



The Oxfam Humankind Index for Scotland

**A Report on the Conversation Café
held in The Scottish Parliament**

10 June 2011

Introduction

Despite decades of economic growth prior to the recession and a doubling of living standards since the 1970s, reported life satisfaction has not increased.

The construction of Oxfam's Humankind Index is a recognition that as a country, society and economy we need a new mode of doing things that prioritises the rights and needs of all people and sustains the environment. The Index is an attempt to move away from an economy and society based on inequalities of income wealth and pursuit of relative status, and towards an economy and society which reduces poverty and over-consumption and promotes health (mental and physical) and equality.

This will, in turn, enable government to focus on what really matters, and to take more informed decisions about where society wants to go. It is about remembering that the economy should serve the people, not the other way around.

Full public and body politic participation in the creation of the Humankind Index is absolutely central. For this reason, Scotland's Futures Forum and Oxfam Scotland linked together to encourage and promote a meaningful dialogue for change.

Café Proceedings

Donald Jarvie from the Scottish Future's Forum welcomed people to the event, highlighting the importance of looking beyond narrow measures of economic growth.

Judith Robertson, Head of Oxfam Scotland, then introduced Oxfam's work in Scotland, explaining Oxfam's *Whose Economy?* analysis which has concluded that the economy is not serving the people, that too many 'bad jobs' have been created and that materialistic attitudes and values have increased. This has damaged the social assets that hold many vulnerable communities together, and moreover this model is detrimental to the environment.

Judith explained the construction of the Index, and that its formulation is drawing on existing work by renowned experts on the factors which increase wellbeing and prosperity (such as the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and the report for President Sarkozy produced by Sitglitz, Sen and Fitoussi).

Perry Walker from the New Economics Foundation then explained the methods of the public consultation. Initial results from participants themselves were announced on the basis of short surveys (akin to the street surveys) that participants had completed as they arrive at the event.

Participants were asked to explore these results and discuss their meaning with each other. Perry then presented some initial results of the wider consultation and suggested that participants compare their own results with those of the wider consultation and make some suggestions as to what might explain any disparity.



Overview of Consultation exercise to identify and prioritise things that matter to the people of Scotland

Creation of the Humankind Index is an example of democracy at work – policies that reflect the Humankind Index will be those that Scottish people say are important to them, and in what order.

At each stage in the process, Oxfam has enlisted experts with considerable experience in research and survey methodology, wellbeing and sustainability indicators and data analysis, and who share Oxfam's commitment to reflecting the priorities of the Scottish people.

This has led to development of a range of methods to gather people's views of what is important to them and their communities. These included:

- Street stalls in 10 locations
- 8 community meetings
- 10 focus sessions with individuals who are seldom heard in the policy making process
- A large scale online survey
- A representative poll conducted by YouGov
- Scottish Future's Forum conversation café in the Scottish Parliament

These conversations and surveys will be distilled by the New Economics Foundation. NEF will categorise the information from the consultation into key themes, and distil the discussions, priority setting and survey results into numerical weightings. An Experts Panel will then attach appropriate statistics to the components of the Index in order to produce a formula which will calculate the Humankind Index (the Experts Panel is a multi-disciplinary group tasked with ensuring the indicators and statistics used are accurate, robust and relevant – it will be lead by the Fraser of Allander Institute).

Afterwards, updated numbers will be fed into the Index each year and the updated Index computed (from this, we will be able to tell whether Scotland's prosperity increases or decreases over time).



Participant feedback

Participants asked some questions about the methodology used in development of the Index – for example, what specific survey expertise was utilised? Did the order of any lists from which people select change with each respondent? How are issues such as dignity taken into account? To what extent might “taken for granted” issues be missed?

Oxfam was able to share with the audience the range of outside experts who have led development of the mixed methods consultation (see above). In addition, Oxfam’s Market Insight Team who regularly undertake market research have approved the survey and advised on its structure. Oxfam was also able to explain that the online survey does randomise lists, that respondents are asked to think in turn about what is important for themselves and then what is important for their communities, and that researchers were careful to prompt for taken for granted issues during focus groups and community meetings.

Participants recognised that developing such a measure using participatory methods is challenging, and warned that many good ideas have not progressed due to arguably disproportionate concern that the methods be ‘just right’.

It was acknowledged that what the Humankind Index is seeking to challenge – narrow economic measures – are themselves often imperfect in their construction and that the ambition of the Humankind Index project was to seek a shift in the frame of reference of policy makers. This was important in itself and should not be derailed by an attempt to develop a ‘perfect methodology’.

Discussion also considered the importance of ‘confidence’ and health – as ends in themselves and as inputs into other goals (finding a satisfying job, for example, can be difficult for those who have low levels of self-confidence). Participants felt that they were a somewhat fortunate group of people, in that their basic needs are likely to be met, but that for many responding to other aspects of the consultation, these may not be met. There was also recognition that in many low income communities it is the community itself, the social assets, which sustains people.

Participants also reflected on the role of equality in advancing some of the issues people identify as important, and noted that in more equal societies there are greater levels of success in areas of life that the Humankind Index consultation suggests people see as necessary to their flourishing.

The relationship of the Humankind Index to resource constraints in the natural world was explored. It was suggested that the Index should be seen as being pursued within environmental limits, particularly because of a lack of awareness about the extent and imminence of climate change. Participants acknowledged the role of education in broadening our understanding of how important the environment is, the many ways in which the environment affects our lives and the danger being posed to the natural world by current modes of economic development.

Finally, a number of attendees expressed the view that the Humankind index was so critical that great care and attention to detail was required in the lead up to launch. If this meant a slight delay in current timescales for launch, this would be fully understandable and acceptable.

Summing up and next steps

Stewart Murdoch, from Dundee City Council and the Community Development Association, concluded proceedings. He has been involved in the Sustainable Development Commission/ Carnegie Foundation's Roundtable on Measuring What Matters (copies of which were placed at each seat for participants to take away).

Stewart stated that he believed the Oxfam Humankind Index to be a great way of taking forward the recommendations in the Carnegie report, particularly the call for a conversation across civil society about what matters in society and in the economy.

He urged people to continue to be part of this conversation and to encourage their family and friends to share their views via the Humankind Index website (www.oxfam.org.uk/humankindindex).

Stewart explained that the views expressed via the public consultation will be gathered together by the New Economics Foundation and then passed to an Experts Panel, comprising individuals with expertise in subject areas identified by the consultation (for example, an environmental economist, a public mental health expert and an expert statistics regarding community involvement and poverty).

The Experts Panel is led by the Fraser of Allander Institute and will develop a formula that will calculate the Index, based on the components identified as important by people of Scotland and weighted accordingly. It is hoped that the first Index will be ready for release later in 2011.

Stewart reminded participants that while Oxfam will be lobbying policy makers, they can't do it on their own. He said that we need all organisations who share the vision that we can have a socially and environmentally sustainable future, and an economy that serves the people, not the other way around, to keep the momentum going, to advocate for the Humankind Index to be taken up by policy makers as a reflection of Scotland's prosperity.

Acknowledgements

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SFF would also like to thank all participants who took part in the Scottish Future's Forum event on the Humankind Index –those who shared their views, who engaged in the conversation with each other and who offered their enthusiasm for the challenging, but vital, project Oxfam Scotland is leading.

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