



Sustainable Society Index

SSI-2014

– your compass to sustainability –

Summary

Geurt van de Kerk

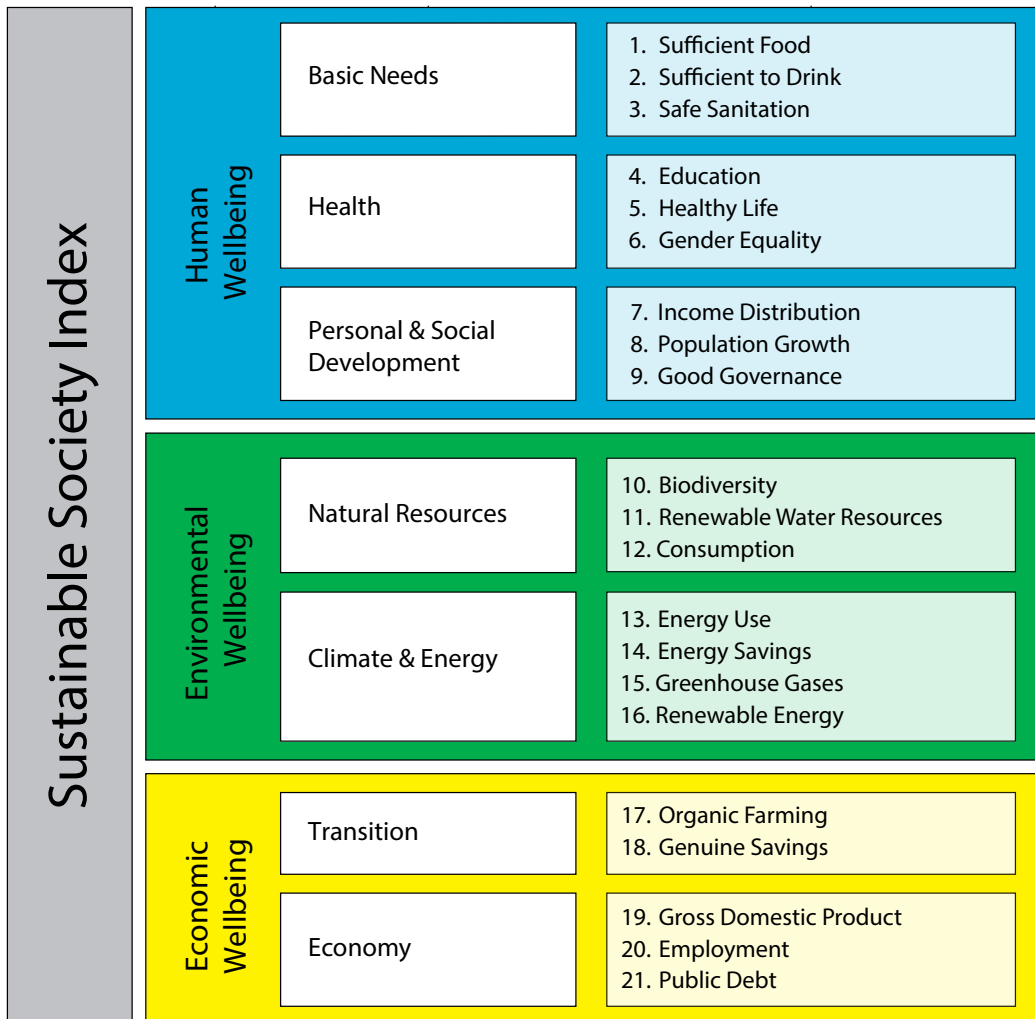
Sustainable Society Foundation

Development towards sustainability is far too important to leave it to chance.

