

Closing panel discussion
Towards Global Transformation: Making Change Happen

At the 3rd International Conference on Gross National Happiness, World Views Make a Difference: Towards Global Transformation, 28th of November 2007 at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand.

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Venerable religious leaders, respected Deputy Prime Minister, honoured guests, friends and colleagues. After a tour of six days of listening to talks about GNH from various groups, young people, faith leaders, workers, teachers, and so on it is very obvious that we, the adults, have failed in giving the opportunity to the young people to include them, to listen to them carefully. We tend to assume that we know better and we know more. This later afternoon we heard what the young people had to say, they articulated very well what they need, what was needed for the society to move towards social change and more sustainable development with happiness as the ultimate goal.

I would like to go straight into how can we learn from those lessons and look forward for something that is tangible. I think overall we have to see that we need to take the young people back, away from the backburner, and put them to the front. We have to see the world and life, and in our daily operations that whatever we do we do it for the next generations. Whatever field you are in, whatever occupation, we do it for the next generations. If we are going to operationalise the Gross National Happiness we do it for the next generations and surely we need to include them.

This strategy that we need to work out carefully is in two areas. The first is the development model itself. We all know we have lead ourselves into this vicious cycle of greed and need. We need to get out of this cycle, this model of development. The second thing is to see what underpins this development model and we need to try to learn from that.

I sense that, based on what I have heard, the root cause of all of this is the quality of education that we have. It is so incomplete and so isolated and in many places it is so backward in its way of delivering the messages. Never mind the incomplete messages. The delivery methodology is so uninteresting to the young people that we have to set up laws to send the kids to school. So I think these two, development model and education are the two key strategies. We need to include the young people in these two areas.

Lets look at education. Education is both formal and informal. The real education is really experiential learning. Young people, if you just teach them, without giving them the opportunity to learn, they would not learn. We have been teaching them more than giving opportunity to learn. To operationalise and to make change happen towards GNH, I think we need to look at how we can link GNH and happy and joyful learning, that is holistic and experiential leaning. For example I would like to see young people do to their own survey on the factors affecting happiness, analyse the results themselves, look for the causes and identify what are the next steps. In other

words we can use this approach to satisfy the academic needs also. Young people can go out to the number of families and examine whatever factors of happiness we have identified.

Just a brief demonstration I have asked young people to come up with mind maps with what makes them happy. In very short time they came up with very interesting ideas. For example, young people from ages 6-10, primary school level, they cannot distinguish physical happiness from mental happiness. So their friendship, being with family, nature and friends makes them happy. Nature is the most important factor. But as they grow up to lower secondary, upper secondary and university they can distinguish emotional from physical happiness. Yet they consistently rank the emotional happiness as the higher priority over physical happiness. And yet we adults think that the young people always want to buy brand name, looking for the most expensive thing. I think here again we do not observe well enough, we don't give them enough opportunities to speak up and therefore we don't really know them. By having this simple survey I was astonished by what they came up with. The emotional happiness which they see as the highest factor, they ranked family warmth, being with family member, they ranked this as the highest contentment. Yet we parents think that the kids do not want to talk to us, they have their own world. In fact they feel alienated; that is why they don't talk to us.

I think if we allow young people to have their own forum, beyond GNH3, I think they would be performing quite well. To make it concrete I would like to propose to talk to the authorities in Nong Khai, which has Youth Assemblies elected from the community level up, by the young people themselves. The problem is that these youth assemblies do not have any activities. So there is a potential there to use this structure and to fit this GNH approach in.

I would like to have my young Lao colleagues who have attended the GNH 3 to work together with the Nong Khai GNH group so that we have cross border grouping of young people. We should allow them to have the forum, we adults should facilitate, and we should feed information that we have gathered from GNH so that we can guide them rather than resource them, and encourage their work. We need to talk about how to raise awareness, commitment, networking, advocacy, new initiatives, global standards and values. We can pose all of this before them. We can see how better they can do in this learning from doing. Leadership would definitely come out of this. If these people go through this process, a real life learning process, I think we will have the next generation of adults who would be better prepared to take up Gross National Happiness as the ultimate goal of development.

Yet it does not end. The model of development and education is also affected by the private sector, the enterprises that are very dominating and are basically controlling the political process. Yet while they have the mandate to maximise their profits, the individuals in the corporate world are human beings just like you and I. I think if we can incorporate these young or otherwise people in the corporate world and nurture their goodness out then I think both the corporate world and young people can learn from each other.

Religious leaders need to also change. Monks who stay in the temple and tend to engage in ceremonies only don't engage in the society. Monk's chanting is not very

interesting to the young people. But at the same time the young monks are very active and they want to do something. So I think linking these dynamic monks with young people is important so that the young people can learn about cultural and spiritual aspects though actually doing the work.

If we can start in one small area like the Nong Khai-Vientiane area this can serve as the model in the region and extend to the Mekong region and even link to the GPI Youth network. I think we have to take young people to the forefront; we should just guide them and use their energy and enthusiasm. We should not forget the media as young people are very keen in making their own media instead of being the victim of the media. They can be entertained by songs but they can also use media to care very high level content.

Thank you