

## Thematic Research **Community Wellbeing**

This thematic research paper has been developed to provide inspiration for the discussions taking place in the co-labs during the 20th World Council. Each paper provides a high-level overview of global developments, challenges and opportunities affecting people and communities in each of the Vision 2030 pillars and a few short case studies highlighting programs addressing these developments around the world.

### **Community wellbeing can mean different things to different people and have different cultural meanings.**

- **Individual wellbeing** (the wellbeing of a person). - as measured through happiness, mental health, and the resilience of individuals.
- **Community wellbeing** - The combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfill their potential. (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008) Community wellbeing is lived and applied differently across diverse cultures and communities.

Individual wellbeing is an essential component of community wellbeing.

There are entire academic fields dedicated to the study of community and the history of community. Similarly, wellbeing as a concept has also become a hot topic in recent years and especially since the Covid-19 pandemic.

- **Wellness and wellbeing** have become buzzwords across the world - from corporate boardrooms and official government statements to kitchen table discussions and at sports clubs. The “wellness industry”, which encompasses all activities that promote physical and mental wellbeing, is now estimated to be worth more than 1.5 trillion USD. But there are many factors that impact wellbeing, as illustrated below

*Education and skills:* If we are engaged in formal or individual learning

*Personal finance:* Whether we feel satisfied that we have sufficient income; if we have difficulty financially

*Governance:* How much we trust government and institutions; if we participate in democratic processes

*Environment:* What the air and water quality is like in our area

*What we do:* If we are employed, if we are satisfied with our jobs: whether we have and enjoy our leisure time; if we volunteer; if we participate in arts, sports, or cultural activities; our spiritual life or belief system

*Personal wellbeing:* How satisfied we are with our lives; how worthwhile we feel our lives are; how happy or anxious we rate ourselves; how we rate our mental wellbeing

*Where we live:* if there is a high crime rate in our area; if we feel safe in our area; how easy it is to access green spaces or the natural environment; our sense of belonging to our neighborhood; whether we can access key services; our we satisfied with our housing

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*Health:* What our healthy life expectancy is; how our physical and mental health is faring; if we are satisfied with our health

*Our relationships:* Whether we are in happy relationships; if we have people to rely on; if we feel lonely often

- **Community wellbeing** is defined differently across cultures. For example
  - **Buen Vivir or “living well”**, which originated in South America, focuses on our holistic wellbeing in relation to our environment.
  - **Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC)**, which has supported community peace resolution and wellbeing by addressing drivers of conflict in Northeastern Kenya through committees led by women, elders and young people.

As noted above, individual wellbeing is an essential component of community wellbeing. When individuals are well and thrive they contribute to their communities and consequently support the wellbeing of community members. The result is that communities thrive. Community wellbeing has a significant impact on young people, the decisions they make, the paths they choose and their overall individual wellbeing as well.

### Trends and developments

The global COVID 19 pandemic has had a severe impact on individual and community wellbeing. The pandemic has also likely had a strong impact on conceptions of what is most important for a good life, and indeed on how society can foster collective improvements to wellbeing. For example

**Depression is on the rise:** Globally, depression has become one of the leading causes of disability, and suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among people aged 15-29 (WHO, 2022).

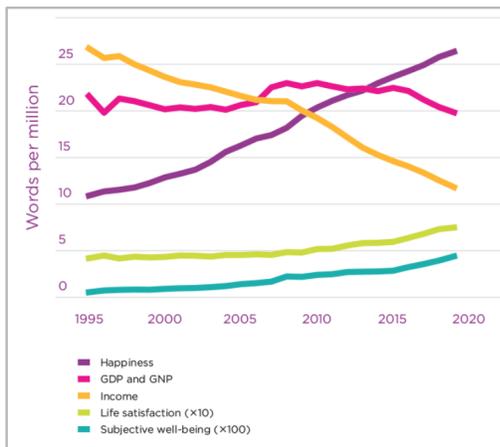
**Mental health issues are growing:** Mental health has been defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as: “A state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.” The pandemic has impacted the world’s mental health in ways no one could have predicted, and young people have been disproportionately affected. There is greater acknowledgement and awareness of mental health and resilience as core components to individual wellbeing, but there is still much work that needs to be done to strengthen the mental health and resilience of young people.

**Resilience is increasingly understood as vital for wellbeing.** Resilience can be seen as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and challenges. Resilience can be built through exposure to new environments and by engaging with individuals from different backgrounds and with different perspectives on life. When referring to resilience building, it is meant to include the types of practices that people can adopt to help strengthen their abilities to overcome adversity and deal with unfamiliar situations (Langeland et al. 2016).

