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Citizen Well-Being and GDP: Toward More Appropriate Measures of Namibia's Success and Progress

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Developing nations like Namibia are aiming to industrialize much like developed nations and use the gross domestic product to measure their progress. However, this development path has been largely unsustainable. For Namibia to develop into a sustainable society, a different approach is needed. This study aimed to find entry points toward such an approach. Surveys were conducted in Windhoek, Namibia's capital, to measure human well-being. Generally, as is expected in a developing country, well-being correlated positively along the income line. However, the indicators did illustrate that a more holistic measure would go a long way toward more effective development planning in Namibia. This study provided an entry point from which further work will be undertaken.

Keywords: *development, sustainability, indicators, survey, Namibia, developing*

Introduction

It has become widely recognized that our current global development path is not taking us in the right direction (Constanza et al., 2014; Rogers et al., 2012; Steffen et al., 2015; Stiglits, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009; Whitby, Seaford, & Berry, 2014). Vast numbers of people live in poverty, and those countries that are deemed successful according to our economic paradigm have major health problems (Compas, Jaser, Dunn, & Rodriguez, 2012; Rogers et al., 2012), depression, and anxiety (Bromet et al., 2011; Streib, 2007). In addition, the globally dominant economic system dependent on industrialization is increasingly putting Earth, and its ecosystem goods and services, under untenable pressure, which has direct effects on human well-being (Constanza et al., 2014; Stiglits et al., 2009).

Global leaders are now realizing that many of our biggest challenges—namely, climate change, soil losses and land degradation, biodiversity loss, food insecurity and water scarcity, poverty, and inequality, among others—are a result of the economic paradigm that we have constructed for society. Fixing them with a short-term one-at-a-time approach will only ever be symptomatic. As a result, on July 19, 2011, the United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/309 was adopted by consensus by the 193-member United Nations. As part of this resolution, the General Assembly invited member states to “pursue the elaboration of additional measures to better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and well-being in their development with a view to guiding their public policies” (United Nations General Assembly, 2011, p. 1). This was followed by an official launch on April 4, 2012, at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Well-Being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm (Musikanski, 2015).

Namibia is a developing country with the driest climate in sub-Saharan Africa. Namibia’s Vision 2030 is for the country to be industrialized by the year 2030. However, it also states that this development must be sustainable, and the ultimate direction is toward the well-being of Namibia’s citizens (Republic of Namibia, 2004). Measuring the progress of Namibia against the vision and its national development plans (NDPs) has been primarily based on the gross domestic product (GDP), and to a much lesser extent, the Human Development Index and Gini coefficient (which measures income equality; Republic of Namibia, 2004).

The GDP is the market value of all goods and services within a country in any given year. It has been governments’ dominant measure to guide public policy, and has been used as a broad measure of human welfare globally, even though Simon Kuznets, the GDP architect and Nobel Peace Prize winner, himself said that it was dangerously inadequate as a measure of quality of life or well-being (Constanza et al., 2014). Two major issues exist with the measure of GDP as a progress indicator for society: (a) it is a single metric, and we live in a complex socioecological system where everything is interconnected, and (b) it interprets every expense as positive and does not distinguish welfare enhancing activities from welfare reducing activities (Constanza et al., 2014). Increased crime rates do not raise living standards but they raise GDP by increasing expenditure on security systems. Natural disasters can boost GDP because they stimulate rebuilding, and the more people are sick or incarcerated, the more money is made (hence, there is more research on management of chronic illnesses than on finding cures or lifestyle health research). In addition, it does not take into account income distribution. A recent study has shown that 1% of the world’s population has more wealth than the rest of the world combined, with just 62 individuals owning the same wealth as 2.6 billion people (Hardoon, Ayele, & Fuentes-Nieva, 2016). GDP, on its own, is inadequate as a measure of quality of life and is now widely agreed upon as a misleading measure of national success (Constanza et al., 2014). However, promoting GDP growth continues to be the primary national policy goal globally.

Development policies need to shift to better account for real welfare and not merely GDP growth. As of 2011, humans were using 135% of the resources that can be sustainably generated in 1 year (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013). Despite this, economic welfare at the global scale has not been improving since 1978 (Helliwell et al., 2013; Kubizewski et al., 2013). If we hope to achieve a sustainable and desirable future, we need to rapidly shift our policy focus away from maximizing production and consumption (GDP) and toward improving human well-being (Atkisson, 2012; Kubizewski et al., 2013).

