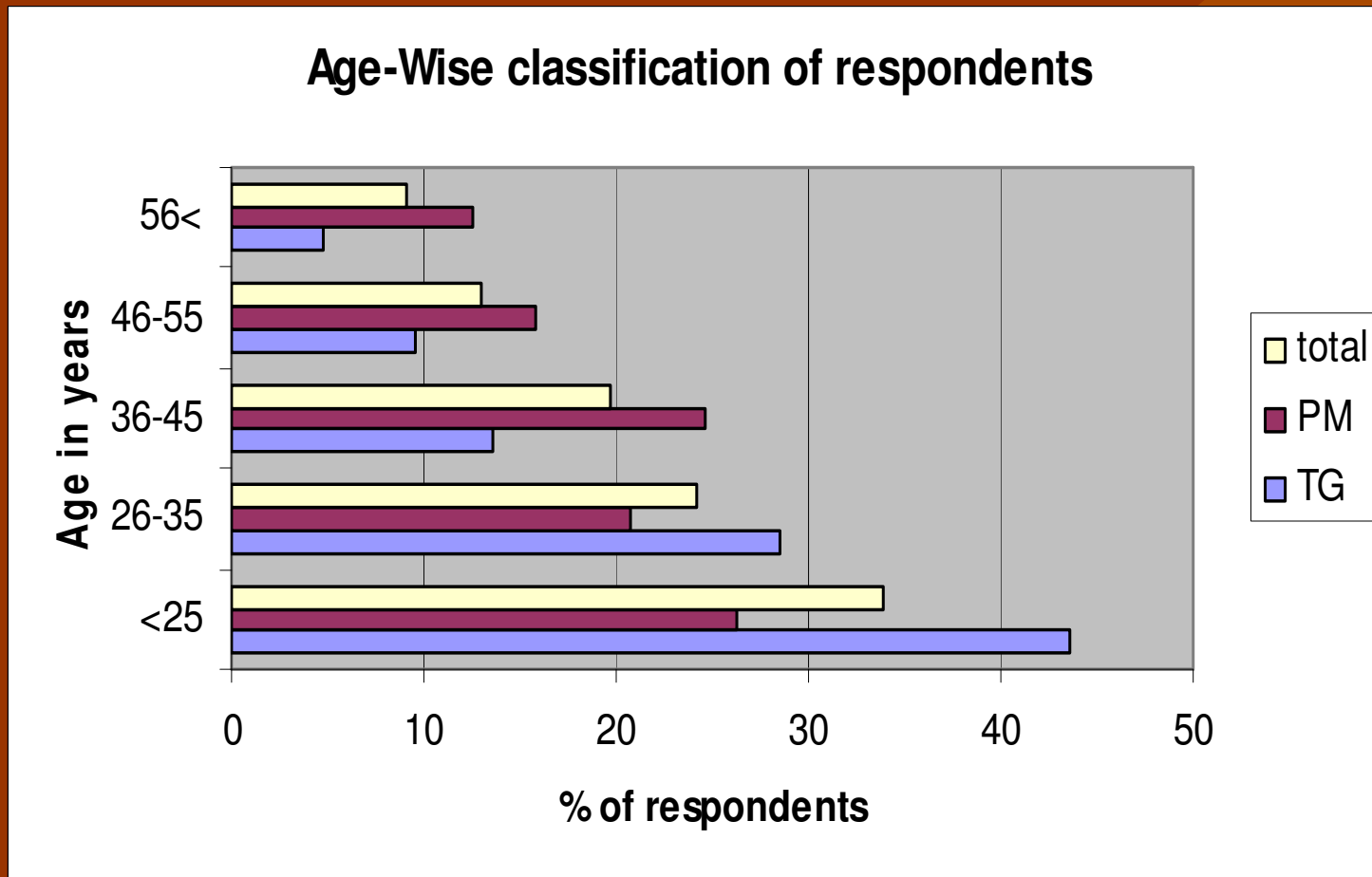
Characteristics

Table 1

Age in years	TG		PM		total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
<25	64	43.5	48	26.2	112	33.9
26-35	42	28.6	38	20.8	80	24.2
36-45	20	13.6	45	24.6	65	19.7
46-55	14	9.5	29	15.8	43	13.0
56<	7	4.8	23	12.6	30	9.1
	147	100	183	100	330	
Aver Age (in years)		30.6		37.4		34.4
Female	51	34.7	103	56.3	154	46.7
Male	96	65.3	80	43.7	176	53.3
Married	93	63.3	139	75.9	232	70.3
Single	54	36.7	44	24.0	98	29.7

