Costa Rica tops 'Happy Planet Index', July 06, 2009

The report, The Happy Planet Index 2.0: Why good lives don't
have to cost the earth, published last Saturday 4 July 2009, by NEF
(The New Economics Foundation) presents the results of the second global
compilation of the Happy Planet Index (HPI).
The new Index is based on improved data for 143 countries around the
world, representing 99 per cent of the world's population. The report, with a
foreword by the ecological economist, Herman Daly, shows that globally, we are
still far from achieving good lives within the Earth's finite resource limits. And,
although there are signs of hope, overall we are still heading in the wrong
direction.

The HPI provides the first ever analysis of trends over time for what
are supposedly the world's most developed nations, the Organization for Economic
Co-operation and Development (OECD).
Some
interesting facts about the report are that Latin America tops the Index with Costa Rica the
'greenest and happiest' country. Nine of the ten highest-scoring nations
are Latin American.
The
USA, China and India were all 'greener and
happier' twenty years ago than today. Although there have been some gains since
then, HPI scores were still higher in 1961 than in 2005. Life satisfaction and
life expectancy combined have increased 15 per cent over the 45-year period,
but it has come at an earth-shattering cost - an increase in ecological
footprint per head of 72 per cent.

"As the world faces the triple
crunch of deep financial crisis, accelerating climate change and the looming
peak in oil production we desperately need a new compass to guide us. Following
the siren's song of economic growth has delivered only marginal benefits to the
World's poorest whilst undermining the basis of their livelihoods. What's more,
it hasn't notably improved the well-being of those who were already rich, or
even provided economic stability. Now we must use the Happy Planet Index to break
the spell and chart a new course for a high well-being low-carbon economy
before our high-consuming lifestyles plunge us into the chaos of irreversible
climate change" says Nic Marks, founder of the centre for
well-being at NEF.
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By stripping the economy back to its meaningful outputs (lives of
varying length and happiness) and the ultimate inputs (the Earth's finite
resources) the HPI is the definitive efficiency measure. It provides a clear
guide to what ultimately matters to us - our well-being in terms of long, happy
and meaningful lives - and what matters for the planet - our rate of resource
consumption.

But the Index also provides clear signs of hope. Overall, the HPI reveals that
the world is heading in the wrong direction, but nations that perform well on
the Index provide valuable insights into how we could do things differently:
Costa Rica
tops the Happy Planet Index 2.0. Costa
Ricans report the highest life satisfaction in the world, have the
second-highest average life expectancy of the New World (second only to Canada)
and have an ecological footprint that means that the country only narrowly
fails to achieve the goal of 'one-planet living': consuming its fair share of
the Earth's natural resources.

In fact, Costa Ricans also live slightly longer than
Americans, and report much higher levels of life satisfaction, and yet have a
footprint that is less than a quarter the size.
In times of great crisis, come great opportunities. According to the
Happy Planet Index, now is the time for societies around the world to speak out
for a happier planet, to identify a new vision of progress, and to demand new
tools to help us work towards it. The HPI is one of these tools. But if it is
to be effective it must also inspire people to act.

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