

Incorporating Gross National Happiness into TVET

A Practical Manual for TVET Trainers

Bhutan Education & Skills Training (BEST)

December 2023



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The following people collaborated in the writing of this manual (alphabetical by Institute):

Kent Schroeder, Humber College

Prakash Sarki, TTI-Samthang

Sonam Tshering, NIZC-Trashiyangtse

Sancha Bdr Subba, TTI-Thimphu

Sonam Dorji, TTI-Chumey

Karma Chogyel, TTTRC-Gelephu

Yebi Dema, TTI-Khuruthang

Tshering Gyeltshen, TTTRC-Gelephu

Nima Dorji, TTI-Khuruthang

Keshab Khandal, TTTRC-Gelephu

Rushna Rai, TTI-Khuruthang

Tandin Norbu, TTTRC-Gelephu

Choki Thinley, TTI-Khuruthang

Tshering Tenzin, TTTRC-Gelephu

Rinchen Dorji, TTI-Rangjung

Sonam Wangdue, TTTRC-Gelephu

Yeshe Wangdi, TTI-Rangjung



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
The Importance & Influence of Gross National Happiness	1
What is Gross National Happiness?	3
<i>Origins of GNH</i>	4
<i>The nature of “happiness” in GNH</i>	5
<i>Defining GNH</i>	7
<i>The GNH pillars & domains</i>	8
<i>GNH values</i>	10
The Current State of Gross National Happiness	12
Gross National Happiness and Education	14
<i>The Education domain of GNH</i>	14
<i>The Educating for GNH Initiative</i>	14
<i>The Royal Kasho on Education Reform</i>	16
Incorporating GNH into TVET Training	17
<i>TVET reform in Bhutan</i>	17
<i>What is a GNH TVET system?</i>	19
<i>Strategies for incorporating GNH into TVET training</i>	22
<i>Personal/Institutional GNH Action Plan</i>	26

INTRODUCTION

Gross National Happiness (GNH) has been Bhutan’s national development strategy for decades. Yet what GNH is and how it can be incorporated into our work is not always clear. Nor does everyone agree on how to incorporate it. Is GNH a philosophy or a practical set of tools? Is it both? Who is responsible for promoting GNH? The government, institutions, or individuals? All of these? Gaining clarity on questions like these is important. It will help us understand how GNH can be best incorporated into our work in the TVET system.

This manual provides an overview of GNH and how it can be incorporated into the TVET system. It focuses specifically on infusing GNH into the work of TVET trainers. It is not meant to be the “final word” on GNH and TVET. Rather, it is meant to stimulate thinking and discussion on GNH and TVET, and to outline some suggested ways that we can practically incorporate GNH into our work as TVET trainers. It is a particularly good time to think about how we can integrate GNH and TVET given the current TVET reform process. By being intentional in our thinking about GNH and TVET reform, we can begin to think about what, ultimately, a “GNH TVET system” looks like and aspire to achieving it.

This manual was written through a process of co-creation. Master trainers from each of the public TVET institutions in Bhutan came together in October 2023 for a collaborative workshop on GNH and TVET. The workshop was part of the Bhutan Education and Skills Training project (BEST). BEST is a five-year project that supports the process of TVET reform. It is led by Humber College of Toronto, Canada, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education & Skills Development and RENEW. In the BEST workshop, master trainers were presented material on GNH and then, based on their own experiences, discussed, assessed, and critically applied the material to the TVET system. The result is this manual, co-authored by all the participants in the workshop. The manual should be considered a “living document” whose content may need to evolve and change as more experience is gained in incorporating GNH into the TVET system in the years to come.

THE IMPORTANCE & INFLUENCE OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

Why focus on GNH at all in the TVET system? Consider the following:

Domestic importance and influence of GNH:

- Gross National Happiness is embedded in the Constitution. [Article 9\(2\)](#) of the Constitution states “The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.”
- Public policy in Bhutan is designed using a [GNH policy screening tool](#). The tool ensures that all policy reflects the nine domains of GNH.
- Bhutan’s [Five-Year Plans \(FYPs\)](#) guide all development activities – from the smallest gewog to the central government – towards the achievement of GNH.

The information in the orange box above illustrates that GNH is central to the development of Bhutan. It is part of the Constitution, the ultimate law of the country, and influences the design and implementation of all development policy and plans. The type of development that occurs in Bhutan is a direct result of Bhutan's focus on Gross National Happiness. Just as importantly, using GNH as a guide for Bhutan's development has resulted in significant development achievements. For example:

- Tertiary education students grew from 3,820 in 2007 to 11,259 in 2017.¹
- The primary school dropout rate decreased from 4% in 2007 to 2.3% in 2018.²
- Bhutan's reduction of poverty was the steepest among all countries with a poverty rate of 50-60% as of 1990.³
- Bhutan was the first carbon negative country.⁴
- Over 70% of the country is forested with a constitutional mandate of 60% for all time.⁵
- Births attended by a health professional increased from 53.6% in 2007 to 96.4% in 2017.⁶
- 98% of the population had access to safe drinking water in 2017 compared to 82% in 2007.⁷
- Real GDP growth averaged 7.8% from the 1990s through to the 2010s.⁸
- Among all Asian countries in 2022, Bhutan ranked as the 4th least corrupt country behind only Singapore, Hong Kong and Japan.⁹

When compared to the rest of the world, Bhutan is a tiny country of around 800,000 people. Yet the success it has had with GNH has allowed Bhutan to have outsized influence internationally. Gross National Happiness represents an alternative development model that moves beyond a primary focus on economic growth. The world has taken notice. Consider the following:

International influence of GNH:

- International [GNH conferences](#) have been held by the Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies in multiple countries and have attracted scholars from around the world.
- The [GNH Index](#) was created through a collaboration between the Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, an initiative located at Oxford University in the United Kingdom.
- On July 19, 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a [Bhutanese sponsored resolution](#) that defined the pursuit of happiness as “a fundamental human goal” that is the embodiment of the Millennium Development Goals.