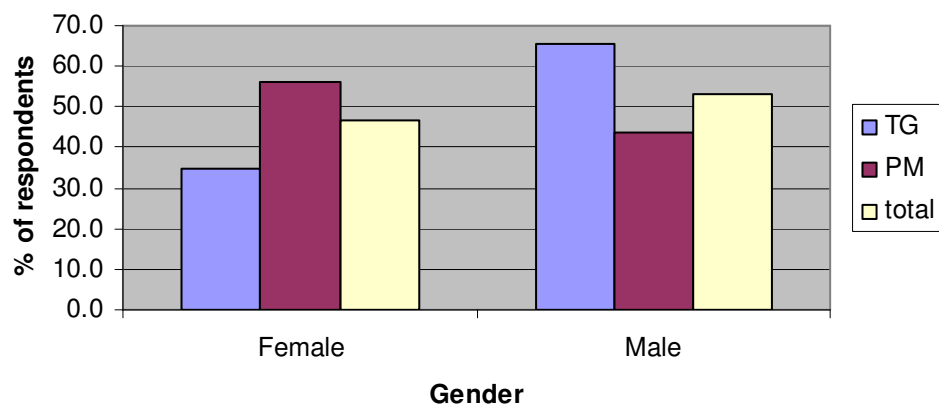


Results - Demographic/Individual Characteristics.

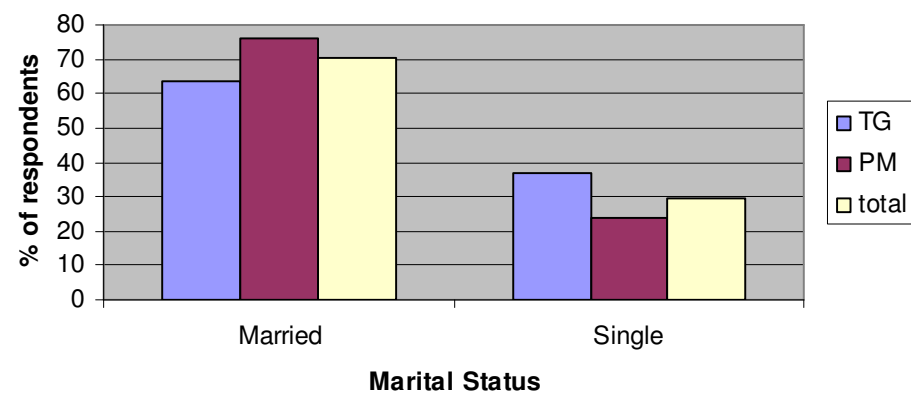


Results - Demographic/Individual Characteristics..

Gender-wise classification



Marital Status of respondents



Results –

Importance of Different Services & Factors

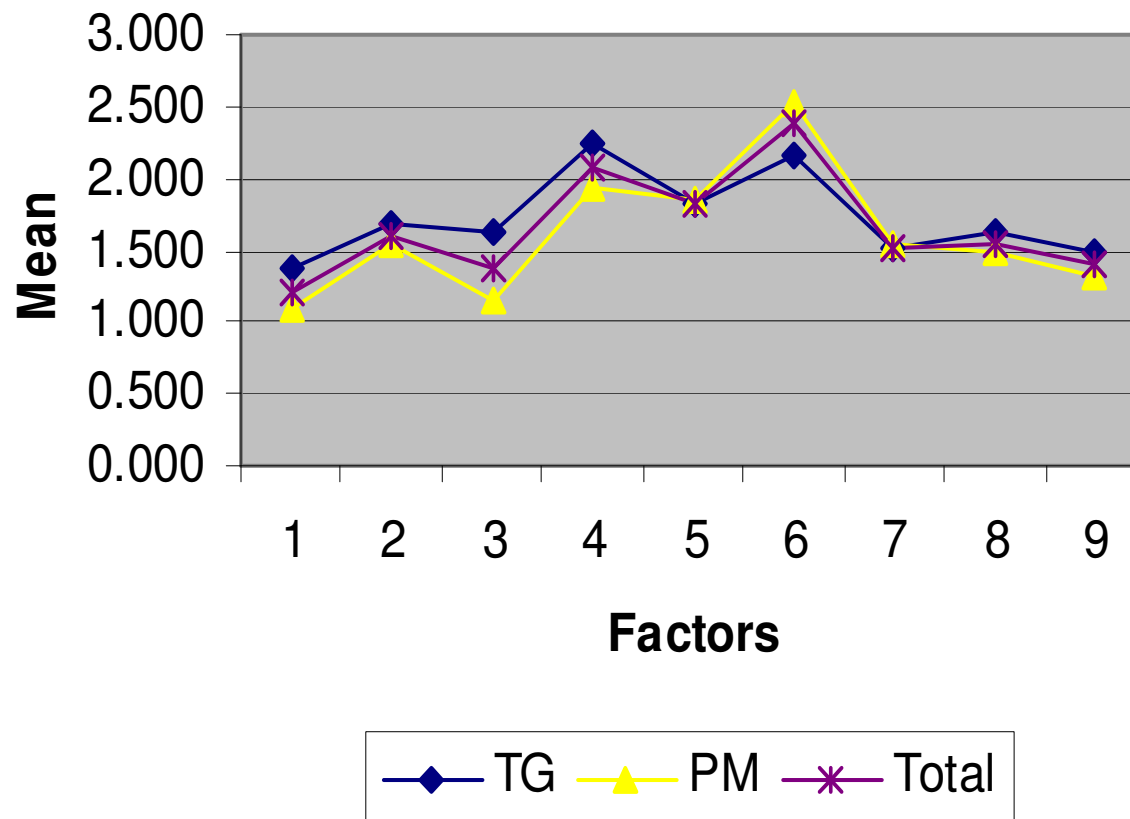
Table 2 – Importance of different factors

