

## Measuring Genuine Progress - Indicators for Enlightened Society

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Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, Head of the Shambhala Mandala, offers his warmest greetings, friendship, and best wishes to His Majesty the King of Bhutan, to the people of Bhutan, and to the directors and participants of this Seminar that is dedicated to manifesting the principles of Gross National Happiness in the world.

The Shambhala Mandala, established in the last century by Vidhyadara, the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the father of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, shares close historical links and an exceptional spiritual connection with the Kingdom of Bhutan. It was here in Bhutan, at Taktsang, that one of the most profound root texts of the Shambhala Mandala - the Sadhana of Mahamudra - came to the Vidyadhara. The Shambhala Mandala has also been blessed with the profound teachings of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, His Eminence Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, and others great teachers from Bhutan.

The name Shambhala has come down through history as an evocation of the archetypal human belief in enlightened society. Today the Shambhala mandala takes the form of a global network of meditation centres devoted to the creation of sane human society, based on the profound wisdom of Shambhala Buddhist teachings. Shambhala is often spoken of as a kingdom, of which the Sakyong (whose title literally means "Earth Protector") is the temporal and spiritual head.

The Sakyong has asked me to express his deep appreciation of the the auspicious potential of this gathering to create a genuine path toward world peace and the cessation of global suffering. He sees this conference as an excellent and timely initiative that will speed the flowering of the sanity and brilliance of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk's daring proclamation that the Kingdom of Bhutan is more interested in Gross National Happiness than Gross National Product. This view embodies the fundamental wisdom and compassion at the heart of both the Buddhist and Shambhala teachings, and is at one with the intention of the Sadhana of Mahamudra to overcome the materialism that now dominates the world. The Sakyong sees the view of Gross National Happiness as a primary foundation for the realization of enlightened society.

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The Sakyong looks forward to close cooperation between Shambhala and Bhutanese scholars and leaders in developing practical indicators of wellbeing and progress that can be used here and internationally in the years to come. He is confident that the shared social vision of this seminar will radiate sanity and compassion far beyond the borders of Bhutan and bring immeasurable benefit to countless sentient beings.

At this time of global violence, environmental degradation, and social confusion, this important endeavour can pave the way toward a new model of development that reflects the world's precious natural, cultural, spiritual and human resources.

### **Our Measures Reflect our Values**

Our goal at this gathering is not just to share our vision. It is to begin to put it into practice. In order to do so, we have to be specific about the basic requisites of an enlightened society and dare to say clearly what we mean by Gross National Happiness. What are our objectives? And how do we measure our progress in getting there? Every measure of progress, by definition, is based on values, because it raises the question "progress towards what?" What we count and measure, therefore, reflects our deepest social values, and in turn determines the policy agendas of governments and other institutions.

In contributing to this gathering on behalf of the Shambhala Mandala, I am also bringing to it my own experience as the Director of the Canadian Non-governmental organization *Genuine Progress Index (Atlantic)* which has been working for a number of years to establish indicators that may be helpful to developing a practical basis for implementing the notion of Gross National Happiness.

So maybe we should begin by saying what Gross National Happiness is *not*, and by looking closely at the values and goals represented by our conventional measures of progress. Then we can more easily identify the values, goals, and measures appropriate to an enlightened society based on Gross National Happiness.

How do world leaders currently assess how "well off" we are? Throughout the world, we currently measure our progress and gauge our wellbeing according to a very narrow set of materialist indicators – our economic growth rates, which in turn are based on measures of Gross National Product or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The more we produce, sell, and buy, the more the GDP grows, and the "better off" we are supposed to be -- or so the conventional wisdom tells us.

