Nutritious Food and Water:

The best goods for wellbeing?

DAN WEIJERS, UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

WATER, FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING, DELHI, 14 DEC 2021

Positive Psychology is growing in New Zealand…

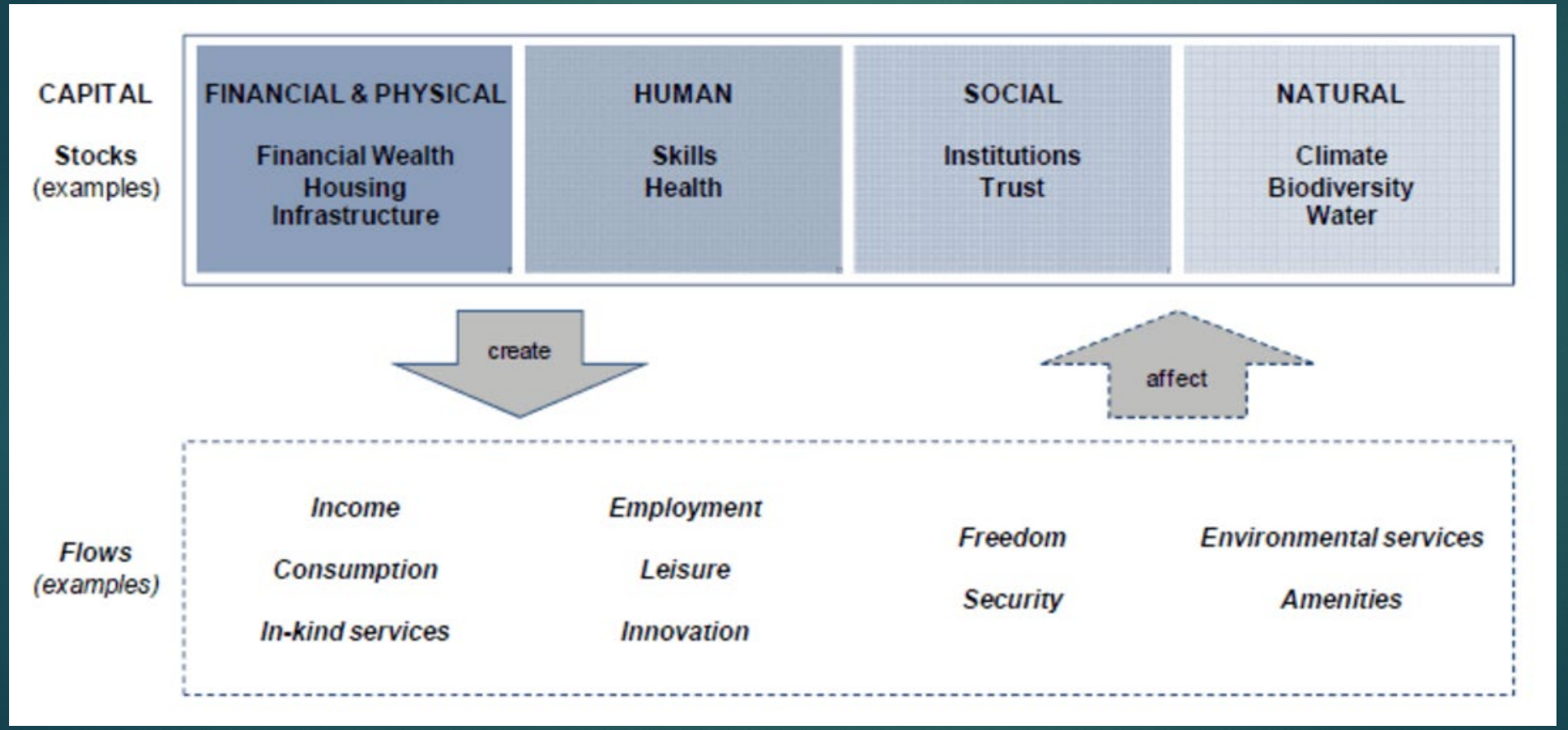
- Caring professions
- Positive education
- Positive organisations
- Positive leadership
- Positive parenting
- Focus on mental wellbeing

Wellbeing and public policy in NZ: The goal

- NZ Treasury: Living Standards Framework ~ public policies should aim at equitable and sustainable wellbeing for all New Zealanders
- Wellbeing ~ *prudentially good lives* for individuals (and groups)

- But what is the *prudential good life*?
  - Wealth, power, & longevity?
  - Health, safety, & freedom,?
  - Happiness, meaning, & respect?

NZ Treasury's (old) Living Standards Framework (Sen's Capabilities)



These stocks and flows are probably *instrumental* prudential goods.

