

**Neo-Happiness Approach: Lessons from
Past Paradigms to Promote the Inclusion of
Happiness in International Development**

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**International Conference
on
“Happiness and Public Policy”**

**United Nations Conference Center (UNCC)
Bangkok, Thailand
18-19 July 2007**

Introduction

Established as a reaction to mainstream economic development theories, the Neo-Happiness Approach (NHA)¹ has gained international traction in the last decade as countries, like Bhutan and Thailand, have implemented development strategies derived from happiness. Although the NHA has provided an important criticism of the status quo, a comprehensive theoretical framework outlining the theoretical basis and functional structure of the approach has not been established.

This paper attempts to provide a “comprehensive” theoretical framework for the NHA through the examination of mainstream development theories and literature surrounding the theories and application of happiness and subjective well-being (SWB). Primarily, the paper suggests that the NHA’s theoretical framework is derived from the failure of mainstream development theories to provide a holistic development strategy. Therefore, these mainstream development theories, i.e. Modernization, Neoliberalism, Basic Needs Approach, Capabilities Approach, and Human Development Approach, will be deconstructed to provide the grounding for the NHA’s theoretical framework. Secondly, the paper suggests that the collective of literature surrounding the theories and application of happiness and SWB, i.e. Gross National Happiness, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and various texts on happiness and well-being, contribute to the functional structure of the NHA. The importance of establishing this framework is to provide the NHA with a legitimate definition by which it can exist in the paradigm of modern development theories. It should be noted that although the paper attempts to provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework; the framework proposed should not be taken as final or restricted to studies and theories discussed within.

Furthermore, this paper is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the deconstruction of two development approaches, the Conventional Approach (CA) and Human Needs Based Approach (HNBA), as a means to establish failures that have contributed to the theoretical function of the NHA. The second part focuses on establishing the theoretical framework, i.e. theoretical basis and functional structure, of the Neo-Happiness Approach through the examination of the deconstructed

¹ The Neo-Happiness Approach is a term I use throughout the paper to identify the development approach that is inclusive of happiness into its development strategy.

development approaches and literature surrounding happiness and SWB. Finally, the last part provides the conclusion of the paper with a summary of lessons learned, as well as, suggestions for the further development of the Neo-Happiness Approach.

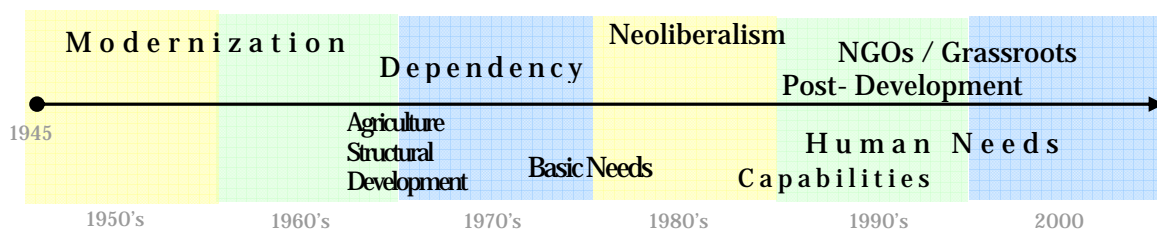
Part I

Part I examines the modern theories of economic development and aims to provide the key failures of these theories in order to establish the theoretical framework of the NHA. This section begins by providing an overview of the development paradigm. Then the section transitions into the overview and deconstruction of the Conventional Approach (CA) and the Human Needs Based Approach (HNBA).

1.1 Modern Theories of Economic Development

The notion of “economic development” is a dated concept that has existed since the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. However, modern theories of development are a relatively new concept that was conceived during the post WWII era due to political and economic changes in the international system. Figure one provides a visual illustration of the discourse of modern development theories and expresses the discourse on a time continuum that begins in 1945, marked by the end of WWII and the expansion of the Marshall Plan in Western Europe. The figure also identifies nine major schools of thought. Yet, only five of these schools, i.e. Modernization, Neoliberalism, Basic Needs Approach, Capabilities Approach, and Human Needs Approach, are deconstructed in the next section.

