

Can we persuade policy makers to focus on the life satisfaction of the people? Learnings from recent findings on Fiji

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Why this talk?

The **main goal** of the state, society, and human is to understand and accept that human well-being is the basis, foundation, basic premise, of a sound society and its successful development and prosperity.

Unhappy people cannot create a society enjoying well-being, and, in turn, such a society cannot provide conditions for creating and developing the well-being of people.

What we already know?

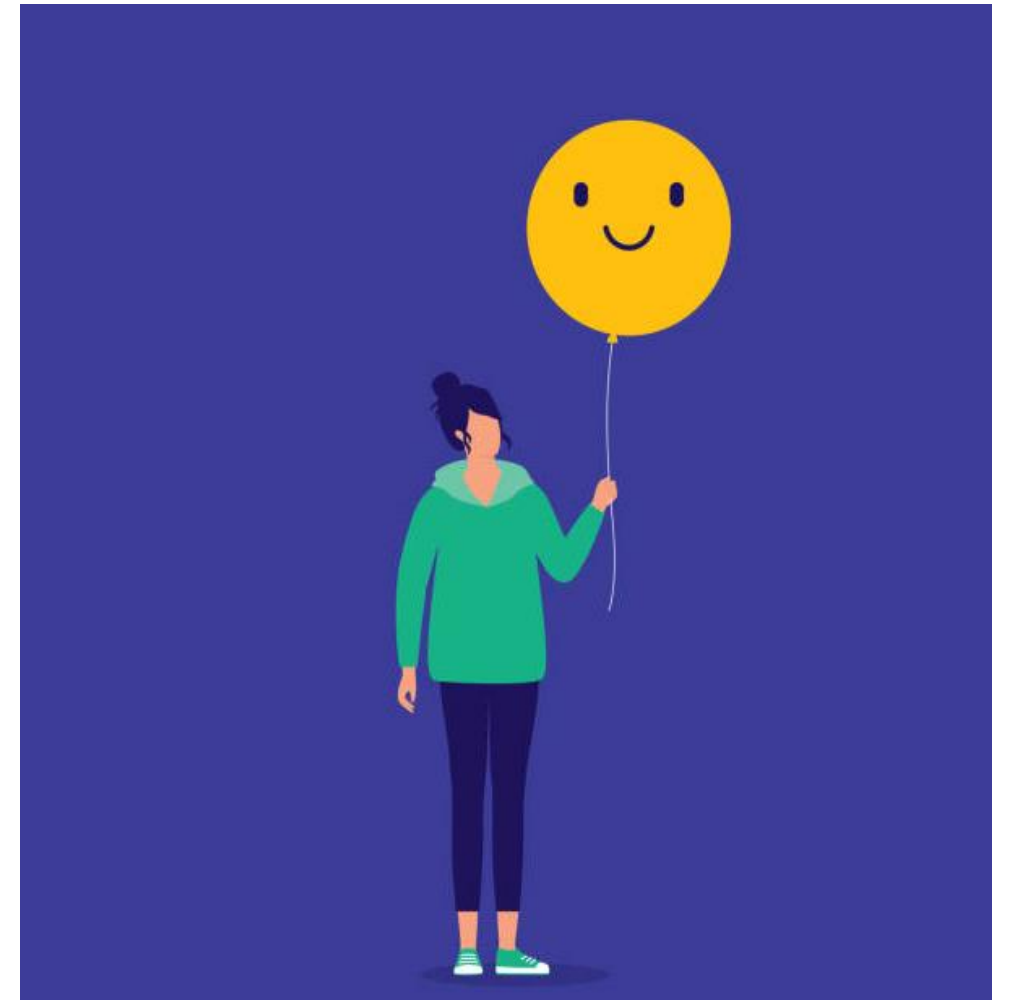
- Traditional GDP measures (GDP growth) does not signify the quality of life and the well-being of people, society, and state.
 - It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for development.
 - GDP was not designed to assess welfare or the wellbeing of citizens.
 - It is often this growth that comes at the expense of exploitation of people, burden of debt, damage to environment, pollution,
- We need measures to complement traditional economic indicators.