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**An interest in “happiness” is on the rise:** According to research conducted as part of the World Happiness Report, words and phrases used in relation to wellbeing are changing. For example, GDP and GNP as well as Income are less frequently searched in connection with wellbeing and instead words including happiness, life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing are increasingly associated with wellbeing.

Figure 1: Frequency of appearance of words and phrases related to wellbeing (World Happiness Report, 2022)



### Wellbeing in an International Context

Wellbeing has a significant impact on global development and has been adopted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 3), as well as in guidelines and publications made by national governments. Wellbeing, both collectively and individually, is being prioritized by governments, businesses, and civil society organizations, and global trends and developments are impacting how discussions about wellbeing are being shaped. For example:

- Recently, 80 companies, from Fortune 50 businesses to high-growth startups, have pledged to continue prioritizing the mental health and well-being of their employees. [This pledge](#) came amid growing concerns that as the economic times are getting tougher, the advances made during the last two years in support of employee mental health and well-being could be lost.
- The World Government Summit in cooperation with PWC released a [report](#) on the practical actions governments, policymakers, businesses and communities can take to build mentally resilient societies where citizens are supported at every stage of their lives to achieve this state of mental wellbeing.
- [The Global Wellness Annual Trends Report: “The Future of Wellness 2022”](#) identified ten new emerging trends in individual consumer demand for wellness that includes wellness technology, wellness travel, and environmental wellbeing.

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### **About the Author:**

Willem studied the IB at the United World College (UWC) of Southern Africa in Eswatini, and graduated magna cum laude from New York University Abu Dhabi in 2019 with a Bachelor's degree in History and three minors in Arabic, African Studies and Political Science. He received scholarships to study at UWC and NYU. After graduating from NYU, Willem was selected for a service year as a Princeton in Africa Fellow in Kenya. Following his service year, he at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) Somalia Country Program throughout the Covid-19 pandemic where he supported grants and program management while coordinating the IRC's Peacebuilding and Governance work. As an



international public servant, Willem hopes to continue serving those in need and build bridges through diplomacy in an increasingly polarized world. He is currently a student at the Geneva Graduate Institute (IHEID), where he has received a scholarship, and is expected to graduate with a Masters of Arts in Development Studies in September 2022. He is very excited to be contributing to the YMCA's Vision 2030 through the creation of this briefing document, and can be reached at [willem.cant@rescue.org](mailto:willem.cant@rescue.org) or [willem.cant@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:willem.cant@graduateinstitute.ch)

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## Annex 1 Case Studies on Community Wellbeing

<b>A Conceptual Approach to Community Wellbeing: The Concept of Buen Vivir in South America</b>	
The Concept	Buen Vivir
	<p>Buen Vivir or “living well” has shaped a lot of discourse in South America and has often been described as a radical questioning of development and other core components of modernity by offering an alternative that is different from Western understanding of wellbeing or the good life (Chuji, Rengifo &amp; Gudynas 2019).</p> <p>Buen Vivir is a worldview that describes a way of doing things that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive (Balch, 2013). It expresses a deeper change in knowledge, affectivity, and spirituality that re-examines the relationships between humans and non-humans beyond the modern separation of society and nature (Chuji, Rengifo &amp; Gudynas 2019). It is rooted in respect for indigenous cultures and ways of living that centers the subject of wellbeing not on the individual, but on the individual within the social context of their community and in their unique environmental situations (Balch, 2013).</p>
Who:	The concept of Buen Vivir is multidimensional and does not have a singular origin, but it has been supported by a wide range of social movements in South America and academic scholars. Most notably Eduardo Gudynas has developed Buen Vivir further and advocated for it as an alternative to Western forms of thinking about community wellbeing.
Where:	While Buen Vivir has been influential throughout the world as a new form of human development that centers on community, the idea of Buen Vivir has affected political changes in Bolivia and Ecuador where both constitutions now recognize and refer to Buen Vivir as a new form of public co-existence. In addition, Buen Vivir has also been influential in Peru and Chile.
The problem addressed:	Buen Vivir looks at societies from a social, historical and ecological perspective that links concepts from indigenous traditions with critiques of Western modernity and individualized views of wellbeing. There is no single Buen Vivir. For example, Ecuador’s sumak kawsay is different from Bolivia’s suma qamaña; approximate translations to Western categories in the first case refer to the art of good and harmonious living in a community, although defined in social and ecological dimensions at the same time, while the latter also address conviviality in mixed communities but in specific territories (Chuji, Rengifo & Gudynas 2019).
Actions taken/ key results:	The adoption of specific references in the Ecuadorian constitution, which now read: “We ... hereby decide to build a new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living.” In addition, the Bolivian constitution now states that: “The State adopts and promotes the following as ethical, moral principles of the plural society: (do not be lazy, do not be a liar or a thief), (live well), (live harmoniously), (good life), (land without evil) and (noble path or life).” The concept of Buen Vivir is a useful example of how community wellbeing as a concept can be differently defined according to context and that it is possible to view community wellbeing as a holistic and changing idea that centralizes happiness and the good life of both individuals and communities.