¹ [Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP. \(2019\). Bhutan Human Development Report: Ten Years of Democracy in Bhutan.](#)

² [Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP. \(2019\). Bhutan Human Development Report: Ten Years of Democracy in Bhutan.](#)

³ [National Statistics Bureau and the World Bank. \(2014\). Bhutan Poverty Assessment 2014. National Statistics Bureau and the World Bank, Royal Government of Bhutan.](#)

⁴ [Shanawez Hossain and Ahmad Tousif Jami. \(2023\). Opportunities and Challenges in Sustainable Development and Governance in South Asia: Case Study of Bhutan. In H.-H. Wu et al. \(eds.\), Moving Toward Net-Zero Carbon Society, Springer Climate.](#)

⁵ [NSB. \(2023\). Statistical Yearbook of Bhutan 2023.](#)

⁶ [Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP. \(2019\). Bhutan Human Development Report: Ten Years of Democracy in Bhutan.](#)

⁷ [Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP. \(2019\). Bhutan Human Development Report: Ten Years of Democracy in Bhutan.](#)

⁸ [GNH Commission/UNDP \(2011\). Bhutan National Human Development Report 2011. Thimphu: GNH Commission.](#)

⁹ [Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2022.](#)

This international influence is quite striking. Bhutan, a small country tucked into the Himalayas, has influenced the global dialogue and practice on development.

It needs to be emphasised that GNH is not a perfect strategy that solves all development problems. Bhutan continues to face very challenging development issues. Some examples include the following:

- Youth unemployment is a growing issue.¹⁰
- Rural/urban migration, and out-migration to Australia, create rural and national capacity drain and other challenges.¹¹
- Notable gender inequality remains.¹²
- The potential for glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) created by climate change are a significant threat.¹³
- Democracy has contributed to political divisions that affect community vitality.¹⁴

These challenges are made more urgent in the post-covid pandemic era as the economy continues to struggle from the pandemic's effects. But overall, GNH remains a unique development model created in Bhutan that has demonstrated significant success, and this success has had influence outside of Bhutan's borders.

The importance and influence of GNH both within Bhutan and internationally point to a key issue: we need to take GNH seriously given its potential. This includes taking it seriously in the TVET reform process. TVET is about equipping young Bhutanese with the technical knowledge and skills needed for a 21st century economy. It is about ensuring youth have the skills to be employed in meaningful jobs and that these jobs contribute to sustainable economic growth. But incorporating GNH principles and practices into the TVET system can mean more than this. It can mean a TVET system that contributes not just the economic wellbeing of individuals and the country, but to social, cultural, ecological and psychological wellbeing as well. How can this be done? Let's first turn to gaining a clear understanding of the concept and practice of GNH itself.

WHAT IS GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS?

The concept of Gross National Happiness articulates an understanding of development that moves beyond a sole focus on economic growth and incorporates multiple and interrelated social, political, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions. It is an attempt to construct development and pursue development policies in a holistic manner that addresses the multiple dimensions of being human. GNH has been Bhutan's national development strategy for several decades.

¹⁰ [UNDP Bhutan \(2022\). Addressing the youth unemployment challenge in Bhutan through a systemic portfolio approach.](#)

¹¹ [Gyem Dorji. \(2022\). Increasing Rural-urban Migration: Policy Briefs on Rural Depopulation and Urbanization in Bhutan. Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 29\(1\).](#)

¹² [Global Gender Gap Report 2023 | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](#)

¹³ [Global Lake Outburst Flood | Department of Disaster Management \(ddm.gov.bt\)](#)

¹⁴ [Parliament of Bhutan and UNDP. \(2019\). Bhutan Human Development Report: Ten Years of Democracy in Bhutan.](#)

Origins of GNH

Gross National Happiness may be Bhutan's national development strategy, but dating its original emergence is not entirely clear. A common sentiment is that it emerged in 1972 when His Majesty the Fourth King ascended the throne. Yet a review of multiple documents demonstrates different views on when it emerged.

Different views on the date of the origin of GNH:

- “Gross National Happiness, as the guiding philosophy of Bhutan’s development process, was pronounced by His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, soon after his enthronement **in 1972.**”
- [Jigme Y. Thinley, What is Gross National Happiness?](#)
- “The actual phrase ‘gross national happiness,’ a pun on gross national product, was first used **in 1979** when the King was interviewed by Indian journalists in Mumbai on his way back from the Non-Aligned Movement’s Havana Summit.”
- [Bhutan National Human Development Report 2019, p. 31](#)
- “Gross National Happiness is the overall guiding development philosophy of Bhutan. The concept was first expounded by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo when His Majesty enunciated the visionary statement that ‘Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product,’ in an interview with the Financial Times of London **in 1986.**”
- [Twelfth Five Year Plan 2018-2023, Volume 1, p. 10](#)
- “**The year 1996** is the point where the tradition of GNH as Bhutan’s long-standing national development policy was invented.”
- [Lauchlan Munroe, Where did Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness come from? The origins of an invented tradition, Asian Affairs, p. 72.](#)

Bhutan’s *Gross National Happiness Report* of 2015 provides an explanation that helps bridge these different dates. According to the *Report*:

“In those days [1970s], he [His Majesty the 4th King] had not coined the exact word GNH – or the precise Dzongkha equivalent *Gyalyong Gaki Pelzom*. He just spoke about happiness and contentment, using the Dzongkha phrase *gatogtog* and *kitogtog*. These words occur resoundingly in all official documents and speeches of His Majesty. However, by 1979, he was speaking about GNH in this particular phrase not only to Bhutanese but also to journalists....

At home, during the Fourth King's reign, the implementation of GNH through government programs depended on people who were working almost subliminally, or unconsciously. There was neither doctrinal position to follow nor managerial formats like goals, strategies and indicators of GNH to be adhered. These were to come later. For a long time GNH was not institutionalised in any procedures, so it depended on people who had intuitively internalised it...." ([CBS, 2016, p. 32 & 34](#)).

The debate over when GNH officially emerged in Bhutan is interesting, but confirming an exact date is not critical. What is critical is that the notion of happiness is at the centre of the GNH development process. Regardless of when GNH emerged, the idea that happiness should guide development and how the government functions goes back centuries in Bhutan as it is at the core of the country's Legal Code of 1729.

"If the government cannot create happiness (dekidk) for its people, there is no purpose for the government to exist."

- 1729 Legal Code

Happiness as the core of development has therefore existed for centuries in Bhutan. But what exactly is the nature of 'happiness' in this context?

The nature of "happiness" in GNH

One of the challenges of GNH gaining international recognition is that the nature of happiness that is central to GNH is sometimes misunderstood, especially among those outside of Bhutan. This misunderstanding arises from the different ways happiness is understood in Bhutan versus the 'west'.