Importance of -		TG		PM		Total		TG	PM	Total
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	1+2	1+2	1+2
1	Neighbourhood	1.36	0.84	1.09	0.4	1.21	0.64	92.52	97.78	95.41
2	Spiritual activities	1.68	1.17	1.53	1.02	1.6	1.09	81.25	88.95	85.54
3	Respecting others	1.61	1.11	1.16	0.67	1.36	0.92	81.63	98.85	90.97
4	Relationship with local authorities	2.25	1.49	1.95	1.44	2.09	1.47	65.07	79.89	73.23
5	Awareness of laws	1.83	1.41	1.84	1.42	1.84	1.42	77.4	86.34	82.37
6	Having a TV	2.17	1.32	2.54	1.6	2.37	1.49	69.18	63.93	66.26
7	Newspaper and Radio	1.52	1.02	1.53	1.19	1.52	1.12	86.9	91.80	89.63
8	Family planning	1.63	1.21	1.48	1.19	1.55	1.20	83.56	91.26	87.84
9	Environment protection	1.48	1.02	1.31	0.84	1.39	0.93	88.36	95.08	92.1



Results – Importance of Different Services & Factors.

Importance of different factors

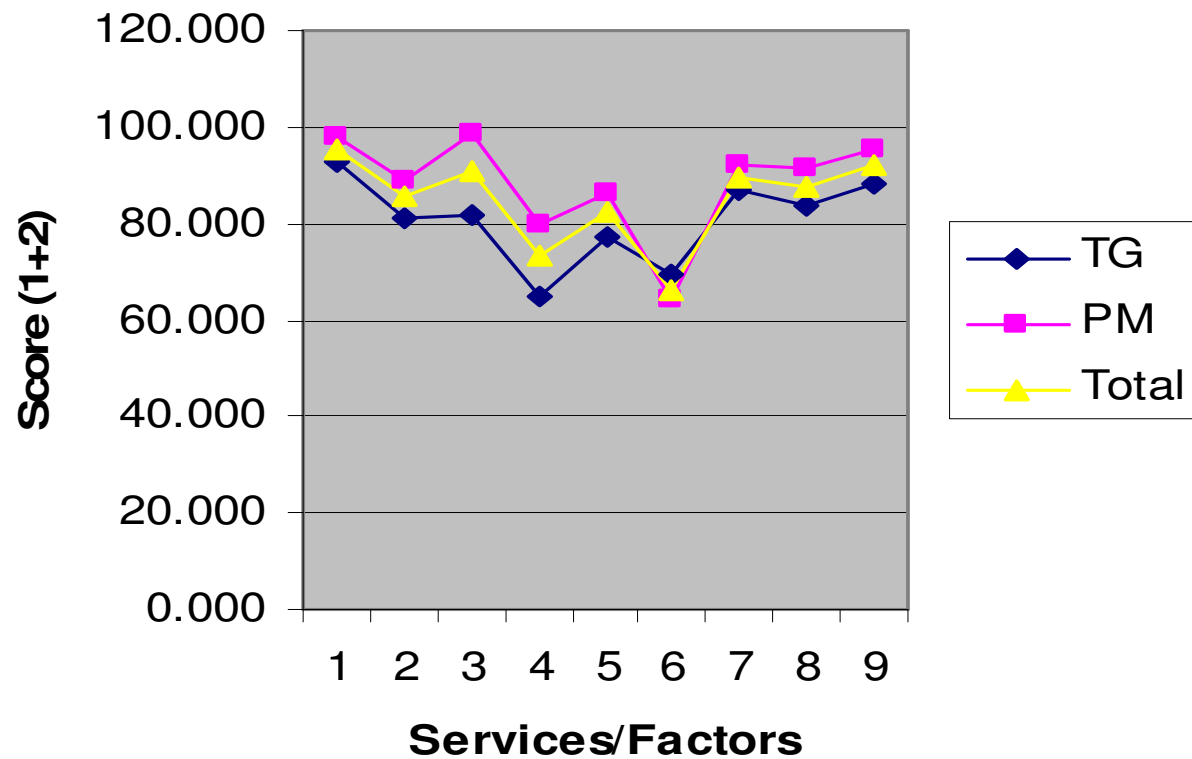


- 1 neighbourhood
- 2 spiritual activities
- 3 respecting others
- 4 rel with local autho
- 5 laws awareness imp
- 6 TV importance
- 7 NewsPaper & Radio imp
- 8 family planning importance
- 9 env protection imp



Results – Importance of Different Services & Factors..

