



A Community Happiness Index: The Experience from Indian Community Group in Kluang, Johor, Malaysia

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify real life issues underpinning the needs of the Indian community in Kluang. Further, understandings the real issues may lead to the establishment of the happiness component among Indian community in Kluang. A focus group discussion was conducted with relevant stakeholders involving selected Indian representatives in Kluang. The focus group data were analyzed using a qualitative analysis. The findings revealed that the critical issues ensuing among Indian community in Kluang are: Economy, Employment, Living Standard, Education and Health. This paper builds a new knowledge of the needs required by the community to sustain their well-being.

Keywords: Community, Happiness index, Sustainable well being.

1. Introduction

One of the important factor or resources of nations (Malaysia) is her people. A subgroup of this ecosystem is the community. Without the community, the nations cannot perform its mandate to develop and enhance her citizens. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain value and societal co-existence by adding value to every community in order to attain the national aims and aspirations, particularly, Malaysian Vision 2020. In fact, this is for the attainment of sustainable community.

It is crucial for the Malaysian government to know more about the people and their community, who need to be managed as well as to be developed. Before policy can be formulated, the policy makers have to understand each stratum of community that makes up local and states of the country. In particular, the government and sustainable scholars must be able to know the factors that affect human behaviour in any given community.

Social scientists in the emerging field of “happiness economics” claim that domestic policy currently focuses heavily on economic outcomes, which are misleading on what the society values (index of happiness). With the belief that the performance of any government administration will be judged on their success in making people happy, and because of the limited information on what makes a person happy, many countries and researchers are now involved in studying “happiness”. In sum, happiness index is in fact recognized as a barometer for measuring the community well-being of the country.

This paper focuses on the construct of the happiness index among the community in Malaysia. The main intention is to present the use of a statistical happiness index in an attempt to understand better the needs of the Indian community in Kluang that lead to the establishment of the community happiness index in Malaysia. The Index can be used by the government, policy makers and administrators to better understand and consequently manage more efficiently this hamlet of the state. The index can be used as a guide in formulating programs and policies concerning the society. Other states and countries can also follow suit to establish a way to better understand their community.

2. Community Happiness Index

Assessment of happiness index is a development in many nations. In fact, some countries do not have an official happiness index to measure the levels of wellbeing of its citizens (Frey & Gallus, 2013). Whereas, Bhutan developed an official happiness index in 1972 and this Asian country was the first in the world to declare that “Gross National Happiness” (GNH) rather than Gross National Product (GNP) would be the nation’s principal yardstick for measuring progress of nations in the world at large (Bok, 2010). Bhutan’s GNH Index is a multidimensional measure of happiness which is itself a multidimensional concept—“not measured only by subjective well-being, and not focused narrowly on happiness that begins and ends with oneself and is concerned for and with oneself” (Ura, Alkire & Zangmo 2012). The pursuit of happiness in Bhutan is collectively though it can be experienced deeply personally. As a matter of fact, European countries have adopted the initiative to measure the collective well being of their people. For instance, the Britain’s prime minister strategy office unit has prepared a study paper on the implications of happiness research for public policy (Stratton, 2010). As a result, the European Commission has initiated a survey on various measures of wellbeing which is called the “Eurobarometer”.

There are variations in the measures of happiness among researchers. Many economists try to measure happiness in terms of objective economic conditions and utilities. Michalos (2008) cites construct of a concept called ‘objective happiness’, which is rooted in subjective experience and involves only a narrow sense of happiness.” Recent survey measures of subjective happiness are still somewhat novel to economists, although most of them agree on the validity of these data (Ball & Chernova, 2008). The authors also agree that economic measures alone cannot explain the variations in the levels of happiness among different aggregates of people.

Many studies have indeed found “high correlations” between subjective and objective measures of happiness (Ball & Chernova 2008). It is nonetheless important to acknowledge their bias toward the subjective measure of happiness, which is to be linked with other relatively objective variables in the survey data, such as age, levels of education, income, work status, marital status, gender, and race. Psychologists emphasized that personality is the single most important determinant of happiness.