Yet vital social and environmental factors remain invisible in these measures. The more trees we cut down, the more fossil fuels we burn, and the faster we deplete our natural wealth, the faster the

economy grows. This is poor accounting, like a factory owner who sells off his machinery and counts it as profit. Our growth rates also make no distinction between economic activity that creates benefit and that which causes harm. So long as money is being spent, the economy will grow. Crime, pollution, accidents, sickness, and natural disasters all expand the economy. The economy can grow even as inequality and poverty increase. At the same time, many of our most valuable assets, like generosity, volunteer work, unpaid caregiving, and our spiritual wealth are not counted at all, because no money changes hands.

So economic growth does not necessarily mean we are better off. In fact, as Robert Kennedy said 30 years ago, Gross National Product measures “everything except that which makes life worthwhile.” Fortunately, there *is* a better way forward, and the Kingdom of Bhutan is the nation to embrace it publicly by declaring openly that Bhutan is more interested in Gross National Happiness than Gross National Product.

The Shambhala mandala, too, is dedicated to the creation of an enlightened society in which all beings may realize their true potential. If we can identify some of the foundations on which such a society might rest, we can measure our progress in getting there.

### **Pillars of Human Dignity**

The Shambhala and Buddhist path recognizes not only that all people want to be happy and free from suffering, but that they are inherently decent and good by nature. All human beings - whatever their culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, or age - have the complete ability to lead dignified lives, to realize their innate wisdom, and to create a brilliant, vibrant society based on kindness and compassion. This is not a theory or mere wishful thinking. It is the profound understanding that comes from the careful study and contemplation of the human mind and the nature of existence.

What are the pillars of such an enlightened society based on human dignity, and what are the measures by which we can assess the health of a society and its progress towards Gross National Happiness?

### **Respect and Care for All Beings**

First, the Buddhist and Shambhala teachings tell us that we are not, by nature, isolated, egoistic, and self-centred creatures, but rather that we are completely connected with and dependent on all other beings - an insight also increasingly appreciated by modern science. This understanding leads to the most profound appreciation of our environment and respect for our fellow beings and for all species.

Because we know that our environment provides the life-support systems on which we depend, we do not recklessly plunder the natural world for our own short-term gain, but rather nurture and care for it, so that it may continue to sustain beings for generations to come. We appreciate and enjoy the services provided by nature without degrading it.

How do we measure that? We can carefully monitor the health of our forests, our soils, our water, our air, and our other natural resources - and the countless species of birds, animals, and insects they contain. Instead of counting the depletion of our natural wealth as economic gain, as the GDP does, we regard this wealth as natural capital that is subject to depreciation. Maintaining and enhancing the value of our natural capital is genuine progress.

How are we doing? Sadly, our children are inheriting a world that is not as rich as the one we found. There are fewer fish in the oceans, fewer old trees in the forests, fewer species of flora and fauna, and more pollution of air, water, and land. An enlightened society that protects its natural wealth and the quality of its environment, that restores its forests and soils, that protects the habitat of birds and animals, that conserves energy and reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, will contribute greatly not only to Gross National Happiness but to Gross *International* Happiness.

That same care and protection extend to the human realm. The Buddhist and Shambhala teachings tell us that *all* beings without exception are blessed with basic goodness and bodhicitta, and that a poverty-stricken mind can be transformed into the wisdom of equanimity that enriches the world. An enlightened society therefore respects all cultures, peoples, languages, and communities; treats them with equal dignity and complete tolerance; and finds its own strength in openness and diversity. Equity is a core principle of the Genuine Progress Index.

The Mahayana teachings go beyond a passive acceptance of others and teach us to give selflessly. Generosity is the first paramita. How do we measure that? Volunteers continuously extend themselves without expecting anything in return - caring for the sick, elderly, disabled, youth in need, and those less fortunate than themselves; teaching the Dharma and other genuine traditions and maintaining and beautifying places of spiritual practice and worship; and enriching and improving their communities and environment in countless ways. In the Genuine Progress Index, we carefully monitor the strength of the volunteer sector, because it contributes so greatly to our wellbeing, quality of life, and standard of living.

