

Scottish Wildlife Trust Briefing

Motion S4M-07111

Oxfam's report: *Our Economy*



The Scottish Wildlife Trust welcomes Oxfam's report *Our Economy* which builds on Oxfam's development of the Humankind Index which we supported.

Measures of prosperity

Our Economy highlights the need to better measure Scotland's prosperity and the Scottish Wildlife Trust agrees that Scotland needs to develop better metrics that are not just focused on economic growth measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP does not measure human well-being or account for the negative side effects of economic activity such as natural resource depletion, increased air pollution or other environmental damage.

GDP is also driven by perversities; major oil spills - such as the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico - is seen as making a positive contribution to GDP by economists (because of economic activity generated from the clean-up).¹

GDP -- has been called a gross mismeasure of progress (Ashok Khosla Co-President of the Club of Rome 2007); -- does not measure the joy of children's play (Robert Kennedy 1968); -- tells you nothing about sustainability (Joseph Stiglitz 2008); and is commodity-centred not people-centred (Amartya Sen 2010).

Economic activity often ignores the negative impacts on natural capital (the global annual cost of environmental externalities has been estimated to be \$7.3 trillion²) and to tackle this perversity the Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that there is a need to develop natural capital methodologies to encourage more 'real economy' accounting for corporate bodies who are based in Scotland.³

Health inequalities

We agree with Oxfam's report that it is an injustice that poorer communities have less access to greenspace, and evidence shows this can exacerbate income related health inequalities.⁴

Indeed in Scotland, poverty and poor health and lack of access to high quality greenspace go hand in hand. Easy access to good quality urban greenspace is essential for physical activity,^{5,6} positive mental well-being⁷ and healthy childhood development.⁸ Contact with nature has also been shown to reduce the severity of childhood Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.⁹

Incidence of heart disease is twice as high in deprived areas as the Scottish average¹⁰ and is influenced by lifestyle choices such as being more or less physically active; the environmental factors most likely to support better population health behaviors are linked to walking access (ideally within 5-10 minutes) to work, shops and local services and better public use of greenspace.¹¹

Oxfam's earlier work on the Humankind Index highlighted what really matters to the people of Scotland and includes affordable housing, having good physical and mental health, and living in an area with a clean and healthy environment where the outdoors can be enjoyed.

This is why the Scottish Wildlife Trust believes that planners need to think long term when creating new places. Decision makers must invest in quality and reject developments which deliver short term 'economic activity' - and thereby contribute to GDP - but pay no long term dividend to society.

Investing in local communities

The Scottish Wildlife Trust agrees that there is a need to regenerate local communities. Nearly 50 years of experience has taught us that nature-rich high quality places – be they in the urban core or in the suburbs – help create attractive, vibrant, liveable neighbourhoods which foster community pride. We are demonstrating through our Cumbernauld Living Landscape project, working in partnership, how this can be achieved. The Cumbernauld Living Landscape aims to enhance, restore and reconnect green areas of Cumbernauld to benefit local people, wildlife and the regional economy. By engaging and working collaboratively with local people, communities are empowered to become actively involved and take pride in their ‘local patch.’

Preventative spend

Investing in high quality outdoor space and the environment also makes economic sense. City and urban trees planted by busy roads filter out air pollution and can help reduce respiratory disorders such as childhood asthma.¹² Green infrastructure saves money by slowing water movement in cities and urban areas thereby reducing flood risk. Energy costs in cities can be reduced, because trees provide a cooling effect and can lower inner city summer temperatures. Large urban trees store carbon and can thus help Scotland meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

Scotland's economy

Scotland needs to move towards a vision of growth in which it is recognised that a ‘healthy’ environment is an absolute requirement for the ‘good health’ of societal and economic systems. Such a system of economic growth is founded on a green economy which the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) describes as resulting in improved human well-being and social equity, which significantly reduces environmental risks and ecological scarcities.¹³ The Scottish people instinctively know this to be the case, and the Scottish Wildlife Trust agrees with Oxfam’s recommendation that the way forward is for the economy to serve the people not the other way around.

To conclude, improving the quality of life for the people of Scotland will require policy and decision makers to rethink and redefine traditional measures of wealth, prosperity and well-being. The biggest risk to the people of Scotland may arise from maintaining the status quo.

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About the Scottish Wildlife Trust

The Scottish Wildlife Trust’s central aim is to advance the conservation of Scotland’s biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations. With over 32,000 members, nearly one thousand of whom are actively involved in conservation activities locally, we are proud to say we are now the largest voluntary body working for all the wildlife of Scotland. The Trust owns or manages 122 wildlife reserves and campaigns at local and national levels to ensure wildlife is protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

¹ See Wall Street Journal, June 15 2010: <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2010/06/15/oil-spill-may-end-up-lifting-gdp-slightly/>

² TEEB for Business Coalition

³ See: World Forum on Natural Capital – Edinburgh 2013, organised by Scottish Wildlife Trust, in association with the United Nations Environment Programme; International Union for Conservation of Nature; World Business Council for Sustainable Development; TEEB for Business Coalition and The Wildlife Trusts.

⁴ Mitchell R, Popham F (2008). Effect of exposure to natural environment on health and inequalities: an observational population study. *The Lancet*, Volume 372, Issue 9650, pp1655- 1660.

⁵ Tanaka A., Takano T., Nakamura K., (1996) Health levels influence by urban residential conditions in a megacity. *Tokyo Urban Studies* 33: 879–945.

⁶ Sugiyama T., Thompson C.W., (2007). Older people’s health, outdoor activity and supportiveness of neighbourhood environments. *Landscape and urban planning*. Vol 83 (2-3) 168-175

⁷ de Vries S, Verheij R A and Groenewegen P P (2001). Nature and Health. The Relation between health and green space in people’s living environment. *Euro Leisure-congress Netherlands*.

⁸ Sadler et al (2010) Bringing cities alive: the importance of urban greenspaces for people and biodiversity. *Urban ecology* (ed. K.J. Gaston) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁹ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) Page 386

¹⁰ See: Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s report : Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Scotland 2013

¹¹ See: Medical Research Council’s study on Impact of the living environment on health behaviours

¹² UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011)

¹³ UNEP, 2011, Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication - A Synthesis for Policy Makers, www.unep.org/greeneconomy