

Human Security, Health, and Well-being

Drivers for Human Flourishing, Quality of Life, and Social Progress

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ABSTRACT

Prioritizing people's physical and mental health and well-being from threats that could hinder their ability to flourish is critical to social progress and environmental sustainability at community, national, regional, and global levels. Simply put, human security, health, and well-being are essential prerequisites for human flourishing, quality of life, and social progress, as they provide the foundation for individuals to live with purpose, meaning, and fulfillment, free from fear and want. In this paper, we describe the initiative of the International Panel on Social Progress (IPSP) on health and well-being to address the conceptualization, measurement, and implementation pathways integral to the

link between human security, health, and well-being. Through its working group on health and well-being, IPSP revitalizes the quest for justice-informed health and well-being amid the decline of social-democratic ideals in developed countries and the mimicry of these models by developing nations. The initiative leverages the innovative capabilities of social scientists to explore how health, well-being, and quality of life are integral to sustainable human security. In addition to establishing linkages between health and well-being and human security, in this paper, we present IPSP's framework for sustainable human security and establish action pathways for social cohesion, human flourishing, and quality of life.

HUMAN FLOURISHING, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

The concept of human flourishing expands traditional ideas of well-being beyond physical and mental health and includes the ability to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life, characterized by opportunities for personal growth, social inclusion, and the ability to be impactful. Basic human needs – including access to nutritious food; potable water; supportive shelter; and affordable, quality health care – while necessary, are not sufficient to ensure that people are able to thrive, despite their geography. Human safety and security – including freedom from physical threats and violence; economic opportunity; and protection from discrimination, marginalization, and other forms of human injustice – are foundational for people in cultivating their human potential. The concept of human flourishing also acknowledges the need to experience fulfillment in life and have a sense of purpose. Lastly, environmental security, including clean air, the responsible use of natural resources, and protection from the effects of climate change, are essential for human flourishing (Buettner & Skemp, 2016).

Barriers to global flourishing include poverty, social inequality, and global inequity in the distribution of resources and opportunities. Social unrest, including war and acts of terrorism, often leaves already marginalized populations unable to meet their basic human needs. The negative effects of climate change also disproportionately impact developing countries and agricultural and coastal communities. Lastly, despite advances in healthcare and technology, many people around the globe continue to have limited access to quality education and healthcare.

Social progress is a complex and multifaceted concept, which refers to the advancement of a society in ways that improve the well-being and quality of life for its members (IPSP, 2018). It extends beyond measures of economic growth and encompasses a wide range of social, environmental, and ethical considerations (IPSP, 2018; Maggino, 2023).). In contrast to human flourishing – an individually-measured construct – social progress is measured at a societal or community level. The three key aspects of social progress include meeting basic human needs, enhancing quality of life, and creating opportunities for societal members to reach their full potential.

GLOBAL MEASURES AND DATA ON HUMAN FLOURISHING, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

The Global Flourishing Study (GFS) is a multi-year, longitudinal data collection and

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research collaboration between researchers at Baylor University and the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University. In partnership with Gallup, the Center for Open Science (COS), and a consortium of funders, the study data are shared as an open-access resource to facilitate stakeholders worldwide in accessing detailed information about factors that promote human flourishing. Nationally representative data will be collected from approximately 200,000 participants from across the following twenty-two geographically and culturally diverse countries and territories:

- Argentina
- Australia
- Brazil
- Mainland China
- Egypt
- Germany
- India
- Indonesia

- Israel
- Japan
- Kenya
- Mexico
- Nigeria
- The Philippines
- Poland
- South Africa
- Spain
- Sweden
- Tanzania
- Türkiye
- The United Kingdom
- The United States

The GFS measures global human flourishing in the following six areas:

1. Happiness and life satisfaction
2. Mental and physical health
3. Meaning and purpose
4. Character and virtue
5. Close social relationships
6. Material and financial stability

The Global Social Progress Index (SPI) is a tool that measures social progress by assessing a country's performance in three key domains: basic human needs, foundations of well-being, and opportunity. The Global SPI is the most comprehensive measure of social progress globally, having tracked the performance of 170 countries between 2011 and 2023. The Global SPI includes a downloadable dataset, which can be customized to gain a deeper understanding of social progress across the globe. (Social Progress Imperative, 2024)

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched the Better Life Index (BLI) initiative in 2011 to facilitate the creation of economic in-

dicators that would better capture the multiple dimensions of economic and social progress. It was specifically designed to compare well-being across countries based on the following eleven essential topics, targeting material living conditions and quality of life:

- Housing
- Income
- Jobs
- Community
- Education
- The environment
- Civic engagement
- Health
- Life satisfaction
- Safety
- Work-life balance

It is well known that the OECD developed the BLI as an alternative to GDP in an effort to create alternative indicators for looking beyond GDP. (OECD, 2022)

These all complement and add rigor to the global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is against this background of methodological standards that the International Panel on Social Progress's (IPSP's) working group integrates the changing needs, demands, and expectations of communities to amplify and promote measurable results, accelerate community awareness and engagement, and strengthen policy action and sustainability.

THE IPSP'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING INITIATIVE

The IPSP harnesses the thinking and competencies of experts, social actors, policy

makers, and decision makers on critical social issues to provide the best response to questions that bear on social change. It seeks consensus whenever possible and embraces controversies to present timely and informed arguments and analyses in an accessible way. With no partisan agenda, the IPSP is focused on restoring hope in social programs and on stimulating intellectual and public discussion on informed policymaking and sustainable solutions. In particular, it disseminates knowledge, fosters research, and engages stakeholders at every level.

