

GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS
An attempt to define the concept
Excerpts taken from notes of Pōkā Laenui @2005

While conventional development models stress economic growth as the ultimate objective, the concept of Gross National Happiness is based on the premise that true development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other," said His Highness the Crown Prince Dasho Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck of Bhutan. "The four pillars of GNH are the promotion of equitable and sustainable socio-economic development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and establishment of good governance."

Some papers persuaded on why Bhutan should be cautious in joining WTO and hinted that the unchecked onslaught of globalisation could choke the concept of GNH. Others argued that GNH revived the forgotten element of Adam Smith school of thought, 'compassion' as an intricate element of market economy.

Still others said that happiness is primarily subjective and usually confined to an individual.

Some papers explained economic techniques of measuring GNH. A paper by Dr Prabhat Pankaj and Tshering Dorji, lecturers at Sherubtse college in Kanglung presented their findings of the field survey of 612 individuals which used econometric technique to measure happiness. "Our study found out that the rural people are slightly happier than the urban ones and that cultural participation and identity have emerged as the strongest variable influencing happiness both in rural and urban areas," said Dr Pankaj. "We also found that religious people tend to be happier."

An IT expert working with Sherubtse college thought that discussions often revolved on abstract orbits. "The world is a complex tapestry with all colours and what some papers did was painted it just black and white," said Graeme Foster.

His Highness the Crown Prince Dasho Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, who graced the closing of the seminar, said that even if the philosophy of GNH is inherently Bhutanese, its ideas may have a positive relevance to any nation, community or peoples.

I feel that there must be some convergence among nations on the idea of what the primary objective of development and progress should be - something that GNH seeks to bring about," he said. "There cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world if our aims are so separate and divergent especially as the world shrinks to a global village.

For Frank Bracho, former ambassador of Venezuela to India, who presented a paper on happiness as the greatest human wealth, the seminar has given the world a basis to work on. "The concept has a profound motive of coming out with helpful solutions to problems that scourge the world today.

Organized by the centre for Bhutan studies (CBS) the seminar was assisted by the sustainable development secretariat, Bhutan programme office of save the children federation (USA), the UNDP, the world food programme and the Nike foundation.