In the west, happiness is understood as the immediate achievement of feelings of pleasure, satisfaction or joy; one experiences pleasure in eating a good meal, satisfaction in achieving a good grade, or joy at meeting a friend. Happiness in this sense can be fleeting and temporary.

In Bhutan and some other Asian countries, happiness has a further meaning that is distinct. Happiness is understood as a balance between the material and non-material dimensions of life. It is a balance of material and mental, emotion and spiritual components. Furthermore, individual and collective happiness are intricately linked. Both require the other.

Happiness in GNH

The achievement of the “full and innate potential” of being human.”

- GNH Commission, 2009

Happiness is the interaction and harmonization between “inner skills of happiness” and “outer circumstances.”

- GNH Commission/UNDP, 2011

“But happiness is proactive. It requires your active understanding that it cannot exist without being shared.”

- Jigme Y. Thinley, 2010

Several commentators have stated that this notion of happiness is rooted in Buddhism. In the document *Bhutan 2020*, the erstwhile Planning Commission states this clearly:

“Our approach to development has been shaped by the beliefs and values of the faith we have held for more than 1,000 years. Firmly rooted in our rich tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, the approach stresses not material rewards, but individual development, sanctity of life, compassion for others, respect for nature, social harmony, and the importance of compromise.”

Bhutan’s form of Buddhism recognises a form of consciousness called *sukha* that helps us understand the nature of happiness in Buddhism. *Sukha* represents a more “skillful” form of consciousness that moves beyond the need for superficial pleasure fulfillment through external and material stimulation. It incorporates a more stable and foundational form of happiness that emphasises balanced emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of fulfillment, regardless of changes in material conditions. It does not rely on external and material sources for happiness. While adequate material necessities are important for avoiding dissatisfaction, human fulfillment requires further cultivation of spiritual, mental and emotional components. Genuine and stable happiness therefore comes from breaking the bonds of attachment to the material sources of fleeting pleasure and moving to the deeper, more stable happiness of *sukha* with its foundation in interrelated external and internal sources of happiness. It is moving from dependence on material sources of pleasure to the harmonization of the spiritual and material. It is towards this kind of happiness that GNH is directed.¹⁵

¹⁵ Kent Schroeder. (2018). *Politics of Gross National Happiness: Governance and Development in Bhutan*. New York: Springer.

Defining GNH

With happiness defined as a state of being involving a balance between the external world and the inner person, pursuing development through [Gross National Happiness has been defined as](#) the following:

GNH is “a multidimensional development approach that seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between material wellbeing and the spiritual, emotional and cultural needs of an individual and society.”

This definition of GNH as a development model is very different than the development models that have dominated across much of the world. For the most part, development has historically been defined and practiced as pursuing economic growth. Gross National Happiness moves beyond this. Economic growth is not abandoned in GNH, but it is balanced by multiple other dimensions (“multidimensional”) that incorporate spiritual, emotional, cultural and ecological concerns. Balance is the key. Given this, GNH has often been referred to as “the middle path”. Please see the video below for an address by former Prime Minister Jigme Y. Thinley at Humber College in Toronto discussing GNH in detail.



Video

Keynote address by Jigme Y. Thinley at *Beyond GDP: Development Alternatives to Growth* conference at Humber College, Toronto.

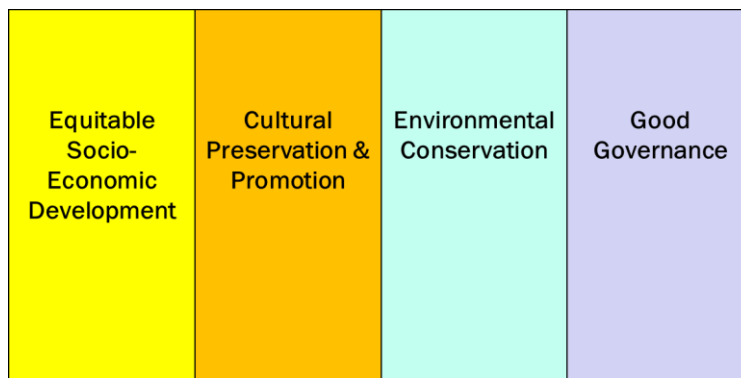


Click here to access the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGvLFq1vxkY>

The GNH pillars and domains

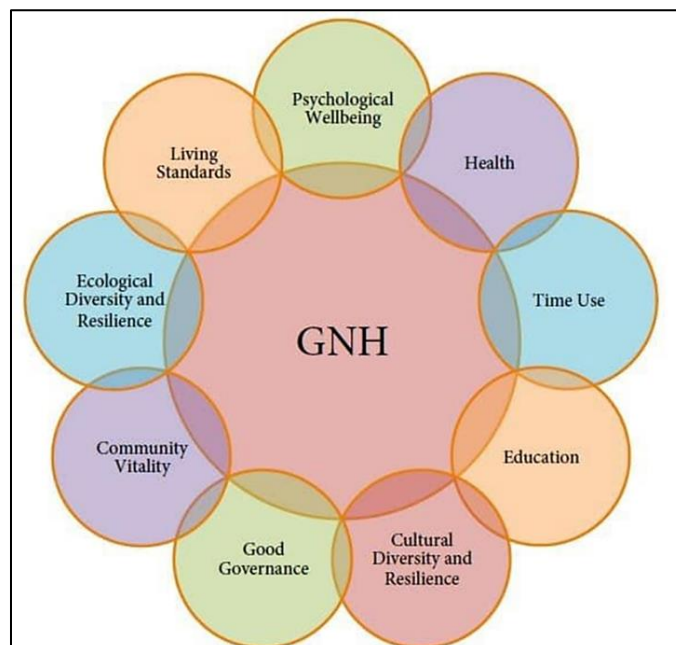
We've seen that GNH is a multidimensional development model based on happiness, which is understood as the pursuit of balance between the material and non-material dimensions of life. This is a development philosophy. But how is this development philosophy actually operationalised? A GNH development framework was initially constructed as four pillars intended to work together to maximise happiness. The four GNH pillars constitute the material and non-material dimensions of happiness that are important in the Bhutanese context: equitable social and economic development, cultural preservation and promotion, environmental conservation, and good governance.

The four pillars of GNH



The GNH pillars were further developed into nine domains that expand upon the four pillars. The domains further operationalise GNH into an applied model that moves beyond its philosophical origins.