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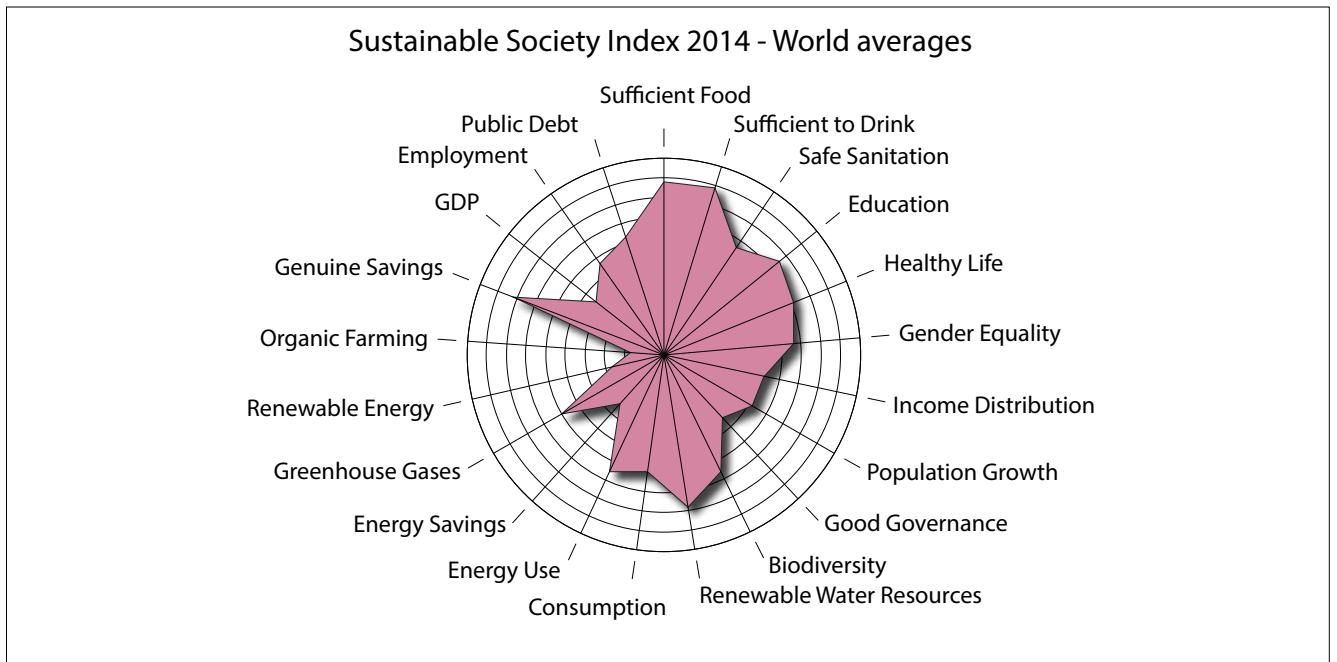
This edition – the fifth already – of the Sustainable Society Index, SSI-2014, offers a picture of the current level of sustainability of countries worldwide. The SSI covers 151 countries, comprising no less than 99% of the world population. It is built up by 21 indicators, clustered in 7 categories and finally in 3 dimensions.



Since the previous edition, we have partly revised the framework of the SSI. We had to remove three important indicators: Clean Air, Clean Water and Air Quality, due to lack of reliable data for all 151 countries covered by the SSI. On the other hand three important indicators have been (re-)introduced: Population Growth, Energy Use and Energy Savings.

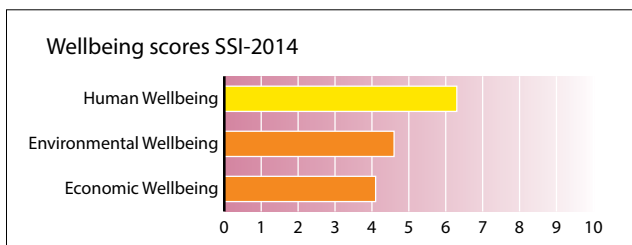
The Joint Research Center of the European Commission (JRC) has again made a statistical analysis of this new version of the SSI and concluded that the new setup meets the statistical requirements and is well suited to measure a country's level of sustainability. JRC strongly advised us to aggregate no further than to dimension level, in view of the negative correlation between Human and Environmental Wellbeing.

Results 2014



The picture clearly shows that, like in previous years Sufficient Food and Sufficient to Drink have the best scores, in spite of millions of people worldwide living under most difficult circumstances: over 800 million people are lacking sufficient food and safe drinking water, 2,5 billion have no access to safe sanitation! Many indicators give 'room for improvement' to say the least of it. Among these the indicators which are a major concern for most people if not all: the four indicators with respect to Climate Change.