“What we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted.”



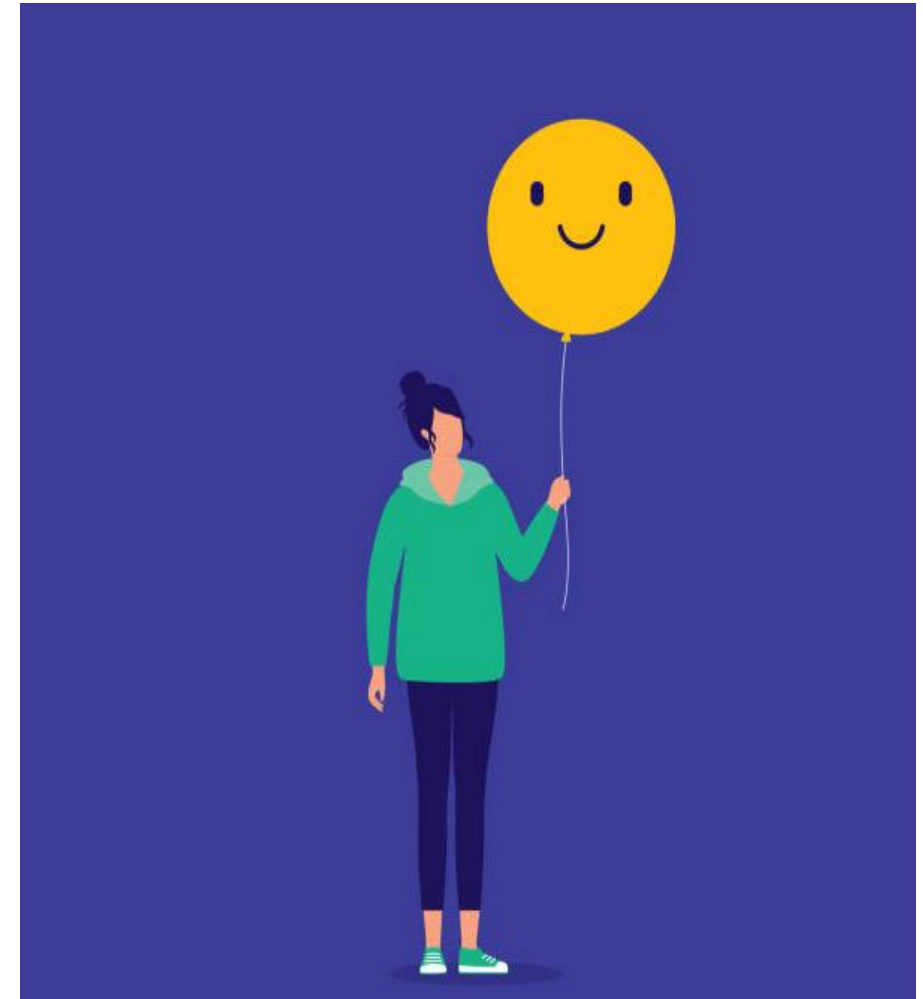
One popular measure: life satisfaction?

- Many times, used interchangeably with **subjective wellbeing, quality of life, happiness, wellbeing.**
- More stable.
- Long-lived than happiness.
- Subjective - based on factors that an individual finds personally important in their own life.



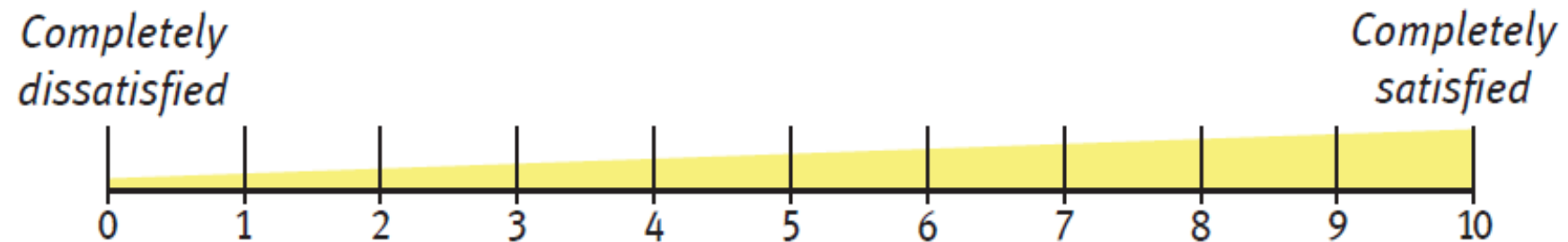
Why does life satisfaction matter?

