

## A Global Research Network on Measuring Progress

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### A. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1. This paper discusses the concept and possible operation of an international research network to support and promote the Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies, hosted by the OECD.
2. It is written as an informal advisory paper for internal use by the OECD Statistics Directorate, rather than as a systematic feasibility study. Its structure is to explore briefly the broad issues and principles implicit in establishing such a network (here called 'the Global Progress Research Network' or 'GPRN') and then propose a series of concrete ideas for its development, around the key issues and themes identified. If desired, the author will be happy to incorporate suggested revisions to enable the paper to receive wider circulation or be more formally structured.
3. It is assumed that the aim is to build a progress research network as a medium to long term project that is commensurate with the time horizon (perhaps 5-10 years) and scale of the MPS project itself, but that at the same time the OECD is seeking a series of immediate and shorter term ideas and actions so that the process can begin as soon as possible.
4. The paper concludes that the development of such a network is an important and timely step for the success of the global project, given the current context and the future goals and directions outlined in its strategic action plan. If it is decided to proceed with the proposal, it might be desirable to commission a more detailed 'Business Case' to address more systematically the key issues canvassed briefly in this paper, namely:
  - (a) What is the broad concept or model for the GPRN we have in mind? ('network of networks?', 'think tank without walls')
  - (b) What is the rationale for the GPRN? What would be its key goals and functions?
  - (c) What would be the main benefits, and for whom?
  - (d) What would be the key challenges or barriers to its establishment?
  - (e) What are the main existing assets and advantages it could draw on?
  - (f) Who would be the main members, stakeholders and participants? (academics and researchers? policy makers? writers and journalists? from what fields and disciplines? what organisations?)
  - (g) How would it work in practice? (Governance, administration, auspices)
  - (h) How would it be funded?

## B. THE CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR A GPRN

### Measuring societal progress is a world movement

“For a good part of the 20th century there was an implicit assumption that economic growth was synonymous with progress. The world now recognises that it isn't quite as simple as that ... Over the past 10 years or so there has been an explosion of interest in producing measures of societal progress ... that go beyond GDP to represent a broader view of the ways in which societies are progressing and regressing ... Initiatives to do just this are being run in many countries rich and poor ... by governments, by civil society, by academics and the private sector ... A world movement is emerging and the linkage between statistical indicators, policy design and democratic assessment of the performance of a country (a region, a city etc) is at its core.”<sup>1</sup>

5. The search for better models and measures of progress by citizens and policymakers at all levels is now an important global movement, which can potentially change the dominant world paradigm – the way people and states think about and plan for progress - from one focused predominantly on economic growth to a model that is more just, balanced and sustainable, and better reflects the values and aspirations of people and the actual conditions of social, economic and environmental life.

### The Global Project and its goals

6. The Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies ('the MPS project') is an international collaboration hosted by the OECD in partnership with organisations including the UNDP, the World Bank and the European Commission. It aims to provide global leadership and support for this emerging world movement.

7. In less than five years since the project was informally conceived at the First World Forum in Palermo, Italy, it has generated remarkable activity and support around the world. It has achieved a succession of milestones and major initiatives at levels ranging from international and regional to national and local communities; sponsored successful conferences and workshops on all aspects of measuring progress from ideas, statistics, and communication to community engagement and democracy; hosted a remarkable global conference with over 1200 participants in Istanbul; produced a widely supported global manifesto and call for action (the Istanbul Declaration); attracted considerable media coverage; produced a short film, handbooks and guidelines, and a series of training courses; and is currently planning a third, even larger, Global Forum in Busan, South Korea in October 2009.

8. The Istanbul Declaration laid out the key elements of a long term global strategy with four main goals: (a) to promote community and international *debate* about the meaning and measurement of progress in the 21st century; (b) to share *knowledge* and best practice in social progress measurement; (c) to build shared public *understanding* of global and societal change; and (d) to build *capacity* to use and apply statistical measures of social progress, both generally and in developing countries (author's emphasis).

9. The OECD and its partners are now planning this strategy in detail (see note 1 below). They intend that it should operate in an inclusive fashion 'open to all levels of society', and through engagement and partnerships with international organisations,

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<sup>1</sup> OECD Statistics Directorate, 2008. 'Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies: Strategic Action Plan', Paris: OECD (*selected quotations*)

policymakers, academics, experts and civil society. Planned activities include developing and supporting regional and national networks, projects and conferences; sponsoring a series of thematic workshops and courses; and developing a global website and knowledge base.

### **Why developing a GPRN is necessary and timely**

10. The MPS project is ambitious and long term, and genuinely global in its operation and significance. Its success will require a major commitment of infrastructure, administration, and resources, and the cooperation of many different organisations and people. But ultimately it is only partly a project about the practical questions of statistical techniques and policy-making.

11. Like the wider global movement, the MPS project is essentially about ideas and values. The key words from the Istanbul Declaration highlighted above are ‘debate’, ‘knowledge’, ‘understanding’ and ‘capacity’. The project is about challenging a prevailing worldview, promoting a critical debate (what progress and wellbeing mean to people and governments), changing how people think and influencing policy. It is about innovation: the development of new research, evidence and techniques; and it is about communication, education and learning. Ultimately it is the idea behind this project – an idea that is compelling, appealing and sensible, and likely to become even more powerful in the next decade – and how this idea is developed, spread and popularised, that will determine its success.

12. The project’s success will therefore hinge as much on its ‘intellectual infrastructure and resources’, as its administrative base and physical resources: on its capacity to generate and communicate ideas, evidence and innovation; and to develop a network of active and influential ‘ideas people’ and communicators (thinkers, researchers, writers etc) to do its work and carry its message all over the world.

13. How well is the project currently equipped for this task? The global movement, and the MPS project itself, have undoubtedly come a long way in a short time. We can reasonably claim that we are at a point in world history where there is a real opportunity to redefine the basic goals, values and priorities regarding what constitutes genuine societal progress. But there is much work to do.

