

Understanding wellbeing in the Hindu Kush Himalaya

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Growing focus on wellbeing and happiness

Global development discourses recognize the need to move beyond a uni-dimensional income-based criterion of assessing the development of societies. These discourses have shifted from an economic development agenda towards a human development approach for advancing human wellbeing, focused on people and their opportunities and choices. We have come a long way since the first [Human Development Report in 1990](#) to the most recent [World Happiness Report 2019](#) in the journey to understand and assess human wellbeing and happiness.

Work on assessing wellbeing and happiness has gained considerable momentum in the last decade. Gross National Happiness (GNH) has been the development paradigm deeply ingrained in Bhutan's planning process since 2008. The UK developed a [national wellbeing programme](#) in 2010 to measure its citizens' wellbeing across 10 domains. In 2011, the UN General Assembly passed the resolution "[Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development](#)". The UAE set up a [Ministry of Happiness](#) in 2016. In the same year, India's second largest state, Madhya Pradesh, [set up a Department of Happiness](#) to periodically assess citizens' happiness and

to embed the concept in policy and planning. [The Center for Excellence for the Science of Happiness](#) at the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur conducts research on happiness and provides capacity-building support to promote and mainstream the concept. New Zealand [unveiled its first "wellbeing" budget](#) in 2019.

Other strides made with respect to the concept's development include the [Better Life Index](#) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); research on [Wellbeing in Developing Countries](#) by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council; and the [Global Happiness and Wellbeing Policy Report 2019](#) by the Global Happiness Council (GHC), which identified evidence-based happiness and wellbeing policies.

Wellbeing: An integral part of ICIMOD's vision

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) is home to about 240 million people, who face unique environmental and socioeconomic challenges. As an intergovernmental organization working in the region, ICIMOD has a [long-term holistic vision](#) to improve the wellbeing of HKH communities. We work towards developing a stronger



understanding of wellbeing for mountain people in the HKH through frameworks such as the *Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment*, ecosystem services assessment, and, more recently, through our work on resilience markers and resilience building. We believe that people's wellbeing is intrinsically linked with enhanced livelihoods; equity; social and environmental security; and resilience and adaptability to environmental, socioeconomic, and climate changes. However, we realize the need to move towards a more holistic understanding of wellbeing for the HKH which also focuses on psychological and socio-cultural aspects of wellbeing.

The HKH wellbeing assessment framework

To understand and improve wellbeing, we are developing an HKH-specific wellbeing assessment framework, inspired by Bhutan's GNH framework. Our HKH wellbeing assessment research in three HKH countries (Bhutan, India, and Nepal) aims to 1) understand what is wellbeing for the people who live in varied contexts of the HKH region; 2) understand social-cultural and psychological aspects that influence and shape wellbeing; 3) combine the framework with other established frameworks for a comprehensive picture of the state of wellbeing of the people and place being studied.

Following multiple discussions, workshops, and pilot testing of the HKH wellbeing assessment framework, we devised a methodology and assessment tools that cover 11 domains (living standard, health, education, cultural diversity, community vitality, good governance, time use, psychological wellbeing, gender, ecological diversity, and resilience). Of these, we considered four domains (time use, cultural diversity, community vitality, and psychological wellbeing) to understand and assess wellbeing in the three HKH countries studied.

Objectives

This webinar aims to share findings and further fine-tune the HKH wellbeing assessment framework. Participants invited from ICIMOD's partner organizations will exchange experiences and knowledge pertaining to wellbeing in the HKH countries. The specific objectives of the webinar are as follows:

1. Share the conceptual and methodological understanding of wellbeing in the context of the HKH
2. Share learning on wellbeing research/pilots/policies from different contexts in HKH countries
3. Co-create a road map of future work towards the development and uptake of the framework

Agenda

Time (NPT)	Programme
14:30–15:00	Check-in on MS Teams Moderator: Tashi Dorji , Programme Coordinator – Kangchenjunga Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative, Transboundary Landscapes, ICIMOD
15:00–15:05	Welcome and introduction – Tashi Dorji , ICIMOD
15:05–15:10	Welcome remarks – Pema Gyamtsho , Director General, ICIMOD
15:10–15:25	Wellbeing in HKH context: Reflecting on the ICIMOD experience – Brij Rathore , Chief Policy Advisor, ICIMOD
15:25–15:55	Panel session Panelists from Bhutan, India, and Pakistan share experiences of wellbeing research and uptake in programmes and policies Moderator: Tashi Dorji , ICIMOD Experiences on happiness research in Bhutan – Karma Wangdi , Center for Bhutan & GNH Studies, Bhutan Happiness research: Key learnings from New Town (West Bengal) and Madhya Pradesh – Priyadarshi Patnaik , Rekhi Centre of Excellence for the Science of Happiness, IIT Kharagpur, India Quality of life assessment in northern Pakistan – Sherzad Ali Khan , Aga Khan Development Network, Pakistan
15:55–16:10	Q&A with audience
16:10–16:25	HKH wellbeing assessment: Sharing findings from fieldwork at Pithoragarh (India), Godavari and Namobuddha (Nepal), and Haa (Bhutan) – Sabarnee Tuladhar , Research Associate – Statistics, and Sajhana Tolange , Wellbeing Intern, ICIMOD
16:25–16:40	Q&A with audience
16:40–16:55	The future road map for the HKH wellbeing research and uptake – Abid Hussain , Food Security Economist, ICIMOD
16:55–17:00	Closing remarks – Eklabya Sharma , Deputy Director General, ICIMOD

For further information

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