

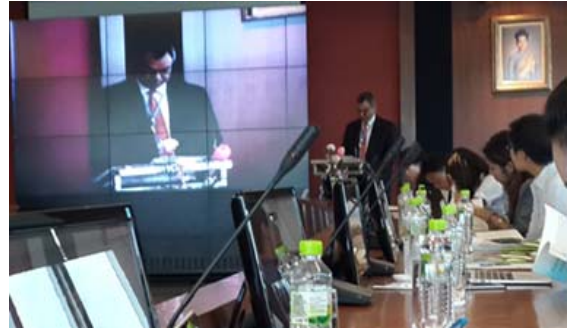
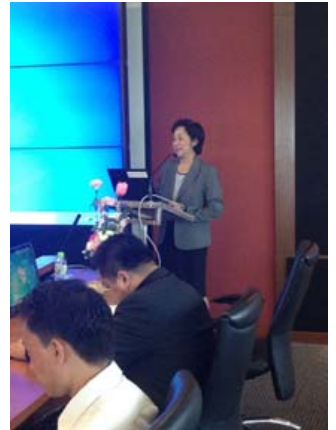
*Sustainable Happiness and
Sustainable Development*

International Forum

March 20, 2015

at

**Rangsit University
Thailand**





“Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”

International Forum

on the occasion of

UN International Day of Happiness

March 20, 2015

Partner organizations:

Rangsit University (RSU)

International Research Associates for Happy Societies (IRAH)

Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Thailand

National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)

United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Asia-Pacific Regional Center

World Health Organization (WHO), Thailand Office

Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development

- Book Title** Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development
- Numbers** 200
- Pages** 86
- Year** March 2015
- Produced by** Economic and Business Research Center for Reforms,
Faculty of Economics, Rangsit University
- Published by** Rangsit University Press
52/347 Road Phaholyothin sub – district Lak Hok
Mueang Ake, Pathum Thani Province Pathum Thani 12000
Tel. 0-2997-2200 – 30 ext. 1669
- Cover design &
arrangement by** Ms.Wanida Chanya

“Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”

Program:

Welcome and Opening Remarks by :

Dr.Chitriya Pinthong, Vice President for International Affairs, Rangsit University

Speeches by ;

1. H.E. Mr. Kesang Wangdi, Ambassador of Bhutan to Thailand
2. Mr.Witaya Pintong, Senior Advisor to Policy and Planning, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)
3. Mr.Bishwa Nath Tiwari, Programme Specialist Human Development Report United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia – Pacific Regional Center
4. Dr.Nima Asgari, Public Health Administrator, World Health Organization (WHO) Thailand

Paper Presentation and Discussion

Morning

1. Dr.Sauwalak Kittiprapas, Director of Economic and Business Research Center for Reforms, Faculty of Economics, Rangsit University, and International Research Associates for Happy Societies (IRAH).

Afternoon

2. Prof.Dr.Vijay Kumar Shrotryia, Professor and Head Department of Commerce North-Eastern Hill University Shillong – Meghalaya : INDIA
3. Dr.Thantavanh Manolom, The Economic Research Institute for Trade (ERIT), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), Lao PDR

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I.
Opening Session



Welcome Remarks
by
Dr. Chitriya Pinthong
Vice President for International Affairs,
Rangsit University

Dasho Kesang Wangdi, Ambassador of Bhutan to Thailand,

Representatives from NESDB, UNDP, and WHO,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Rangsit University, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this important and timely forum “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development” at Rangsit university today.

We are here to celebrate the International Happiness Day, which falls on March 20th of every year. By designating a special day for happiness, we are reminded that happiness is a fundamental human goal. Economic growth, economic well-being or economic development, whichever term we may wish to choose to indicate and measure our prosperity, cannot by itself capture the well-being of people. We are reminded that economic growth must be inclusive, equitable and balanced such that it promotes sustainable development. Additionally, economic development must be accompanied by social and environmental well-being. Together they define global happiness. Since the UNGA resolution in July 2012, more and more countries are trying to find practical ways to incorporate happiness in the context of global development. This new concept and approach will be a feature of sustainable development and the future of sustainable development and the future of the world we may want to live in.

Today discussion can contribute to global development agenda as this year- 2015- is a transition to post MDGs, that global development partners seek for new ideas and goals for development. Coincidentally, this year is also an important milestone of our university as we reach 30th year anniversary, showing that we are ready to support academic and research works for a new direction of development. As such, it is a very good opportunity for Rangsit University to host this important event.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all distinguished supporters in the organization of this event, particularly the Royal Bhutanese Embassy, respective UN organizations, and International Research Associates for Happy Societies (IRAH). Many thanks to all speakers and participants for your contributions, particularly to those who come a long distance.

I would also like to congratulate the Economics and Business Research Center for Reforms of the Faculty of Economics and IRAH for bringing this issue up for discussion and for taking

on a task of organizing this seminar. Thanks all RSU colleagues and staff for their hard work and cooperation in making this seminar materialized.

I believe that this forum will be successful in providing significant guidance and contributions to development theories and practices. I wish you a happy meeting and fruitful discussion.

Thank you

Statement
by
H.E. Mr. Kesang Wangdi.
Ambassador of Bhutan.
International Forum on "Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development" on the
occasion of the UN International Day of Happiness

Dr. Chitriya Pinthong, Excellencies, Distinguished speakers Ladies and Gentlemen,

On June 28, 2012 the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 66/281 declaring today as the International Day of Happiness. The language of resolution is soft and subtle but its message is loud and clear. It was yet another ringing recognition by the family of United Nations that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental and universal human goal and that it must find expression in our public policies. Happiness and well-being must remain at the heart of an inclusive, equitable and balanced growth. The resolution called for observing the International Day of Happiness through education and raising public awareness. It is propitious and relevant that today's deliberations is taking place at the cusp of finalization of the Sustainable Development Goals and post-2015 development Agenda. That we are gathered here today on the subject of happiness especially this year as we celebrate the 60th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck and Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirinthorn is indeed auspicious. It is for these reasons I pay a special tribute to Rangsit University for organizing this event in collaboration with UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Center, International Research Associates for Happy Societies and the Royal Bhutanese Embassy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sustainable development and sustainable happiness are and must remain as two sides of the same coin. A set of 17 goals and 169 targets is being submitted by the Open Working Group to UNGA later this this year. Is it comprehensive and holistic or are we being shortchanged? We are certain the eminent speakers, with whom I have the honour of sharing this platform, will illuminate us with their wisdom. Given today's context, it behoves of me to speak a few words on Gross National Happiness, a subject I believe whose time has come as the contours of a post-2015 development agenda appears in sharper relief. While I lay no claim to be an exponent on it, I am personally greatly inspired by it. My enthusiasm to speak on GNH is only tempered by the thought that I stand before a constellation of learned dignitaries, seasoned diplomats and luminaries from the academia whose erudition and experience far exceed my knowledge.

I shall make my presentation in the following way: who, what, how, why and when?

Who:

An early legal code of Bhutan states there is no purpose for the government if it cannot create 'Dekyid' or happiness for its people. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of Bhutan enunciated in 1972 the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness

(GNH). He had declared that GNH is more important than GNP. From then on the country oriented its policy towards GNH as manifest in its development plans. Following the establishment of parliamentary democracy and the coronation of His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, government programs and initiatives remain coherent with GNH. Indeed, the 2008 constitution calls on the State to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.

What:

Simply put GNH is an alternative development paradigm founded on the belief that happiness can be achieved by balancing the needs of the body with those of the mind within a peaceful and secure environment. It requires that the purpose of development must be to create enabling conditions through public policy for the pursuit of the ultimate goal of happiness by all citizens. It is sustainability based, wellbeing centric, inclusive socio-economic development model. His Majesty the King succinctly captures it as "development with values"

How:

The holistic aspect of GNH comprises four strategic pillars: 1. sustainable and equitable socio-economic development 2. Environmental conservation 3. Preservation and promotion of culture and 4. Good governance. The pillars are further delineated into 9 dimensions or domains which include psychological wellbeing, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, and community vitality, areas that traditionally receive little or no priority in many state policies. The 9 domains are instrumented by 33 indicators which are sensitive to 124 weighted variables. These constitute the GNH Index which is expected to measure more accurately the multidimensional nature of life and well being. The index serves as a live dash board for policy makers for monitoring progress and taking critical decisions in a timely manner.

Why:

Increasing in their frequency and intensity, the myriad crises both man-made and natural, are threatening the very survival of mankind. Abetted by technology, the GDP-blinkered development over the decades continues to rob our planet of its finite resources to feed an insatiable and pervasive consumerism. In the ultimate analysis, global warming fueled by consumerism that leads to inequities and competition for fast-diminishing resources often ignite conflicts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

we are faced with a clear and present danger of annihilation at our own hands. Some measure of achievement of MDGs has been marred by a growing chasm of inequities, severe climatic changes, non-sustainability and absence of a clear roadmap for the future. It is against this precarious backdrop our collective conscience is fortuitously waking up to today's reality as is evident in the ongoing discourse on post-2015 development Agenda and the Rio+20 process. The UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution 65/309 entitled: Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development which welcomed Bhutan to convene high level meetings on wellbeing and happiness with the objective of defining a new development paradigm to promote human happiness and the well-being of all life forms

within a sustainable environment. Bhutan has since facilitated broad consultations involving government and spiritual leaders, economists, scholars, members of civil society organizations and media. A set of holistic recommendations emanating from these consultations has been forwarded for deliberations on the post-2015 development agenda.

I shall take this opportunity to highlight some myths that may have grown around GNH: That Bhutan is still striving for happiness; it certainly is a land for happiness where government policies are geared towards making all its initiatives and programmes GNH compliant.

That it does not reject economic advancement which it asserts is merely one of the many means to the overarching goal of happiness.

That a country cannot achieve a bubble of GNH in isolation given the multidimensional character of happiness in a profoundly interdependent and interconnected world. The responsibility of realizing it is a joint one, lying with the citizen, community, civil society, government and indeed all nations.

That it is not a set of one size-fits-all proposition. The prescriptions may differ adjusting to local conditions and time-frame under the same overall architecture.

While the validation of GNH is self-evident. A peek into the minds of world leaders, thinkers and economists is revealing. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej declared that he will reign with righteousness for the benefits and happiness of the people of Siam. HRH Prince of Wales felt encouraged to discuss the need of a new economic paradigm with happiness and wellbeing at its core. H.E. President Pranab Mukherjee of India pointed out that the abode of happiness is where economic progress is a means and not an end, and where development has not cast a shadow on the preservation of natural heritage. Her Excellency President Laura Chinchilla Miranda of Costa Rica is convinced the purpose and meaning of development is not sheer accumulation of wealth but well being and pursuit of happiness. Nobel Laureate Prof. Joseph Stiglitz underscored the failures of GDP and argued for a more comprehensive metrics for measurement of economic and social progress as Bhutan does through GNH. Prof. Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University suggested sustainable mechanisms to ensure happiness which is the central goal of humanity. On a broader level OECD's Better Life Initiative, French President Sarkozy's Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission and UK Prime Minister David Cameron's initiative for improving society's well being all lay bare the inadequacy of GDP based economy and call for an alternate model for development with humans at the center. H.E. Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay of Bhutan recently drew attention to an ancient saying that "The king loves his people, his people desire happiness, and the source of happiness is the rule of law".

Who, what, how and why have been covered so far.

When:

We are currently at a confluence where various streams of processes for fashioning post 2015-development agenda is merging this year. The timing of mainstreaming happiness and well-being into a holistic sustainable development agenda for a post MDG world is now.

In concluding, I wish express heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Arthit Ourairat, President of Rangsit University for making this event possible and Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas for organizing it. This event affords us the opportunity to briefly reflect on the timeless theme of

happiness when the world is collectively awakening to the thirst for a new development paradigm that seem to resonate with GNH ethos. An ethos which has equitable and sustainable socio-economic development at its heart. Happiness is finally beginning to be understood not merely as a subjective, hedonistic and fleeting emotion. It may sometimes begin with a smile but its pursuit is a serious and collective endeavour that must succeed for sake of this planet and everything existing on it presently and in the future.

Tashi Deleg and Khob Khun Khrab

Speech
By
Mr. Witaya Pintong,
Senior Advisor in Policy and Plan,
Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board
International Forum “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”

Dr. Chitriya Pinthong,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today to talk about “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development” which is a very interesting topic because it has a strong influence on many countries’ development in the world.

Sustainable Development and Happiness Development

At present, as most of you might have known, the concept of both “Sustainable Development” and “Happiness Development” are widely acknowledged as the necessary parts of a country’s development. For the sustainable development point of view, the world has realized the importance of “Sustainable Development” since the 1992 UN conference in Rio, which led to Agenda 21. Then we moved on to the 2012 UN conference or Rio +20 which supported “Sustainable Development Goals” or SDGs. For the happiness point of view, as the ambassador of Bhutan had mentioned, the concept of the importance of the happiness which was said “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product” was first announced in 1972 by Bhutan's fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The concept of Gross National Happiness was that physical development alone was not enough for country development, and happiness of people must be developed altogether. In 2005, a quantitative Gross National Happiness was made as an index function of total average per capita. Since then, there have been a lot of countries and institutions which have adapted the happiness concept to their development measurement and policies beside the Gross National Happiness Index (GNH) of Bhutan, such as Canadian Index of Wellbeing Network (CIW Network), the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) of Australia, including Green and Happiness Index (GHI) of Thailand.

Development of Thailand in the Past

Before I go further, let me give you a historical perspective about the development of Thailand, in order to give you an overall picture of how the sustainable and happiness development has become an important part of Thailand’s development. In the past, the national development focused on economic growth and used growth of income per capita as

the main indicator of country development. The economic growth was expected to render trickle-down effect to the majority of the country and eradicated poverty. Therefore, growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was given more attention than stability and sustainability of development. Results of the development in that period of time showed the growth of GDP and the better quality of life, but they also resulted in deteriorate natural resources and environment, poverty and unequal income distribution. Thai economy depended heavily on external sectors such as export, foreign capital and technology. Development effort had been concentrated on exploiting opportunities given by external sectors without considering readiness of people and environment. Economic crisis in 1997 was a good lesson of what this imbalance, unstable and inappropriate development could bring.

In the Eight National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001), the development's paradigm shifted from 'economic-led development' to 'people-centered development' which aimed at building the well-being. The holistic approach and people participation were applied through all the development process. The Ninth plan (2002-2006) upheld the Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy of His Majesty the King as a guiding principle of the national development, which emphasized on moderation, reasonableness, and resilience based on knowledge and ethics. The Plan focused on a balanced approach toward issues of social, economic, natural resource and environmental development. The Tenth Plan (2007-2011) was pursued the Green and Happy Society under the direction of the Sufficiency Economy. People-centered development and holistic approach were still applied.

GHI Includes Concept of Sustainable and Happiness Development of Thailand

To evaluate the development of the country in each period, Thailand, by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), had developed indices which were in line with the development direction of Thailand in each period. The development direction of Thailand in the Eight Plan (1997-2001) and the Ninth Plan (2002-2006) geared toward well-being of people and sustainable development, so "Well-being Index" was developed for development evaluation in the Eight Plan and "Sustainable Development Index" as well as "Economic Strength Index" were formulated to be used together with Well-being Index for the development evaluation in the Ninth Plan period.

The Development direction in the Tenth Plan focused on happy society, which was in line with many countries in the world. Therefore, GDP or even the 3 indices NESDB had developed could not address the development vision of the Tenth Plan, because it could not measure mental dimension of development which was the most important factor for happiness. With this respect, NESDB has developed Green and Happiness Index (GHI) to monitor and evaluate the Tenth Plan's development impacts on the well-being and sustainable happiness of Thai people and the society. In the process of formulating GHI, concepts and indicators of many concerning indices including Well-being Index of the Eight Plan, Sustainable Development Index of the Ninth Plan and Gross National Happiness Index of Bhutan had been reviewed. Therefore, concepts and some indicators of these indices had been included in the GHI. Therefore, GHI includes concept of sustainable and happiness development of Thailand.

Development of Happiness Evaluation

However, during the Tenth Plan, Thai society faced rapid and complicated circumstances. Thailand relied on international economic and had high inequality of wealth. Moreover,

good value and culture have been weakening by materialism. Natural resources and environment are depleted. Natural disaster occurred frequently and severely. Most of all, Thai society has encountered difficulty in unity and harmony. Therefore, the Eleventh Plan (2012-2016) has been focused on “A happy society with equity, fairness and resilience.” The development direction was laid down to generate security and protection in all dimensions, which are economic, social, environmental and good governance dimensions, toward balanced and sustainable development. To do this, the country’s capital endowment must be strengthened and utilized correctly, good governance must be promoted, and people participation must be encouraged. Therefore, GHI needs to be adjusted in order to be an effective index for national development evaluation.

Then, NESDB revised the GHI to be appropriate with the changing situation in the 11th Plan. To improve the index, NESDB hired a Thai advisory institute, namely, the Institute of Good Governance for Social Development and the Environment, to review the indicators. We also requested assistance from the World Bank for the GHI revision task. The Global Expert Team (GET Team) of the World Bank had come to work with NESDB’s officials in August 2012. A consultative workshop was held with representatives from the private sector, civil society, and other Ministries to discuss future directions for the GHI to increase the relevance of the Index in Thai society. The World Bank also presented two options for consideration in revising the GHI. **The first option** was to convert the GHI into a set of outcome indicators to measure the impact of the Five Year National Plans. **The second option** was to create a universal Index which would measure outcomes relevant to the public that would capture overall well-being/happiness in society. NESDB also arranged a field trip to Bhutan to exchange knowledge and experience about happiness index with Centre of Bhutan Studies and Gross National Happiness Commission staffs. The information received from these activities was the precious resource for GHI revision. The revised GHI, then, can be a more accountable tool for sustainable and happiness development evaluation.

Happiness of Thai Society

Green and Happiness society means a state, where Thai people have well-being with good quality of life, have balanced of physical, mental and intelligence. The economic, social and environment are integrated within a peaceful and harmonious society. Underpinning the conceptual framework for the GHI is the philosophy of the “Sufficiency Economy” developed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Six components were selected to reflect the multidimensional nature of the conceptual framework for the GHI. There are; 1) Health 2) Warm and loving family 3) Community empowerment 4) Economic strength and equity 5) Surroundings and ecological system 6) Democratic society with good governance.

