

# Gross National Happiness: Limitation and Constraints

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## ABSTRACT

Bhutan is, no doubt, facing many challenges for example growing population and all-time developing pressure on natural resources; problems in balancing the increasing demands for socio-economic development infrastructures with environmental concerns in a new democracy; climate change and threats of climate has given rise to disasters such as floods, droughts, diseases and their implications on food security, energy and water supply and biodiversity; and increasing food and fuel prices. Gross National Happiness is problematic for several issues and acts; but it is the heart of the sustainable development movement in Bhutan.

**Keywords:** Climate Change and Natural Disaster, Urbanization, Youth Unemployment

## INTRODUCTION

Gross National Happiness is a holistic approach. However it is facing major challenges in various dimensions. These challenges mainly relate to conceptual underpinnings, socioeconomic attainments, environmental dislocations and local and global acceptance. This calls for a joint responsibility by the government, private sector, civil society and the development partners.

### Climate Change and Natural Disaster:

Bhutan is facing the brutal sights of climate change. The glaciers are receding leading to flash floods. In Bhutan one can no longer find the thick snows on mountains which the country used to have around ten years ago. Bhutan has seen three damaging flash floods so far in 1994, 2004 and 2009 that devastated lot of natural resources. Species are also getting lost day by day. Sub tropical diseases that were earlier unknown to Bhutan's people, are starting to emerge in the temperate climate of Bhutan. Mosquitoes have become a great problem in Thimpu, a place which never had mosquitoes earlier. Agriculture is also facing similar hard time. The size and

quantum of the land holdings is getting reduced because of erosion and degradation. Monsoon is becoming very unpredictable. Bhutan had always seen four clear seasons. Now, just seasons are all diluted and staggered. There are occurrences of cyclones and mini-cyclones that were unheard of earlier. Though the country is far away from the sea. This is attributed to climate change, in which Bhutan has made no contribution ever (IPCC, 2013).

The difficult penalty includes a cut in agricultural production, land fragmentation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and continuous occurrences of natural disasters and steady cultural erosion. Bhutan is one of the few nations in the world with carbon sinks larger than greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, mostly due to its low degree of urbanization and dense forest cover. The difficult penalty includes a cut in agricultural production, land fragmentation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and continuous occurrences of natural disasters and steady cultural erosion. The phenology of plants has changed in a number of ways, and new plant and domestic animal disease outbreaks have increased. The Sephu and Chokhorgeogs are also seeing an increase in mosquitoes (GNHC, 2008).

The amount of rainfall has increased over the past 10 to 20 years. Furthermore, additional hailstorm incidences have been observed, which has resulted in agricultural destruction. There has also been a change in the snowfall pattern. Traditionally, snowfall began in January or February, but now it begins in November. There are several modifications in frost systems and snowfall occurs more frequently than in the past, roughly seven times a year instead of three. Frost mainly occurred from December until the starting of March whereas it now occurs from October to April with many gaps in between. Incidents of frost are at times more harsh. This has damaged vegetables. For instance, on the morning of March 3, 2011, in Bumthang, a heavy layer of frost covered most of the paddy rice seedlings that had just begun to emerge in nearby nurseries. According to reports, this frost's timing and severity were highly rare. Additionally, the issue of diseases and pests seems to be becoming worse. Pests include fruit flies, trunk borers in rice and wheat, and ants in potatoes were reported to be common (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2011).

Cut worms eat through the stem of cabbage and chilli seedlings above ground, and feed on to potato and turnip below ground. Certain crops are also afflicted by fungal infections that infest vegetables and even paddy, as well as diseases like citrus greening. Farmers have been using more pesticides as a result of the rise in pest prevalence, which is bad for ecosystems. In addition, there is concern that conventional lowland ecological illnesses and pests may eventually spread to hillside and mountainous regions. Bhutan National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) 2004 is a crucial first step towards initiating a national response strategy that deals with the possible effects of climate change in Bhutan.

"Bhutan's National Human Development Report 2011" was grounded on the theme "Sustaining progress: Rising to the climate challenge". The 2011 NHDR is jointly produced by Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat and UNDP and is a result of the detailed consultations with several national institutions, civil society organizations and development partner agencies of Bhutan. The ecosystems of the Himalayan mountains are especially susceptible to the effects of climate change. Bhutan took the initiative to convene a sub-regional climate conference with the title "Climate Summit for a Living Himalayas - Bhutan 2011" in recognition of this fact. UNDP supported the Summit's

planning and offered technical assistance for the background paper on energy security. Fostering south-south cooperation among the Himalayan watershed countries—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal—was the main goal of the summit.

