

# Wellbeing and beyond: making the policy case

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# Overview

1. Introducing NEF's wellbeing work
2. Making the case through headline indicators
  - The Happy Planet Index
3. Making the case using wellbeing evidence

# **1. Introducing NEF's wellbeing work**

# New Economics Foundation

- London-based
- Politically independent think tank
- NEF's mission is to kick-start the move to a new **economy that promotes:**
  - Social justice
  - Well-being
  - Environmental sustainability

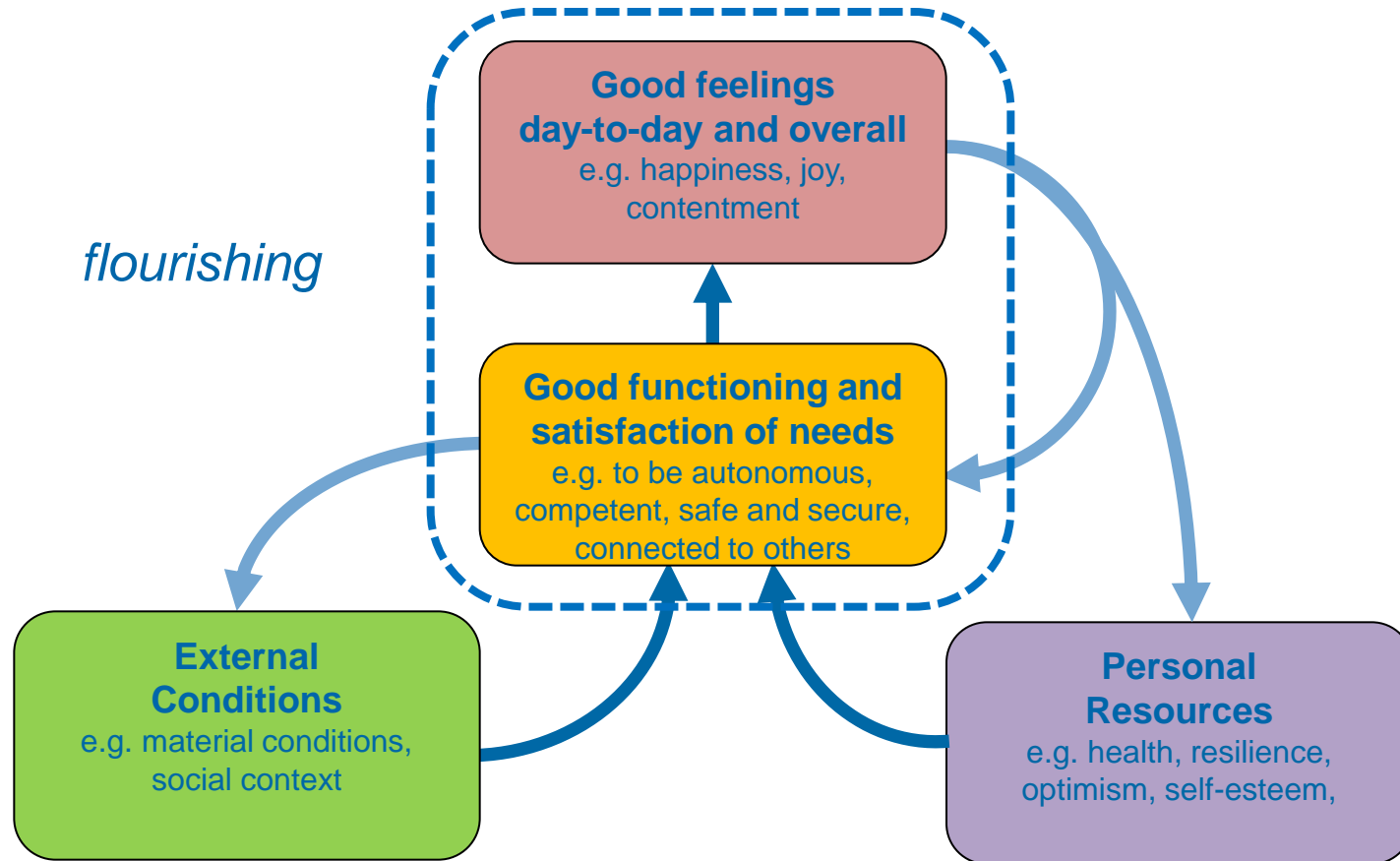


# NEF's wellbeing programme

The work of NEF's Centre for Wellbeing has set out to help NEF achieve these three goals by advocating high political priority on:

1. The **systematic measurement of population wellbeing**, using a range of subjective measures, and **embedding wellbeing analysis in the policy** process
2. **Adopting the policies** which are most consistent with (the implications of) the findings which this measurement generates
3. Using subjective wellbeing *and other measures* as **headline indicators of national progress / success**

# The dynamic model of well-being



# Comparing our work to uses of indicators

- **Instrumental:** objective information tools for decision-making
- **Conceptual:** more intangible, influencing how problems are defined
- **Political**, which includes:
  - **Strategic** - to justify or bolster a decision which has already been taken
  - **Tactical** - decisions are postponed or avoided with the excuse that data is being awaited
  - **Symbolic** - indicators are used only to convey a message or present an image

# Timeline of key developments

## 1990s

- 1998: Demos publishes *The Good Life*
- 1998: Martin Seligman Presidency of American Psychological Association and founding of 'Positive Psychology'
- Start of growth of economics articles on 'happiness economics'

## 2000s

- 2000: Local Government Act heralds start of policy use of 'wellbeing'
- 2005→: Whitehall Wellbeing Working Group & wellbeing in Defra SDIs
- 2005: Layard's *Happiness*
- 2006: Cameron speech on 'General Well-Being'
- 2007: Report of Tory Quality of Life Policy Group
- 2007: OECD World Forum and Istanbul declaration
- 2009: Stiglitz Commission report published

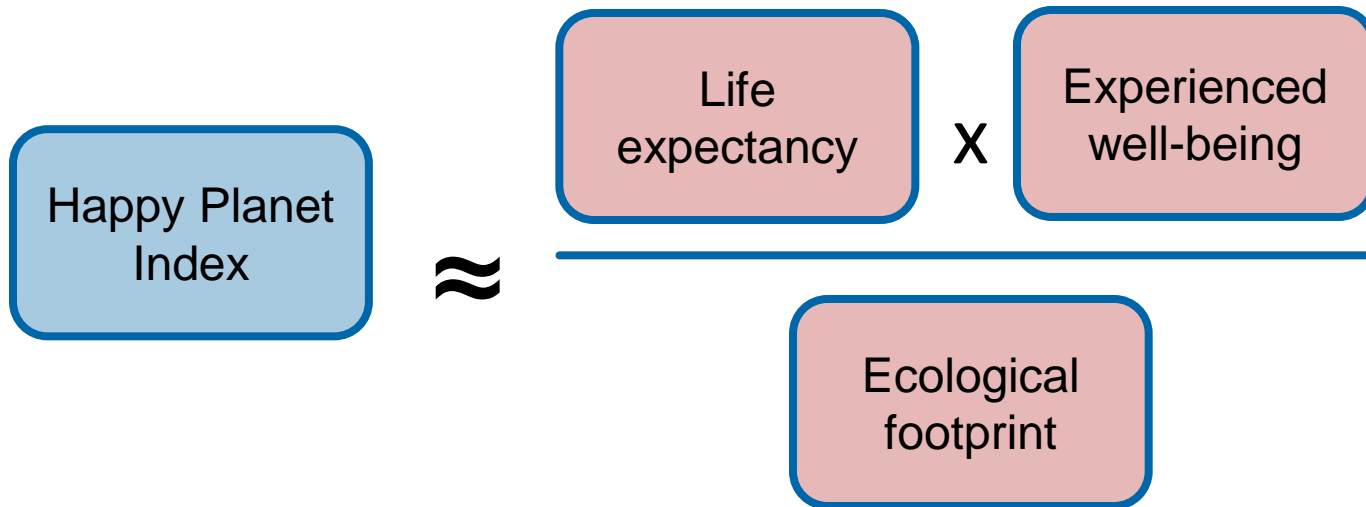
## 2010s

- 2010: Measuring National Wellbeing launch
- 2012: Resulting 'Life in the UK' report published
- 2011/2: General Assembly declaration, UN High Level Meeting, World Happiness Report
- 2014: What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- 2014: 'Economic wellbeing' indicators published alongside GDP
- 2015: Labour calls for Living Standards Index