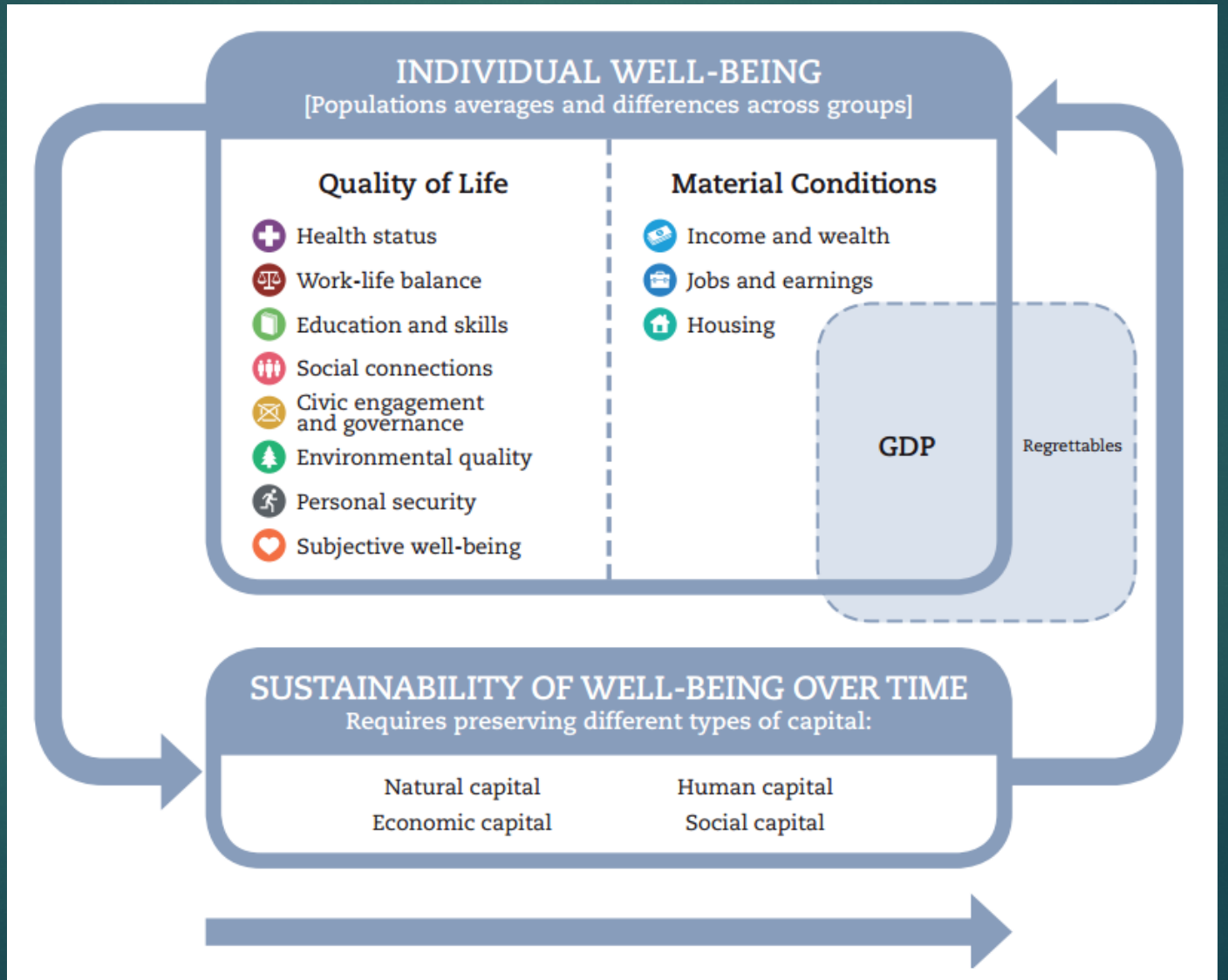
Where is mental wellbeing?

Subjective & mixed approaches

Alex Michalos	Low objective living conditions	High objective living conditions
Low subjective wellbeing		
High subjective wellbeing		

OECD Better Life (dashboard)

Includes objective and subjective measures + mental wellbeing



What about cultural factors?

What about religion?

Table 3: Influences that have shaped the LSF and LSF Dashboard

	Level	Definition	Influences	Alternatives (examples)
LSF	**Worldview**	Overarching philosophical approach that motivates our work	The Treasury's strategy The capability approach The Treasury's role as a public agency	Sir Mason Durie's four pillars (Te Whare Tapa Whā)[3] Fuiomaono Karl Pulotu-Endemann's Fonofale Model of Health[4]
	Elements	Conceptual elements of the wellbeing framework derived from the worldview	Domains, capitals and risk and resilience	Spirituality, family
LSF Dashboard	**Indicators**	What we measure to assess wellbeing	Numerical dashboard with measureable indicators (eg, unemployment rate)	
	Data	The technical definition and dataset for indicators	Statistic and source (eg, unemployed people as a percentage of the labour force, Household Labour Force Survey, Stats NZ)	