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The Concept	A Practical Approach to Community Wellbeing: The Wajir Framework in Northern Kenya
	Another approach to community wellbeing is showcased through the work of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), which is a community-based organization that has been working in conflict resolution and peace-building in the Wajir District of Kenya's Northeastern Province since 1993. The Wajir district has suffered from conflict as a result of competition over scarce resources such as water and land. The central government has been unable to exert much control over the district and other areas of the Northeastern Province, and this has often meant that violent conflict within and between communities has been widespread, fueled by additional inter-clan rivalry (Ndegwa, 2001). The conflict causes were mainly local and impacted the community wellbeing of all communities members, but it therefore also needed local peace solutions.
Who:	<p>Realizing that violent clashes and conflict were undermining the development and wellbeing of all community members, a group of young women set out to change the status quo and support peaceful community dialogues.</p> <p>Among the women spearheading the decision to seek a dialogue on peace were senior district government workers, two college-educated women, and an entrepreneur owning a private school (Ndegwa, 2001). These women, drawn from different clans, agreed to work towards peace and started a committee called Women for Peace to coordinate their efforts. Their initial activities included door-to-door canvassing for peace and the facilitation of a resolution by civil servants from various clans who, in continuing to work closely at their places of employment, contradicted the pervasive climate of inter-clan rivalry (Ndegwa, 2001). In addition, these young men and women also approached elders to support their peace efforts and to organize community meetings to resolve conflicts. These elders became known as the Al Fatah elders and they issued a declaration (referenced in the reference guidebook) that support peace efforts and promoted community wellbeing. As a result, three committees were formed: Women for Peace, Youth for Peace, and the Elders for Peace. Even though these committees worked as separate entities, combined, they formed the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, which has later also become known as the Wajir Framework for its approaches to supporting peace and strengthening community wellbeing.</p>
Where:	Wajir District in Northeastern Kenya.
The problem addressed:	The lack of access to natural resources, including land and water, as well as the lack of centralized government support to address violent conflicts and clashes as a result of this resource scarcity.
Actions taken/ key results:	The Wajir Peace and Development Committee worked closely with the local district authorities and sought to have extensive buy-in from all community members, government officials, business leaders and other civil society organizations. In general, it has been observed (Ndegwa, 2001) that the Wajir Peace and Development Committee has succeeded in six notable ways: a) It has achieved peaceful settlements in most interventions, b) It has established an infrastructure for responding to conflict and promoting peace and community wellbeing, c) It has revived elements of the pre-colonial Somali justice system, which, when combined with the modern state system, seems to assure more peace and community wellbeing than either one by

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itself, d) It has induced perceptible attitudinal change and reduced the incidents of retaliation and conflict, e) It has targeted, with modest success, (ex-)combatants through development and community projects, and, f) It has produced a model of community-based organization and government collaboration in peace and community building that is unique in Kenya and that is being replicated in other communities.

### **Annex 1: Why Community Wellbeing**

Humans are a social species and there is ample research to support the fact that we are happier when we form meaningful social connections and live longer when we have close support from each other (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Layton, 2010). Not only do we live longer when we have more extensive social networks and a strong sense of community wellbeing, but our brains actually function better (Harri et al. 2015) as we have an innate desire to belong and feel connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). There are hundreds of psychological studies that have been conducted to reaffirm our need to feel part of a group and that show that togetherness, particularly through community bonds, strengthens our overall happiness.