## **2. Making the case through headline indicators**

# The Happy Planet Index



## Key aims:

- to challenge dominance of GDP as primary policy metric
- to challenge notions of economic efficiency
- to advocate for promoting wellbeing and environmental sustainability as headline policy goals

# WHICH ECONOMY IS MORE EFFICIENT?



VS



78

YEARS

LIFE  
EXPECTANCY

79

YEARS

7.2

/10

AVERAGE  
HAPPINESS

7.3

/10

7.2

G HA

ECOLOGICAL  
FOOTPRINT  
PER PERSON

2.5

G HA

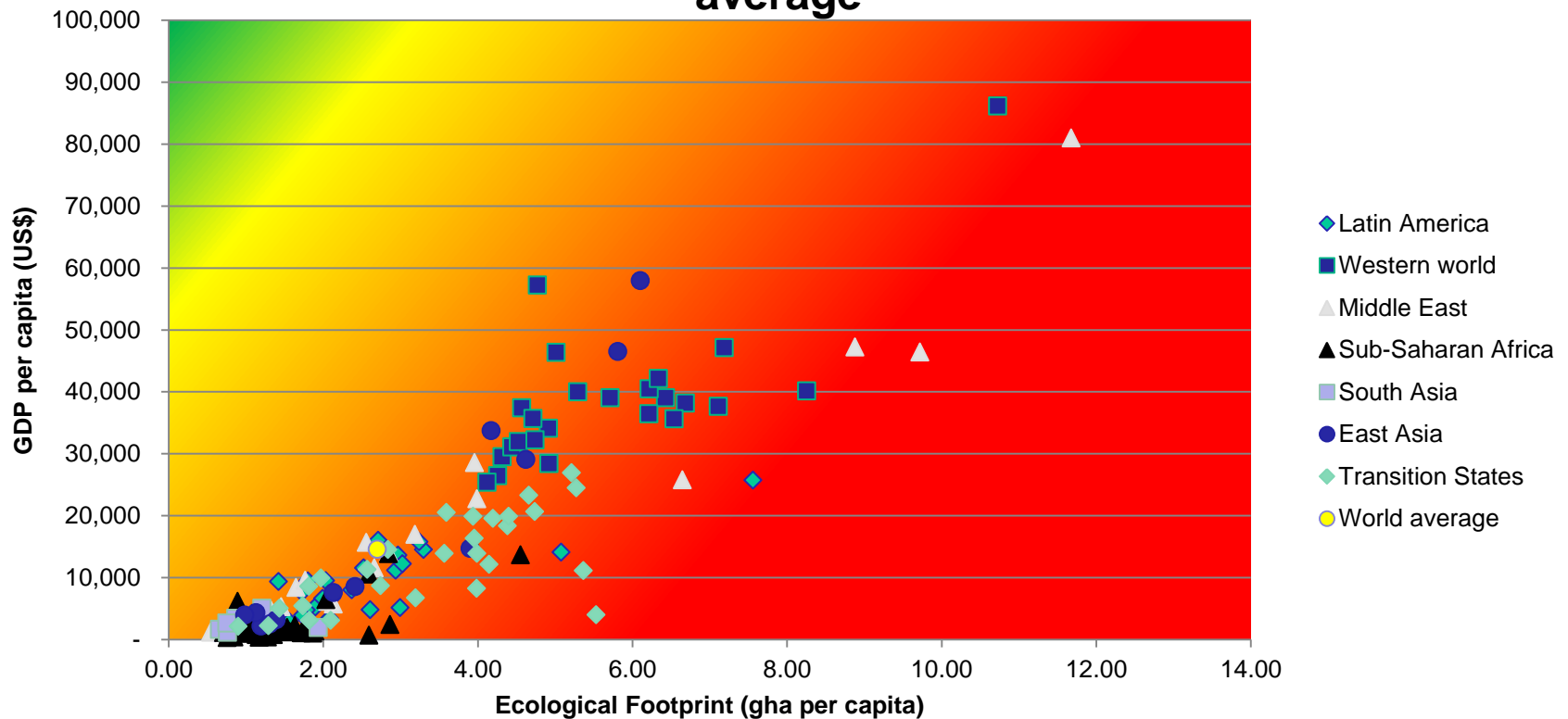
SEE HOW OTHER COUNTRIES COMPARE:

