

Consultation Paper

# A HAPPIER INDIA

**The Need for a Wellbeing  
Approach towards India's  
Social and Economic  
Objectives**

Y20 INDIA 2023

# Health, Well Being and Sports

Agenda for Youth



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This Consultation Paper is based on the Y20 Panel Discussion organised by the National Economic Forum (NEF) along with the Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, in collaboration with Youth20 (Y20). The G20 Secretariat has generously supported this initiative. Our sincere appreciation goes to Mr. Anmol Sovit, Chair, Y20 India, for providing valuable guidance and unwavering support throughout this endeavour. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Manoj Kumar Sinha, Director, ILI New Delhi, and Mr. Lakshit Mittal, Track Chair, Y20 India for their insightful contributions and constant encouragement.

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document. We thank the participants who attended the panel discussion. This consultation paper constitutes a concerted effort of the National Economic Forum to present an academic and research perspective on the pertinent global issue of happiness, under their overall Y20 track of Health, Well-being and Sports Agenda for Youth.

This paper serves as not just a meaningful exploration of the diverse viewpoints on the theme of happiness and well-being, but also proposes implementable policy suggestions. The opinions presented in this paper solely reflect the perspectives of the authors, and any omissions, inaccuracies, or errors are our own. Please note that no endorsement is implied for any commercial entity or product mentioned within this publication.

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## Contributors

**Mr. Devesh Tripathi**

President, National Economic Forum

## Speakers

**Prof. B. S. Sahay**

(Director, Indian Institute of Management, Jammu)

**Mr. Virendra Gupta**

(Former Ambassador, Government of India)

**Prof. Manisha Priyam**

(Professor, Department of Education Policy, National Institute for Education Planning and Administration)

**Prof. Sanjeev Kumar**

(Dean and Professor, Rashtram School of Public Leadership, Rishihood University)

**Mr. Lakshit Mittal**

(Track Chair, Health, Well-Being and Sports: Agenda for Youth, Y20 India)

## Authors of the Consultation Paper

**Aparajita Kumar**

(Visiting Research Fellow, NEF)

**Harsha Pareek**

(Research Associate, NEF)

**Jatin Mathur**

(Research Associate, NEF)

**Shubha Tiwari**

(Research Associate, NEF)

## Content Supervisor

**Mr. Abhishek Singh**

(Senior Consultant, NEF)

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## Partner Organisations



G20 India Secretariat, New Delhi



Indian Law Institute, New Delhi



Y20 India Secretariat, New Delhi

## About National Economic Forum

The National Economic Forum (NEF) is one of India's finest not-for-profit, apartisan, and independent think tanks and policy research institutions. The Forum utilises data, analytical approach, comprehensive research, and policy outreach programs to produce policy outputs and outcomes about the issues that directly or indirectly impact the Indian economy. We work across six focus areas, namely Technology, Economy and Development, Good Governance and Economic Growth, Knowledge Economy, Sustainable Economy, Law & Economy, and Strategic Economic Areas. NEF conducts in-depth, focused, yet holistic research on various contemporary and emerging policy-relevant economic issues. The organisation actively engages with multiple government stakeholders, private firms, and academic institutions to pursue core policy research, provide policy recommendations for reforms, and undertake dedicated piloting as well policy outreach activities. Currently, NEF is overseeing a diverse portfolio of projects covering a range of topics such as sustainability, renewable energy, legal reforms, digital economy, semiconductors, and foreign direct investments. These projects are carried out in close collaboration with a range of partner organisations.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	2
Contributors	3
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	7
The Happy Economy Project	9
Y20 Panel Discussion	9
Review and Analysis	12
A. Global well-being Indices and India's Rankings	12
B. Cultural Contextualisation of Happiness	14
C. Socio-Economic Indicators And Happiness	17
Recommendations and Conclusion	19
References	21

