Gross National Happiness:
Concepts for the Debate

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This article does not reflect a specific point of view, but proposes vocabulary and concepts to structure the debate on gross national happiness. A common conception, primarily based on Buddhism[i], may bring future debate to a higher level, preventing the discussions from jumping back and forth between different ends of the spectrum of relevant issues.

Instigated by the welcome address of Lyonpo Jigme Thinlay, the meeting on GNH and HDI on March 4th 1999, reflected on the topics relevant to making GNH a comprehensive concept. It explored whether the 'three gates' as taught in Buddhism (the categorisation into body, speech and mind) was a useful framework to place themes like economy, cultural and environmental preservation, good governance, and spiritual promotion. However, rather than positing a single framework to relate and place all other views, in this paper we want to contribute a number of concepts that can provoke further reflection on comprehensive approaches to gross national happiness.

Three Gates, Two Truths, Two accumulations

The three gates, *Gosum[ii]*, of body, speech and mind (*lü, ngag, yid*) as taught in Buddhism[iii], provide a basic categorisation of which the main merit for policy makers may lay in

recognising that existence embraces more than the physical aspect alone. Within Buddhism this trinity appears in different forms. It emerges as the three objects of refuge (*Könchhogsum*): *Sangay* (*Skt: Buddha*), representing the mind level, *Chhö* (*Skt: Dharma*) speech, and *Gedün* (*Skt: Sangha*), the embodiment, the community of practitioners. In the *Dorji Thegpa* (*Skt: Vajrayana*) the three aspects are known as the *Tsasum*, the three roots: *Khadroma* (*Skt: Dakini*), the source of activity[iv], *Yidam* (*Skt: Tapasya*), the source of spiritual attainment, and *Lama* (*Skt: Guru*), the source of blessing.

The three aspects are also referred to as the three bodies (*Kusum*): *Chhöku* (*Skt: Dharmakaya*), the body of Truth, *Lungku* (*Skt: Sambhogakaya*), illusory body[v], and *Tülku* (*Skt: Nirmanakaya*), emanation body. These three principles furthermore link a range of symbolism and qualities, either enlightened or confused. The confused aspect of mind is ignorance, the deluded aspect of speech desire, and the twisted aspect of body anger[vi].

Although, according to Buddhism, the final objective of evolution is on the level of mind (enlightenment being defined as the mind recognising itself), the 'lower' two aspects are not neglected. In fact the spiritual path involves *in the first place*, after a spark of insight and intention in the mind, working with body and speech – because working with the mind directly is too illusive.

This introduces what is known as the two truths, *Denpanyi*, absolute truth (*Döndam*), and relative truth (*Kündzop*). Absolute truth refers to *Chhöku*, primordial enlightenment where nothing ever changes. Relative truth refers to both *Lungku* and *Tülku* (together called *Zugku*, form body, *Skt: Rupakaya*), the level of appearance where things always change based on causes and conditions, following the laws of cause and effect. In the higher teachings the *Denpanyi* are

therefore known as emptiness (*Tongpa*) and appearance (*Nangwa*).

The next concept we like to relate to the above is that of *Tongnyi* (*Skt: Shunyata*), emptiness, and *Nyingje* (*Skt: Karuna*), literally 'noble heart' but normally referred to as 'compassion'. Emptiness and compassion is the same couple as wisdom and compassion, because in the latter 'wisdom' refers to seeing emptiness – the experiential realisation that appearances in the relative world lack inherent existence. These two are also known as *Thab* and *Sherab* (*Skt: Upaya* and *Prajna*), skilful means and wisdom, because the expression of compassion appears as appropriate methods. In meditation practice they are furthermore called *Kyerim* and *Dzogrim* (*Skt: Utpatti* and *Sampannakrama*), creation and completion stage, because (after flashing emptiness), the practitioner creates a pure vision and later dissolves that back into emptiness.

Engaging in these two, compassion and wisdom, results in the two accumulations, the accumulation of merit (*Sönam*) and wisdom (*Yeshe*). The three gates are like the neutral ground, which can be used for good, neutral or bad action. If an individual understands emptiness and is moved by compassion, his actions have as fruition the two accumulations, the creation of positive karma[vii].