[WWW.HAPPYPLANETINDEX.ORG](http://WWW.HAPPYPLANETINDEX.ORG)

HAPPY  
PLANET  
INDEX

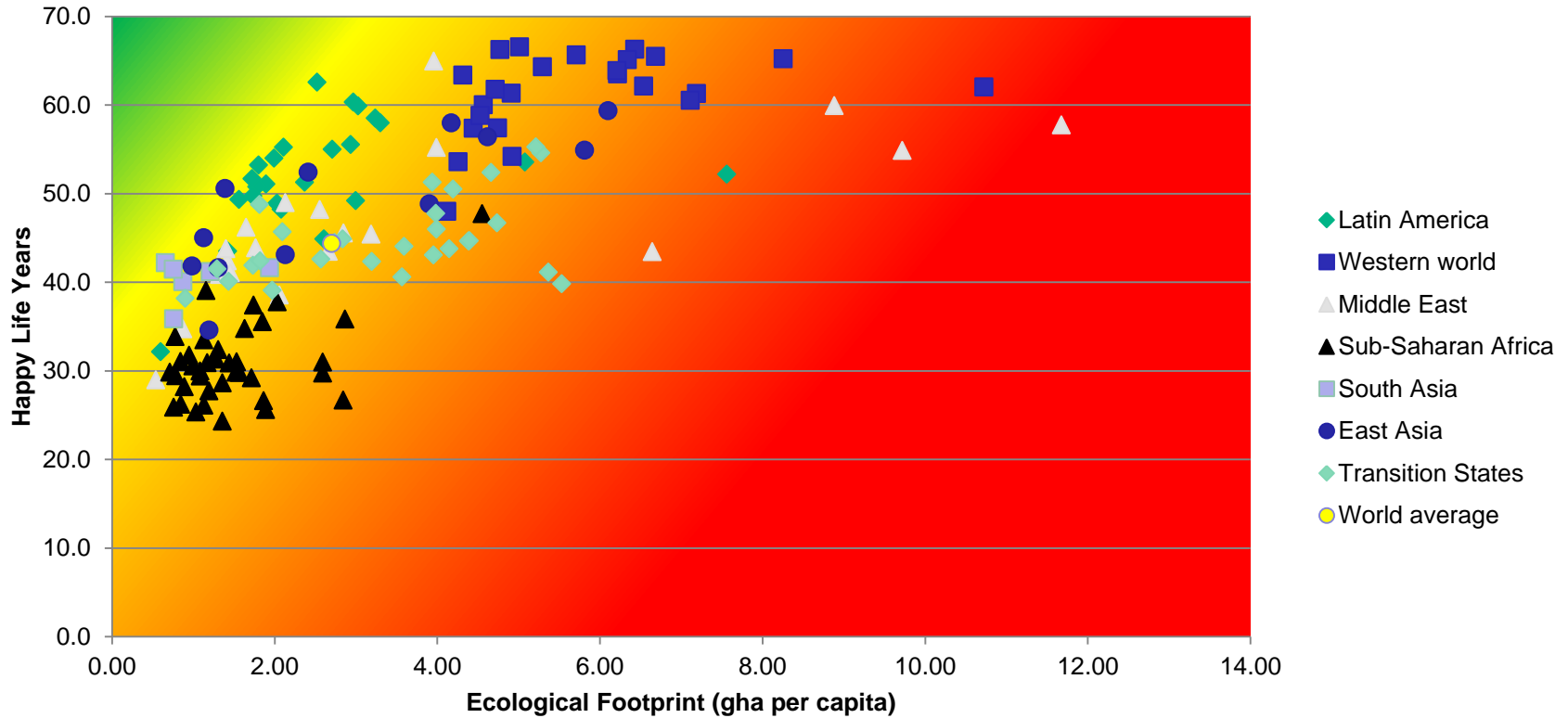
# A new direction of travel

## GDP and Ecological Footprint for 151 countries, and world average



# A new direction of travel

## Happy Life Years and Ecological Footprint for 151 countries, and world average



# Reaction to HPI

- 2006 launch: Within two days the report was downloaded and read in 185 countries worldwide.
- 2009 launch: In the first week, website received 87,500 visitors. Website currently gets 1000 visitors a day when there is no particular coverage.
- Press coverage and public interest has been very high, less so for 2012 report launch than previously, but still bursts of unexpected interest.
- But has been difficult to fund



# Explaining the reaction

- Novelty of measuring happiness (and to some extent mis-understanding?)
- International 'league table' and unexpected results
- Deliberate provocation – 'disruptive energy' – hence some angry responses
- 'Simplicity holding the complexity' – communication of a compelling fundamental idea
- The conceptual nature of the project is likely linked to the difficulty we have in funding it

# National Accounts of Wellbeing

- Design of ESS wellbeing module in 2006, and publication of resulting analysis in 2009, including through interactive website
- Considerable media and policy interest
- European 'league table' aspect
- Aim was partly to advocate for 'nuanced' subjective wellbeing measurement, as well as challenging traditional headline measures
- Less challenging / surprising results than HPI, and (hence?) less attention
- But succeeding in 'annoying' and pushing ONS