Opinion about Importance



- 1 neighbourhood
- 2 spiritual activities
- 3 respecting others
- 4 rel with local autho
- 5 laws awareness imp
- 6 TV importance
- 7 NewsPaper & Radio imp
- 8 family planning importance
- 9 env protection imp



Results –

Importance of Different Services & Factors...

- Relatively, PM residents thought that having a good neighborhood is very important as compared to TG residents.
- PM residents thought spiritual activities are more important than the residents of TG.
- There was a significant difference as to the importance of respecting others. On an average around 91% respondents thought it to be important; however for around 99% respondents of PM it was important as against around 82% of TG respondents.



Results –

Importance of Different Services & Factors....

- The relationship of the people with the local authorities was found to be better at PM (80%) than TG (65%).
- Contrary to the general belief that urban people are more aware about family planning measures, it was found that around 91% of PM respondents thought it to be important whereas 84% of TG respondents thought so.



Results –

Satisfaction Level with Different Services

Table 3 – Satisfaction from different factors

Satisfaction from -		TG		PM		Total		TG	PM	Total
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	1+2	1+2	1+2
1	Neighbourhood	1.90	1.21	1.44	0.81	1.65	1.03	78.77	90.71	85.41
2	Development plan	2.31	1.75	3.18	2.54	2.79	2.27	53.28	13.49	33.06
3	Education	1.72	1.19	2.43	1.54	2.12	1.44	80.28	61.45	69.78
4	Medical facilities	1.72	1.25	1.84	1.29	1.79	1.27	81.38	78.89	80.00
5	Water & sanitation	2.01	1.35	2.19	1.24	2.11	1.29	70.63	74.03	72.53
6	Public services & utilities	2.05	1.27	1.97	1.16	2.01	1.21	66.20	76.24	71.83
7	Police services & crime control	2.07	1.38	1.97	1.48	2.02	1.43	70.34	81.97	76.83
8	Public transport	2.10	1.29	2.44	1.61	2.29	1.48	71.53	61.24	65.84
9	Electricity	1.54	0.96	1.52	1.03	1.53	1.00	84.83	91.62	88.58
10	Housing	2.25	1.35	2.36	1.30	2.31	1.32	62.33	57.54	59.69
11	Media (Newspaper, Radio & TV)	1.97	1.30	2.27	1.29	2.14	1.30	72.79	66.67	69.39
12	Leisure activities	2.13	1.56	1.85	0.94	1.97	1.25	65.25	85.39	77.22