Finally, I would like to inform you the latest situation of the Thailand’s Green and happiness Index. GHI increased from 71.52% in 2012 to 71.76% in 2013. The accelerating factor was the Community Empowerment indicator which was increased from 81.00% in 2012 to 86.35% in 2013, while the decelerating factor was the Surroundings and Ecological System Indicator which was decreased from 68.46% in 2012 to 64.89% in 2013. The indicators which were quite stable were Health, Warm and Loving Family, and Economic Strength and Equity, which were 71.76%, 66.28% and 78.73% in 2013 respectively. The Democratic Society with Good Governance indicator was 57.23% in 2013 which was needed to be urgently improved. These data provides significant information for the direction towards sustainable and happiness

development. It would finally leads to policies making and measures for sustainable and happiness development, and bring about happiness for every Thai in the future.

Thank you.

Green and Happiness Index (GHI) 2007-2013

Unit : %

| Components | The 10th Plan | | | | | The 11th Plan | |
|---|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
| 1. Health | 70.16 | 71.09 | 69.63 | 69.35 | 72.11 | 71.52 | 71.76 |
| 2. Warm and loving family | 61.65 | 63.97 | 63.18 | 63.08 | 65.17 | 68.31 | 66.28 |
| 3. Community empowerment | 46.38 | 55.73 | 60.89 | 66.07 | 76.47 | 81.00 | 86.35 |
| 4. Economic strength and equity | 73.65 | 70.27 | 71.57 | 77.20 | 75.85 | 79.46 | 78.73 |
| 5. Surroundings and ecological system | 75.16 | 73.08 | 70.11 | 68.92 | 74.30 | 68.46 | 64.89 |
| 6. Democratic society with good governance | 70.45 | 74.95 | 60.37 | 55.70 | 53.75 | 55.56 | 57.23 |
| GHI | 67.60 | 68.78 | 66.28 | 67.35 | 70.48 | 71.68 | 72.15 |

Remarks :

80.0% - 89.9%

Average = 70.0% - 79.0%

To be urgently improved \leq 59.9%

Excellent = 90.0% - 100%

Good =

To be improved = 60.0% - 69.9%

Speech

by

Dr. Bishwa Nath Tiwari

UNDP Regional Office, Bangkok

International forum on “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”

Dr. Chitriya Pinthong, Vice-President for International Affairs, Rangsit University

Your Excellency Kesang Wangdi, Ambassador of Bhutan to Thailand

Distinguished speakers

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Morning!

It is a great honour to be here today amongst you on such an important event of international day of happiness. I would like to thank the organizers, Rangsit University, especially Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas, Director of Research Center, Faculty of Economics of the University for inviting me to speak few words on the sustainable happiness and sustainable development.

The implementation of the MDGs is coming to an end in 2015. The world today is engaged in a major policy debate about the objectives of public policy. The debate is about what should be the world’s Sustainable Development Goals for the period 2015-2030? There is a growing demand that policy be linked with what really matters to people. Several world leaders including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye and British Prime Minister David Cameron are speaking about the importance of wellbeing as a guide for their nations and the world.

In fact, 2015 is an important year, as it offers a unique opportunity for global leaders and people to end poverty and transform the world to a better place to live in, through protecting the environment, ensuring peace and realizing human rights. Three high level international meetings are taking place this year that give an opportunity to chart a new era of sustainable development. The first is the international conference on financing for development to be held in Addis Ababa in July which will build a compact for the global partnership. The second is the special summit on Sustainable development at the United Nations in New York in September where the world will finalize and implement a new agenda and set of sustainable development goals. The third is the 21st conference of parties of the UN framework convention on climate change in Paris in December where member states will adopt a new agreement to tackle the climate change threat and meet the new development agenda.

As we are aware sustainable development was advanced as a development paradigm in the first UN Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio in 1992, where it was emphasized that economic and social progress depend critically on the preservation of natural resource base with effective measures to prevent environmental degradation. Rio+20 conference held in 2012 renewed the political commitments to sustainable development that were made at the original conference 20 years ago.

The concept of sustainable development has been variously defined, however, the most widely used definition comes from the Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 which says: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainable development has three dimensions -- social, economic and environmental. Therefore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are under preparation will be a broad spectrum of the development objectives encompassing the three spheres of human lives. It has also connotation with the political life as improved governance is very much necessary to achieve the SDGs.

SDGs are the core of the Post-2015 development agenda which are at its final stage of formulation. Unlike the MDGs, a much consultative process has been adopted in their formulation. Open Working Group and high level panel have been constituted which have been supported by UNDP and UNDESA in the process of formulating the development agenda. The development of the agenda has been further informed with various thematic studies, regional and country consultations. The open working group already submitted its proposed SDGs in July last year, with 17 goals and 169 targets. They serve the main basis of the Post-2015 development agenda.

Efforts have been made to inform the SDGs from various perspectives including material and spiritual wellbeing. Happiness has been brought forward this time to feed into SDGs. In July 2011 the UN General Assembly passed a historic resolution. It invited member states to measure the happiness of their people and to use this to guide their public policies. In April 2012, this was followed by the first UN high-level meeting on happiness and well-being, chaired by the Prime Minister of Bhutan. At the same time the first World Happiness Report 2012 was published. Later in the same year OECD published Guidelines setting an international standard for the measurement of well-being. Furthermore, General Assembly Resolution on 28 June 2012 decided to proclaim the 20th March as the international day of happiness, and requested the UN secretary General to bring the resolution to the attention of all member states, organizations of the UN system and civil society for appropriate observance.

At national level, happiness has been advanced as a major goal for the development policy in several countries. In 1972, the fourth king of Bhutan declared that the Gross National Happiness was more important than Gross National Product. Consequently, the Government of Bhutan has given due focus to Gross National Happiness (GNH) over Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with policies designed to directly enhance people’s happiness. The concept of GNH is based on the premise that real development takes place when material and spiritual development occur simultaneously to complement and reinforce each other. Bhutan’s happiness criteria consist of economic, environmental, physical, social, mental and spiritual wellness.

Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron in 2010 announced initiatives for measuring British people's level of happiness so as to advance wellbeing. The announcement was the latest evidence of growing awareness among governments that GDP and other traditional metrics of economic progress had failed to measure the kind of progress that makes life better. In July 2012, the UK Office for National Statistics released its first national well-being survey in an effort to produce an alternative scale for measuring national performance apart from the traditional GDP. The Government of Malaysia integrated happiness in the SD framework with 36 major indicators derived under 6 dimensions. Similarly, France and Canada are also looking at how to incorporate happiness into governance. In 2008 French President Nicholas Sarkozy constituted a three-member commission which advanced GDP as an incomplete measure of economic performance and social progress, and suggested to take into account non-market activities into the income measures, among others.

In a similar vein, Thailand is pursuing His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej' "sufficiency economy" philosophy, which is very much in line with the approach of sustainable development. The philosophy emphasizes moderation, responsible consumption, and resilience to external shocks which are of great relevance today. The middle path approach of this philosophy strongly reinforces the United Nation's own advocacy of a people-centered and sustainable path towards human development.

In fact, the concept of happiness has its root since long past. The concept was discussed 2100 years ago in the works of Mencius and Aristotle. One of Aristotle's most influential works is the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he presents a theory of happiness. According to Aristotle, happiness is the ultimate purpose of human existence. It is not pleasure, nor is it virtue but it is the exercise of virtue – i.e. exercise of good moral character!

The concept of sustainable happiness has been on the rise since last one decade, drawing mainly on Buddha's teachings. O'Brien (2005) defined sustainable happiness as the pursuit of happiness that does not exploit other people, the environment, or future generation. Bringing sustainability and happiness together within the concept of the sustainable happiness holds significant possibilities for individual, community and global wellbeing. It follows the middle path approach of Buddhism and sufficiency economy and holds that sustainable consumption and production as one of the means for sustainability. This is possible through the "inner happiness" obtained by the wisdom and understanding of interdependence of all kinds of living beings and nature.

With the growing relevance and popularity of the concept of happiness, efforts have been made to measure it. In the process of measuring happiness, the concept is used in at least two ways — the first as an emotion; and the second as an evaluation. The 2013 World Happiness Report using the data of Gallup World Poll measures the happiness following the emotion and evaluative approach. It points out that people generally do not mix their short term emotions with the long term satisfaction and recognize the difference between happiness as an emotion and happiness in the sense of overall life satisfaction.

The Royal Government of Bhutan has constructed Gross National Happiness Index with 33 indicators falling under 9 domains (including psychological wellbeing, health, education, culture, time use, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and standard of living.). Launched in 2011, the OECD's "Better Life Initiatives" reports a better life index biennially. It has 11 dimensions (income and wealth; job and earnings;

housing; health status; work life balance; education and skills; social connections; civic engagements and governance; environment quality; personal security; and subjective wellbeing).

UNDP advanced human development to measure wellbeing since 1990. Human development means expanding the options or choices of people. It considers income as one but important choice. The concept is evolving, and is dynamic as people's options change over space and time.

Human development is based on the concept of functioning and capabilities. Functioning's are so-called "being and doings". 'Being fed' and 'being sheltered' are examples of the "being functioning". Working, and travelling are the "doing functioning". Capabilities are people's opportunities to achieve desirable functioning.

The concept of human development is very broad, however, an attempt has been made to measure it through some indices. UNDP uses four indices to measure it. These include the human development index, inequality-adjusted human development index, gender inequality index, and multi-dimensional poverty index. These indices reflect only some facets of human development as there are several aspects which are difficult to quantify and measure. Of the four indices, HDI has been most popular which consists of three dimensions --health, education and standard of living, with four indicators.

The concept of human development is very much similar to the concept of happiness. Both approaches see the limitation of Gross National Product (GNP) as a measure of human wellbeing. Both approaches have income, education and health as common dimensions of measurement. Moreover, there are several other overlaps. The major difference between them is that human development is embodied with a conceptual framework based on capability approach, whereas the concept of happiness is based on real situations of emotion, self-satisfaction, and spiritual wellbeing. Thus, happiness is a real approach that shows how people feel about their current days and those of overall life. Both concepts – human development and happiness - are very much complementary and will contribute to the type of policies required for enhancing human wellbeing and happiness. Moreover, they could serve as the basis for evaluation of policies and political system.

UNDP has been widening and deepening the concept of human development. Towards this end, it has been conducting and commissioning research and publications to trigger debates and discussions, and building capacity on the measurement of human development. UNDP mainly produces its flagship Human development Report (HDR) at 3 levels: global, regional and national. From its inception in 1990, when the first global human development report was launched, UNDP has produced 23 global HDRs, more than 33 regional reports and 682 national HDRs. Because of its growing relevance and popularity the report is now prepared at sub-national level such as in Indonesia at provincial levels, and in India at state and district levels.

The usefulness of human development approach is growing over the years. Human development index (HDI) and related indices have been used as tools for planning and resource allocation. HDI serves as a basis for resource allocation at the provincial and district levels in countries like Indonesia and Nepal. Recently Cambodia has used multi-dimensional poverty index to identify poor provinces so as to target poverty interventions.

In conclusion, the concept of sustainable happiness, sustainable development and human development are inter-related. All of them are much wider measures of human wellbeing. They correct the limitations of GNP as a measure of wellbeing. Systematic measurement and analysis of happiness and human development can inform about the ways to improve sustainable development. Today our happiness and concerns surpass the national physical boundaries. We are so inter-connected that one's happiness and wellbeing depends on other's actions. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of sustainable development should be the world's wellbeing and happiness, which is possible with the efforts of all countries working together!

I hope today's discussion in this forum will help understand further the relation between sustainable happiness and sustainable development, and the ways how sustainable happiness could contribute to attain sustainable development which forms the core of the Post-2015 development agenda.

Thank you all!

Speech
By
Dr.Nima Asgari,
Public Health Administrator
World Health Organization (WHO), Thailand
International Forum “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development” Forum

*Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen*

Dr Tegegn, the WHO representative to Thailand sends his apologies and asked me to represent him at this meeting and it is indeed a pleasure for me to be here and share with you some of the principles that guide our work in WHO and how they are linked to happiness.

I want to start by reading some of the points in WHO constitution:

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, and that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition”

At the same time when we look at what we mean by happiness, it is “ an outcome of ultimate desire & fulfillment which depend on physical, mental, social, economic, and spiritual well-being”.

You will see that in most of my speech, I will focus a lot on health- not surprising since I come from the World Health Organization, but, since health is such an important pre requisite for happiness, you cannot have one without the other and I think that the above two quotes in health and happiness show this very clearly.

Sustainable development is sometimes a hard concept to grasp. Measuring happiness and sustainability is even more difficult. However, Health outcomes can be measured and can generate public and political interest. WHO has developed tools and indicators to assess the impact of policies in different sectors and their potential impact on peoples' health. Health indicators alone cannot convey progress on development, but as both contributor and beneficiary of sustainable development, they will be a critical component to how we track the progress and impact of sustainable development. The post 2015 development agenda is certainly renewal of our global commitment for sustainable development. Health is also playing important role in this process.

Rio +20 offers an opportunity to re-examine the relationship between health and sustainable development. It does so at a time of global uncertainty; at time when the world is reacting to the on-going impact of financial and other crises; and at a time of growing inequities within and between countries. The key messages in this note are that improvements in human health contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, that they are one of its principal beneficiaries and - of particular importance in this context - health indicators provide a convincing and powerful means for measuring progress.

The links between better health, the economy and the environmental sustainability are well established: people who are healthy are better able to learn, to earn and to contribute positively to the societies in which they live. Conversely, a healthy environment is a prerequisite for good health. Reduction of key air, water and chemical pollution risks can prevent up to a quarter of the total burden of diseases, and a large proportion of childhood deaths.

A changing climate not only increases the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, but in the longer term threatens the fundamental requirements for health - clean air, safe drinking water, a secure food supply and adequate nutrition and shelter.

Many health risks can be prevented and health benefits enhanced by a more integrated approach to policy making. Such approaches ensure that health and human well-being, equity and poverty eradication are the outcomes of development, and not factors to be traded off against economic growth alone.

I would like to remind everyone that there is a need to show how these linkages between various inputs into happiness and sustainability work and I am glad to see that there are panel discussions on research into happiness and wellbeing in various Asian Countries. I hope that this can help with shaping the policy discussion when it comes to SDGs.

Finally, allow me to wish you a happy, harmonious and fulfilling day.

Thank you

II.
Morning
Presentation and Discussion



*Achieving Sustainable Development by Inner Happiness:
A New Approach of Sustainable Development*

By

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and

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*Paper presented at “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”
International Forum on March 20th, 2015 at Rangsit University, Thailand*

Achieving Sustainable Development by Inner Happiness: A New Approach of Sustainable Development

By Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas¹

1. Background and Rationale

Sustainable development has been a topic of discussion and global movement for a long time and will become the global post-2015 MDGs agenda with sustainable development goals (SDGs). Since the UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 which considered as the start of global concern towards the environment internationally, related UN organizations as well as the World Commission concerning the environment and development were established. There have been many active movements towards sustainable development, mainly driven by environmental stream; whereas another stream of movement from UNESCO declared: “the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1997) to focus on culture (related to human values) for development.

Since the 1992 UN conference in Rio, heads of states and government adopted Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration; however, over decades there have been huge implementation gaps across the world in moving along the sustainable development pathway. Upon reaching 20 years of implementation in 2012, Rio + 20 adopted “the Future We Want” to speed up campaigns of sustainable development which focused on green growth concept of sustainable development by integrating economic, social and environmental aspects. The Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) - a global initiative for UN supporting the SDGs, proposed the fourth dimension, good governance, to the framework of mainstream sustainable development covering economic, social and environment.

After more than four decades of globally sustainable development movement, large implementation gaps as well as serious environmental problems still exist. It should be questionable why it has not been very effective. Obviously, that conventional idea implemented globally is still attached to growth, aiming for green growth. As environmental problems remain in global development today largely driven by consumption-led growth, it seems difficult to achieve both continued growth and sustainable development goals. Therefore, the development framework may need a rethinking. There may be some missing elements in the sustainable development pathway which may be more crucial than those four dimensions that exclude human minds and spirits.

The concern for living in harmony with nature is likely to be driven from inner happiness obtained by wisdom with the understanding of interdependence of all kinds of living-beings and nature, as well as happiness from the less use of resources or less dependent from materials. In this regard, promoting inner happiness with moderate consumption, in line with middle-way economics, well supports holistic sustainable development approach. The spiritual or inner happiness focus of sustainable development can also be considered as a direction for advanced human development, encouraging human to move along the path of happiness from low/ basic level of material dependence up to higher (mind => wisdom)

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happiness levels. This is to promote human to obtain happiness at high level which is more sustainable and independent (as explained in Buddhist happiness concept). This type of happiness can be achieved with less consumption and low resource utilization.

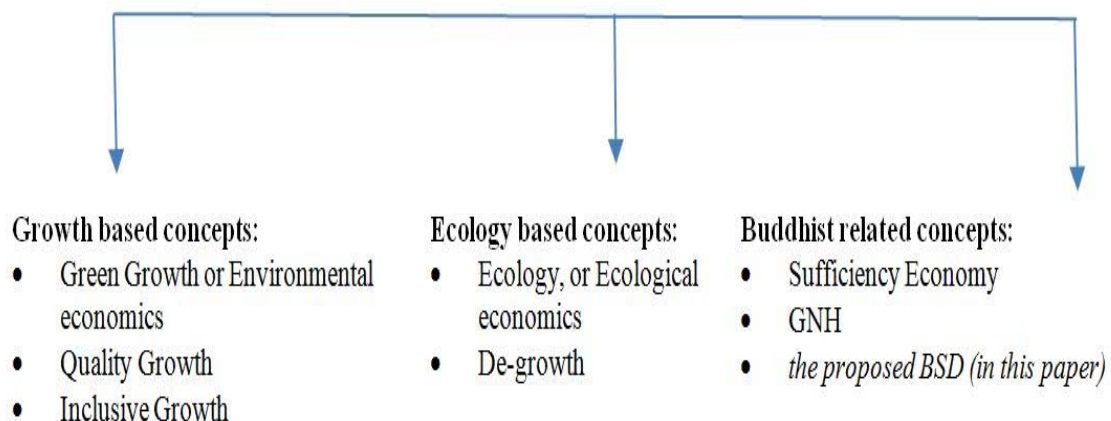
This is why the approach of sustainable development has to link with happiness that also has sustainable nature. This sustainable type of happiness could help making sustainable development effective. The inner-human dimension which is a critical factor for sustainable development and a starting point for all changes need to be discussed and subjective well-being of human beings should not be neglected.