The regional conference acknowledged that while the global negotiations are ongoing, localized action is necessary to address regional climate change concerns effectively and promptly. During the Bhutan Climate Summit, which was chaired by the southern region, a regional framework of cooperation on watersheds in the eastern Himalayas was successfully developed. This framework aims to increase resilience to the negative effects of climate change. Four key areas for cooperation were identified in the Framework: water security, food security, energy security, and biodiversity conservation.

### **Urbanization:**

The two largest towns in Bhutan, Thimphu and Phuentsholing, are home to over 40% of the country's urban population. It is in these cities that environmental issues including water scarcity, air and water pollution, municipal waste production, traffic jams, and land degradation are most prominent. In general, urban areas encroach on forested hill slopes and devour valuable agricultural land in the valleys. The ecosystem suffers from a combination of negative effects caused by inadequate drainage, sanitation, and waste disposal systems and infrastructure. For instance, Thimphu produces roughly 40 tonnes of garbage every day at the moment (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2011).

Bhutan started this initiative for the further consolidation of Bhutan National Urbanization Strategy (BNUS) and Thimphu City Development Strategy (TCDS). State of the Environment (SOE) for Thimphu was also included in this afterwards. This is also referred to as a component of the RGoB's efforts to attract donors in the urban sector and to offer a structure for the investment initiatives. The Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Urban Infrastructure Development project and the World Bank's Second Urban Development Project are among the other initiatives.

### **Poverty:**

In Bhutan, poverty is still mostly a rural problem. There are significant differences in living quality among the Dzongkhags. The data reveals that, with regard to demographics and educational achievement, impoverished

households typically have more children and are larger.

and to have heads who work mostly in the agriculture sector and lack formal education. There is a sense that public investments in basic social services, particularly in education, have been successful in rural areas because the estimated literacy rates and inequality metrics in this study seem to be improving from the 2007 levels. The bulk of the population (66%) still lives in rural areas, which is still where poverty is most prevalent, according to this research and earlier evaluations of poverty (National Statistics Bureau, 2007).

According to the Tenth Five Plan (2008–2013), in order to effectively support poverty reduction, more focused interventions for the poor are required. Annual grants for local government under this plan are determined using a formula that takes into account the size of each local administrative region, the population, and the poverty rate. Since fiscal year 2010, the yearly grant allocation at the gewog level has been based on the poverty rate at the gewog level, which was estimated by the NSB with technical assistance from the World Bank.

According to the Poverty Analysis Report of 2004, the majority of Bhutan's impoverished people live in rural areas, especially those in isolated areas that rely heavily on agriculture for subsistence and have few options for income-generating activities outside of agriculture. Large household sizes, geographical isolation or remoteness, reliance on subsistence farming, sensitivity to natural disasters, restricted or tiny land holdings or physical assets, inferior human capital, and susceptibility to food shortages are the key causes.

The entire poverty level, however, was set at Nu. 1,704.84 per person per month in the Bhutan Poverty Analysis 2012 report. Adding the food poverty limit of Nu. 1,154.74 to the non-food allowance of Nu. 550.10 yields the overall poverty line. An estimated 12 per cent of people live in poverty. Therefore, poverty has decreased by roughly half from the 2007 estimate of 23.2%. Rural poverty is much higher (16.7%) than urban poverty (1.8%). Merely 3% of the population is considered subsistence poor, meaning that their per capita consumption is less than the cost of food for a subsistence diet. It has been noted that Dagana, Samtse, Lhuentse, Pema Gatshel, and Zhemgang have significant rates of poverty.

Therefore, it will be necessary to continue, even increase, and speed up efforts in rural and regional development. Increasing rural farmers' access to credit,

helping them sell their produce at town vegetable markets, and educating farmers as entrepreneurs to change their Farmers should be able to better enjoy the results of their labor thanks to rural products. Since it raises the recipients' level of living, livestock development is a great strategy to alleviate poverty in the most impoverished rural areas.

Families benefit from improved nutrition and a revenue stream from the sale of excess dairy products. Another choice is to open up markets so that people in rural areas can sell their items at competitive prices. Plans for Bhutan must be tailored after examining the achievements and shortcomings of other nations' efforts to reduce poverty. It is intended that this report will assist all parties involved in development in comprehending the living situations of the impoverished and in hearing their frequently ignored opinions, which will result in well-informed debate and policy action. The cost of numerous food items grew significantly between 2007 and 2012. This essentially indicates that the poverty line should actually be greater than Nu 1,704 per month, which implies that the poverty rate is higher than 12%. As a result, the price increases of certain food goods between 2007 and 2012 were significantly larger than those determined by the NSB (National Statistics Bureau, 2007).

Although Bhutan has made strides in alleviating poverty, these have been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of Bhutanese living below the national poverty line was 12.4% in 2022. The percentage of Bhutanese individuals classified as moderately multidimensionally poor in 2022 was 17.8%. 8.2% of people in cities and 23.9% of people in rural areas were categorized as moderately multidimensionally poor in 2022. 20.7% of children under the age of 18 were categorized as moderately multi-dimensionally poor in 2022 (5<sup>th</sup> The National Health Survey, 2023).