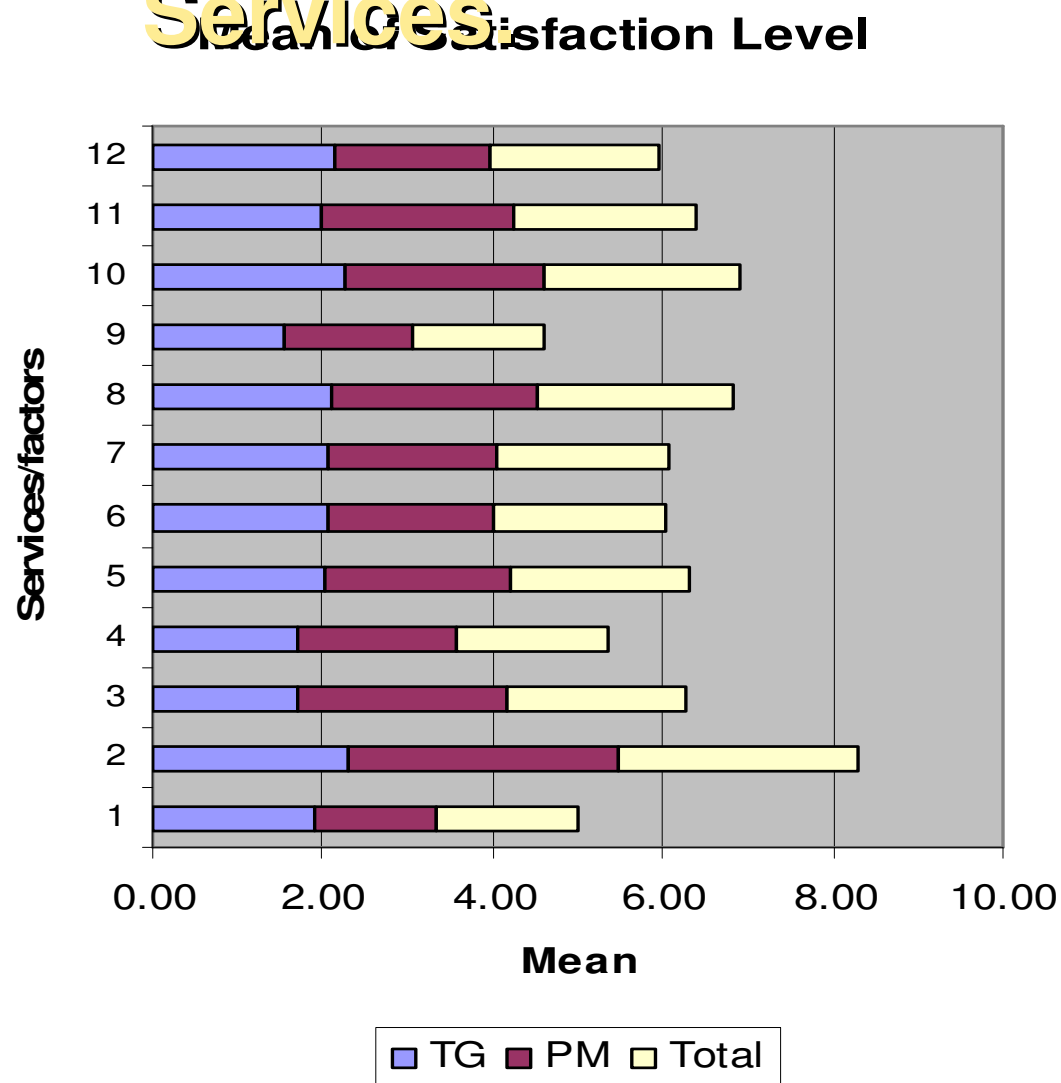
7/11/2007

VK. Shrotryia, NEHU, Shillong, India

24

Results –

Satisfaction Level with Different Services



- 1 Neighbourhood
- 2 development plan
- 3 education
- 4 medical facilities
- 5 sanitation & water
- 6 local pub services & utilities
- 7 police services & crime prev measures
- 8 pub transport
- 9 electricity
- 10 housing
- 11 newspaper & Radio, TV
- 12 leisure activities

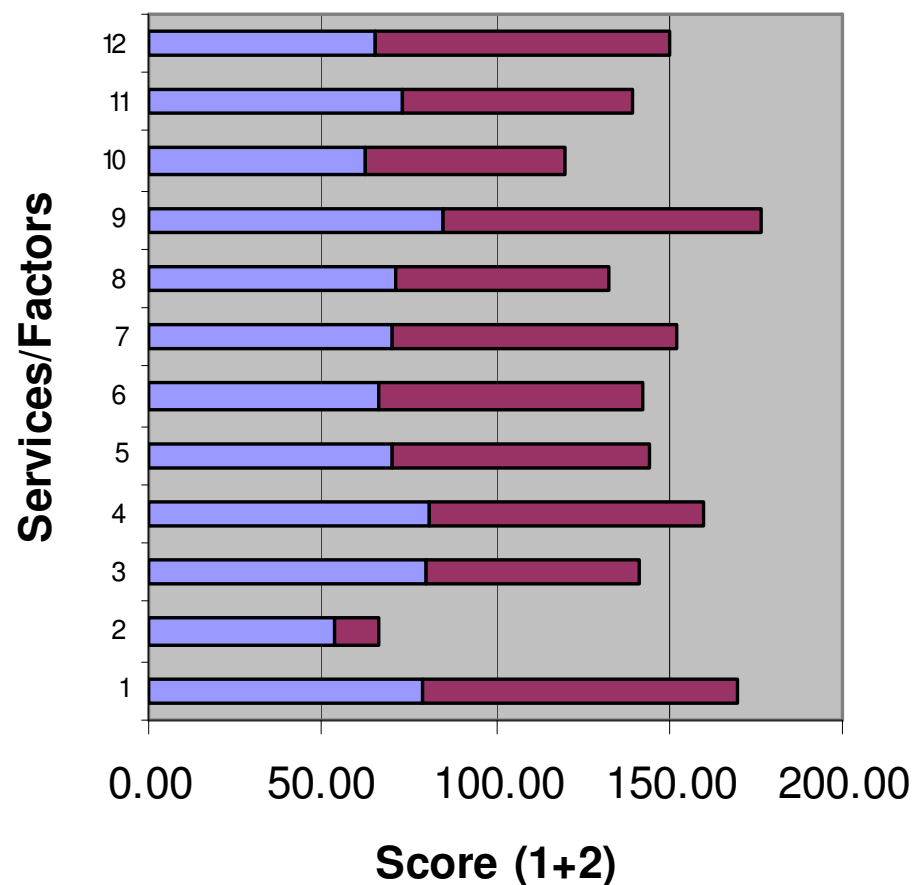


Results –

Satisfaction Level with Different

Services..

Score of Satisfaction Level



- 1 Neighbourhood
- 2 development plan
- 3 education
- 4 medical facilities
- 5 sanitation & water
- 6 local pub services & utilities
- 7 police services & crime prev measures
- 8 pub transport
- 9 electricity
- 10 housing
- 11 newspaper & Radio, TV
- 12 leisure activities



Results –

Satisfaction Level with Different Services...