The nine domains of GNH



It is important to note that the nine domains of GNH are interrelated. As depicted in the figure above, GNH involves an overlapping of the domains. Each domain should not be seen as standing on its own; rather, each one is connected to the others and works together with the others. For example, a decent living standard cannot be pursued without understanding its connections to ecological diversity, psychological wellbeing, and balanced time use.

Another way to understand the nine domains as being interrelated is through thinking about [GNH as a tree](#). The overall tree represents GNH while its many branches are the individual domains of GNH. Each branch may be an individual branch, but they all connect to one another through the trunk in order to live and grow as a whole tree.

The GNH domains are the framework that guides the pursuit of happiness. What is often less clear is exactly how the domains do so. Popular perceptions of GNH often assume a direct link between the implementation of the nine domains and the creation of happiness. The reality is actually more subtle.

The GNH framework does not directly create happiness; rather it creates the enabling conditions for the creation of happiness. Conditions like accessible health care and education, a pristine environment, a protected culture, a good job, effective governance, balanced time use, etc., create the conditions that allow people to be happy.

“Happiness still remains an individual responsibility, but the State makes sure that the necessary conditions are there for people to pursue the path they choose.”

- Karma Tshiteem, 2009

Several GNH policy tools were developed using the nine domains to ensure policies and programs are directed towards creating the enabling conditions for happiness. A *GNH Policy Screening Tool* is used in the policy design process. It ensures that all policies at the design stage are assessed for their potential impacts on the GNH domains. Bhutan’s *Five-Year Plans* (FYPs) are now also GNH tools as they explicitly root all development planning at the gewog, dzongkhag and central levels in the GNH domains.

In order to measure whether enabling conditions for happiness are being established in Bhutan, the *GNH Index* was created. The Index incorporates the nine domains of GNH and uses 33 indicators to measure the domains. In this way, GNH can be measured nationally. This, in turn, can help the Royal Government of Bhutan evaluate its existing policies and design new ones that seek to continuously pursue GNH.

The 33 indicators of GNH



GNH values

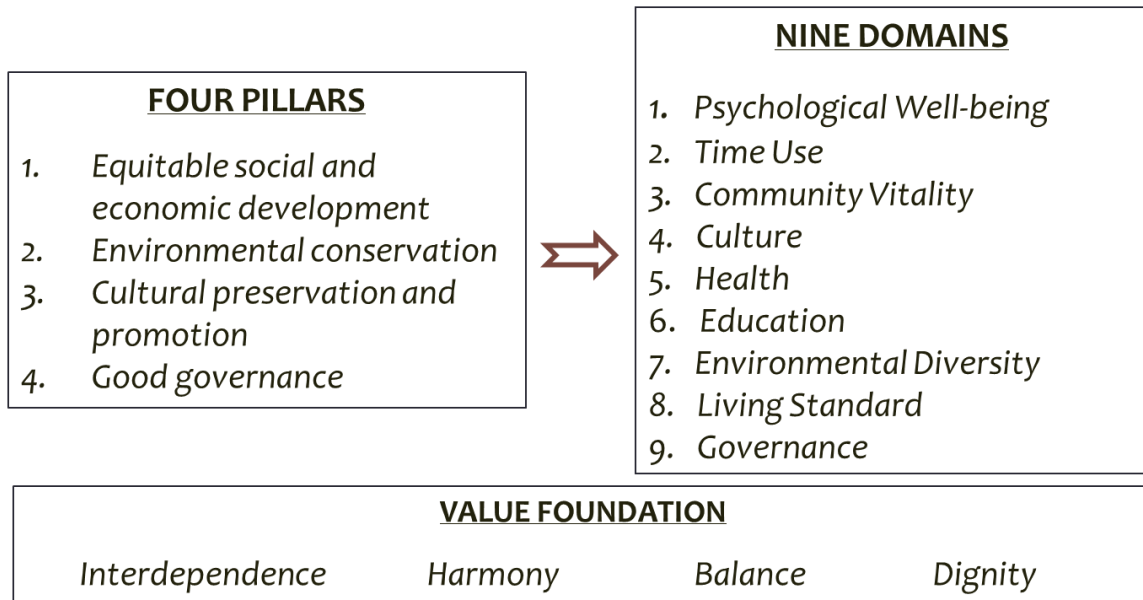
“To me, GNH is simply development with values.”

- His Majesty the Fifth King


The GNH pillars and domains usually get the most attention as they operationalise the GNH model. But it is important to recognise that the pillars and domains are rooted in Bhutanese cultural values. These values include things like *interdependence* among all sentient beings, *harmony* within society and with nature, *balance* between the inner and outer worlds, and *dignity* of all people.¹⁶

As the figure on the next page illustrates, these cultural values are best understood as a foundation upon which the GNH pillars and domains rest.

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the literature on GNH values, see Kent Schroeder. (2018). *Politics of Gross National Happiness: Governance and Development in Bhutan*. New York: Springer.




Watch former Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay in the video below discuss how GNH values have been put into practice through a holistic approach to climate change.



Video

TED Talk by Tshering Tobgay entitled *This country isn't just carbon neutral – It's carbon negative.*



Click here to access the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Lc_dIVrg5M



Further Reading

[GNH Resource Hub at the Bhutan Canada Foundation](#)

[Journal of Bhutan Studies](#)

[The Druk Journal](#)

THE CURRENT STATE OF GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

Every five years or so, a GNH survey is undertaken in Bhutan to determine the current status of happiness in the country. The GNH survey makes use of the GNH Index. The Index measures overall GNH happiness using the 33 indicators of the nine GNH domains. A statistical calculation using the 33 indicators provides a measure of national GNH between 0.0 and 1.0. A score of 0.0 means there are zero happy people in the population. A score of 1.0 means every person in the population is happy.

The results of the GNH survey are published in a GNH Report. So far, there have been three GNH Reports in 2010, 2015 and 2022. Comparing the results across all three of these GNH Reports shows that happiness has gradually increased from 2010 to 2022. The overall GNH Index value was 0.743 in 2010, 0.756 in 2015, and 0.781 in 2022.

“Here in Bhutan, for many decades GNH has provided a developmental pathway to prioritise what is genuinely important in the quest of a satisfying and meaningful life. The GNH framework seeks to place multidimensional wellbeing at the centre of all economic, fiscal, and development decisions, thereby assisting in the creation of conditions that improve people's lives.”