Measuring the well-being of single individuals can be easily accomplished by administering questionnaires such as the Satisfaction With Life (SWL) test, whose score effectively reflects the extent to which a person feels that his/her life is worthwhile (Diener, et al., 1995). Self-reporting has been shown to be reasonably accurate, and recent studies have further highlighted that it tallies with for example; sentiment expressed in Facebook status updates (Park, et al., 2009). A substantial literature has developed for the measurement of wellbeing and happiness. A number of survey measures which focus on self-rated happiness and life-satisfaction have been found to be reliable and valid (Diener et al., 2009). A number of these measures are summarized in Table 1. The comparison of the two measurement framework will assist in developing appropriate variables of consideration in the evaluation of the subject community.

Table-1. Comparison of Population Health Framework and Gross national happiness (Diener et al., 2009)

Population Health Framework Key Determinants	Gross National Happiness Contributors
Income and social status High income contributes to living conditions such as safe housing and adequate nutrition. Equitable income distribution contributes to health.	Living Standards Similar concept in GNH but more inclusive of non-income contributes to material wellbeing to adapt the concept to rural societies in which the non-cash informal economy plays a larger role.
Social Support Networks Support from friends, family and community	Not separated out as a specific contributor. Included in Time Use (frequency of interactions with family and friends) and Community Vitality (social supports).
Education Education increases sense of control over life and promotes job security and income.	Education Broader concept in GNH to include informal education as well as formal. Focused on ability to develop skills and abilities through both formal and informal means.
Employment/Working Conditions Unemployment, stressful working conditions and a lack of control over work contributes to poor health.	Not separated out as a specific contributor. Included in Time Balance as one of a number of productive activities which individuals need to balance. Some aspects of work stress also included in psychological wellbeing.
Social Environment Social stability, participation, community safety and cohesiveness, and respect for diversity contribute to good health.	Community Vitality Similar concepts in both frameworks except GNH include social supports within this contributor.
Physical Environments The quality of the natural environment and man-made environment (housing, workplace safety, etc.) contribute to health.	Ecology Similar concepts except PHF tend to focus on the negative effects of environmental problems on health while GNH also emphasizes the positive effects of the environment on wellbeing. Some similarity with Psychological Wellbeing and Health contributors.
Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills Healthy choices, lifestyles and coping abilities contribute to good health.	Not separated out as a specific contributor.
Healthy Child Development Practical experiences and early childhood experiences contribute to health, coping skills and competence	Not separated out as a specific contributor.
Biology and Genetic Endowment Genetic factors cause an inherited predisposition to a wide range of behaviours and characteristics that contribute to health.	Not separated out as a specific contributor.
Health Services Access to health services, particularly preventive services promotes health.	Access to effective and timely services included in Governance
Gender Issues of gender inequality and bias contribute to health problems and	Not separated out as a specific contributor. Included in Governance (discrimination and protection) as well as Culture.

inequities.	
Culture Some individuals face health risks and challenges due marginalization, stigmatization and lack of access to culturally appropriate services. Not explicitly addressed in PHF, but included in employment/working conditions, social supports and social environments.	Culture Similar concepts except GNH also emphasize positive contribution of culture to wellbeing through support for a sense of identity, values and participation in cultural activities.
Not explicitly addressed in PHF	Time Balance Maintaining an adequate balance between work, family, friends, community, study and other activities that are necessary for wellbeing.
Not explicitly addressed in PHF	Governance Protection of rights and freedoms, effective electoral systems, access to services, access to information, and freedom from corruption.
Identified as the outcome in PHF (the end, rather than a means to an end).	Health Identified as a specific contributor to wellbeing in GNH (a means to an end).
Incorporated into Personal Health Practices and Coping Skills and Healthy Child Development.	Psychological Wellbeing Emotional wellbeing, stress and spirituality.

The inclusion of items related to happiness and satisfaction-with life in the World Values Survey has resulted in the accumulation of national normative data for countries containing almost ninety percent of the world's population for five waves between 1981 and 2007 (Ingelhartetal., 2008). The newly developed Gallup-Health ways Wellbeing Index produces a daily index of wellbeing in the US based on a sample of 1000 adults on six broad scales- life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behaviours, work environment and basic access (Gallup-Health ways, 2008). The Gallup-Health ways index is an example of a survey-based tool which attempts to measure a broad framework of well being and key contributors. A broader multi-national framework for wellbeing-based national accounts have been produced by the New Economics Foundation (Marks, 2008; New Economics Foundation, 2009). This framework utilizes measures from a European survey and includes a variety of sub-indices which can be combined into one index. The individual components were - emotional well being, satisfying life, vitality, resilience and self esteem, positive functioning, supportive relationships and trust/belonging.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this investigation requiring a focus group meeting. As shown in Table 2, the group consisted of 6 individuals from the Indian community in Kluang and 4 researchers from Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM).

