

FOR
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NAMIBIA
PROJECT

Citizen wellbeing:

Towards more appropriate measures
of Namibia's success and progress

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In recent years, it has been widely recognised that our global development path is not taking us in the right direction. Vast numbers of people live in poverty, and those in developed nations are increasingly becoming disconnected from each other (with rising health problems, such as cancer, depression, obesity, allergies, anxiety, etc).

We are living in a very unequal society, with 1% of the world's population having more wealth than the rest of the world combined, and just 62 individuals owning the same wealth as 2.6 billion people.

We live under the illusion that economic growth since the turn of the century has helped the global poor, but in fact only 1% of the growth in wealth since 2000 has gone to the poorest of society, with more than half of that increase in wealth having gone to only 1% of the world's population.

Development policies need to shift to better account for real welfare and not merely GDP growth. Namibia is now implementing its fourth National Development Plan with primary goals including high and sustained economic growth, employment creation and increased income equality.

Namibia's real GDP growth was projected at 5% for 2015, and it ranks 126 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index.

Remembering that economic development without social upliftment of all Namibians is meaningless, wellbeing indicators that are specific to Namibians should ideally become the new yardstick on which we measure success and policy formulation in Namibia.

The aim of this (initial) study was to find entry points into the more holistic measure of a developing country like Namibia's success, which includes a range of indicators to measure welfare.

In 2012, an experimental survey was conducted with a sample of Windhoek residents to take the first steps toward this aim.

Approach to the study

A small group was formed in 2012 to develop and implement the study, consisting of young volunteers who share a passion for their country and its citizen wellbeing (called the committee). Based on reviews and discussions among the committee, the survey was adapted from previous country studies on similar work, with modifications according to the Namibian context (templates such as the one in Bhutan and the Happiness Alliance).

The chosen suburbs to survey were done along an income line, namely Ludwigsdorf, Windhoek West, and in Katutura: Shandumbala, Okuryangava, Hakahana. Approximately 600 people were surveyed in total. Surveys were conducted between August and October 2012.

Nine domains and 30 indicators were chosen for the study, and a questionnaire was developed to gauge the sufficiency (above sufficiency meant satisfactory, below sufficiency meant unsatisfactory) of each individual. All suburbs were collectively analysed as well as separately.

The domains included (1) state of mind, (2) health, (3) education, recreation and culture, (4) community strength, (5) good governance and political freedom, (6) area and environment, (7) time balance, (8) material wellbeing, (9) work.

Results

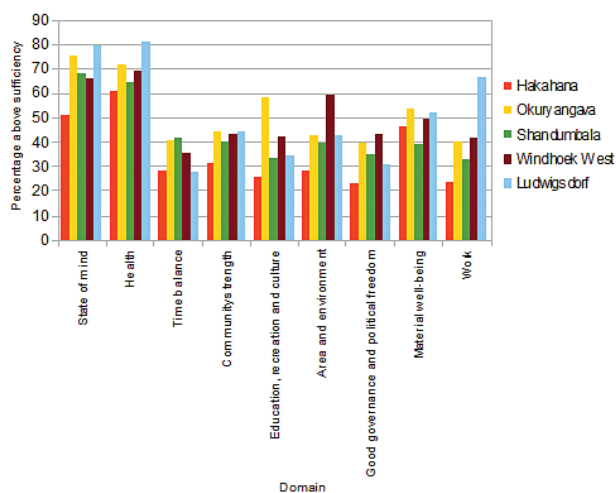
The overall sufficiency of all suburbs was 46%, with sufficiency reached in only 12 indicators and two domains, namely health (67%) and state of mind (66%). In Okuryangava, sufficiency was also reached in education, recreation and culture (58%) and material wellbeing (53%).

In Windhoek West, area and environment was achieved (59%), and in Ludwigsdorf, material wellbeing (51%) and work satisfaction (68%) were above sufficiency.

Hakahana achieved sufficiency in the least indicators and had the lowest sufficiency. Okuryangava had the highest sufficiency (52%).

Generally, wellbeing seemed to correlate along the income line, with the exception of Okuryangava. It would be expected that in a developing country with a high income gap, increasing income has an impact on increasing wellbeing. However, the exception of Okuryangava having the highest state of wellbeing is surprising, giving it was rated amongst the poorest communities.

Discussions with residents of the community and within the committee yielded suggestions, that perhaps residents may be satisfied in comparison to pre-independence, illustrating signs of humility and perhaps lower expectations.



Generally, respondents felt that they did not have enough free time (in terms of work/life balance) and work satisfaction (e.g. appropriate pay, productivity, level of freedom for creativity) was generally low in all suburbs except Ludwigsdorf.

Community strength and a sense of belonging to a community was found to be important, and this was found to be lowest in the high income suburb, and highest in Katutura in general. Sense of security and safety was lowest in Hakahana, possibly linked to high unemployment and a lack of trust by the community.

Education, recreation and culture was rated low in all suburbs. People felt generally, they did not have access to proper education, informal education facilities or recreational facilities. Access to basic services reached sufficiency in only two suburbs (Ludwigsdorf and Okuryangava). In suburbs of Katutura, people felt that the natural environment was badly maintained.

Community citizen projects could improve the natural environment (e.g. through community park creations, access to recycling services, etc).

Unsurprisingly, access to employment was below sufficient. Good governance and political freedom was perhaps the most challenging domain. Financial freedom and buying power was low in all suburbs except Ludwigsdorf.

Conclusions

This study was purely an entry point into investigating more holistic measures for the success and prosperity of Namibia. It hopes to spark a debate on the future indicators of wellbeing and success in Namibia. The next step is to take the results back to a community (in this case Shandumbala was selected) and discuss how one could improve the status of the community. In addition, fine-tuning the domains, indicators and survey questions based on feedback from this survey, and furthering it into other parts of Namibia, would give a good baseline of the current state of wellbeing of Namibian citizens.

This study was funded through volunteer work and a small stipend (NAD 7,000) received through the Balaton Group from the Dutch Lottery Post Code Fund.

The project was conducted purely on a volunteer basis. This information brief was summarised from a paper that has recently been published in the Journal of Social Change. For access to the entire study, or for more information on ongoing work, please contact Dr Justine Braby, justine@progress-namibia.com.