Figure One: Continuum of Modern Development Theories



1.2 Conventional Approach

The Conventional Approach (CA) sought to solve the problems of the underdeveloped through the implementation of economic strategies. The goal of the approach was to industrialize the economies of the underdeveloped, which was believed to lead to the modernization of the society, as witnessed in Western Europe and the U.S. The approach is commonly characterized as a “one-size-fits-all” strategy that focuses on industrialization, commodity markets, and government interventions, by which development is measured by economic indicators such as gross national product (GNP) and gross domestic product per capita. Additionally, the CA is generally associated with two major development theories, each described briefly.

1.2.a Modernization

Modernization, as defined by Todaro (2003) is “primarily a theory of development in which the right quantity and mixture of savings, investment, and foreign aid were necessary to enable developing nations to proceed along an economic growth path that historically had been followed by the developed countries.” For developing countries, the goal was to achieve a sustainable increase in real per capita GDP through rapid industrial sector development which would allow a low-income agrarian economy to transform into a high-income industrialized economy as suggested by Rostow’s ‘Stages of Growth’, the Harrod-Domar Growth Model and the Lewis Model.²

1.2.b Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is often seen as the improvement of the Modernization theory. Neoliberalism viewed price as an effective tool for resource allocation, and sought more open trade policies and minimal government intervention.³ The most significant policy associated with Neoliberalism are the structural adjustment loans (SALs) provided by the Bretton Woods institutions. SALs were a method to maintain growth and to facilitate the balance of payments adjustments in the short-term while providing

² Naqvi, 1995; FASID, 2003

³ FASID, 2003

financial credit for developing economies that had suffered severely during the global recession and oil crisis.⁴

1.2.c Criticisms

The most prominent criticism of the CA is its “one-size-fits-all” strategy that failed to acknowledge the initial conditions of developing economies. A study conducted by Lefebvre (1974) pointed out that when comparing initial conditions of Africa to the West, specific characteristics explain why Modernization failed. Lefebvre observed that unlike the West, Africa had 1) limited capital and cultivatable land available to the underdeveloped countries, 2) a lack of comparable resources productivity, 3) different international and domestic demand conditions, and 4) urban migration already in excess.⁵ Neoliberalism critic, Adebayo Adedeji (1999), also pointed out that the West’s failure to acknowledge fundamental features of the African economics, e.g. its lack of competitiveness and excessive dependence on external factor inputs, led to the economic catastrophes associated with SALs in Africa. This has led to the belief that the CA has a built-in Euro-centric cultural and power bias which has been imposed on other culture and people without their consent, thus inhibiting the emergence of different models to development based on these different cultural heritages.⁶

Additionally, critics also point to the resulting economic conditions of developing countries as evidence of the failure of the CA. The Pearson Report (1969) noted that under Modernization policies “even under favorable circumstances, the export credits and development assistance had raised rapidly to a level of nearly \$50 billion, while debt service had since been growing at 17% annually, absorbing much of the increase in export earnings” that would have contributed to economic growth. Furthermore, a study conducted by Easterly (2005) showed that “the intensive recipients of adjustment loans had the same near-zero per capita growth rate as non recipients”, as well as, “the same current account deficit, government deficit, black market premium and inflation rate, and near zero real overvaluation and real interest rate.” Similar results have been found in studies conducted by Mosley and Toye (1991), Crisp and Kelly (1999), Van De Walle and Johnston (1996), Adedeji (1999), and McGregor (2005).

