

# GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS, LIMITS TO GROWTH, AND CHALLENGES FOR BHUTAN'S DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Jeremy Brooks, PhD  
Environmental and Social Sustainability Lab  
School of Environment and Natural Resources  
The Ohio State University



**THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**

---

# Starting points...

- Impressions from Bhutan
- 40 year update of Meadows et al.'s *Limits to Growth*



A photograph of a yellow sticky note with a handwritten list comparing 'NEEDS' and 'WANTS'. The note is divided into two columns by a vertical red line. The left column is titled 'NEEDS' and the right column is titled 'WANTS'. Both columns are numbered 1 through 10. The items listed are:

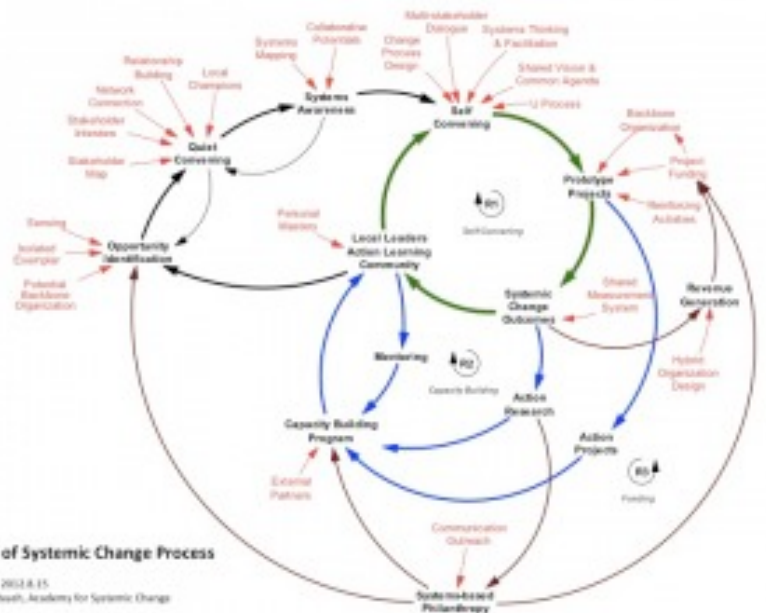
NEEDS	WANTS
1 Food	Watches.
2 Water	Car.
3 Shoes.	Library book.
4 Utensils.	Television.
5 Book and pen.	Water boiler.
6 Light.	Washing machine.
7 Oxygen.	Electric rice cooker.
8 Fire.	Expensive pen.
9 Shelter	gold.
10 Clothing.	New school class.

# 30 year update to *Limits to Growth*

## 1. How can we respond?

- Deny, disguise and confuse signals
- Markets, technology, and efficiency

- ***Change the system; structural, systemic change***



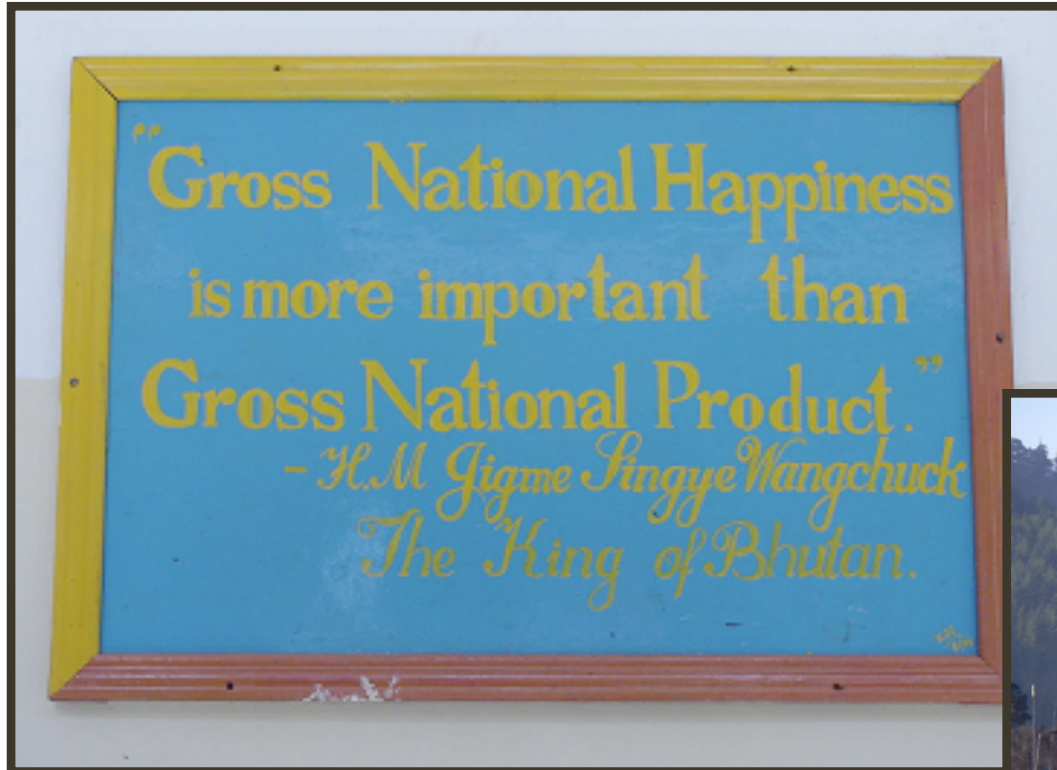
# 30 year update to *Limits to Growth*



## 2. How do you change the system?

- i. need a vision of the kind of society we want
  
- ii. Change the information and signals that guide decision-making
  
- iii. Change social structures that impact desires, behaviors, and lifestyles

# 1. A new vision from Bhutan



# 1. A new vision from Bhutan



## Gross National Happiness as a development goal

“...maximize the happiness of all Bhutanese and to enable them to achieve their full and innate potential as human beings.”(p. 12).

“...achieve a balance between the spiritual and material aspects of life...give preference to happiness and peace, even at the expense of economic growth, which we have regarded not as an end in itself, but as a means to achieve improvements in the well-being and welfare of the people.”(p. 19).

# 2. Change the information/signals

## Gross National Happiness Index



Figure 1: The nine domains and 33 indicators of the GNH



Ura, Alkire and Zangmo 2012



# 3. Change social structures



Creation of environmental citizens in Bhutan?



# 3. Change social structures



## Social norms for sustainability

Confluence of:

- Govt. goal of creating unique Buddhist identity
- Buddhist foundation of cultural traditions and national policies
- Govt. goal of linking Buddhism with conservation
- Unifying development principle of GNH

# Challenges for Bhutan



- Common identity = ethnic tension
- Competitive consumption/ impact of consumerism
- How to distinguish between consumption in service of well-being and *over*-consumption at multiple scales.
- Democracy: greater public voice=less interest in *sustainable* development and GNH?

# Conclusion



- Bhutan has a new vision and a new metric
- Social norms are emerging and evolving
- Bhutan is experiencing the challenges of the *process* of developing a sustainable society
- More importantly, other countries are discussing new visions and adopting new metrics and measures
- The spread of their vision is already a critical contribution from the Bhutanese