How are we doing? In Canada, we found a dramatic 12.3% decline in the level of volunteer work in the last ten years. In Nova Scotia, the capital of Shambhala, we now have 30,000 fewer volunteers today than in 1997. Imagine if the GDP had fallen by 12.3%. That would be a national emergency; Cabinet would be meeting around the clock; we would call that a major Depression. But the sharp decline in volunteer work is not a blip on the radar screen of policy makers, and has never been discussed in any legislature in Canada, because unpaid work counts for nothing in our GDP-based measures of progress.

By contrast, an enlightened society appreciates and nurtures its volunteers and recognizes their contribution as a manifestation of generosity. Even though they contribute nothing to the Gross National Product, our volunteers contribute greatly to our Gross National Happiness.

### **Basic Security**

To realize their full potential and their innate wisdom, human beings require basic security. If people live in fear and poverty and are overly afflicted by illness - if their lives are not free and well-favoured, and if they are tormented by the hell and hungry ghost realms - they cannot easily practice the Dharma. Some measure of basic security is essential to wellbeing.

How do we measure that? Safe communities free from crime; a healthy population free from sickness; prosperous communities free from grinding poverty and hunger signify genuine progress. How are we doing? It is a mixed picture. In Nova Scotia, we are much safer than in most U.S. cities, but we still three times more likely to be victims of crimes than 25 years ago, and we are more likely to lock our doors than our parents were. We are living longer and smoking less, but we are still afflicted by high rates of preventable diseases fueled by an epidemic of obesity and physical inactivity. Our children have more stuff than we dreamed off at their age, but they are not more economically secure. In 1989, the Canadian Parliament vowed to abolish child poverty by the year 2000. But in 2000, rates of child poverty were higher than in 1989.

A society that strives for Gross National Happiness recognizes that material and financial wealth alone does not ensure true security, wellbeing, and human dignity, but that basic livelihood security is an essential component of wellbeing. In the face of excessive materialism, people yearn for the true wealth that comes from contentment, simplicity, and community. An enlightened society will encourage the cultivation of many forms of richness, including healthy family lives, strong and safe communities, an equitable distribution of resources, and support and care for those in need. It will invest in improving the health

of the population and in ensuring that everyone has access to a standard of living that sustains their health and wellbeing as well as that of their families and dependants. That security is not an end in itself, but creates a supportive environment that encourages all citizens to realize their full potential.

### **Education**

The attainment of true knowledge and wisdom for the benefit of all beings is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist and Shambhala paths. Education in this sense does not merely refer to a set of curricula for the classroom or for job training. It includes a deep exploration and understanding of the way the world works - our minds, bodies, and the society and environment in which we live - and it involves great respect for the wisdom of our teachers, elders and traditions.

How do we measure that? Just as we described care for our environment as an investment in natural capital and in our natural wealth, so services and programs that foster true education are not just a "cost" (as in most government ledgers) but a profound investment in human capital and in the future. Education is not only essential for human beings to achieve their full potential, both individually and collectively, but it is also key to dealing with the environmental, social, health, and economic challenges mentioned above, and to resolving conflicts in peaceful ways. A good education will promote respect for diversity and for other cultures, and will promote peaceful and mutually respectful relations between peoples holding widely divergent views.

How are we doing? This depends entirely on what we mean by "education." The schools and universities of our world are turning out an unprecedented number of graduates, but it is questionable whether our wisdom or understanding as a society is growing as a result. Of all the components of the Genuine Progress Index, we have therefore found the education component the most challenging in terms of indicator development, as good indicators must assess the *quality* of the education and its outcomes, not just the number of graduates. To take a crude example, we might well put greater trust in a Finance Minister who had never studied conventional economics than in one with a graduate degree in the kind of economics that takes economic growth as its unquestioned paradigm and dogma. The sad reality is that most economics texts still take an insular view of the economic system as separated from social and environmental realities.