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## Executive Summary

This Consultation Paper is based on the Y20 Panel Discussion organised by the National Economic Forum (NEF) along with the Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, in collaboration with Youth20 (Y20). The theme of the discussion was “A Happier India: The Need For A Well-Being Approach Towards India’s Social and Economic Objectives”. The aim of this paper is to represent the findings and recommendations of the esteemed panellists on the role and significance of happiness and well-being in the Indian context. Both happiness and well-being have garnered a lot of attention, in recent years, as essential parameters for determining a country’s holistic development. The United Nations in 2012 passed a resolution proclaiming 20th of March as International Day of Happiness, wherein it recognised pursuit of happiness as a fundamental human goal and emphasised on

the intrinsic role of happiness in the formulation of public policy. A majority of studies have concluded that economic prosperity and happiness are not directly proportional, and thus, a need has arisen to relegate the policy of economic growth to a secondary position and to adopt a more comprehensive approach for the fulfilment of governmental objectives. However, global happiness ranking systems have always attributed an unfavourable position to India, thereby seriously undermining its position as an emerging world power. India’s rich ancient history has the concept of well-being and happiness deeply entrenched within its cultural values; and thus it becomes critical to place this approach within the Indian context.

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## Introduction

In the Arthashastra, Kautilya minutely examined the “*Dharma*” of the king to his subjects and stated, “In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness; in their welfare his welfare, whatever pleases him he shall not consider as good, but whatever makes his subjects happy, he shall consider good.” In his book *The Art of Happiness* (2020), The Dalai Lama says, in Buddhism, there is frequent reference to the four factors of fulfilment or happiness: adequate wealth, worldly satisfaction, spirituality, and enlightenment. But what is this happiness and why has it suddenly become so relevant at the global and domestic levels?

Happiness, conservatively considered to be a positive emotion or experience, has now evolved into a scientific term capable of being quantified and measured via the defined medium of Subjective Well-Being. This evolution of happiness has been propelled by extensive research in various fields, regarding the importance of happiness as an objective of legislation and policy. This unusual correlation between happiness and policy stems from the realisation that economic prosperity doesn’t necessarily translate into increased individual happiness and consequently, national happiness. Contrarily, reliable data shows that in many wealthy nations, an increase in per capita income has not led to a concomitant increase in happiness levels; thereby leading to a skewed model of national development. In an

attempt to rectify this and to advocate for more inclusive growth, researchers have been promoting a transition to the happiness approach. This happiness approach primarily puts forth a model wherein happiness parameters are a part of policy-making.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines happiness from two perspectives:

“Philosophers who write about “*happiness*” typically take their subject matter to be either of two things, each corresponding to a different sense of the term:

- A state of mind
- A life that goes well for the person leading it

In the first case our concern is simply a psychological matter...What is this state of mind we call happiness? Typical answers to this question include life satisfaction, pleasure, or a positive emotional condition ... In the second case, our subject matter is a kind of *value*, namely what philosophers nowadays tend to call *prudential value*—or, more commonly, *well-being*, *welfare*, *utility* or *flourishing*.”

Edward Diener goes a step further and introduces the concept of Subjective Well-Being (SWB) within the happiness paradigm. He stated:



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*“Philosophers debated the nature of happiness for thousands of years, but scientists have recently discovered that happiness means different things. Three major types of happiness are high life satisfaction, frequent positive feelings, and infrequent negative feelings (Diener, 1984). “Subjective well-being” is the label given by scientists to the various forms of happiness taken together.”*

Thus, happiness for the purpose of quantification is subdivided into three types: Evaluative (life satisfaction), Affective (positive or negative feelings), and Eudaimonic (sense of purpose). It is the sum of all the above which is taken together to measure a nation’s happiness levels.



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## The Happy Economy Project

The Happy Economy project is an initiative by the National Economic Forum, to facilitate the vision of a more holistic and multi-dimensional approach towards the nation's development. We believe that societal well-being and economic growth are complementary in nature; and together they provide a more inclusive model of development for the country. Combined with the knowledge that an increase in the economic wealth of a country is not concomitant with an increase in the happiness and well-being levels of the citizens, the relevance and necessity of the project increases manifold. We are advocating for an India which is both materially and spiritually happy.