⁴ Crisp and Kelly, 1999; Easterly, 2005

⁵ Lefebvre, 1974

⁶ Nabudere, 1997

1.3 Human Needs Based Approach

The Human Needs Based Approach (HNBA) is a broad collective of several development approaches that rejects a purely economic development strategy, because of the negative impact it has had on the environment, education, employment, health, and equality.⁷ Instead, the HBNA focused on poverty and inequality through three directions of thought that included: 1) an attempt to improve standards of living in the absence of an enlarged economic pie, 2) a reinvigorated emphasis on institutions and social capital; and 3) attention to the role of human capital in the development process.⁸ Each of these directions is highlighted in the following sections as associated with the appropriate development theory.

1.3.a Basic Needs Approach

The Basic Needs Approach (BNA) was grounded in the belief that poverty can be defined in terms of a specific income level necessary to secure the basic human requirements of food, clothing and shelter.⁹ The BNA was defined by two elements that are the minimum requirement of a family for its own consumption, including but not limited to food, clothing and shelter, and essential services provided by and for the community, including drinking water, sanitation, education, and health facilities.¹⁰ Theorists believed that a high level of basic needs could be satisfied at a relatively low level of per capita income; however, satisfying this would require significant government involvement.¹¹

1.3.b Capabilities Approach

The Capabilities Approach arose from Amartya Sen's belief that poverty cannot be properly measured by income due to diversity of those affected by poverty. Instead, he believed what should matter are not the things a person had, but what a person is, or can be, and does or can do. In turn, Sen proposed that the development process should provide a minimum set of capabilities for all individuals that are generated through entitlements, which allow for functioning.

⁷ Ingham, 1993

⁸ FASID, 2003

⁹ Ingham, 1993

¹⁰ FAISD, 2003

¹¹ FASID, 2003

Although Sen does not provide a definitive list of capabilities, several other capabilities theorists have attempted to “complete” the framework. Both Seers (1979) and Nussbaum (2000) have contributed to the capabilities approach by constructing a framework of capabilities that is inclusive of 1) the capacity to obtain physical necessities, 2) a job, 3) equity, 4) participation in government, 5) belonging to a nation that is independent, both economically and politically, and 6) adequate education levels.¹²

1.3.c Human Development

The Human Development Approach (HDA), which was advocated by Mahbub ul Haq, is a derivative of both the BNA and Capabilities Approach.¹³ Allen (2000) defined HDA by stating that “advocates view poverty in terms not of poor material living standards, but of lack of choice or of capacity, people should therefore be enabled or empowered to take direct action to meet their own needs through methods such as participation and empowerment, particularly by non-governmental organization.” In 1990, the United Nations adopted the HDA as a universal strategy for development and began an annual publication, *the Human Development Report*, to measure and compare human development between and within countries. The publication premiered the Human Development Index (HDI), which ranks countries according to the population’s life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate and combine enrollment rate in primary, secondary and tertiary, and real income measure by purchasing power parity (PPP). Other major indices of HDA include the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), the Human Poverty Index, the Gender Related Development Index, and the Gender Empowerment Measure.

1.3.d Criticisms

Basic Needs Approach. The major criticism of BNA is its lack of theoretical grounding, which makes it difficult to be conceptualized. Frances Stewart (1989) described the BNA as a “complex chain of cause-related relationships that were believed to foster particular interactions between a set of goods and services and a person leading to certain condition of human life”. In turn, BNA’s theoretical complexity led to many

¹² Allen, 2000; Clark, 2005

¹³ “What is HD”, The United Nations

misinterpretations.¹⁴ Sen (1984) also criticized the BNA for being focused on a “commodity fetish” that promoted the acquisition of commodities in order to fulfill a certain level of basic needs and missed the target on what development should be.

Capabilities Approach. Within his own writings, Sen (1984,1993,1999) pointed out several shortcomings of the capabilities approach. Sen admitted that the lack of a fixed or definitive list of capabilities made the theory less valid. He also pointed out that the theory was extremely complex, since it must assess individual advantages in a range of different spaces and lacked any material substance sufficient for evaluative purposes, therefore questioning the usefulness of the approach for making inter-personal comparisons of well-being.¹⁵ Additionally, G.A. Cohen questioned Sen’s central concept by asking, “what counts as freedom?” According to Cohen (1994), Sen wrongly deemed freedom as what is obtained by people without it having been chosen by them and without it coming about, because it is something that they would choose.¹⁶ Therefore, if Cohen is right, the capabilities approach is caught having a too expansive a definition of freedom, which could invalidate the approach.

