

# Editorial

## Towards a Sustainable Bhutan

The potential of the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) as an inspiration for “development with values” has drawn attention around the world. Since 1979, when His Majesty The Fourth Druk Gyalpo first coined the term, GNH has been studied by journalists, scholars, NGOs, and development experts. In 2011 GNH was propelled to the global stage with the United Nations adopting the “Happiness Resolution” as it is popularly known, and the declaration of March 20 as the “International Day of Happiness”.

In 2012, as the UN-initiated discussions to define a new and more viable post-2015 (post Millennium Development Goals) global development agenda gathered momentum, the government of Bhutan contributed ideas for an alternative development paradigm drawn from the concept of Gross National Happiness. For various reasons, the initiative did not have a major impact.

The global effort to define the new paradigm ultimately resulted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDGs are a set of 17 aspirational “Global Goals,” with 169 targets, and the objective of “Transforming our World.” Bhutan is among the 193 countries that formally signed the SDGs to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all” as part of the new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years.

What does this mean for Bhutan? The truth is that Gross National Happiness requires much more clarity as a national vision. While it has influenced national planning by defining priorities, GNH is a long way from being translated into clear policies for development. As we talk about the synergy between GNH and SDGs how do we adopt a set of new goals which are so broad that they try to cover every aspect of human development?

The government of Bhutan has decided to focus on three of the SDGs: SDG 1 (no poverty), 13 (climate action) and 15 (life on land) as immediate goals to be showcased. Together with UNDP, the driver of the SDGs, the government has also attempted to align the SDGs and the country's 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Plan targets. However, this is just the beginning of a process that will be as complex as it is ambitious.

The SDGs, introduced about one year back, are new to Bhutanese planners and completely unknown to the rest of the population. Yet we are all committed to implement them. The SDGs call for the partnership of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens to make sure we leave a better planet for future generations.

The Druk Journal is dedicating this issue to begin a substantive discourse on the SDGs as well as ideas and initiatives related to the SDGs to help us understand them. The articles, written by Bhutanese and international thinkers, aim to help decision makers and all sections of our society reflect on and find innovative ways to achieve sustainable development.

We hope that this issue and the Conversations to follow, will lead to a better understanding of the direction of our own development process. We hope it will help us gain a clearer perspective of our own national vision.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and adequate nutrition for all, and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Attain healthy life for all at all ages
4. Provide equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning opportunities for all
5. Attain gender equality, empower women and girls everywhere
6. Secure water and sanitation for all for a sustainable world
7. Ensure access to affordable, sustainable, and reliable modern energy services for all
8. Promote strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all
9. Promote sustainable industrialisation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Build inclusive, safe and sustainable cities and human settlements
12. Promote sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Promote action at all levels to address climate change
14. Attain conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, oceans and seas
15. Protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems and halt all biodiversity loss
16. Achieve peaceful and inclusive societies, rule of law, effective and capable institutions
17. Strengthen and enhance the means of implementation and global partnership for sustainable development.