Happiness is a subjective and abstract emotion, which has now been reduced to a quantifiable entity, through the medium of SWB, for the purpose of policy-makers, economists and scholars. Keeping in view its attributes it is still difficult to arrive at a comprehensive definition of happiness and well-being, but its pivotal role in the inclusive growth of a country is an undeniable fact. Significant empirical research has been conducted in the past 3 decades establishing a positive relationship between well-being, growth and policy outcomes throughout the globe. Taking into account India's robust rights framework, rich constitutional history and the bedrock of welfarism, the learnings of happiness and well-being form the very grundnorm of our polity. Thus, India needs to draw from its roots

to develop its own framework which is domestically relevant and viable.

## Y20 Panel Discussion

With the aim of fostering dialogue on the role of happiness and well-being in the Indian context, the National Economic Forum (NEF) along with the Indian Law Institute, New Delhi, in collaboration with Youth20 (Y20) hosted a panel discussion under the "Happy Economy" project. The theme of the discussion was "A Happier India: The Need For A Well-Being Approach Towards India's Social and Economic Objectives".

It is necessary for any policy change to be facilitated by in-depth discussions in the public arena. NEF, in sync with its vision and objectives, decided to take the well-being debate further and place it among learned experts for a nuanced and extensive debate. The panel discussion attempted to not only increase awareness on the theme but to also achieve concrete policy results as a product of the dialogue. The panel comprised of the following esteemed speakers:

1. Professor B.S. Sahay, Director, Indian Institute of Management, Jammu.
2. Mr. Virendra Gupta, Former Ambassador, Govt. of India.
3. Professor Manisha Priyam, Professor, Department of Education Policy, National Institute for Education Planning and Administration.

4. Professor Sanjeev Kumar, Dean and Professor, Rashtram School of Public Leadership, Rishihood University.
5. Mr. Lakshit Mittal, Track Chair, Health, well-being, and Sports: Agenda for Youth, Y20 India

The following key points were covered during the discussion:

### **1. Global well-being Indices and India's rankings**

As the theme conveys the vision of the discussion was “A Happier India”. India is not an unhappy nation, as it is touted by global rankings that use a uniform measuring scale without incorporating necessary social, economic, political and geographical factors. Our ancient philosophies and modern political thought are based on well-being. The speakers discussed the drawbacks of the global ranking systems and the apparent methodological issues they face. The discussion emphasised on the way in which happiness is already a part of the way of life in India, and what more can be done to realise the full potential of the existing framework.

Happiness is a critical point of discussion in the West and thus, the research and literature on it is overwhelming. However, the western concept of happiness is different from the East. In the East happiness is distinct from materialism. It is neither its antithesis nor is it a product of

it. Also, community living plays a very important role in the perceived levels of happiness and well-being in our societal structure. The significance of culture in the happiness approach is further evidenced by the North South divide being represented clearly in the Happiness Index as well, where the Nordic countries consistently rank high while the global south always occupies the lower positions. Thus, for accurate representation it becomes necessary that happiness be placed within respective cultural perspectives.

### **2. Socio-Economic Indicators and Happiness**

Happiness has also attracted the cost benefit analysis by economists in an attempt to place it alongside economic indicators. The social and economic advantages of a well-being approach have been firmly substantiated by empirical studies; and that is why societal well-being and economic growth are considered to be complementary in nature. The basic premise of the happiness approach is the lack of positive relationship between income and happiness. Richard Easterlin established that an increase in wealth does not necessarily translate to higher happiness in the citizens of a country over an extended period of time. This dichotomy in the relationship between wealth and well-being perpetuates the need for an inclusive model of growth

which takes into account socio-economic parameters. global ranking systems and the apparent methodological issues they face. The discussion emphasised on the way in which happiness is already a part of the way of life in India, and what more can be done to realise the full potential of the existing framework.

