

Progressing Beyond GDP:

Towards a Multidimensional Living Standards Index (MLSI) and Integrated Headline Measure of Gross National Sustainable Development (GNSD)

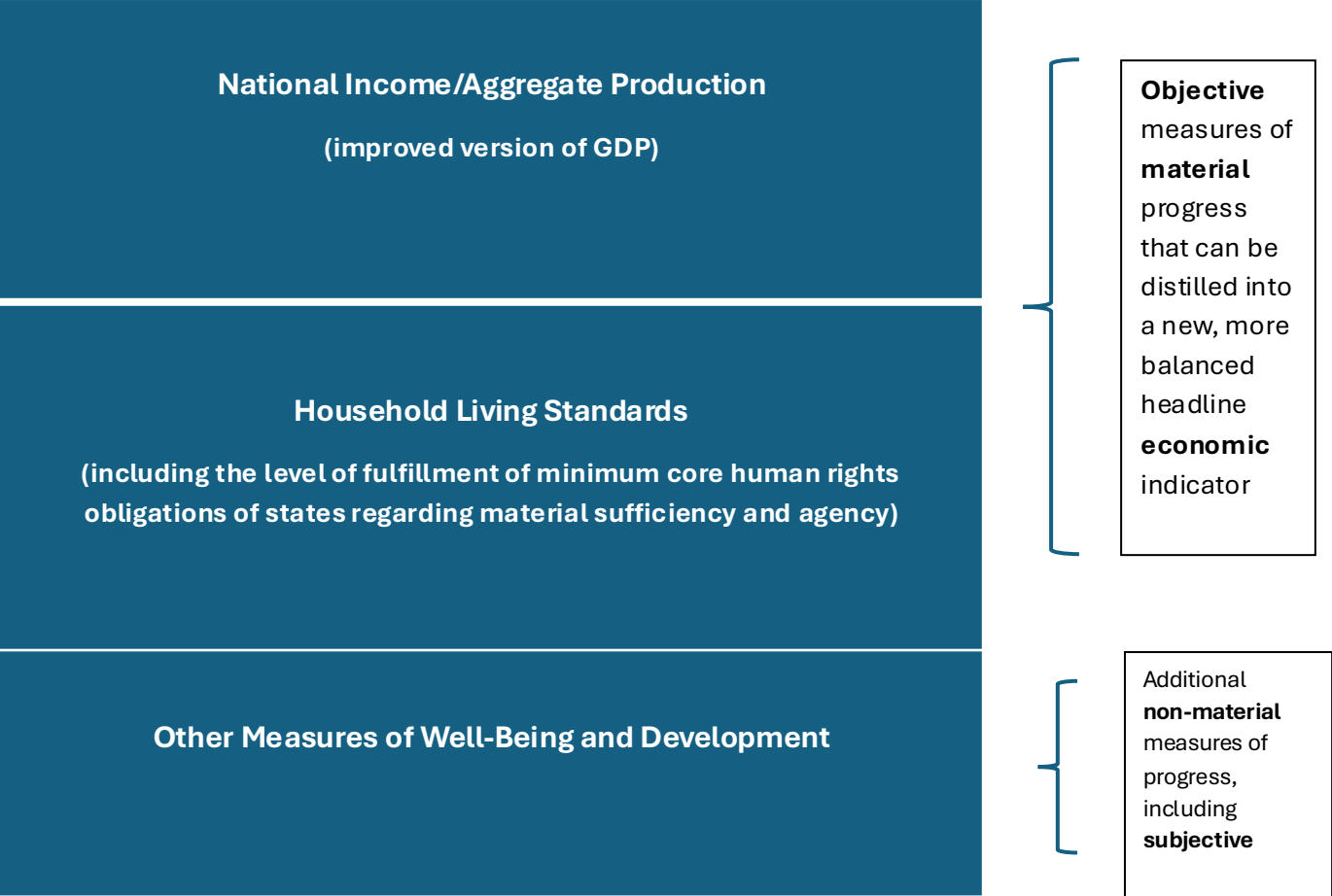
United Nations Economist Network Working Paper

by Richard Samans, Chafik Ben Rouin, Tasneem Mirza, Stuart Davies, Uma Rani and Sara Castro de Hallgren

International Panel on Social Progress, New Horizons Webinar

“Counting What Counts: The UN Goes Beyond GDP,” May 28, 2026

Figure 1. Beyond GDP Segmentation



Towards a Multidimensional Living Standards Index (MLSI)

Standardized measure of **material** social welfare (general standard of living)

- Including and wrapping around HDI and Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) indicators

In the five principal dimensions of living standards:

- Employment and entrepreneurial opportunity
- Disposable income
- Availability and affordability of material necessities
- Economic and social security
- Environment and natural resource security

A bottom-up, household lived-experience view of national economic performance (complementing that of top-down national income/GDP)

- including extent of “progressive full realization” of universal economic and social human rights

The social **quality** of growth, beyond its **quantity** as measured by productive output

Constructing a MLSI: Full Dashboard and Headline Indicator Index

A series of nested diagnostic views similar to the way the medical profession conducts regular health examinations of people:

- Vital signs plus panel of bloodwork and electrocardiogram
- Headline indicators (2 or 3 per pillar) plus full dashboard (8 or 9 per pillar)

Aim #1: Surfacing specific weaknesses or anomalies in on-the-ground, lived experience performance of economies warranting attention by policymakers:

- Granularity of dashboard important for policymaking and public accountability, outweighs traditional emphasis of research economists and statisticians on correlation/elegance

Aim #2: Recontextualizing GDP by combining it in some fashion with a limited set of vital sign/headline MLSI indicators to produce a more balanced and human-centered *headline annual measure* of national economic performance and int'l. level of development, e.g., Gross National Sustainable **Development**.

Supplanting GDP as the principal headline indicator of national economic progress

Annual change and overall level of

“Gross National Sustainable Development” (GNSD) =

0.5*mean productive output (GDP/capita) + 0.5*median standard of living (MLSI score)

or indeed

0.4*GDP/capita + 0.6*MLSI (0.12/pillar)

Access full UN Economist Network Working Paper:

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