Human Development Approach. Criticisms of HDA mainly focus on the HDI. Critics of the HDI believe that there could be biases in the data providing an inaccurate picture of the human development. Criticisms also question the formulation of the HDI equation asking if “the different weights relate in different values?” and if “does the choice of maximum and minimum values influence effective weight given to different dimensions?”¹⁷ Critics also question if HDI is too universal, only appropriate for developing countries, or is culturally biased toward Western values and not even relevant to the local context.¹⁸

Part II

Part II focuses on providing a “comprehensive” theoretical framework for the NHA through the analysis of the theoretical basis and the development of the theoretical

¹⁴ For more information on this topic see FASID, 2003

¹⁵ Clark, 2005

¹⁶ Olsaretti, 2005

¹⁷ “Composite Indices – HDI and Beyond”, The United Nations

¹⁸ “Composite Indices – HDI and Beyond”, The United Nations

structure. This section begins by establishing the theoretical basis of the NHA in correlation to the development theories deconstructed in the previous part. The CA provides the antithesis to the NHA by which the grounding of the theory is derived. While the HNBA provides insight into how the NHA should view the theoretical space of the development paradigm, emphasizing the relationship between the macro level phenomena and the meso and micro level indicators. Then the section transitions into a brief discussion on the development of the functional structure of the NHA, focusing on the literature surrounding the theories and application of happiness and SWB, as well as, the functional structures of the CA and HNBA.

2.1 Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis for the NHA, as I perceive, is a reaction to the failure of economic development to provide societies with the security and stability once believed to be all within the control of a nation's economy.

As discussed in the previous section, the CA proved little evidence that employing pure economic strategies in developing countries could result in development, industrialization or modernization. Studies have shown that in the majority of developing countries these policies were a failure, e.g. Mosley and Toye, 1991; Naqvi, 1995; Van De Walle and Johnston, 1996; and Layard, 2005. Modernization theory provided a Western-centric development strategy that refused to adapt to the conditions of developing countries, leading to policy failures. However, in the rare case sustainable growth rates were achieved, these gains were easily lost to the instability of the commodities market and increasing foreign debt. Additionally, Neoliberalism took fragile developing economies and placed them at the mercy of the international economy. The results for the majority of these countries were high monetary and fiscal instability, increased foreign debt, and in some cases hyperinflation and economic collapse. By the end of the "golden era of SALs", many developing countries were worse off economically than when the development process had begun in the 1950's.

Surprisingly, for those countries that were developed the picture wasn't any brighter. Although, these countries had long achieved sustainable levels of high income per capita, studies has shown that the populations were not achieving the same

increasing levels happiness or SWB.¹⁹ In his landmark study, Richard Easterlin examined the correlation between income and happiness in the U.S. and concluded “money does not buy happiness.”²⁰ Later studies that examined the U.S. that during the post-WWII era also found that a rise in income failed to directly correlate with a similar rise in happiness.²¹ This same occurrence has been observed in Western Europe and East Asia²². For example, in Great Britain, research has found that despite massive increases in real income at every point of the distribution happiness has been static since 1975 and is no greater than in the 1950s.²³ Additionally, separate research has shown that coinciding with the trend mention above, Western society have witnessed a rise in depression, crime and suicides as well as decline in satisfaction by domains of life, e.g. job satisfaction.²⁴

The evidence shows that development by means of the CA failed to provide a holistic strategy for development. And most importantly, achievement of development did not translate into the sustainability of a population’s happiness or SWB. As a result of the disenchantment felt from economic development, modernization, and industrialization, the NHA developed as the antithesis to the CA. And as a development theory, the NHA must function within the theoretical space of the development paradigm.