Namibia is now in the final throes of implementing its fourth NDP (2012/2013–2016/2017) with primary goals including high and "sustained" economic growth, employment creation, and increased income equality (Republic of Namibia, 2012). Namibia's real GDP growth is projected at 5% for 2015 (Bank of Namibia, 2015), and it ranks 126 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Remembering that economic development without social upliftment of all Namibians is meaningless, well-being indicators that are context specific to Namibians should ideally become the new yardstick on which we measure success and policy formulation in Namibia. The aim of this study was to find entry points into the more holistic measure for the success of a developing country like Namibia, including a range of indicators to measure welfare. In 2012, an experimental survey was conducted with a sample of Windhoek, Namibia, residents to take the first steps toward this aim.

Approach and Methodology to Survey

The Approach

The general approach to this study was fivefold. First, a small group was formed (the committee) to develop and implement the study. Second, a literature review of the current alternative national indicators of welfare and well-being globally was conducted. Third, training sessions were conducted with students to run the surveys. Fourth, the survey was conducted. Last, the results were collated, analyzed, and written up.

Committee and Research

The small committee consisted of young volunteers who all share a passion for their country and its citizens' well-being. Together, this group discussed the different options available regarding national domains and indicators, available time and resources, the methodology of the survey, and developing the questionnaire for the survey. This included intensive literature research and mentorships by international experts in formulating alternative national indicators (e.g., the Balaton Group). A good review of the alternative indicators of welfare is given in Constanza et al. (2014). Based on reviews and discussions among the committee, the Bhutan example (www.grossnationalhappiness.com) and Happiness Alliance (<http://www.happycounts.org/>) were chosen as the templates from which to work.

The Survey

After discussions on how to best provide for a cross section of Windhoek's demographic with the limited budget and available time, the chosen suburbs to survey were done along an assumed income line, namely Ludwigsdorf (high income); Windhoek West (middle income); and Hakahana, Okuryangava, and Shandumbala in Katutura (ranging low to middle income). Approximately 600 people were surveyed in total, and suburban variation depended on various factors, such as willingness to answer, number of surveyors, etc. Surveys were conducted between August and October 2012.

Analysis

The survey was adapted from Gross National Happiness Bhutan and the Happiness Alliance with modifications according to the Namibian context. These were discussed and agreed upon by the committee. Domains were based on Gross National Happiness Bhutan and included (a) state of

mind; (b) health; (c) education, recreation, and culture; (d) community strength; (e) good governance and political freedom; (f) area and environment; (g) time balance; (h) material well-being; and (i) work. To evaluate each domain, several indicators were assigned (Table 1).

Table 1: Domains With Indicators and Relative Weightings

Domain	Indicator	Individual indicator weight		Domain weight	Total weight	
		Percentage	Fraction		Fraction	Decimal
1 State of mind	Life satisfaction	40.0%	2/5	1/9	2/45	.044444
	Life purpose	40.0%	2/5	1/9	2/45	.044444
	Positive emotion	10.0%	1/10	1/9	1/90	.011111011111
	Negative emotion	10.0%	1/10	1/9	1/90	.011111011111
2 Health	Health status	33.3%	1/3	1/9	1/27	.037037
	Energy	33.3%	1/3	1/9	1/27	.037037
	Ability	33.3%	1/3	1/9	1/27	.037037
3 Time balance	Time enjoyment	50.0%	1/2	1/9	1/18	.055556
	Pace	50.0%	1/2	1/9	1/18	.055556
4 Community strength	Trust	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
	Unity	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
	Safety	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
	Donation (time and money)	15.0%	3/20	1/9	1/6060	.016667
	Support and relationships	10.0%	1/10	1/9	1/90	.011111
5 Education, recreation, and culture	Education satisfaction	33.3%	1/3	1/9	1/27	.037037
	Recreation satisfaction	33.3%	1/3	1/9	1/27	.037037
	Cultural satisfaction	33.3%	1/3	1/9	1/27	.037037
6 Area and environment	Access to services	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
	Access to housing	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
	Access to employment	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
	Natural environment	25.0%	1/4	1/9	1/36	.027778
7 Good governance and political freedom	Infrastructure	20.0%	1/5	1/9	1/45	.022222
	Responsive governance	20.0%	1/5	1/9	1/45	.022222
	Political freedom	20.0%	1/5	1/9	1/45	.022222
	Corruption	20.0%	1/5	1/9	1/45	.022222
	Governance performance	20.0%	1/5	1/9	1/45	.022222
8 Material well-being	Financial freedom	50.0%	1/2	1/9	1/18	.055556
	Buying power	50.0%	1/2	1/9	1/18	.055556
9 Work	Work satisfaction	40.0%	2/5	1/9	2/45	.044444
	Work environment	60.0%	3/5	1/9	3/45	.066667