To achieve the goal of sustainable development successfully, human beings must be happy and be willing to do so. Thus, sustainable happiness from inside is necessary and is missing from the current sustainable development concept. The linkage of happiness and sustainable development is the focus on demand-side of sustainable development, rather than supply-side management that generally discussed.

2. Sustainable Development Concepts

This paper categorizes sustainable development into three groups: 1) economics or growth based concepts, 2) ecological based concepts, and 3) Buddhist related concepts. The first group includes concepts that accept growth or having no process to limit growth, in general. The second group are those concerning ecological factors or de-growth concepts that counter growth and materialism in order to preserve resources. The third group includes those related to Buddhist economics concept that promote simplicity, a balanced life style with moderate consumption and middle-way economics, driven by wisdom. The diagram in Figure 1 below shows the classification of these three main concepts.

Figure 1. The diagram classifying different sustainability concepts:



2.1 Growth based concept

Growth based concept is conventional model of intervention used by environmental economists and most of international organizations. It is the blend of development and environmental concerns by merging economics and environment. The conventional concept still require growth for poverty eradication, but with concern for environment and sustainability. This model needs growth with little or no adverse effect to environment; for example, green growth (or green GDP), quality of growth, and even inclusive growth (that protect the poor and the vulnerable). As a result, the conventional sustainable development approach focuses on three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environment – which has been used in international development circles until now.

This type of concept concerns sustainability based on physical resources. Sustainable development definition of Brundtand report¹ also concern physical resources for inter-generation consumption point of view by defining sustainable development as:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Our Common Future (1987)

2.2 Ecological based concept

In contrast to mainstream economics’ idea of sustainability, ecologists value the natural ecosystem and interdependencies within the ecosystem. Human capital, technology and human-made capital cannot substitute largely for natural capital. This school of thought concerns ecological sustainability within limits of time and space scales.

Therefore, the increase in human population growth and consumption growth would affect the system balance. This imbalance is also enhanced by technology. Since the industrial revolution, human beings have utilized massive amounts of resources for the sharp increases in production and consumption. Global development, as based on Western economic models emphasizing consumption and production accelerated by technological advancements, has adversely affected the environment and ecological system.

A key difference between ecological economics and mainstream economics is that ecological economics focuses on an appropriate economic scale, the fair distribution of resources and products concerning long-term efficiency and sustainable development. It focuses on quality development of human life and societies.

The concern of oversized economy in the planet also leads to a radical view that global development now needs de-growth because the development path following the conventional development model allowing the increased consumption and over limits for appropriate economic scale². Continued growth seems impossible for sustainable development.

¹ The World Commission on Environment and Development published it in 1987.

² Chiengkul (2013)

2.3. Buddhist based concepts

Related Buddhist development concepts that have emerged recently in the Eastern world, for example, are: Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and Gross National Happiness (GNH). The paper, in following chapters, also proposes a new Buddhist Sustainable Development (BSD) focusing on inner happiness as a pathway towards wisdom and holistic sustainable development. They seem closer to ecological concepts than the mainstream one, but not exactly the same. They concern more than physical aspects of sustainable development.

Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP)

The sufficiency economy philosophy initiated by King Bhumipol Adulyadej of Thailand can be seen as a practical model of Buddhist concepts. It is based on the Buddhist principles of self-reliance, contentment, moderation, and the middle-path, which are consistent with Buddhist economics. The word “self-sufficiency” in this concept means having enough to live on and to live for, as well as being satisfied with the situation (i.e., people are satisfied with needs at the moderate level, less greedy and more honest, consequently less trouble towards others).

Sufficiency economy means a philosophy that stresses the middle path as the overriding principle of appropriate conduct by the population at all levels. “Sufficiency” means moderation and due consideration in all modes of conduct. It also requires the strengthening of morality of all sectors and groups to adhere to principles of honesty and integrity, and serves as a balanced approach combining patience, perseverance, diligence, wisdom and prudence to appropriately cope with critical challenges from socioeconomic, environmental and cultural changes derived from globalization¹.

Therefore, sufficiency economy philosophy is beyond economics but shares Buddhism’s core concepts for right living. Sufficiency economic principles rely on the concepts of three-elements under two-conditions, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Principles & Conditions of the Sufficiency Economy

Three principles

- Moderation “Satisfaction”
- Reasonableness
“Being aware”
- Self-immunity
“Down-sizing risk”

Two conditions

- ⚙ Knowledge
- ⚙ Ethics



¹ Summarized from Philosophy of the “Sufficiency Economy” page in *The King’s Sufficiency Economy and the Analyses of “Meanings by Economist”*, The Office of the National Research Council of Thailand, 2003.

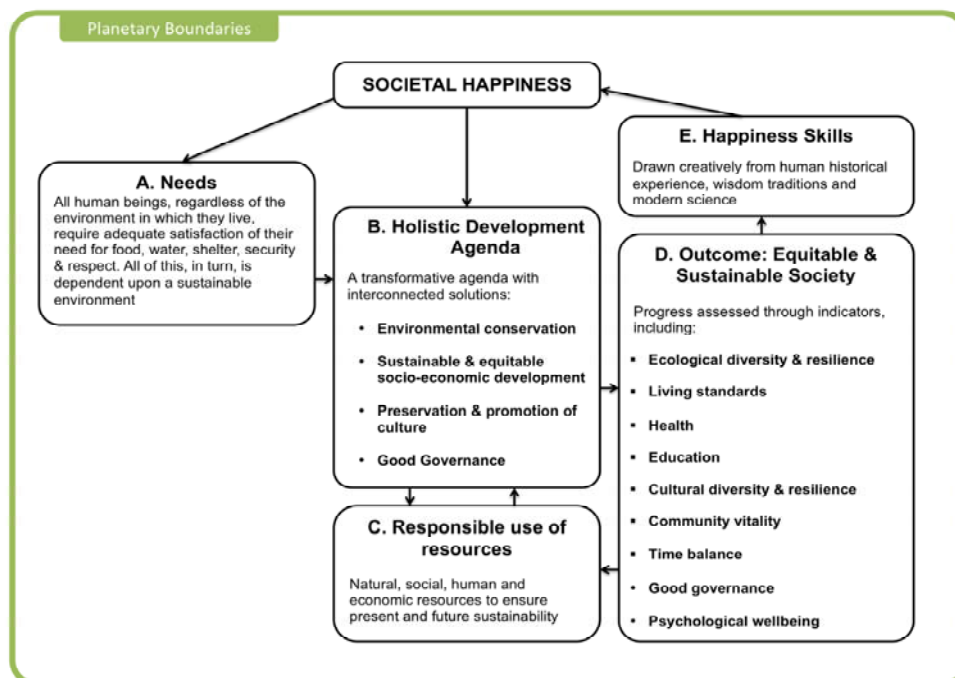
Gross National Happiness (GNH)

Gross National Happiness or GNH was known when H.E. Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King of Bhutan enunciated in 1972. GNH places the core value of happiness into a relationship with four main dimensions: sustainable and equitable socioeconomics, good governance, promotion and preservation of culture, and environmental conservation. Viewing economic growth strategy as misdirection in pursuing individual and societal happiness, GNH has inspired a new paradigm for development. Bhutan proposed to the UN and global development community to promote happiness as a new development paradigm¹.

In the new development paradigm (NDP), genuine happiness arises from a deep sense of harmony with nature, with compassion and contentment. It also acknowledges basic needs from society and the environment (i.e., clean air and water, good health and decent living conditions, knowledge, peace, security and justice, meaningful relationships, etc.) as preconditions for human-beings to flourish and achieve true happiness. It values the sustainability of all life on earth (e.g., humans and other species) and interrelatedness. With global crisis in all dimensions, it addresses the need for holistic views on development. The new paradigm is expected to influence the transformative post-2015 development agenda.

In the NDP model, the vision of societal happiness views human progress within planetary limits, thus it becomes necessary to focus on real needs and the fulfilling of the needs of *all* humans rather than the “wants” of just a few. The NDP also recognizes happiness skills as necessary personal tools to experience human and social happiness. The NDP framework can be illustrated as in Figure 3.

Figure 3. New Development Paradigm (NDP) framework



Source: NDP (2013: p. VIII).

¹ NDP (2013)

Under this concept, wellbeing conditions and measurement can be assessed according to the nine domains currently used in Bhutan's GNH Index: ecological diversity and resilience, living standards, health, education, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, time balance, good governance, and psychological wellbeing. These are under key four components of GNH: environmental conservation, sustainable or equitable socio-economic development, preservation & promotion of culture, and good governance.

In sum, Buddhist related concepts of Sufficiency Economy and GNH recognize non-growth dimensions of well-being and the relationship with nature; thus, providing a holistic view of development. They also promote a balanced life style with moderation and contentment, rather than materialism and consumerism as the economic growth model. Obviously, the two models disregard growth and place value on their own pathways, which can guide for happier development for their societies rather than following the mainstream one.

Analyzing conceptual differences

Buddhist related concepts are different from the economist and ecologist concepts that concern sustainability only with physical factors. Sustainability in Buddhism also focuses on the inner spirit and values of humans. While the other two concepts (growth-based and ecological-based) have only a physical sense and focus on physical sustainability similarly, their approaches are different in how to maintain it.

Overall, these three schools of thoughts are similar in trying to meet basic needs of all and extend opportunities for bettering lives, but they are difference in "how to" or pathways to reach the goal. The Buddhist approach deals with human behavior (which has consequences towards sustainability) more than the other two approaches which deal directly with natural resources. However, each Buddhist related concept may have different focuses in aims and practical processes. For example, the Sufficiency Economy philosophy is concerned as being a living guidance system for individuals and societies, while GNH concerns happiness as the ultimate goal of human beings, of which sustainable development is a key element.

Given the above existing concepts, another Buddhist approach introduced in this paper (so called "Buddhist Sustainable Development" – BSD) focuses on inner happiness as the key factor to make sustainable development goal effective as well as indicates direction or a pathway to reach the goal of sustainability. Inner happiness which can be generated inside human beings and independent to external factors is beyond physical level of happiness.

3. Happiness Classification and Conceptual Differences

In Buddhism, happiness rank starts from the lowest level or physical based which is happiness from acquisition or meeting sensual pleasures to higher level or inner happiness which can be obtained from non-acquisition which is a mind and wisdom based, leading to the highest happiness level with total extinction of suffering that considered as real happiness. The following three types of happiness are simply categorized according to Buddhist happiness concept¹.

¹ The following happiness classification and explanation are interpreted or extracted from Payutto, P.A. (2011), Payutto, P.A. (2012) and P.A. Payutto, (P.A. (1992).

1. Happiness from Physical Level

This is the lowest rank of happiness from meeting physical needs or sensual pleasures. It depends on external factors; therefore, it can be unstable and unsustainable.

Happiness at physical or material level is needed for basic needs to relieve person's physical sufferings and get out of poverty. However, human beings may demand over materials and resources much more than the necessity level of human needs. Human desires at physical level can be classified into two types: 1) basic need that is really needed for improving quality of life (real need), and 2) the unlimited wants which are not necessary or over luxury. Following Buddhist economics, when there are internal conflicts in choosing between the two desires, people should go for the first type for improving real quality of life. The second type of wants can cause problems to oneself as well as to social and environment.

Excessive material accumulation driven by greed may not lead to the increase in happiness and not sustainable, instead it can cause problems. Happiness depending on external pleasures to serve ones' needs may also cause conflicts with others who also need them. People can get stress and tensions from object dependent and social comparison, and their happiness can be faded down with higher desire and pressure. This can increase suffering instead. Eastern Buddhist philosophy explains this type of happiness as temporary and mix of suffering, if not be managed by wisdom.

Thus, physical level of happiness is acceptable in the case that it is supervised by good mind & wisdom and to be used for advancing human development. After the basic needs are fulfilled, humans should be able to develop further to gain higher level of happiness or inner happiness.

2. Happiness from Mind Development

Happiness at this level is the start of inner happiness that can be generated inside one's own mind. People can be happy from good quality of mind, peaceful and mindful, loving kindness and compassion as well as giving or sharing to others, instead of being happy from accumulation for self-interests. This mind level of happiness can be generated from inner spirit, not from material acquisition for themselves.

This mind based happiness can also be driven by good desires; for example, the desire to be useful for others (not for selfishness), to be happy to work for its own results (not for rewards), the love to learn and develop oneself, etc. It is a higher happiness level than the first one because this is more developed or trained to be, not driven by personal benefit only. People can have good will or aspiration to be good, to be knowledgeable, to be creative, to be useful, to help people out of suffering, to do good things, etc. Thus, this type of happiness would benefit societal development and happiness.

This type of mind development can be characterized by purified, calm, and clear mind. Positive psychology as well as meditation can be trained for having this mind-based happiness. When mind is developed to higher level with higher quality, it leads the way for more wisdom. Even with the search for happiness on the level of sensual pleasures/ materials, it will be in a positive direction (i.e., not aim for oneself but for selflessness and more useful

for others) bringing more peace and happiness of the society. Humans should be trained to achieve this type of happiness, reflecting higher level of human development.

However, this level of happiness or good mind may involve sufferings due to expectations, attachment to goodness, etc. Therefore, humans are encouraged to move beyond this happiness level to the highest level completely free from suffering.

3. Happiness from Insights/ Liberation

Happiness at this level is the highest inner happiness, characterized by wisdom or insight with full understanding of natural truth; i.e., interrelationship of causes and effects and changes. By developing inner happiness to reach this level, one would reach true happiness.

With understanding of natural interdependence and natural laws of the impermanence, the state of suffering, and the non-existing (or selflessness), one would have purified minds and free from any attachment. With fully understand what really matters in a good life and true happiness, one would not attach to any cause of suffering and can achieve completed liberalization. One will neutrally understand everything under the natural truth without suffering. This level of happiness is considered as genuine happiness that human beings should be trained for and it should be the goal for complete human development. People who enjoy this type of happiness fully desire to be good and useful for others. They totally devote to work and help others with selflessness.

Thus, the progress in happiness development beyond the first level of material based is encouraged. People are able to be happy from mind development and wisdom based happiness, although they may not fully reach the highest level of ultimate happiness.

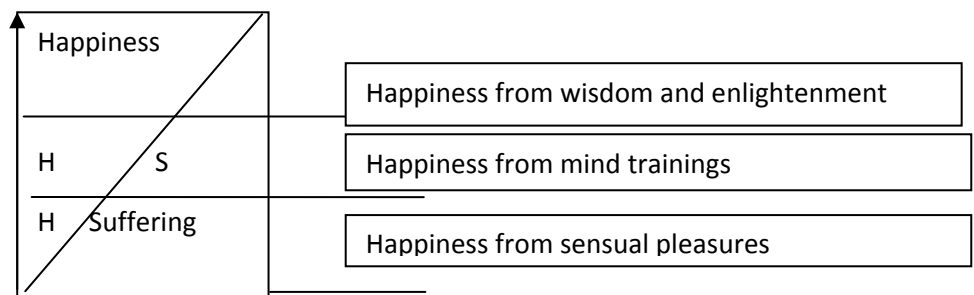
Inner Happiness: the Difference from General Happiness Concept

Inner happiness is happiness development higher than the physical-based. General happiness studies mostly use happiness concept at physical or emotional levels. Although current happiness surveys may cover spiritual wellbeing as one element in their happiness domains (composing of various psychological and economic factors in the same rank), spiritual aspect is not the special focus (unlike Buddhism which give higher rank for inner happiness and guide direction to be free from suffering). While happiness economics today explain the unsustainable happiness from theories of social comparison, adaptation and aspiration, they do not suggest how to exit from this problem.

The difference in happiness concept in Buddhism and that of general theories can also be illustrated in Figure 5. Buddhist happiness aims for completely free from suffering at the highest level by encourage people to move upward or developing themselves with inner happiness, while happiness in general theories still attach to the first or the lowest level involving a lot of suffering

Figure 4. Degree of happiness and suffering at different happiness levels.

Inner Happiness

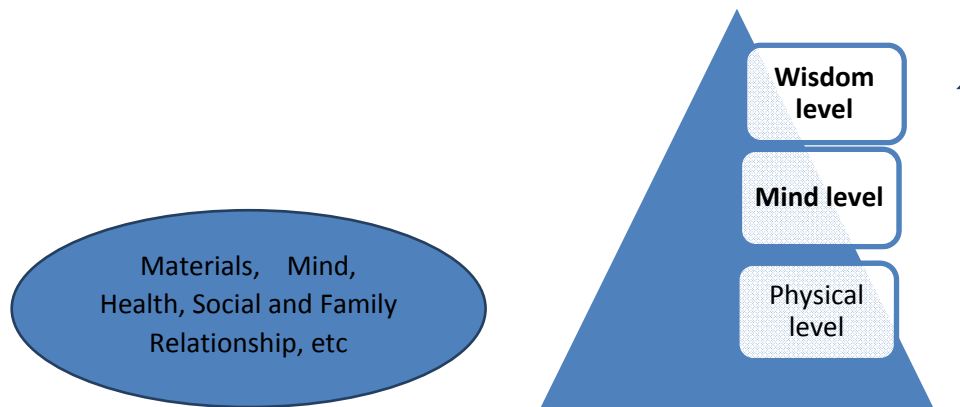


The bottommost level is happiness from sensual pleasures which involves a lot of suffering, so it can not generate much true happiness. The middle level represents the mind based level which involve more happiness generated by oneself. Suffering is reversely dropped with the degree of increased inner happiness. That is why people should aim for higher level of happiness. When inner happiness can be increased to the highest level, there would be no room for suffering left.

Western happiness studies such as those of positive psychology also consider inner happiness from mind level (but unlikely to cover wisdom level of understanding natural truths). Positive psychologists believe in positive thinking and state of mind that influences individual's happiness, which also requires trainings. Practicing meditation is also growing popular in the Western world.

So far, happiness economists somehow have adopt tools to research and measure happiness by applying happiness concept of Jerame Bentham (1789)'s the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers, and mostly refer happiness to sensual pleasures. Psychologists and economists have measured happiness or subjective well-being with questions regard to life satisfaction. Their happiness domains in questions may include happiness determinants at both physical and mind level, but they are given equal value (or same weight) for the total sum of happiness or life satisfaction score. In other words, happiness is seen as a combination of various influences from the same level/ dimension. In contrast, happiness in Buddhism are ranked in different levels. The concept difference can be illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Comparison of various happiness domains in the same rank in Western concept and different steps and kinds of happiness in Buddhism



Current happiness studies mostly explain happiness as influenced by various domains; such as, from materials/ income, health, family & social relationship, mind and spirituality, etc. in the same level of equal importance. Buddhist concept of happiness distinguishes the higher and lower forms of happiness and encourage people to move from the lower to the higher levels which is more important. However, this encouragement in Buddhism does not mean to force all people to accept and practice; it accepts that different individuals have different levels of human development. However, ones should try their bests.