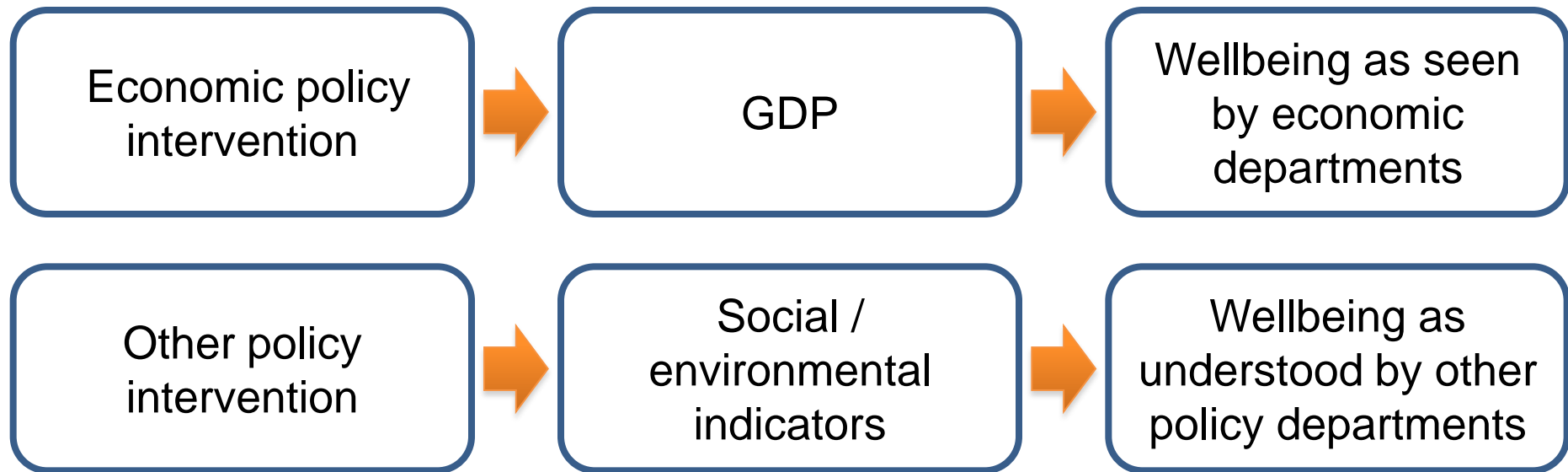


# Headline Indicators of Progress

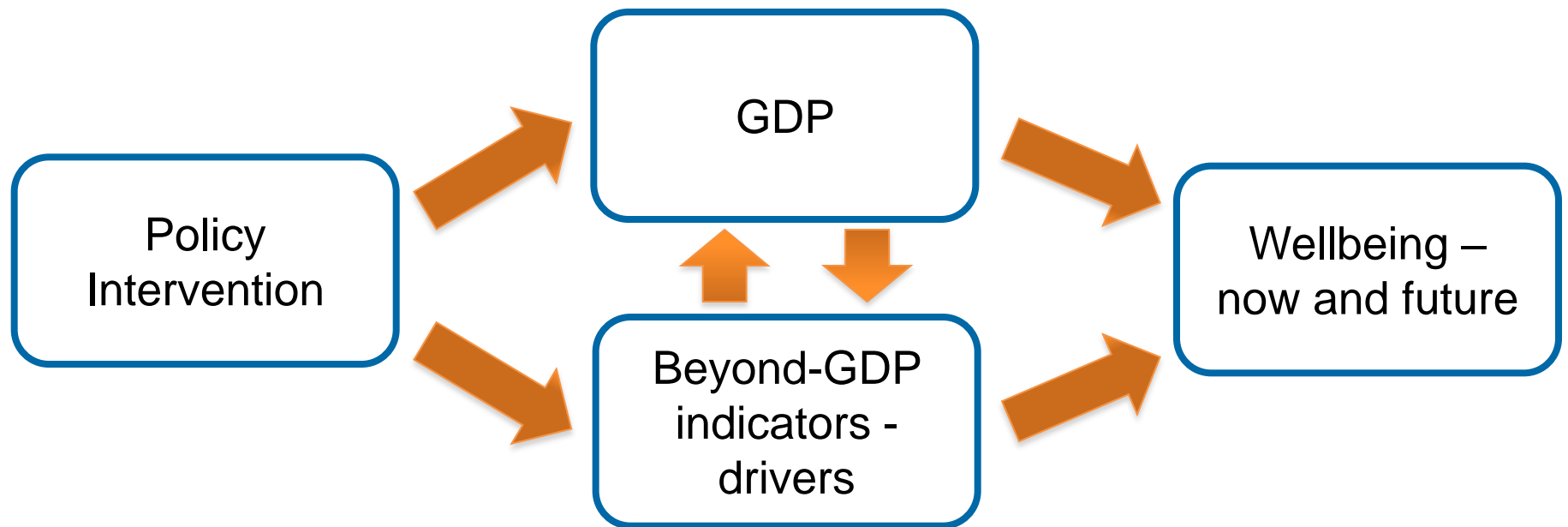
- Aim: a collaborative proposal for +/- 5 headline indicators of national progress
- Based on our analysis that Measuring National Wellbeing Programme has failed to 'break through'
- Opportunity to use Labour Living Standards Index intervention
- Intend to do a lot of work on framing, narrative and language – unlikely to use wellbeing language in title
- Watch this space for what happens next!