It is further worth noting that *Nyingje* has two aspects: *Jamba* (*Skt: Maitri*), friendliness towards oneself or aspiring compassion, and actual compassion itself[viii]. Significant in this distinction is that it expresses that compassion arises from a capacity to be intimate with oneself, rather than from aggressive self-denial or self-improvement, or a missionary compulsion to 'help'.

These concepts sum all that needs to be manifested and nurtured by an individual   or government that strives to

enhance GNH. Referring to them, while discussing the same government themes as before, may therefore show where modern development thinking emphasises physical and intellectual progress over emotional and spiritual aspects[ix]. Once again these concepts cannot lead to a nihilistic view, neglecting physical needs and desires and clinging to asceticism and spiritual ideas alone, because suffering can only be extinguished through working in the first place on the level where it is experienced: on the relative level.

The below table reflects some of the concepts discussed above, and identifies which government themes may be broadly related to them.

Door	*Truth*	*Themes*
Mind – Emptiness	Absolute truth: Wisdom (female)	Spiritual promotion
Speech – Energy	Relative truth: Compassion (male), Skilful means	Procedural justice and accountability Participation
Body - Manifestation		Sustainable livelihood

Hierarchy of Needs (and Eight-fold Path)

The philosopher and psychologist Abrahan H. Maslow introduced the concept of a hierarchy of basic needs of human beings[x]. Roughly in order of appearance (in the history of societies) they are: Subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, freedom, and transcendence. The last one is not always included, because not all humans manifest this desire, but for reasons mentioned in footnote x we do include it in our discussions below.

The concept of basic needs, underlying our many-faced desires, overcomes a shortcoming of classical economic science, namely that desires are all equally valued. Whereas the basic needs (e.g. food) are universal, the satisfiers (e.g. rice) applied to fulfil them are culture specific. Nevertheless, by looking at their relationship to the basic needs, we can distinguish true and lasting satisfiers from temporary or even entirely deceptive satisfiers (compare e.g. critical thinking and adopting dogmas of a sect as satisfiers for understanding and identity). Mafred A. Max Neef *et al* further noted that needs that are not sufficiently satisfied lead to pathologies – destructive behaviour. Such behaviour therefore is an indicator of a shortage on a relevant (bottleneck) level.

Although the levels are not strictly hierarchical, there is an obvious progression, and good governance lies in addressing the bottlenecks of that moment. Once again the hierarchy tells us that enhancing GNH is not a matter of exclusive attention for either the top (spirituality) or the bottom (subsistence and economy). Except maybe for physical subsistence, however, Max Neef recognises that the needs are not absolute and static (implying that one cannot formulate 'minimum requirement' for each of them) as a society evolves. A Buddhist perspective confirms this. Whereas a person struggling for survival may have little concern for identity and freedom, at a later stage of development he needs freedom to express and identity to respect himself, while as an evolved practitioner he again need not define an identity and feels free even under the most repressive regime[xi].

For curiosity's sake note that there is considerable congruence between the hierarchy of needs and the eight-fold path taught by the Buddha. Whereas the former lists what a society should endeavour to offer its citizens, the later lists the attitude an individual should take, regardless of the outer circumstances. They are linked in that individual development is enhanced under good governance[xii].

Basic need	Satisfier	Governance themes
Transcendence (10)	Spiritual study and practice	Spiritual promotion
Freedom (9)	Freedom	Promotion of free thinking
Identity (8)	Living cultures	Cultural preservation, promotion and tolerance
Creation (7)	Meaningful work	Balanced economic development
Idleness (6)	Recreation, nature	Nature preservation
Participation (5)	Influence, being listened to	Accountable governance Justice
Understanding (4)	Worldly knowledge	Education
Affection (3)	Giving and receiving love	
Protection (2)	Shelter, peace (culture)	Equitable economic opportunities, health care, nature preservation
Subsistence (1)	Food, health	

This table lists the basic needs discussed above, relating them to possible satisfiers and adding some of the government themes that may be broadly related to them. (Note that the 'better' satisfiers relate positively to more than one need at the time, and have little or no negative impact on others).

The table is already ill digestible, but one feature may be helpful in defeating term confusion. In the GNH/HDI debate it was discussed whether the government should engage in cultural/spiritual promotion or rather in cultural preservation. In this regard the table suggests that they relate to different needs (transcendence and higher understanding versus identity and protection respectively). The question is therefore not 'either-or' but 'what-when'. Rigid preservation will not enhance spiritual development, but neglecting cultural heritage altogether would provide a poor service to

identification and protection.