14. The dominance of GDP (and the wider ‘economic growth as progress’ world view) in the public worlds of government, policy making and the media is matched by its very strong presence in the more interior world of ideas, knowledge and research, in universities and think-tanks, and in courses and publications. And its message is resilient and tenacious; it is continuously reinforced and re-interpreted, and able to absorb and even exploit crises which on their face appear to undermine it.<sup>2</sup>

15. But the same is not yet true of the movement to re-define societal progress. Certainly, the core idea is growing strongly in public acceptance (and perhaps has been intuitively accepted for many years)<sup>3</sup>; but it is not yet matched by in-depth generation of ideas, research and education producing knowledge and training for leaders, culture change within organisations and simple and accessible information for ordinary citizens.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, some commentators argue that the critical policy response to the current ‘Global Financial Crisis’ is to focus more single-mindedly on restoring ‘sound’ economic growth, rather than considering whether there is perhaps a deeper flaw in the model of progress that it represents.

<sup>3</sup> This intuitive public perception goes back over a decade, and was well captured in the title of the now famous Atlantic Monthly article of 1995 “If the GDP is up, why is America down?”

16. In terms of research, practice and public understanding, the whole global ‘measuring progress’ movement is still young, scarcely a generation old. There are still many unanswered questions, and many gaps in understanding, knowledge and research, which need practical answers. For example, we must understand better how different cultures and nations think about progress, and how to develop new indicators to measure phenomena that previously were not identified or measured in accounts of progress, such as social cohesion, happiness, civic participation etc. We need better knowledge and better models for applying new measures of progress to policy and planning. Most of all, and most crudely, we need many more influential people and organisations to understand and accept the underlying rationale and ideas.

17. In some ways, it could be said that the ‘measuring progress’ paradigm, not yet having (unlike its main rival) its own champions, networks, resources and institutions to promote its worldview, must rely even more heavily on the strength and wide appeal of its central idea. And as we have seen there is no doubt that this central idea itself is both timely and powerful.

18. Thus the more systematic development of a worldwide ‘ideas’ network - a Global Progress Research Network that is an active, committed, problem-focused collaboration working on agreed tasks – is a necessary element of the long term development strategy for the MPS project. Its role would be to help spread ideas in centres of learning, research, ideas and policy development; to develop more effective underpinning and support material; to identify and fill holes in existing knowledge; and to build a forward looking research agenda, and a stronger evidence and research base, for the global project . Now is exactly the right time to develop such a network; and some of the key elements are already in place.

#### **Existing foundations to build on**

19. There is a promising base to build the GPRN on:

(a) *The nature of the idea*: The idea of balanced and sustainable progress resonates with many people and across different cultures and religions. It is both a sensible and highly defensible notion; but also intuitively appealing to ordinary people and to thoughtful policymakers.

(b) *The global context*: The importance of the idea will inevitably increase over the coming decade. As global problems such as climate change, economic and financial instability, and social inequality worsen, ‘balanced and humane progress’ will present itself as an increasingly logical, and perhaps the only viable, solution.

(c) *International organisational support*: The Global Project has already built impressive support from international organisations and some national governments. With careful and intelligent leadership, this should grow over the next decade to include an increasing array of international organisations around the world and in all regions. There are limits to the capacity of the OECD, with its perceived role as a primarily economic development organisation of wealthy European nations, to carry the project alone. More attention should now be given to partnerships with cultural and educational bodies (such as UNESCO).

(c) *Elements of a global network in place*: Some of the key elements of a global network are already in place. First, the ideas behind the MPS project are well spread (and in the process increasingly being understood, thought about and discussed) through the development of many practical projects at local, regional and national levels throughout the world. Most of

these have their roots in real communities, organisations and governments. Secondly, the MPS project itself is gradually bringing together many projects, participants, policymakers and academics all over the world, and so building up informally a virtual ideas and research network. These constitute an excellent pool to draw from, but are still some way from being systematically organised, and are not yet strong enough to meet the increasing demands that the growing global movement and the MPS project are likely to make in the next decade. There will be a need for practical research and new knowledge; public and community education; timely response to critics and challenges (such as the global financial crisis); building academic and university support; increasing influence and understanding in government and policymaking; and critically, anchoring down this knowledge for future generations through ongoing university courses, research, books and publications etc.

(d) *Research and intellectual appeal:* From an academic and research standpoint, the essential appeal of the MPS project (and of the GPRN) is that it is fundamentally concerned with cross-disciplinary and applied research around a real global problem. It requires different disciplines and research centres to work together on a common problem that crosses many fields, but is also clearly a problem of urgent global importance, not just a theoretical one. Finding a new global paradigm for progress – a new way to think of, plan and measure human and global progress – is at least as important a task as finding solutions to climate change and the global financial crisis; perhaps more so, because the failure to develop such a paradigm has been a direct cause of these two crises. This is inherently an exciting challenge, for those many academics and researchers who want their work to contribute to a better and fairer world.

20. The rest of this paper focuses on exploring the nature and development of the proposed network, under the following headings:

- Key issues and possible models for developing a GPRN
- Main tasks and research themes for the network
- Funding
- Immediate steps to establish the GPRN.

Under each of these topics, the issues are discussed broadly and then a series of possible concrete measures or actions is proposed. The latter have been put together in the manner of ‘brainstorming ideas’ and not systematically evaluated for cost or feasibility, so there will inevitably be some overlaps and contradictions, and some ideas which will be discarded.

### **C. KEY ISSUES AND POSSIBLE MODELS FOR A GPRN**

21. Discussed below are some of the main models on which a GPRN might be built. These models are not mutually exclusive; the aim might be to include the best features of each. Whichever organisational model is adopted, the emphasis should be on:

- (a) bringing together academics and researchers around the world and setting up branches or nodes of the network in each global region;
- (b) creating or reinforcing a shared commitment to the goals and values of the MPS project, and the paradigm change it represents; and
- (c) building agreement to work together (collaboratively or through network members’ own organisations) on an agreed research agenda and the resolution of an agreed set of problems and questions.