## **3. Making the case using wellbeing evidence**


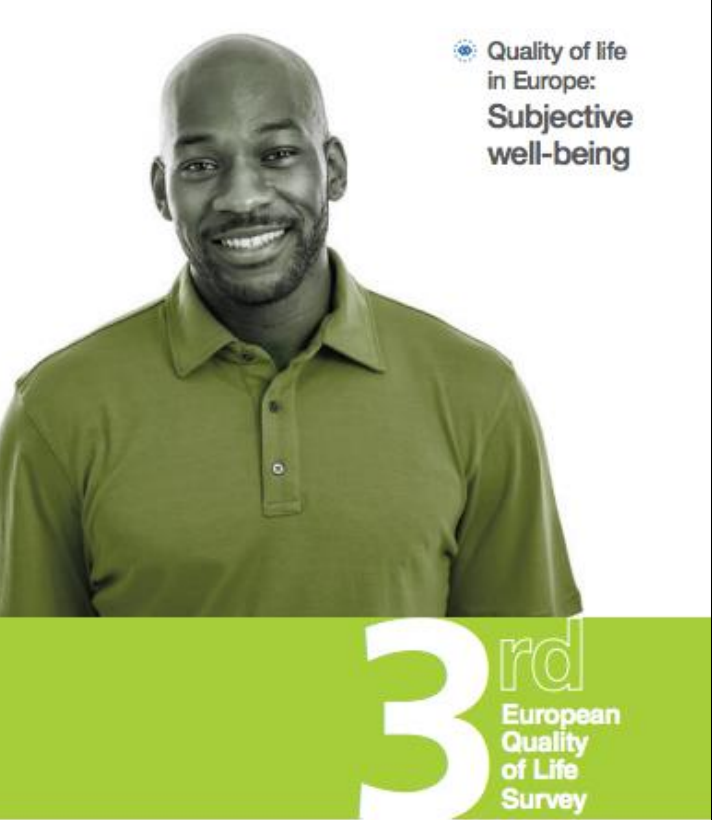

# Beyond GDP and Policy



# Beyond GDP and Policy



# Some of our wellbeing 'policy' publications

<p><b>a well-b for a flo</b></p> <p>The power of w</p>	<p>nef working paper 2</p> <p><b>Well-being: Human v economic policy-ma</b></p> <p>Charles Seaford, head of C additional input from the W</p>	<p><b>Well-being evide</b></p>	<p>nef consulting</p>  <p><b>Well-being at work</b> A review of the literature</p>	 <p>Quality of life in Europe: <b>Subjective well-being</b></p> <p><b>3<sup>rd</sup></b> European Quality of Life Survey</p> 
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# Key wellbeing findings we have emphasised (among others)

- Much stronger effect of income on wellbeing for those with lowest incomes
- Unemployment causing significant drop in wellbeing over and above loss of income
- Importance of stability and security to wellbeing, revealed in e.g. permanent / temporary job contracts
- Strong effect of close relationships, and need for time to spend on them
- Importance of social connections and physical environment which enables them

**Hence, policy implications re:** taxes, benefits and minimum wage; secure employment vs labour market flexibility; working time; planning & development

# Government wellbeing policy priorities...

...as reflected in What Work Centre for Wellbeing evidence call:

- Wellbeing as a 'common currency', policy appraisal tool
- Wellbeing and work and learning
  - Transition into sustained employment and wellbeing (both directions)
  - Wellbeing at work
  - Wellbeing and adult learning
- Wellbeing and communities, particularly in relation to
  - Social networks
  - Community governance
  - Living environment
  - Wellbeing and culture and sport

# Reflections on wellbeing in policy

- Has been real progress in government's approach to wellbeing, especially around measurement and use of data
- Evidence of What Works shows that findings on e.g. social capital and experiences of work are being given serious attention in government
- But also indications that many of the economic findings are being sidelined, despite emerging very strongly from the literature – perhaps because they are most challenging to current political consensus?
- Seems to be hard to make the radicalism of many of the findings stick – despite this being a clear part of what was so appealing about wellbeing research



# A source of optimism?



“Stable and secure employment for all should be the primary objective of economic policy. Steady and sustainable growth should be prioritised over absolute levels of national income as a means to this end, and policy should address work insecurity as a priority”

“Government should address the wellbeing consequences of low pay...[and]...of inequality”

“The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should be revised to make clear that promoting wellbeing is the over-arching objective of the planning system, not just a peripheral concern, and that the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ is subject to local authorities’ right and responsibility to set high wellbeing standards.

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