



British Columbia
Assembly of First Nations

Centering First Nations Concepts of Wellbeing

Toward a GDP-Alternative Index in British Columbia



An aerial photograph of a river winding through a dense, lush green forest. The river's surface is calm, reflecting the surrounding trees and sky. The banks are covered in thick vegetation, and a rocky shoreline is visible in the lower right portion of the frame.

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"The Indigenous worldview has been marginalized for generations because it was seen as antiquated and unscientific and its ethics of respect for Mother Earth were in conflict with the Industrial worldview, bent on treatment of the Earth as if what native people call gifts were nothing more than resources destined for consumption by humans.

But now, in this time of climate change and massive loss of biodiversity we understand that the Indigenous worldview is neither unscientific nor antiquated, but is, in fact, a source of wisdom that we urgently need."

**ROBIN WALL KIMMERER
(POTAWATOMI NATION)**

ADDRESS TO THE UN 5TH INTERACTIVE
DIALOGUE ON HARMONY WITH NATURE
JANUARY 6, 2016

Executive Summary

This discussion paper explores the ways in which our official BC measures of economic value are inadequate and fail to reflect the values of First Nations governments and individuals to the overall wellbeing of the province.

BC, like Canada and most countries around the world, currently measures economic growth using gross domestic product (GDP). GDP is a crude proxy for gauging economic wellbeing in that it essentially measures only national income. However, countries around the world are increasingly adopting new indices of wellbeing that measure economic income, plus a full suite of indicators such as the environment, culture, safety, leisure time, health, and education. These wellbeing indices measures are remarkably similar to those held by BC Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples in BC already have a sophisticated concept of what constitutes a “good life”, a conception and way of living that has been refined over millennia and that varies within each culture, place, and language. An Indigenous good life is one that is “richer” with, for example, clean air, regenerative wild fisheries and forests, socially healthy families, the passing-down of cultural values and language, excellent education, respect for traditions that value Elders and living Indigenous knowledge, a responsive health care system, and a natural environment that sustains our collective wellbeing and species.

Given the global trend in GDP-alternative measures, and considering the need for a productive and efficient COVID-19 recovery, there is an opportunity for BC to develop its own made-in-BC wellbeing index that considers Indigenous knowledge of environmental, health, education, community and cultural outcomes in order to improve the livelihoods of all British Columbians.

This paper takes the following rationale to supporting an Indigenous-centric, made-in-BC wellbeing index:

- There is a growing global movement in GDP-alternatives now becoming substitute indices for measuring human wellbeing.
- Within this global movement, there is a lack of Indigenous values in current GDP-based valuation of the BC economy.
- Indigenous values – which are showing up in other countries in their re-examination of their economies – can be incorporated into a re-imagined BC Wellbeing Index.
- Indigenous values and knowledge have the potential to strengthen GDP alternative indices worldwide and here in BC.
- BC now has an opportunity to take the lead in defining a made-in-BC wellbeing index.

This logic is organized and discussed in the four-part report that follows.

PART ONE

Part One provides a brief history of GDP as a 1930s Great Depression economic planning tool that contrasts with an Indigenous worldview of what is important to a living a good life. The paper describes alternatives to GDP starting with Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Index (GNH), followed by notable successors such as the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Better Life Index, the United Nations World Happiness Report, and the acceleration of wellbeing indices that appeared between 1990 and the present.

PART TWO

Part Two discusses current wellbeing indices by first highlighting the most notable present-day GDP-alternative indicator: New Zealand's 2019 Wellbeing Budget, its associated Living Standards Framework, and the relevant Indigenous Māori wellbeing outcomes. It then discusses other indicators either already in place, or currently being developed, in Iceland, Scotland, Finland, Wales, Belgium, and India. Also highlighted are the wellbeing indicators in Canada, Australia, and Ireland that have not yet been adopted by their governments.

"GDP tells you nothing about sustainability."

JOSEPH STIGLITZ
NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING ECONOMIST

PART THREE

Part Three hones in on the wellbeing and economic indicators that involve Indigenous peoples, including:

1. New Zealand's Wellbeing Budget and Living Standards Framework
2. Manitoba's Indigenous Contributions to the Manitoba Economy
3. Atlantic Canada's Indigenous Economic Performance
4. Ecuador's Constitutional Enshrinement of Sumak Kawsay or Buen Vivir
5. Bolivia's adoption of the Biocultura Programme a.k.a. Vivir Bien
6. USA's Swinomish Indigenous Health Indicators (Washington State)

PART FOUR

Part Four outlines the rationale for BC to create and adopt a wellbeing index that is more comprehensive and Indigenous-centric than GDP, particularly as the province works to overcome the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in this section are details on BC's "Progress Board", an early, limited, wellbeing template abandoned by the BC Liberal Christy Clark government.