### 3. Cultural Contextualisation of Happiness

Happiness is a critical point of discussion in the West and thus, the research and literature on it is overwhelming. However, the Western concept of happiness is different from the East. In the East, happiness is distinct from materialism. It is neither its antithesis nor is it a product of it. Also, community living plays a very important role in the perceived levels of happiness and well-being in our societal structure. The significance of culture in the happiness approach is further evidenced by the North-South divide being represented clearly in the Happiness Index as well, where the Nordic countries consistently rank high while the global south always occupies the lower positions. Thus, for accurate representation, it becomes necessary that happiness be placed within respective cultural perspectives.





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## Review and Analysis

### A. Global well-being Indices and India's Rankings

In a world driven by progress and material wealth, the pursuit of happiness remains a universal aspiration. As countries strive to improve the well-being of their citizens, the World Happiness Index (hereby referred to as WHI) has emerged as a popular tool and global benchmark for measuring and comparing happiness and well-being across the world. The happiness report is a publication of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, powered by the Gallup World Poll data and World Values Survey, and compares happiness across several indicators for over 155 countries ([WHI 2023](#)). As per the report, Finland is the happiest country in the world while Afghanistan is the most unhappy nation. India came at the 126th position out of 137, behind Pakistan (108), Sri Lanka (112), Myanmar (117), and Bangladesh (118). However, the rankings have over the years been criticised for methodological flaws and a biased ranking system. Apart from the WHI, indices like Satisfaction with Life ([Adrian White 2007](#)), Better life index ([OECD](#)), WHO-5 well being index ([WHO](#)) and many others which attempted to undertake this complex subjective exercise have also met with inherent fundamental challenges..

Throughout the panel discussion, various speakers have emphasised the necessity of transcending Western conceptualisations of

happiness and well-being. **Former Ambassador Mr. Virendra Gupta** notably highlighted the challenge in constructing a mathematical model to gauge or rank states based on happiness due to its inherent subjectivity. **Professor Manisha Priyam** further questioned the validity of indices, particularly noting that Nordic countries, having abstained from involvement in world wars, now occupy top positions. In regards to this, several studies have examined the global divide between the North and South, evident not only in traditional economic metrics but also in social indicators. Alba discusses this dichotomy, pointing out its manifestation in the World Happiness Index (WHI), where the top and bottom 10 ranking countries correspond to the global North and South, respectively ([Alba 2019](#)). It is important to note that within the WHI, GDP serves as a component of happiness, yet empirical evidence suggests its minimal significance as an indicator.

Carlsen demonstrates that metrics such as dystopia and generosity hold greater relative importance ([Carlsen 2019](#)). This perspective was underscored by both **Professor Manisha Priyam** and **Former Ambassador Virendra Gupta**, who emphasised contextual indicators like poverty and familial values in shaping discussions concerning happiness and well-being in India. Amb. Gupta observed:

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*“... so I'm not faulting that UN project which came out with a particular model but I'm surprised that's been going on for the last so many years and they haven't paused to think that this model is absolute nonsense.”*

In analysing the World Happiness Index, Indian critics have identified and contested its validity within two distinct contexts. The first context addresses the very nature and meaning of the concepts of Happiness and Well-Being and their Westernisation. India has a rich traditional heritage where happiness (Anandam) has occupied a central position through the ages. This aspect has been extensively discussed by **Professor Sanjeev Kumar** and **Professor B.S. Sahay**, who (the latter) have articulated their reservations through the following quote:

*“What is our culture? What is our philosophy? What is our value? Take pride in that. That's really important. We need not to copy any western world or anything. We are one of the oldest civilisations on this planet and we have everything.”*

Furthermore, the second aspect that Indian critics have highlighted pertains to the methodological inaccuracies inherent in the structure of the World Happiness Index. Many experts in India have pointed out the underlying biases, contradictions, and dichotomies that are present in the creation and operationalisation of these indices. One

