

The Happy Planet Index 2012

What is the Happy Planet Index?

The Happy Planet Index (HPI) is the leading global measure of sustainable well-being.

As a new measure of human progress, it measures what matters: the extent to which countries deliver long, happy, sustainable lives for the people that live in them.

The 2012 HPI report ranks 151 countries based on their efficiency – the extent to which each nation produces long and happy lives per unit of environmental input.

Why do we need it?

A growing number of people, organisations and governments agree **we need new measures of progress** – measures that account for important things that older measures, like GDP, do not.

The HPI puts current and future well-being at the heart of measurement. It frames the development of each country in the context of real environmental limits.

In doing so **it tells us what we instinctively know to be true** – that progress is not just about wealth, that it is possible to live happily and sustainably. It shows that while the challenges faced by rich resource-intensive nations and those with high levels of poverty and deprivation may be very different, the **end goal is the same**: to produce happy, healthy lives now and in the future.

The HPI demonstrates that the dominant Western model of development is not sustainable and we need to find other development paths towards sustainable well-being.

How is the HPI calculated?

The HPI blends subjective and objective data to build a picture of progress within a country. The index uses global data on **life expectancy**, experienced **well-being** and **ecological footprint** to rank countries. It asks the question: “how much well-being is achieved per unit of resource consumption?”

$$\text{Happy Planet Index} \approx \frac{\text{Experienced well-being} \times \text{Life expectancy}}{\text{Ecological Footprint}}$$

The components of the HPI

- **Well-being.** If you want to know how well someone’s life is going, your best bet is to ask them directly. In this year’s HPI, experienced well-being is assessed using a question called the ‘Ladder of Life’ from the Gallup World Poll. This asks respondents to imagine a ladder, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 the best possible life, and report the step of the

ladder they feel they currently stand on.¹ Evidence indicates that this is an effective measure of overall well-being.

- **Life expectancy.** Alongside experienced well-being, the HPI includes a universally important measure of health – life expectancy.
- **Ecological footprint.** A society that achieves high well-being now, but consumes so much that the same resources are not available for future generations can hardly be considered successful. The HPI uses the Ecological Footprint promoted by the environmental NGO WWF as a measure of resource consumption.² It is a per capita measure of the amount of land required to sustain a country's consumption patterns, measured in terms of global hectares (g ha) which represent a hectare of land with average productive biocapacity.

Results

The 2012 results confirm that we are still not living on a happy planet. No country is able to combine success across the three goals of high life expectancy, high experienced well-being and living within environmental limits.

Whilst **high-income countries score low** because of their large ecological footprints, the lowest income countries in **sub-Saharan Africa score even lower** because of low life expectancy and low well-being.

High and medium development **Latin American countries tend to score highest** in delivering long and happy lives with a relatively low ecological footprint.

The HPI charter

Alongside this report, **nef** is launching a Happy Planet charter. We are calling on **governments** to adopt new measures of human progress that establish the goal of delivering sustainable well-being for all at the heart of our societal and economic decision making process.

We call on the **United Nations** to develop an indicator that builds on the Happy Planet Index and measures progress towards the key goal for a better future: sustainable well-being for all.

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The website www.happyplanetindex.org goes live on the report release date of Thursday 14th June. Embargoed full report and infographic available from Thursday 31st May.

¹ See Appendix 1 in our full report for explanation of why this measure of experienced well-being was used in this report. See <http://www.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx> for information on how Gallup have used this indicator.

² See www.footprintnetwork.org.