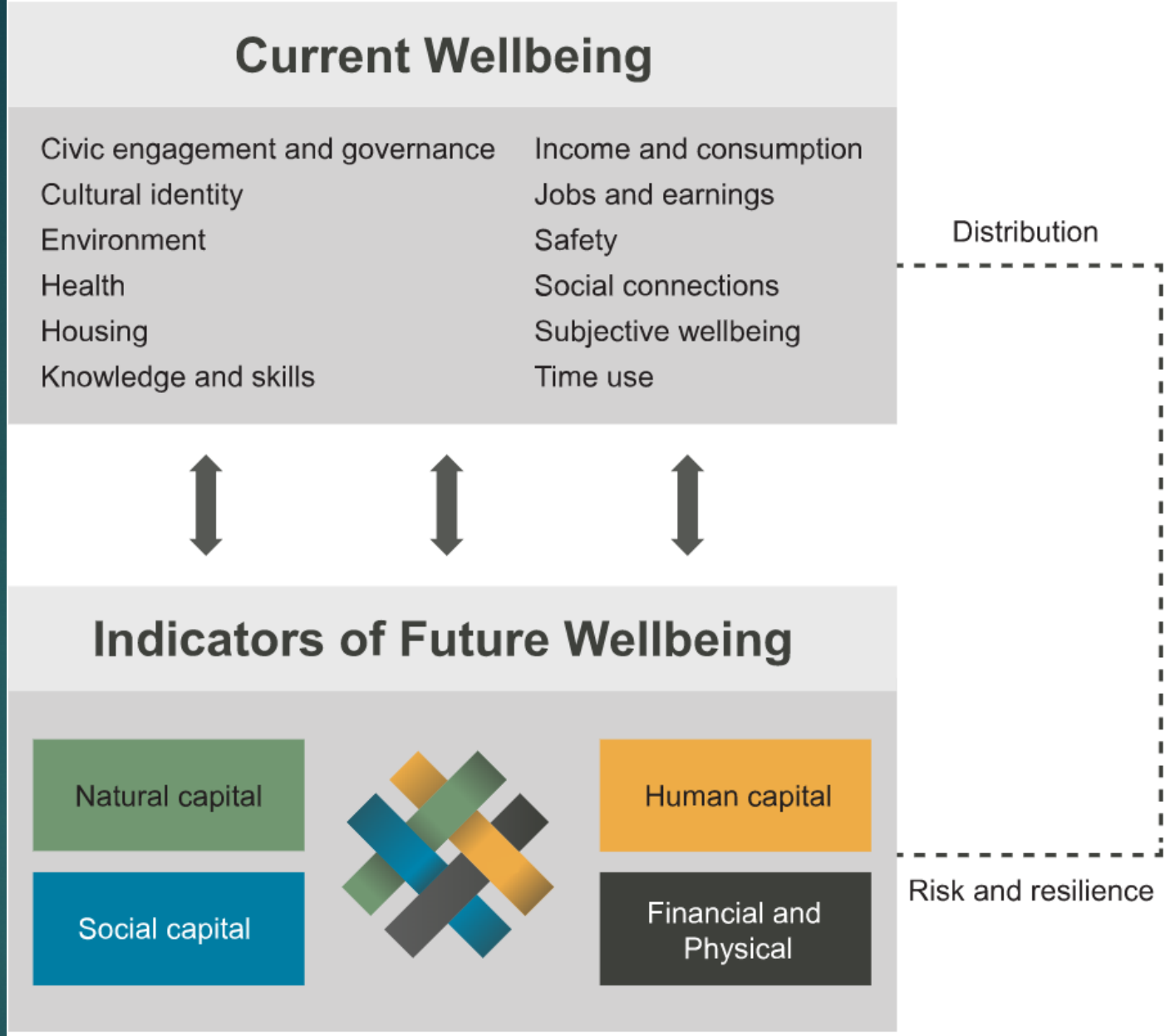
https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/tp/living-standards-framework-background-and-future-work-html#section-5

Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand – Ngā Tūtohu Aotearoa

- What is important for your wellbeing, the wellbeing of your whānau, your hapū, your iwi?
- (He aha te mea nui mō te oranga o tō whānau, o tō hapū, o tō iwi hoki?)
- Currently in Phase 3 "Data expert input", but it will still take your view on wellbeing
- https://www.stats.govt.nz/consultations/indicators-aotearoa-new-zealand-nga-tutohu-aotearoa-consultation

The new LSF

- https://lsfdashboard.treasury.govt.nz/wellbeing/



Our people

Our people describes the current wellbeing of New Zealanders aged 15 and over across the LSF's **current wellbeing** domains.

