

Scottish Wildlife Trust Briefing

Motion S4M-02703: Humankind Index



The Scottish Wildlife Trust welcomes the Oxfam Humankind Index which reflects a true measure of Scotland's prosperity rather than the traditional indicator Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Oxfam's work has highlighted what really matters to the people of Scotland. 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, all score very highly and are above monetary considerations.

That the quality of outdoor space matters and contributes to health and wellbeing, is supported by a growing body of evidence which shows that access to good quality urban greenspace is essential for physical activity,^{1,2} positive mental well-being³ and healthy childhood development.⁴ Contact with nature has also been shown to reduce the severity of childhood Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.⁵ In addition, it has been found that income related health inequalities are reduced by having easy access to high quality greenspace.⁶

GDP as a measure of prosperity does not reflect the social and human price paid for the side effects of economic activity, such as air pollution and natural resource depletion. For instance, between 1981 and 2005 the global economy more than doubled, but 60% of the world's ecosystems were either degraded or over-used.⁷ GDP is also driven by perversities; treatment by the health service of those suffering from respiratory diseases caused by poor air quality is included as a *positive* contributor to GDP.⁸

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. A green economy also significantly reduces environmental risks and ecological scarcities.⁹ The people of Scotland instinctively know this is the right way forward, 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.

Scotland's natural capital (e.g. biodiversity and ecosystem services) provide essential services upon which Scotland's true prosperity depends such as providing clean water, high quality environments, recreational facilities and improved air quality. It has been estimated that the total value of these services to Scotland is worth in excess of £21 billion per year.¹⁰

Scotland has led the way in setting ambitious greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and moving towards a low carbon economy. However it should also recognise that growth should be driven by investments that increase resource efficiency¹¹ and prevent the loss of natural capital and the ecosystem services they provide.

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 Oxfam Humankind Index shows how this might be done. The biggest risk to the people of Scotland may arise from maintaining the status quo.

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 35,000 members, several hundred 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.

For further information please contact:

Dr. Maggie Keegan, National Planning Co-ordinator, mkeegan@swt.org.uk, 0131 312 1462 / 07739 428213

¹ Tanaka A., Takano T., Nakamura K., (1996) Health levels influence by urban residential conditions in a megacity. Tokyo Urban Studies 33: 879-945.

² 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

³ De Vries S, Verheij R A and Groenewegen P (2001). Nature and Health .The Relation between health and green space in people's living environment. Euro Leisure-congress Netherlands.

⁴ 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.

⁵ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) Page 386

⁶ 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.

⁷ UNEP press release on the launch of the Green Economy Initiative, London 22 October 2008.

⁸ Building the future we want. EEA Signals 2012 available at: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/eea-signals-2012>

⁹ UNEP, 2011, Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication - A Synthesis for Policy Makers, www.unep.org/greeneconomy

¹⁰ RPA & Cambridge Econometrics. (2008). *The Economic Impact of Scotland's Natural Environment*. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No.304 (ROAME No. R07AA106).

¹¹ See: Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe. EU Commission COM(2011) 571 final