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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GNH WITH SDGS AND MDGS

*Tsheten Dorji

Chief, Sustainable Livelihood Division, Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Thimphu, Bhutan

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*Corresponding Author:
Tsheten Dorji

ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to analyze and compare Bhutan's GNH development philosophy with the UN's SDG and MDG development strategies. The most common parameters of GNH have been compared through a thorough examination of the conceptual foundation and interrelations of GNH, SDGs, and MDGs to development. Further, the achievements and challenges of implementing GNH, SDGs, and MDGs are reviewed and studied. Data on such variables are collected by desk reviewing of past studies, reports, books, and journal articles on GNH, SDGs, and MDGs by different researchers, authors, and writers to establish the interconnections and distinctions. The paper concludes that GNH may be seen as a gimmick but it is a balanced, holistic and shared development philosophy, which has brought real gains in guiding policy directions to Bhutan's overarching long-term strategies and five-year development plans. Likewise, MDGs are ambitious, yet it is a touchstone for universal development policy for UN member nations since 2000, and have succeeded in lifting society from extreme poverty, reducing hunger, enabling more girls to attend schools, and protecting our mother earth. Similarly, SDGs, UN's 2030 strategy for sustainable development is a persuasive and inspiring policy for UN member nations, and executing SDGs is not just about providing a future of harmony and dignity, it is more profound and a moment for each nation to consider what connects it as a peaceful nation, and what drives and defines it as a people.

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INTRODUCTION

Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan nation, known as the last Shangri-La is located between the two giant nations of China and India. Bhutan with an average annual economic growth of 7.6 percent, withstood as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world since the early 1980s (World Bank, 2019), and Bhutan pursues its economic growth by embracing the broad-based approach of GNH. The Third King in the 1960s had declared that the development goal should be to 'make people happy and prosperous'. Development must not mean a blind expansion of commodity manufacture, but rather an inclusive view of life and development that amplifies people's spiritual and emotional well-being (Planning Commission Secretariat, 2000). Further, in the 1970s, the Fourth King first enunciated the vision statement as 'GNH is more important than GDP', thereby drawing ardent attention to this historic declaration from both national and international academicians, scholars, and educators for further study and research on GNH. Additionally, the current King affirmed that 'GNH means very complex to many individuals but for him, it indicates economic growth with values. Therefore, for a country, GNH is an essential value of equity, humanity, and gentleness in the chase of economic growth'. To support GNH as one of the holistic development paradigms, SDGs and MDGs are interpreted to compare and contrast with GNH.

Conceptual Foundation of GNH, SDGs and MDGs to Development: Fourth King first visioned Bhutan's holistic development paradigm of GNH soon after his enthronement in 1972.

However, happiness as a policy resonant much long ago and can be traced back to Bhutan's 1729 legal code, which affirms that 'there is no significance for the government to exit in the country if the government fails to create happiness (*dekid*) to its citizens' (Ura *et al.*, 2012). King Jigme Singye Wangchuck persistently directed the government and leaders to plea to satisfy people's desires and needs and that is 'happiness'; but not a single occasion is documented as the first instance where His Majesty affirmed his idea, shared by honorable Prime Minister Jigme Y. Thinley (Dorji, 2012). GNH as its development philosophy to the outside world was first declared by Bhutan only in 1998 during the Asia-Pacific Millennium Summit in South Korea's capital Seoul through the address of Prime Minister Jigme Y. Thinley, stating 'GNH as an alternate non-quantifiable development paradigm'. Bhutan successively hosted the first international GNH seminar in the capital city of Thimphu in 2004 and decided to quantify happiness in 2005. In 2008, CBS conclusively formulated numerical parameters for measuring GNH index and conducted the first GNH survey in 2010 based on the 9 constituent domains using the Alkire-Foster technique. In July 2011, Bhutan created history subsequent to the UN General Assembly unanimously acknowledging and adapting a Bhutan-led declaration on '*Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development*'. Bhutan embraced GNH as a unifying tool for all policy formulation and five-year plans ever since the 9th five-year plan and Bhutan requested the world to embrace GNH as a new development philosophy during the during Rio+20 Sustainable Development Conference in 2012. SDGs principle not only fulfills human development goals and safeguards sustainable provision of natural resources and ecosystem services but is a strategy depended on by humanity and the world economy.