contention focuses on the inconsistencies observed among various widely recognised Western indices. For instance, Benjamin et al. (2020) discuss the systematic challenges associated with single-question well-being indicators, which have yet to reach competitive levels when compared to traditional economic metrics ([Benjamin et al 2020](#)). Additionally, the issue of cross-cultural comparability poses a more fundamental challenge, as current instruments are deemed inadequate in providing valid cross-cultural measures of subjective well-being ([Cummins 2018](#)). Another contention raised by critics is the presence of contradictions among widely recognised Western indices. Hanke's Misery Index, for instance, employs a different methodology compared to the World Happiness Index, aiming to evaluate various dimensions of well-being and economic circumstances that impact levels of misery. However, the findings derived from these measurements have yielded questionable and contradictory outcomes. An illustrative instance of this inconsistency is observed in the case of Finland, which is ranked as the world's happiest nation according to the World Happiness Index, yet curiously occupies the 109th position on the Misery Index out of 157 countries ([Sinha 2023](#)).

Thus, these global indices and rankings fail to take into account the very subjectivity of well-being and happiness, and their cross-cultural variations. This in turn inadvertently presents an unrealistic portrayal of India, failing to acknowledge the nation's

multifaceted culture and its progress across diverse domains. **Mr. Lakshit Mittal**, Y20 Track Chair and one of the speakers, highlights these intricacies of such indicators, emphasising the significance of India's unique socio-cultural history and heritage as a guiding light to showcase an alternative approach to happiness, health, and spirituality. Consequently all the speakers agreed that it becomes imperative for India to critically examine the data and methods employed by these indices, the narratives they construct across the globe, and the necessity of developing an India-centric framework to assess happiness and subjective well-being in order to inform robust policymaking.

*“This event becomes pivotal and forums like National Economic Forum and discussions like these are the ones that will bring forth the realities of tomorrow and will bring forth the frameworks for tomorrow and will guide us on how we can marry and show the world a different way of being happy, being healthy, being economically and spiritually developed and lead it with example.”*

*- Lakshit Mittal  
Track Chair, Y20*

## **B. Cultural Contextualisation of Happiness**

**Former Ambassador Mr. Virendra Gupta**, while making some important points about the

social and economic components of happiness, also raised an extremely pertinent point relating to the cultural aspects of happiness. He highlighted, “...people in India are happy because of our cultural values, because our religion and our values teach us to be content, not pursue mindlessly material possessions.” This is an important distinction made in the overall scholarship of happiness, stating that the measure of happiness goes beyond materialistic notions and varies as per the cultural makeup of a society. Happiness, a complex and multifaceted emotion, is not only a universal concept but also one deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of societies. The principles governing the cultural contextualisation of happiness are also rooted in the acknowledgment that happiness is not a monolithic concept. As highlighted by research ([Tsai & Park, 2014](#)), cultural psychologists have moved beyond early assumptions of universal assessments and have begun to rigorously investigate the diverse conceptions of happiness. This recognition of cultural diversity in the conceptualisation of happiness aligns with the principles of cultural relativism, emphasising the importance of understanding happiness within its cultural context.

Hofstede has conceptualised cultural values as “software of the mind” which are not biologically determined, but have evolved in response to environmental and human challenges in a historically contingent manner ([Hofstede et al., 2010](#)). Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping perspectives on happiness. Research ([Oishi & Gilbert, 2016](#)) demonstrates

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that happiness definitions have evolved over time within societies, with linguistic analyses revealing shifts in conceptualisations. For instance, the traditional view of happiness in the U.S. included 'good luck and fortune' in the 1800s, yet this notion became 'archaic' in more recent times. These historical shifts underscore the impact of cultural traditions on shaping the very definition of happiness. This characterisation of happiness stemming from the lexicography of the word in different cultures was also substantiated by **Professor Priyam's** anecdotal reference of the fact how her younger brother always defines his state of being as '*kushal*' in each of their letters, hinting that the conceptualisation of happiness in the Indian cultural context reaches far beyond the Western idea of happiness, wherein the well-being of a person is mostly related to the physical and material states of feeling and being.

This idea of happiness in India was further discussed in detail by **Professor B.S. Sahay**. In his speech, he underscored the importance of embracing Indian culture, values, and philosophy as a source of pride and advocated for the integration of Indian values and philosophy into discussions on happiness, highlighting the unique cultural context that contributes to well-being. This aligns with the idea, discussed earlier, that cultural context plays a significant role in shaping concepts of happiness.