Kluang district was chosen as the case study area in this study as it demonstrates the second largest Indian population in Johor. Based on the Malaysian statistic department, the total population of Indians in Kluang district in 2010 is 24,012, the second largest after the Johor Bahru district that comprises of 120,683 (Statistics Department, 2010).

Table- 2. Focus Group Personnel Profile

No.	Job Title	Affiliation	Community group	Area of residence
1	Counselor	Secondary school	Indian Representative	Kluang
2	Director	Private Consultant firm	Indian Community leader	Kluang
3	Excellent Teacher	Secondary school	Indian Community leader	Kluang
4	Medical Doctor	Private Clinic	Indian Community leader	Kluang
5	Excellent Teacher	Primary school	Indian Representative	Kluang
6	Research Teacher	Secondary school	Indian Representative	Kluang
7	Director	UTHM	Community Researcher	Parit Raja
8	Dean	UTHM	Community Researcher	Parit Raja
9	Lecturer	UTHM	Community Researcher	Parit Raja
10	Lecturer	UTHM	Community Researcher	Parit Raja

The focus group discussion was conducted over approximately three hours, beginning with a 20 minute presentation of the research's objectives which are the real life issues/experience among Indian community in Kluang. This provided opportunities for the clarification of responses among the group. Each of the group members was free to express his/her minds open and without concern for whether others in the group agree with the opinions/issues offered. The discussion was held on 23 January 2014 at Sultan Abdul Jalil Secondary School, Kluang. A numbers of critical issues related to Indian community were identified from the focus group discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

The primary issue was identified based on the community's real life experience towards the current needs and issues amongst the Indian Community in Kluang. Findings from the focus group discussion are further listed in Table 3 and summarized in the following five (5) domains/attributes of happiness index:

Table-2. Findings from the focus group discussion

Nos.	Domains/Attributes	Description
1	Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for an affordable rental rate of small and medium (SME) business premises • Need for business loans (soft loan) to initiate new business • Given the opportunity of owning/renting land for agricultural activities • Need for business premises
2	Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low employability rate • Need for skill development programme mechanism. (e.g. Increase employability rate amongst members of the community)
3	Living Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for affordable / low cost houses (e.g. PPRT) • Need for crematorium facility
4	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for knowledge and skills for engineering, automotive, agricultural, business and other fields • Need for short courses/workshops on bridal, interior design and

		hotel management fields	
		• pre-marital courses for Indian society	Provide
		• for patriotic programmes (National Service Training)	Need
		• for better access to the available corporate directory for contractors and projects	Need
		• for information on available educational based scholarships	Needs
		• for active participation in UTHM's knowledge based related programmes	Need
5	Health	• knowledge of health facilities provided	Lack of
		• accessibility to the health information dissemination	Less

From the findings, it can be deduced that the Indian community is less happy. Therefore, a conceptual model was developed to carry out further research towards happiness index among Indian community in Kluang. The conceptual model as in Figure 1 derive five (5) hypotheses as below:

5. Conclusion

The happiness index domains/attributes identification are required for the Indian Community in Kluang. Base on the outcome of the study and the establishment of the community happiness index among Indian society in Kluang, the paper concludes and recommends that the real needs/issues of the Indian community in Kluang are identified and prioritized; a measurement in term of remedial and controlling for improving the happiness mood of the Indian community in Kluang is addressed; and the resources in carrying out activities (seminars, welfare programmes, consultancy programmes and others) associated with the identified measures are optimized.

