Flourish Project
The Ecology of Wellbeing

ESF Evaluation of *Counting What Counts: A Compass of Progress for People and Planet*

Originating entity: United Nations High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP

Primary focus: A global multidimensional framework designed to complement GDP through the measurement of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable wellbeing across present and future generations. The framework integrates wellbeing, inclusion, sustainability, resilience, institutional quality, and environmental conditions into a unified dashboard architecture for national and international policy application.

ESF Evaluation Score: 16/20

Introductory Context

The *Counting What Counts* report represents one of the most significant recent international efforts to move beyond GDP as the dominant measure of societal progress. Developed through the United Nations High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP, the framework responds to growing recognition that economic growth alone is insufficient for understanding whether societies are genuinely thriving.

The framework proposes a multidimensional architecture organised around four interrelated dimensions:

- Foundational principles
- Current wellbeing
- Equity and inclusion
- Sustainability and resilience

It explicitly defines progress in terms of:“equitable, inclusive, and sustainable well-being” and seeks to integrate environmental sustainability, social cohesion, economic conditions, and future generations into a coherent policy-oriented framework.

From an ESF perspective, this represents one of the strongest current large-scale efforts to operationalise systemic wellbeing measurement at a global level. The framework demonstrates particularly strong alignment in ecological integration and post-GDP economic thinking. However, it remains less developed in relation to cultural identity, worldview formation, developmental psychology, and the deeper relational and meaning-centred dimensions of flourishing.
As such, it can be understood as:

a highly advanced multidimensional wellbeing architecture, but not yet a fully integrated ecosystemic flourishing framework.

1. Natural Environment Integration

Score: 5 / 5

This is one of the framework's strongest areas of alignment.

The report explicitly positions:

- planetary boundaries
- climate stability
- biodiversity
- environmental quality
- natural capital
- ecological resilience

as foundational conditions for long-term human wellbeing.

Particularly significant is its recognition of "the intrinsic value of the planet and its environment" which moves beyond purely instrumental or economic approaches to nature.

The framework includes indicators and conceptual attention relating to:

- greenhouse gas emissions
- biodiversity intactness
- environmental assets
- air and water quality
- natural capital
- sustainability for future generations

It also explicitly recognises the "triple planetary crisis" of:

- climate change
- biodiversity loss
- pollution

as central risks to future flourishing.

Unlike many conventional wellbeing frameworks, ecological conditions are treated not as external policy concerns, but as constitutive dimensions of societal wellbeing.

ESF judgement: Very strong alignment. The framework demonstrates a highly developed understanding that ecological conditions are foundational to long-term human and planetary flourishing.

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2. Circular and Regenerative Economics Integration

Score: 4 / 5

The framework demonstrates strong alignment in this domain.

The report explicitly challenges GDP-centric economic thinking and recognises that economic growth has often coexisted with:

- inequality
- environmental degradation
- declining trust
- social instability

It includes substantial attention to:

- unpaid care work
- labour underutilisation
- multidimensional poverty
- wealth inequality
- produced capital
- human capital
- natural capital
- institutional capital

The framework also proposes integration into:

- budgeting
- national reporting
- long-term policy planning

which gives it unusually strong practical policy relevance.

From an ESF perspective, the report clearly moves beyond conventional economic measurement and toward a broader understanding of societal wellbeing and resilience.

However, the framework remains more sustainability-adjusted
than fully regenerative in its economic orientation.

There is limited explicit attention to:

- circular economies
- community wealth building
- regenerative enterprise
- local resilience systems
- bioregional economics
- reciprocity-based economic models

The framework still largely operates within an improved version of existing economic systems rather than articulating a deeper civilisational economic transition.

ESF judgement: Strongly integrated. A substantial post-GDP economic framework, though not yet fully regenerative in worldview or economic architecture.

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3. Cultural Values and Identity Integration

Score: 3 / 5

The framework demonstrates moderate alignment in this domain.

It includes meaningful attention to:

- social cohesion
- discrimination
- institutional trust
- loneliness
- inclusion
- governance quality
- social relationships

Its recognition that wellbeing is both:

- individual
  and:
- collective

is especially important from an ESF perspective.

The inclusion of loneliness and trust as key indicators reflects growing recognition that social fragmentation and relational breakdown significantly affect societal wellbeing.