SDGs are a continuation of MDGs that ended in 2015; however, SDGs were formulated around 2014 when both the Program of Action of the ICPD and MDGs were coming to terms (Edouard and Bernstein, 2016). SDGs transitioned from the resultant effects, global learning, and critique of the earlier MDGs. SDGs compliments the 2015 post-global development agenda, and resolution 'the Future We Want', endorsed by UN member countries in 2015 at the Rio+20 Conference. SDGs, a non-binding global agreement and a multilaterally negotiated amongst the UN member nations are claimed to be universally accepted. SDGs, UN approved 2030 agenda as a roadmap for new development is a call to action to protect the planet, end poverty, and assure the well-being of society. The overarching objectives of SDGs representing the first global policy for sustainable development are intended to be action-oriented and to leave no one behind, whereby both developed and developing states are called upon to take action in their own countries. MDGs are the global community's most commonly shared, inclusive and focused framework with quantitative objectives of reducing hunger and poverty by 2015. "Millennium" refers to a period of 1,000 years that ends and another beginning, and MDGs ascended from an aspiration, clearly conveyed at the Millennium Summit that in turn the Millennium, the good intentions had to be matched by concrete actions. During the UN Millennium Summit of the UN General Assembly on September 18, 2000, development goals of the world agenda were drawn and adopted, and around 190 UN member states signed the resolution (Okon and Ukwai, 2012). Millennium Declaration, which is not only the UN's vision for poverty reduction and hunger, peace, security and disarmament, safeguarding natural ecosystem, human rights, development, democracy, good governance, and the special safeguard of vulnerable communities; also aimed to meet the needs of global communities and strengthening the UN (Mair, 2005; Hassan *et al.*, 2005). Likewise, MDGs are one major breakthrough in development policy and have set a benchmark for global development, and described as a catalyst for reforms and social development policy since inception in 2000.

Commonalities of GNH, SDGs and MDGs: GNH, SDGs, and MDGs are important development approaches of the 21st century. While the approaches are compatible reasoning that SDGs and MDGs are subsets of GNH like democracy is a subset of GNH in Bhutan; yet are incompatible in how approaches are conceptualized, quantified and the 'sustainability' of development is comprehended, and adopted. GNH domains and indicators clearly align with many of the individual SDGs and MDGs. GNH philosophy for Bhutan is pitched for operationalizing the wholesome economic development concept that fosters collective happiness as a fundamental value. GNH is coined within the principles of five capitals: human, social, cultural, economic, and ecological. GNH index is the aggregation of 9 domains, 33 clustered indicators, and 123 variables, and a single GNH indicator is a combined index ranging from 0 to 1. While 0 indicates the lowest possible value, 1 is a highest possible value, and this multidimensional index is linked to a set of policy screening tools to support applications practical. Similarly, SDGs adopted by UN member countries are the combination of 17 universally accepted goals with 169 targets to assist in the formulation of development and political policies from 2016 to 2030. SDGs aspire to eliminate poverty and hunger, offer an opportunity to every child to live a decent life, and create a flourishing and progressing environment for businesses and jobs within the natural boundaries set by mother earth. SDGs used a rater scale of 1 to 10 with 1 as the lowest possible value and 10 as the highest possible value. Likewise, MDGs consist of 8 goals and 18 interlinked targets and 48 indicators. MDGs identify key areas of human development, profile for coordinated action, set clear goals to quantify development; and represent an exceptional partnership among nations to better the lives of poor and hungry people on the planet earth. MDGs, the UN's millennium agenda are broadly shared, focused, and comprehensive strategies for reducing poverty and hunger from 2000 to 2015.

