

**SHIFT IN THE MEASURES OF QUALITY OF LIFE  
VIZ-A-VIZ HAPPINESS – A STUDY OF *PHONGMEY GEOG*  
AND *TRASHIGANG TOWN* IN EASTERN BHUTAN**

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## ABSTRACT

The measures of Quality of life are very similar to the measures of happiness for the people. The objective of the present study is to find out the variations in the different measures between the year 2000 and 2005. The first survey was conducted in the year 2000-2001 on the residents ( $n=406$ ) of *Trashigang town* and *Phongmey geog* and a follow up study was carried out at the same places ( $n=330$ ) during 2005-2006. The sample includes farmers, government employees, business owners, priests, and housewives. The study compares the variations on the opinions as to the importance of certain factors (neighbourhood, spiritual activities, respecting others, relationship with local authorities, awareness of local laws, TV, newspapers and radio, family planning measures and environment protection) and the satisfaction level as to these factors. The satisfaction level gauged on the 5 point Likert scale (1 being Very Satisfied and 5 being very dissatisfied) on the factors like development plan, education and medical facilities, transport, sanitation and water, police services, electricity etc. is studied to find out the shift during the given period. It is found through the study that the satisfaction level is going down over time which questions the general hypothesis that with the improvements in the facilities and services (electricity, water, sanitation, transport, public utilities etc) the satisfaction level should also improve.

The paper discusses the issues involved in quality of life viz-a-viz happiness with the help of available literature as well as the policy documents of the government of Bhutan.

**Keywords:** *Bhutan, Quality of life, Happiness, Satisfaction*

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## **SHIFT IN THE MEASURES OF QUALITY OF LIFE VIZ-A-VIZ HAPPINESS – A STUDY OF *PHONGMEY GEOG* AND *TRASHIGANG TOWN* IN EASTERN BHUTAN**

Bhutan has introduced the world with a concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). There have been works carried out in the country to find out its variables, ways of measuring GNH and sensitizing the residents about this noble philosophy. *GNH is an attempt to define quality of life in more holistic and psychological terms than Gross National Product.*<sup>1</sup> The whole philosophy is based on the basics of quality of life (QOL) of the people. Better QOL is supposed to improve happiness level of people as well. This is the main premise on which the paper is based. There have been many contributions in the area of welfare economics about the public policy being initiated to look after the welfare or well being of the people. The nations have invested hugely on building infrastructure in order to provide better services to its residents. This has helped the nations to improve their development and growth parameters. This development is primarily based on human development and then leads to economic development. As human capital or population in general, is the back bone of any country's economy, it becomes important to study their satisfaction level. Their perception about the importance of public services, laws of the land, environmental issues, spiritual activities etc is also an area which relates to their QOL.

The resources and allocations are all directed towards the well being of the people but still there are people who are not able to reap the good fruits and who are not aware of real development. Their understanding of development is much broader and better in many ways than that of so-called developed and powerful groups of the society. Their level of happiness and contentment, their sense of understanding, and the mind with the least expectations speaks volumes of their goodness as human beings.

The satisfaction of people, QOL, human development or population quality are very closely related to the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is one of the guiding principle of economic, social, and political planning in Bhutan. *'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.*<sup>2</sup> The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) has been targeting to provide better facilities and services to the people to ensure their development through its Five Year Plans and other planning instruments.

The importance of family values and various issues like protection of countryside and environment, the role of newspaper/s, radio, & television, laws of the land and taking part in spiritual activities, provision of public utilities and services, infrastructure, etc., play important role to satisfy the citizens of a nation. The premise of QOL is derived theoretically from human needs (Figure 1) and once these needs are fulfilled it results into Subjective Well-Being (SWB). The objective aspect of QOL can be taken care of by looking around the economic and social indicators as well as through human development index. However it is important that the satisfaction level of people is studied from QOL perspective which can provide some policy guidelines which can further be used to improve satisfaction.