### **Tobacco trafficking : a big concern:**

“Buddhism is the cornerstone of our development, shaping institutions, arts, drama, architecture, literature, and the social structure including day-to-day lifestyles. Although tobacco is not specifically mentioned in ancient Buddhist texts and the religion is not proscriptive in nature, it has played a pivotal role in maintaining very low smoking rates in the country. The significant influence of religion on the values on the Bhutanese people is also probably responsible for

discouraging tobacco farming and manufacture. Cannabis, despite being grown with abundance, is rarely used for human consumption.”(Ugen, S. “Bhutan: the world’s most advanced tobacco control nation? Significant achievements in the area of to”, Tobacco Control, Dec 2003 Issue)

Bhutan put its signature on the WHO Framework Convention (WHO FCTC) on Tobacco Control on 9 December 2003. The Tobacco Control legislation of the country was developed and was started with its implementation by the Parliament of Bhutan on 6th June 2010.

Bhutan has an executive order that forbids smoking in public areas. Two notifications were sent on November 8, 2004, and February 18, 2005, to that effect. These notifications established smoke-free zones, and violations of the notifications are now punishable by law. They went into effect on March 1, 2005. The Royal Bhutan Police have been given the authority to oversee and enforce the establishment of smoke-free zones. Since 1995, tobacco product advertising has been prohibited on all national media outlets.

The government said that tobacco products would no longer be sold starting in December 2004. Bhutan typically does not make tobacco products, and they are prohibited from being imported for retail sale (Parliament of Bhutan, 2021). Each and every tobacco product that is imported into the nation for individual use must bear the relevant health warnings and the country of origin. The result of the survey done found that the ban was maintained with a strong resolution, the implementation of the ban remained weak.

A large increase in tobacco imports has resulted from the choice of the former governments to repeal the prohibition on the Tobacco product import and sales in July 2021, during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, by amending the Tobacco Control Act. In an attempt to reduce the risks of Covid-19 transmission and stop smuggling, the amendment has unintentionally caused a sharp increase in tobacco use nationwide.

Figures are self-explanatory. Bhutan bought 531 million cigarettes between 2020 and June 2024, of which 511 million came from India and 19 million from other nations. The value of imports skyrocketed to Nu 1.524 billion, with 2022 seeing the largest import of Nu 1.4 billion. According to Bhutan Trade Statistics, tobacco goods even made the top 10 imported commodities list for that year. Nu 337 million was spent on tobacco imports in the first

half of 2024 alone. With a total value of Nu 14 million, the second quarter of 2024 (April, May, and June) had the largest import of cigarettes from nations other than India. Compared to the overall imports during the preceding three years, the importation of cigarettes from non-Indian sources increased by an astounding 237.75 per cent.

The Tobacco Control (Amendment) Act 2021’s section three forbids smoking in establishments, public areas, recreational facilities, commercial centers, and public transit. The nation’s tobacco product availability has grown to be a serious public health issue. Additionally, there are more and more cases of underage and public smoking.

The Tobacco Control (Amendment) Act 2021’s section three forbids smoking in establishments, public areas, recreational facilities, commercial centers, and public transit. According to Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency Tobacco Smoking is a significant risk factor for several illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and several cancers (The National Health Survey, 2023).

Emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are all exacerbated by smoking and tobacco usage. These illnesses impair lung function, lower quality of life, and increase the risk of dying young.

Additionally, tobacco smoking is a major contributor to a number of diseases, most notably lung cancer, which has a high death rate. It also raises the chance of oesophageal, throat, and mouth cancers, among other malignancies. One of the most powerful behavioral risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is tobacco use. Among Bhutanese aged 15 to 69, 29.8% now use tobacco, with 14.2% smoking and 19.8% using smokeless tobacco products. 52.53 per cent of people between the ages of 15 and 69 reported being exposed to secondhand smoke at work, compared to 17.65 per cent who reported being exposed at home. (The National Health Survey, 2023)

Dr. Bhupinder Kaur Aulakh, the World Health Organization’s (WHO) representative to Bhutan, voiced concerns about youths’ easy access to tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and cigarettes. Adolescents and young people are the targets of this sector since the newer tobacco products appear safe to the naked sight. We must raise awareness since parents and educators may

not be aware that their kids are using these goods. The primary age at which children begin using tobacco is 19, according to the statement that tobacco has no safety limit. Research indicates that early initiation of smoking leads to early addiction that persists throughout adulthood. Tobacco use is a significant risk factor for NCDs, which account for 70% of Bhutan's death burden. 400 persons die from tobacco use each year. It costs Nu 1.2 billion annually and accounts for 10% of all deaths (The National Health Survey, 2023). Emphasized the substantial financial burden that tobacco-related diseases place on the healthcare system and demonstrated that prevention is more effective than treatment. Since Bhutan's young people will be the change agents of the future, we must ensure that this type of advocacy is conducted in schools and that they are made aware of the negative impacts of tobacco use. Together with government organizations, the WHO is creating a Multi-Sectoral Action Plan to reduce tobacco use through advocacy and prevention.