- Poor satisfaction level as regards to the existing development plans. Especially at PM it was just 13% whereas at TG it was around 53%, which shows that TG people were much more satisfied with the development plans as compared to their counterparts at PM.
- It is important to mention that only 29% of PM respondents were aware of the development plan.



Results –

Satisfaction Level with Different Services....

- Around 61% of PM residents were satisfied with education whereas at TG it was around 80%.
- Not much of a difference in case of medical facilities where it was around 81% and 79% for TG and PM respectively.
- Satisfaction with electricity facility was found to be very high (89%) both at TG (85%) and PM (92%).



Results –

Satisfaction Level with Different Services.....

- Around 58% of PM and 62% of TG people were satisfied with their housing status.
- Satisfaction level from leisure activities was around 77% and surprisingly there was a gap of around 20% between TG (65) and PM (85) residents.

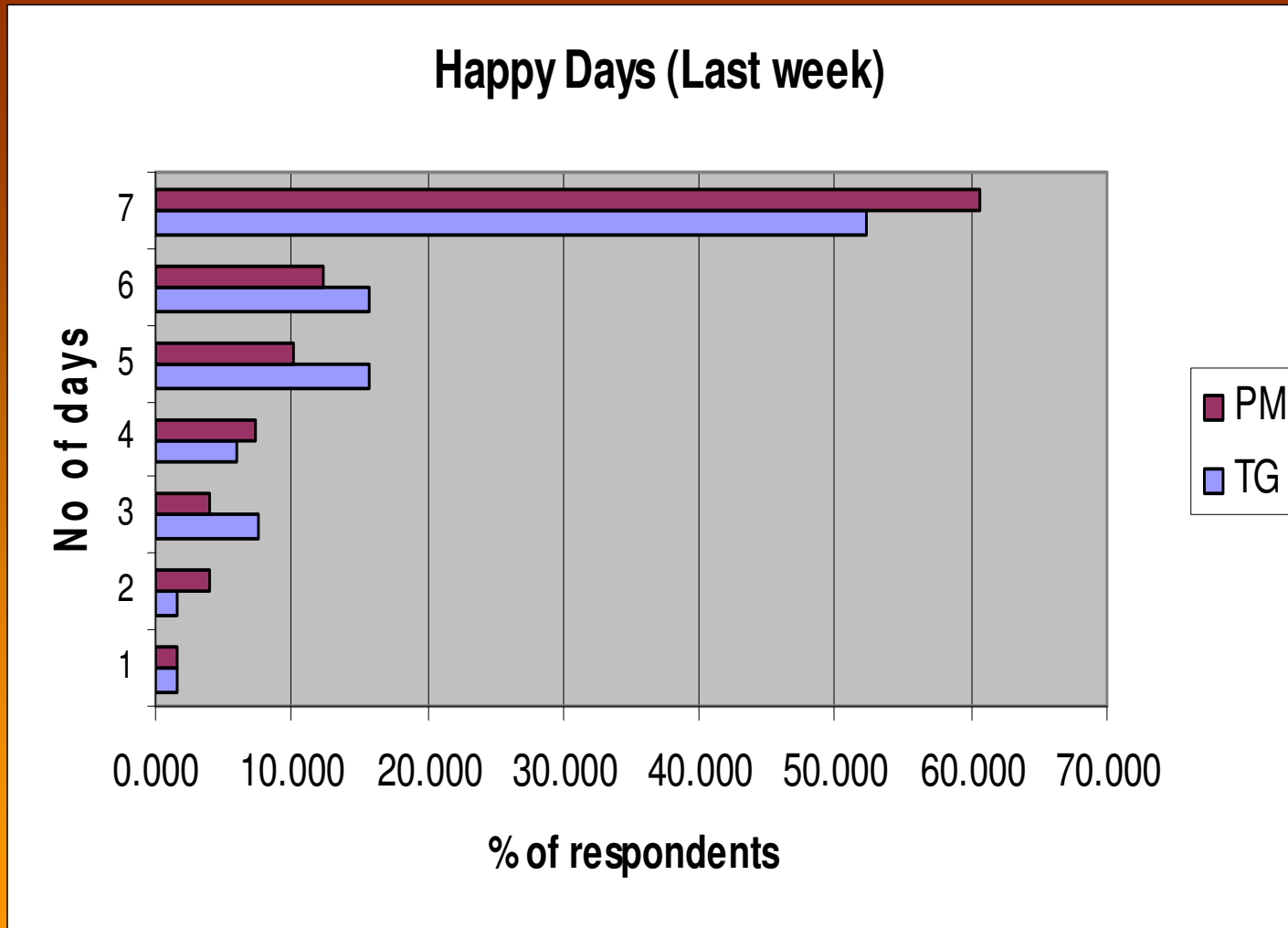


Results – Happy Life Years

Table 4 – Happy Life Years			
	TG	PM	Total
Mean	5.367	5.836	5.627
SD	2.196	1.820	2.007
Happy Days in a week	% of the responses		
1 day	1.50	1.70	1.60
2 days	1.49	3.93	2.89
3 days	7.46	3.93	5.45
4 days	5.97	7.30	6.73
5 days	15.67	10.11	12.50
6 days	15.67	12.36	13.78
7 days	52.24	60.67	57.05



Results – Happy Life Years.



