

## Ban: new economic paradigm needed, including social and environmental progress



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (right) and General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser at high-level meeting on happiness. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today highlighted the need for an economic paradigm that incorporates social and environmental progress in efforts to achieve sustainable development.

“Gross National Product (GDP) has long been the yardstick by which economies and politicians have been measured. Yet it fails to take into account the social and environmental costs of so-

called progress,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in his [remarks](#) at a high-level meeting at UN Headquarters in New York.

Convened by the Government of Bhutan, the meeting – “Happiness and Well-being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm” – brought together hundreds of representatives from governments, religious organizations, academia and civil society to discuss the issue.

In the early 1970s, the Himalayan kingdom introduced a new measurement of national prosperity, focussing on people’s well-being rather than economic productivity. In recent years, there has been growing interest in this concept – known as “gross national happiness” (GNH) – with the General Assembly adopting a resolution in 2011, which noted, inter alia, that the gross domestic product (GDP) indicator “does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people in a country.”

“We need a new economic paradigm that recognizes the parity between the three pillars of sustainable development. Social, economic and environmental well-being are indivisible. Together they define gross global happiness,” the Secretary-General told the meeting’s participants.

Mr. Ban praised the Bhutanese Government for initiating the meeting, and noted that other countries have also started to explore various ways to measure prosperity that go beyond material wealth, such as Costa Rica, which strongly supports environmentally responsible development, and the United Kingdom, where statistical authorities are experimenting with measuring ‘national well-being.’

The Secretary-General stressed that sustainable development is intricately linked to happiness and well-being, and underlined that the UN Sustainable Development Conference, also known as Rio+20, in Brazil in June, will need to provide an outcome that reflects this.

The President of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, [echoed](#) Mr. Ban’s remarks. He emphasized that “today’s unprecedented ecological, economic and social challenges have made the achievement of happiness and well-being an unachievable goal for many,” adding that a new economic paradigm that takes into account not only economic growth but environmental protection and social development is needed.

“It is imperative that we build a new, creative guiding vision for sustainability and our future,” Mr. Al-Nasser said. “One that will bring a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach that will promote sustainability, eradicate poverty and enhance well-being and happiness.”

In a recent interview with the UN News Centre, Bhutan’s Prime Minister, Jigme Thinley, said that GNH is a development paradigm that has guided Bhutan’s development for several decades and that he hoped Monday’s meeting would result in recommendations which governments can act on.

“I hope that by 2015 the international community will have adopted a sustainability-based economic paradigm, committed to promoting true human well-being and happiness, and ensuring at the same time, the survival of all species with which we share this planet,” he said.

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