I also perceive the NHA as viewing the theoretical space of the development paradigm as complimenting levels of interaction, rather than competing. Therefore, viewing the development process as a macro level phenomenon that requires meso and micro level indicators to balance the fragile relations between happiness and the development process. Whereas, the macro level provides the functional platform by which the neo-happiness approach can exist, i.e. public policy. While, the meso and micro levels provide the definition to what the public policy should be tailored to.

¹⁹ Literature that discusses this observation includes: Easterlin, 1974; Scitovsky, 1976; Hirsch, 1977; Ng 1978; Layrad, 1980; Veenhoven, 1991; Diener, 1995; Oswald, 1997; Lane, 2000; Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Layard, 2005

²⁰ Easterlin, 1974

²¹ Lane, 2000; Layard, 2005

²² Lane, 2000; Ng, 2002; Layard, 2005

²³ Layard, 2005

²⁴ Oswald, 1997; Lane, 2000; Layard, 2005

The incorporation of the meso and micro levels derives from the HNBA. As discussed in previous section, the HNBA focused on the development of human capital rather than economic capital. The BNA and the HDA took a macro level interpretation of human development focusing on national levels of development. While, the framework surrounding the Capabilities Approach recognized that the conditions of individuals vary from case-to-case. However, the Capabilities Approach failed to provide a list of what those capabilities are. Therefore, providing the theoretical notion that development varies not only on the macro level, but also on the meso and micro levels. Thus, development of a country restricted to a macro level analysis fails to embody the true depth of development needs. So, by integrating the meso and micro levels with the macro level, the NHA attempts to provide a development strategy that is inclusive of all of the population's development needs and perceptions of happiness and SWB.

Most importantly, it is crucial for the success of the NHA that these levels work in sync with one another, since the development of public policy is directly associated with the meso and micro levels perceptions interpreted by the macro level. The success of the NHA will be determined by the relationships that exist between the actors on each level. Realistically, these actors would be the government and various groups within the country that differ in size, culture, ethnicity, values, beliefs, and norms. A relationship without power dimensions must be formed between the government and these various groups in order for mutually beneficial dialogue to be formed. Once this dialogue has taken place, the government should be able to use the population's concepts and ideas of happiness and SWB in light of development to design and implement public policy based on the NHA.

A case that illustrates this point is the Bhutanese public policy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). In brief, the Bhutanese government developed GNH in 1972 as an alternative to the CA. Since then, the government has used its position as a means to provide a platform for GNH to exist within Bhutanese public policy. The platform in which GNH exist has made GNH functional, since the government has been able to alter the policy as needed to stay aligned with the perceptions and characteristics of the Bhutanese population. What the case illustrates is that the government must act as an advocate and architect of the public policy, once it has derived the aim of the public policy from its populations in order to create sustainable functionality.

2.2 Functional Structure

The functional structure of the NHA, as I propose, is derived from various sources of literature surrounding the theory and application of happiness and SWB. However, it should be noted that the following is only a brief description of what I view the NHA's functional structure to be.

As the only well-established application of the NHA, GNH provides a functional structure that is important to examine in order to determine crucial components for the functional structure of the NHA. The functional structure of GNH is based on four key strategies that are known as the four pillars, which were developed by the Bhutanese government to reflection of population's perspectives of happiness and SWB in relation to development. These thematic pillars are 1) sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development, 2) conservations of the environment, 3) preservation and promotion of culture, and 4) promotion of good governance.²⁵ Indicators associated with each pillar were developed in accordance to what would enable the population to pursue happiness with a reasonable chance of success. The most important aspect of the four pillars concept is that the pillars function interdependently of one another to provide holistic development.

It is also important to examine the functional structures of the CA and the HNBA in order to gain insight on the functionability of other development theories. A broad analysis of each approach's functional structure provides general observations that are significant for the development of the NHA's functional structure. For all theories within the CA and the HBNA, except for the Capabilities Approach, three concepts can describe their functional structures; these are 1) a top-down approach, 2) narrowly focused strategy, and 3) lack of local ownership / local contribution. Together these concepts have made the functionality of their respected development policies non-adaptive and alien to the populations it is attempting to develop. And in the case of the capabilities approach, no functional structure concretely exists.