**Professor Sahay** also introduced a very important lens to viewing happiness in a

holistic approach where he suggested a comprehensive understanding of happiness, integrating physical and mental well-being, aligning with cultural practices that prioritise a balanced and harmonious life. This incorporates *Yoga* (the age-old Indian practice of physical exercise), *pranayama* (breathing exercises), meditation, and self-realisation. The achievement of *Anandam* (happiness) is possible only once these stages are fulfilled. This holistic perspective reflects the cultural belief that well-being extends beyond material success.

Research suggests that the pursuit of happiness varies across cultures, reflecting distinct cultural values and priorities. The differences in the conscious pursuit of happiness between these cultures underscore the impact of cultural values on the approach to and understanding of happiness. For example, Americans associate happiness with personal achievement and positive experiences. In contrast, the Japanese often mention the transient nature of happiness and social disruption.

The conscious pursuit of happiness, a prevalent goal in American culture, may lead to anxiety and stress. However, this pursuit is positively associated with happiness in cultures like Russia, Japan, and Taiwan, where it is approached in an interpersonal, socially engaging fashion ([Oishi & Gilbert, 2016](#)). Similarly, India formulates the pursuit of happiness as per its culture and traditions. Elaborating on this point, Professor Sahay



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presented some distinct ideas that represent happiness in the Indian cultural context. The first idea highlighted by him in this regard is 'Seva' (service) and humility, suggesting that true happiness is found in serving others, emphasising the interconnectedness of individual well-being with the well-being of others in Indian culture. He also underscored the impact of one's company on happiness, advocating for positive relationships and expressing gratitude. This aligns with the cultural value of strong interpersonal bonds and gratitude. He very rightly pointed out that fostering positive relationships and expressing gratitude, prioritising interpersonal connections and acknowledging the contributions of others, are an integral aspect of happiness. Further, he linked happiness with the concept of the "Joy of Giving", also backed by Professor Priyam, extending beyond material gifts to encompass love, passion, and compassion, suggesting that happiness is intricately connected to acts of kindness and generosity.

**Professor Sanjeev Kumar** who returned to Bharat last year after spending 20 years in the United States spoke about the profound impact of India's cultural heritage on the concepts of happiness and well-being. He unpacked a unique framework rooted in pure awareness or consciousness, referred to as *Brahman* wherein he asserted that true happiness stems from an understanding of one's pure awareness. Furthermore, he introduced the concept of *rin* or debt and its connection to gratitude. The idea of being

born with three debts, namely *Rishi rin*, *Pitr rin*, and *Deva rin*, adds depth to the cultural context of happiness. He urged the audience to explore the ontological foundations of such a duty-based society, hinting at the rich cultural heritage and ethical framework of our country. The significance of acknowledging and repaying debts also resonates with Professor Sahay's earlier comments on gratitude.

Variations in societal factors, such as governance, economic and political freedom, and attitudes toward civic virtue, contribute to differing levels of happiness across nations ([Ott, 2014](#)). These factors not only influence individual predictors of happiness but also shape societal conditions conducive to citizens' well-being. Professor Kumar built on this idea and highlighted how the concept of good governance has been a part of India's cultural fabric. Quoting from the Mahabharata and Chanakya, Professor Kumar highlights the importance of *Dharma* (righteousness in governance) and ethical conduct in the pursuit of happiness. He also reminded the audience of India's rich history in governance by posing a peculiar question, "How did our ancestors perceive the world that they managed to imagine a society based on duties rather than rights? " Further, he introduced the role of public leaders as crucial in turning *Anandam* or happiness into a driving force for India. He emphasised the need for ethical public leaders to align the pursuit of happiness with social and economic objectives.