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Figure 1 – about here

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The literature on happiness has dealt in detail with different components of QOL as Veenhoven (1991) put it (on happiness) - *the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of life favorably*. Further he describes four qualities of life viz., Livability of environment, Life-ability of the person, Utility of life and Satisfaction. (Veenhoven 2000) (Figure 2). This description of qualities of life is not related to physical quality of life unlike its relationship with ‘human needs’ and ‘SWB’.

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Figure 2 – about here

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The Big-Push theory as propounded by Rosenstein (1943) and the Balanced Growth Theory by Hirschman (1958) provide models to be followed for improving economic growth and subsequently developing a nation. But to poor countries, the main concerns are always identified as health and hygiene, education, social security, poverty alleviation, gender related issues, people participation and empowerment etc. The trade-off between quantity and quality of life has been studied by Jones (1977) with the help of health status indices. The study is based on the indices which allow an increase in the quantity of life to offset decrease in average health status. The impact of health on happiness also has been studied from philosophical angle.

Well-being has been taken as a very near variable to QOL. A paper by Grinde (1996) looks into a biologically-based understanding of what constitutes the QOL. Brotchie (1978) related the concept of QOL with focus on freedom of choice and diversity for urban population and community. Further, Falkenberg (1998) studied Scandinavian and American cultural view on three basic elements of QOL which are social equity (including issues like virtues, justice, fairness, equal moral value, human rights, resource ethics etc), efficiency (including liberty, pursuit of happiness, individual choice, exit and voice options, etc.) and freedom (including liberty, pursuit of happiness, individual choice, exit and voice options, etc.). The argument concentrates on social equity being a driving force for efficiency and freedom of choice.

The present work is based on the background that happiness is derived from satisfaction, as Frey & Stutzer (2002) puts it – *happiness is not identical to utility, but it well reflects people's satisfaction with life*<sup>3</sup>. Hence once we are able to assess satisfaction, we could be able to project happiness level of the people. As discussed earlier it is closely related to QOL as well.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the paper is:

- to study the shift in the measures of QOL from the year 2000 to 2005.
- to compare the status of QOL in Rural and Urban settings.

## METHOD

The data is collected through opinion survey conducted during December 2000-March 2001 and December 2005-March 2006. The data was collected from Trashigang (TG) representing urban population and the villages under Phongmey (PM) geog to represent the rural population. Random convenience sampling was used to select the respondents both from TG and PM.

There were 21 items related to satisfaction and importance and respondents were from different individual characteristics. Individual characteristics such as gender, age, education, marital status, occupation and place of stay were included in the first part of the schedule. Apart from these 21 items, questions as to 'whether they are aware of the development plan of the government, whether their lives are peaceful and comfortable, whether they think that they are happy family, were put towards the end. 5 point Likert scale was followed, 1 being very satisfied/important and 5 being very dissatisfied/not important at all. Another option 6 was also there which was to be selected if they 'did not know' the answer. The data was recorded in MS Excel work sheets and is analyzed on the basis of Mean, Standard Deviation and coefficient of standard deviation. Further, the satisfaction level is assessed by adding the option 1 (very satisfied/important) and 2 (satisfied/important), which indicates the percentage of people which were satisfied with the services and utilities.

## RESULTS

The data is analyzed on the basis of the information provided by the respondents in the given questionnaire (schedule). Their individual characteristics are discussed first and then the importance and satisfaction level is analyzed.

### DEMOGRAPHIC/INDIVIDUAL PROFILE (TABLE 1)

The respondents were between the age of 16 and 93 years. The average age of TG respondents was 33 years as compared to 42 in case of PM respondents. Total valid samples were found to be 736 which included 406 for the year 2000 and 330 for the year 2005. 49% (n=200) were from TG in 2000 and 51% (n=206) were from PM whereas in 2005 this was 45% (n=147) and 55% (n=183) respectively. The respondents were

divided in 5 age groups as below 25 years, between 26 to 35 years, 36 to 45 years, 46 to 55 years, and 56 years and above. TG respondents consisted of 39% (highest) between the age group 26-35 whereas at PM 27% (highest) were between 36-45 age group. Overall 60% were males and 40% were females, however there were more female respondents from PM (47%) than TG (32%). Single respondents were more from TG than PM.

### IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT SERVICES & FACTORS (TABLE 2):

There were 9 items in this category which included the questions related to the perception of the respondents as to the importance of neighborhood, spiritual activities, respecting others, relationship with the local authorities, awareness of the laws of the land, television, news paper and radio, family planning measures, and environment protection. It is observed that PM had a better mean value (1.30 <2000> and 1.11 <2005>) than TG (1.37 <2000> and 1.30 <2005>) so far as the importance of neighborhood is concerned. It shows that relatively, PM residents thought that having a good neighborhood is more important as compared to the residents of TG. There seems to be no two opinions about having a good neighborhood both at TG as well as at PM during both the surveys. As far as their opinion about the importance of spiritual activities is concerned, PM residents thought it to be more important than the residents of TG and at both the places it had an uptrend in their mean from 2000 to 2005 which reflects the opinion that with the time spiritual activities are becoming less important. There was a significant difference as to the importance of respecting others. At TG with the time the importance of respecting others was going down however at PM it was going up. There was a downtrend for the people thinking it to be important at TG (94% in 2000 and 82% in 2005) as against an uptrend at PM (96% in 2000 and 100% in 2005). This could be because of urban impact on society at TG. The importance given to the relationship of common people with the local authorities was found to be same at both the locations in 2000 (mean 1.86) but in 2005 at TG it became less important than 2000 whereas at PM it was found to be more important than 2000. The importance of being aware of the laws of the land was found to be more at TG than PM and interestingly it was becoming less important with the time both at both the locations.

Until 1998, TV viewing was banned in Bhutan, however there were many video libraries in the urban areas to make available entertainment software like Video cassettes and CDs. But Bhutan was away from the telecasted information. When TV viewing was publicly allowed in 1998, the residents were happy and its impact on society was being discussed and debated in the local media. The mean values at both the places in both the times was highest amongst all the factors which indicates that the residents both urban as well as rural, thought it to be least important amongst all other factors. However the percentage of people finding the importance of owning a TV was on a downtrend (75% to 71%) at TG as compared to PM where it was having an uptrend (69% to 72%). Though the residents at PM were not having wider electricity coverage in 2000, still people were aware of TV and thought that it is important to own one. The size of the respondents giving importance to news paper and radio was more as compared to TV at both the places in both the years. It could be because of the slow growth of TV network in the eastern Bhutan between 1998 and 2005. There were inconsistent views so far as the opinion of the respondents regarding family planning measures is concerned. Contrary to the general belief that urban people are more aware about family planning measures, and thought may be more important than their counterparts from the rural settings, it was found that in 2005 at PM respondents thought it to be important whereas as compared to TG respondents, though in 2000 it had just the reverse views.

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<sup>4</sup>. Environment protection was also one of the highly important factors for the respondents especially at TG where amongst all the factors it was thought to be most important factor in 2000. It was found to be third most important factor amongst 9 factors by PM residents in 2000. Its awareness in villages seems to be improving as it became more important at PM in 2005 than 2000 whereas at TG it became second most important factor in 2005. Still it shows that the RGOB has been quite successful in providing awareness about environment protection for both urban as well as rural population.

### SATISFACTION LEVEL WITH DIFFERENT SERVICES (TABLE 3):

This section had 12 items covering satisfaction level of the respondents as to their neighborhood, development plans, public services and utilities, education facilities, public transport system, police services and crime prevention measures, medical facilities, electricity, housing status, sanitation and water, newspapers, radio and TV, and leisure activities.