The IPSP's Human Security, Health and Well-being Working Group, a collaboration of multisector, global partners, launched the Health and Well-being Initiative in 2024. Its goal is to establish an ecosystem of collective knowledge to improve global health, social progress, and human flourishing. The three primary objectives are as follows: (1) to collate data and information to monitor global trends in social progress and human flourishing; (2) to convene global stakeholders to deepen our understanding of the drivers of social progress, as well as the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in advancing social progress; and (3) to connect the people doing the work to the resources needed to advance social progress and sustainable human flourishing.

IPSP's work is modeled on the landmark Blue Zones project and aims to identify areas that have made substantial social progress in the twenty-first century. The term "Blue Zones" refers to the geographic regions across the globe in which people live longer and healthier lives than average. These areas tend to have a higher concentration of centenarians, i.e., people

who live to be 100 years of age and older. The concept was popularized by National Geographic fellow Dan Buettner, who studied these regions in depth. Buettner and his team drew blue circles on maps while identifying these areas (Vander-Weele, 2017; Buettner & Skemp, 2016). They initially identified the following five Blue Zones:

1. Okinawa, Japan
2. The province of Nuoro, Sardinia, Italy
3. The Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica
4. Ikaria, Greece
5. A Seventh Day Adventist community in Loma Linda, California, the United States

This seminal work identified common life-style, environmental, and social factors that are associated with population-level health and longevity and has prompted multiple implementation projects to create model Blue Zone communities, globally.

Inspired by the Blue Zones framework and using data from the Global SPI and the GFS, the IPS aims to identify Social Progress Zones (SPZs), namely national and sub-national locales with the greatest improvements in social progress over the past two decades. The GFS and the SPI both provide transparent and actionable data, enabling comprehensive insights into the true state of our global society, as well as an examination of historical trends. These rich data also allow for a more resolute study of population subgroups. The IPSP's Health and Well-being Initiative aims to specifically identify areas of greatest social progress for (1) Indigenous people and people of color, and (2) women and girls, two groups who, despite global advancement, continue to experience per-

sistent health disparities. It also aims to identify the geographic areas experiencing the greatest economic equality and environmental prosperity. These SPZs will become the target of a more in-depth inquiry by leveraging other local health data and regional partnerships to identify areas where people are flourishing the most and living the longest and the healthiest. Like the Blue Zones project, it will also identify the key drivers of social progress in these places and population subgroups. It is hoped that the IPSP can shine a light on communities that are doing the work well and provide exemplars for other global stakeholders.

Furthermore, as the IPSP highlights communities and stakeholders, it builds on the notion that health and well-being are both critical drivers of human security. In so doing, it can capitalize on its Human Rights and Human Security Framework, which amplifies the United Nation's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as aptly captured by Travanti (Figure 1) in his Framework of Sustainable Human Security.

It is important to make the link between health, well-being, and human security. Sustainable human security encompasses health and well-being as a global vulnerability. The COVID-19 pandemic has refocused attention on health and well-being as a critical factor in human security and emergency preparedness – health, safety, education, and social integration. (UN-Habitat, 2021) In addition, the global framework of the SDGs provides a comprehensive set of interconnected domains, which are focused on inclusivity, equity, and sustainability. (WHO, 2024) The localization of the SDGs

requires objective indicators of health, economic, social, and environmental dynamics, which capture the lived experiences of people in communities, cities, municipalities, and countries.

The IPSP's Health and Well-being Initiative intends to (1) deepen our understanding of the factors that contribute to human security, health, and well-being across geographies and populations; (2) track global trends in human flourishing, quality of life, and social progress; and (3) provide a framework to evaluate the impact of interventions and policies. The initiative leverages the innovative capabilities of social scientists to explore how health and well-being

are integral to sustainable human security, in addition to establishing linkages between health, well-being, and human security. By working together to address these challenges, we can create a world where all humans can thrive.

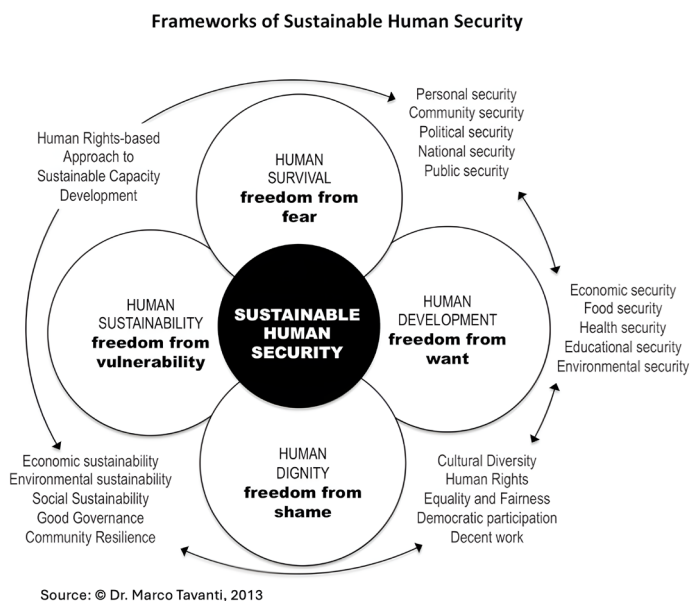


Figure 1

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