Each of the nine domains was assigned equal weights of 1/9, as each domain is considered to be equal in its intrinsic importance as a component of gross national happiness (Ura, Alkire, & Zangmo, 2012). However, the 30 indicators within the domains were weighted according to public opinion, previous studies, and committee discussion. In five domains, the indicators within the domain were equally weighted (health; time balance; education, recreation, and culture; area and environment; good governance and political freedom). In the remaining four domains, indicators were assigned weightings between 10 and 60% (Table 1). A sufficiency threshold was assigned to each indicator at a level that was considered “sufficient” for the majority of people (www.bhutanstudies.org.bt). The sufficiency thresholds are based on several inputs including international and national standards, normative judgements from consultative sessions, and previous studies. Thus, for each indicator, the percentage of people above and below sufficiency was calculated, following which the percentage of people above and below sufficiency for each domain was calculated. All suburbs were collectively analyzed as well as separately.

Results and Discussion

Of 600 questionnaires attempted during the survey, 480 were returned, and 417 were answered (Hakahana, 71; Okuryangava, 87; Shandumbala, 105; Windhoek West, 123; and Ludwigsdorf, 31). The overall sufficiency for all suburbs was 45.92%. Sufficiency was reached in 12 indicators and two domains, namely, state of mind (66.46%) and health (67.06%; Table 2, Figure 1). For all suburbs, sufficiency was reached in these two domains. In Okuryangava, sufficiency was also achieved in education, recreation, and culture (58.13%) and material well-being (53.04%). In Windhoek West, area and environment achieved 59.23% (Table 2, Figure 1). In Ludwigsdorf, material well-being (51.9%) and work (50.96%) were above sufficiency. In all suburbs, health status was the highest scoring indicator, while corruption and trust were the two lowest scoring indicators (Table 2, Figure 1). Hakahana achieved sufficiency in the least indicators (four) and had the lowest overall sufficiency at 35.27%. Okuryangava had the highest (51.74%), with sufficiency achieved in 17 indicators (Table 2, Figure 1).

Generally, well-being seemed to correlate along the income line, with the exception of Okuryangava (Table 3, Figure 2). Okuryangava is an informal settlement, and has a relatively high rate of poverty, rated second poorest community amongst the chosen suburbs. It is not surprising that in a country with a high income gap, and one that is still considered developing, that increasing income has an impact on increasing well-being. However, what is surprising is the exception that the sample members from Okuryangava had the highest state of well-being, despite being the second lowest in income. Discussions with residents of the community after these results were found, as well as discussions within the committee, yielded suggestions that perhaps, due to the historic demographic of the suburb (older community), residents are satisfied in comparison to the little freedom they had preindependence, illustrating signs of humility and perhaps lower expectations.

Table 2: Summary of Sufficiency According to Suburb

Suburb	Overall sufficiency	Number of domains above sufficiency	Number of indicators above sufficiency	Highest indicator	%	Lowest indicator	%
Okuryangava	51.74	4	17	Health status	94.10	Corruption	13.50
Ludwigsdorf	50.9696	4	15	Health status	93.40	Corruption	3.20
Windhoek West	50.00	3	16	Health status	92.50	Corruption	15.00
Shandumbala	43.72	2	10	Health status	88.90	Trust	12.28
Hakahana	35.27	2	4	Health status	92.80	Trust	8.75