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Happiness, well-being, and culture are intricately related and the importance of culture becomes even more paramount in the existing global landscape. Cultural contextualisation of happiness is a nuanced and dynamic process shaped by principles, traditions, and cultural values. The esteemed panellists rightly recognised the importance of cultural values in the conceptualisation and pursuit of happiness as essential for a comprehensive understanding of this complex emotion. As the field of happiness research continues to expand, it is extremely crucial to explore these cultural dimensions further and to engage in investigations that deepen our understanding of the intricate interplay between culture and happiness.

### C. Socio-Economic Indicators And Happiness

**Former Ambassador Virendra Gupta** opened his address with an extremely thought provoking observation, “happiness is more important than development”; and how one would be both quick and wrong in assuming that happiness is dependent on GDP and per capita income.

Even though the discernment that one is better than the other is subjective, it becomes important to separate the two. While the earlier economists believed that there exists a linear relation between the two, with higher rates of development translating into higher levels of happiness for its citizens. The underlying assumption being that as societies grow richer, their access to education, health, welfare improves, improving their standards of living.

However, research has concluded that a higher income does not necessarily translate into happier beings, and they share a nonlinear relationship ([Rodriguez-Pose et al., 2011](#)). The [Easterlin Paradox](#) proposes that initially, “at a point in time happiness varies directly with income, both among and within nations, but over time the long term growth rates of happiness and income are not significantly related”. One way to further understand it is through adaptive expectations, as people have their own expectations from the future, an increase in income does not lead to an increase in happiness.

The Human Development Report (HDR), first introduced in 1990, attempted to shift the focus of development away from purely monetary assessment of GDP, and towards the new development paradigms to provide a more comprehensive imaging of standards of living such as poverty, wealth and development. Originating in 1954 with the 'Report on International Definition and Measurement of Standards and Levels of Living,' which proposed twelve components to present a comprehensive view of standards of living, poverty, wealth, and development ([Noorbakhsh, 1998, p. 517](#)). Subsequently, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the emergence of the social indicator movement due to increased resource depletion and environmental degradation, seeking alternative measures for a deeper understanding of human well-being (Noorbakhsh, 1998, p. 517).

Despite the 1980s' focus on economic aspects through structural adjustment programs, UNDP responded by integrating dimensions of human well-being beyond income-related variables, despite rising poverty and inequality (Sen, 1999, p. 14). The HDR draws widely from the capability approach, "to put people back into the centre of development" and places humans as primary as well as the principal means of development and steps away from GDP as it includes factors like education and health and marks a global step away from wealth at the centre of growth and development.

The GDP has a positive influence on the Human Development Index (HDI), the relationship between the two is evident in the country's progress over the past few decades. India's HDI has significantly improved since economic liberalisation in the early 1990s. The HDI considers indicators such as life expectancy, education, and income per capita. In 1990, India's HDI was 0.427; in 2019, it increased to 0.645, reflecting a considerable rise in the country's overall quality of life ([United Nations Development Programme, 2020](#)). However, a lot of this can be traced to how UNDP defines poverty, wealth and development and how it is placed in the dichotomy that poverty, deficiency and ill-state is placed on one side and wealth, abundance and well-being on the other. "Development is thus a teleological process according to which, in terms of well-being, quantity is quality, i.e. more is automatically better, and maximised

indicators necessarily mean optimised well-being" ([Schimmel, 2007](#)).

**Professor Manisha Priyam** in her discourse rightly pointed out how seeing happiness is subjective and has an individualistic notation to it, it is imperative to start with a proxy indicator, the indicator being "well-being". Throughout history, there lies confusion around these terms: happiness, subjective well-being, quality of life and life satisfaction. Though, through most research, these terms are used interchangeably. Veenhoven in 1984 defined happiness as, "degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favourably" (Veenhoven 1984, p. 22). But studies suggest that the influence of external factors have a higher effect on happiness than, say, personality ([Diener, 1984](#)).

The biggest issue here then lies in how comparable is happiness between an individual and the country. Thus, socio-economic indicators have a role to play. These indicators can be broken down to individual factors, macroeconomic factors and institutional factors as proposed by Frey and Strutzer in 2000 (as cited in Rodriguez-Pose et al., 2011). Individual factors include factors like gender, age, income, civil status, the number of children, employment conditions, religion, level of education or where the person lives. Macroeconomic factors include factors like unemployment, inflation, inequality within societies and institutional factors like, the effect of good government, perceived levels of corruption, size of the welfare state,

government decentralisation. The emphasis on these factors is pertinent to driving policy further to lay down the path to happiness. Well-being needs to be considered as a key link to further develop our current approach towards newer policies.

