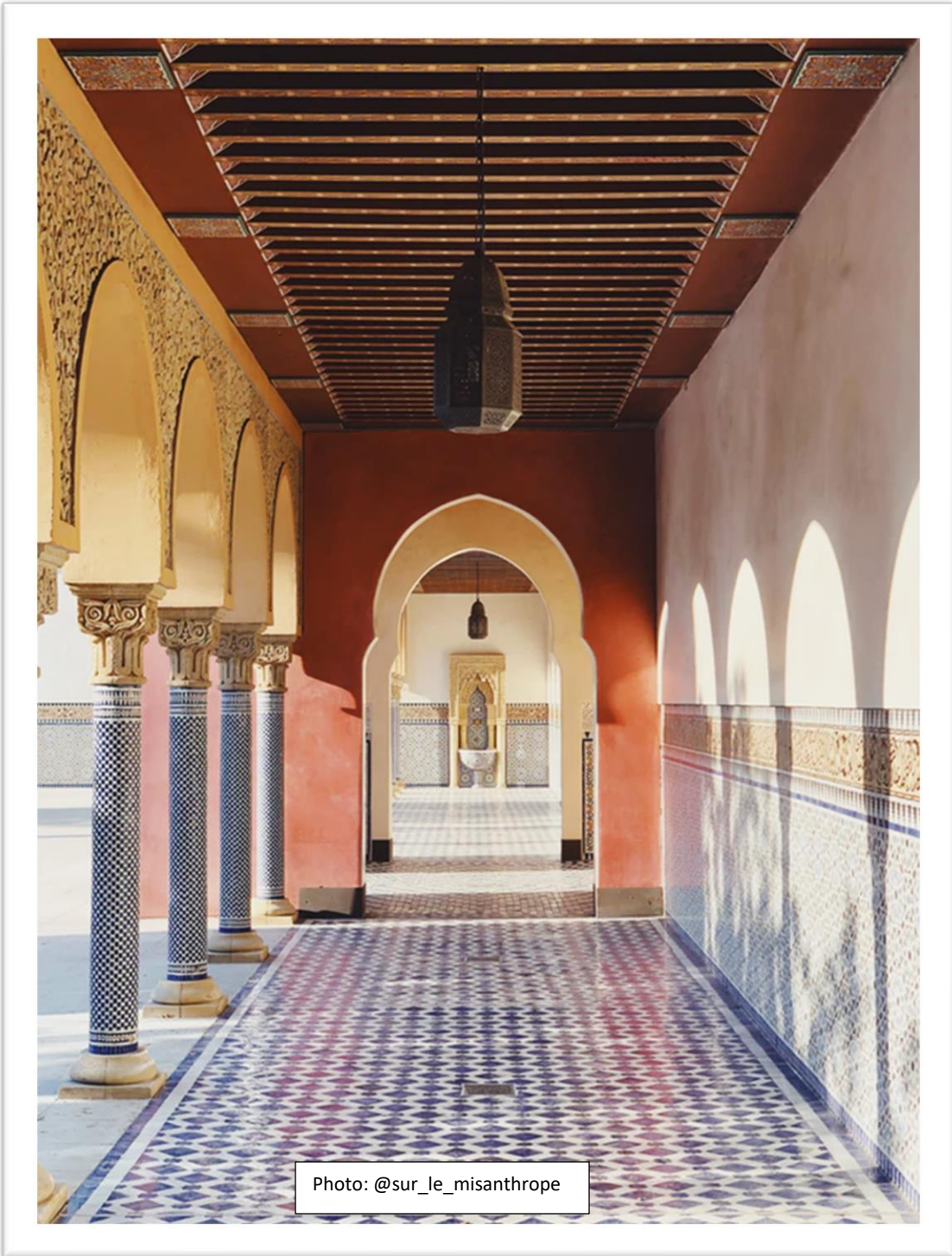


THE PRISM OF WELLBEING FOR PEOPLE & PLANET: BRINGING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO GROUND



A white paper from the Global Councils on the white paper from the Global Councils on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): the working group on wellbeing as a cross-cutting theme

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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals are 17 interconnected goals that address 5 key areas of human and environmental wellbeing: People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace & Partnership. The SDGs were created to include critical issues of current development without compromising future needs.

