

MS TASHI CHODEN:

Thank you very much. Good evening everybody. It's a great pleasure to be here today and I am very happy to be able to present to you the Gross National Happiness Index.

This index has currently been developed by the centre for Bhutan studies in the Kingdom of Bhutan so first, let me begin by giving you a brief background on the concept behind the index itself.

Gross national happiness was first enunciated by Bhutan's present King in the early 1980s when he said that gross national happiness is more important than gross national product. Essentially the message was that in our country's development the pursuit of economic growth should not take place at the expense of other very important aspects such as people's happiness and wellbeing.

So basically, GNH is not to be a holistic approach to development. There is a balance between the material and the non-material and a consideration for the overall wellbeing of the population as the main goal of development.

Now, until very recently GNH has been widely understood in the context of the four pillars which are sustainable and equitable social economic development; number two, environmental conservation; three, cultural preservation and promotion; and number four, good governance. These were actually based on priority policy areas that the Bhutanese Government had already been focusing on since the beginning of planned development in the country in the early 1960s.

Now, in order to operationalise the GNH concept and to move it from the level of academic discourse and sometimes policy rhetoric, the Bhutanese Government, last year, towards the end of 2005, formalised the decision to develop the indicators for GNH which are basically to assist in situations to be better assessed and for policy makers to be better informed in taking appropriate measures for actual implementation of GNH policy and programs.

So since the beginning of this year we at the centre have been working on the development of indicators for GNH across nine broad areas which is an expansion to the original four pillars, and at this stage I would like to inform you that this is still very much a work in progress so changes in detail could change over time, but the overall framework for the GNH index that I will present now is more or less formal.

The main domains of the GNH index, what do they look

at? Number one, we have psychological wellbeing. Basically this will be the outcome of all the other elements put together. Here we want to look at the sense of wellbeing, people's personal happiness and enjoyment, their sense of satisfaction in major life domains, such as the quality of their life, health, work, family, financial security.

The next domain, we have health. Here we are trained to look at a healthy lifestyle, spiritual and emotional health, healthy stress levels, people's perception of the Health Services, quality of health. The next one is time use and balance. We are trying to see how people are leading their lives, making use of time. The work stress, reasonable time stresses, enjoyment of activities and opportunities for productive and satisfying activities.

The fourth domain is community vitality where we are looking at social support, social cohesion, interpersonal trust, strong supportive families, family relationships, crimes and safety.

The fifth domain is cultural diversity and resilience where we look at the cultural identity, basic Bhutanese culture and values, people's knowledge of Bhutanese culture, traditions, customs, the practice of these and also the support for cultural trends and changes that are taking place.

Under the education domain, besides conventional indicators that are already in place we are also looking at people's knowledge of traditional skills, practice of traditional skills, their satisfaction with the education, the quality of education; basically a very ingenious approach to education, and under good governments we have trust in government, trust in the police and judiciary, respect for rights and freedom, satisfaction in government performance, media and also opportunities for people to participate and to be informed.

In the area of environment, we are looking to see if people have positive ecological values which are quite often tied up with cultural values. The satisfaction with the physical environment, the lifestyle, satisfaction with development trends and things like air and water quality also.

Living standards. This is the economic part. Again, there are conventional indicators in place, so besides these we are really looking at financial security equally balanced with needs, people's indebtedness and for the larger section of the Bhutanese population we are looking into more details into agricultural resources and the effect of wildlife because this is a major source of livelihood for the majority of the

Bhutanese population.

So basically what I have presented, what we have today, is the GNH survey based indicator framework which incorporates the GNH status indicators that I just talked about. These are designed to be measures of the specific dimensions which make up the GNH model for Bhutan. Then we have demographic indicators to allow for an analysis of the distribution of GNH dimensions across different social and demographic groups, and we also have the causal indicators to allow for an analysis of the causal factors which may affect the performance of the GNH status indicators.

So, in this framework, indicators are also subjective as well as objective. There are also positive indicators as well as negative indicators.

So last month we actually began with the survey pre-test in Bhutan in rural, urban and semi-urban areas and already it has proven to be very challenging because currently we have over 420 questions in the survey which took a full day to complete with even just one person in a face-to-face interview. But still, the idea right now is to be as comprehensive as possible, to see if the items are applicable and relevant through this pre-test and then gradually settle down to the most important and workable indicators.

So, in conclusion, the intention behind all of this work is that with such a set of indicators we hope the GNH will be integrated as a decision-making tool across all sectors and that measures of wellbeing will be instituted at all levels. We hope that systems will be put in place to ensure that policies and legislations are reviewed from the perspective of the GNH outcome and that, as difficult as it is, values will be established for non-marketable assets such as biodiversity, amenity and aesthetic qualities and ultimately, the GNH indicator should be incorporated into our national accounts. Thank you very much.