



“Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development”

International Forum for the UN International Day of Happiness

By Dr. Sauwalak Kittiprapas¹

Not many people know that the United Nations International Day of Happiness falls on March 20th of every year which was established by United Nations General Assembly in 2012. To celebrate the International Happiness Day this year, the International Research Associates for Happy Societies (IRAH) and the Economic and Business Research Center for Reforms at Faculty of Economics, Rangsit University, will organize the International Forum on “Sustainable Happiness and Sustainable Development” on March 20th, 2015, with cooperation from international agencies such as the Embassy of Bhutan in Thailand, UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Center and WHO Thailand.

The selected theme is to link happiness and sustainable development, as this year – 2015 - marks the ending of the so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the starting of the proposed set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), expected to be promulgated later this year which the global development partners plan to commit to achieve towards 2030.

Since the first 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm to the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development or Rio Conference since it was held in Rio de Janeiro and to the 2012 Rio + 20 Conference also held in Rio de Janeiro, there has been four decades of global movement for sustainable development. However, large implementation gaps and serious environmental problems still remain to this day. Thus, it may be timely to rethink about the development framework and consider alternative frameworks. There may be some missing elements in the sustainable development paradigm that excludes human minds and spirits.

The concern for living in harmony with nature is likely to be driven from inner happiness obtained by wisdom with the understanding of the interdependence of all kinds of living-beings and nature, as well as happiness from the less use of resources and less dependent on materials. In this regard, promoting inner happiness with moderate consumption, in line with middle-way economics, well supports the holistic sustainable development approach. The spiritual or inner happiness focus of sustainable development can also be considered as

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a direction for advanced human development, encouraging humans to move along the path of happiness from low/ basic level of material dependence up to higher (mind => wisdom) happiness levels. This is to promote human beings to obtain happiness at high level which is more sustainable and independent (as explained in Buddhist happiness concept). This type of happiness can be achieved with less consumption and low resource utilization.

This is why the approach of sustainable development has to link with happiness that also has sustainable nature. This sustainable type of happiness could help making sustainable development more effective. The inner-human dimension which is a critical factor for achieving sustainable development and a starting point for all changes need to be discussed and subjective well-being of human beings should not be neglected.

So far, happiness has not much been linked to conventional sustainable development framework with the usual 3 main dimensions of economic, social and environmental considerations. Adding inner happiness of human dimension to the framework could perhaps help usher in the critical change that is needed.