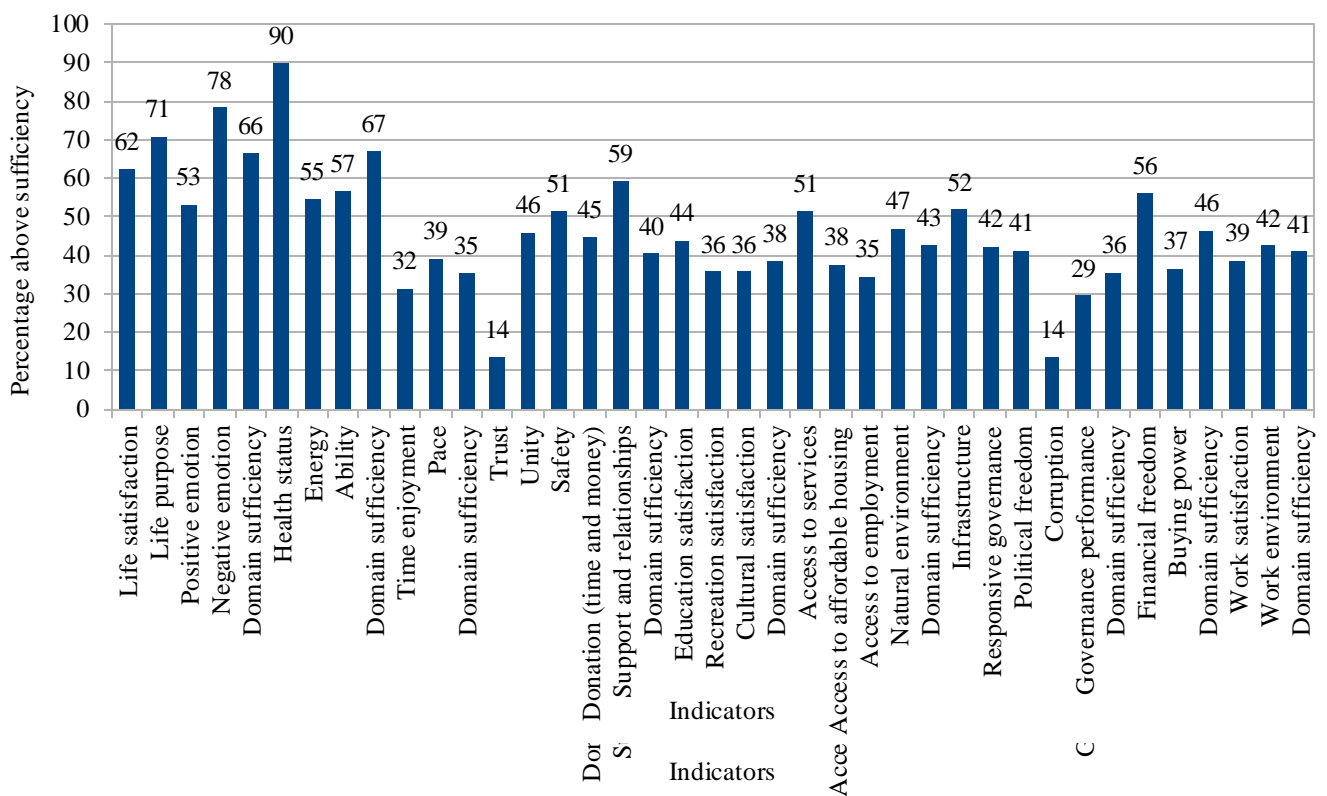


Figure 1: Percentage Above Sufficiency for All Indicators Including All Suburbs

Table 3: Percentage Above Sufficiency for All Domains and Indicators According to Suburb