Beyond the scientific evidence supporting the impact of community wellbeing on our functioning (additional links to scientific studies are accessible in the reference guide), we also experience the importance of community wellbeing within our YMCAs on a daily basis. Many of our YMCAs play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of community wellbeing, providing both physical spaces as well as programs that support young people form social connections and feel part of a community. YMCAs are made up of individuals that form a special YMCA community at the local, regional, national and international levels. Communities are a part of YMCAs overarching identity while national YMCA movements form a community in and of itself, while operating within the local contexts where they are located. In our rapidly changing world that has many unprecedented challenges, community wellbeing is an anchor that allows us to grow, find meaning, and provide support for each other. This is why the YMCA believes that community wellbeing should be essential to the YMCA Vision 2030, and that every person should have the means to grow and thrive in body, mind and spirit while taking care of their individual and collective wellbeing.

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### **Annex 2: Sample Indicators and Targets to Measure Progress Towards Community Wellbeing**

- By 2030, the 95% of National YMCA Movements will have established mental health, safeguarding, and protection protocols that covers its staff and volunteers. (Goal 1)
- By 2030, 80% of National YMCA Movements will have established programming that focuses on promoting the mental health of young people. (Goal 1)
- By 2030, 80% of National YMCA Movements support safe and inclusive spaces. (Goal 2)
- By 2030, 80% of National YMCA Movements have promoted physical, spiritual and mental health programs amongst the broader communities in which they operate. (Goal 2)
- By 2030, the YMCA has facilitated 15 new partnerships that effectively champion the values and policies of the YMCA Vision 2030. (Goal 3)
- By 2030, the YMCA has held at least 6 advocacy and awareness campaigns to champion policies and practices that focus on safeguarding of young people (Goal 3).

*<sup>1</sup>The figures and numbers that have been included (i.e., 95%, 80%) are not meant to be prescriptive, but should be seen a source of inspiration for targets and indicators that could be suitable for the Vision 2030 activation plans.*

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## Reference Guide

### Website Links & Further Resources on Community Wellbeing:

- What is community wellbeing? (WhatWorksWellBeing, 2017).
- What is community wellbeing? (TakingCharge, 2022).
- Community wellbeing: Concepts & Questions (WhatWorksWellBeing, 2017).
- A conceptual review: community wellbeing (WhatWorksWellBeing, 2017).
- The future of the 1.5 trillion wellness industry (McKinsey&Co, 2021).
- Community level indicators: examples (CommunityToolBox, 2022).
- The Pledge – Promoting wellbeing and mental health for all employees (The Pledge, 2022)
- World Government Summit Report on Wellbeing (WGS, 2022)

### Academic Articles & Books on Wellbeing:

- Stronger social relationships leads to increased likelihood of survival (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Layton, 2010)
- Social connections and interactions make our brain function better (Harri et al. 2015)
- Humans have an innate desire to belong and feel connected (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).
- A definition of community wellbeing (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008).
- Handbook of community wellbeing research (Phillips & Wong, 2017).
- The Community Wellbeing Index in Canada (McHardy & O’Sullivan, 2004).
- Promoting well-being: Linking personal, organizational, and community change (Prilleltensky, Developing and using local community wellbeing indicators: Learning from the experiences of community indicators (Cox et al. 2010).
- Measures of Community Well-Being: a Template (VanDerWeele, 2019).

### Articles on Resilience:

- How Civil Institutions Build Resilience (Langeland et al. 2016).
- How People Learn to Become More Resilient (Maria Konnikova, 2016).
- How to Be More Resilient (Friedman, 2018).
- How Resilience Works (Coutu, 2002).

### Statistics on Mental Health:

- Key Facts on Adolescent Mental Health (WHO, 2021).
- Key Data on Mental Health (Our World in Data, 2021).
- Key WHO data on mental health (WHO, 2022).
- What is mental health (MedicalNewsToday, 2020).
- Mental health: strengthening our response (WHO, 2018).

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### “Community Wellbeing” Measurements:

- The Human Development Index (HDI)
- European Union’s Social Indicator Framework

### UN References:

- UN Safeguarding Support Hub
- UN Sustainable Development Goal 3

### Case Study References (Buen Vivir):

- Buen Vivir (Chuji, Rengifo & Gudynas, 2019)
- Buen Vivir: A brief introduction
- Buen Vivir: the social philosophy inspiring movements in South America (Balch, 2013).
- The Bolivian Constitution
- The Ecuadorian Constitution

### Case Study References (Wajir Framework):

- The Women of Wajir
- The Wajir Story: A Documentary
- The Wajir Peace and The Wajir Peace and Development Committee (Ndegwa, 2001).
- Al Fatah Declaration