### **A network of networks?**

22. Rather than building the GPRN as a new and separate network recruited from selected individuals, and in this sense competing with other existing research networks organised around a single theme, it may be more effective to develop it as, in effect, a cross-disciplinary 'network of networks'. The theme of measuring the progress of societies is broad enough to encompass a wide range of existing research networks and interests, and doing this would have the additional advantage of ensuring that the GPRN operated at a higher level than existing thematically organised networks and did not have to compete with them.

23. The starting point would be to identify all the main existing international research and policy networks and research centres which might have an interest in either the overall issue of MPS or an important component part i.e., health, education, democracy, quality of life etc. It is preferable to select research networks by theme and on a cross-disciplinary basis (i.e., quality of life, futures studies) rather than by disciplinary grouping (for example, sociological or statistical associations). (Appendix F2 includes an indicative list of relevant research fields and some existing networks).

24. It would then be proposed that they join the GPRN as a network or centre from the start, with a view to their involvement in and contribution to the larger movement and the cross disciplinary issues and questions. The approach might be to initially identify and work through the outstanding researchers and leaders of existing relevant networks, rather than approaching the organisations 'blind'.

25. In the task of building a unified network from existing networks, there are a number of sensitivities which need to be respected. As a general rule, many academic and research institutions (and networks) anxiously protect their area of disciplinary specialisation from perceived interlopers; and in the present field, there are various networks and associations potentially in this category, grouped around themes closely related to 'progress' such as 'quality of life', 'sustainability', 'wellbeing', and 'development'. In fact the research networks in these fields actually have much more in common thematically (if not organisationally) than they have differences. It will therefore be necessary to combine a high level auspice with considerable diplomacy in dealing with existing networks.

26. For this reason, and for the broader success of the GPRN, it would be highly desirable to enlist UNESCO in the MPS project as a research-education partner, and for approaches to individual research networks and researchers (and universities etc) to be made jointly by UNESCO and the OECD secretary general. UNESCO is already engaged in many broad coordinating projects in research and education and is known and respected by most universities and research bodies. Its participation will also improve access to research funds to build the network and support specific research and strengthen the MPS project's links to other UN bodies.

### **A cross-disciplinary 'think tank without walls'?**

27. The global research network should be developed as a 'think tank without walls'. This has three aspects. It means first, fostering the sense of a large and committed global cross-disciplinary collective, working together on shared tasks and problems; each member organisation contributing both from its own specialised field of knowledge as well as contributing to the larger shared and cross-boundary issues; and a mission that is not some dry rearrangement of the academic deckchairs, but action and project focused.

28. Secondly, it means an intellectual emphasis on integrating the different dimensions of progress: economic, social, environmental, cultural, philosophical and governance. The network should aim to embrace a diversity of projects, movements, ideas and institutions which are sympathetic and relevant to the values and direction of the MPS project. For example, a strong complement to the project has developed around Asian (Buddhist, Confucian) values emphasising harmony and balance in development, most clearly manifest in Bhutan's 'Gross National Happiness' project. Joining this project and its regionally appealing values with the more positivist and policy-driven European approach (embodied, for example, in the EC's 'Beyond GDP' project) suggests how a more powerful and globally relevant synthesis of the key ideas of MPS – a genuine world movement – could be created. This is likely to be a function of the project's success in establishing a vigorous regional presence (para 35 below).

29. Thirdly, it implies that the GPRN should function like a policy-based think tank, aiming to ensure that its research and projects have a powerful influence on ideas and feed directly into policy-making, government, media and public debate. There are useful lessons to be learnt from the way that successful 'high level' think tanks have operated; and also from the way good research has been used to promote community education and debate in major national projects on measuring progress like the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.<sup>4</sup>

30. Critical elements of this approach might be: defining a shared agenda and goals; formulating a Charter or Declaration of common values and priorities; issuing or commissioning a series of initial position papers<sup>5</sup>; launching a 'Journal of Progress Studies'<sup>6</sup>; developing a powerful and attractive interactive web site, which would be the basis for lively discussion, blogs, posting research papers and announcing important events (perhaps linked to the OECD MPS website and maintained by a University consortium, perhaps funded as part of a wider international research collaboration program); and building regional 'nodes'.

### **Engaging leading thinkers and researchers**

31. It will be important for the success of the GPRN (and of the MPS project generally) to attract and engage the most outstanding thinkers and researchers, both globally and in their region, on issues relating to progress measurement and from a wide range of related disciplines. This will have many benefits: it will ensure the support of education and research organisations; strengthen the intellectual basis and credibility of the MPS project and of the proposed GPRN; improve research funding prospects; and help attract the young researchers who will be needed for the substantive work, summarised below.

32. To attract these leaders, the MPS project should develop a thoughtful and systematic strategy and an active 'recruitment campaign', perhaps with help from a network building organisation or a short term consultant or project team, such as suggested in para 42 below. The starting point would be the list of people who have already participated significantly in various MPS projects. Appendix F1 lists some of these people, as well as other logical candidates based on eminence in this and related fields. A 'target list' should be drawn up so as to ensure that all regions and relevant disciplines are represented and that outstanding researchers, writers and thinkers who have not yet participated in the MPS project, but are likely to be sympathetic to its goals, are considered: as suggested above, the core idea of this project is likely to have strong appeal to many such people.

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<sup>4</sup> The CIW released its first national report this month (June 2009). See [www.ciw.ca/en/Home.aspx](http://www.ciw.ca/en/Home.aspx)

<sup>5</sup> Discussed in more detail below, paras 53-58.

<sup>6</sup> Discussed in more detail below, paras 59-62.

33. Having identified the desirable list of supporters and participants, there are various options as to how they can be most effectively deployed. One possibility might be the idea of setting up a global expert panel of social scientists and statisticians, somewhat like the WMO-UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in effect a 'Global Panel on Measuring Progress' with the specific brief of advising the global project or as a more independent body; or more simply, as the MPS Research Advisory Committee. Another might be to engage these eminent names as the key sponsors or initial signatories of a Global Declaration or call to action, directed, for example, at universities (see para 38).

