

## **THE GOOD SOCIETY FRAMEWORK – UNDERSTANDING QUALITY OF LIFE**

**Professor Patrick W. Jordan**

This paper presents a framework, the Good Society Framework (GSF), for assessing quality of life and explains how it was developed. It is conceived as a comprehensive model of wellbeing incorporating all of the major factors included in the various indices and grouping them into nine dimensions.

- **Relationships** – the quality of people’s social, family and interpersonal relationships; the extent to which society is coherent and harmonious.
- **Economy** – people’s degree of economic prosperity and spending power; the extent to which jobs are rewarding and offer potential for growth and development.
- **Environment and Infrastructure** – the pleasantness and sustainability of the natural environment; the degree to which the built environment is pleasant and functions well and extent to which the infrastructure is effective and efficient.
- **Health** – whether people have access to good healthcare and healthy food; whether work, home and public environments are generally safe.
- **Peace and Security** – whether crime is low and people feel safe in their homes and public areas; whether or not society is affected by war or terrorism.
- **Culture and Leisure** – whether there is a rich and rewarding culture, both ‘high’ and ‘popular’; whether there are opportunities to participate in rewarding leisure activities.
- **Spirituality, Religion and Philosophy** – whether there is access to religious and spiritual teachings and the opportunity to practice one’s religion of choice; whether there is access to philosophical teachings and ideas about how to live.
- **Education** – whether there is education that enables people to function effectively in society; whether the education is intellectually enriching.
- **Governance** – whether there is democracy, fairness and freedom of expression; whether justice is transparent and consistent, and whether society is governed with compassion and equality.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

So far, a wide variety of indices for measuring QoL have been proposed and, although there is some overlap in their dimensions, there is little consensus as to which is the most appropriate.

The indices differ both in terms of the dimensions that they use and in the weightings that they give to each dimension.

The Good Society Framework (GSF) was compiled through amalgamating the dimensions used in the other indices and merging them into a manageable number of dimensions (nine).

The GSF is not an *index* of quality of life as there is no attempt to score nations on its dimensions, nor are the dimensions weighted or ranked in order of importance.

Rather the GSF can be seen as a framework, model or checklist outlining the characteristics that a great society should have in order to enable its citizens to have an optimum QoL.

## 2. QUALITY OF LIFE INDICES

The GSF was developed using information and indices from a number of sources including:

- Quality of Life Index
- Gross National Happiness
- Human Development Index
- Genuine Progress Indicator
- World Values Survey
- Life Quality Index
- Satisfaction with Life Index
- Happy Planet Index

Each is described below

### **2.1 Quality of Life Index**

The Quality of Life Index was created by the Economist magazine's intelligence unit. It ranks countries according to quality of life based on the following dimensions: health, family life, community life, material wellbeing, political stability, climate, job security, political freedom, gender equality.

### **2.2 Gross National Happiness**

This index was originally started by the government of Bhutan, but has been developed into an international collaborative project involving many academic and research institutions. It ranks countries based on how they perform on the following dimensions: economy, environment, physical health, mental health, work, society and politics.

### **2.3 Human Development Index**

This index was created by the United Nations Development Program. It ranks countries based on a combination of life expectancy, education and wealth.

#### **2.4 Genuine Progress Indicator**

The Genuine Progress Indicator was developed by the Methodist Church in collaboration with the University of Maryland. It ranks countries based on a combination of economic conditions and environmental sustainability.

#### **2.5 World Values Survey**

This survey was founded by the University of Tilburg in The Netherlands and is now run as a collaborative project involving social scientists from all over the world. It ranks countries according to happiness based on people's subjective ratings of how happy they are.

#### **2.6 Life Quality Index**

This index also results from an international collaborative academic project having originally been created at the University of Waterloo in Canada. It ranks countries based on: wealth, life expectancy and leisure time.

#### **2.7 Satisfaction with Life Index**

Another collaborative international project, this was founded by the University of Leicester. It ranks countries based on people's subjective ratings of how satisfied they are with their lives.

#### **2.8 Happy Planet Index**

The Happy Planet Index was created by the New Economics Foundation. It ranks countries based on: people's subjective ratings of happiness, life expectancy, and ecological footprint.

The GSF was created from a content analysis and cross referencing of these indices, followed by a grouping of the content in to a manageable number of dimensions.

### **3. DIMENSIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE**

This section gives more detail of each of the dimensions of the GSF.

#### **3.1 Relationships**

*This category is about the relationships between the people within society.*

Good societies are those that have strong communities where people know their neighbours and are friendly and supportive. They are well integrated, for example people of different races live in harmony with each other and interact fully.

They are also societies in which personal relationships can flourish. This includes people finding love and staying together, parenting children effectively and in a loving environment. It also includes having good and meaningful friendships.

##### *Key Issues*

- Communities
- Marriages
- Racial integration
- Parenting
- Romance
- Friendship

### **3.2 Economy**

*This category is about the benefits that the economy brings to the people.*

Good societies are economically prosperous. They enable their citizens to enjoy a good standard of living which covers the essentials and also gives plenty of disposable income. Both essentials and luxuries are plentiful.