Domain	Indicator	Percentage above sufficiency					
		All	Hakahana	Okuryangava	Shandumbala	Windhoek West	Ludwigsdorf
1 State of mind	Life satisfaction	62.3535	41.50	79.55	62.2020	59.40	77.40
	Life purpose	70.92	58.28	74.44	73.72	70.84	80.6868
	Positive emotion	53.23	36.6565	57.43	52.60	58.75	75.00
	Negative emotion	78.28	73.70	78.78	80.10	78.98	85.32
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>66.46</i>	<i>50.95</i>	<i>75.22</i>	<i>67.64</i>	<i>66.87</i>	<i>79.26</i>
2 Health	Health status	89.90	92.8080	94.10	88.90	92.50	93.40
	Energy	54.63	40.50	55.23	54.00	56.27	78.50
	Ability	56.65	49.30	66.00	50.05	58.60	70.95
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>67.0606</i>	<i>60.87</i>	<i>71.78</i>	<i>64.32</i>	<i>69.12</i>	<i>80.95</i>
3 Time balance	Time enjoyment	31.50	25.70	37.90	38.5050	29.20	32.30
	Pace	39.18	30.90	43.45	44.6868	42.00	22.55
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>35.3434</i>	<i>28.30</i>	<i>40.68</i>	<i>41.5959</i>	<i>35.60</i>	<i>27.43</i>
4 Community strength	Trust	13.58	8.75	17.23	12.28	16.38	19.35
	Unity	46.03	38.47	51.70	46.87	41.37	37.63
	Safety	51.40	32.80	60.00	51.50	60.30	51.60
	Donation (time and money)	44.75	45.75	33.80	43.60	51.20	66.15
	Support and relationships	59.10	45.67	65.37	56.27	61.90	71.90
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>40.37</i>	<i>31.43</i>	<i>43.84</i>	<i>39.83</i>	<i>43.38</i>	<i>44.26</i>
5 Education, recreation, and culture	Education satisfaction	43.9393	37.13	50.20	44.67	53.27	19.37
	Recreation satisfaction	35.70	20.00	62.10	27.90	36.40	42.00
	Cultural satisfaction	35.70	20.00	62.10	27.90	36.40	42.00
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>38.44</i>	<i>25.71</i>	<i>58.13</i>	<i>33.49</i>	<i>42.02</i>	<i>34.4646</i>
6 Area and environment	Access to services	51.30	36.93	56.90	47.23	68.87	40.00

Domain	Indicator	Percentage above sufficiency					
		All	Hakahana	Okuryangava	Shandumbala	Windhoek West	Ludwigsdorf
	Access to housing	37.60	28.80	45.20	36.90	47.50	25.80
	Access to employment	34.5050	20.8080	32.20	30.10	49.20	45.20
	Natural environment	47.07	26.6666	37.87	44.54	71.34	59.49
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>42.6262</i>	<i>28.3030</i>	<i>43.04</i>	<i>39.69</i>	<i>59.23</i>	<i>42.62</i>
7	Good governance and political freedom						
	Infrastructure	51.80	26.10	51.80	53.40	62.70	74.20
	Responsive governance	42.25	27.7070	55.85	36.20	46.70	31.30
	Political freedom	41.20	24.60	49.40	38.40	55.50	30.00
	Corruption	13.60	13.0000	13.50	18.10	15.00	3.20
	Governance performance	29.45	22.05	27.15	29.60	38.75	16.15
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>35.66</i>	<i>22.69</i>	<i>39.54</i>	<i>35.14</i>	<i>43.73</i>	<i>30.97</i>
8	Material well-being						
	Financial freedom	56.1010	57.70	65.75	48.95	57.35	48.50
	Buying power	36.7070	33.87	40.33	28.70	41.47	55.30
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>46.040</i>	<i>45.78</i>	<i>53.04</i>	<i>38.83</i>	<i>49.41</i>	<i>51.90</i>
9	Work						
	Work satisfaction	38.63	21.7070	40.00	27.90	40.80	67.83
	Work environment	42.43	24.50	40.70	36.40	42.20	66.10
	<i>Domain sufficiency</i>	<i>40.91</i>	<i>23.38</i>	<i>40.42</i>	<i>33.00</i>	<i>41.64</i>	<i>66.79</i>
	<i>Overall sufficiency</i>	<i>45.92</i>	<i>35.27</i>	<i>51.74</i>	<i>43.7272</i>	<i>50.00</i>	<i>50.96</i>