The SDG approach is complex and, for some, overwhelming. The framework includes 169 interconnecting indicators by which to measure progress. The SDGs also represent a fundamental paradigm shift in development. Standard government practice is to focus on single issues such as health, safety, or the environment, and to make these goals the purview of individual ministries or departments. The SDGs, by contrast, represent an opportunity to think more holistically; impacts in any one of the 5 areas of the SDGs will have an impact on the others.

It is, admittedly, challenging to make progress toward each of the 17 goals and to measure this progress. There is a risk that, without a compelling and unifying vision, progress on the SDGs may stall. We argue here that the cross-cutting theme of wellbeing provides exactly this unifying element.

It is, therefore, instructive to apply the wellbeing prism to each of the 17 Goals to better elucidate how each goal serves the ultimate goal of wellbeing for people and the planet and how human and planetary wellbeing itself enables and is an outcome of each of the SDGs as they advance. From the macro to the micro, spanning the globe at every level, human and planetary wellbeing is the recurring fractal structure in which sustainable development occurs.



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Wellbeing and its relation to each of the SDGs

Goal 1: End poverty

Poverty is one of the most pressing social concerns in the world today. Poverty has many dimensions, but it is related to unemployment, social exclusion, and high vulnerability to disasters, diseases and other phenomena which prevent people from enjoying wellbeing (Gough, McGregor & Camfield, 2007).

Goal 2: Zero hunger

Recent research reveals that 27% of the global population is “food insecure.” That number rises to 50% in low-income economies and 10% even in high-income nations (Smith, Rabbitt & Coleman-Jensen, 2018). Access to adequate, nutritional food is linked to health, longevity, and fetal development. Eliminating hunger is an essential foundation for wellbeing.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Although health can enhance wellbeing it is also true that wellbeing can improve physical and psychological health (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005). Improved wellbeing can act as a protective factor against loneliness and other mental illness that affect an estimated 20% of the world’s population. Similarly, increasing wellbeing reduces the load on health systems by promoting health behaviours, boosting immune system functioning, and supporting recovery from minor injuries and illnesses.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Education is the gateway to economic empowerment, gender equality, technological advancement, and citizen participation in community and governmental affairs. Access to quality education provides more than the simple acquisition of knowledge. It can also help people develop critical psycho-social skills such as perseverance, curiosity, cooperation, planning, and self-control. There is solid evidence that a whole school approach to wellbeing—one that includes parents, teachers and students-- is a mechanism for better psychological health in society (Seligman & Adler, 2018; Glazzard, 2019).

Goal 5: Gender equality

While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality, women and girls continue to suffer widespread discrimination and violence. There is strong and consistent evidence that promoting gender equality leads to greater subjective well-being (Audette, Lam, O'Connor & Radcliff, 2018). In addition, worsening gender equality is associated with deteriorating scores on the Better Life Index (Hsieh, et al., 2018). Policies to mitigate gender inequalities should be emphasized to improve the happiness and well-being.

Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation

Currently, 2.6 billion who live without improved sanitation. Improvements in sanitation practices can immediately affect the health and wellbeing of a large percentage of the world's population (Zhang et al., 2019). The development of clean water practices is a source for cautious optimism. Currently, 87% of the world's population uses safer and improved sources of drinking water. Promoting better access to clean water are important to health, industry and agriculture.

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Human flourishing in a modern economy relies on equitable energy distribution to support basic electrification, healthy housing and efficient food preparation (Bethell et al., 2018). At the same time, negative health and wellbeing impacts of pollution generated by the development and consumption of fossil fuels undermines human and environmental health. Renewable energy is critical to access affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy to underpin increasing human wellbeing.

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth

At its best, work provides purpose, security, growth, and income (Warr, 2002). Poor job quality and low pay, by contrast, have a profoundly negative effect on people's wellbeing. Economic growth can drive progress, create decent jobs for all, and improve living standards.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Economic health is an important predictor of citizen wellbeing. Diener and Diener (1995) found that GDP per capita, purchasing power, and meeting basic needs were all strongly correlated with wellbeing across nations. Every dollar spent on improved psychological health and wellbeing in the work force results in increased performance and productivity, and has an estimated return on investment of more than six dollars (Mills, Kessler, Cooper & Sullivan, 2007).