The jobs in good societies are highly rewarding, both financially and in terms of the fulfilment that they provide to those that do them. They also provide plentiful opportunities for personal and career development.

#### *Key Issues*

- Wealth
- Essentials
- Luxuries
- Jobs
- Personal Development

### **3.3 Environment and Infrastructure**

*This category is about the physical conditions in which people live.*

Good societies have a pleasant and sustainable natural environment, free of pollution. They also have an attractive and functional built environment that is pleasant to live and work in.

They have an effective infrastructure with good transport and communication links and cheap and plentiful energy that is available to all.

#### *Key Issues*

- Natural environment
- Sustainability
- Built environment
- Transport
- Energy
- Communications

### **3.4 Health**

*This category is about how well a society supports the good health of its citizens.*

In good societies healthy food and drink is plentiful and affordable for all. There is effective healthcare and the conditions in which good health can thrive. People are safe in their homes and in public, and have safe working conditions.

People have a long life expectancy and good physical and mental health.

#### *Key Issues*

- Physical health
- Mental health

- Safety from attack
- Preventing accidents
- Health and safety
- Longevity

### **3.5 Peace and Security**

*This category is about whether a society creates a peaceful, secure environment for people.*

In good societies, crime is low and people and their possessions are safe. People feel comfortable in their homes and in public areas.

Good societies have civil harmony and are at peace with other nations, their citizens are not at risk from domestic or foreign conflict or from terrorism, nor do they visit war or terrorism on other nations.

#### *Key Issues*

- Crime
- Antisocial behaviour
- Terrorism
- Civil war
- War

### **3.6 Culture and Leisure**

*This category is about opportunities for rewarding activities outside of work.*

Good societies have a rich culture with people having access to excellent arts, literature, music, movies and plays, TV shows, sporting events and other forms of both 'high' and popular culture.

People have a wide variety of leisure opportunities that are affordable to participate in. They also have plenty of time to pursue them.

#### *Key Issues*

- High culture
- Popular culture
- Entertainment
- Sports
- Leisure

### **3.7 Spirituality, Religion and Philosophy**

*This category is about having access to teachings which look at the meaning and purpose of life.*

In good societies people have access to a wide variety of religious and spiritual teachings and the opportunity to practice the religion or belief of their choice.

They also have access to philosophical teachings and different views about how to live. They have the opportunity to put these philosophies into practice.

#### *Key Issues*

- Spirituality
- Philosophy
- Religion

### **3.8 Education**

*This category is about the quality of education a society provides for people.*

In good societies people have access to an excellent education. This education enables them to function and thrive within society. It also enriches them intellectually and is fulfilling and rewarding in and of itself.

This education empowers the individual, giving them choices about how they live their lives and the ability to make informed judgements and participate fully in society.

#### *Key Issues*

- Education
- Intellectual development
- Personal empowerment
- Judgement

### **3.9 Governance**

*This category is about the way society is governed.*

Good societies are democratic with full political and civil liberties. They enable their citizens to have freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of movement and action.

They are compassionate and grant equal rights and responsibilities to all regardless of race, religion, sexuality and age (except minors). They have a fair, consistent, transparent and proportionate justice system. They also act with fairness and peaceful intent towards other nations.

#### *Key Issues*

- Political freedom
- Civil liberties
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom
- Justice
- Compassion
- Equality

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Although the GSF is not itself a metric of quality of life – as it does not offer a ranking or weighting of the importance of the dimensions, nor a set of formulas by which a society's wellbeing can be measured on each – it could be used as a starting point for such an analysis.

Whatever the measure that is ultimately used to assess quality of life, it is important that it includes all the elements that contribute significantly to the wellbeing of a society's citizens.

#### **5. FURTHER READING**

For more detail of the indices that were used in compiling the GSF take a look at the Wikipedia entries for each index. See also the following references.

##### Quality of Life Index

Economist Intelligence Unit 2005, The Economist Intelligence Unit's Quality of Life Index, The World in 2005

##### Human Development Index

United Nations Development Program 2009, Human Development Report 2009

##### Genuine Progress Indicator

Cobb C., Goodman, G.S., Wackernagel M. 1999, Why Bigger Isn't Better: The Genuine Progress Indicator – 1999 Update

##### World Values Survey

Inglehart R, Foa R, Peterson C, Welzel C 2008 Development, Freedom, and Rising Happiness: A Global Perspective (1981–2007), Perspectives on Psychological Science

##### Life Quality Index

Nathwani J.S., Lind N.C. and Pandey M.D. 1997, Affordable Safety By Choice: The Life Quality Method, Institute for risk Research, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

##### Satisfaction with Life Index

White, A., 2007, A Global Projection of Subjective Well-being: A Challenge To Positive Psychology?, Psychtalk 56, 17-20

##### Happy Planet Index

New Economics Foundation 2009, The (Un)Happy Planet Index 2.0: Why Good Lives Don't Have to Cost the Earth