

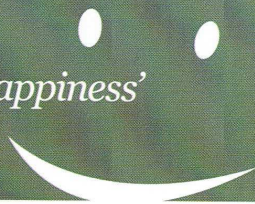
HAPPY AND BLUE

MOODS FOR THE FUTURE



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Two of the world's greatest ideas 'Gross National Happiness' and the 'Blue Economy' come together in Bhutan

Welcome to Bhutan, the small Himalayan Kingdom where His Majesty the 4th King some 30 years ago brought a revolutionary concept to life when he declared that measuring Bhutan's progress by 'Gross National Happiness' is far more important than measuring the 'Gross Domestic Product' of the country. This development approach has guided the country ever since and is affectionately referred to in Bhutan as 'GNH'. The visionary approach is today on everyone's agenda including His Majesty the King, political leaders, researchers, academics, scientists, civil servants and thought-leaders of Bhutan. The application of GNH is also blossoming here through initiatives such as the development of a systemised decision-making tool for developing government policy, through private sector business initiatives and within Bhutan's education system.

The concept of happiness as an important development indicator has also captured the attention of many other countries, as the world realises that we need a new and more holistic way of looking at progress. The most recent affirmation of happiness as an important measure of quality of life across the world, has been the resolution by the United Nations (UN) to adopt Bhutan's proposal that happiness be the ultimate aim of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. UN member states are now encouraged to suggest their own measures of happiness and contribute them to the UN's development agenda.

This is a landmark achievement for the tiny Kingdom that

demonstrates extraordinary visionary leadership by His Majesty the 4th King and the Honourable Prime Minister for putting the proposal to the UN to include happiness as a development indicator. This resolution could very well be the catalyst that starts a global realisation and a change in direction away from the current development models. It may also be the moment in history when people all around the world realise that rampant consumerism is unsustainable and keeps perpetuating the endless cycle of greed for more, followed by the dissatisfaction that more is never enough.

With this backdrop in mind, Bhutan found itself the centre-stage for an extraordinary world-first event this summer. An event that managed to put in one room some 75 international innovators, thought-leaders, philanthropists, teachers, scholars, investors and entrepreneurs from 25 countries together with some 50 local entrepreneurs, Bhutanese Government Ministers and a wide variety of Bhutanese institutions. The event unfolded as a gigantic think-tank on how to achieve Gross National Happiness through the development of local innovative and competitive business models.

The event was inspired and facilitated by none other than the global citizen and mastermind of the 'Blue Economy' movement Professor Gunther Pauli. For those of us who just got used to the term 'Green Economy', the 'Blue Economy' definitely pushes our conceptual boundaries. The Blue Economy takes another important step beyond what we know as green production

and consumption. The main idea behind a green economy is about minimising pollution and impacts on the environment in the process of feeding our insatiable consumer needs. A green economy is based on production that is 'good' for the environment and communities, generating green jobs and minimising inputs. However, as the last 20 years have shown, most of the green products and services made from organic and sustainable materials are more expensive than their mass-produced and environmentally damaging counterparts. Therefore the consumption of green products and services is limited to a small market segment of the world population who can afford to pay more for every-day consumables such as organic vegetables, biodegradable soaps and renewable energy. On top of that, many of the green products and services often need to be heavily subsidised by governments to make them marketable in the first place.

This is where the concept of a 'Blue Economy' turns our conditioning and current reality on its head and reverses the notion that 'being green' will cost you more. As Gunter Pauli explains "The Blue Economy proposes instead that the best for our health and the environment is the cheapest and that necessities for life are free thanks to a local system of production and consumption that works with what you have". This means that we need to tap into our local resources and local potential in Bhutan to build social capital that enhances mindful living. We need not look far to find great potential and abundant resources. A striking example is Bhutan's story of dolomite export.



Bhutan currently mines and exports dolomite to India at a very low cost and with little profit to Bhutan. However, through a simple process of using Citric Acid the same dolomite can be used to extract food-grade magnesium, which can be sold locally and internationally at a much better value for the same amount of mining effort.