34. An important part of the recruitment strategy will be to identify younger and mid-career researchers. Heavy reliance on the most eminent researchers and thinkers will certainly bring higher recognition benefits but also has a down-side, because these same people are usually the busiest and least able to contribute time and detailed work. In the development of reports, and participant lists for conferences and workshops, vigorous efforts should be made to ensure that promising younger researchers are involved. In this way, the project can galvanise the energy and idealism of these researchers and build the next generation of leaders. This policy should be especially adopted in relation to African and Asian researchers, for otherwise the research emphasis would have an overwhelmingly Western bias.

#### **Building regional nodes**

35. If it is critical for the success of the MPS project as a truly global project to establish a strong regional presence, this is especially true for a supporting global research and ideas network. The aim should be to establish (say) 5 or 6 strong and viable regional MPS research clusters or 'nodes' around the world: for example, in Europe, Asia, Pacific, Africa, America, with the possibility of additional sub-regional centres in, say, Western Europe/Scandinavia, North America, India, Japan, depending on capacity and leadership potential. These nodes might be joint ventures, structured around a group of the most prominent local universities and key regional partners (such as UNESCAP, Asian Development Bank etc in the Asia); and functionally organised around collaborative research tasks on regional progress ideas and issues (including promoting debate and knowledge about progress in the region), but also feeding back into the larger global project and network.

#### **Engaging universities**

36. In building a global research network which will hinge so pivotally on the support and core work of universities around the world, careful thought needs to be given to the best way to engage universities, in terms of auspice, internal culture, research processes and partnership options. The medium term goal should be to build a global network of key universities linked together around shared tasks and a common commitment to the goals, values and outcomes of the MPS project.

37. This goal will need to be pursued steadily but realistically and with recognition of some initial barriers. For example, in many countries, collaboration and interdisciplinary research is made harder by the increasing emphasis on competitiveness and maximising the corporate goals of individual universities and the increasingly tough competition for declining research funds, which makes universities much less inclined to share knowledge or resources. On the other hand, an idea can be so compelling as to create a bandwagon effect that breaks these barriers: and this may be just such an idea.

38. The initial strategy might be to identify the most likely universities in each region to play a role as leaders and initiators, by virtue of their general eminence or because they host an outstanding research centre relevant to the project. Letters inviting universities to join this network (or a specific project built around the MPS project) could be sent to the Vice Chancellors/Rectors, perhaps jointly signed by the Directors-General of UNESCO and the OECD (see below), and other eminent researchers. Another 'engagement strategy' might be to develop a wider rolling campaign seeking universities to sign up to a Declaration on research and education aspects of the MPS project, perhaps following a special conference aimed at key universities; this Declaration could be sponsored by one of the key university 'engagement' networks discussed below.

39. Making the global research network project from its inception a joint venture between (say) UNESCO and the OECD would create the highest level of prestige and legitimacy for the project. This in turn would naturally lead to the involvement of the regional equivalents of both the international and the university peak bodies (for example, in Europe, Asia Pacific, America etc). The UN University could be a key partner or convenor in this process. Early discussions and negotiations with these organisations would be sensible.

40. Two key peak university/education bodies which should be actively engaged in the network's development are the UNESCO based International Association of Universities (IAU) and the Council of Europe's Higher Education and Research Division (HERD).

- (a) Measuring progress fits very well with the current highest priority theme of the IAU (sustainable development). It may be possible for the IAU to devote one of their global conferences to 'The role of universities in promoting and measuring societal progress'. The 2008 general conference was on the theme 'Addressing local and global needs' (see: [www.unesco.org/iau](http://www.unesco.org/iau)).
- (b) HERD's relevant current priority themes include: 'Social Sciences and the Challenges of Transition'; 'Universities as Sites of Citizenship'; and 'The Research Mission of Universities'. (see: [www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Activities\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Activities_en.asp))

41. From the perspective of applied research, network building and community and organisational partnerships with universities, perhaps the most critical and relevant network for the GPRN to engage and work with is the broad and growing university-community engagement network. This network, although constituted fairly loosely through several different global organisations, is already committed to the most important goals and values of the MPS project (integrated development, applied research, open debate, democratic sharing of knowledge, community partnerships etc); and already has excellent practical 'on the ground' networks. The key global networks and their focuses are:

- (a) *The Global Universities Network for Innovation (GUNI)*: sponsored by UNESCO and UNU, focusing on implementation of the 1998 UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education, which stressed the role of higher education in promoting innovation, social development and sustainability: <http://www.guni-rmies.net/>
- (b) *The University Community Partnership for Social Action Research (UCP SARnet)*: a global network of 'faculty, students and community activists' with a strong presence in Asia and Africa and especially directed at young researchers committed to 'searching for solutions to global issues (through) multicultural dialogue and (participatory) action research': <http://ucpsarnet.iglooprojects.org/>
- (c) *The Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research*: a Canadian-based world network aiming to 'use the strengths of existing networks to advance the common

global purpose of using knowledge and community-university partnership strategies for democratic social and environmental change and justice, particularly among the most vulnerable people and places of the world’:

<http://communityresearchcanada.ca/?action=alliance>

- (d) *The International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy*: a US-based and Council of Europe supported network focused on the role of education in promoting democratic development:

<http://www.internationalconsortium.org/about>

42. It may be useful to consider appointing a specific organisation as the key coordinating and ‘recruiting’ agency for both universities and research networks. One example of such an organisation is the Australian-based Eidos Institute, which is effectively a national university network builder around themes such as university –community engagement and human capital. Headed by Professor Bruce Muirhead, Eidos specialises in ‘rapid mobilisation of networks and its associates include two influential researchers also connected to the MPS project, Jeff Mulgan and Tom Bentley. (See: [www.eidos.org.au](http://www.eidos.org.au) )

#### **D. OPERATION, TASKS, AND RESEARCH THEMES**

43. What should be the key functions and tasks of a GPRN? Perhaps the most important aim in establishing the research network is to ensure that it is purposive: that its functions and tasks are as closely linked and practically applied to the specific goals of the MPS project as possible. The best way to begin to answer this question is by asking ‘What are the critical issues around MPS project that especially need research and academic/intellectual support?’