**Professor Priyam** further emphasised how on our path to becoming global leader, *vishwaguru*, we first need to put on a robe, “it’s the robe of giving up and putting on your body what is true and characteristic of this country, which is its poverty”. **Former Ambassador Gupta** had highlighted the same earlier mentioning how India experiences abject poverty. As established earlier, a lack of or a decline in income causes a negative impact on happiness. Studies show that many socio-economic characteristics affect subjective well being. While poverty might not be the direct indicator, existing levels of inequality in a region, country have an effect on perception of happiness. The calculation should be based on an understanding of happiness sensitivity based on context ([Mizobuchi 2016](#)).

## Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions of the panel, the following recommendations were put forward:

1. It is of utmost significance to develop an India-centric model of happiness and well-being by exploring India’s rich traditional knowledge in the field.
2. The Global ranking systems are unable to depict a comprehensive picture of

well-being; and therefore, it has become pertinent to investigate their lacunae and decode the ranking systems.

3. To curb reliance on global rankings it is important to develop an inclusive domestic framework where growth is measured in terms of both objective and subjective parameters.
4. Cross cultural variations in happiness and well-being, both among and within nations, have a huge bearing on the structuration of domestic frameworks, thus it becomes necessary to adopt a culture sensitive outlook while developing domestic frameworks.
5. Existing domestic data frameworks need to be evaluated from a well-being perspective, which will ensure that the available data set can be utilised to fuel further research and development.

Critics of the happiness agenda primarily point out two drawbacks. Firstly the subjective and individualistic nature of the concept. Secondly the fear of interventionist governmental policies under the garb of promotion of happiness and well-being. This paper is an attempt to bring to the table the foundational aspects of happiness and well-being in the policy-making arena. The aim is not to regulate people’s life and happiness but rather to orient policies made by the Government where the happiness and well-being of the citizens is a primary consideration. The undue reliance on economic parameters of growth is leading to lopsided development riddled with increasing social, political and economic inequalities. A



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holistic, integrative, people led, socially cohesive and principled policy framework suited to India's unique socio-cultural history and heritage must be developed, to facilitate India's position as a vishwaguru.

Keeping in view the vast geographical and demographic concerns, it becomes essential to first implement this concept within the existing constitutional and statutory set-up. For example, the OECD urges states to make happiness, via the medium of measuring Subjective Well-Being, an operative part of their national surveys or census. As even that can be a humongous task for a country like India, the initial steps can be focused on giving a boost to happiness research in the Indian context with localised pilot studies; which would eventually transition to the national stage. The resultant outcome that is anticipated is that the incorporation of these studies in the political processes would further the inherent aspiration of the people for a better and more contented life, both at the individual and community levels.

Therefore, governmental processes and activities need to be structured in a manner that people's interests become the principal controlling force in politics. Fundamental institutions, or rules of the game, have to be established which provide politicians and public bureaucrats with incentives and information to adequately respond to people's preferences. Well-being research provides insights about how and to what extent institutions have systemic effects on indicators of subjective well-being. According to this constitutional view, the results gained from well-being research will provide productive inputs for the political decision-making process. These inputs then have to prove themselves in political competition and in public and political debates. An ideal outcome is envisaged, where the integration of this research in the political process will enable people to actively promote and realise their idea of the good life, both individually and collectively. ([Odermatt & Stutzer, 2017](#))

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## NATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM



Think Tank & Policy Research Institute in India  
28, Firozeshah Road,  
New Delhi- 110001



[email@nationaleconomicforum](mailto:email@nationaleconomicforum)



[www.nationaleconomicforum.in](http://www.nationaleconomicforum.in)



+91 11-35639392 +91-7080909191

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