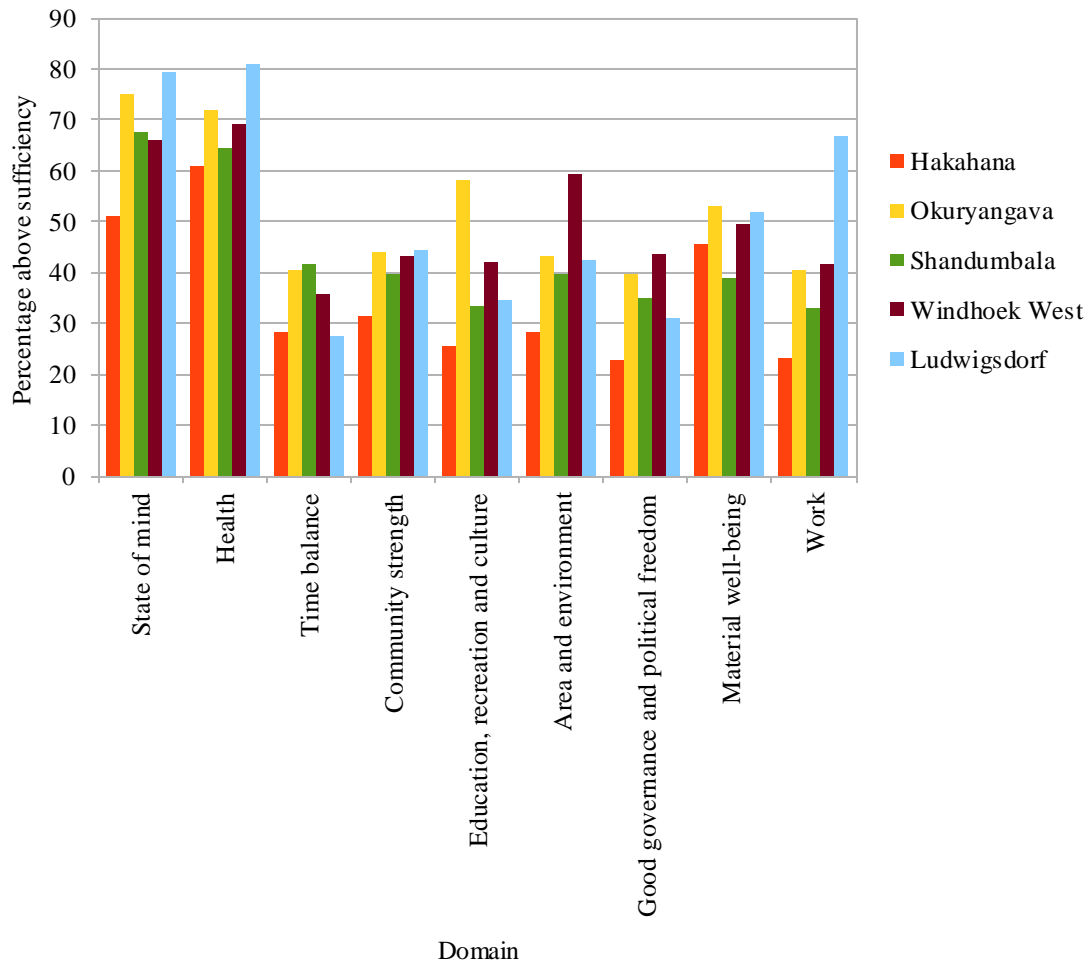


Figure 2: Percentage Above Sufficiency for Each Domain According to Suburb

Generally, across the entire survey sample, state of mind (i.e., satisfaction with life and life purpose, as well as emotional stability) was sufficient, as was personal health (health status, energy, and ability; Table 3, Figure 1).

Generally, respondents felt that they did not have enough free time (Figure 1). This is connected to time/work balance. Work satisfaction as well as the work environment (e.g., appropriate pay, productivity, level of freedom for creativity) was generally low in all suburbs except Ludwigsdorf.

Community strength and a sense of belonging to a community are immensely important components of well-being in human society. According to our study, sense of community strength was lowest in the highest income area, Ludwigsdorf, and highest in the Katutura suburbs in general (i.e., Shandumbala, Okuryangava, and Hakahana; Table 3, Figure 2). Sense of security and safety was lowest in Hakahana, possibly linked to lack of trust, low income, and high poverty rates (resulting in desperation leading to crime), high unemployment, and a lack of trust by the community in general.

The education, recreation, and culture domain was rated low in all suburbs, although Okuryangava rated above sufficiency in this domain (Table 3, Figure 2). People, generally, felt that they did not have access to proper education, informal education facilities, recreational activities, and facilities. It is assumed that lack of access might be due to lack of infrastructure and opportunities. However, some access issues might be a result of a lack of awareness or knowledge of available and existing opportunities.

Access to basic services reached sufficiency in only two of the suburbs (Okuryangava and Windhoek West; Table 3, Figure 2). Ludwigsdorf respondents were below sufficiency even though the entire community has direct access to water and electricity, for instance. However, the low sufficiency might be associated with higher costs for these services as opposed to the lack of them.