44. In general terms, as we have seen, it can be said that there is a need to create a strong global intellectual and research infrastructure and people/institutional network to underpin and support the global MPS project/movement; to spread the ideas and influence of MPS approach, and its specific approach and techniques, more widely in global intellectual, policymaking and media community; and to generate a continuing supply of new ideas and new research, especially ‘problem solving’ ideas and research that address specific issues, needs and problems identified by the ‘policy arm’ of the project.

45. More specifically, the Istanbul Declaration provides some guidance as to strategic priorities, in that it proposes five key goals, loosely built around the three core questions ‘What to measure? How to measure? How to apply measures?’. As we have seen, each of these goals clearly includes a specific research, education, analysis or knowledge sharing aspect, as follows:

- (a) Analyse and compare what progress means
- (b) Identify and compare ‘best practice’ models and best applications in policy
- (c) Develop new ideas and research to stimulate debate, innovation
- (d) Help produce broader public understanding and debate (and monitor current understanding and debate)
- (e) Make the case for better investment in statistical capacity etc

46. Taking these ‘knowledge’ aspects a step further suggests a series of more recognisable research themes and possible projects:

- (a) Cultural, political, philosophical issues: what is progress and what does it mean to different people and cultures?
- (b) Democratic and community development issues: who should decide the meaning of progress and what are the best ways to engage citizens and communities in a debate about it?; new ideas for community engagement; broader links between progress measurement and democracy.
- (c) Statistical issues: such as the development of new and experimental indicators; aggregate indices etc ; comparability of data; better data sharing etc.
- (d) IT and communications issues: New ways to store, compare, share and communicate information and statistics; new interactive technologies, visual display and web platforms; applying strategic communication techniques etc
- (e) Economic issues: for example, evaluating the economic benefits of an MPS approach to progress; identifying the cost of externalities of the 'GDP first' approach to progress.
- (f) Public policy issues: applications of progress measurement indicators in policy and government: for example, in planning, reporting and program evaluation of best practice models.
- (g) Communication and education: understanding how people think about progress, how to better communicate and teach the idea of 'balanced progress', how to create a shared interest across different interest groups and cultures.
- (h) Monitoring and overview of the MPS movement, identifying best practice, linkages and growth over time, creating a shared knowledge base and activities etc.
- (i) Capacity building and training: evaluating present capacity to use tools and knowledge on indicators and progress measurement; setting standards and designing better learning and training processes, at the community, school, university and professional development levels.

### **Research projects and tasks**

47. Moving from a thematic to a more concrete approach, one can readily identify some basic tasks needed to move the broader agenda forward:

- (a) Identify and commission a series of foundational 'Working Papers' on key issues identified by the MPS project (see paras 53-58 below).
- (b) Provide a 'bank' or clearing house to monitor and collect best information public relevant public attitude surveys on MPS and document MPS projects and best practice globally; this involve will require improvements to the present 'Knowledge Bank' (see below, paras 50-51).
- (c) Create vivid, innovative and high-profile platform for display and exchange of news, developments, new ideas, new research related to MPS, especially an interactive website but perhaps also a print and/or e-journal ('Journal of Progress Studies': see below, paras 59-62).
- (d) Identify a 10 year strategic research agenda identifying critical questions and future issues; and commission key research projects according to this agenda amongst network members.

- (e) The development of training courses could be a shared task of the research network, with support and input from key universities. In the medium term, the goal would be to develop and improve university courses, research and teaching which promotes ideas and practice around better, more integrated and more legitimate (citizen engaged) models of progress.
- (f) A strong emphasis must be placed on marketing ideas and putting them into media: a media and communications strategy should be an early priority. (As suggested below, the development of this strategy, and of an improved knowledge base and website, could be an important ongoing project from the recent DD4D conference, with the IIID as a continuing partner and adviser to the MPS project or the GPRN.)

48. The actual tasks undertaken by network members will need to be determined on the basis of a more detailed study, and of course will depend on resources and capacity available. However there are some obvious general principles which should apply to the selection of tasks and projects. First, wherever possible, projects should be designed as cross disciplinary and 'cross-fertilisation' projects, because the crucial goal of the MPS project and in some ways a precondition of its success, is to encourage cross disciplinary thinking and break the dominance of a single issue approach to progress. Secondly in designing projects, a balance should be struck between the three key questions around which the MPS project is built, since each is essential but each involves different sets of issues ('What to measure? How to measure? How to apply measures?').

49. There are four specific projects which seem to me to have a larger strategic importance for the project, and for the legitimacy of both its process and its intellectual infrastructure, given that is essentially seeking to change a long established global paradigm of progress as material growth (which in fact goes back well beyond the GDP, really to the Industrial Revolution) and to stimulate a global debate about the new meaning of progress that we might replace it with:

- (a) *History, meaning and philosophy of progress and its measurement:* A particular focus area should be the meaning and philosophical ideas behind progress, and in different cultures and an attempt to analyse this issue through history and for the 21st century, to see what it will tell us (drawing, for example, on Aristotle, Confucius, Condorcet, etc). This should also include a clear analysis and set of definitions showing the contrast and overlaps between related concepts such as: the good life, development, wellbeing, quality of life, happiness, etc. This is both theoretically and practically important if we are to gain acceptance for a clear idea of societal progress. The historical development and use of social progress indicators is itself a fascinating and illuminating story (starting with the earliest use of indicators such as the Domesday Book, and the gradual expansion and democratisation of these).
- (b) *Current public attitudes and debates about progress, its meaning and measurement:* A key goal of the MPS is to establish national round tables on progress measurement. Part of the research program might examine the best ways to do this, including models for consultation, communications strategies, citizen engagement and deliberative democracy (the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, for example, is an excellent model for the development of a national roundtable on progress and well-being). Research is needed to better understand public attitudes, how they are based, and what might change them; and how best to communicate new ideas about progress, how to link them into current debates, and connect with

- (c) *Climate change and the Global Financial Crisis*: It is strategically important that MPS should strongly engage with these two current critical global issues. We should not allow MPS to be dismissed as subordinate to, or be postponed because of, these two issues. Instead, we should aim to show directly how a better (i.e., more balanced and widely accepted) concept of progress and better ways to measure it, is an important solution to these problems and that the lack of it was one of the key causes of those problems. Thus it will be desirable that the earliest working papers should directly confront this issues and show how MPS might help to resolve them.