Comparative Overview of GNH, SDGs and MDGs: Global knowledge of GNH, SDGs, and MDGs is correlated with confident actor networks, GNH is progressively linked with Bhutan from the

perspective of common knowledge and remains at the periphery of mainstream development. SDGs and MDGs are collective knowledge within mainstream development and are less known to the larger public and local end-beneficiaries of development for whom the purposes are intended; therefore, they are the primary basis of policy formulation for international development; bounded in providing policy direction and resources to development practitioners and UN member states. While GNH is Bhutan-specific, notwithstanding and modest but growing influence internationally, SDGs and MDGs are the global set of goals, conceptualized, instituted, and endorsed by the UN member countries to advance a shared approach to development. GNH, SDGs, and MDGs are alike approaches to advance the impulse of betterment, but from different sets of values, beliefs, and end goals. In this context, Bhutan has made significant contributions toward attaining happiness and well-being recognized as an element of development, while the moral concept is not centered on SDGs and MDGs with the expectation of well-being included in SDG 3 is only concerning exclusively to health as it relates to psychological well-being, and MDGs have no inclusion of well-being index. Bhutan's development paradigm of GNH comprises 9 domains and 33 indicators geared toward operationalizing wholesome development perception that upholds 'collective happiness as a fundamental value'. In contrast, SDGs embracing 17 goals and 169 targets signify as first global sustainable development strategy with an overarching goal of 'leaving none behind'; while MDGs with 8 goals and 18 targets support formulating development policies with an aim to 'fight against poverty'. GNH's holistic development approach is growing international recognition but remains at the periphery of the development system because of the specific relevance and policy influence limited to Bhutan and with diminutive global funding. On the other hand, SDGs and MDGs with the backing of international development resources, institutes, and policies have a prominent place in international development. Nonetheless, GNH is unique and holds a special place in the global world because of its nearly 40 years of sustained focus, progress, evolution, and learning on different manifestations unlike the SDGs and MDGs indexes. Further, GNH emphasizes happiness and well-being at the national level with the unintentional by-product of moderated influence internationally, while SDGs and MDGs leverage their development at the international level with ambitious goals that are heralded as being universal.

Achievements and Challenges of Implementing GNH, SDGs and MDGs: It is uncertain if the Bhutanese are happier now than before the adoption of GNH, yet research has shown that Bhutanese people are happy with the direction and the strategy it has ensured for the country (Thinley and Hartz-Karp, 2019). GNH embodies a holistic, all-encompassing index that serves to inform policy and decision-making for sustainable development in Bhutan. It also provides Bhutan with a values-based method of focusing policies and budgetary provisions on those who need it the most, and it provides a way for the country to understand and endorse progress based on the society's value of happiness. GNH enables action at local, national, and regional levels, as well as the ability to target specific disadvantaged groups and particular aspects of unhappiness needing attention. Further, the spirit and intent of the GNH concept are enshrined as a principal state policy under Article 9, section 2 of *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008*, "The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of GNH", and has been articulated in the *Bhutan Vision 2020* document: "Maximize the happiness of all Bhutanese and to empower them to achieve their full and innate potential as human beings". However, Bhutan was not spared from the hurdle of implementing GNH as a holistic and sustainable development approach. The key challenges are the deficiency of a clear definition and understanding of GNH among the various stakeholders, Bhutan's lonely battle in promoting GNH in a GDP-centric consumerist world, the top-down approach to GNH advocacy and implementation, and the inadequacy and non-uniform application of the GNH index and screening tools (Dorji, 2013). SDGs, UN Agenda 2030 with the principle to "leave no one behind" have been driving and inspiring governments and all stakeholders to take transformative actions, and country ownership of the 2030