- 2022 GNH Report

Some key results from the 2022 GNH Report can be found on the next page.

KEY RESULTS FROM THE 2022 GNH REPORT

1. Overall GNH Index value for 2022: 0.781

- A score of 0.0 means zero happy people in the population
- A score of 1.0 means every person in the population is happy

2. Extent of happiness

- 9.5% of Bhutanese are 'deeply happy'
- 38.6% are 'extensively happy'
- 45.5% are 'narrowly happy'
- 6.4% are 'unhappy'

3. Happiness among different groups of people ("Happy" defined as "deeply happy" or "extensively happy")

- 50.5% of urban Bhutanese are happy; 46.4% of rural Bhutanese are happy
- 55.3% of males are happy; 43.8% of females are happy
- Only 14% of people with a disability are happy

4. Happiness by occupation ("deeply happy" or "extensively happy")

- 61.1% of monks/nuns are happy
- 59.9% of people looking for work are happy
- 59.4% of people studying are happy
- 54.2% of lay priests are happy
- 51.9% of people working in a sector other than agriculture are happy
- 50.4% of people taking care of family or the household are happy
- 48.3% of people who are pensioners or retired are happy
- 41.6% of people working in agriculture are happy



Further Reading

[The 2022 GNH Report](#)

[The 2015 GNH Report](#)

GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS AND EDUCATION

Education holds a central place in GNH. Indeed, the vision of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development is “An educated and enlightened society of GNH, built and sustained on the unique Bhutanese values of *tha dam-tsig ley gju-drey*.”¹⁷ The Education Policy of 1974 and 1984 included “the essence of GNH in its aims”, with multiple policy documents since then infusing various aspects of GNH values into education.¹⁸

The Education domain of GNH

Education is also one of the nine domains of GNH. The indicators for the education domain, which measure the success in achieving the indicator, include both formal and informal education components as well as an explicit focus on values. The indicators for the Education domain include the following:

- i) Literacy: a person is able to read and write in any one language, English, Dzongkha or Nepali.
- ii) Schooling: a person has achieved six years of schooling.
- iii) Knowledge: a person’s knowledge of local legends and folk stories, local festivals, traditional songs, HIV/AIDS transmission, and the Constitution.
- iv) Values: a person’s values related to five destructive actions: killing, stealing, lying, creating disharmony in relationships, and sexual misconduct.

These four indicators are quite specific. In some cases, literacy and schooling in particular, they have limited relevance to TVET as trainees will likely have achieved these indicators prior to starting a TVET course. The knowledge and values indicators do have some relevance to TVET as being educated in the TVET system can promote the specific areas of knowledge and values in the indicators. Yet, the relevance to TVET is quite broad and not specific to the technical kind of education and training provided in the TVET system. As we have seen, however, the GNH domains are interrelated. Incorporating GNH into TVET therefore is not limited to the indicators in the Education domain. Rather, incorporating GNH into TVET should draw on all the domains of GNH as relevant.

The Educating for GNH initiative

One initiative that has drawn on multiple pillars and domains of GNH beyond just the Education domain is the Educating for GNH (EGNH) initiative in the school system. Formally initiated in 2009 by the then Ministry of Education, the EGNH initiative incorporated several key GNH areas into school education: meditation, infusing GNH values into curriculum, holistic assessment of students, creating broader learning environments, and strengthening critical thinking, particularly around media literacy.

“Education for Gross National Happiness’ is an important way to achieve the education objectives set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

- Kishore Singh, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education

¹⁷ <http://www.education.gov.bt/?p=7024>

¹⁸ [Kaka, Judith Miller and Nadya Rizk. \(2022\). Assessing Educating for Gross National Happiness in Bhutanese Schools: A new direction. Bhutan Journal of Research & Development, Spring 2022, 21-40.](#)

The initiative also focused on promoting Green Schools. EGNH therefore took a holistic approach to infusing GNH into the school system that draws upon multiple domains of GNH.

Since its introduction over a decade ago, notable practical experience has occurred with implementing EGNH in schools across Bhutan. In the video below, one school principal discusses how the implementation of EGNH in his school has contributed to the four pillars of GNH.



Click here to access the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYmkz5e0Xc0>

The EGNH initiative represents a meaningful way to incorporate GNH into the school system. It has faced some challenges in its implementation, though, including teachers lacking confidence in implementing it, a lack of guidelines and supports, and some aspects of the initiative being viewed as impositions that need to be complied with rather than as a meaningful education framework.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid.

Incorporating GNH into the TVET system can learn from the experience of the EGNH initiative and take into account how to respond to the challenges it has faced.



Further Reading

[Kaka, Judith Miller and Nadya Rizk. \(2022\). Assessing Educating for Gross National Happiness in Bhutanese Schools: A new direction. *Bhutan Journal of Research & Development*, Spring 2022, 21-40.](#)

The Royal Kasho on Education Reform

The Royal Kasho on Education Reform was formally handed over to the people of Bhutan by His Majesty the Fifth King in February 2021. The Kasho makes clear that Bhutan needs to “radically rethink” the education system for the 21st century.

As we prepare to educate and equip them with competencies for the twenty-first century, we must equally prioritise their holistic development so that they become caring, dependable, and honest human beings as well as patriotic citizens. We need to embed in them the conviction and sense of pride as a Bhutanese by grounding them in our country’s history, culture, tradition, and value system. In their thoughts, attitudes, and actions, they must live the very ideals and values which define us as a unique nation and people, who have overcome all odds stacked against our survival.