Based on the brief analysis given on the functional structure of GNH, the CA, and the HBNA, the functional structure of the NHA should adopt a similar broad structure as GNH, i.e. the four pillar strategy, while avoiding functional structure failures

²⁵ Thinley, 2005

demonstrated by other development theories. Adopting the four pillar strategy provides a balance between concepts central to the process and sustainability of development as well as the happiness and SWB of the population, a central goal of the NHA.

The central mechanism that allows for the functional structure to operate is the indicators chosen to gauge the public policy. As discussed above, indicators should be derived from the population through a meso and micro level analysis and should not be presupposed by the government. More importantly, the focus / aim of the indicators should evolve throughout the span of the public policy to adjust with changes in need and perceptions of the population. Maslow's study on the hierarchy of needs illustrates that once a level is securely achieved humans have a need to satisfy successively higher needs.²⁶ Additionally, studies on happiness and SWB show that as an individual accomplishes a desired level of attainment, fulfillment is short-lived, and aspirations shift to desire a higher attainment level.²⁷ Therefore, indicators should not be limited to only what present perceptions are. Instead, the collective of indicators should reflect what is presently perceived by the population to obtain happiness in congruence with development, as well as, what will be relatively desired by the in the future.

Furthermore, indicators should be arranged in a hierarchal fashion that reflects present and future levels of attainment. To provide guidance on the order of indicators and relational connectivity, the NHA should adapt Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to provide a hierarchal structure, since it provides a structure that rationally illustrates changes in one needs in relation to attainment, i.e. low-level needs, e.g. physiological needs, must be satisfied before high level needs, e.g. self-fulfillment, can be pursued.²⁸

Part III

This paper attempted to provide a "comprehensive" theoretical framework for the NHA through the deconstruction of past development paradigms and examination of literature loosely associated with it. The main focus was on emphasizing the cause-related relationship between mainstream theories of development and the NHA, therefore directly deriving its theoretical framework from the failures of the CA and the

²⁶ Maslow, 1970

²⁷ Frey and Stutzer, 2002

²⁸ Maslow, 1970

HNBA. In summary, the theoretical framework of the NHA occurs in two parts, the theoretical basis and the functional structure. The theoretical basis of the NHA is directly derived from the disenchantment felt with the development's failure at providing holistic development and a holistic development strategy. While, the functional structure is derived from the functional structures of CA and the HNBA, as well as, the literature surrounding the theories and application go happiness and SWB.

The following is a list of "lessons learned" from the CA and the HNBA as applied to the theatrical framework of the NHA :

- 1) A strictly economic-based development strategy does not provide holistic development in either the short-run or long-run. (*Conventional Approach*)
- 2) "One-size-fits-all" strategies do not provide comprehensive frameworks that focus on the needs of the developing. (*Conventional Approach*)
- 3) Development strategies focused on macro indicators fail to meet the needs of the variety of groups within a population. (*Conventional Approach and Human Needs Base Approach*)
- 4) Development needs and perceptions differ within a country. (*Human Needs Based Approach*)
- 5) A semi-definitive structure must be produced in order to provide a development strategy with functionability. (*Capabilities Approach*)

Furthermore, I would like to suggest the deepening of research concerning the theoretical framework of the NHA. In order to continue the establishment of the NHA, it is important for research to focus on four separate areas; these areas are 1) the development of the collective of literature loosely surrounding the NHA, 2) the development of a general structure framework for application of the NHA, 3) the development and testing of studies that highlight the importance and difficulties of integrating meso and micro level indicators into public policy, and 4) the application of happiness through public policy.

Finally, I believe that in order to continue this discussion of happiness within public policy, it is essential that we continue the development of the NHA to establish the importance of integrating happiness into development.

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