Goal 10: Reduced inequalities

The goal of reducing inequalities is, in part, about empowering historically marginalized groups. This can be seen in the emphasis on financial opportunity, government representation, and the reduction of discriminatory policies. Ultimately, greater equality translates to greater wellbeing. This can be clearly seen in the example of income equality, which is a consistent predictor of wellbeing in nations (eg. Biswas-Diener, Vitterso & Diener, 2008).

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

The history of urbanization reveals many risks to human and environmental wellbeing in rapid urbanisation. A policy commitment to resilient cities which promote wellbeing will drive the planning, design and development of city infrastructure in a positive direction. There is ample evidence that attention to transportation, green space, natural light, population density, and other aspects of urban planning are directly linked to wellbeing (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2018). What's more, liveable cities with high wellbeing are safer and attract more investment to support sustainable growth.



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Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production

It is tempting to think of the goal of more responsible production and consumption of products as a principally environmental aspiration. Although there are clear environmental advantages to lowering waste and similar eco-friendly policies, there are wellbeing advantages also. People who are thrifty, and those who take an intentional stance toward their consumption behaviors, report high levels of happiness (Brown & Kasser, 2005; Kasser, 2002).

Goal 13: Climate action

The high concentrations of human-influenced greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is a concern that transcends national boundaries. Collective action is necessary to mitigate the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change, and this can especially be seen in the case of reducing carbon emissions. Not only can mitigating climate change promote collective wellbeing but so can working toward this goal. Collective climate action creates opportunities for cooperation, purpose, ingenuity, and empathy; all of which are vital aspects of wellbeing.

Goal 14: Life below water

Careful management of the world's oceans, the largest and most essential global resource, is a key feature of a sustainable future. There is neither future development nor wellbeing for people if the planetary system upon which we depend fails. Marine protections and sustainable fishing policies will have benefits for humans as well as marine life. What's more, air pollution has a deleterious effect on the world's oceans even as it also affects human happiness and life satisfaction.

Goal 15: Life on land

Biodiversity and habitat loss are accelerating due to human influences such as climate change and urban development. This is a threat not only to wildlife and the natural environment but also to human health and wellbeing (Dallimer et al., 2012). On a smaller scale, there is evidence that green spaces and biodiversity in urban areas are related to wellbeing (Fuller et al., 2007). If we promote a greater appreciation of the ways that the environment affects health and wellbeing, there may be a greater collective will to protect it.

Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

In many ways, strong institutions are the foundation of all effective government and policy. Dolan and colleagues (2008) argue that trust in government is associated with wellbeing, and this dovetails with scholars who point to equal application of justice and low corruption (Tay, Herian & Diener, 2014) as critical correlates of societal wellbeing.

Goal 17: Strengthen partnerships to achieve the goal

Taking action on environmental protection, social equality, and economic development is a difficult task. This is, in part, because nations differ in their access to resources, their regional priorities, and their commitment to these goals. Fortunately, history provides many examples of successful cross-national cooperation, both in the private and public sectors. Cooperation is a natural process that can be effectively harnessed and which, itself, is linked to wellbeing (Keltner, Kogan, Piff & Saturn, 2014).



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A Note on Wellbeing Measurement

Among the historic obstacles to using wellbeing as a policy focus is the widespread skepticism that this abstract concept can be adequately measured. In fact, the United Nations has traditionally operationalized wellbeing through the indicators of longevity, infant mortality, and literacy. These variables tell us much about the downstream effects of economic development but little about people's subjective experience of their lives. Indeed, it is the subjective aspects of wellbeing that have been the source of measurement skepticism. Only two decades ago, the study of "happiness" was seen as a fringe science. In the new millennium, however, wellbeing has gained greater acceptance among social and behavioral researchers. This change in attitude is undoubtedly influenced by improvement in measurement strategy, the proliferation of academic publications on the topic, and the award of two Nobel Prizes to happiness researchers.

