

EMBARGOED: 00:01, THURSDAY 14 JUNE 2012

Jamaica more efficient than the UK: nef publishes 2012 Happy Planet Index

- **Costa Rica and Vietnam are happiest countries in the world, given their resource use**
- **The UK tops the EU, ranking 41 out of 151 countries globally**
- **Spain and Greece experience significant falls in national well-being.**

A new report published today finds the UK is less efficient than Jamaica and most Latin American nations at using environmental resources to create long and happy lives for its citizens.

The Happy Planet Index, compiled by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) ranks countries based on the health and happiness they produce per unit of environmental input, using global data on life expectancy, happiness and environmental sustainability.

Happy Planet Index is the leading global measure of sustainable well-being. The Happy Planet Charter has been endorsed by leading environmentalists, economists, and politicians ahead of next week's United Nations Earth Summit.

Costa Rica and Vietnam are the happiest countries in the world given their resource use

The 2012 Happy Planet Index is topped by Costa Rica, Vietnam and Colombia – the countries that live the longest, happiest, most sustainable lives.

Costa Ricans have higher average life expectancy and well-being than people living in the United States and the country has a per capita Ecological Footprint one third the size of that of the US.

Of the nine countries closest to achieving happy, green lives, eight are in Latin America and the Caribbean.

UK ranks 41 out of 151 countries

The UK ranks ahead of all other G8 nations and comes top of EU nations in the Happy Planet Index.

But the UK's HPI score is 48/100 which ranks it behind Jamaica, Mexico and Norway in terms of efficiency. Like most other high income countries, its low overall score is caused by a large ecological footprint, of 4.7g ha per capita – if everyone consumed as much as the UK we would need almost 3 planets to maintain our consumption. The USA fares even worse in 105th position out of 151 countries.

- **Spain and Greece experience significant falls in national well-being.**

Spain (62nd) and Greece (83rd) have both shown falls in their populations' well-being scores during the economic downturn, according to Gallup World Poll data from between 2007 and 2010.

Both countries, now experiencing severe economic difficulties and huge unemployment, are within the top ten fallers in happiness levels. These results provide strong evidence that well-being data is an accurate reflection of the economic and political fortunes of a country.

Nic Marks, nef fellow and creator of the Happy Planet index:

"The Happy Planet Index measures what really matters – long and happy lives now and the potential for good lives in the future. For too long we have relied on incomplete measures of progress that focus only on economic activity, such as GDP.

"Rich and poor nations face different challenges but their ultimate goal is the same. The HPI not only reveals how far every country has to travel before it achieves good lives that don't cost the earth [or within its fair share of planetary resources] but also the direction it needs to move in."

Saamah Abdallah, Senior researcher at the New Economics Foundation

"Countries like Costa Rica outrank the UK in the Happy Planet Index because their inhabitants live long and happy lives using a fraction of the planet's resources that we do. They point the direction towards a development model that can achieve healthy, happy and sustainable lives."

-ENDS-

Contact: Carys Afoko, Communications Manager
m: 0787 596 6955 e: carys.afoko@neweconomics.org

-ENDS-

Full results attached

All spokespeople available for interview

Country case studies available on request

Notes to editors:

1. **The New Economics Foundation** is an independent think tank that aims to improve quality of life by promoting innovative solutions to economic, environmental and social issues.
2. **The Happy Planet Index was first published** in 2006. The 2012 report is the third global HPI report.
3. **The Happy Planet Index was devised by** Nic Marks. His Global TED talk on the 2010 has attracted over 500,000 views:
http://www.ted.com/talks/nic_marks_the_happy_planet_index.html
4. **The following organisations and individuals have signed the Happy Planet Charter, calling on the United Nations to develop an indicator as part of the post-2015 framework that, like the Happy Planet Index, measures progress towards the key goal for a better future: sustainable well-being for all:**
Friends of the Earth; Soil Association; 10:10; Action for Happiness; Bird Life international; La Fabrique Spinoza; NUS; Progressio; Stakeholder Forum; Practical Action; IIED; World Development Movement; People and Planet; Green Economy Coalition; The Green New Deal Group; onehundredmonths.org; The Energy and Resources Institute, Europe; Caroline Lucas MP; Joan Ruddock MP; Jonathan Porritt; Anthony Seldon; Bill McKibben.
5. **How the HPI is calculated**
The HPI uses global data on **life expectancy**, experienced **well-being** and **ecological footprint** to rank countries.

Data sources

Wellbeing: Experienced well-being is assessed using a question called the 'Ladder of Life' from the Gallup World Poll. The poll used samples of around 1000 individuals aged 15 or over in each of more than 150 countries. For a majority of countries, the poll was administered in 2010 or 2011. But there were 20 countries where the latest poll was administered in 2008 or 2009, and 7 countries where it was administered in 2006 or 2007.

Life expectancy: Taken from the 2011 UNDP Human Development Report.

Life expectancy and experienced well-being are used to generate Happy Life Years, developed by sociologist Ruut Veenhoven. Modelled on the indicator Quality Adjusted Life Years, this indicator is calculated by adjusting life expectancy in a country by average levels of experienced well-being.

Ecological Footprint: Ecological Footprint measures the amount of land required to sustain a country's consumption patterns. It includes the land required to provide the renewable resources people use (most importantly food and wood products), the area occupied by infrastructure, and the area required to absorb CO2 emissions. Crucially it includes 'embedded' land and emissions from imports. So the CO2 associated with the manufacture of a mobile phone made in China, but then bought by someone living in Chile, will count towards Chile's Ecological Footprint, not China's.

$$\text{Happy Planet Index} \approx \frac{\text{Happy Life Years}}{\text{Ecological Footprint}}$$

www.happyplanetindex.org

www.neweconomics.org