### **Improving the knowledge base**

50. The current OECD 'Knowledge Base' is potentially a great asset, but would benefit from a systematic 'makeover' as part of designing a purpose-built research website. Careful thought needs to be given to the best possible way to establish such a web site as a means to exchange ideas, sponsor surveys, display new work, call for research proposals, advertise research conferences all round the world and to showcase the best research and the key universities with cross-references, advertising training courses and materials as data.

51. A short term consultancy given to a high quality specialist researcher and an IT-Web designer specialising in interactive information platforms could convert the Knowledge Base into a world class asset. (Some of the participants from the recent Paris DD4D conference may be able to assist here). The first steps might be: to design a better conceptual framework for the knowledge; more systematically collect and call for material in the categories identified; and design a separate but linked website with improved capacities.

### **Co-hosting conferences on MPS theme ('piggy-backing')**

52. One effective way to immediately expand awareness of the MPS project and its ideas in the research and intellectual community is to identify influential conferences in key global regions on related themes and ensure that the MPS project either co-hosts them or has a major theme or segment in the conference. This is a strategy that the OECD has already used very effectively, and it now should be pursued more methodically, starting with a systematic review of key conferences and workshops over (say) the next five years, including those organised by relevant research networks and on theme areas related to MPS, such as health, education, housing, human rights, futures studies etc (see Appendix F2 for more details).

### **A 'Working Papers' series**

53. The OECD is already planning to launch a Working Papers series for the MPS project, with perhaps with two or three papers being released before the Busan World Forum in October 2009. Thought is also being given to the idea of a dedicated Journal, in the medium term.

54. The Working Papers proposal is seen an important step in building a research network, with benefits both for the project and for contributors, identified as follows:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Email from Enrico Giovannini to the author, 12 May 2009

- (a) Benefits for the Project:
    - i) Help (the project) to outreach to academics working in this field and act as an initial project of the academic consortium.
    - ii) Give a higher profile to the work of the Project.
    - iii) Give the Project a centralized point to refer people to for new ideas and initiatives in this field, particularly when presenting at international conferences etc.
    - iv) It would be an independent, Global Project series as opposed to an OECD series, however we would have the possibility to publish it in 'Source OECD' which is widely accessed around the world .
  - (b) Benefits for contributors:
    - i) Provide a vehicle for researchers in this area to have their work published and access a broader audience.
    - ii) As contributors they would have their name associated with the Project, either as part of the academic consortium or a broader online community of "contributors" that could be given space on the website.
    - iii) Contributors could share their work with this online community for review or comment prior to publication.
    - iv) As a working paper series, the peer review process is shortened and the articles are published in a timely manner. It is also clear that the views published are that of the author and not the Project.
    - v) In the long-term, articles could be commissioned by experts in this field on topics that (MPS) would like to explore in further depth (trust, vulnerability etc).
55. There are also three perceived problems connected with this proposal:
- (a) Potential overlap with already established journals in this area, such as 'Social Indicators Research';
  - (b) Internal staffing capacity to manage the coordination with contributors, peer review mechanisms etc;
  - (c) Ability to get a continuing stream of good quality articles to keep the series going and of a high standard.
56. My response is as follows:
- (a) In general, this is an excellent proposal, and the benefits identified should be real. It will be an especially valuable means to begin organising the consortium and to create a platform of shared ideas and values.
  - (b) It will be important to select the initial topics carefully, to ensure they cover the different dimensions of the project (i.e. meaning of progress, measuring progress, applying measures).
  - (c) The papers need to be both authoritative and striking. The project should try to commission outstanding authors and writers, rather than just going for the outstanding experts in the particular field. Will Hutton, Paul Krugman, Robert Skidelsky, Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz, Arundhati Roy, and Robert Putnam are all in the former category.

- (d) The impact of the Working Papers will be much greater if they can be simultaneously published on a good website (with an interactive facility allowing response and debate) and syndicated (perhaps in simplified form) in mainstream media and ideas magazines. Developing strategies for widespread dissemination and popularisation of these papers in the community and among policymakers in the long run will be just as important as ensuring their high quality.
57. As regards the possible problems:
- (a) The distinguishing feature of these papers (and of a possible 'Progress Studies Journal') will be that they deal holistically with the question of global progress and its measurement: the breadth of issues covered is illustrated in para 46 above. No other journal or network does this. ISQOLS and *Social Indicators Research*, for example, though their coverage is broad, and *SIR* is an excellent journal, are still primarily focused on the material quality of individual life and its statistical measurement.
- (b) The approach taken in dealing with established journals might be twofold: first, not to compete with them, but rather to invite them directly to be partners in the larger umbrella movement of which their sector is an essential component; and second, to negotiate to include articles on MPS in their journals, which explain how their field relates to the larger project. Most of the leading researchers in these fields can be expected to be sympathetic to the MPS project.
- (c) This approach might be part of a wider 'collateral' strategy to achieve maximum coverage for the core ideas of the MPS project in research and learned journals. Using the proposed 'Research advisory committee' (para. 33), the 20 or 30 most influential journals (academic and mainstream) around the world could be identified, and a plan developed to place articles in each of them over (say) 2-3 years. Where possible, articles should be tailored to the interests and the readers of the particular journal, but always maintaining a focus on global and cross-disciplinary issues, especially the integration of economic, social and environmental domains of progress.
58. Concerns about staffing capacity and continuity of articles are justified, but will be best addressed as part of the wider planning of the network and supported by external research funding (see paras. 63-69 below), rather than being seen as an internal responsibility of the OECD (other than in the initial stages).

