

# Want effective policy? Ask the locals

June 11 2019

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Associate Professors Andrew Chapman (left) and Hidemichi Fujii (middle) and Professor Shunsuke Managi (right) of Kyushu University discuss the research outcomes and applications of key results from their multinational survey including 37 nations and 100,956 respondents toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Credit: Andrew Chapman, Kyushu University

As multinational organizations such as the United Nations strive to improve life for people across the globe through initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a tendency to look for indicators that can be used across the board to drive policy aimed at achieving these objectives. However, analysis of a survey conducted across 37 nations by researchers at Kyushu University in Japan shows that regional economic, developmental, and cultural factors greatly influence the relationships among self-reported levels of energy affordability, life satisfaction, health, and economic inequality.

"Based on our findings, we can state that there is no 'one-size-fits all' policy approach that will solve [health](#), [economic inequality](#), life satisfaction, or income level issues," says Andrew Chapman, associate professor at Kyushu University's International Institute for Carbon-Neutral Energy Research and first author of the *Nature Sustainability* paper announcing the new results. "Instead, policy responses need to be tailored to the nations in which they are to be delivered."

To investigate the relationships, the researchers conducted a survey from 2015 to 2017 across 37 countries, yielding 100,956 respondents. While an internet survey was used for a majority of the countries, field agents—who were individually trained by one of the researchers—administered face-to-face surveys in Egypt, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

Although the researchers found that [income level](#) is correlated with a number of factors, high income did not always improve perceived life satisfaction, health, or economic inequality. For example, some low-income nations, even those with limited energy access and lower healthy life expectancies, reported superior life satisfaction and health, strongly indicating that cultural factors influence individual self-reporting.

One general trend was that increased national welfare spending reduced

respondents' perceived economic gap with their peers. In addition, although increasing energy access in poorer, marginalized nations is generally likely to lead to an improvement in health, cultural and lifestyle factors also play a strong role.

"On the one hand, less-developed nations are likely to be improved through developmental aid from more-developed nations," says Chapman. "But at the same time, developed nations can learn important lessons from less-developed nations that experience comparatively better levels of perceived life satisfaction despite their lower incomes and worse access to energy."

The researchers believe that the findings of this research will aid in the development of fit-for-purpose energy affordability, health, and economic policies to improve the lives of those affected and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

"The big take away is that policy that seeks to improve energy affordability needs to be culturally aware with respect to each [nation's](#) residents, specifically when dealing with overlapping issues such as energy access and limited government expenditure on health or welfare," comments Chapman.

In the future, the researchers plan to assess the non-income-based factors leading to superior levels of self-reported [life satisfaction](#) and health in some less-developed nations.

**More information:** *Nature Sustainability* (2019). [DOI: 10.1038/s41893-019-0303-5](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0303-5)

Provided by Kyushu University

Citation: Want effective policy? Ask the locals (2019, June 11) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-effective-policy-locals.html>

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