4. Implications of Inner Happiness to Development

Unlike general happiness concept, inner happiness has different implications to development. Inner happiness created internally can come from higher development of human mind and wisdom inside each individual. The higher mind development human beings can achieve, the less need to exploit or do harm to others and nature for self-interests. One can be happy from goodness, kindness towards others, or helping others to be happy. Therefore, instead of taking advantage or accumulate materials for themselves, they are happy to share them to others or allocate to the needy of the society. Natural resources can be saved from less wants. Resources can be more allocated to the needy, resulting in fairer distribution of resources. The societal happiness as a whole would be increased.

The key implication is that people can be happy with less consumption and acquisition, so they have no need to over accumulation/ consumption/ production which leads to massive use of natural resources that are unnecessary to increase happiness. Being less want for themselves and less dependent on materials, higher or inner happiness can lead to less resource utilization and more societal happiness or peaceful societies as well as more equitable resource distribution.

Promoting inner happiness (with less wants) would lead to efficient consumption for real needs and resources used only for the purposes of usefulness, efficient work and time used for usefulness, and more allocation of resources to the disadvantaged. People should receive basic needs more equally (resulting in reducing poverty and inequality) to allow them for

advance their human development. The concept is pro-poor and pro-equity as well as inclusive development to relieve sufferings for all.

This process of limited unnecessary demand (with higher level of happiness) is missed in mainstream economics and development concept which believe that the higher consumption implies the higher well-being. **In contrast, inner happiness with less consumption and resource utilization can lead to higher (subjective) well-being.** Most of theories and approaches have not incorporated this happiness issue, especially sustainable development concept which still relies on supply-side management of resources but not tackle the root cause of over resource utilization. Particularly, the widely used global definition of sustainable development (from Brundtland report) considers meeting the needs of present and future generations only - without due consideration of unlimited desires of human beings, as noted below:

“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This framework is unclear in the concept of inter-generational well-beings and how to reach the goal. This sustainable development framework seems to concern only physical well-being and seem to request present generation to concern for future needs. The question is whether it could be possible if people of this present generation still have greed and attach to low level of happiness for themselves. This concept misses the path of ‘how to’ and seem to ‘trade-off’ with their happiness (from fulfilling unlimited wants). People may not be happy to do so due to their attachment to the material consumption/ accumulation; thus, the request is unlikely to be possible or sustainable. This concept seems to neglect the root cause of human greed and selfishness, the main obstacle of sustainable development.

That is why the proposed Buddhist Sustainable Development (BSD) has to focus and analyze happiness issue and provide a direction to eliminate of the root cause with inner happiness. This proposed sustainable development framework promotes the limitation to real needs with real consumption for true quality of life while not trade-off with true human well-being or happiness. Also, it would not trade-off for the future generations’ happiness, as they can be happy presently with limited real needs and higher forms of happiness.

The promotion of this concept could limit unnecessary material uses and over-exploited behavior of human beings who have unlimited wants. At the same time, it believes that people can be happy (and even increasingly happy) by living in moderation. **People can have high level of happiness with moderate consumption and resource use.**

Without well-trained mind, human desires will not end and lead to more and more consumption, leading to excessive energy and resource utilization. This type of behavior would definitely be in conflict with limited natural resources available in the earth as well as conflict among human beings. The world would not be in sustainable path with the escalation of consumptions over time and over materialism in the consumption-led growth economy. This is the key problem threatening sustainable development. Particularly, the world problem is escalated by the increased population and urbanization as well as industrialization that increase more materialistic societies.

Problems arise at country and global levels. Developed countries with more materialistic have utilized resources more than their resource availability and may invade or bring adverse impacts in environment to less developed countries. The more developed economy is likely to have the higher resource utilization. For example, USA. alone with about 5% of world population has consumed about 40% of the world resources and 30% of world energy, and accounting for about 30% share for total global warming. One could imagine when emerging economies or big countries/ regions; i.e., China, Brazil, India, or ASEAN, etc., have become more urbanized, industrialized and developed, much more resources will be needed to serve those increased consumption and investment.

Therefore, given that resources in the planet is limited, a socioeconomic system that stimulates people to continuously consume more and more with unlimited want (may be referred as “fake demand”) is unlikely to go along with sustainable development goal and that is why the current development paradigm under the consumption-led growth model could not solve the world problem of unsustainable development effectively.

This new concept of development encourages people to realize real value of products/ materials using or consuming for improving real human development. This can restrict the unnecessary use and over-exploited resources of human behavior. Humans cannot live without basic physical needs for survival, but can live happily without excessive materials that are over luxury. With inner happiness in mind, the limited desire close to standard quality of life (real need) would reduce the overwhelm use or consumption in luxury or unnecessary production and mindful to consume what really good for life (real or efficient consumption). Human beings would have less unnecessary wants and less production as well as less intervening natural resources, while have more time to do useful things in life. In other word, human well-being can be maximized by minimizing consumption and least resource utilization.

With the middle way of life, consumption and production can be modest and achieved in most efficient way with least utilization of resources. More energy and resources saved can be utilized for social development. With love, care and gratitude to nature, human beings would have less conflicts with nature. Thus, economic well-being would no longer be a natural trade-off. This kind of happiness development would lead to sustainable path of development.

5. Looking Forward: A New Concept of Sustainable Development

This type of inner-happiness focus of human development is essential for effectively sustainable development. Given that conventional idea of sustainable development has long been used and has not solved environment and sustainable development effectively, it may be a time to change the development mindset and rethinking sustainable development framework with the right path and right views, which could shape a new direction for effective sustainable development. Putting inner happiness as the key for driving sustainable development can be a critical change.

While mainstream sustainable development framework focuses on environment and resource management or supply side, this approach focuses on human behavior or consumption management which is the demand side of sustainable development.

This new approach of inner-happiness focused sustainable development suggests that human beings can live happily with moderate consumption, cooperation and compassion, as well as harmony with nature. This type of development can increase subjective well-being of individuals with contagious effects, leading to societal happiness and sustainability.

Wisdom and mindfulness is the key to drive the new direction of development. Human beings would have higher quality spiritually to move towards caring and sustainable society by deep understanding of relationship of all beings under the law of nature. Human needs to learn to appreciate nature that enrich human well-being and human relationship should be under the culture of loving kindness and cooperation.

This type of development focuses on inner happiness, developed along the path to purify minds towards highest life's goal of liberalization, as well as appropriate systems allowing middle-way of life and middle-way economy. The relationship of human, social, economic, and environment in this system can use less quantity of natural resources. This is a pathway towards real sustainable development.

The existing framework of sustainable development emphasizing only on compromising needs of inter-generations may be difficult to achieve as long as individuals normally concern for their own happiness at low level. Unless people are developed to be able to enjoy their higher or inner happiness, they would not care for others or future generations.

That is why the new approach of sustainable development has to focus and analyze happiness issue and stress the path for higher level of happiness that can result in effective sustainable development. New sustainable development approach proposed in this paper promotes the limitation to real needs with real consumption for true quality of life while it does not trade-off with true human well-being and happiness. With modest and efficient consumption, people can be happy with higher forms of happiness.

Under the BSD framework, human behaviors would be driven by wisdom, rather than by self-interests and unlimited wants as assumed in the conventional economic theory. This human spiritual focus is missed in the mainstream sustainable development concept, and perhaps that is why it cannot solve current global problems effectively. Therefore, right views towards life goal (with inner freedom/ happiness) is a firm foundation for right behavior to others and nature, leading to sustainable path of development.

This paper suggests holistic approach for human spiritual development as a foundation for sustainable happiness for all and sustainable development. Therefore, **an additional key element to existing economic, social, environment elements of mainstream sustainable development concept is human development by Inner Happiness.** As a result, this paper purposes the new concept of sustainable development or BSD briefly as

“Sustainable development driven by human spiritual development that humans are developed to be happy from moderate needs or less attach to unnecessary desires/ materials, leading to real consumption/ less resource utilization as well as compassion to others and nature resulting in living in harmony and peace”.

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- <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/> Center of Bhutan Studies (CBS).

Round-Table Discussion Session

Reporter: Wanpat Youngmevittaya

Participated by:

- Prof. Dr. Sandro Calvani, Senior Adviser on Strategic Planning at the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (MFLF)
- Prof. Dr. Vijay Kumar Shrotryia, Professor and Head Department of Commerce North-Eastern Hill University Shillong – Meghalaya : India
- Dr. Thantavanh Manolom, The Economic Research Institute for Trade (ERIT), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), Lao PDR
- Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas, Director of Economic and Business Research Center for Reforms, Faculty of Economics, Rangsit university, and International Research Associated for Happy Societies (IRAH)
- Dr. Nima Asgri, Public Health Administrator, World Health Organization (WHO), Thailand
- Mr. Bishwa Nath Tiwari, Representative from UNDP Regional Office, Bangkok
- Dasho Kesang Wangdi, Ambassador of Bhutan to Thailand
- Mr. Ugyen Dorji, Minister Counselor, Royal Bhutanese Embassy
- Mr. Loday Jamtsho, Minister Counselor, Royal Bhutanese Embassy
- Mr. Stuart Ward, Representative from Embassy of Sweden to Thailand
- Mr. Apichai Sunchindah, Independent Development Specialist.
- Assist. Prof .Dr.Anusorn Tamajai, Vice President on Research and Dean of Faculty of Economics, Rangsit university (RSU)
- Mr. Dion Peoples, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University
- Mr. Chanont Kaopaiboon, Senior researcher, Securities and Exchange Commission Thailand
- Mr. Smitthi Harueanphuech, Programme Manager, , Mae Fah Luang Foundation MFLF
- Ms. Pattamon Rungchavalnont, Assistant Programme Manager, MFLF
- Ms. Nantharat Sriwattanangkoon, Business Development Manager. MFLF
- Mr. Nattawat Theeralerttham, Development Policy Officer, Kepa Mekong Office
- Dr. Prawate Tantipiwatanaskul, Senior Advisor, Dept. of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health
- Ms. Prapa Kongpunya, Happiness unit, Institute of Nutrition, Mahidol university
- Mr. Pawel Bartosik, graduate student, Chulalongkorn University
- Mr. Thanakorn Chaichanudomsuk, graduate student, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University.
- Dr. Chitriya Pinthong, Vice President of International Affairs, RSU
- Assist. Prof. Chintana Chernsiri, Faculty of Economics, RSU
- Assoc. Prof. Pirom Chanthawon, Faculty of Economics, RSU
- Assist. Prof. Gessinee Maneerat, International College, RSU
- Students in Rangsit University

Round-Table Discussion: Morning Section

The round-table discussion started after the presentation by Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas on the topic “Achieving Sustainable Development by Inner Happiness: A new Approach of Sustainable Development,”

In her presentation, Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas argued that even though sustainable development was implemented for more than four decades, there have been serious problems such as continued environment deterioration and climate change. The development have still been driven by consumption-led growth which made it difficult to achieve both continued growth and sustainable development goals. She suggested to rethink the development paradigm and propose an alternative one by focusing on inner happiness which requires the use of less resources; then, sustainable development can be achieved by sustainable happiness. This approach is the conception on demand-side rather than supply-side management that generally proposed for environmental and sustainable development. She also mentioned that the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has not much incorporated inner happiness; however, perhaps after SDGs, happiness could be a central goal for development as HDGs –Happiness Development Goals.

Dr. Sandro Calvani mentioned that happiness is an engine of revolution or change all over the world. He also suggested that sustainable happiness should be more widely disseminated and more research on this subject is encouraged. Too much research is going into unhappiness approach and not enough research on the subject of happiness. We have not educated the next generation enough from kindergarten up to universities on happiness.

Mr. Apichai Sunchindah saw that happiness was a matter of balance, and finding the right balance. For example, we cannot be happy if we are unhealthy and unnourished. Uncontrolled growth or unlimited growth would lead to many problems such as cancer, obesity, and pollution. It should not be the case that a few people destroy and a large majority is affected. We may have to consider sustainable consumption/production and a more sharing and caring society, etc and transform the “tragedy of the commons” to be common happiness. He suggested that we should be focused more on moderation or sustainable development. Particularly, ASEAN is now developing a post -2015 vision with ASEAN Development Goals (ADGs), we should have a clear and measurable ADGs to measure the progress of ASEAN and moderation life style is one that could be considered. To this point, Dr. Sandro added that moderation was really needed because overconsumption and uncontrolled growth would lead to so many problems e.g. destroying limited resources on the planet. Even the UN climate change framework with thousands of scientists’ evidence also showed that consumption pattern (i.e, in using energy and natural resources) in the past was not sustainable in terms of exceeding the limits of the planet.

Dasho Kesang Wangdi viewed that we needed the balance approach or moderate pathway. He also mentioned Gandhi’s words that “there is never enough for one person’s greed, but there is enough for everybody’s needs”. He admired the way the Buddha enlightened and found happiness. After the Buddha tried not to eat anything for a month but still could not enlighten, he decided to go on the moderate way by eating something, and finally he could become an enlightened Buddha. This shows that we all should be moderate instead of being extreme in one way or another. Dasho Kesang thought that this is also what Gross National Happiness (GNH) and sufficiency economy talked about. Regarding “what is happiness”,

every country may have their own interpretation. He suggested that we should not focus too much on meaning of happiness, but instead should focus on how to create happiness for people in different countries. All countries/nations talk about happiness. Bhutan is still struggling to achieve happiness and do not claim to be a land of happiness, but a land for happiness. In addition, he saw that we could not achieve happiness from isolated living; in contrast, we should collaborate with each other as a bigger community, especially in international level. For example, if the world needed to cope with climate change, then every country should be responsible for this problem and collaborate with each other. He also pointed out that different places and times might need different forms of happiness, although we all strive towards happiness.

Mr. Stuart Ward stated that even though European countries may have not done right in everything, one thing they have done right is social mobility. They were very successful at the improvement of social mobility. In his view, the situation of this issue was much better in Europe than in Asia. To put it simply, social mobility is the opportunity or chances for anyone to improve their social statuses. Poor people have potential opportunity to improve their socio-economic backgrounds. He added that if GDP has not spread, people cannot be happy. This is very important for the happy society. He saw that there were three main factors supporting social mobility: (1) universal healthcare system; (2) tax system, i.e., progressive taxation; (3) Free public education with high quality standard.

Dr. Nima Asgri discussed that there were two levels when talking about happiness. One was a structural societal allocation level (i.e, universal health care), and another one was an internal individual voluntary reallocation process. For him, discussion on connection of these two levels was needed. He also remarked that what made someone in a particular community - country happy may not necessarily be exactly what made someone in other communities/ countries happy. This is because cultures play an important role in defining characteristics of happiness.

Dr. Sandro saw that more and more organizations such as UN, NGOs, and governments have been listening to local people much more such as in the process of SDGs and the allocation of resources. Democracy is not only elections, but also listening to what people really needed. More national policies were affected by individual level such as investment on health, education, and environment. He mentioned the case that school children in the high mountain in the North of Thailand (Doi Tung) understand the importance of environment and their surroundings by “Montessori” education system that were demanded from local people themselves.

Mr. Bishwa Tiwari shared that different countries may have different definitions of happiness; e.g., short term happiness is different from long term happiness, or even Western happiness is different from Eastern happiness. Therefore, he suggested focusing on only a few indicators of happiness that could allow us to measure happiness across all countries and regions. These were indicators that are common and acceptable in all countries. Although human development concept is very broad, we cannot put all relevant indicators into HDI to measure in details across countries. It may be possible to measure many indices in a single country, but that may cause problems when measured across countries and time periods. He also mentioned that after human beings’ basic needs have been met, they must have psychological well-being. Bhutan needs income and psychological well-being in one in the nine domains of its GNH. Therefore, we need a balance between income and non-income dimensions of happiness. Happiness in Buddhism means the relief of all kinds of sufferings.

Mr. Stuart said this subject is interesting; there are some key words that our societies are now categorized by such as greed, lack of respect to each other, and regression. He also shared his experiences as a tourist to Thailand about 20 years ago, he found that Thailand was really the “land of smile”, but this has become less so in the present time. He found lack of happiness in many parts of the world and not only Thailand. He suggested that we should have material well-being for all by focusing on redistribution of income and wealth for all because this is an important factor for happiness. We have to ensure happiness to all different groups of people such as all age groups, all different social groups, minorities, ethnicities. For example, what is the happiness level of Rohingya in Myanmar, or gays and lesbians, etc. He insisted that everyone really needed happiness, so we have to ensure happiness for all groups of people.

Dr. Thantavanh Manolom said there is no national well-being or happiness indicators in Lao PDR now. She suggested two policy recommendations to increase happiness and wellbeing in the case of Lao PDR. The first one was redistribution of government expenditure. Five years ago, 70% of the government expenditure of Lao PDR was for transportation. But in the eighth national economic plan of Lao PDR has changed this pattern significantly by spending around 23% on health, and 22% on education. The second point was to develop tools to measure well-being quality of life of people. She informed that Lao PDR now only use Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Human Development Index (HDI) to indicate wellbeing of people which is not enough. Therefore, measurement of happiness and wellbeing is needed and still a very challenging issue. If we do not have a good tool to measure development, we cannot have sustainable development.

Mr. Chanont Kaopaiboon shared the recent results from Bloomberg survey which is a global survey that Thailand was the happiest country in the world but ranked 44th for GDP per Capita, whereas Switzerland was the second happiest country in the world with ranked 4th for GDP per Capita. The results seem to support Dr. Sauwalak’s presentation that with inner happiness, it was possible for Thailand with less GDP and consumption can be ranked higher in happiness.

Mr. Apichai also suggested the exchange of experiences between Bhutan and Lao PDR as the two countries share many similarities such as being small, landlocked, surrounded by larger and more powerful neighboring countries, etc. Mr. Vijay who used to live in Bhutan for 10 years also thought that Bhutan had so many things in common with Lao PDR. They were going along the same line, and many indicators domains of happiness in the two countries’ studies are similar and could be compared with each other.

Mr. Vijay mentioned that sometimes existing tools cannot measure happiness effectively. He showed an example from India that happiness of Indian people has become less and less in the last twenty years. But he questioned about its result because this survey was conducted with only 2,000 Indian people in which he thought it could not represent real happiness of all Indian people in such a large and diverse nation.