The Logical Framework

The GNH debate may also gain from using the logical framework or LogFrame designed for project planning and monitoring. The figure below gives an example of a multi-tier (involving more than one actor[xiii]) LogFrame (omitting the fourth column containing indicators)[xiv]. The arrow indicates the intervention logic: If the precondition of availability of funds is met, then the central government's activity of program design and dispatch of 'waste bins' leads to the result that the Districts are capable of implementing the project, if they take note of the instructions. Furthermore this central government action result leads to the Districts implementing the project, only if the Districts are motivated to do so.

Actor	Results & · *Activities*	Assumptions
Rural population	Better health	Assumed relationship *bin use* « *health* correct
	• *Use bins*	**Population uses as 'expected'**
District	Population able to use	Training effective
	• *Distribute bins* • *Train on use*	Districts interested to implement
Central	Districts capable to go ahead	Districts read instructions
	• *Design program* • *Despatch bins*	Funds available

The above Log Frame of an imaginary garbage bin project illustrates two interesting lessons. Firstly that a project is

badly designed if it is doubtful that the assumptions will be met. In such cases the project should either be given up or reformulated to include directly address what was previously excluded as an assumption. In the above project the bolded assumption is highly dubious, and therefore this project should either include activities to promote and ensure that the population really uses the bins for garbage disposal, or the project should be given up altogether. In the GNH debate it will be a challenge to see which assumptions, such as the previously 'ingrained' adherence to the predominant culture, now may need to be included in development planning.

The second lesson relates to the fact that the project agreement is an agreement between all the tiers. Therefore, to be able to take responsibility for ones own share of responsibilities *towards the overall intervention logic*, any party wishing to change their contribution should do so in agreement with the other stakeholders - which differs from the common view that partners can change their contributions autonomously. The LogFrame analyses only has the added value of inducing actors to feel motivated to work together towards an overall objective, if the logic and transparency is maintained. If, for example, the Districts decide to stop training the target group, without discussion with the central level, this does, strictly speaking, not hamper the latter from fulfilling its responsibility of enabling Districts to perform their designed function. However, it *does* defy the feeling of commitment to the larger view, impeding the satisfaction of the basic needs for understanding, participation, and creativity.

For the GNH reflections this lesson too may be relevant, shedding light on the modernisation and transformation process (both in administration and on the level of personal relationships) the country is involved in. It may be reflected progressively in determining which barriers to transparency and participation need to be addressed in order to

enhance the satisfaction of the needs and desires of Bhutan, and for it to climb to the highest reaches of GNH.

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[i] In our view the use of Buddhist concepts does not make the discussions culture specific. Just as Newton did not invent the law of gravity, the Buddha sought *the* truth – not a subjective interpretation of reality. In this respect 'Buddhist' wisdom (wisdom taught by Buddhism) differs from actual Buddhist cultures. While the latter *do* provide a subjective value base, true Buddhist philosophy is value free (this is affirmed by the fact that many traditions have discovered the same truths, see footnote iii).

[ii] The words in *italics* are *Chhöke*, unless prefixed '*Skt:*' in which case they are *Sanskrit*.

[iii] The same, or at least highly similar, divisions into three aspects of existence appears in many traditions. Hinduism speaks of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Sustainer), and Shiva (the Destroyer), Christianity of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son, or Truth (Thought), Beauty (Emotion), and Goodness (Will power), and the Islam of Allah who communicated through the Archangel Gabriel to Mohammed, his Prophet. Native cultures distinguish the principals of Heaven (Ideal), Man (Warriors shaping Reality as per the View), and Earth (Practicality). The philosophers of the French Revolution furthermore attached the ideals of Freedom, Equality and Fraternity to the three respective domains.

[iv] In other contexts the body aspect of the three roots is the *Chhökyong*, the protector (*Skt: Dharmapala*).

[v] This is the level on which saints, of different traditions, meet higher beings in clear visions (not in normal dreams, which are merely a reshuffle of memory).

[vi] The three aspects of existence are closely linked to the five buddha families (*Gyalwarignga*), depicted in mandala's (*Kyilkhor*). Below find some characteristics of the basic mandala, with body speech and mind in the middle column, noting that some of the qualities vary in different tantras, especially those of *Sangay* and *Dorji* (in many mandala's, for example, these two exchange colour).