Our country

Our country describes the progress we are making towards high wellbeing for all New Zealanders for each of the 12 LSF **current wellbeing** domains.

Our future

Our future describes the resources (four capitals) that influence our ability to have great **future wellbeing** in New Zealand

The Subjective wellbeing domain

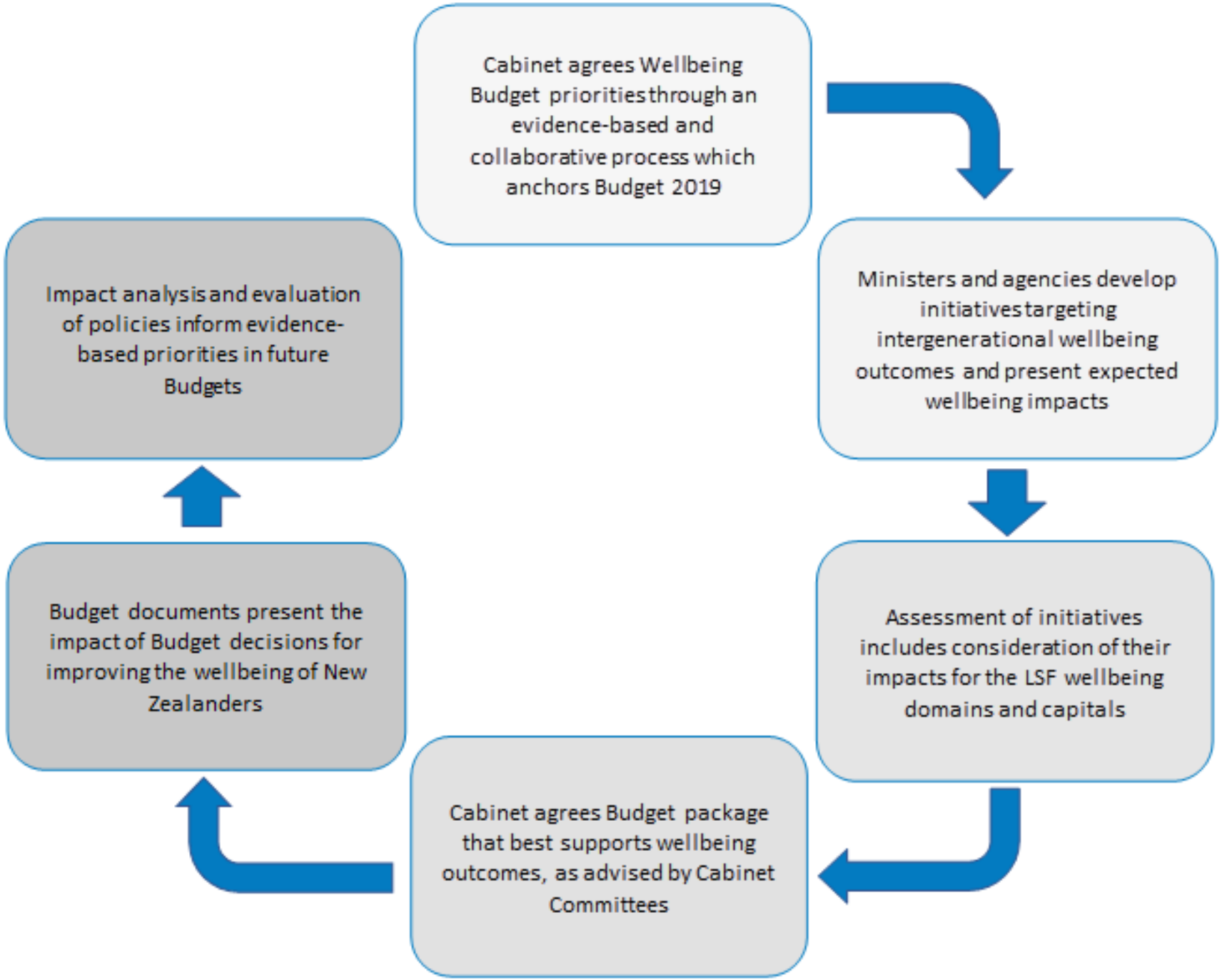
- "Overall life satisfaction and sense of meaning and self."
- https://treasury.govt.nz/publications/tp/living-standards-framework-background-and-future-work-html#section-5
- But this description implies a limited range of subjective wellbeing indicators:
  - Life satisfaction
  - Meaning in life
  - Self-esteem (/?satisfied with who I am?)
- IS THIS ENOUGH? Probably not for positive psychologists

A bigger problem…

- Dashboards do tell policy makers which kinds of thins to consider when making policy… but
- They *don't* help make tradeoffs between domains
- This means that major budget priorities will be completely politically generated
- The current govt. in NZ attempted to use wellbeing research to influence budget priorities in a way that didn't really use the LSF at all…