Agenda remains strong. Five years after its inception, SDGs have become a common language for UN member countries to exchange and develop strategies for a more just and sustainable planet. Governments have made great progress in prioritizing the integration of SDGs into their national policies and plans, and are creating institutional arrangements that will help drive and monitor progress toward the transformation needed in the economies and societies. One of the major accomplishments of SDGs is the success of MDGs as they overcome their weaknesses of MDGs. Further, SDGs are successful in the continued reduction of extreme poverty and child mortality rates and diseases including hepatitis, and progress towards gender equality such as more gender-responsive budgeting. Nonetheless, the key challenges of implementing SDGs are due to the ambitious goals with greater and far-fetching targets, which requires a coherent and significant amount of anticipated resources and investment; therefore, the limited resources and technology for fostering the need to pursue these goals and targets become demanding in context to Bhutan (Lhamo and Tshering, 2020). Similarly, the 2017 African Sustainable Report states that around 6 out of 10 SDG indicators cannot be traced in Africa because of several data limitations, which resulted to slow progress toward poverty reduction despite accelerated growth enjoyed over the past years. Furthermore, one of the major challenges affecting the effective execution of SDGs is funding as many UN member countries are not economically capable to fund the implementation of the SDGs framework in their countries. MDGs attained enormous progress and represented human development into a concise, focused, and naive measurable set of goals and targets emphasizing on poor. There can be no disbelief that the legitimacy of the new sustainable development agenda rests with the momentum and real experience nourished in the world as MDGs had a real effect on people's lives. MDGs symbolized the greatest and most successful anti-poverty movement in history with an accomplished extreme poverty reduction by half. MDGs also enhanced access to water resources, dramatic drop in child deaths, increase women's partaking in politics, and eliminated disparities in primary school enrolment between boys and girls; but not without failures and critics. The key challenges of implementing MDGs are inadequate consultations during the conception, which led to ownership deficiency in implementation and allowed the perception of a donor-centric agenda to foster. The other major challenges of implementing MDGs are poor preliminary conditions, weak governance and institutions, conflict and instability, and environmental degradation, which not only stops development but reverses progress, exacerbating hunger, poverty, disease and premature death, no respect for human rights, and heightened environmental risks and natural disasters.

Conclusion: Significance of GNH, SDGs and MDGs in an Unequal World: GNH may be seen as a gimmick but it is a balanced and holistic approach to development, which has brought real gains to the fights against poverty and shared philosophy in Bhutan and is translated into broad policy directions that provide the government's overarching long-term strategies and five-year-plans. Therefore, in the last 40 years, the yardsticks of development have evolved significantly towards happiness and well-being, and GNH is arguably a flash of a wholesome idea that illuminates the landscape. GNH as a middle path approach to development is a foreign policy instrument and a brand, implicitly, used as an instrument of soft power to put Bhutan, a small country nestled between two political and economic giants on the map for the UN. It is also a brand; which Bhutan uses to market itself in tourism with the trademark 'Happiness is a place'. UN 2030 agenda and its 17 SDGs have been driving and inspiring nations and stakeholders to take transformative actions, individually and collectively to attain prosperity for humanity and planet earth fortifying worldwide peace in a larger freedom. SDGs call for a paradigm shift with follow-up on MDGs and continuing to achieve sustainable development, precisely on economic development, social inclusion, and sustainable ecosystem. Implementing SDGs is not just about providing a future of prosperity and dignity, it is more profound and a moment for each country to consider what connects it as a peaceful nation, and what drives and defines it as a people. SDGs offer nations an opportunity to delineate their own sustainable

pathway, which transcends political cycles and 'leaves none behind'. MDGs, an ambitious UN agenda embraced from Millennium Declaration symbolize pledges of UN member countries to reduce extreme poverty and manifestations of hunger, diseases, gender disparity, deprivation of education, access to basic infrastructures, and ecosystem degradation. MDGs have set a touchstone for global development policy since 2000 and attained remarkable progress. MDGs exemplified an unprecedented partnership among states in bettering the lives of poor and hungry people across the globe, where several developing countries made extraordinary progress, and improving the lives of millions. MDGs have succeeded in lifting over 1 billion people around the globe from extreme poverty, creating inroads against hunger, enabling a large number of girls to attend school than ever before, and protecting our planet earth. Through the end of 15 years period, MDGs are able to save the lives of millions and improve conditions for many more and succeeded by SDGs.

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