### **A Journal of Progress Studies?**

59. The idea of developing a *Journal of Progress Studies* is a valuable one and should be planned for over several years, but not as an immediate priority. The journal (hopefully with a more modern and arresting title) is likely to emerge naturally out of a Working Paper series and the organic growth of a global progress research network itself, which should create a natural pool of contributors and increasing global interest in the issues.

60. As suggested earlier, there should be a strong attempt to differentiate this journal from existing specialist journals, even those which cover many similar issues. The dominant and consistent emphasis should be on a global, cross disciplinary and problem-solving approach. Thus articles should be sought from a wide range of contributors: environmentalists, economists, philosophers, historians, lawyers, sociologists, futurists, political scientists, government ministers, communications and IT specialists, all of which should make for reading that is diverse, lively and challenging.

61. But within this diversity there needs to be a strong editorial hand to ensure a consistent focus on the key sets of problems: what is progress, how do we debate and define it, how do we measure it, and how we apply and plan for it better, globally and in different regions. This will require a very special editorial board with globally eminent names from each different area, such as economics (Stiglitz, Sen); health and inequalities (Wilkinson, Atkinson etc), quality of life studies (Michalos), Happiness (Layard, Frey, Diener etc), development studies, philosophy etc. There is a real opportunity to establish such a board by drawing from the key people already engaged in the MPS project (see Appendix F1). It will also be desirable, in order to ensure a genuine global dialogue, to appoint regional editors; and sensible to attract younger talents and enthusiasts (who will probably do much of the real work).

62. The Journal could be developed as a joint-venture between (say) OECD and UNESCO but it should ultimately be an independent journal. The aim should be to produce it in both an elegant printed form and a state-of-the-art e-journal format, perhaps partnering with Google or linked to Wiki-progress. Substantial funding will be required, but this should be planned for as part of the larger funding strategy suggested below.

## **E. FUNDING**

63. There is potentially a very large source of funds for the MPS project which has not yet been tapped, because MPS has primarily focused on corporations and philanthropic funds: and that source is the collective funds available for national and international research projects.

64. A priority task for the GPRN should therefore be to develop a long-term (5-10 years) research funding plan to support a parallel global research program for the overall MPS project. This could be initially based on identifying major national and international research funds not yet accessed by the MPS project. Canada, Australia, UK, France, USA and especially the very large-scale European long-term research program all maintain quite generous research funding programs to support important international collaborative research projects, especially if auspiced by international bodies like UNESCO, the Council of Europe or the OECD.

65. A starting point might be to commission the development of a "Business Case" or basic prospectus for the funding and development of such a global research project. This prospectus would inherently be exciting and challenging and provide a real sense of focus and shared purpose for many research centres, and perhaps the impetus for an international progress research project team (rather than merely an international research advisory group), with key universities being identified as initial sponsors and participants.

66. Some promising sources for European collaborative funding are:

- (a) The European Union 7th Research Framework Programme: There may be a possibility that the OECD (perhaps with UNESCO and Council of Europe support) could obtain the agreement of the EU to devote one key research stream to 'sustainable societal progress'. See: <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/>.
- (b) The European Research Council is a possible source of major grants for a global or European collaborative project or network building: <http://erc.europa.eu/index.cfm>

67. There are also extensive research and development funds maintained by large international corporations with relevant IT, communication and data interests (such as Google and Microsoft, Sun Microsystems etc). These corporations will be interested to fund projects where there are strong mutual benefits between universities and corporations, in the development of innovative computer and internet platforms and programs relating to information and statistics management. The Google Foundation, for example, has contributed large scale funds (\$US 500,000 to 2 million per project) to a range of applied research projects around information access and empowerment, wellbeing evaluation and transparency, mostly at national level: see <http://www.google.org/projects.html> .

68. There are also a number of major philanthropic bodies which regularly support projects which are likely to contribute to global wellbeing, progress, justice and transparency: for example, the MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Open Society (Soros) Foundation: the Gates Foundation. (Some of these are already supporters of the MPS project in some form).

69. One approach well worth exploring for the GPRN is the development of an international Research Funder Network Cooperative to support the GPRN. This model of a 'funder coalition' has been successfully developed by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing to ensure the sustainability of that project and to spread funding and involvement over a number of funding partners, thus avoiding over-reliance on a single sponsor and the consequent risk of 'funder fatigue'.

#### **F. BUILDING THE NETWORK: WHERE TO NEXT?**

70. Set out below are a series of concrete ideas and proposals to start to put into action the approaches suggested above. The assumption is that the full development of the GPRN will take 2 years and that its active life would be 5-10 years, possibly more.

71. The ideas suggested offer a broad menu of possible action for the first two years, without detailed feasibility analysis. Some of these proposals overlap and some are alternatives. Obviously, the ultimate determinant of what can be done will be the commitment of the project organisation and availability of resources.

72. If, as is strongly recommended, it is desired to commission a detailed 'Business Case' for the long term development of this research network, this paper and these proposals might be a useful starting point.

##### ***Immediate***

- (1) Discuss the concept of a GPRN informally or if possible, at a special workshop at ISQOLS Conference in Florence (19-23 July 2009)
- (2) Open discussions with UNESCO and CoE HERD about possible co-sponsorship of GPRN.
- (3) Plan a special session at the Global Forum at Busan in October to discuss or launch the GPRN. Enlist key academics, writers and policymakers at the conference to support, sign up to, fund or directly contribute to it.