The 1st box says it all

- *Source*: New Zealand Government (2018), *Budget Policy Statement, Budget 2019*, www.budget.govt.nz/budget/2019/fiscal-strategy/bps2019.htm



The resulting wellbeing budget priorities:

1. Improving mental health
2. Reducing child poverty
3. Addressing the inequalities faced by indigenous Maori and Pacific islands people
4. Thriving in a digital age
5. Transitioning to a low-emission, sustainable economy

Wellbeing researchers have argued for this for a long time

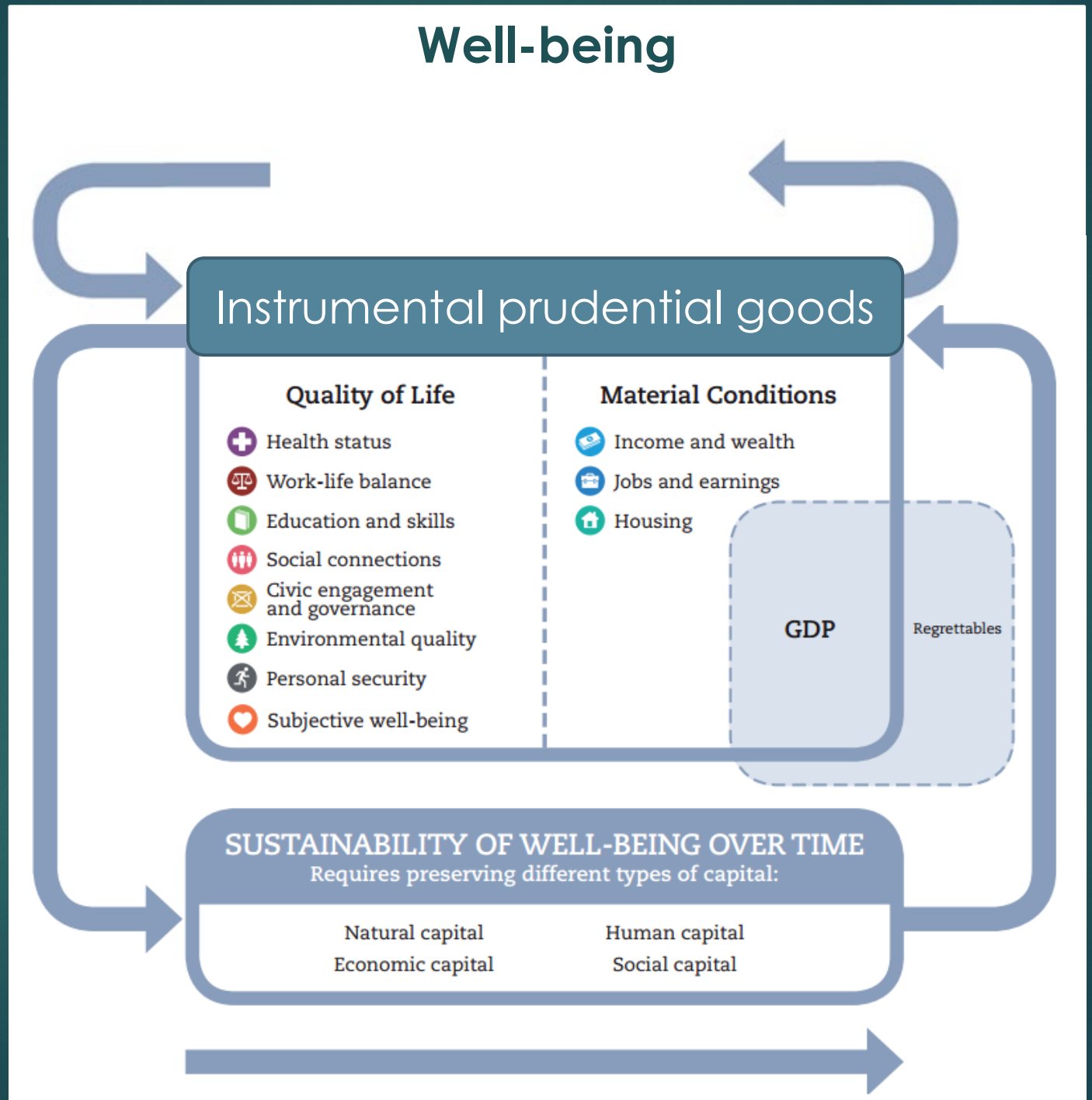
Eudaimonic wellbeing or faster wifi?

Is there a better (less political) way to generate budget priorities?

- Maybe.
- It requires making a call about what wellbeing really is, or which aspects of wellbeing are the most important

Solution?

Positive psychologists have argued for dashboards with many mental and subjective well-being measures



"Well-being economists" are starting to argue for a single ultimate measure of well-being: **Life satisfaction**

Being precise about well-being has never been more important

- What should the **ultimate measure of well-being** be for policy?
- Old school policymakers: Money
- Well-being economists: Life satisfaction
- Positive psychologists: Mental well-being index? PERMA?