Mr. Smitthi Harueanphuech shared the experience of sustainable development under Mae Fah Luang project in Doi Tung, Chiangrai, Thailand with the balanced approach of people, nature, and growth. About 30 years ago, the place was full of violence, opium, drug dealers, deforestation, lack of water, crimes, etc. The reason was that local people had no choice but to plant opium for earning their living. The situation was much better when the current King's mother came to the Doi Tung and proposed the plan to make the balance between people and nature. Since then, the local people ceased to plant opium, and started to plant macadamia

nuts and coffee instead. The result was the absence of deforestation, crimes, and poverty. It was a sustainable growth which generated the balance between people and nature. This tells us that humans should learn to live consistently with nature instead of only controlling and taking advantages of the nature without conserving them.

Even though happiness is desirable for everyone, it is not easy to have consensus on what happiness is conceptually, and how it should be measured and application in the reality. In relation to this, Dr. Anusorn Tamajai asked: (1) what was the difference between 'Buddhist Economics' and 'Inner Happiness?'; (2) How could we measure inner happiness which is very subjective and what and how it is different from that mentioned in other religions like Christianity? and (3) inner happiness or GNH, according to Marxist or socialist economists, may try to lower class struggle of the underprivileged.

Dr. Sauwalak replied to these questions that the concept of 'Inner Happiness' is the core in Buddhist happiness concept as explained in the presentation, along the same line with Buddhist economics. Buddhist happiness can be classified into three ranks (Physical level, Mind level, Wisdom level) of which the second and third ranks are inner happiness. So far, there are measurements for the first two levels. However, the third level of happiness (wisdom level) is really new to western concept, so the measurement of this level is very rare. But recently some scholars in Thailand have tried to measure it. Dr. Sauwalak further explained that inner happiness is a universal conception in which anyone with any religion, not only Buddhists, can apply. In other words, Buddhist happiness and Buddhist Economics can be practiced and perceived by every individuals regardless of religions and places concerned. Therefore, she suggested using the term 'inner happiness' instead of 'Buddhist happiness' at international level in order to be unbounded by religions and make people of other religions feel more comfortable to accept it. She also responded to the last question that it was a misunderstanding of concepts. She insisted that, in Buddhist economics, every individuals must be met with basic needs before they can be developed further. We have to make a clear distinction between 'basic real needs' and 'unnecessary wants.' In fact, to promote inner happiness at mind level is to help the poor by promote sharing and fairer distribution of resources, thus, less gaps between the haves and the have-nots, reducing inequality. With inner happiness, the wealthier people would have less greed and willing to help poor people to get out of suffering and be able to enhance their development. Thus, inner happiness should be viewed as a pro-poor policy

Dr. Sandro shared his views that the discussion also reflects that we don't have enough research on this subject. Within the United Nations, there is a need to have consensus in definition of each area such as health, labor, etc. which could be done by in-depth studies. Despite the current Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon would like to have and advocated to have happiness-based in international policy making, he also realized that different country members (as well as different levels in each country) and different specialized organizations have different opinions/priorities and so many comments.

This also relates to Sandro's earlier remarks that there have not been much enough education and research on happiness; for example, by searching on google engine the day before to see if there are any research about happiness done by Italian universities he found no study on the subject of happiness from those universities, so he thought this was a sign of suffering in Europe. However, Dr. Vijay Shrotryia argued that even though many people may not write about happiness directly, they wrote about quality of life or well-being which was similar

conception as happiness but under different names. He also suggested that if there are more works such as on measurement to explain the theoretical framework that Dr. Sauwalak presented, that would be very useful. Also, after two years of movement at the UN level, perhaps, we should be able to compare the countries' economies not only by GDP but in terms of well-being.

Mr. Dion Peoples responded to the issue of greed that his study has covered. He shared his experience in living in Bangkok that he saw many poor people living along railroad who have been told to find new homes just because the government needed to build railroad track like sky train. He viewed that Buddhist economics was a bottom-up approach, instead of a top-down one. Buddha teaches that we should invest some portion of money we get into different areas such as to take care of our necessities, to reinvest and develop our businesses, and to save. However, not everybody could save their money because they don't have enough money, and they had to live day to day or month to month. This was a very stressful sort of living.

In sum, this forum shared the importance of moderation for achieving happiness, how to build happy societies and sustainable happiness, how to lead a balanced life, and measurements of such as well as encouraging more research on this subject.

III.

Afternoon

Presentation and Discussion



*Bhutan's Experiments with Gross National Happiness –
Leading towards Sustainable Development*

By

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*Paper presented at “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”
International Forum on March 20th, 2015 at Rangsit University, Thailand*

1. INTRODUCTION

The responsibility of the state is said to be looking after the welfare of its people. The rulers or the state should ideally be putting efforts to improve the well-being of its citizens and to look after their welfare through effective policies. The world that we are living today strives to achieve economic growth which is assumed to result in providing enough finances to the state in order to fund welfare schemes and to develop more humane society on the principle of equity and justice. This is where economic growth model which dominates development thinking of the greater mass on this earth tries to provide solutions. However it is experienced that once we keep focusing on economic growth and to improve economic parameters we tend to come within the grip of market and consequentially market forces start dominating all our decisions, then whether it is an individual or an organization or a nation all fall trap to the drive to achieve more and more, work harder and harder, earn more and more, contribute more and this spoils the social fabric of a nation. This is the cause of worry in nutshell.

We need to think of an alternative route to holistic development and not just economic development, we need to think better on human development and not just infrastructural development. The measure of Gross Domestic Product which is considered to be the differentiator is slowly losing its importance more so in the world where production based or economic growth approach has landed them with huge capital base but broken family ties. Paul Hawkenⁱ puts it very succinctly '*at present, we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it GDP*'. The United Nations in 2011, while approving Bhutan's proposal on considering happiness as more important a measure of development stated: *that GDP by its nature does not reflect the goal (happiness is fundamental human goal and universal aspiration); that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption impede sustainable development; and that a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach is needed to promote sustainability, eradicate poverty, and enhance wellbeing and profound happiness*ⁱⁱ. This justifies the efforts being put to prioritise well-being or happiness of people over economic growth or increase in GDP.

The learning of the developed world should help the policy makers of the developing world to not to repeat their mistakes and with that learning to develop an alternative route. What is more important than economic growth is social and human development. The focus of state

if shifts towards developing better social infrastructure then it can make better social progress without compromising on the social fabric of society. The competition to acquire more and more, to consume more and more and feel better has to come to an end and the feeling to contribute for the development of others and for contentment has to somehow come into play to teach the children of today that it is not the consumption which makes them better but it is conservation which is sustainable.

Bhutan is a small Buddhist nation sandwiched between two largest populated nations (India on one side and China on the other) has enjoyed sovereign state and has never been colonized which has saved its culture and heritage from any kind of interventions. The major occupation is agriculture which is for self-sustenance primarily. Through the efforts of the fourth king of Bhutan, it successfully launched its treading path to progress and prosperity from early seventies. Ever since Gross National Happiness got interwoven in the policy priority of Bhutan it has focused more on developing social infrastructure and improving on social indicators whereby assuring strong social progress to its citizens. In last forty odd years its growth in GDP is not as much as it is in the parameters leading towards better education, better health, environment, etc. It has also been able to connect to its people through engaging them and developing their mindset towards finding solutions within themselves and to be away from consumerist culture. It follows the path not appreciated much by the practitioners of consumerist culture and capitalist thinking. It is no surprise that none of the neighboring countries ever have suffered because of migration of people from Bhutan looking for so called better pastures of life, unlike many other small nations which have been finding it difficult to deal with their neighboring countries in this matter. It could be assumed or attributed to the feeling of satisfaction and contentment which is well articulated in the policy framework as well as in policy implementation through the philosophy of GNH. In the next part of this paper we would discuss the concept, components and practice of GNH.

2. CONCEPT OF GNH

The concept of GNH evolved from the basic constituent features of Bhutanese society in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the social fabric was being woven. Buddhism, which surrounds feudal set of values, forms the basic constituent features of Bhutanese society. The official documents and publications in Bhutan show that their development

objectives lie in the happiness and satisfaction of their people rather than the growing GDP. This has come from the initiation of the third king of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk who was of the view that the development should be to make the people prosperous and happy. Further this idea was articulated by the fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, through coining the term Gross National Happiness and to present it formally in a meeting of the UN in 1972 where he said GNH is more important than GDP, to reflect on what the earlier king was thinking of development.

Development can be achieved and maintained through the philosophy of happiness which makes the process of development more focused and sustainable. We tend to become complacent when we feel happy and contented. Sustainability is the issue to be kept in mind here. Sustainability here means sustaining the sense of happiness both at the individual level as well as at state level. Apart from sustaining happiness the efforts have to be put to minimize suffering. GNH is about minimizing suffering and maximizing happiness. The premise of GNH includes cultural preservation and creative experimentation apart from technological and material development. The Buddhist culture has harmony, stability and integration as important components which are addressed in the policies of development (GNH driven) in Bhutan.

GNH is more close to human development than economic development. *'GNH rejects the notion that there is direct and close relationship between wealth and happiness'*ⁱⁱⁱ. Population quality and GNH are two sides of the same coin. Better quality of population ensures higher GNH. GNH finds its base in the parameters of Population quality. *'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'*^{iv}. Veenhoven (2004) defines GNH as *'the degree to which citizens in a country enjoy the life they live; GNH is then an aggregate concept, like the concept of GNP that sums goods and services.'* The discussion during the 7th Round Table Conference held in 2004 at Thimphu concluded one very interesting thought according to which the underlying idea of happiness within GNH concept is the *'capacity to make choices for oneself'*. Mathou (2000) puts modernisation and preservation of national heritage as two merged rhetoric *'under the catchphrase of GNH (p 240)'*.

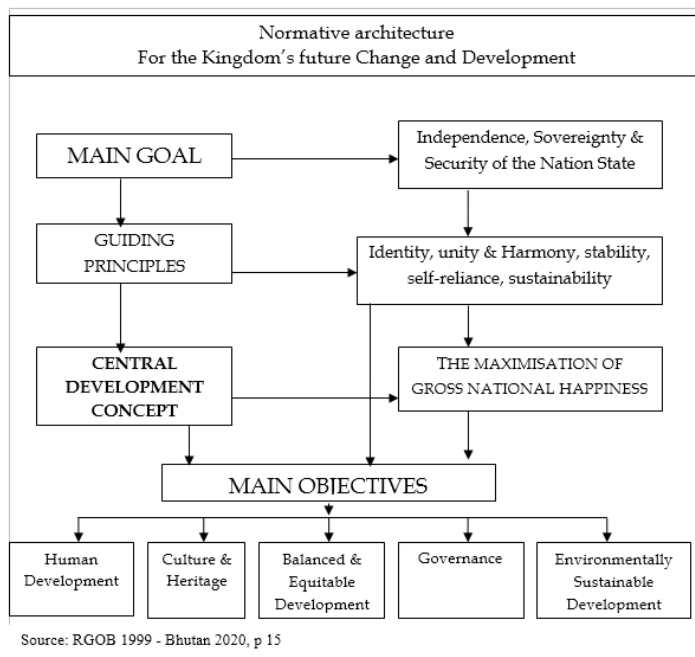
Jigme Y Thinley, the then Chairman of the Council of Ministers, while giving his keynote address to the Millennium Meeting for Asia and the Pacific at Seoul, Korea, in 1998, had put many relevant questions as to the changing socio-economic environment. The questions included the effect of informational technology, rapid automation of society and the economy, and shrinkage of biological and cultural diversities on people's happiness, role of value education, secularisation and nuclearization of family affecting loneliness and self-enclosure, global capitalism and competitive international trade resulting into unhappiness and uncertainties, impact of cloning on happiness and the forms of global and regional governance best suited for promoting happiness among people.

These questions might look stereotyped but the felt concern is what makes these questions important, relevant and worth deliberating on. There is a price which we pay for development; hence there are certain questions like secularisation and nuclearisation of family, competition etc which are firmly attached with the development process. Keeping this premise in mind the concept and practice of GNH is progressing and cautioning the policy makers. As given on the official website^v of GNH commission 'GNH is a "multi-dimensional development approach that seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between material well-being and the spiritual, emotional and cultural needs of our society" which is founded on the belief that happiness can be achieved by balancing the needs of the body with those of the mind within a peaceful and secure environment and it requires that the purpose of development must be to create enabling conditions through public policy. We know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds'. This is in brief the concept of GNH apart from its religious linkage and belief.

3. COMPONENTS OF GNH

GNH is conceptualised on the four pillars viz., equitable and balanced socio-economic development; preservation and promotion of cultural and spiritual heritage; conservation of environment; and good governance which are in one or the other way focused in all public policy documents and part of implementing machinery. Bhutan has taken initiative to propagate the priority of Happiness over several visible economic indicators. Almost all the planning documents are the testimonies of the fact that GNH is in the top agenda of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Spiritualism and Culture are two very important issues for GNH. Traditional thinking and different components of GNH is reflected through the figure as

Figure 1



given in Bhutan 2020 document published in 1999 (figure 1), however in 2010 it has got for focused and more than just being a concept the government has put efforts towards measuring it. This is where they identify four pillars and nine domains (figure 2) to evaluate the outcome of their public policy which is supposed to provide them guideline as to what

should be their plan of action for future to improve well-being or happiness.

| Figure 2: GNH FRAMEWORK | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| FOUR PILLARS | | | |
| PILLAR – ONE | PILLAR – TWO | PILLAR – THREE | PILLAR – FOUR |
| <i>Sustainable & Equitable Socio-Eco Development</i> | <i>Preservation & Promotion of Culture</i> | <i>Conservation of Environment</i> | <i>Good Governance</i> |
| NINE DOMAINS | | | |
| 1. Living Standards | 4. Cultural Diversity & Resilience | 8. Ecological Diversity | 9. Good Governance |
| 2. Education | 5. Community Vitality | | |
| 3. Health | 6. Time use | | |
| | 7. Psychological Well-being | | |
| SIXTEEN KEY RESULT AREAS (KRAS) | | | |
| 1. Sustained Economic Growth | 5. Strengthened Bhutanese Identity, Social Cohesion & Harmony | 7. Carbon Neutral/ Green & Climate Resilient Development | 11. Public Service Delivery |
| 2. Poverty Reduced & MDG Plus achieved | 6. Indigenous Wisdom, Arts & Crafts Promoted for Sustainable Livelihood | 8. Sustainable Utilization & Management of Natural Resources | 12. Democracy & Governance Strengthened |
| 3. Food Secure & sustained | | 9. Water Security | 13. Gender Friendly Environment for Women’s Participation |
| 4. Full Employment | | 10. Improved Disaster Resilience & Management Mainstreamed | 14. Corruption Reduced |
| | | | 15. Safe Society |
| | | | 16. Needs of Vulnerable Group Addressed |

GNH forms a central development concept for Bhutan (figure 1) and in order to maximise it its policy framework concentrates on following its guiding principles (*identity, unity and harmony, stability, self-reliance and sustainability*) to maintain its independence, sovereignty and security. At operational level the normative architecture for dealing with change and

development as envisaged in its Bhutan 2020 document, identifies five main objectives as – human development, preservation of culture and heritage, balanced and equitable development, governance and environmentally sustainable development. Though it is sixteen years old document, however all the five year plans as well as other policy documents have been concentrating on achieving the targets as established in that document. The four pillars are part of almost all planning documents, however in order to get more focused on micro areas in 2010 nine domains were identified for developing GNH index and further in the 11th five year plan (GNHC 2013) document the government identifies sixteen key result areas (KRAs) to focus (figure 2). While developing GNH index these nine domains are further gauged through thirty three indicators which are as, acquisition of assets, housing, household per capita income (living standards), literacy, schooling, knowledge, value (education), mental health, self-reported health status, healthy days, disability (health), speaking native language, cultural participation, artistic skills, driglam namzha (cultural diversity & resilience), donations - time & money, community relationship, family, safety (community vitality), work, sleep (time use), life satisfaction, positive & negative emotions, spirituality (psychological well-being), ecological issues responsibility towards environment, wildlife damage – rural, urbanisation issues (ecological diversity), government performance, fundamental rights, services, and political participation (good governance). These components are basically for studying the happiness level of residents and hence are important, however when it comes to policy focus, it is sixteen KRAs which are focused in the current planning process.

4. PRACTICE OF GNH

Bhutan marched towards planned development through launching its first five year plan in 1961. Till the sixth plan, the five year plan documents were usually the summary of their proposed expenditure on some key areas of development. From 7th five year plan (1992-1997) onwards the documents started having broader focus areas. A cursory look at figure 3 provides that the government has narrowed down its priority areas on the basis of GNH during the different five year plan periods. These documents provide a guideline to the government planning for development of the country as a whole. It is through these documents that the government tries to reach out to the people for their better quality of life. The King has been conveying his opinion through various modes

| Figure 3 - Priority Areas in the Planning Documents of Bhutan | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| 7 th FYP (1992-1997) p 23 | 8 th FYP (1997-2002) p 25 | Bhutan HDR 2000, p 21* | 9 th FYP (2002-2007) p 4-6 | 10 th FYP (2008-2013) p 17 | 11 th FYP (2013-2018) p 13 |
| Self-reliance | Self-reliance | Human Development | Economic growth & development | Broad based sustainable growth | Self-reliance |
| Sustainability | Sustainability | Culture & heritage | Preservation & promotion of cultural heritage | Preservation of country's rich culture | Inclusive social development |
| Efficiency & Development of the private sector | Preservation & Promotion of Cultural & Traditional values | Balanced & Equitable development | Preservation & sustainable use of the environment | Conservation of the natural environment | Green Development |
| People's Participation & Decentralization | National security | Governance & Environmental conservation | Good governance | Strengthening good governance | |
| Human Resource Development | Balanced Development | | | Improving the quality of life | |
| Regionally Balanced Development | Improving the Quality of Life | | | | |
| | Institutional Strengthening & HRD | | | | |
| | Decentralization & Community Participation | | | | |
| | Privatisation & Private Sector Development | | | | |
| *Four priority areas mentioned under HDR 2000 have been identified as four essential constituents of happiness. | | | | | |

on the five year plans as 'if at the end of a plan period, our people are not happier than they were before, we should know that our plans have failed.'^{vi} The Bhutan National Human Development Report (BNHDR, 2000) identified four important pillars of happiness for the nation and these pillars are same as the priority areas of the government. This also indicates that Bhutan has not vitiated from the basic concerns.