Another crucial part of Blue Economy-thinking is that every waste stream and every emission from one system is considered as an input for another system. For example food waste, instead of being dumped at a landfill site where it generates and releases methane into the atmosphere, can instead be used as fuel for a biogas digester generating gas for heating or cooking or generating electricity. The food scraps therefore are turned from a waste product into a valuable resource for another process. There are many more types of 'waste' such as the sludge from a waste water treatment plant that

can be combined with organic food scraps to produce even more gas.

The purpose of the Blue Economy event in Bhutan was to empower local Bhutanese entrepreneurs to work with sustainable technologies to develop a local economy that supports happiness and wellbeing of the Bhutanese people by using the resources that are available right here. After six intense and inspiring days, the event culminated in some 20+ projects being developed each linking a local Bhutanese entrepreneur and international partner organisation with a mechanism to realise the project either through funding or training. This innovative approach to shaping a new economic development model has the potential to be dynamic and successful by placing unwavering faith in the capacity of young entrepreneurs.

The development of a vibrant and young private sector in Bhutan is certainly a much-needed

initiative. For the cynics the private sector usually symbolises self-interest, pirate attitudes, greed and exploitation. However, this is where Bhutan's determination that an economy can be based on the principles of GNH may provide the necessary remedy for greed-based entrepreneurship to be replaced with social entrepreneurship. After all, GNH is focussed on individuals and collectives making decisions that contribute to the happiness of society at large and responds to the basic needs, rather than decisions based on greed and rampant consumerism.

Consumerism is the biggest illusion of happiness that we have let ourselves be fooled into. Our world-view is built on consumerism needing to uphold the global economic system and if consumption stagnates or even drops the world goes into shock and convulsions. As Gunter Pauli notes in his book *Zen and the Art of Blue* "We are obliged to search

for progress since the theoretical constructs we use remain an incomplete reflection of reality."

The next three to five years will be a defining journey for Bhutan let alone the rest of the world. Many of the Blue Economy projects proposed for Bhutan will have either failed or succeeded by that time. Some of these projects include ancient ideas applied with a revolutionary contemporary twist such as the harvesting of pine-resin as a sustainable fuel for vehicles. This method was used already in the 1940s in Japan and recently proven in South America to be commercially viable. It is not only viable but also a sustainable fuel source, as the pine trees keep growing even after harvesting the resin. Bhutan's Ministry of Agriculture and Forests is currently trialling this technology and studying the feasibility of producing all of the vehicle fuel requirements in Bhutan from its forests that cover over 70% of the country.

Other projects on the table with local entrepreneurs ready to take the next step include the manufacturing of bioplastics from agricultural and forestry wastes, the production of clean soaps from the native Bhutanese soap nut plants and cruelty-free silk farming of high quality silks. If you are interested in finding out more about the projects discussed at the Blue Economy event in Bhutan, a complete list can be found in the full report on the Zero Emissions Research and Initiatives website <http://www.zeri.org>.

All of these inspired projects and great ideas like GNH and the Blue Economy lead us to some compelling questions that will define our future as a global society. Are we prepared to look at a more complete picture of reality? Are we prepared to change our way of life and our way of thinking? Are we brave enough to live a GNH way of life and to cultivate a Blue Economy way of doing business? Dealing with some of these questions and

making revolutionary, or may be even evolutionary choices will determine whether our civilisation as we know it will collapse or flourish. I hope these questions may provide you with some wonderful food for thought while you are travelling and exploring Bhutan.

I want to leave you with one final thought. Even though Bhutan is listed by the UN as one of the 48 'Least Developed Countries' in the world, don't underestimate the vision and leadership of its people when it comes to matters of the mind, imagination and ancient wisdom applied to modern challenges. There are several reasons for the extraordinary foresight and insight found here. I hope you will have a chance to explore what these reasons might be and discover some of

the aspects of life in Bhutan, which make this country a truly unique place in the world. ■

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Isabel has been travelling, living and working in Bhutan for the past five years. She is currently engaged in the implementation of a three year program of brining the GNH way of life and sustainability into every aspect of the business operations at Hotel Zhiwa Ling and within Yangphel Adventure Travel. For further information please see the following websites at www.zhiwaling.com and www.yangphel.com.

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Map labels: Norzin Lam, Main traffic, Clock Tower, Druk hotel, Wangchuk Hotel, WILLY'S, 8/11, The Zone, Mandela meat shop, Chang Lam, Changlimithang National Stadium