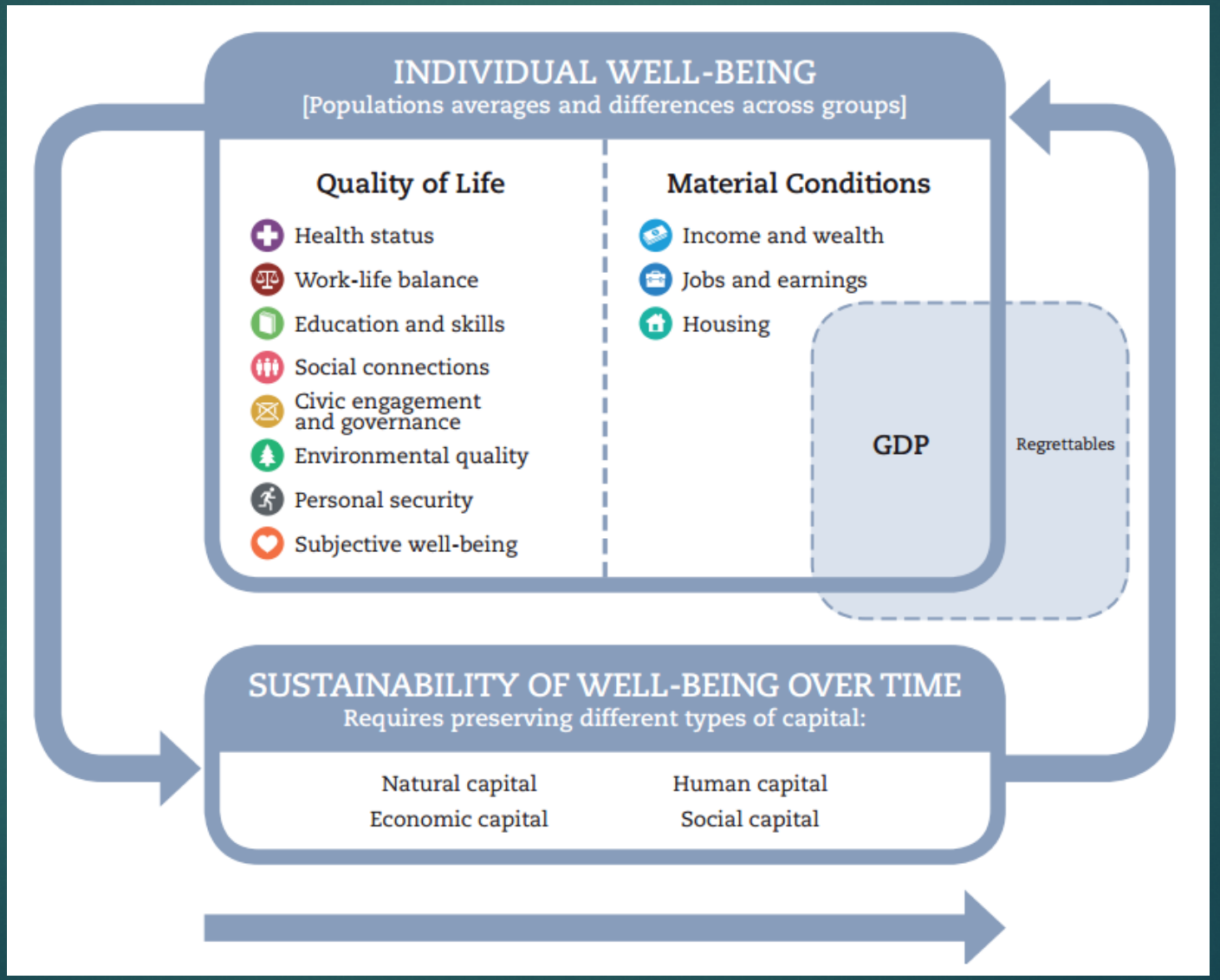
- If life satisfaction is chosen as the only subjective wellbeing indicator, then few positive psychologists will be involved in top-level public policy