The world average scores for the three wellbeing dimensions are shown below.



Of the three dimensions, Human Wellbeing is worldwide performing best with an average score of 6.3. Environmental Wellbeing is second best, with a much lower score of 4.6. Economic Wellbeing is last with a score of 4.1.

Progress 2006-2014

It can be no surprise that the world is performing poorly with respect to sustainability. Nevertheless on average, countries show progress over the last 8 years: the score for Human Wellbeing increased by 6.4%, while the score for Economic Wellbeing increased in terms of percentage even more, by 11.9%. But Environmental Wellbeing showed a decline by 4.7%. So this is a mixture of good news and bad news. It certainly doesn't suggest a great concern of our generation for the wellbeing of future generations.

Human Wellbeing	+ 6.4%
Environmental Wellbeing	- 4.7%
Economic Wellbeing	+ 11.9%

Of all indicators Income (GDP per capita) has increased the most. On the other end of the scale three out of four indicators for Climate & Energy decreased.

Progress indicators 2006-2014

GDP	+ 30%
Public Debt	+ 18%
Organic Farming	+ 15%
Renewable Energy	- 4.3%
Energy Use	- 5.0%
Greenhouse Gases	- 5.7%

Notice that a decrease in score means worse performance, like for Greenhouse Gases!

Regions

The regional differences are interesting. With respect to Human Wellbeing, all African regions, with the lowest scores for this dimension, made progress, most of all Middle Africa. On the other hand, Central Asia showed the largest decrease. Oceania, Eastern and Northern Europe also were in decline. Overall, 15 of the 19 UN regions showed progress on Human Wellbeing.

The progress of Environmental Wellbeing across the regions is – alas – more ‘balanced’: 10 regions were progressing, one stayed even and 8 were in decline, above all Southern Asia, which includes India with a decrease of 20% for EW.

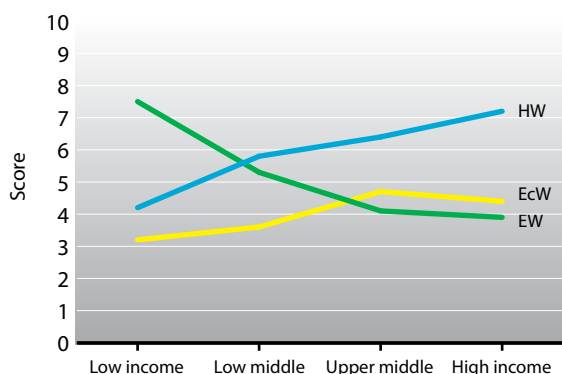
14 regions made progress on Economic Wellbeing, with three Asian regions topping the list: West, Southeast and South Asia. 5 were in decline: North, South and West Europe and North America. The decline of Southern Africa was very small.

Progress regions 2006-2014 / Human Wellbeing

Africa Middle	+ 21%
Africa West	+ 13%
Africa East	+ 11%
America Central	+ 11%
Asia South	+ 11%
Europe North	- 0.5%
Europe East	- 0.7%
Oceania	- 1.4%
Asia Central	- 4.0%