##### ***Short term (next 6 months)***

- (4) Appoint a project officer or a suitable consultant or network building organisation to develop the GPRN over a period of six months, with tasks including:
  - i) Write brief for and commission a GPRN Business Plan including a funding strategy and a media/communications strategy.
  - ii) Compile list of outstanding academics, champions, leading universities, research centres, research projects and research networks in each key MPS field (with assistance from current MPS research advisers etc in each region) and select most likely candidates
  - iii) Using major network partners and research associates, identify 50 or so most important or influential conferences (in next 5 years) and journals around the world on themes related to MPS and all its key domains over the next 5 years and plan a session, theme or speaker on MPS.
- (5) Commission a MPS Working Paper series and produce the first three papers.
- (6) Write to Vice-Chancellors/Rectors of key universities (joint letter from OECD and UNESCO Secretary Generals) inviting their university to join GPRN as regional convenors etc. Send a similar letter to eminent individuals.
- (7) Appoint a Progress Research Advisory Committee ('PRAC') from this 'eminent researcher' list.
- (8) Organise a specialised research conference or workshop in early 2010 (jointly sponsored by MPS partner organisations, aimed to expand GPRN, agree a Progress Research Charter or Declaration, and a 10 year progress research strategy.
- (9) Develop a rolling campaign over five years to enlist universities and research centres to sign the Charter and a program of action developed from it.

***Medium Term (6 months – 2 years)***

- (10) Set up GPRN with its own web site and knowledge base, linked to the main OECD web site (in partnership with IIID).
- (11) Develop the wider GPRN network, beginning by enlisting networks organised around 'Community Engaged universities' and UNESCO.
- (12) Designate a series of existing appropriate research centres around world as 'OECD-UN Regional Centre for Measuring Progress Research' (centres such as EC Joint Research Centre, Ispri). Negotiate shared research tasks.
- (13) Establish regional GPRN groups with designated convening universities agreeing to host a regional research network and program and to develop courses and training.
- (14) Develop a detailed research work program and commission projects based on the agreed 10 year strategy and network building program, with oversight from PRAC .
- (15) Plan a second research conference or series as a lead-up to the fourth Global Forum.
- (16) Establish OECD-UN-EU-UNESCAP sponsored Chairs in Progress Studies in strategic and prestigious universities regionally (Oxford, Harvard, Kyoto etc).
- (17) Establish an annual prize for the best book, article or project on MPS issues and a global competition for the best children's essay on 'The world I want to live in' (co-sponsored by UNICEF).
- (18) Set up a series of specialist research panels in each of the key fields of progress and well-being, where possible using existing specialist bodies and designate them as

- (19) Commission a major documentary in the style of the Al Gore film 'An inconvenient truth' with 'star' narrators.

## **APPENDIX F1: PROMINENT INTERNATIONAL PROGRESS RESEARCHERS**

Listed below are of people who have been prominent in research, writing and ideas around the key themes most relevant to Measuring the Progress of Societies.

They might form the basis of a broad international pool, from which the GPRN could take its core members and the members of a possible Progress Research Advisory Committee or a Global Commission on Measuring Progress, as discussed above.

This list is undoubtedly influenced by the author's own experience. In compiling a more comprehensive list, care should be taken to ensure a better balance of women and regional representatives.

Atkinson, Tony (UK)	Land, Kenneth (USA)
Chandra, Shailaja (India)	Layard, Richard (UK)
Cobb, Clifford (USA)	May, Doug (Canada)
Colman, Ron (Canada)	Michalos, Alex (Canada)
Cooke, Len (New Zealand)	Muirhead, Bruce (Australia)
Eckersley, Richard (Australia)	Nikolova, Aneta (UNESCAP)
Fitoussi, Jean-Paul (France)	Saltelli, Andrea (Italy)
Fleurbaey, Marc (France)	Salvaris, Mike (Australia)
Foessleitner, Martin (Austria)	Sen, Amartya (UK)
Franchet, Yves (France)	Sharpe, Andrew (Canada)
Frey, Bruno (Switzerland)	Stanley, Fiona (Australia)
Gadrey, Jean (France)	Stiglitz, Joseph (USA)
Giovannini, Enrico (OECD, Italy)	Takeuchi, Sawako (Japan)
Guo, Xinbiao (China)	Trewin, Dennis (Australia)
Hagen, Hans-Olof (Sweden)	Uhra, Karma (Bhutan)
Hall, Jon (OECD, Australia)	Viveret, Patrick (France)
Harkavy, Ira (USA),	Walker, Dave (USA)
Henderson, Hazel (USA)	Waring, Marilyn (NZ)
Holland, Barbara (USA)	Watson, David (UK)
Huy, Vu Quoc (Vietnam)	Wilkinson, Richard (UK)
Kim, Sul Hee (South Korea)	Wiseman, John (Australia)
Krishnamurthy, Ramanathan (India, UNESCAP)	Woolcock, Geoff (Australia)
Krugman, Paul (USA)	Young, Soogil (Korea)

## **APPENDIX F2: POTENTIAL NETWORK MEMBERS AND THEMES**

This is a brief, indicative list of relevant disciplinary study areas, and of some existing research networks, which could form the starting point for a more systematic survey.

The purpose of such a survey would be to identify the major research networks in relevant disciplinary and cross-disciplinary fields that are most relevant to the MPS project, and propose their participation in the wider Global Progress Research Network (as suggested above, in Sec C 'Key issues and possible models for a GPRN').

- 'Beyond GDP' project/network of the European Commission
- Children's welfare
- Communications and IT design
- Community development
- Democracy, applied democracy, democracy measurement
- Development studies
- Environmental studies, climate change
- Futures studies
- Gross National Happiness network
- Happiness studies
- Health inequality
- Human rights
- Indigenous wellbeing
- NEF (New Economics Foundation), UK
- PEKEA (France)
- Progressive economics
- Progressive think-tanks (is there a global network of these?)
- Public attitudes and values studies
- Public policy
- Quality of Life studies/ISQOLS network)
- Social capital
- Statistical research (applied, alternative), i.e., RADSTATS (UK)
- University-Community engagement and social action research networks
- Urban studies