In the suburbs of Katutura, people felt that the natural environment was badly maintained, with Windhoek West and Ludwigsdorf above sufficiency. Community citizen projects could improve the natural environment of Katutura (such as, for instance, antilittering campaigns, community park creations, and access to recycling services).

Unsurprisingly, access to employment was below sufficiency, and, indeed, one of the greater challenges (Figure 2). This is already an addressed challenge in our NDPs as well as more direct work done by the Namibian planning commission (such as the Targeted Intervention Programme for Employment and Economic Growth) and the recent ministerial reshuffle leading to one of the ministries being now named Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, and Employment Creation.

Good governance and political freedom was perhaps the most challenging domain (Table 2, Figure 2). Generally, respondents were content with existing infrastructure, with the exception of Hakahana (an informal settlement with very little access to basic services). All suburbs with the exception of Okuryangava felt that their government was not responsive enough. All suburbs, except Windhoek West (middle-income suburb), were below sufficiency regarding political freedom. Corruption was generally found to be the biggest problem and lowest indicator by the respondents. Governance performance was also ranked very low in all suburbs.

Generally, respondents felt that they had financial freedom (i.e., being able to pay minimal bills and feed themselves; Figure 2). Buying power (i.e., paying for desired versus required items), however, was low in all suburbs except Ludwigsdorf (Table 3).

Conclusions and Way Forward

Shortcomings and Lessons Learned From the Entry Point Study

Overall, the study was limited by funding and available human resources (all of which were voluntary). Restrictions had to be made to keep in line with the small budget, and often, additional money was sourced privately to pay for services and materials. Volunteerism was strong, and the committee was passionate and put forward immense effort given the amount of other commitments.

There were many lessons learned throughout the process of this entry point initiative. These came from two separate angles, namely, (a) through the methods and approach we tested and (b) feedback from the survey participants.

The questionnaire had a section in which participants could give comments and feedback. Most of the participants claimed that the questionnaire was too long, with many repetitive questions. Some felt that the questions were too personal. A few entrants made demands, such as the need for housing, closing down of shebeens (informal bars), more jobs, and better access to education, among others. One or two participants claimed they should receive money for answering the questionnaire, and some asked that something be done for them based on their answers. Most participants who entered feedback gave appreciation toward the effort of the survey and overall initiative.

The feedback from participants, coupled with our own lessons learned, has culminated in a few important lessons for the way forward:

1. The questionnaire was too long and there were unnecessary duplications, with too many options. In addition, it was complicated for some people. We will need to shorten and simplify the questionnaire, with translations into vernacular languages.
2. The door-to-door process worked in some areas, but not in others. For instance, in Ludwigsdorf, it was very difficult to even have the door answered, and, often, we were turned away. In addition, those who did accept to answer the questionnaire (only after telling them that they could do it on their own time and we would collect after a given number of days) were then not home or could not be contacted to retrieve the answered questionnaire. It may have been easier to have used another method of survey for this area—through e-mail or an Internet link. This was initially discussed, but again, funding limited further action. In other areas, where Internet access is not available, the door-to-door process was the most appropriate approach—but was also not an ideal situation.

Toward a More Appropriate and Holistic Measure

This study is the entry point into investigating more holistic measures for the success and prosperity of Namibia. We hope that this work sparks an important debate on the future of indicators for well-being and success in Namibia and mobilizes thought processes in at least local development planning for Windhoek. Another aim of this work was to allow for an entry point for further study and work in this arena. This small entry point study was merely a first step and a learning process to inform future and more detailed studies and resulting action in Namibian communities for the eventual inclusion of such information and indicators into our national planning systems, such as the coming NDPs. The next step would be to take the results back to a survey community and discuss, with the community and the city of Windhoek, how one could improve the status of the community. In addition, fine-tuning the domains, indicators, and survey questions based on feedback from this study, and furthering it into other parts of Namibia, would give a good baseline of the current state of overall well-being, happiness, and contentment (and the contextualized definitions thereof) of Namibian citizens living in different communities. The final step would be to hone in on the results and determine where improvements can be made by government in partnership with communities, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and community-based organizations, with a sound feedback mechanism that is people-centered.

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