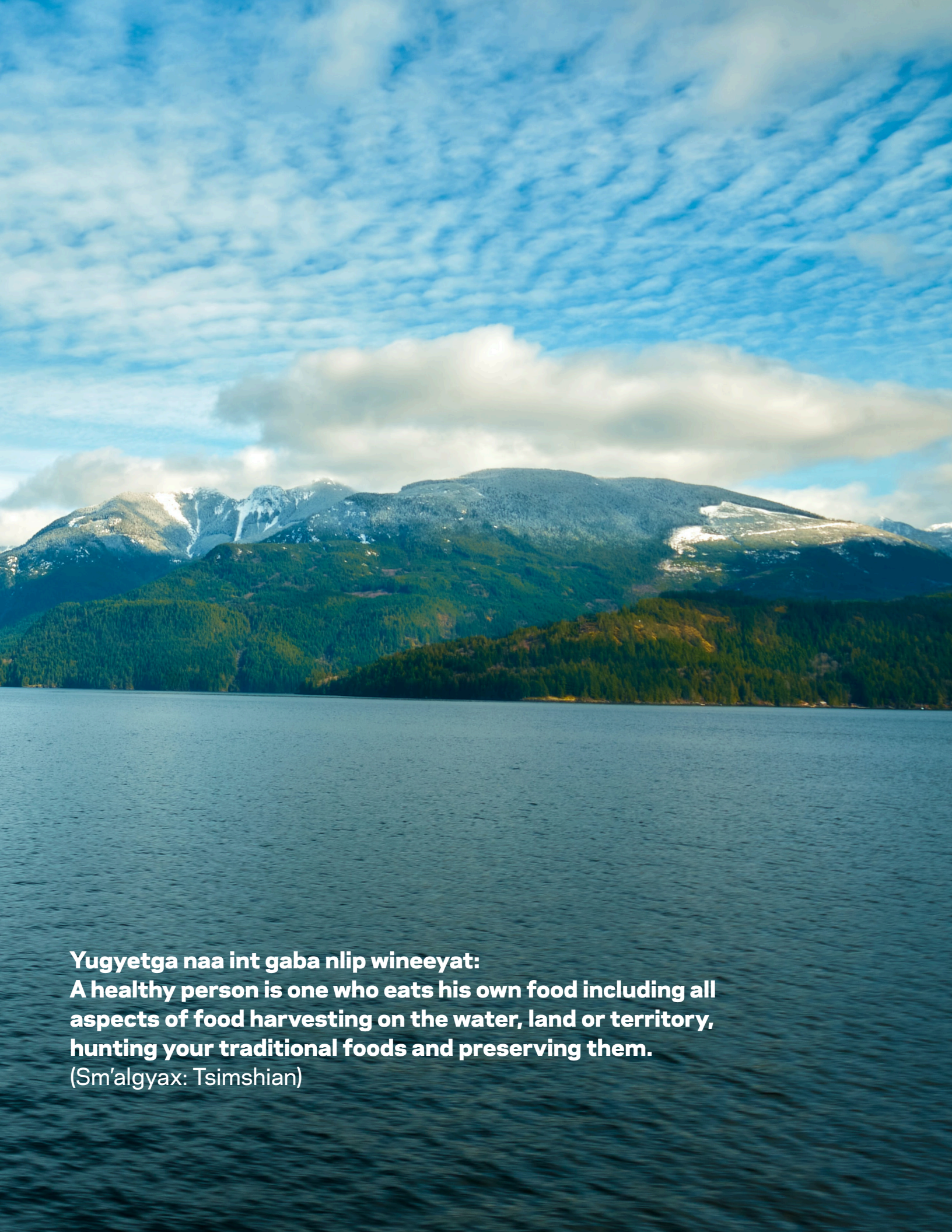
The paper concludes with recommendations which are to:

1. Adopt a collective commitment, in lockstep with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, to a new wellbeing framework for BC.
2. Meaningfully include First Nations as central to the development and implementation of the BC wellbeing framework.
3. Mandate a shared Centre of Excellence to develop the BC wellbeing framework.
4. Examine and learn from the best practices and specific examples of Indigenous wellbeing indices in other jurisdictions.
5. Prioritize the development of data needed to support the framework.
6. Accelerate the implementation of UNDRIP principles by incorporating the BC wellbeing framework and resulting made-in-BC wellbeing index into government policy, laws and decision-making.



Eshelhekwiws:
Our connection to all of creation
(Skwxwú7mesh: Squamish)

Hishuk Ish Tsawalk:
Everything is one
and all is interconnected
(Nuu-chah-nulth)



Yugyetga naa int gaba nlip wineeyat:

A healthy person is one who eats his own food including all aspects of food harvesting on the water, land or territory, hunting your traditional foods and preserving them.

(Sm'algyax: Tsimshian)

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