

# Water and Happiness

for International Dialogue

“Water, Happiness, and Conscious Cooperation for Peaceful and Prosperous Mekong River Basin”

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**Celebrating International Happiness Day and World Water Day.**

By

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# Outline of presentation:

- Factors affecting happiness, and happiness-based policies
- Relationship of happiness and environment => water
  - : A case study of happiness research: happiness determinants
- Implications for Mekong River Basin/ countries



# Factors affecting happiness

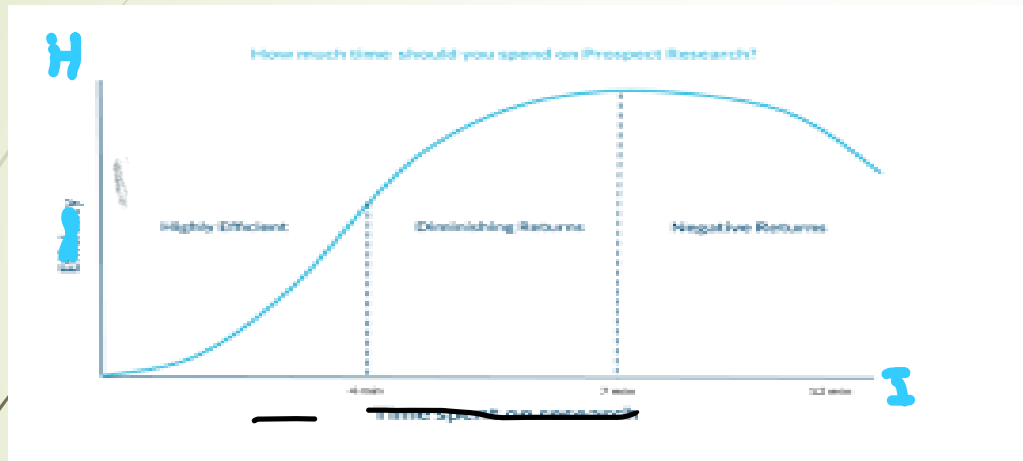
What matters most also depends on stage of development of each country/ cultures/ period, etc.

- Economics (basic needs)
- Health (physical and mental)
- Relationship: social (community, friends, family)
- Environment (natural and social environment)
- Freedom, value, inner happiness, etc.

# What factors affect happiness? Implications to policies

## 1. Economics

- ▶ When income higher than basic needs, their impacts to happiness decline. Other factors have more impacts.



- ▶ Increasing income has induce happiness gain to the poor than the rich
- ▶ Justify for redistribution of income/ resources to the poor, or reducing inequality  
=> **policies prioritize poverty and inequality reduction rather than high growth**
- ▶ **Middle-way economics, not too low, not too high (in terms of materials)**
- ▶ Higher materials may not bring in better quality of life (but less materials can bring in higher quality and happiness in mind => inner happiness, not only for yourself, but caring for others and nature, less consumption and less exploitation of natural resources.

## Non-economic factors, quality of life, subjective well-being matter:

- ▶ Inequality in wellbeing/ quality of life is more important than inequality in income, in explaining level of happiness (WHR, 2020).
- ▶ People are happier in societies with less disparity in quality of lives=> improving quality of life of the disadvantages
- ▶ SWB/ happiness strongly collerates with HDI, SDGs (in general), WHR, 2020
- ▶ Countries with higher level of happiness tend to reach SDGs faster (in general, except some goals), (0.79).
- ▶ Interestingly, countries not doing well in SDG have population experience negative emotions (0.57), WHR, 2020
- ▶ Nordic countries (high correlation of SDGs and SWB), they have higher social and institutional trust with political support.

# Implications to happiness-based policies

- **Help the disadvantages to reduce the inequality both in terms of income and quality of life.**
- **Prioritize happiness that support or can lead to sustainable development.**
- Inner happiness => less dependence on materials and care for others and nature. Happiness from inner transformation. Inner happiness => inner peace => societal /world peace=> peaceful & inclusive society.
- **Ensure Inclusive society with good social relation between human beings, and human-nature relation.=> sustainable development & human wellbeing > economic growth.** Livelihood should be more concerned than economic growth. So far, we have experience of improper human and natural relationship
- **Balance and holistic wellbeing of internal and external elements: body, mind/wisdom, environment.**
- Ethics, social compassion, mindful or conscious in every actions not harmful others and nature, responsible consumption and production.



## Human-Natural relationship:

- **A case study of Bangkajao, greenspace community, nearby Chaopraya river in Thailand.**
- **Water is the fundamental infrastructure of this green space.** Bangkajao is water dependence as their fruit tree garden are much affected by quality of water (increasing salty and polluted).
- **Bangkajao has been vulnerable to water mismanagement in flood, salty and polluted water. The adverse effects arisen from outside community,** related to national policies
- We use people participation in action research (PAR) to solve the problem together. We accomplish some goals but still more to be done.