Bhutan adopted its written constitution on 18th July 2008 and provided ‘happiness and well-being of people for all time’ in its preamble^{vii}. Further through its principles of state policy in Article 9 (2) it assured that “*The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of GNH*”. The country has concentrated on the policy of decentralization and participation in the last two decades and both of these elements have been chosen as essential elements of GNH. Since 1981, the King has initiated a vigorous program of administrative and political decentralization. The 9th FYP emphasized on *Geog*^{viii} based planning which ensured the participation of people from the lowest level of administration. ‘The decentralization policy has enhanced the democratic powers, social responsibilities, transparent processes and structures of villages and communities to make decisions at grass roots level’^{ix}. The nation has made great efforts to achieve these objectives through its policy initiatives in all the sectors of development. Bhutan has shown that it is open for change happening around the world even when it comes to look at its culture as its foreign minister expresses this to Orville (2002) ‘Some people tend to look at culture as static, but actually culture is always evolving. It is a tool, and when a tool becomes obsolete, you have to change it.’

The reflection of GNH is seen in the cultural follow up in Bhutan ‘a culture of mutuality, not of competition; of inclusion, not exclusion; and of compassion, not acrimony’. Bhutan has taken into account the cultural, social, economic and historical costs of not engaging in prioritising infrastructural development in its planning and policies till 10th plan period. However the 11th five year plan has provided for developing adequate infrastructure to respond to the growing need of population. The most important factors for Bhutan’s development have been continuous culture, environment and *Vajrayana Buddhism*^x.

Orville (2002) writes that the King Jigme Singye Wangchuk once told Barbara Crossette, South Asia correspondent of New York Times that "Being a small country, we do not have economic power. We do not have military muscle. We cannot play a dominant international role, because of our small size and population and because we are a landlocked country. The only factor we can fall back on ...which can strengthen Bhutan's sovereignty and our different identity is the unique culture we have. ...happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process". The kingdom has concentrated on maintaining its unique culture in all these years which is evident from the fact that as a nation

there is a dress code and *driglam namjha* (code of conduct) which is strictly followed. The residents proudly follow it in their public life.

5. RESULTS OF GNH FOLLOW-UP

The focus of planning was to concentrate on measures that were to result in happiness of people as compared to economic growth as such. This thinking led towards policies that were to assure better quality of life of people whereby developing a happy society. As it became a national priority in Bhutan all the ministries and departments which were involved in developing public policy got involved in orienting the decision makers and implementing agencies to initiate and execute the policies and programs for concentrating on GNH.

Though it was qualitative initially the government discussed and debated the issues involved in operationalising this noble concept which included organizing workshops, seminars and conferences at different levels by involving academicians and practitioners. These constructive events brought some clarity in developing this concept and brought out issues which were crucial for looking at the practical aspect of GNH. Since at the policy level this was done for more than three decades (1970s, 80s and 90s), its impact on the well-being of people was an area which needed attention. The first decade of this century was an important time for the development of GNH in Bhutan as several international conferences and workshops were organized to deliberate on the issues of operationalising and measurement of GNH.

In 2008 the erstwhile Planning Commission was rechristened as the GNH Commission which was to be headed by the prime minister of the country and assisted by the bureaucrats and policy makers. GNH Commission assigned the task of *developing practical and target oriented indicators for GNH* to the Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS). The CBS brought out a short guide to GNH Index and developed nation-wide index (comprehensive GNH Index) on satisfaction level (impact of public policies on well- being of citizens) of people on different aspects of QOL (based on nine domains each having equal weight) in the year 2010. Some of the major findings of this work are as follows (Ura et al 2012):

- Men were happier than women on average.
- Of the nine domains, Bhutanese had the most sufficiency in health, followed by ecology, psychological wellbeing, and community vitality.
- 50 percent of people were happy in urban areas; in rural areas it was 37 percent. Urban areas did better in health, living standards and education. Rural

areas did better in community vitality, cultural resilience, and good governance.

- Happiness was higher among people with primary education or above than among those with no formal education, but *higher education did not affect GNH very much*.
- The happiest people by occupation were civil servants, monks/nuns, and GYT/DYT members. Unemployed were happier than corporate employees, housewives, farmers or the national work force.
- Unmarried people and young people were among the happiest.
- The happiest *Dzongkhags* included Paro, Sarpang, Dagana, Haa, Thimphu and Gasa while Samdrup Jongkhar and Lhuentse were among the less happier *Dzongkhags*
- In terms of numbers, the highest number of happy people lived in Thimphu and Chukha – as do the highest number of unhappy people!
- Thimphu was better in education and living standards than other *Dzongkhags*, but worse in community vitality.
- Financial Security was ranked the most important source for individual happiness.

A study (Shrotryia, 2014) of comparing rural and urban population on Quality of life measures at two locations in eastern Bhutan, viz., Trashigang town (urban) and Phongmey geog (rural) through the year 2000, 2005 and 2011 summarizes its findings as:

- Rural population's thinking on the importance of good neighborhood, pursuing spiritual activities, respecting others, protecting environment, having good relationship with local authorities, importance of being aware of the laws of the land, having television, newspaper and radio is improving.
- Urban population's thinking on giving importance to newspaper and radio and protecting environment has a downtrend.
- The increase in satisfaction level of urban population was highest with education facilities as compared to other factors however satisfaction from sanitation and water facilities provision increased satisfaction of rural population in comparison to other factors.
- Highest fall in the satisfaction was witnessed from electricity facilities as provided by the government for urban population whereas in case of rural population it was public transport system where there was fall in the satisfaction level of people.
- Leisure activity was identified as an activity which on an average satisfied more people at both locations. Urban residents were using their leisure time for socializing and/or playing whereas rural residents were using it for spiritual activities and/or weaving.
- At both locations the number of people saying 'yes' to whether they were happy person and family increased during the period of study though as far as their life being comfortable and peaceful their number had a fall.

The physical conditions during last 14 years have got into transformation when we look at road conditions, medical facilities, education, transportation facility, etc, however the subjective well-being or satisfaction with different variables has not really improved

significantly rather in some cases (sanitation & water, electricity, newspaper, radio and television for urban, and medical facilities, public services, policing, and public transport for rural areas) it has become poorer. However the conditions in general have improved (Shrotryia, 2014). Similarly in earlier work (Shrotryia, 2009) it was observed that the improvement in the variables is not leading to a corresponding increase in life satisfaction which hints towards a thinking that quality of life or happiness is much more important than mere physical development.

Bhutan had 72.5% forest coverage (RGOB 2001) and the highest legislative body, i.e., the National Assembly had mandated that the country should maintain at least 60% of the land area under forest cover for all time to come (RGOB, 2002). Bhutan attained the status of “Normal Iodine Nutrition Country” becoming the first South Asian country to do so (BNHDR, 2005:29). Bhutan has been identified as MDG fast-track countries on the basis of governance qualification (UNMP Report 2005:234). Bhutan has been one of the most successful countries in South Asia in its development and delivery of social welfare (Rutland, 1999). It has enjoyed a strong growth record over the last decade through a combination of sound macroeconomic management, good governance and rapid development of hydro power resources^{xi}.

Bhutan has developed in isolation and the development philosophy viz. GNH, has allowed this tiny nation to sustain development. There is absence of extreme poverty and negligible unemployment with large availability of renewable a natural resource base such as forests and hydropower. It has maintained its culture par excellence and has ensured that the development approaches are in no way contrary to the local conditions. It does not believe in the policy of isolation now and the initiatives taken by the government prove that the kingdom is trying to learn lessons from other nations and is prepared with a strong base for the challenges ahead. ‘We can continue to be cautious, but being cautious does not mean shutting our eyes, ...shutting our eyes and cloistering ourselves as we did at one time during the policy of isolation which served us once. But then we took the conscious decision to strengthen our sovereignty through involvement in the world. That means some intrusion, and we are prepared for that’ these words were told to Orville while his interaction with Jigme Thinley. Further Orville (2002) mentions on his own that ‘Bhutan has passed an important milestone in convergence with the outside world.’ GNH is a phenomenon which has transpired the citizens of this nation to put forth their efforts to maintain peace, tranquillity

and sovereignty (Shrotryia 2006). In the world map of happiness as developed by Adrian White (2006) Bhutan ranked 8th among 178 countries, which is an achievement in itself. The GNH Commission spearheads the planning process and scans through the national policies as to their impact on the well-being of its people. GNH has become a global topic because of new institutional structure and decision making processes that better reflect it. Political parties' manifestoes also have GNH in their agendas and prospective candidates swear by GNH to garner the much needed popularity and votes (Samal 2010). The nobel laureate in economics, Joseph Stiglitz while his visit to Bhutan has appreciated the framework of GNH and the concern of the RGOB towards the cause of GNH.

The sense of one community is reflected in practice in rural and urban areas alike in Bhutan. Bringing up the children of relatives or of the people of the same village, bearing their expenses, etc. is a very common practice in the country. This is also a part of culture in all Bhutanese families. Bhutan has been participating in the international discourses and deliberations and in the last decade it is observed more with a difference. It is making good investment in building up the institutions of national cohesion for the cause of well-being of its people and improvement in the GNH. The law and order condition is excellent, crime and corruption very minimal, no capital punishment, beggars hardly seen, life is relatively less hectic and the physical environment well protected. These are some of the generally observed indicators which have been maintained through different institutions and the policy of following GNH and maintaining its rich culture and traditions. Tideman^{xii} says that though Bhutan's move toward GNH has been more of a guiding principle than an actual form of measure, its impact has been powerful. For example, the government has restricted tourism in order to prevent its eroding impacts on local cultural values. This has allowed temples in Bhutan to remain places of study, worship and spiritual practice rather than mere tourist attractions.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Bhutan has experienced a life of transformation in last two decades, more so in the last 7 years when it chose to get into electoral politics by having its first democratic government in 2008. Private education and medical clinics are on the rise as some government doctors are preferring to operate their private clinics. It is an urban trend and is providing a choice to the people who can afford though it is also felt that it is to cater to rich people of urban society as it has created class based society. It is in the last one decade that they have started their own

university otherwise for after school education they depended on Indian education system as the only college of the country was an affiliate of University of Delhi, India. The number of college graduates is on the rise which is causing unemployment problem slowly. Bhutan has responded quite positively on the ICT count and many of their transactions are through web and in one way it has opened up their society to the outer world. The residents feel that after having democratic government they have become more open and the accessibility to the higher government officials have become easier. Transparency and accountability has improved and media has become proactive towards issues of common concern. Capital investment in infrastructure project is on the high which has resulted in better road conditions and development of townships. When we look at its economy it is found that still suffers from balance of payment problem and its dependence on India is still prominent which is also translating into huge liquidity crunch.

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). This transformative phase of the nation shall continue for few more years as it is too young a democracy. The comparisons of quality of life measures before and after introduction democracy in the country shall make an important case for future scholars.

END NOTES

<http://self.gutenberg.org/article/WHEBN0001433722/Gross%20national%20happiness#>
ibid

Bandyopadhyah 2004, p 259

BNHDR 2000, p. 20

<http://www.gnhc.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/GNH-FAQs-pdf.pdf>

Powdyel, 2004, p 736.

Bhutan adopted its first written constitution in 2008 and in the preamble itself it provides for happiness and well-being of people for all times.

Geog is a unit of local administration under a district consisting of many villages. One district has many geogs under it as one geog has many villages under its control.

Thinley 1999, p. 21

As mentioned in RGOB 2000, three factors (continuous culture, environment and Vajrayana Buddhism) have been of the greatest influence for Bhutan's development. It is of strength for

Bhutan that it has never been colonized or conquered, so the culture has been maintained continuously in all the times. The prevalent Buddhist culture considers nature and man as mutual friends and there is a special symbolic relationship between the people and nature. Since Bhutan follows Vajrayana Buddhism in its development policies.

Bhutan – Joint Staff Advisory Note of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Dec 2, 2004, prepared by staffs of the International Development Association and the International Monetary Fund. p 7

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The Local Conception of Wellbeing in Lao PDR

by

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Abstract

Although material resources are insufficient, wellbeing becomes a promise concept which leads to an argument that wellbeing is a socially and culturally defined concept. Therefore, wellbeing can be varied with many different perspectives whose definition is challenged. This paper proposes to explore the local notion of wellbeing within the social cultural contexts of Lao PDR. The study adopted a qualitative method, 35 representatives of the households participated in the focus group discussion in Sangthong district, and 15 key informants were in-depth interviewed. The content analysis and triangular technique were employed for data analysis and reviewing. This study argues that to develop the measurement of development should include the wellbeing of social and cultural dimension. The result shows that the notion of wellbeing's meaning in local Lao people conception are comprised of five components with 39 indicators, including family (4); society (9); health (7); environment (9); and economic (10). This finding suggests that the social cultural construction of wellbeing should be considered a form of work to develop the measurement of development in Laos by including the social and cultural wellbeing.

Keywords: Lao PDR, Lao people perspective, local conception, wellbeing, social cultural construction

Paper presented at International Forum "Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development" on March 20, 2015 at Rangsit University, Thailand

1. Introduction

Post World War II, development policies for many Least Developed Countries (LDCs) have focused heavily on economic growth. It was assumed that economic growth leads not only to modernization, but also to an improvement in the quality of life. These policies were based on the premise that a reduction of poverty is associated with a higher quality of life (Rerkrai, 1987). However, after an initial period of high growth, many LDCs found that a significant portion of their population still did not fully and equally gain the benefits of development; they still suffered from a plethora of social problems after processing the initial term of high growth (Sanni et al., 2010). Therefore, the mainstream monetary measure of wellbeing attainment cannot be seen as representative indicators. They can even appear to be absurd in the case of a serious economic crisis in which Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data can still increase even though the wellbeing of the majority of the population and communities decreases (Xing & Muchie, 2003). If we agree in that development can lead to the improvement of quality of life which is partly defined by perceptions of their own being, the use of GDP to measure development is therefore will be insufficient. With the recognition of limitation of GDP (Sen, 1988), as well as many other scholars (Xing & Muchie, 2003), there have been concepts to pursue measurements of development, and one of these perceptions comes under the idea of “wellbeing” which the definition remains the area of contention (Dodge et al., 2012).

One important point of moving from seeing development achievement from GDP to wellbeing is that these achievements should be socially and culturally defined. The relevance of society and culture are increasingly recognized in writings on both wellbeing and development. Following to this line of idea, there has been argued that wellbeing is socially and culturally constructed (WeD, 2007). This concept would be enable the development policy meets the need of local people and improves to strengthen the quality of life.

The movement of defining development achievement from “economic growth” to broader concepts of “wellbeing” thus requires our understanding of local notion regarding development and wellbeing. The issue here does not simply to see non-material aspect in oppose to economic growth in development. It is rather how to accommodate both “objective” and “subjective” worlds into the concept of development, suggested by this study, which could be done through exploring local conception of wellbeing.

The inclusion of social cultural notion of wellbeing into development policy is particularly challenging for Laos, for two reasons. Firstly, there are huge diversities of social cultural groups of population. Secondly, the Lao PDR has embarked on “market-led” development since the reform program called “New Economic Mechanism (NEM)” in 1986. The development efforts aim to transform the country from a central planned economy that is relatively isolated and subsistence based to a market economy that is open, production and service oriented (Souvannavong, 2000). Since the introduction of economic reforms under the NEM, considerable changes have been evident in high economic growth, macroeconomic stabilization, and structural adjustments. As the government revenue and international aid increased and expanded, family owned farms were dependent on agriculture, many state enterprises in manufacturing were leased or sold and state-owned agricultural marketing enterprises were disassembled.

Since the start of the reform, economic growth has been changed prominently, particularly in the year of 1990s GDP of the Lao PDR reached 6.3%. In 2000–2012, annual growth rate was on the peak of 7.4%. However, the most number of Lao populations still did not fully and

equally get out from poverty and some significant social problems (NSC, 2011). Additionally, there are several critics on development to the focusing on the economic growth. There brings the queries on the new development concept under the NEM whether it would be succeeded for Lao people to achieve the wellbeing or not. To respond to its queries we would need to understand what Lao local conception of wellbeing is.

The subject of this study is the local notion of wellbeing in people perspective with in social cultural contexts of the Lao PDR. The wellbeing has been widely perceived with many methods to research and there are different perspectives on this concept. This work is on track with the tradition of the social cultural constructionism. In this paper the most important viewpoint is to find out the exact meaning and component of wellbeing in local Lao people conception. The collecting data are centered on the questions of: What are the things Lao people need to have in order to maintain good live (having)?; What would Lao people like to be or which goals/needs that are considered to be highly value for Lao people living (thinking)?; What can Lao people do in order to achieve what they would like to be (doing)? This study argues that to develop the measurement of development should include the wellbeing of social and cultural aspects.

The paper is organized to begin with setting out a framework of “wellbeing” in term of the theoretical conception of wellbeing. Then, it provides a short introduction to the Lao context, the field sites themselves, and the research methods employed, followed by the presentation of the empirical results. The last substantive section of the paper relates these results back to the conceptual framework, and drawing the paper to a conclusion.

2. Theoretical conception of wellbeing

There has been generally argued that the development is a concept to impose from outside, so that local conception of development or progress is denied. Recently the study of the development is turning more to local knowledge indigenous development that it will focus mainly on the linkage of people wellbeing. Thus, if wellbeing is perceived as a concept of development, the study of its meaning is hence a process to be operated together with the development.

The wellbeing is a multi-varied and dynamic phenomenon. There is a concept under the family’s quality of life, subjective wellbeing or happiness, welfare, life satisfaction and human development. There are many different perspectives of wellbeing but in numerous dimensions they are coincide each other (McGillivray, 2007). Some scholars like Easterlin (2001) conceived that it could be exchanged, and used as proxies. However, all concepts having mentioned here point out that wellbeing has different meaning which cannot be refused that those are linked and being portions of wellbeing.

As far as the concept of wellbeing has been originated from Aristotle and the teaching of the Buddha or from other major philosophies (McGregor, 2008), the word of wellbeing is not a new concept then. However, most founding religions have defined the concept of wellbeing to be more vivid and offer moral direction for life. As modern social sciences Jeremy Bentham has argued that the utilitarian conception of wellbeing remains current in economics (Collard, 2003). Wellbeing in this concept means “Satisfaction With Life”. Presently, it is also popular to identify Adam Smith’s concern with wellbeing in his “Theory of Moral Sentiment” as well as in “The Wealth of Nations” (McGregor, 2008).