Results – Major Findings

- Respecting others was most important for rural residents whereas having good neighborhood was most important for urban residents
- Least importance was given to own a TV both by urban as well as rural respondents.
- The variation was least in case of media (TV, newspaper, and radio) importance whereas in case of importance of respecting others the variation was most between TG and PM respondents.
- Highest satisfaction level was observed for electricity facility provided both at TG as well as at PM.



Results – Major Findings.

- Least satisfaction level was found from the development plans; the variation was also too high between TG and PM in this case.
- Residents ranked less satisfaction from housing status as compared to other items.
- 57% of the respondents reported that they were happy on all the seven days of the last week.
- Very few people reported their leisure time activity, however generally it was found that most of them were involved in spiritual activities during their leisure time.



- The kingdom is committed to *'maintain at least 60% of the land area under forest cover for all time to come'*. (9th FYP)
- 'one nation - one people'
- The most important factors for Bhutan's development have been continuous culture, environment and *Vajrayana Buddhism*
- First written constitution is in the public domain for opinion at present.



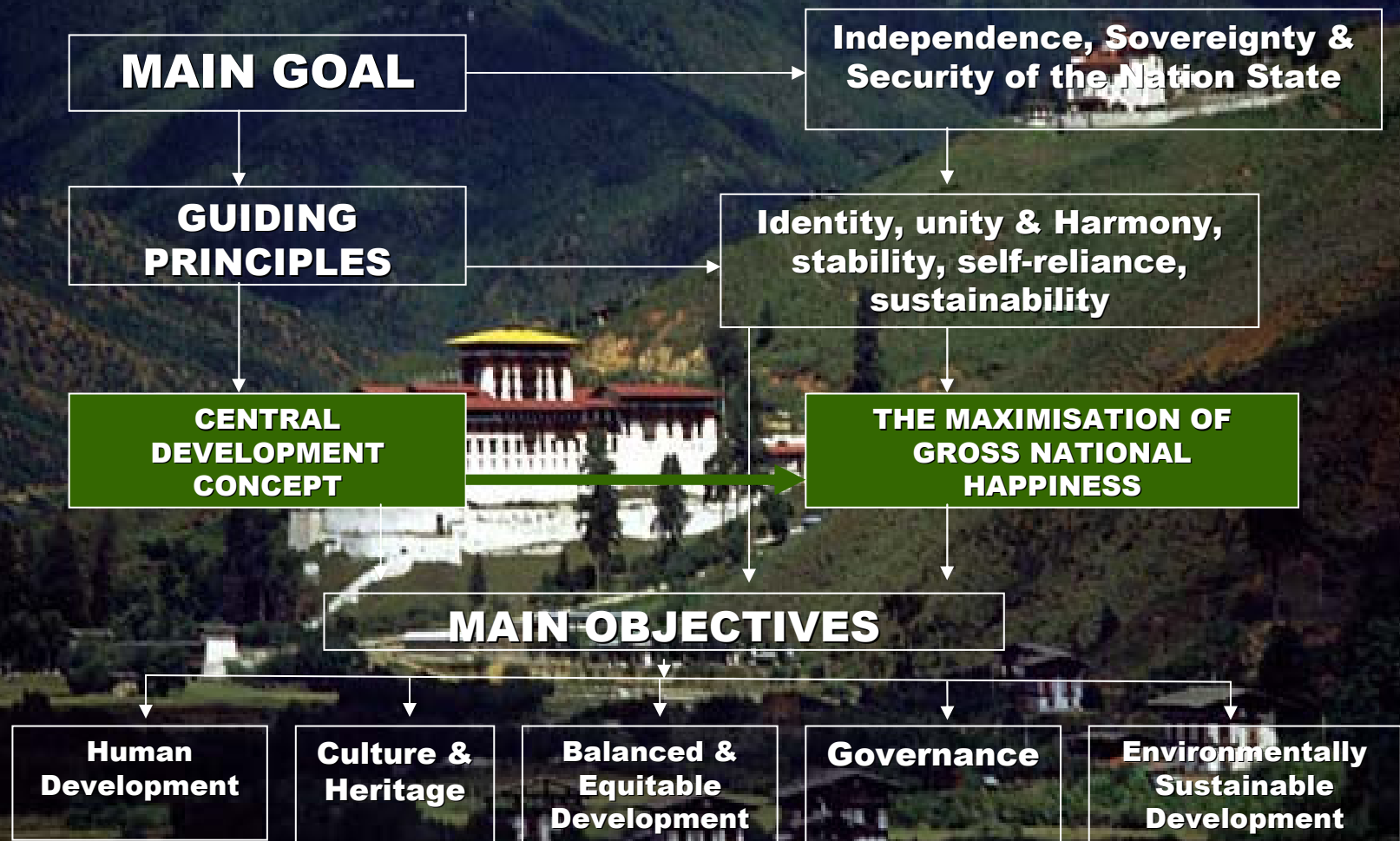
Discussion

Bhutan's Development Mantra called Gross National Happiness

Normative Architecture for Bhutan's development - it provides a guideline for setting priorities as well as could also provide guideline for GNH audit.



