**Another Voice Podcast with Eric Nelson**

**to accompany Strayer/Nelson, *Ways of the World*, Third Edition**

**Looking Forward: Development in the Twenty-First Century (Chapter 22)**

**SLIDE 22.1**

Economic development remains a central issue for much of the Global South, so what will the future of development look like in the twenty-first century?

**SLIDE 22.2 [Image: Slums and Skyscrapers in Brazil]**

It is impossible to predict the future, but some emerging trends offer possibilities for new directions. Twentieth century experiences have led some to ask whether industrialization has to be accomplished through the traditional model of low wages, difficult working conditions and great costs to the environment. Nearly everywhere that has industrialized has followed this pattern, but given our experience, could there be better, more humane and environmentally friendly pathways to industrial development? Some believe so. For instance, the idea that developing countries should rely on renewable sources of energy, rather than on fossil fuels, has gained considerable support from both developed and developing nations seeking to limit climate change.

**SLIDE 22.3** **[Image: Environmentalism in Action]**

Others have questioned the very criteria by which industrial development is measured. They ask whether we rely too much on indicators like Gross Domestic Product, which only measure economic production. Instead some advocate for broader measurements that take into account social, environmental and spiritual well-being alongside more traditional economic criteria.

Perhaps nowhere has this approach been taken further than the tiny landlocked kingdom of Bhutan, which lies between China and India on the eastern slopes of the Himalaya Mountains. It has developed its own measure, called Gross National Happiness, to assess the country’s well-being and to guide government policy. First developed in the early 1970s, this new measurement balances economic growth with social and spiritual well-being, and the needs of Bhutan’s 750,000 citizens with the kingdom’s natural environment. “It’s easy to mine the land and fish the seas and get rich,” declared Bhutan’s minister of education in 2012 “yet we believe you cannot have a prosperous nation in the long run that does not conserve its natural environment or take care of the well-being of its people.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

One of the poorest countries in the world with a quarter of its population earning less than one dollar and twenty-five cents a day, Bhutan has made some remarkable progress since adopting its Gross National Happiness measure. The lives of citizens have improved: life expectancy has doubled since the early 1990s and primary school is nearly universal for Bhutan children. At the same time, the country has also shown a commitment to the environment by enshrining its protection in its constitution and banning the export of forest products.

Gross National Happiness has attracted wide attention. In 2011, the United Nations recognized and embraced Bhutan’s more holistic approach to development and set up a committee to explore ways to adopt this approach more widely.

**SLIDE 22.4 [Image: Microloans, Indian Grameen Bank representative meeting with women]**

However, even as Gross National Happiness gains wider recognition, Bhutan is reassessing its own understanding of this measure. Elections in 2013 brought a new government to power that preferred to focus on what it termed more concrete goals. As their new leader put it, “If the government of the day were to spend a disproportionate amount of time talking about Gross National Happiness rather than delivering basic services, then it is a distraction. Rather than talking about happiness, we want to work on reducing the obstacles to happiness.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Bhutan’s experience with Gross National Happiness reflects the longer-term history of development in the Global South. No single model has proven suitable for all contexts or stages of development, leading to continued interest in new ways of approaching development and defining its goals. As with alternative approaches to industrialization, Gross National Happiness and similar holistic measures of development offer a promising—but far from universally applicable—path forward in the twenty-first century. And perhaps it also represents a return to earlier understandings of the good life before the push for economic development.

1. Annie Kelly, “Gross National Happiness in Bhutan: The big idea from a tiny state that could change the world”, *The Guardian*, 1 December 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gardner Harris, “Index of happiness? New Leader Prefers More Concrete Goals.” *New York Times*, October 4, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)