The percentage of satisfied people with their neighborhood had a downtrend between the years 2000-2005 both at TG and PM, though the mean values at PM had gone down during these years indicating improvement in their satisfaction level marginally. The satisfaction of respondents at PM as to the development plans was quite high as compared to TG respondents where there was a downtrend in their satisfaction level during the given period. The awareness about the plans was quite high both at TG as well as at PM. For the basic facilities of education and health, TG residents were found to be more satisfied than PM residents. The percentage of people satisfied with education and medical facilities was found to be decreasing in case of PM whereas it was increasing at TG. In the year 2000 TG residents' level of satisfaction as to medical facilities was least among all the factors; however it had improved significantly in the year 2005. On the other side at PM the satisfaction level had a downtrend both in case of education as well as medical facilities. The trend as to the satisfaction level with water and sanitation facility was similar both at TG and PM it was going down and the percentage of people satisfied also was going down. However, TG residents were found to be more satisfied with these facilities as compared to PM residents. The satisfaction with local public services like banks, post offices, telephones, and other utilities like public toilets etc was found to be better for PM than TG in both the years; however at both the locations it was going down with the provisions of better services which was quite unexpected. So far as availability of these services is concerned, TG certainly has better services than PM. Still TG had lower satisfaction level. It could be because of the expectations people had at TG. PM residents were having better satisfaction level as to the police services and crime prevention measures adopted by the government as compared to the residents of TG in 2005 whereas in 2000 it had just the reverse trend. The public transport system in Bhutan is not yet developed and still only few public buses are operating on the designated

routes. In the last 5-6 years, good numbers of private taxis are operating which has made things easier for the people. However it is important to mention here that ownership of personal vehicle is very common in Bhutan. And it could be assumed that there is a cause and effect relationship between transport facility offered and ownership of vehicles. There was an improvement in the satisfaction level of people as to public transport system at TG, though it was going down at PM. The percentage of people satisfied with public transport was also on a lower side as compared to many of the factors both at TG as well as at PM.

In general, Bhutan does not have problem of electricity as they have huge potential of hydro-power and the government has recognized it as one of the most important potential. Bhutan exports electricity to the adjacent states of India. And for the economy of Bhutan power generation is one of the most important sectors. It was also reflected in the satisfaction level of the people as it was found to be highest amongst all the factors at TG in 2005, even in 2000 it was having relatively better mean value than many of the other factors. The position as to PM was very different as in 2000 most of the respondents expressed that in their villages there was no electricity, however it was witnessed that during 2000-2005 there were initiatives taken by the government to provide electricity in the villages falling under PM geog. Hence in 2005 PM residents expressed very high satisfaction with electricity as 93% of the respondents were satisfied with it.

The satisfaction level with their housing status was relatively low as compared to other factors both at TG and PM. At PM in both the years it was one of factors with which people expressed lowest satisfaction. In 2005 only 58% of the respondents were satisfied with their housing status and it was much better in 2000. At TG as well the satisfaction level of the residents was having a downtrend. The satisfaction level as to media (newspaper, radio and TV) services provided, was found to be better at TG than PM in both the years. And at both the places there was a decline in the satisfaction level though marginally. Leisure time activities are found to be very important component of assessing quality of life or life satisfaction of people. PM residents were found to be better satisfied with their leisure time activity as compared to the residents of TG and as in case of media; in case of leisure activities also the satisfaction level was observed

having a downtrend with time. Playing archery or *khuru*<sup>5</sup>, weaving, and praying were observed as common leisure time activities for PM residents whereas at TG it were playing games, watching TV, socializing and reading.

The respondents were asked whether their life was comfortable and peaceful and do they think that they are a happy person and family the trend of the results was quite similar (Table 4). As in case of many factors mentioned above the size of people giving affirmative answer went down during the given period. However when we look at the mean values it shows that the number of respondents thinking that their life was most/very comfortable and peaceful and they had high level of happiness and it had an uptrend.