Normative architecture For the Kingdom's future Change and Development



Source: Bhutan 2020, p 15



Discussion.

Bhutan has been placed 8th in the World Map of Happiness (White, 2006) based on the parameters of life expectancy, access to education, GDP per capita and life satisfaction.

This shows that though Bhutan is lagging behind in GDP (an indicator of economic growth) and Human Development Index, but on the basis of happiness of people it enjoys much higher status as compared to many developed nations.



Discussion..

A fact sheet published by RGOB (2006) also records very high percentage of people enjoying happy status of life. This is based on 3 point scale (1 being very happy, 2 being happy and 3 being not very happy).

As reported 45.2% people responded to 1, 51.6% to 2 and remaining 3.3% choosing 3. This data is based on the sample of 126115 persons which can easily be taken as representing the status of the nation.



Discussion...

The attitude of people towards their neighborhood seems to be very good, as when asked 'while their neighbors are in trouble, how often they help' around 90% of the respondents told that they help them.

This attitude speaks of the good value system and strong community feeling.

Neighborhood was taken as one of the most important variable and the satisfaction level with existing neighbors was also one of the highest just ranked after electricity service which could satisfy around 90% people.



Discussion....

Though it was observed that most of the people were involving themselves in some spiritual activities during their leisure time, however respecting others, importance of media and family planning measures were thought to be more important by relatively larger respondents.

TV ownership was given least importance.

Rural-urban divide was visible in case of the importance of respecting others as for PM residents it was much more important than TG residents.



Discussion.....

On the basis of the satisfaction level of the people it could be concluded that they are happy people and their happiness level is very high as most of them (85% or more) feel that their life is comfortable and peaceful and they are happy person and happy family.

Similarly if we analyze their response as regards to number of days of the last week when they were happy, a meager percentage of less than 10 was reported as being happy for 3 days or less, which further strengthens the argument that people in Bhutan are happy people.



Discussion.....

Access to primary health care is over 90%,

Access to safe drinking water in rural areas is around 65%,

More than 90% children are immunized,

Life expectancy at birth has gone up to 66 years

(BNHDR 2000, p 7)



Discussion.....

Bhutan attained the status of “Normal Iodine Nutrition Country” becoming the first South Asian country to do so.

(BNHDR 2005, p 29).

Bhutan has been identified as MDG fast-track countries on the basis of governance qualification (UNMP Report 2005, p 234).

Bhutan has been one of the most successful countries in South Asia in its development and delivery of social welfare.

(Rutland, 1999).



Discussion.....

- *At a point in time, those with more income are, on average, happier than those with less. Over the life cycle, however, the average happiness of a cohort remains constant despite substantial income growth. [Easterlin 2001]*
- *Material consumption is not accompanied by a concomitant rise in happiness. [Thinley 1999]*



Discussion.....

Bhutan can lead the breed of the GNH economists who can tell the world that even within lot of constraints and having been under pressure, it can sustain its developmental process.

GNH is a phenomenon which has transpired the citizens of this kingdom to put forth their efforts to maintain peace, tranquility and sovereignty (Shrotryia, 2006).

The general perception is that economic growth takes care of human development and human development takes care of the happiness of people.

This is a traditional approach to guide public policy in a state.



Discussion.....

With the lessons from Bhutan it could be concluded that if this cycle is reversed and the public policy is initially targeted at providing satisfaction (happiness) to the people, it could take care of human development which further would influence economic growth positively. Bhutan has basically experienced it. The time would prove it with more success stories and evidences brought out from this unique kingdom which is marching ahead slowly but steadily in order to sustain the fruits of development.



Major Suggestions

What Can Be Done...

- The awareness campaigns of the development plans should be initiated at the government level.
- Better planning for improving housing status of people, more importantly in rural areas is required.
- To bridge up rural-urban divide, better social infrastructure (for education, health & public utilities) in the rural areas is required.
- Some initiatives to develop better community feeling at urban areas are required.



‘If it is medicine, you should take it from an enemy. But if it is poison, you should refuse it from a friend.’

[Famous Bhutanese Proverb]



[Photo courtesy : www.jovial.on.ca/vica/asia/bhutan]

Would you like to get in touch

Vijay Kumar Shrotryia

vkshro@gmail.com or
vkshrotria@nehu.ac.in

vkshrotryia@yahoo.com



7/11/2007

VK Shrotryia, NEHU, Shillong, India

49

Dhanyavad
T h a n k Y o u
Kokhun Krab/Ka



7/11/2007

VK Shrotryia, NEHU, Shillong, India

50