- Royal Kasho on Education Reform

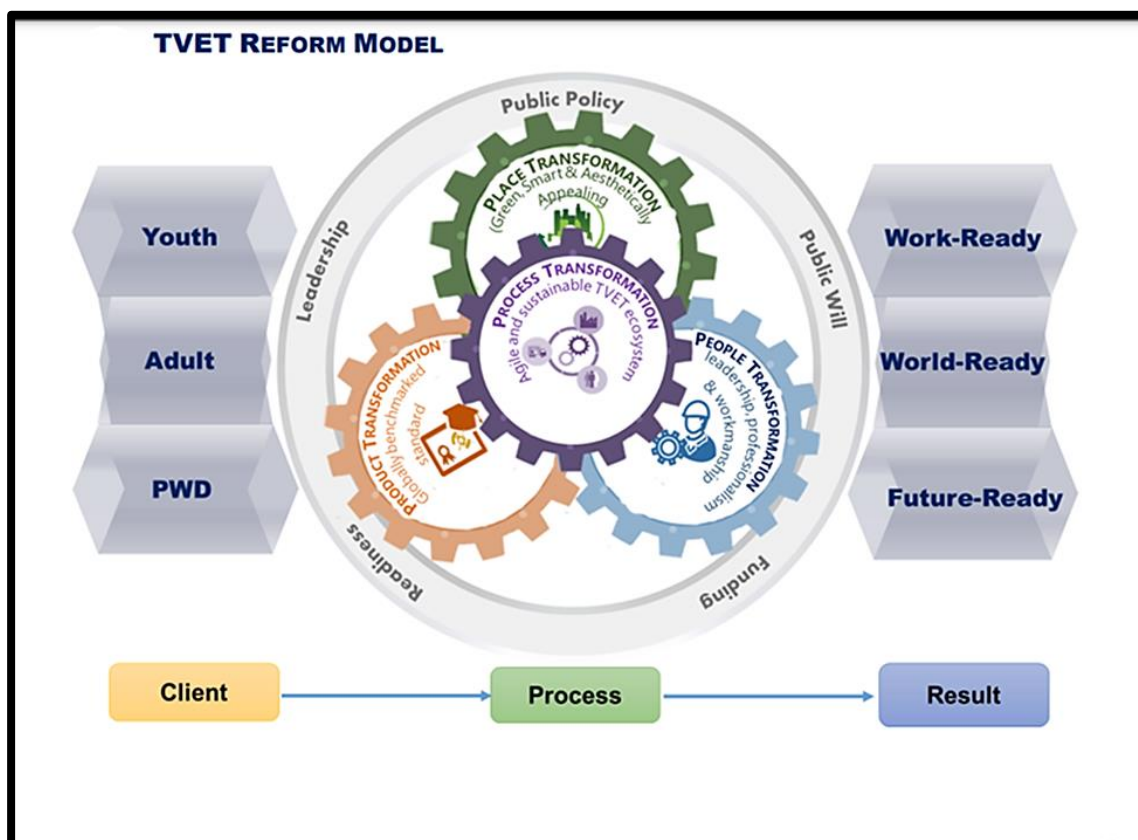
As outlined in the excerpt from the Royal Kasho above, preparing students for the 21st century not only involves building appropriate competencies, but prioritizing *holistic* education. This means education that not only provides trainees with technical skills needed by industry, but also creates selfless and patriotic individuals who understand and live the values, ideals and culture of Bhutan. For TVET, technical skills and knowledge must therefore be characterised by an education experience that contributes to building such individuals and society. In other words, Bhutan’s TVET system needs to be a GNH TVET system.

INCORPORATING GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS INTO TVET

TVET reform in Bhutan

The Education Kasho depicts an education system in Bhutan in which TVET can play a central role. Moreover, Bhutan already places high priority on TVET. The constitution states that vocational training is a principle of state policy. According to Article 9 (12): “The State shall endeavor to ensure the right to work, vocational guidance and training and just and favourable conditions of work.” TVET is therefore central to Bhutan’s development. Yet, the current TVET system is characterised by a mismatch between the skills learned by TVET trainees and the demands of the current Bhutanese economy, decreasing the system’s effectiveness in addressing youth unemployment.²⁰ Bhutan has therefore embarked on an ambitious process of TVET reform. The reform process focuses on reforming the “Four Ps”: Place, Product, People and Process. This represents a comprehensive approach to reform. Reforming ‘place’ will address the need for updated equipment and improved physical access; ‘product’ will revise and update curriculum to meet current industry needs; ‘people’ will build pedagogical and management capacity of TVET stakeholders; and ‘process’ will modernise policies, procedures and systems.

The intended result of this reform process is TVET graduates who are ‘work-ready’ for the current Bhutanese economy, ‘world-ready’ in that they have skills in demand in the global economy, and ‘future-ready’ so that they continue to provide innovation that moves the Bhutanese economy ahead.



²⁰ Norbu Wangchuk. (2021). Preparing the Technical and Vocational Workforce, *The Druk Journal*, vol. 7, issue II.

The process of TVET reform in Bhutan is supported by the Bhutan Education and Skills Training (BEST) project. The BEST project is:

- A five-year project (2022-2027) to support the TVET reform process;
- Funded by the Government of Canada;
- Implemented by the International Development Institute at Humber College of Toronto, Canada, and MoESD with support from RENEW and others;
- Focused on an end-to-end process, contributing to reform from the recruitment of new TVET trainees, through to the training of trainees, through to supporting the transition of TVET graduates to employment.
- Places a specific emphasis on promoting TVET reform that is gender responsive and inclusive of people with disabilities.



The TVET reform process, supported by BEST, offers a meaningful time to think more deeply about how Bhutan's TVET system can incorporate GNH. As discussed in an earlier section of this manual, the importance and influence of GNH both domestically and internationally means we need to take GNH seriously for all development initiatives, including in TVET reform.



Further Reading

[Preparing the Technical and Vocational Workforce by Norbu Wangchuk, *The Druk Journal*, vol. 7, issue II.](#)

[Push, Pull and Falling out: Determinant Factors of Drop-out in Technical Training Institutes in Bhutan by Sonam Wangmo and Sangay Tshewang, *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, vol. 44, Summer 2021.](#)

What is a GNH TVET system?

What does a GNH TVET system look like? In this manual we've seen that GNH is central to Bhutan's development and that the central role of happiness goes back to the Legal Code of 1729. We've also seen that "happiness" in GNH is understood not as immediate pleasure or joy, but as a balance of external needs with internal contentment. Based on this understanding of happiness, GNH itself is a development model that is multidimensional involving 9 domains, and these domains are understood to be interdependent and overlapping. The domains do not simply stand alone; they interact and work with one another. In addition, the domains themselves rest on a set of cultural values that are Bhutanese cultural values.

The 9 domains and the 4 pillars that preceded them, resting on a foundation of Bhutanese cultural values, operationalise GNH into a working model where the pursuit of the 9 domains creates the *enabling conditions* for happiness. Pursuing Gross National Happiness is therefore about creating the enabling conditions for people to choose happiness.