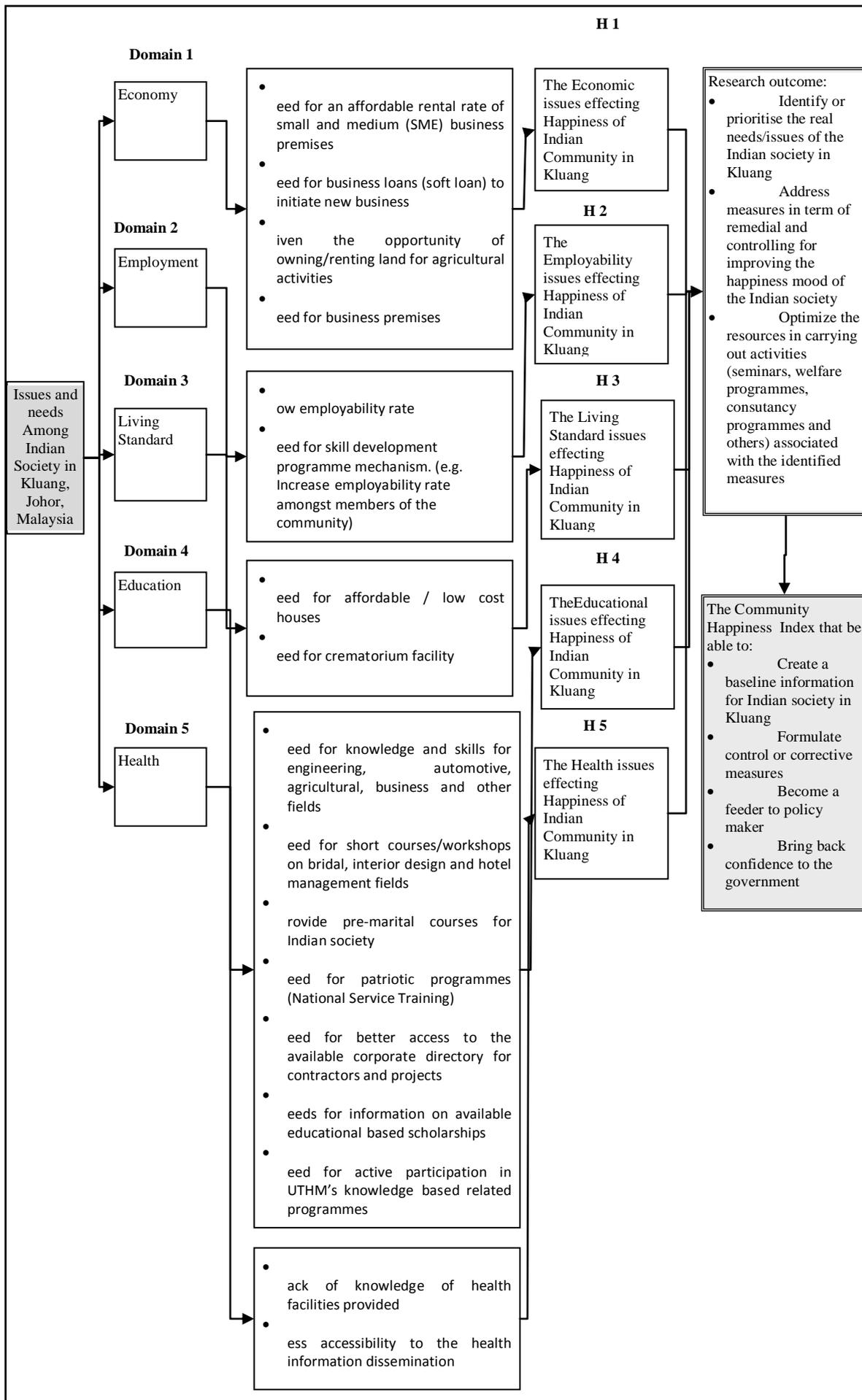
Moreover, the proposed establishment of the community happiness index in this paper lead to the creation of a baseline information for the Indian community in Kluang; formulate control or corrective measures; become a feeder to policy maker; and bring back confidence to the government.

From the outcome of these actions, it is hoped that the Indian community will be happier and able to contribute to the development and well being of Malaysian society. The findings have also suggested that it is an essential to establish a community happiness index especially within a Malaysian context.

6. Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia and Sultan Abdul Jalil Secondary School. Special thanks to all Kluang community leaders who participate and giving valuable input for the study.

Figure-1. Conceptual Model Towards Community Happiness Index among Indian Society in Kluang, Johor, Malaysia



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