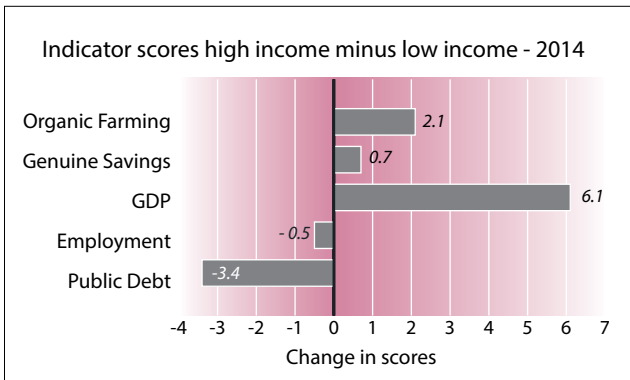
Income

Wellbeing scores per income class SSI-2014



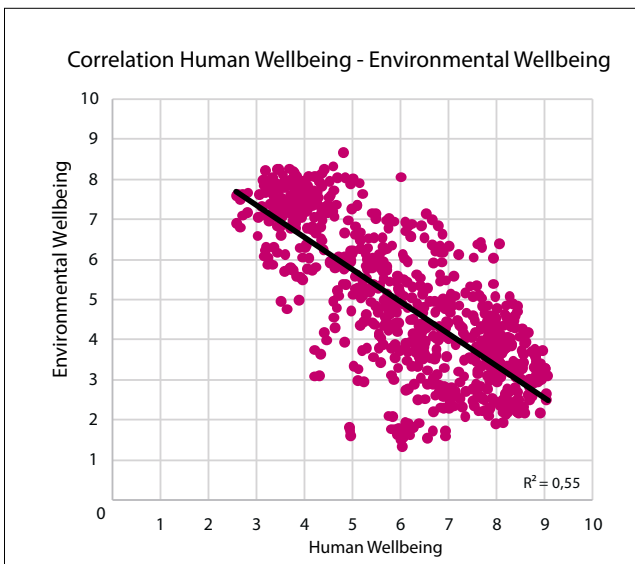
Not unexpectedly, the picture clearly shows the increasing Human Wellbeing and the decreasing Environmental Wellbeing for increased income. This doesn't necessarily mean that there is a causal correlation between the two, but it is at least suggestive and needs further examination.

The variation in values per income class are much smaller for Economic Wellbeing than for the two other dimensions. However this certainly doesn't mean that this also applies for the five underlying indicators as can be seen in the following graph.



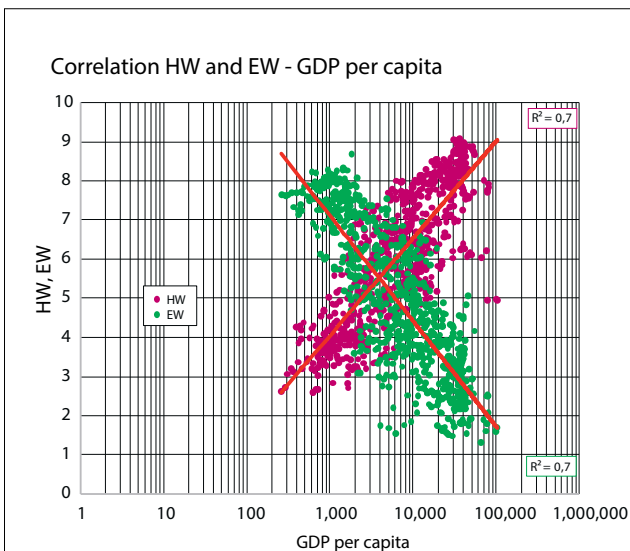
Correlation HW and EW

The correlation between Human and Environmental Wellbeing appears to be rather strong as can be seen in the next figure.



This picture seems to suggest that the two dimensions are at collision course: increasing Human Wellbeing goes together with a decrease in Environmental Wellbeing. However, let's not jump to conclusions. The pretty strong correlation doesn't necessarily mean that this is a causal one. Moreover, many countries do not perform in accordance with the trend line.

Further examination has shown a strong correlation between income (GDP per capita) and Human and Environmental Wellbeing as shown below.



Higher incomes correspond with higher Human Wellbeing and lower Environmental Wellbeing. Not a nice prospect, since each country wants to increase its income, and most of them actually do! So this looks quite serious. The two R^2 values of about 0.7 indicate a statistically strong correlation for HW as well as EW with GDP per capita. But again, this doesn't mean that the correlation is a causal one.

The other correlations we have assessed (Population size, Population density, Area size, Natural resources rents) all appear to be statistically (very) weak. Without further research, one cannot draw definite conclusions, how suggestive the graphs may be. So, further research on this subject is urgently needed.

In spite of the lack of a scientifically sound analysis and conclusion many people expect that

- Higher income leads to higher Human wellbeing
- Higher income leads to lower Environmental wellbeing
- Increasing population size leads to higher pressure on the bearing capacity of our one and only planet.

Are these developments unavoidable? Possibly not, provided one really wants to avoid them. Maybe our political leaders need a bit more pushing in the right direction? Civilians are the most powerful community on earth. Don't hesitate to use this power.