Amartya Sen's (1999) has challenged the term wellbeing to the utilitarianism of mainstream welfare economics recently. His disputes with Martha Nussbaum, who is guarded of the term precisely since its utilitarian baggage, and the imaginative and brighten work of many of their discussants, have improved the recent development literature (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Alkire, 2002; Gasper, 2004). There are also other remarkable presents of the concept to be more comprehensible including Partha Dasgupta's "Inquiry into Human Wellbeing and Destitution" (Dasgupta, 1993); and some of the writing of Robert Chambers on the notion of "Responsible Wellbeing" (Chambers, 2004).

Amartya Sen states that the ultimate effect from the development is making individual success on their needs, and the individuals have freedom on chosen goal by themselves. In other words, this concept considers an individual's life as a joining of diverse "Functioning" that is freely chosen called "Capabilities". The income is not just only a tool, but also the trail leading to success (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2008). However, Sen has been criticized that the idea is highly abstract (Promphakping, 2006).

The emergence of positive psychology, the work of Nobel prize-winner Daniel Kahneman and others debating the virtues of pleasure and understandings of wellbeing (Kahneman et al., 1999; Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2006; McGregor, 2008) is another discussion in the social sciences that have also raised the profile of the notion in academic and policy circles. This strengthening work has found much significance in coexistent social sciences and policy circles. However, wellbeing is a growing area of research, yet the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered (Dodge et al., 2012).

To conduct the research that is summarized in this paper it is crucial to develop a precise and practical definition of wellbeing. The conception of wellbeing used in this paper synthesizes contributions from three broad traditions in the social sciences which argue that each must be comprehended if we are to develop a more holistic concept of wellbeing. There are four major thoughts from these three traditions that have been drawn upon to develop wellbeing concept. These are those concerned with theories of human needs, as exemplified by Doyal and Gough (1991); the work of Sen on capabilities, functioning and freedom (Sen, 1999), combined with the resource profiles approach (Gough, McGregor, & Camfield, 2007). This is a livelihood type framework that allows exploration of the ways in which different combinations of resources support or obstructs the capacity to act meaningfully; and the work on subjective wellbeing, life quality satisfaction. Thus, the concept and methodology of wellbeing that has been modified by the Research Group on Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (WeSD) will be employed. The concept includes (1) What the needs and resources that people have "Having"; (2) What satisfaction with life of people would like to be "Thinking"; and (3) What they do to achieve the things that they satisfy "Doing" or "trying to achieve/satisfy". Consequently, the meaning of wellbeing should depend on situations that humans are able to achieve their goals by using the thing they have and the way that they do. It can be an objective and a subjective wellbeing. The hypothesis is to use wellbeing indicators as a best tool to measure the result of the development, because it reflects subjective and objective wellbeing which is not just what people have, but what they think, what and why they do. Moreover, it also reflects the relationship between people and others (Mee-Udon, 2009).

The issue to be addressed here on the idea of wellbeing is on how people might live well together in society and have good change in development. While it is necessary to focus on the wellbeing of the person; this definition is nevertheless equally concerned with notions of "the good society" and "the common good" (Deneulin & Townshend, 2007). The ability of

the person to achieve wellbeing is dependent largely on society being structured as to make this possible. Therefore, wellbeing of the person can not be perceived without understanding the role that wider social collectivities play in creating the conditions that support to achieve wellbeing (McGregor, 2008). Moreover, wellbeing here encompasses the notion of happiness but cannot directly be equated with it as a person who is happy yet unwillingly suffers from malnutrition cannot be regarded as experiencing wellbeing. While suffering various privations in terms of freedoms or material needs, it is possible to be happy. But this cannot be taken into account as an adequate indicator of a more comprehensive notion of a person's wellbeing, nor can this conception be equated with wealth. Because being materially wealthy but miserable about the quality of life does not add up to wellbeing. As recent experiences from more opulent societies indicates that wealth can also translate into declines in wellbeing, for example, through obesity or increased mental dissatisfaction due to destructive status competition. Thus, the study of such meaning of wellbeing in Lao society is very important for supporting the development in Laos, as the social cultural constructed wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a crucial achievement to indicate the potentiality of people living. Wellbeing is different between countries, because it involves closely to the physical and mental state of family members and society. In order to be able achieving wellbeing and make this possible for a person depends largely on structured society. In addition, the intensity of such an increase in wellbeing differs across countries in the sense that least developed countries have converged among them whereas medium developed countries have converged toward highly developed nations (Jordá & Sarabia, 2014). Hence, to study the concept of human wellbeing in Laos it should rely on the context of Lao people.

At the present no wellbeing's measurement in Laos, even the Lao government has aforementioned concept of wellbeing since the 7th of National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSC, 2011). The Lao government has pursued the principle of development indicators to enterprate the situation of poverty, development, quality of life, and livelihood of its people. These are all important parts of wellbeing, namely The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Human Development Index (HDI), Poverty Vulnerability Index (PVI), and the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey (LECS). However, in such diversity of cultural settings, to develop a standard set of measurement of wellbeing is more required.

Additionally, there are some questions to be answered: What we call the "development" leading us to the right direction? What are the goals that human beings want to achieve? Which process would lead them to their goals? Thus, these studies are interested in what the wellbeing is in terms of local Lao people conception, and what the components are that could make the clear knowledge about the concept in their perspective.

As mentioned-above, this research is adopted the tradition of the social cultural constructionism from the theoretical perspective. An initial important factor which is vital to have in account is that the social cultural constructionism has different theoretical roots (Stam, 2002), and it is possible to recognize these roots from the work of Giam-battista Vico (Lock & Strong, 2010) though it was very long time ago. Vico indicates that "worlds are artificially constructed by people, as people change their constructions they transform their worlds, and in doing so change themselves" (Hosking & Morley, 2004: 1–14). This statement is central in the social cultural constructionism theory.

Another important characteristic of the social cultural constructionism theory is about the language which is not only a means to know the meanings, but it co-constitutes reality that is a part in the epistemological and ontological constitution of the reality (Nightingale &

Cromby, 2002). If the reality is a social cultural construction, how this was born then. The answer is the social interaction process, and more specifically in the relationship between the different social actors (Gergen, 1985). Additionally, important implications for the social cultural constructionism perspective are about how the scientific knowledge in social science must be constituted, and what specific methods are suitable for this scientific enterprise. Nevertheless, the same conception can not be used both in social and physical sciences because concepts like objectivity or measurement have very different meaning (Luckmann, 2008). Furthermore, another important dimension of people capacity to be in contact with the world is emotion which is the first level of the sensible and concrete dimension in wellbeing such as fear, anger, joy, compassion or sorrow (Kitayama et al., 2000). Therefore, the questions raising here are: What is about the nature of the emotions? Can the emotions be social cultural constructions? The answer for the social cultural constructionists is that the emotions are a socio cultural phenomenon (Armon-Jones, 1986).

Concisely, in this study the social cultural constructionism describes the social reality as the interplay between the social actors and their historical and cultural contexts which aims to find out the meaning of wellbeing conception for Lao people. Also the objective of this paper is to explore the concept of wellbeing based on theories and the conceptions in a more specific way of Lao people that is developed in the tradition of the social cultural constructionism. A field study was conducted in Sangthong district and qualitative methods were adopted in this study.

3. Laos Context and Field Sites

Compare to other countries in Asia, Lao PDR is among the smallest one. After the reform, particularly after 1986, the Lao government introduced their reformation known as *jin-ta-na-kan mai* (*New Imagination*), the economic growth has played a crucial role in development, and the wellbeing is more defined by GDP. The introduction of NEM or market economic mechanism system was considered as far-reaching reform in order to achieve sustainable economic growth in Laos (Anderson et al., 2007).

In the past, the Lao economy followed a centrally planned system. Since the introduction of NEM in 1986, the country has been transitioning to a more open-market economy. This has led to the liberalization of prices and markets, including opening up of the economy to foreign investment and trade, and implementing reforms in the legal, regulatory, and financial sectors. Moreover, as Lao PDR became a full member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1997 and the ASEAN Free Trade Area, this is considered one of the most important foreign policy objectives of the country. As believed that it allows for the creation of a more secure, stable and mutually beneficial relationship with its neighbors in the region. Lao PDR has also put in a request to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), and has officially become a full member of the WTO on February 2, 2013. In addition, the national priority target aiming to reduce poverty, make wellbeing of people, and to shed the country's status from a Least Developed Country (LDC) by the year 2020. However, having high growth in the initial period, the great number of Lao people still did not fully and equally reap the benefits of development and still suffered from some social problems and quality of life such as poverty, health and environment problems.

Sangthong district, the study area, is mountainous and most remote area of nine district of Vientiane Capital. Its total area is of 752.7 square kilometer with unique culture, fresh air and rich of natural and mineral resources such as gold, copper, coal and some others. Apart from that, the district also has various rivers namely Tone, Sang and Mekong rivers which can be used as a source of production and livelihood of local people. There are 37 villages, five village groups that are different in the development levels. There are 5,417 households out of 27,683 population, female 13,628, including 92.98% of low land group, Khamu 7% and Hmong 0.02%. Sangthong is one of the base districts for revolution, people are patriotic and nationalists, and strengthen solidarity. 95% of population is active agriculture in producing the crops (Sangthong District Office [SDO], 2012). They have good culture and live in the prosperous natural resources such as soil, forest, air, mineral and rivers which are suitable for the sustainable economic development in the future. After the independence on 2 December 1975, Sangthong is one of the selected development districts as others. Sangthong is also connected with the National High Way No.11 which links the main road with all villages and the villages group. Sangthong has the standard of electricity, public telephone, radio, school, hospital, and some others, which are located in the central of district as it facilitates the social and economic development.

However, from the determination of Lao government, Sangthong is one of the poorest districts in 47 poor districts in the Lao PDR (NSC, 2011). It is also found that there are many challenges for the economic and social development. For instance, the livelihood of people are based on the natural conditions, it hardly adapts the status while the development has been changing. There are no sufficient infrastructures such as road are damaged in the wet season, and human resources are not enough for the advocacy campaign for the development from government and private sectors. In addition, Sangthong is limited in education and culture, particularly in female population. Otherwise, the government sector has initiated to increase the role of women and this brings the general development to be better than in the past.

Moreover, as mentioned, Sangthong has traditionally the poorest district (SDO, 2012). Most of the populations living in villages do the farming. To meet household needs, however, they have, for some decades, moved to other more prosperous parts of the country and crossed border to Thailand. The reason is for circular labor migrants, remitting a portion of their income to sustain livelihoods in settlements. In recent years factories have launched in Sangthong, which improved transportation infrastructure and lower costs. This has advantages for many families to return for farming and shrinking land holdings, while meeting rising needs and growing expectations. At the present, regarding to the government's report, in 2014 Sangthong district will be announced to be the "development district". It means Sangthong will be out of the poorest district which can be a good example for the development in the Lao PDR.

4. Methods

The study employs qualitative research. Fieldwork was conducted during 2012–2013. To primarily understood the concept of wellbeing in local Lao people perspective by taking social phenomenon under phenomenology into critical consideration (Creswell, 2008).

The procedure of the study, start with reviewing relevant documents as well as the research data from field work, which focused on household and community level. Then, the focus group discussions with 35 household representatives were employed. Participants in the target groups were selected by purposive sampling in five villages. There involved various issues relating to the development and wellbeing in Lao local society, implementation at the local level such as seniors or chiefs of village who have responsibility for political, economic, social, and environmental aspects. Follow by in-depth interviews were employed by using the interview guidelines that can get from the reviewed relevant documents step, for the key informants from public and private organizations. Interviewees include 15 people whose involved in policy development at the local, provincial, and central levels. These include chiefs of village or seniors in amount of 5 persons by selecting from five villages in target areas, 2 from the district levels, 2 from the provincial levels, 4 at the central level (from the Prime Minister's Office), and 2 representatives from the private sector. All techniques used to collect the data are centered on the questions: What are the things Lao people need to have in order to maintain good live (having)? What would Lao people like to be; or which goals/needs that are considered to be highly value for Lao people living (thinking)? What can Lao people do in order to achieve what they would like to be (doing)?

After collection, the acquired data was processed and analyzed. Content analysis was conducted for discrimination, interpretation and comparison for investigation of relationship and patterns in phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This study was based on theory and the data was processed using analysis for finding the meaning and the components of wellbeing for Lao people.

The selection of research area was based on: (1) one of the poorest districts with diversity of ethnic groups is in 47 poor districts in Lao PDR (SDO, 2012; NSC, 2012); (2) location are under the community physical that represent to the Lao PDR (SDO, 2012); (3) locations are under government and private sectors development projects i.e. mining exploration, agricultural development, hydropower; (4) communities are near urban areas or affected by present or future projects; (5) rural communities are unaffected by urban development; (6) areas are designated by the Lao government for social and economic development; (7) the development levels are different between villages in the area (villages with high levels of income disparity); and (8) people in the community include both poor and non-poor people.

5. Results and Discussion

In the term of "Development", it is a value or normative concept. It is considered to define the value by person, location, and timing fundamental. The interpretation of its meaning of the development would differ from each other, local, and time contexts. As well as the "wellbeing" is largely used for scholars and policy makers, this is different aspect in a particular area. Thus, the development of wellbeing indicator has to begin from those meaning of the regional or local aspects (Promphakping, 2006).

According to the local context of Lao society, there are varieties of wellbeing's meanings. The word of "wellbeing" would mean "being opulent and being happy (som-boun poun-souk) or being well and being strong (yu-dee mee-hang)", which is common found in Lao language. When giving blessing it is usual said "wishing you being well and being strong (khor hai chao yu-dee mee-hang der)", when greeting other by saying "are you being well and being strong or being good (chao yu-dee mee-hang bor)?" Those words are the same meaning of being opulent and being happy.

In Lao language the basic meaning of those words for communication usually means the human health being. If we split its components we could be able to divide into two main parts: “being well/being opulent” and “being strong/being happy”. The being well/being opulent means the physical, environment, economy and society which are substantial such as the natural resources, shelter, food, medicine and utilities materials to reflect the human opulence for individual and household levels. Those words mean in English as “being well”, but for the word being strong/being happy are related to the health on both physical and mental or the sensational meaning of satisfaction, or in English meaning of “feeling well”. If we consider this meaning we would find that being well and being strong could replace the meaning of being opulent and being happy or wellbeing in the term of local context. This is well consonant to the meaning of wellbeing in Lao PDR derived from theoretical and research perspective of Laos’ context.

The local perspective of wellbeing based on people in Sangthong district, the “*Being well*” means to live in the best environment (both from natural and human made), economic, social and cultural. “*Being strong*” means to live with happiness mentally and physically such as good health, having good and safe food, having regular exercise and good emotion. Therefore, according to the research process, the framework for the meaning of wellbeing in Lao people conception means the capability of living in a happy and warm family, good society and community, spirit/belief religion and culture, security in life and property, good physical and mental health, good knowledge and education, good leader and public management, freedom to participation, good environment, and enough of living economy. There are five components of wellbeing conception for local Lao people showing in the express their opinions and define the meaning for each component as follows:

5.1 Good family. This refers to the state of family wellbeing with happiness from understanding and helping each other while living together in family, warmth of family, disagreement avoiding in family, good offspring, success of family members, family members do not involved temptation, and single family (Monogamy); as shown in their statements as follow:

“Our children obey to the parents, avoid playing with drug and alcohol, and complete their studies and success in having jobs” (Female, 52 years old, 10/8/2012).

“Having a warm family, one man and wife with harmonious family and support each other in solving the difficulties is the most happiness” (Male, 44 years old, 24/7/2012).

Family wellbeing includes 4 indicators: (1) Warmness of family; (2) Family members joining activities together, close caring each others; (3) Descendants are tractable, not involved temptation; (4) Family members achieve an education goal and success in living.

5.2 Good society. This refers to the state of community’s members having good social and cultural wellbeing with high spirit, realizing all the truth, being less selfish; living in the fair and good relationship society; inheriting and observing in local cultural, social, religious, and traditional activities. Also there is good quality and equality education in the society; security in life and assets; having wisdom, equity, good and transparency leader; effective public management; and providing the community participation for the development policy and planning; as shown in their statements as follow:

“Religion, good custom and culture of nation are the most preservative. We must conserve as this will protect all kinds of social problems. Those are related to the wellbeing of people” (Male, 55 years old, 24/07/2012).

“Nowadays, there are many treats in the society such as snatching, robbery and drug uses in many areas. There are so terrified thus making us sleepless and unhappy” (Female, 50 years old, 19/01/2013).

Social and cultural wellbeing includes 9 indicators: (1) Good relationship/unity in community; (2) Inheriting and observing in local social, cultural, religious, traditional activities; (3) Security of life and property in the community; (4) Sufficient fundamental services providing by the government; (5) Equality access to educational services; (6) The education systems are good quality, efficiency, and reliable with real situation; (7) Individuals in the community get access to the public services fairly; (8) Transparency and effectiveness of public management; (9) Good and virtue leader.

5.3 Good health. In this dimension “wellbeing” means good health, both mentally and physically. Health can be cured and cared while illness with good caring by family, doctor, nurse and community with equity and equality, with regularly exercise in the good facility provided; as shown in statements bellow:

“Having tough mentally and physically, consuming healthy food with regular exercise, being able to work every day, providing basic prevention the disease and treatment, are the most happy life” (Male, 54 years old, 11/06/2012).

“Whatever we are sad or happy it depends on ourselves, it depends on the adaption of us to live with it” (Female, 47 years old, 11/06/2012).

Health wellbeing includes 7 indicators: (1) Household members without health disease; (2) Having leisure time and doing exercise; (3) Having comfortable and sufficient exercise facilities; (4) Having respected from others members; (5) Being happy and being proud; (6) Having to sufficiency health care center nearby the village; (7) Sufficiency of basic health care knowledge such as prevention and basic treatment.

5.4 Good environment. This refers to the natural resources and environment wellbeing with the happy state from cleanness of natural and non-natural environment, rich of natural resources especially the forest, without pollutions from chemical substances, waste, chemical fertilizers, sufficient clean water, fresh air, and no risk from natural disaster; as shown in statements as follow:

“Natural disaster is the most devastated, because the destruction and change of environment can effect on the wellbeing of people in the community” (Female, 65 years old, 17/07/2012).

“In our village, the management of rubbish and pollution should be in concern” (Male, 47 years old, 24/07/2012).