So many important **interdisciplinary** questions

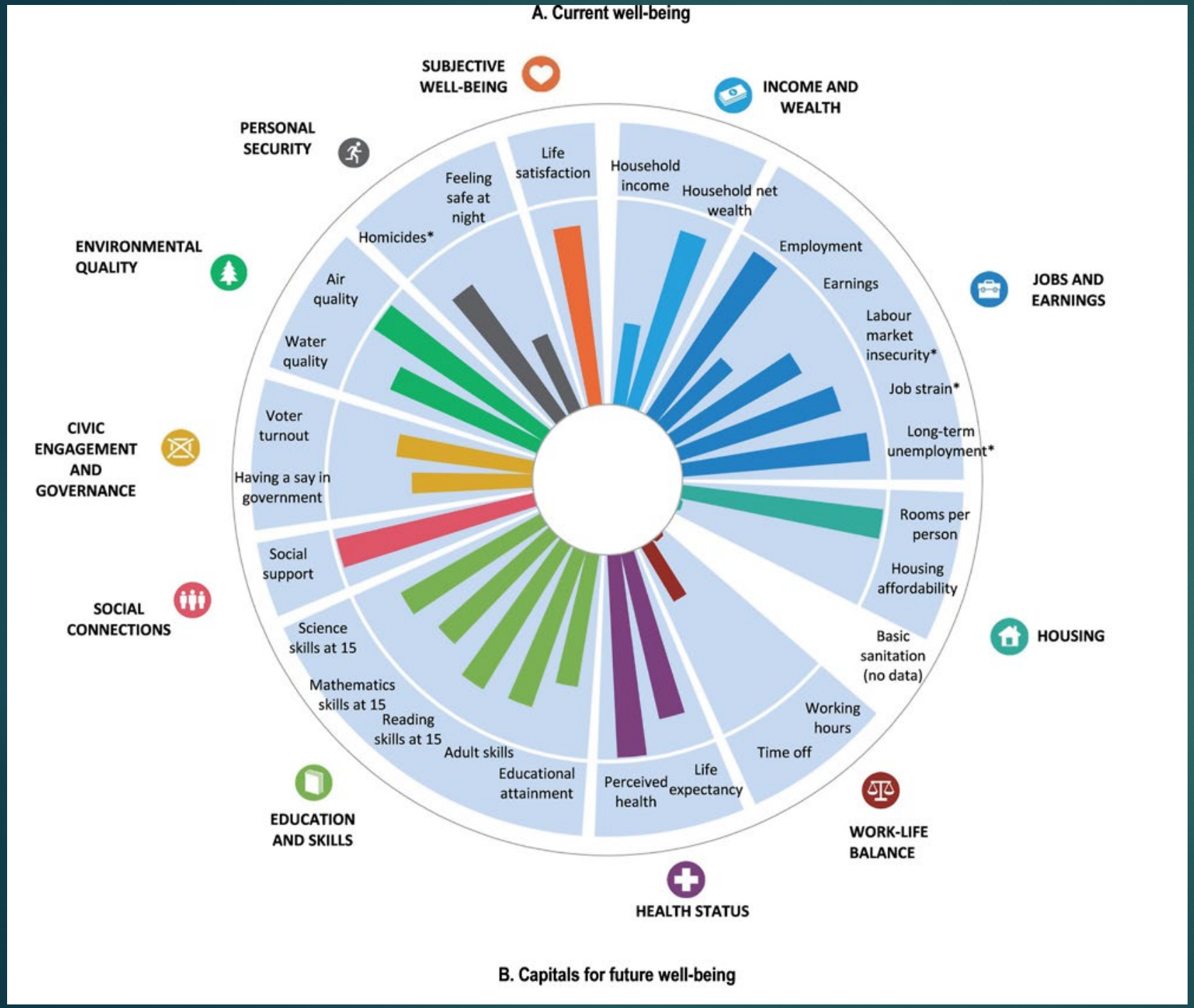
- Wellbeing of **who/what?**
- **One or many** ultimate prudential goods?
- Can the **goods change** over time?
- **Average, total**, lowest quintile?
- **Who** should **decide**?
- What are the **causes** of the ultimate prudential good/s?
- Can they be efficiently **measured**?
- Can **policies affect** the good or its causes?

OECD Better Life (index/headline?)

A good measure of national progress, but how to use for policy-making?



Too many non-fungible goods to effectively use cost benefit analysis



Water quality reflects low "swimmability" of lakes and rivers, not lack of clean drinking water

Source: OECD Economic Surveys: New Zealand 2019 Link

% of Nzers that have gone without fresh fruit and vegetables to keep costs down

Demographic category	Year	Estimate(percent)	Absolute sampling error (percentage points)
All	All	All	All
$30,000 or less	2018	34.2	3.8
$30,001–$70,000	2018	29.3	2.3
$70,001–$100,000	2018	24.6	3.1
$100,001–$150,000	2018	22.1	2.4
$150,001 or more	2018	13.6	2.3

Source: https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/wellbeing-time-series-explorer

In 2019/20 one in five children were living in households where food ran out sometimes (**15.6%**) or often (**4.3%**) due to lack of money.