Developing a TVET system characterised by education excellence that leads to meaningful jobs, reduced unemployment and an enhanced economy is one of these enabling conditions for happiness. Indeed, we've seen that education is one of the nine domains of Gross National Happiness, has been incorporated into school education with varying degree of success through the Educating for GNH Initiative, and identified by the Royal Kasho as a key area for reform. The reform of the TVET system provides an opportunity to continue the work of infusing GNH into education in a holistic way. Incorporating GNH into the TVET system will ensure TVET contributes to the broader development aspirations of Bhutan.

Part of moving towards a demand orientated TVET system is to identify skills that are in line with the development plan and aspiration of the country.

- TVET Blueprint 2016-2026

To continue this work, the co-authors of this manual – TVET Master Trainers from all public TVET institutes and a BEST project facilitator – engaged in a collaborative process to define general statements of what a "GNH TVET system" should look like. These definition statements were aspirational in nature, meaning they defined what a GNH TVET system should look like in the future. Using the date of 2027, when the BEST project will be completed, the co-authors broke into four groups to co-create definition statements based on the nature of GNH and the nature of the 4P TVET reform process. The following page provides the four definition statements that were developed by the co-authors.

“By 2027, a GNH TVET system will redefine TVET as a preferred tertiary education and produces graduates who meet international labour market standards emphasizing human values.”

“By 2027, a GNH TVET system will focus on wellbeing, environmental sustainability, women, people with disabilities and the Green TVET concept, all incorporated into Technical and Vocational Programs.”

“By 2027, A GNH TVET system will be the premier choice for youth without discrimination in gender or ability/disability, with completed reform within the 4Ps (People, Product, Place, Process).”

“By 2027, a GNH TVET system will be a pioneering institution in terms of equity, equality, inclusion and sustainability.”

What do these definition statement tell us about what a GNH TVET system looks like? Several key themes emerge across the four statements:

1. Education excellence: the definition statements reference Bhutan’s future GNH TVET system as being “preferred”, “pioneering”, and “premier”, all the while meeting “international labour market standards.” This bridges both GNH and the 4Ps of TVET reform. By promoting excellence in the TVET system that meets international standards, the GNH domain of education is enhanced. In addition, international education excellence will foster *Work-Ready, World-Ready* and *Future-Ready* graduates as is the intention of the 4P reform process.

2. Inclusion: Ensuring that the TVET system effectively includes populations in vulnerable or marginalised situations, like young women and people with disabilities, is a central part of the four definition statements. These are also targeted clients in the 4P TVET reform model. Providing these populations with access to a TVET education and meaningful employment upon graduation contributes to the living standards domain of GNH, with a specific focus on promoting equitable living standards. It also fosters greater community vitality by providing a broader sector of the community with access to education. In terms of the 4P TVET reform process, focusing on inclusivity targets the intended clients of the process.

3. Environmental sustainability: Locating environmental sustainability as a key characteristic of a GNH TVET system is part of several of the definition statements. This is especially critical as the world economy increasingly moves towards renewable energy sources which will require new kinds of knowledge and skills among TVET graduates. GNH has always been at the forefront of

understanding the inherent connections between humans and the environment. Placing environmental sustainability at the centre of a GNH TVET system will allow Bhutan to play a potentially leading role. It will also contribute to creating graduates who are *World-Ready* and *Future-Ready* in the global move to a greener economy, as outlined in the 4P reform model.

4. Human values: Perhaps the key characteristic of a “GNH TVET system” as outlined in the definition statements is that it is based on human values. All of the above – education excellence, inclusion, and environmental sustainability – are rooted in the cultural values that define GNH. This will distinguish Bhutan’s TVET system from other systems globally. It ensures TVET is not just about jobs and economic growth, both of which are important, but also about how people in the TVET system are connected and treat one another and the environment around them. A GNH TVET system based on human values is one that is holistic in nature, contributing to the development of the individual and society as a whole, not just economically.



What are your ideas?

- The four definition statements above help us understand what Bhutan’s TVET system can look like in the future. They root it to Bhutan’s own culture and experience, and illustrate what can distinguish it globally from other TVET systems.
- The definitional statements were developed by the co-authors of this manual, but they are not meant to be the final statements on what a GNH TVET system can look like. They are intended to stimulate further conversation among others, based on their own experience.
- Given what you’ve read in this manual about GNH and TVET reform, as well as based on your own ideas and experience, what do you think a GNH TVET system should look like by 2027? Write your answer below.

By 2027, A GNH TVET system will: _____

Strategies for incorporating GNH into TVET training

Based on the aspirational statements above that define what a GNH TVET system should look like by 2027, the co-authors of this manual brainstormed, assessed, and refined a set of strategies and accompanying activities for incorporating GNH into TVET. As Master Trainers, the co-authors focused specifically on areas related to training work: incorporating GNH into curriculum and into teaching methods/pedagogy. In a few cases, strategies and activities that were not specific to curriculum or teaching methods were also identified as “other” strategies.

The strategies and activities for incorporating GNH into TVET curriculum and teaching methods are outlined below. As you will see, the process of identifying the strategies clearly demonstrated the idea that GNH is a holistic and interdependent model: the strategies for incorporating GNH into TVET address all nine domains of GNH, not just the education domain.

Each of the strategies and their corresponding activities were also connected to one of the 4Ps of TVET reform (product, people, place, process). As a result, the strategies and activities below tightly connect individual GNH domains to individual components of the current TVET reform process, ensuring both GNH and the nature of reform move forward together.

STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING GNH INTO THE WORK OF TVET TRAINERS		
STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING GNH INTO CURRICULUM		
<i>Curriculum Strategies & Activities</i>	<i>GNH Domain</i>	<i>Which of the 4Ps of TVET reform?</i>
1. Strategy: <i>Foster mindfulness and internal wellbeing among trainees</i>		
Activities:		
• Develop & incorporate a mindfulness class within TVET courses	Psychological wellbeing	Product
• Incorporate mindfulness components into existing classes	Psychological wellbeing	Product
• Add positive psychology integration into value education module/curriculum	Psychological wellbeing	Product
• Incorporate the concept on psychological wellbeing measures into curriculum	Psychological wellbeing	Product
2. Strategy: <i>Promote environmentally sustainable mindset and practices</i>		
Activities:		
• Incorporate waste management content into curriculum	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add an environmental attitude component to curriculum (efficient use of resources) 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate environmental laws into content of curriculum 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product
3. Strategy: <i>Promote healthy workplace practices</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure health and safety issues are incorporated in curriculum 	Health	Product
4. Strategy: <i>Foster culturally literate trainees</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop co-curricular workshops and sessions to promote culturally literate trainees (e.g. oral history, traditional crafts, etc). 	Cultural diversity & resilience	Product
STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING GNH INTO TEACHING METHODS/PEDAGOGY		
<i>Pedagogy Strategies & Activities</i>	<i>GNH Domain</i>	<i>Which of the 4Ps of TVET reform?</i>
1. Strategy: <i>Foster mindfulness and internal wellbeing among trainees</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct meditation in class 	Psychological wellbeing	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainers demonstrate empathy and compassion 	Psychological wellbeing	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate positive psychology into training 	Psychological wellbeing	People
2. Strategy: <i>Promote environmentally sustainable mindset and practices</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digitalise and go paperless with class materials where possible 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make greater use of the Google platform 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reuse and recycle class materials and other relevant materials where possible 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use more natural light during training 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use mechanised hand tools that require less energy 	Ecological diversity & resilience	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage in-class and related waste properly (segregating, disposing off, etc.) 	Ecological diversity & resilience	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasise green jobs to trainees 	Ecological diversity & resilience	People
3. Strategy: <i>Promote healthy workplace practices</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct safety drills 	Health	People

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create penalty system for non-compliance with safety rules 	Health	People
4. Strategy: Foster culturally literate trainees		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct cultural activities as per institute calendar 	Cultural diversity & resilience	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct cultural literature activities 	Cultural diversity & resilience	People
5. Strategy: Facilitate meaningful relations between trainees and the local community		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop On the Job Training (OJT) that engages local businesses as per nature of the courses 	Community vitality	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PBL in community 	Community vitality	People
6. Strategy: Promote accountability, transparency & good citizenship		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use group activities to promote trainee accountability to one another 	Good governance	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pedagogical methods that foster civic engagement of trainees to develop responsible democratic citizens 	Good governance	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate in-class accountability and transparency strategies for trainers 	Good governance	People
7. Strategy: Promote education/life balance among trainees		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure course requirements of trainees respects balanced time use in their lives 	Time use	People
8. Strategy: Create an inclusive education environment		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and deliver training programs for Faculty and Staff on Gender & Accessibility 	Education, Living standards & Community vitality	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide trainers with access to assistive technology 	Education, Living standards & Community vitality	People
STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING GNH INTO OTHER ASPECTS OF TVET		
Other Strategies & Activities	GNH Domain	Which of the 4Ps of TVET reform?
1. Strategy: Foster mindfulness and internal wellbeing among trainees		

Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance counselling for trainees 	Psychological wellbeing	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create physical spaces for trainee, trainer and staff reflection & contemplation 	Psychological wellbeing	Place
2. Strategy: <i>Promote environmentally sustainable mindset and practices</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create waste management clubs at TVET institutes 	Ecological diversity & resilience	People
5. Strategy: <i>Facilitate meaningful relations between trainees and the local community</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate community services plan into institute calendar 	Community vitality	Product
8. Strategy: <i>Create an inclusive education environment</i>		
Activities:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Gender and Accessibility Guidelines 	Education, Living standards & Community vitality	People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish the Gender and Accessibility Committee 	Education, Living standards & Community vitality	People

The above strategies and activities for incorporating GNH into the work of TVET trainers were developed by the co-authors of this manual. They offer a foundation to start from based on the experience of Master Trainers. You may have additional ideas based on your own experience in the TVET system.

“[T]he ultimate success of reforming Bhutan’s TVET System from a last-resort education to being the ‘jewel’ of Bhutan’s education system will largely depend on the collective effort and wisdom of the Bhutanese people.”

- Norbu Wangchuk in The Druk Journal



What are your ideas?

Based on what you've read in this manual about incorporating GNH into TVET reform and the proposed strategies & activities presented above, are there additional strategies and activities that you think are needed for TVET trainers based on your own experience? Write your ideas below.

STRATEGIES FOR INFUSING GNH INTO CURRICULUM OR TEACHING METHODS/PEDAGOGY		
<i>Strategy/Activities</i>	<i>GNH Domain</i>	<i>Which of the 4Ps of TVET reform?</i>

Personal/Institutional GNH Action Plan

Developing a set of strategies and activities for incorporating GNH into TVET curriculum and teaching methods is a first step. The co-authors of this manual have provided a set of strategies/activities as foundation to build on. The previous activity allowed you to add any additional ideas you may have. The next step is to develop a GNH Action Plan to implement these strategies and activities. A GNH Action Plan can either be for an individual TVET trainer or for a TVET institution as a whole.

It is important to note that context is important when developing an Action Plan. Every TVET institute is different. It may not be possible to implement every single strategy/activity at every TVET institute. Some institutes may already be implementing some of the strategies/activities identified above. Make sure to consider your context when developing a GNH Action Plan!

Contextual Questions to ask when developing a GNH Action Plan:

- Is the Action Plan 'do-able' for your institute?
- Are financial resources needed for implementing any component of the GNH Action Plan and, if so, are these resources available?
- Are all the necessary human resources available for successfully implementing your proposed GNH Action Plan?
- What kind of additional support is needed from the institute to implement your proposed GNH Action Plan? Is this support available?
- Is there available time to implement the GNH Action Plan, or parts of the Action Plan, in a sustainable way?

No matter how good a GNH Action Plan is, it is not useful if it is not 'do-able'. Make sure that you are clear on whether you have the needed finances, human resources, institute support, and time to successfully implement the GNH Action Plan. If not, revise your Action Plan so it fits your context.

Below is a template for creating a personal or institutional GNH Action Plan.

PERSONAL/INSTITUTIONAL GNH ACTION PLAN					
NAME OF TVET INSTITUTE:					
NAME(S) OF ACTION PLAN DESIGNER:					
INCORPORATING GNH INTO CURRICULUM					
Curriculum Strategy/ Activities	GNH Domain	Which of the 4Ps?	Support needed from institute (if any)	Person(s) responsible	Timeframe (if relevant)
INCORPORATING GNH INTO TEACHING METHODS/PEDAGOGY					
Pedagogy Strategy/ Activities	GNH Domain	Which of the 4Ps?	Support needed from institute (if any)	Person(s) responsible	Timeframe (if relevant)