# Bangkajao community: surrounded by water, affected by water mismanagement and outsiders







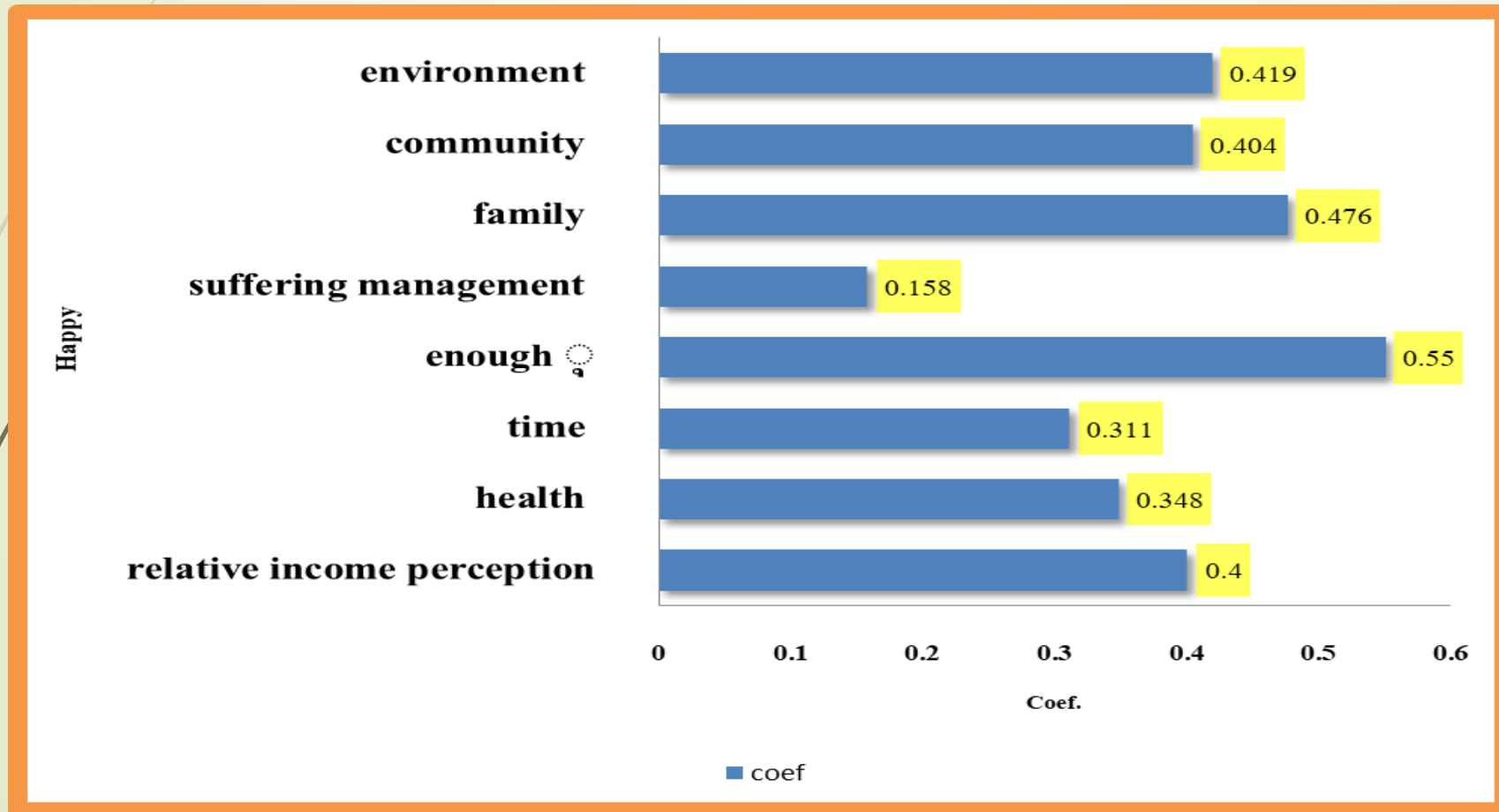
# Water, greenspace and happiness

- “We want to keep this green-space, but that need good quality of water and well water management” Bangkajao community.

Their first priority now, “water is the first thing to be managed for the whole island, to make fruit trees alive => maintain the green space”.

- Water is a source of community happiness. However, water quality are affected by outsiders along the river stream: polluted water from other industrial areas, human-management (i.e., mismanagement of water gates), the natural salt water with the increased climate change effects.

Some evidences from this community research the relationship of environment=>happiness, and inner happiness => environment quality. These are statically significant variables.





Are these happiness determinant factors applicable for Mekong river basin? should we promote?

- : Environment, water
- : Relationship ( family, community)
- : Inner happiness (enough in materials, giving/helping, suffering management,)
- : Narrowed income gap
- : Health
- : Time balance

Are these happiness affected factors are suitable guidelines to apply for Mekong river basin? Is that suitable for the new normal life style? After COVID?

# Conclusion/ Implications to Mekong region

- ▶ Water is a critical source of happiness in communities/ societies in river basin, but can be affected by others outside: how we manage the disputes and mitigate adverse affects of the vulnerable areas. Mekong river involving 6 countries (not equal bargaining power to control water).
- ▶ To manage water resources depends on development model of the region? What kind of development model we aim for ? Mekong way of happiness?
- ▶ A need a shift from material dependence to more natural dependence? to inner happiness to achieve sustainable development? Improving environment and natural resources for our long-term well-being and sustainable development and reduce risks from pandemics.
- ▶ Roles of international cooperation for peaceful and happy societies, particularly in Mekong River basin. Which direction to lead us to sustainable development and happiness.
- ▶ To promote balance development with happiness-based public policies, guided by factors affecting their happiness. More work and research should be done in this area.



Thank You!