However, the framework remains relatively limited in its treatment of:

- cultural identity
- worldview
- spirituality
- shared meaning
- cultural continuity
- heritage
- intergenerational narrative
- Indigenous knowledge systems

Culture is primarily approached through social inclusion and governance rather than through deeper questions of:

- meaning
- identity
- civilisational values
- ethical formation
- collective story

As a result, the framework captures important aspects of social cohesion, but gives less explicit attention to the cultural and worldview dimensions that shape human behaviour and long-term flourishing.

ESF judgement: Moderately integrated. Strong on social cohesion and inclusion, but less developed regarding worldview, identity, meaning, and deeper cultural dimensions of flourishing.

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4. Human Capacities and Potential Integration

Score: 4 / 5

This is a strong area of alignment.

The framework includes substantial attention to:

- health
- education
- life satisfaction
- subjective wellbeing
- security
- public trust
- social participation
- labour participation
- access to services

Importantly, the report recognises that wellbeing cannot be reduced to economic conditions alone and explicitly incorporates both objective and subjective dimensions of quality of life.

The framework also reflects several aspects of the ESF developmental model, particularly in relation to:

- security
- relationship
- engagement
- aspects of fulfilment

However, the framework remains more outcome-oriented than developmentally oriented

It gives limited attention to:

- early childhood
- developmental psychology
- agency
- creativity
- inner development
- contribution
- self-expression
- spiritual development
- transformational growth

Education is included primarily through attainment and capability measures rather than through a broader flourishing-based conception of human development.

As a result, the framework provides a strong multidimensional account of wellbeing conditions, but not yet a full-spectrum developmental model of human flourishing.

ESF judgement: Strongly integrated. The framework provides substantial coverage of human wellbeing and capabilities, though it is less developed regarding inner development and long-term developmental flourishing.

Overall ESF Score

ESF domain	Score
Natural Environment	5
Circular and Regenerative Economics	4
Cultural Values and Identity	3
Human Capacities and Potential	4
Total	**16 / 20**

According to the ESF evaluation scale, a total score of 16 / 20 places the framework in the category of **Moderately - Highly Integrated**

Overall Assessment

The *Counting What Counts* framework represents one of the most advanced global attempts currently underway to operationalise multidimensional wellbeing measurement beyond GDP.

Its principal strengths are:

- exceptionally strong ecological integration
- substantial post-GDP economic thinking
- explicit inclusion of equity and future generations
- broad multidimensional wellbeing architecture
- serious institutional and policy relevance
- strong systems-level orientation

The framework's greatest contribution lies in its recognition that:

- wellbeing
- sustainability
- equity
- resilience
- ecology
- institutional trust

must be understood together rather than as isolated policy domains.

However, from an ESF perspective, the framework remains incomplete as a fully ecosystemic flourishing model. Its principal limitations are:

- limited treatment of worldview, identity, and cultural meaning
- weak engagement with spirituality and ethical formation
- no explicit developmental model of flourishing
- limited attention to early childhood and developmental psychology
- insufficient treatment of inner capacities and transformational development

- sustainability-oriented rather than fully regenerative in economic framing

As a result, the framework provides a highly sophisticated model of multidimensional wellbeing governance, but does not yet fully integrate the cultural, developmental, relational, and meaning-centred dimensions from which lasting flourishing emerges.

Concluding Assessment

The *Counting What Counts* framework should be regarded as one of the strongest current international wellbeing architectures emerging within the global Beyond GDP movement.

It already shares ESF's concern with:

- integration
- sustainability
- equity
- future generations
- multidimensional wellbeing
- systemic resilience

However, it stops short of ESF's deeper contribution, which is to show that flourishing is not only:

- ecological
- economic
- institutional

but also:

- cultural
- developmental
- relational
- ethical
- meaning-laden

ESF Assessment

The *Counting What Counts* framework represents one of the most important current transitions beyond GDP-based governance towards a full-spectrum model of ecosystemic flourishing.

The Flourish Project is a global initiative dedicated to advancing the Ecosystemic Flourishing (ESF) Framework - an integrative approach to wellbeing that recognises the deep interdependence between human development, cultural values, regenerative economies, and the natural world. Rooted in systems thinking, relational practice, and emerging research on flourishing, the project seeks to support the development of compassionate, resilient, and ecologically conscious individuals and communities through education, policy innovation, research, and cross-sector collaboration.