Children without consistent access to enough food or healthy food by ethnicity (%)

Hunger is most evident in our children

Source: https://www.childpoverty.org.nz/measures/food

International comparison: Current OECD ranking	Change over time since ~ 2005: Worse than before	Change over time since ~ 2005: Same or better than before
Good	**WATCH CLOSELY** Falling cognitive skills at age 15 Rising long-term unemployment	**SAFEGUARD** High employment rate Strong social support and civic engagement Strong social capital High life satisfaction Good air quality
Bad	**COUNTERACT** High economic vulnerability, rising household debt, and rising labour market insecurity Low housing affordability High and rising obesity prevalence Mental health problems High per capita greenhouse gas emissions, threats to water quality and biodiversity	**STRENGTHEN** Rising disposable household income and earnings Fewer people working long hours Increased feelings of safety Low investment in R&D

Inequalities

REDUCE LARGE INEQUALITIES IN:

Health and educational outcomes
Employment and material well-being outcomes
Child well-being

Might some of our problems (students performing worse) be due to this?

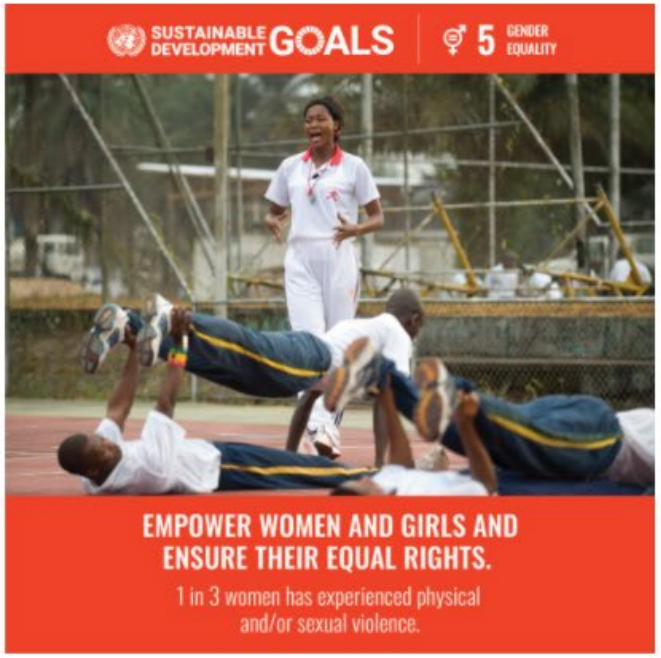
Source: OECD (2019) OECD Economic Surveys: New Zealand 2019

Goal 1: No Poverty

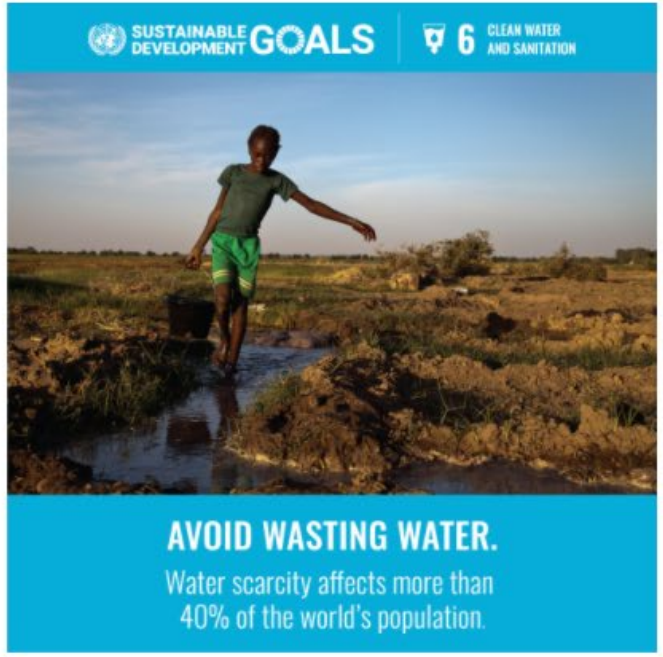
Goal 2: Zero Hunger

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being

Goal 4: Quality Education



Goal 5: Gender Equality



Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Given the importance of food and water, even developed nations would do well to focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Further reading (open access)

- Weijers, Dan & Morrison, Philip (2018). Well-being and Public Policy: Can New Zealand be a Leading Light for the 'Well-being Approach'?, *Public Policy Quarterly*, 14(4): 3-12. https://www.victoria.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1713626/Weijers_Morrison.pdf
- Weijers, Dan & Mukherjee, Udayan (2016). Living Standards, Wellbeing, and Public Policy, *The New Zealand Treasury*, 1-32. Available from: http://www.treasury.govt.nz/government/longterm/fiscalposition/2016/ltfs-16-bg-lswpp.pdf
- Weijers, Dan & Jarden, Aaron (2013). The Science of Happiness for Policymakers: An Overview, *Journal of Social Research and Policy*, 4(2): 21-40. https://sites.google.com/site/jrspone/content/JSRP_Vol4_Iss2_Weijers