## MAJOR FINDINGS:

On the basis of the above results, following major findings are drawn -

- Having good neighborhood was found to be consistently having lower mean value which indicates they thought it to be more important than other factors. Relatively it was more important for rural residents as compared to urban residents.
- Least importance was given to own a TV both by urban as well as rural respondents in both the years.
- Protecting environment was found to be very important for both urban as well as rural population.
- Highest satisfaction level was observed (amongst the factors given) from the leisure activity in 2000.
- The satisfaction level with electricity services provided was observed to be highly important factor (amongst the factors given) both for urban as well as rural population.
- Least satisfaction level was found from the medical facilities by urban residents whereas it was sanitation and water facilities having lowest satisfaction at rural setting.

- Urban residents in 2005 were least (amongst the factors given) satisfied with development planning of the government for their areas.
- Rural residents ranked least satisfaction from housing status as compared to other factors in 2005.
- The satisfaction level with housing status and public transport was relatively lower as compared to other factors during all the years in both areas, rural as well as urban.
- Urban residents were using their leisure time for socializing and/or playing whereas rural residents were using it for spiritual activities and/or weaving.

## DISCUSSION

Bhutan has been placed 8<sup>th</sup> in the World Map of Happiness (White, 2006) based on the parameters of life expectancy, access to education, GDP per capita and life satisfaction. This shows that though Bhutan is lagging behind in GDP (an indicator of economic growth) and Human Development Index, but on the basis of happiness of people it enjoys much higher status as compared to many developed nations. A fact sheet published by RGOB (2006) also records very high percentage of people enjoying happy status of life. This is based on 3 point scale (1 being very happy, 2 being happy and 3 being not very happy). As reported 45.2% people responded to 1, 51.6% to 2 and remaining 3.3% choosing 3. This data is based on the sample of 126115 persons which can easily be taken as representing the status of the nation. This also convinces that the development mantra called 'Gross National Happiness' has really worked well in the nation.

This present work also more or less, focuses on this aspect. On most of the items the responses are very positive resulting in very high level of satisfaction. Neighborhood was taken as one of the most important variable and the satisfaction level with existing neighbors was also found to be higher than many other variables similarly as electricity service. Environment protection was also in the top priority of the people on the basis of the importance of its conservation. Though it was observed that most of the people were involving themselves in some spiritual activities during their leisure time, however respecting others, importance of media and family planning measures were thought to be

more important by relatively larger respondents. TV ownership was given least importance. Another important concern is housing with which relatively the satisfaction level was low. The satisfaction level was higher for medical facilities as compared to education in 2005 whereas in 2000 it was just reverse.

On the basis of the satisfaction level of the people it could be concluded that they are happy people and their happiness level is very high as most of them feel that their life is comfortable and peaceful and they are happy person and happy family. The government has been quite successful in implementing their programs with a focus on GNH rather than concentrating on just improving economic indicators. However, on many of the parameters it has improved, access to primary health care is over 90%, access to safe drinking water in rural areas is around 65%, more than 90% children are immunized, life expectancy at birth has gone up to 66 years.<sup>6</sup> Bhutan attained the status of “Normal Iodine Nutrition Country” becoming the first South Asian country to do so<sup>7</sup>. Bhutan has been identified as MDG fast-track countries on the basis of governance qualification<sup>8</sup>. *Bhutan has been one of the most successful countries in South Asia in its development and delivery of social welfare. (Rutland, 1999). It (Bhutan) 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.*<sup>9</sup> As discussed in a paper by Shrotryia (2004), the development philosophy called GNH, can teach lot of lessons to the other nations which might have better economic conditions and so called much favorable economic indicators. *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).* The general perception is that economic growth takes care of human development and human development takes care of the happiness of people. This is a traditional approach to guide public policy in a state. With the lessons from Bhutan it could be concluded that if this cycle is reversed and the public policy is initially targeted at providing satisfaction (happiness) to the people, it could take care of human development which further would influence economic growth positively. Bhutan has basically experienced it. The time would prove it with more success stories

and evidences brought out from this unique kingdom which is marching ahead slowly but steadily in order to sustain the fruits of development. The switching over from a monarchy to a democratic sovereign nation and moving towards more democratic process of decision making has won the confidence of its residents and their happiness level is on the high. The nation has a new king whose youth would guide the future destiny of this heavenly abode and teach many a lesson to sustain and survive successfully by maintaining good relations with its neighbors without making a compromise on its development mantra.