Social science research literature is full of a number of approaches to studying wellbeing. Sociologists have examined flourishing and livability. Psychologists have studied subjective wellbeing and psychological well-being. Anthropologists have emphasized local definitions of wellbeing through ethnographic accounts of daily life, and a Nobel Prize was awarded for research in wellbeing in the field of economics (see the work of Kahneman). Each of these (and other) distinct approaches has its own set of strengths and drawbacks. Among the notable strengths is the fact that these approaches are valid and have been replicated across many studies.

With public policy and sustainable development specifically in mind, we recommend a simple approach to measurement: the "Cantril self-anchoring striving scale" (Cantril, 1965). This single-item survey method has been used widely and effectively in multiple waves of the Gallup World Poll and the UNICEF 'child wellbeing in rich countries' reports. The Cantril Ladder, as it is sometimes called, asks survey respondents to think of a ladder with the lowest step (a score of 0) representing the worst possible life they can imagine and the highest step (a score of 10) representing the best possible life they can imagine. This measurement strategy has several advantages:

- It uses a single item and so is not complicated and is not related to survey attrition
- It is widely used and so can be compared to the scores of many samples
- It is anchored in a local understanding of "the good life" and so does not represent Western ideals of wellbeing
- It shows good validity and has been associated with other measures of wellbeing

This simple scale is a gauge not of emotional whims but of a broad assessment of life. It provides a brief and uncomplicated measure of the quality of a person's life as defined by him or herself. This is an important piece of information because it serves as an additional point of data: although it is unquestionably helpful to know if citizens are healthy and literate, it is also important to understand if their experience of life is meaningful and rewarding.

Case Studies

To better understand the relationship of wellbeing to sustainable development, we provide three case studies. They represent a wide range of policy concerns—governmental, private, and educational. We have chosen them because they are large-scale examples of attempts to marry sustainable development with wellbeing.

A. National Government Policy: Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is legislation passed by the National Assembly for Wales which came into force in April 2016. The Act imposes a legal duty on devolved public bodies to carry out sustainable development, defined as the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of the people of Wales. As the name suggests, this legislation was intended to emphasize a long-term focus and the consideration of the potential impact of policies and decisions on the well-being of both current and future generations. The Act also introduces statutory ways of working including collaboration, prevention of future problems from occurring or getting works, involving people in all decisions that affect them, and integrating policies and objectives in addition to long-term thinking. These ways of working should be used to seek to achieve 7 statutory interconnected well-being goals such as a more equal Wales, a healthier Wales, a globally responsible Wales and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language as key aspects of wellbeing. These goals are aligned to the SDGs and it is important to note that all four aspects of well-being are considered including cultural well-being. This law is particularly interesting in that it focuses on wellbeing and sustainability explicitly and simultaneously at the national population level.

It might be tempting to dismiss such legislation as aspirational or political posturing, except for the specific provisions of the Act make it grounded, measurable and trackable. Among these provisions are the creation of the position of an independent Commissioner to act “as a guardian for the interests of future generations of Wales, and to support the public bodies listed in the Act” (Welsh Government, 2015). This position is supported by an advisory panel, provides advice and assistance to the public bodies and is authorized to carry out reviews and research, make recommendations, and publish reports.

Wales remains the only country to have imposed duties on public bodies and it is possible to see a direct alignment between the legislation and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Commissioner is also the Chair of the Network of Institutions for Future Generations, which is a collective group of international institutions looking at the well-being needs of future generations across the globe. More [here](#).