True education must be directed towards the full development of human capacities. It must encourage students to express their innate wholeness, strengthen their kindness and ability to help others, and stimulate them to participate in the evolution of a humane and decent

society. Such an education will promote a culture of resourcefulness, initiative, and cooperative effort. Because of the challenges in devising indicators capable of measuring these outcomes, we have left the development of the education indicators to the very end of our Genuine Progress Index development. In fact, we currently have researchers working on this very issue, with the help of a research grant from Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Certainly we see education as a life-long process, not just as something that happens to young people in schools, and we therefore see free time as an essential prerequisite for further education and human development over the life-time. In measures based on the Gross National or Domestic Product, free time has no value. The more hours we work for pay and the more busy and stressed we are as a result, the more the economy will grow, and the "better off" we are supposed to be. The Genuine Progress Index, and a society based on Gross National Happiness, will give explicit value to free time, without which study, contemplation, and meditation are not possible.

Interestingly, as women have entered the paid labour force in ever greater numbers, their free time has shrunk dramatically, since women still bear the lion's share of unpaid household work. Women's *total* work burden of paid and unpaid work and their growing time stress are never acknowledged in GDP-based measures of progress, which ignore both unpaid work and free time. While the Gross National Product only counts paid work time, enlightened measures of progress for a society based on Gross National Happiness will account for *all* of people's time - their paid work, unpaid work, free time, and education. In the work of Genuine Progress Index, we therefore use time use surveys and time stress surveys as key measures of wellbeing.

### **The Nova Scotia Genuine Progress Index**

These are a few of the key pillars of an enlightened society based on Gross National Happiness. The list above is by no means exhaustive, and serves only to illustrate some of the key elements of our human, social, and natural capital - our innate wealth - that are ignored by our current GNP and GDP-based measures of progress. Fortunately, there *are* better ways to measure progress that do take these vital dimensions of wellbeing into account.

Nova Scotia's new Genuine Progress Index or GPI assigns explicit value to environmental quality, our natural wealth, population health, livelihood security, equity, free time, and educational attainment. It values unpaid voluntary and household work as well as paid work. It counts sickness, crime and pollution as costs not gains to the economy. The GPI methods can help provide a more complete and accurate picture

of how societies are really doing in ways that more accurately reflect humanity's deepest values.

At this conference and in the months and years to come, we look forward to exploring with our Bhutanese colleagues whether and how any of the GPI measures are relevant to Bhutan, how they can be adapted to Bhutanese conditions and circumstances, what additional indicators important to Bhutan might be needed, and how they could be measured in practical ways that can help guide day-to-day policy making.

To this end, and to initiate this further dialogue, GPI Atlantic has prepared a separate, lengthy (180 pages), and detailed technical report for the Centre for Bhutan Studies and the Inner Asia Centre for Sustainable Development. This document suggests a potential framework for measures of Gross National Happiness, and discusses methodologies, data requirements, reporting systems, strengths and limitations of expanded capital accounts that include measures of human, social, and natural capital, and other technical details. It also reviews our own work developing wellbeing and sustainable development indicators in Nova Scotia and attempts to summarize some of the lessons we have learned as well as potential directions for future research. While some of this technical discussion may be premature here, and while this document is far too long and detailed to present to this seminar, we have suggested that it might be posted on the Gross International Happiness web site for those interested specifically in measurement issues.

Here, the main point is to appreciate the profound importance of what the Centre for Bhutan Studies and the Inner Asia Centre for Sustainable Development have undertaken with this initial seminar. Bhutan has clearly, directly, eloquently, and profoundly challenged the dominant materialist ethic embodied in our GNP and GDP-based measures of progress. That places Bhutan in the forefront of the community of nations on this issue, able demonstrate a new path forward that can be a model of development for many countries in the world.

The ripples from this seminar will spread far and wide, helping to lay the basis for enlightened societies worldwide, so that the confusion engendered by measures based on Gross National Product will be transformed into the wisdom of Gross International Happiness.