Natural resources and environment wellbeing includes 9 indicators: (1) Rich of forestry, trees, and natural food in household and community; (2) Community participation for the usage and management of natural resources; (3) Sufficiency natural water supply for agriculture of household; (4) Sufficiency of the quality, cleanness, and sanitary water; (5) Good waste management; (6) Free of chemical use in agriculture; (7) Proper mitigation measurement for negative impact of development project; (8) Risk from natural disaster/good preventive practice from natural disaster; (9) Contagious disease supervision that causes from environmental problems.

5.5 Good economy. This refers to the state of having enough and various food, well-built and safety house, having own land for farming, sufficient rice for household consumption through the year. There is also pleasant work and security, sufficiency and permanent earnings for living costs, less expenses, no risk, less/no debts, more savings; as shown in statements as follow:

“Without debts is the most important for the better life and happiness of family” (Female, 37 years old, 01/08/2012).

“If our product is more valuable, our life would be better and happier” (Male, 49 years old, 10/8/2012).

Economy wellbeing includes 10 indicators: (1) Ownership properties (land, shelter...); (2) Sufficient of the safety and variety food product in the household (including rice); (3) Sufficient income and saving ; (4) No debts; (5) Having equipment and innovation for work; (6) Being a member of economic group/enterprise for community; (7) Having government authorities providing consultation for job recruitments/access to job outside agriculture; (8) Good prices products; (9) Sufficient labors and water for farm produce in the household; (10) Household receiving money supporting from offspring

The concept of wellbeing for Lao people in this study is synthesis base on the framework of social and cultural construction of local Lao people which we call the insider perspectives. There has been shown that the livelihoods of Lao people in deed are all related to the significant of social and natural factors. As a whole Lao people and community have been generous, dependent, and considered a sincere family and society is the most influence for the livelihood which is long lasting with Lao people from the ancient times. This study has found that the meaning of wellbeing can be classified into five components including both materials (objective) and non-materials (subjective) categories. There is consistent with the study of Forgeard et al. (2011), who believed that wellbeing is best understood as a multifaceted phenomenon which can be assessed by measuring a wide array of subjective and objective constructs. As mentioned, this wellbeing conception of local Lao people synthesized from the flame work of “What the needs and resources that Lao people have (having)? What satisfaction with life that Lao people would like to be (thinking)? What they do to achieve the things that they satisfy (doing)”.

For Lao people’s “needs and resources” or “*Having*”, it can be classified into two categories, materials and non-materials. *The materials* include concrete items such as natural resource, shelter, clothes, food, medicine, farm-land, valuable and durable properties like accessories, vehicle, technology equipment, household stuff, working equipment, labor, domestic animals, and food. *The non-materials* are consciousness, wisdom, honesty, warmness of family, respect each other, no greed, good mind, moral, feeling safe, united community, mutual understanding, having pride, good culture, and being loyal to religion and nation. These needs and resources are the foundation for Lao people’s wellbeing. They will use the resources to do whatever they satisfy for their wellbeing. Moreover, the “satisfaction in Lao people life” does not only relate to the resources that Lao people have but it also refers to what they would like to be or “*Thinking*” and how to lead their lives to achieve what they would like to be or “*Doing*”. Even though they have a lot of resources, they still would like to get something else that they do not have or they are not satisfied with what they have. This situation means that Lao people have not achieved their wellbeing. This study has found that the valuation or wellbeing of Lao people from their perspective includes *three* characteristics.

The first feature reflects objective values (Objective wellbeing - OWB) including (1) *variety, cleanness and goodness in the natural resources and environment*. At present, in the Lao PDR the natural resources are limited; the environments are damaged, and have many environmental problems (UNDP, 2013). This situation effects the livelihood of Lao people, as their lives rely on the natural resources which makes the environmental burden leading to diseases (Reig-Martinez, 2013); (2) *having good and strong physical health*, physical health is very important for people in working, because participation in the workforce is also an important activity which can provide income, social relationship, status, daily routine, and life satisfaction (Campen & Cardol, 2009; Cramm et al., 2013), and higher levels of wellbeing (Lehto et al., 2009; Meltzer et al., 2009). Also they can earn for their living, support their families which will not be a burden for their living; (3) *having enough and equality of income or economics*, as people need and should be concerned about objective inequality, they want their society to move toward (Beja, 2013) by having land and home ownership (Hu, 2013); no debt. Lao people especially most farmers in rural areas are critical in debt both legal and illegal (NSC, 2011), because they need money for their farming or buying their farming equipments. Some farmers are in debt because they do not yield good cultivation or face the problem of drought or flood. However, most farmers believe that they can pay their debt as long as they still can work and businesses are still in process; (4) *high knowledge and high education*, the education is very important condition for people to get a good job and examine the human wellbeing (Haq & Zia, 2013). They can apply their knowledge in their living, and their working place even the farmers who can also work in the farm field.

The second feature refers to the mental aspect that is the most valuable one (Subjective wellbeing - SWB). Wellbeing is not only limited in terms of material or physical needs but also relates to other needs that are subjective in nature (Lyndon et al., 2013). It is now recognized that mental health is not merely the absence of mental illness, but also the presence of the subjective wellbeing (Keyes, 2005; Bak-Klimek, 2013). Mental health includes seeing their children grow up and succeed, spirits of the Lao people who are happy in their occupation, living in the safe environment, having good leader and public management, proud and satisfied with their living, meriting and doing religion's activities. Especially for religion it is an important dimension of human experience which is positive relation with wellbeing (Graham & Crown, 2014).

The third feature of wellbeing also reflects the relationship between people and others. Therefore, the most important aspect in this sense is significantly related to the warmness of family, attending and participating in communities' activities, and cultural values. There is consistent with the study of Trung (2013), who believed that cultural value positively affects people happiness and satisfaction especially in East Asia. Moreover, it is also related to the study of Ruchiwit (2013) which mentioned that one of the factors predicting the wellbeing of Laotians has been their attitudes toward their society and its cultural values. However, the values can change due to time and situations. Additionally, this wellbeing's meaning also depends on the process of wellbeing creation which is considered from the effort to achieve their satisfaction that is not necessary to use only one way.

In summary, the concept of wellbeing in local Lao people conception is comprised of three perspectives: (1) What are the needs and resources that the Lao people have "having"? (2) What satisfaction with life of Lao people would like to be "thinking"? (3) Their effort "doing" called "the processes" of achieving that satisfaction of Lao people under the frame of wellbeing that is suitable for Lao society. The meaning of wellbeing can classify into five

components including three characteristic: “Objective wellbeing”; “Subjective wellbeing”; and “Relationship between people”. The concepts of wellbeing are different in each society because it depends on the social cultural construction of the society. Therefore, the objective and subjective wellbeing measures are needed in unison or the relationship to understand human quality of life in each society and to make informed policy decisions (Haq & Zia, 2013).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, from the results of this research it investigates the possibility in different levels of analysis. First of all the multidimensionality of the wellbeing concept is raised up and it uses the different methods from the studied groups to show the concepts of wellbeing formed the social and cultural construction which is the insider perspective that comes from local Lao people.

There are three features of the wellbeing for Lao people. One is objective wellbeing visible from several aspects that are concrete and can touch, namely having their own basic needs such as shelter, clothes, food, medicine, farmland, equipment, vehicles, valuable and non-valuable goods, and natural resources. Second is subjective wellbeing that is abstract and cannot touch resulting from people’s thoughts and feeling, namely having warmness of family, feeling safety, going to the temple for listening to dharma, having loyalty to the nation, religions and the merit, good mind, united, mutual understanding, and having pride. Third, wellbeing of Lao people is a social cultural construction, reflected the relationship between people and others, which refers to wellbeing as family, relatives, community, education, religion and culture, health, natural resources, and environment. However, this social cultural construction of wellbeing is not separately from economic wellbeing, it still has the connection as a means to acquiring quality of life. This finding suggested for developing the measurement of development that should include the social and cultural wellbeing. In addition, it is also closely related to the economic indicators with the social, cultural and environmental aspects. The implication of this study recommends policy makers to implement the policy as a priority by taking into consideration the needs of the local people, the culture and knowledge system itself. As a matter of fact, future research should capture the relationship between the views of wellbeing that is conceptualized in this study with the world-view of the wellbeing in the empirical of the local community level.

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Round-Table Discussion: Afternoon Section

The afternoon round-table discussion began after the presentation by Prof. Dr. Vijay Kumar Shrotryia in the topic of “*Bhutan's Experiments with Gross National Happiness – Leading towards Sustainable Development,*” and by Dr. Thantavanh Manolom's “*The local Conception of Wellbeing in Lao PDR.*”

Dr. Vijay showed that a present problem Bhutan is facing is increasing unemployment. He thought that this made Bhutan less happy, though there was no survey asking them whether they were happy or not from unemployment. However, Mr. Bishwa argued that overall unemployment rate in Bhutan is not high, and a problem with the survey was that the population size was very small. Moreover, he said, Bhutan is a very Buddhist society. Even though they did not have a job or something to do, they are still fine because someone would give them free food. This practice still exists in rural areas of Bhutan. That may be the case why unemployment rate is not a problem in Bhutan. In connection with this problem, Dasho Kesang said that the new Bhutan government is really concerned about it.

Mr. Bishwa asked how to measure psychological well-being in Lao PDR case. Dr. Thantavanh clarified that her survey used 82 questions to investigate in 5 domains about mental health such as self-satisfaction, respect from community, feeling of happiness or not, in the family and household. She also said that her work is the first one of its kind and the government of Lao PDR gave her a scholarship for this project. The government is planning whether to use well-being measurement at the national level; so, this would be a very important development for the country.

On statistical interpretation, Dasho Kesang showed from a record he had that 84% of deeply happy persons were married persons and 12% were never married, so most happy persons are married. The sample size that the unmarried ones are happier in the presentation may not reflect the national situation. In addition, a Bhutanese female student responded to the result presented that men are happier than women in Bhutan that the situation now has changed from previously as women now have more opportunities.

Regarding gender equality concern, Mr. Stuart questioned whether we can generalize on happiness index for men and women as it is likely to vary a lot across time periods and places. Dr. Sauwalak answered that it was different case by case, but normally the set of questions were the same when they asked and they just distinguished between men and women. She referred to UNDP's report in 2010 that measured about life satisfaction, and

found that Lao PDR was ranked in a very high position in Southeast Asia, though it was ranked very low in terms of income level.

Dr. Thantavanh found that most indicators were subjective, and her sampled subjects told her that education and family warmth were the most important indicators for happiness, not any amount of money. For most of them, money was less important than family and community in the sense that they would be happier to work within their own community that allowed them to be close to their families and can have meals together rather than going to work far away from their community, though working outside their community would give them more money. In addition, since Lao PDR is still a developing country, so Lao people had low material expectation and they did not need much in materials consumption. Instead, they valued the sense of community and families; for example, they like to go for temple activities together, or when they get sick, they need to stay with their family.

Mr. Apichai asked Dr. Thantavanh about her views on how wellbeing of Lao people would be over the next 10 years, and how openness of her country to the outside would affect that? Dr. Thantavanh answered that she hoped and expected that wellbeing of Lao people should be better. She explained that now Lao people is happier than in the past and this is because of many factors. First of all, more and more Lao students studied abroad and came back to the country and many of them became government officials. Second, the government tried to deal with problems like corruption and environment. Third, the government also increased wages and salaries in order to encourage Lao people to work within their communities, since they did not want them to work far away from their homes. Finally, the government has increasingly spent its budgets on education and health.

Mr. Stuart suggested that one happiness factor is fairness. People would be unhappy if they think that the society is not being fair. He questioned how to incorporate corruption, which he thought crucial in Asian societies, in happiness indicators. Vijay added that although we might not have it directly, we could get something from the survey. Vijay said that India is facing corruption which is a big problem as it consumed a lot of resources. Anyway, he saw some positive signs about dealing with that problem as so many people began to talk about it on social media and newspapers. He thought that a way to solve this problem was to practice moderation. If we still focused on money and income, corruption would occur because it produced greed that made us to want more. 'The more we get, the more we want, and this led to corruption. He suggested that better education and infrastructure would help improve this

problem. A Bhutanese teacher who was doing his Master degree in Rangsit University said that he really agreed with Dr. Vijay in the point that education was a crucial factor to prevent citizens from corrupt behaviors and education would lead to long-term benefits for a nation, and Bhutan has done well on this. Vijay said that happy teachers would lead to happy outcomes of the society and the issue relating to corruption is important to consider in future studies.

In this connection, Dr. Thantavanh said that Lao participants in her field study, with about three indicators relate to corruption, saw corruption in different way as they might not see corruption as a problem as long as the government distribute the benefits to them. Mr. Stuart added that this was very similar to the Thai case which many polls showed that people could highly tolerate corruption if they benefit from that too. Dasho Kesang added that a very good reason people talked about corruption in social media was that they had very high intolerance for corruption, and this was really the case in Bhutan. It is a challenge how to control corruption, dealing with issues of transparency, fairness, etc.

A Bhutanese student said that she was curious whether Lao females were less happy than Lao males like the results in Bhutan or not. She said that this may be the case for Bhutan about 10 years ago because at that time women were more discriminated than now. But these days, things are different as there are now many organizations promoting women's rights. Dr. Sauwalak mentioned that many Lao women are in prominent roles in politics and leaders with the highest percentage of woman participation in politics among ASEAN countries, and perhaps that relates to why Lao women are happier. Dr. Thantavanh stated that these days Lao women are happier than in the past because women's rights were much better. She thought that there were three factors for women's happiness: (1) good behavior of man; (2) human rights for women; (3) higher salary, this is because when men got enough salary, then they did not need to go somewhere faraway to find a job. She said that Lao women played more important roles in public like in politics, and Lao men even needed to ask for permission from their wives whether they could go to meetings.

Mr. Stuart argued that though the high portion of female representatives in politics may generally increase woman happiness, it may not always be a good indicator for women's wellbeing like in the UK, for example. He also wondered how Lao's New Economic

Mechanism¹ (NEM) implemented in 1986 affected Lao people's happiness. Dr. Thantavanh said that if we looked at Lao economy as a whole, we found that economic situations in Lao were much better than in the past. For example, economy, social, education, health has improved a lot. Lao PDR collaborated with many international organizations such as the World Bank and UNDP which helped to attract many international investors to come to Lao PDR. But the country still had problems of environmental degradation resulting from the development. However, if we looked at Lao PDR after 1986 as a whole, she said, we could not say that wellbeing of Lao people were much better than in the past. For example, if we asked someone in rural areas whether he or she was happy or not, they may reply that they are fine, but they are happier in the past than now. This may be because, in the past, they could work within their community which allowed them to stay with their family. If they wanted to get something to eat, they just went to find something in the forest. But this pattern has changed nowadays as the market economy has become more predominant to their lives. Dr. Thantavanh showed that since government officials earned just 3,000 Baht per month but the price of a bowl of noodle was about 100-120 Baht, so this would be difficult for them to live without money.

Pertaining to issues about Asian Economic Community (AEC), Dr. Thantavanh said that the Lao government has prepared for AEC about 10 years ago by spending budgets to develop knowledge and technology. Lao people had to study at least three Asian languages which were Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian, apart from Thai, English, and Japanese. While some groups of people really preferred AEC, other groups feared that they may lose their jobs after AEC has been introduced because of high competition, especially in factories. However, the Lao government has spent their budgets on the development of knowledge and technology since 6 years ago in order to increase competitive capacities of Lao people. Some labor may be worry, but they may be happier as they can work in Thailand. This is a trade-off. Although they may not be able to work in Lao PDR, they can work in other countries in ASEAN.

¹ New Economic Mechanism is a program launched by the Lao government in 1986 to decentralize Lao economy and supported market economy.



INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”

20th March 2015, 9.30 – 16.30 hr.

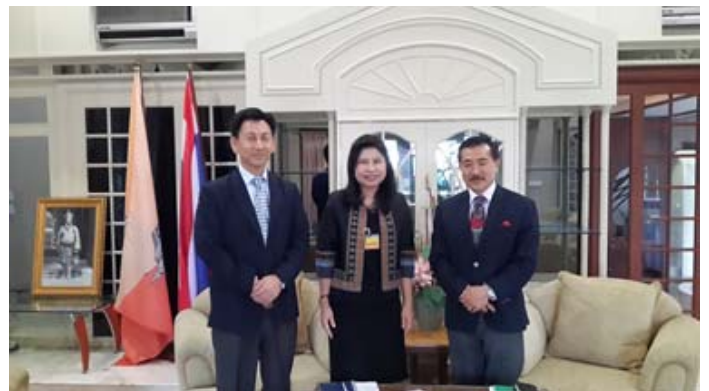
Venue: Room 1-801 Arthit Ourairat Building
(Bld.1, 8th Floor), Rangsit University

Tentative Schedule :

- 9.30 am. Reception & Registration
- 10.00 - 10.15 am. Welcome and Opening Remarks by **Dr.Chitriya Pinthong**, Vice President for International Affairs, Rangsit University
- 10.15 - 11.15 am. Speeches by the **Ambassador of Bhutan, Acting Secretary-General of NESDB, Representatives from UNDP and WHO.**
- 11.15 - 1.00 pm. Round-table discussion, led by presentation “Achieving Sustainable Development by Inner Happiness: A new Approach of SD.” By **Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas**, Director of Economic and Business Research Center for Reforms, Faculty of Economics, RSU, and International Research Associates for Happy Societies (IRAH).
Moderated by: Prof. Dr. Sandro Calvani, Senior Adviser on Strategic Planning at the Mae Fah Luang Foundation (under Royal Patronage)
- 1.00 - 2.00 pm. Lunch break
- 2.00 - 4.00 pm. Presentation by researchers on
- “Bhutan’s Experiments with Gross National Happiness - Leading towards Sustainable Development” by **Prof.Dr.Vijay Kumar Shrotryia**, Professor and Head Department of Commerce North-Eastern Hill University Shillong – Meghalaya : INDIA
 - “The Local Conception of Wellbeing in Lao PDR” by **Dr. Thantavanh Manolom**, The Economic Research Institute for Trade (ERIT), Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC), Lao PDR
- Moderated by: Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas**, Director of Economic and Business Research Center for Reforms, Faculty of Economics, RSU, and IRAH.
- Closing Remarks by Assist.Prof.Dr.Anusorn Tamajai**, Dean of Faculty of Economics, RSU
- 4.00 - 4.30 pm. Coffee & tea

MC: Asst.Prof.Gessanee Maneerutt, Associate Dean for Administration, International College, Rangsit University







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