In the years since its inception, there has been notable progress on sustainable development and wellbeing in Wales. For example, the Commissioner has provided advice and assistance to 44 public bodies in Wales including Welsh Government and local authorities and has particularly promoted the decarbonization agenda and the involvement principle. In this capacity, she has shared best practices and helped public bodies for example set energy-relevant objectives in line with a goal of ‘a resilient Wales’. The Commissioner is currently advising Welsh Government on how to fund a climate emergency and has also advised on national policy such as the national

transport guidance and planning policy. She also monitors the progress public bodies are making towards achieving the well-being goals. Public bodies in Wales have started using the Act. For example, Perhaps one of the clearest examples of how the Act has successfully had an impact on the national level is within the largest procurement contract awarded by Welsh Government. The largest single procurement contract worth £5bn was awarded to French-Spanish joint venture Keolis Amey in 2018. The modelling done by KeolisAmey was focused on delivering against the seven well-being goals. Also, 14 of Cardiff's leading public sector organisations have jointly signed the newly developed Healthy Travel Charter, committing themselves to supporting and encouraging their staff and visitors to travel in a sustainable way to and from their locations. Between them, they hope to reduce the proportion of journeys commuting to and from work made by car from 62 per cent to 52 per cent, increasing the proportion of staff cycling weekly to and from work from 14 per cent to 23 per cent, and increase the proportion of vehicles used during the day which are plug-in hybrid or pure electric from one per cent to three per cent by 2022. Cardiff and Vale Health Board which means bike hire will be available for free on prescription, as part of a new pilot scheme at doctor surgeries. Doctors can prescribe six months of bike membership for people who need to do more exercise or lose weight.

Furthermore, it is widely suggested that the Commissioner's interventions were central in halting a Welsh Government proposal to build a controversial (M4) motorway relief road. This road would have meant borrowing £1.4bn for a 14-mile stretch of road, destroying environmental habitats and contributing dangerous levels of carbon emissions to the atmosphere.

A final item of note is that the Act emphasizes transparency in government operations and public involvement in policy discussions. This has been made manifest in several ways. First, the Welsh well-being Bill followed from engagement with citizens in 2014. They were able to express their views on well-being policy in a variety of community meetings created expressly for the purpose of a national conversations called 'The Wales We Want' which shaped the legislation. Secondly, the Act places a legal expectation on public bodies to involve citizens. The Commissioner also prioritizes involvement across her work programme and in public dialogues. In 2018, for instance, she received 218 letters covering more than 100 distinct issues and she later launched the "People's Platform," a digital platform that allows people to share current stories and concerns for the future. This correspondence has served as one of many guides for the Commissioner's priorities and actions.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- The legislation includes 'culture' as one of the pillars of Sustainable Development (including economic, social and environmental)
- The creation of statutory duties to mandate action.
- The creation of an independent Commissioner position to coordinate efforts between governmental and public bodies with distinct agendas
- The emphasis on involvement: creating opportunities for citizen participation
- Prioritizing long-term development and wellbeing strategies
- Using the widest definitions of sustainable development and well-being

B. Private Enterprise Policy: Illycaffé

Despite the reach and mandate of government, it is important to acknowledge the role and responsibility that the private sector bears in promoting both sustainable development and wellbeing. To this end, we highlight the case of the Italian coffee company, Illy. Based in Trieste, Italy, Illy operates 259 coffee shops and works with more than 100 thousand points of sale in 140 nations. They generated almost 500 million euros in revenue in 2018.

Illy is a company of note because it has developed an explicit emphasis on sustainability and on wellbeing. In fact, Illy explicitly anchors its own sustainability initiative in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. To do so, the company created a sustainability policy intended to direct company behavior through 2030. They used the 17 SDGs to inform their own policy which includes attention to sustainable agricultural practices, an emphasis on improving human happiness, energy efficiency, and similar objectives. This policy was approved by a specially appointed sustainability committee.

Illy has a number of initiatives that embody their progress toward these lofty objectives. Among them are:

- *University of Coffee*: Illy places a premium on access to education and the ways that knowledge act as a foundation for sustainable development and wellbeing. Producers, consumers and coffee professionals can engage with University of Coffee coursework to learn about supply chain, retail management, and other aspects of coffee production.
- *Employee wellbeing*: Illy promotes employee wellbeing through a variety of human resource initiatives. These include programs to subsidize kindergarten for the children of employees, subsidized on-site cafeterias, the provision of medical insurance, and safety policies.
- *Investment in supplier economies*: Illy takes an active interest in economic development of the nations that are the sources of their coffee. For instance, Illy contributes to reforestation efforts in Colombia and to long-term economic planning in Ethiopia.