### **Youth Unemployment:**

In Bhutan, youth unemployment has grown to be a significant problem. In Bhutan, young people make up over half of the population and are regarded as a key labor force. They aren't given the right opportunity to use their brains and energy, though. As the most active group of people, they have the potential to contribute positively or negatively to society. If they are not properly managed and continue to be unemployed, the nation is likely to face severe social and economic issues. The reasons behind youth unemployment are numerous. These include a sharp increase in school enrollment and a fast population growth. As a result, a significant number of young people are now looking for their first jobs. The younger generation typically takes longer to get employment and frequently lacks the necessary training or expertise. The mismatch in skills is another factor contributing to this unemployment. The majority of job searchers seek for white-collar jobs in the public or private sectors (Ministry of Health and Education, 2007).

Since the idea of a "blue collar" profession has historically been associated with uneducated farmers, qualified individuals in the nation perceive it as too demeaning to perform. The nation's public sectors likewise have a limited capacity for absorption. Due to the fringe benefits of civil service, such as security, dignity, training, and career chances, the majority of educated youth favor it. Only fewer job chances have been

developed in the market as a result of the private sector's poor expansion. Working in the private sector makes young people uneasy as well because it doesn't offer long-term employment stability. This is the reason why labor is imported from India. Bhutan's young unemployment crisis has a catastrophic effect on the nation's social and cultural advancements. This has a negative effect on the nation's GNH power as well. It has an impact on the nation's social cohesion, which leads to burglaries and other crimes (UNDDP, 2007).

Unemployment in Bhutan has deeply affected its young population. The age groups of 15–19 and 20–24 have the highest unemployment rates. There is a high need for workers who are competent and skilled, as well as those with education relevant to the nation's market, as youth unemployment has been steadily rising. On the other hand, many early school dropouts who enter the workforce are considered unemployed because they lack the necessary job-related skills and functional literacy. Unemployment among the young adults is also a growing concern as there are not adequate jobs for the growing young population of Bhutan (Bhutan National Human Development Report, 2005),

### **Conclusion:**

Bhutan still has several problems to sort out; not only internal issues, but also beyond the borders which is seen at the surface. The chunk of its southern and eastern Bhutanese population, who were banished during the pro-democratic movement in the beginning of 1990s are still banned from coming in the country. Bhutan has to recognise and address its ethnic conflict and fights that exist today, before it is too late for them. There is an exigent necessity for reconciliation with the democratic forces in exile and make the democracy entirely participatory in nature to be successful. The chances are consolatory to move beyond instrumentalism to actual systemic change. Incrementalism is a cautious style of decision making where differences and changes are applied gradually or in small steps.

GNH advocates for a multifaceted approach to development that necessitates preserving equilibrium and harmony among economic forces, environmental protection, cultural and spiritual values, and good governance. The dissemination and recognition of happiness as the

Bhutan's Buddhist traditions provide strong foundations for the development goal. These young people

of Bhutan are probably eager to engage in risky chances including the use of drugs, alcohol and other narcotics. They also seem to be at greater risk of mental health issues and involvement because of their violent behaviour. And if this all happens, Bhutan government would be solely responsible for the self-destructive engagements of Bhutanese young for all these would be because of the lack of employment in Bhutan especially for the youth. Bhutan is a unique country in many respects especially for its tobacco control movement.

Climate change is the result of human being way of life that is driven by insatiable human greed. The present factors of climate change in this country are mainly too much weather events, but effects from incremental changes are supposed to be lucid in upcoming decades. The main driver of climate change's effects is public opinion, which is typically determined by factors like poverty, governance, capacity, awareness and remoteness, natural resource management, and other occurrences that make it difficult to achieve national development goals. Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF) are a problem because of the current climate-related consequences on the glaciers.

The country's development and way of life are predicted to be significantly impacted by the impending climate change. The hydropower, agricultural, infrastructure (including highways and urban services), and health sectors are expected to be the main areas affected by climate change.

Bhutan remains optimistic about its ability to overcome these challenges since it sees a lot of opportunities. Considering its small population, it has a high per capita availability of natural resources. As evidenced by the Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy, which is predicated on striking a balance between socioeconomic development and environmental protection, the preservation and advancement of cultural and social values, and good governance institutions and principles, Bhutan has adopted a measured and appropriate approach to development.

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