## NOTES

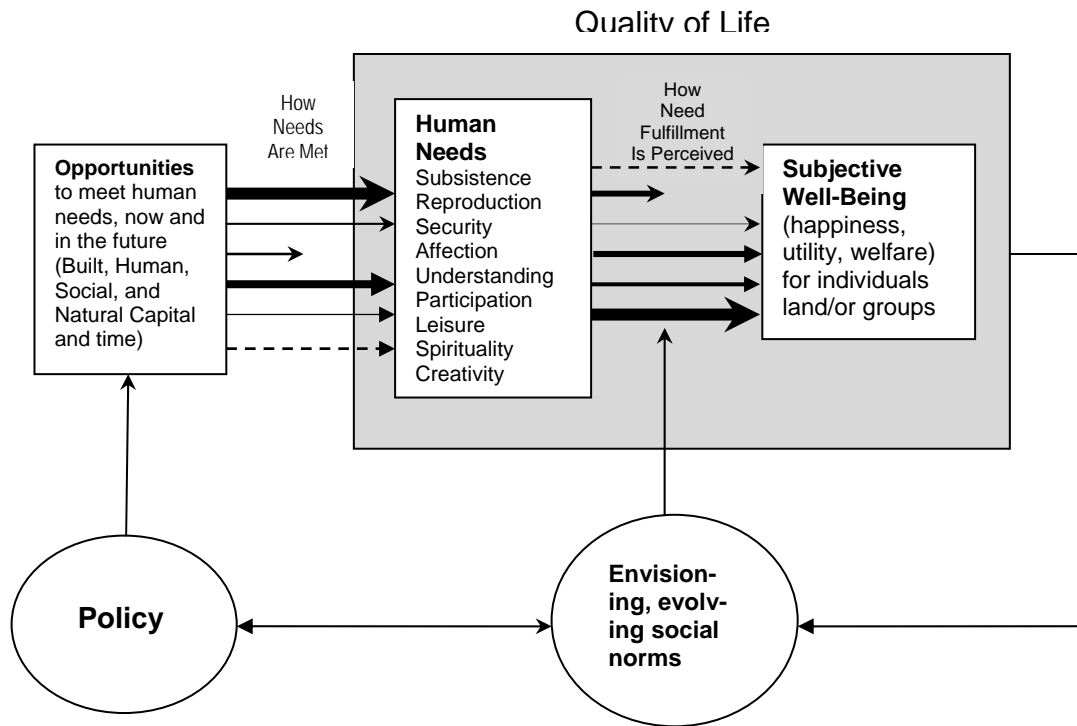
1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross\\_National\\_Happiness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_National_Happiness) retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept 2008.
2. See BNHDR (2000) p 20.
3. See Frey & Stutzer (2002) p 12.
4. See RGOB (2002) p 30.
5. *Khuru* is one of the popular games played by the locals of Bhutan hitting a target through a smaller arrow. It is a lower version of archery.
6. See BNHDR (2000) p 7.
7. See BNHDR (2005) p 29.
8. See UNMP Report 2005 p 234.
9. 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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# ANNEXURES



**Figure 1** - Quality of Life (QOL) as the interaction of human needs and the subjective perception of their fulfillment, as mediated by the opportunities available to meet the needs. (Costanza, et al 2007)

	<i>Outer qualities</i>	<i>Inner qualities</i>
<i>Life-chances</i>	<b>Livability of environment</b>	<b>Life-ability of the person</b>
<i>Life-results</i>	<b>Utility of life</b>	<b>Satisfaction</b>

**Figure 2** - Four Qualities of Life (Veenhoven 2000)