Form (1)		Anger
	Dorji (*Skt: Vajra*)	
	OM (white, east)	
	Mirror-like Wisdom	
Hell	**Body** – Water	

Intention (4) Jealousy	Consciousness (5) Ignorance	Feeling (2) Pride
Thinle (*Skt: Karma*) HA (green, north) All Accomplishing Wisdom	*Sangay* (*Skt: Buddha*) HUM (blue, center) All encompassing Wisdom	*Rinchhen* (*Skt: Ratna*) SO (yellow, south) Wisdom of Equanimity
Demi-God Activity - Air	God (Animal) **Mind** – Space	Human Quality – Earth
	Perception (3) Greed/Desire	
	Pema (*Skt: Padma*) AH (red, west) Discriminating Wisdom	
	Hungry Ghost **Speech** – Fire	

[vii] Note, however, that the final aim is not to accumulate any karma at all. This point is often misunderstood. The lower practices do indeed stimulate a healthy fear of accumulating bad and a wish to accumulate good karma, but this should not be mistaken to be the highest view.

[viii] Corresponding to the capacity of beings there are actually many methods to develop compassion and correspondingly more subdivisions. Superior beings can engage in realising equality and exchanging self and others (*Dagzhennyamdzenyamlen*). Others may take the gradual path practising the seven points of mind training of Atisha, starting with realising the kindness of all mother-like beings (*Marshepa*), through to the fruition of *Jangchubgisem* (*Skt: Boddhicitta*) as the seventh step.

[ix] The link between Buddhism and policy is less direct than the connection between modern concepts (discussed hereafter) and policy. This ought to be so (else spirituality would stop to represent a more aerial perspective), and does not make the attempt to direct Bhutan in a spiritual manner irrelevant. Being unable or fearful of naming and debating the highest objectives of development is like not daring set and to look at the target while playing archery. It may raise a lot of dust, but cannot be effective (left alone efficient) towards ones aim.

[x] According to Buddhism this implies the needs of *all* sentient beings, because according to its philosophy, the true needs of beings are universal. However, even though the true needs of all beings are the same, the desire to satisfy a basic need may not manifest in all, as this may be hidden by the disturbing emotions of the lower and higher realms.

[xi] Ultimately some of the needs listed by Maslow may actually be debatable from a Buddhist perspective. Freedom, for example, is required to fulfil some of the lower needs, but does not seem itself a basic need. What

beings really need is *right* understanding. However, freedom of thought (both right and wrong) is a means to that end (because without freedom of thought one cannot establish convincingly for oneself whether a given view is right or wrong).

xii Below find a view of how the eight-fold path and the hierarchy of needs may be linked.

For this comparison the only change we made in the order of the hierarchy of needs was to move understanding to a higher place, which reflects that full-blown understanding belongs to the highest ranges of development, even though the desire for knowledge emerges earlier. In the traditional order of the presentation of the eight-fold path we most notably 'postponed' the first two, right view and right intention (which are an embryonic form of wisdom and compassion, ultimate and relative truth). This seems legitimate in that (together with mindfulness and meditation) they belong to the highest principle of mind (while all others relate to the relative truth, to body and speech). The reason why they appear at the start of the traditional exposition of the eight-fold path is related to the word *right*. As in many Buddhist practices one arouses the highest principle first, prior to engaging in relative activities, else the latter would miss the accumulation of wisdom leading to liberation, and not classify as *right*.

Meditation (8) Mindfulness (7)	Transcendence (10)
View (1)	Understanding (4)
	Freedom (9)
	Identity (8)
Effort (6) Discipline (5)	Creation (7) Idleness (6)
Speech (3)	Participation (5)
Intention (2)	Affection (3)
Livelihood (4)	Protection (2)
	Subsistence (1)

xiii The highest actor, or recipient, relating to this intervention is the rural population. Since their activities and results are beyond what the project designer plans to manipulate, the intervention should be designed in such a way that the what the rural population wishes to do with the product leads to fulfilling the project purpose, and the result of that to achieving the project objective. This justifies why we have named the second column 'Results and Activities', although traditionally the highest two activities and results are called 'Objective and Purpose'.

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^{xiv} Omitting this column reinforces what seems an inherent imperfection of the LogFrame: That the tool suggests that project design and implementation can be done top-down rather than in an interactive manner. The upward arrow does not reflect feedback and interaction, in which different stakeholders together set the development agenda.