C. Educational Policy: Universidad Tecmilenio

Tecmilenio University is a large private, not-for-profit, university located in Mexico. It includes 29 campuses in 18 states as well as online programs. Tecmilenio has graduated more than 81 thousand scholars and currently caters to 56 thousand students with its 1700 employees. Its programs include secondary, tertiary and graduate education, as well as professional certificates. Tecmilenio is noteworthy in that it has an explicit focus on both wellness and the 17 SDGs.

Staff at Tecmilenio have leveraged an aspect of Mexican education law to help propel a focus on the twin objectives of wellbeing and sustainable development. Specifically, Mexican law requires students to complete almost 500 hours of community service as part of their educational tenure. Historically, placements with organizations are often spent in mundane tasks such as data entry. Tecmilenio seeks to change this by promoting a focus on the development of personal meaning and by using the 17 SDGs as a tool for doing so.

After learning about the SDGs, students are encouraged to engage in “positive action” projects. These are pilot projects that address one or more of the SDGs and which are aligned with the students’ strengths and interests. The placement organizations, similarly, have an opportunity to learn about how their own professional objectives align with the SDGs and to pilot programs that they might otherwise not have the resources for. Examples of positive action programs include:

- Following the 2017 earthquake, which killed more than 300 and injured more than 6 thousand, students collaborated with the Red Cross to create a computer program for cataloging and distributing donations and aid.
- A program raising awareness about green spaces and reforestation resulting in 250 students being supplied with immature trees and given the knowledge to plant them and care for them.
- An all-female robotics team worked with an indigenous community in the state of Tabasco to create a flood warning system for the deaf, and prioritized the use of local language.

Currently, more than 3 thousand students are registered in courses related to the SDGs and, of these, they have formed 600 teams bringing positive action projects to more than 300 organizations. Tecmilenio is currently implementing a measurement strategy to gauge potential increases in student citizenship, wellbeing, and sense of purpose.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- Tecmilenio emphasizes the ways that working on SDGS can, itself, promote wellbeing
- Tecmilenio explicitly educates students at the secondary and tertiary level in the SDGs
- Tecmilenio capitalizes on existing law and policy to promote action

D. Regional Government Policy: South Australia

Since 2012, South Australia—a state with a population of 1.5 million people— has made rapid progress towards becoming a psychologically healthy state, driven by business, public sector, citizens, politicians and collaborative local leadership. A popular, bottom-up movement has emerged as wellbeing is becoming widely accepted as being beneficial to business, health, community, and general livability.

The program was initiated by inviting a wellbeing expert (Dr. Martin Seligman) to South Australia to advance political, professional and community acceptance of the importance of wellbeing in society. More than 14 thousand citizens engaged in sessions in which they learned about the science of wellbeing. Committed local leaders emerged with a collective embrace of a wellbeing vision: for South Australia to become a global leader in wellbeing implementation. This led to the establishment of the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI). SAHMRI has a mandate to build wellbeing across distinct contexts, to develop a measurement strategy, and to provide support to leadership to make this initiative successful.

SAHMRI's approach to implementation of wellbeing emphasized both systems and scale. All wellbeing projects employed the lens of LIMBER (Lead Initiate Measure Build Embed Research). This allowed all stakeholders to emphasize measurement, to set specific objectives (productivity, health, and reduced psychological distress), to track long-term change, and to collaborate across sectors. More than 13 million dollars were invested in wellbeing projects. The impact of these projects includes:

- The creation of the first Australian Department for Health and Wellbeing;
- Positive education programs in hundreds of schools as well as the measurement of the wellbeing of students
- The creation of a Masters of Applied Positive Psychology degree
- An emphasis on wellbeing as a formal policy concern in the capital city, Adelaide
- More than 5 thousand citizens trained in wellbeing skills
- Wellbeing programs rolled out in prisons, health and aged care agencies, the Air Force, and in the private sector

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- The Wellbeing and Resilience Centre has a tested methodology to implement *wellbeing at scale*
- Citizens, community and workforces drive a bottom -up citizens' movement towards wellbeing
- Systematically measuring and building wellbeing is cost effective and achievable.

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