- Health and longevity.
 - Report better physical and mental health, healthy behaviours, few life style diseases.
- Work and income.
 - Earn more, enjoy their work, career success, creative, productive, higher work quality.
- Social relations.
 - Warmth, leadership ability, more friends, better family relationship.
- Societal benefits.
 - Engage in pro-social activities, volunteering, cooperative, strong support for democracy.



How do we measure life satisfaction?

- A natural way to measure people's wellbeing is to ask them:
 - **“All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life?”**



- Widely used standard measure in national surveys.
 - Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey); The British Household Panel Survey, the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions; German Socioeconomic Panel, Gallup World Poll.

How do we measure life satisfaction?

- Or based on multi-item index capturing different domains of life:
- **“How satisfied are you with?”**
 - your standard of living.
 - your health.
 - what you are achieving in life.
 - your personal relationships.
 - how safe you feel.
 - feeling part of your community.
 - your future security.
- Often tailored to reflect community, cultures, population groups.



What does global evidence on life satisfaction tell us?

- World Happiness Report (run by Gallup World Poll > 150 countries ~ last 10 years) finds what explains differences in wellbeing around the world, both within and among countries, include:
 - Physical and mental health
 - Human relationship (in the family, at work, in the community)
 - Income and employment.
 - Character virtues (including pro-sociality and trust)
 - Social support
 - Personal freedom
 - Lack of corruption
 - Effective government

What are our bigger neighbours doing in this space?

- New Zealand government is leading the way.
 - Already passed its 5th Wellbeing Budget.
 - Has “Living Standards Framework”.
 - Takes into account current wellbeing (income, housing, security, education, health, etc.) and future wellbeing (land use, skills and knowledge, health, nature and social environment).
 - New Zealand is the only country that requires all new policy proposals to specify their contribution to wellbeing and be evaluated on this basis.

- The Australian government has started the process towards having Wellbeing Budget:
 - The Albanese government has started the consultation process on “Measuring What Matters” statement.

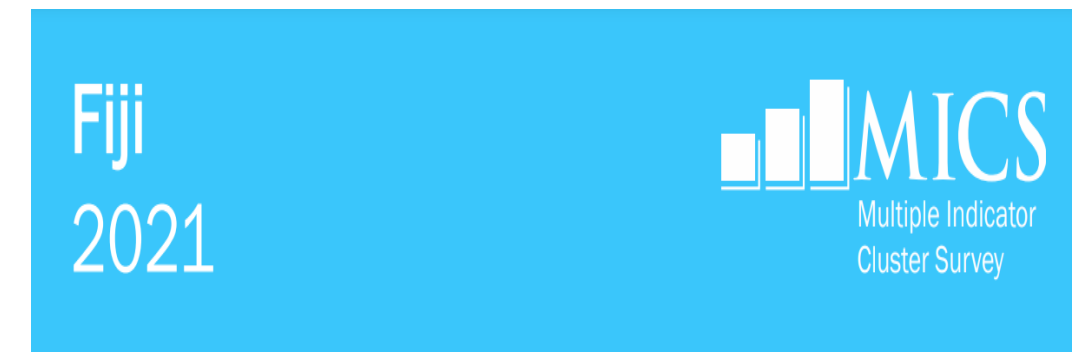
Why do we need this data for Fiji?

- Provide data driven evidence to how people feel about their lives and what's happening in them.
 - not just as a marketing jargon for “where happiness comes naturally”
- To understand:
 - How Fijians perceive their life to be?
 - What life domains do Fijians value the most?
 - Varying experiences of living through various political turmoils?
 - How do Fijians value policy actions of the government?
 - Wellbeing effects of climate change?



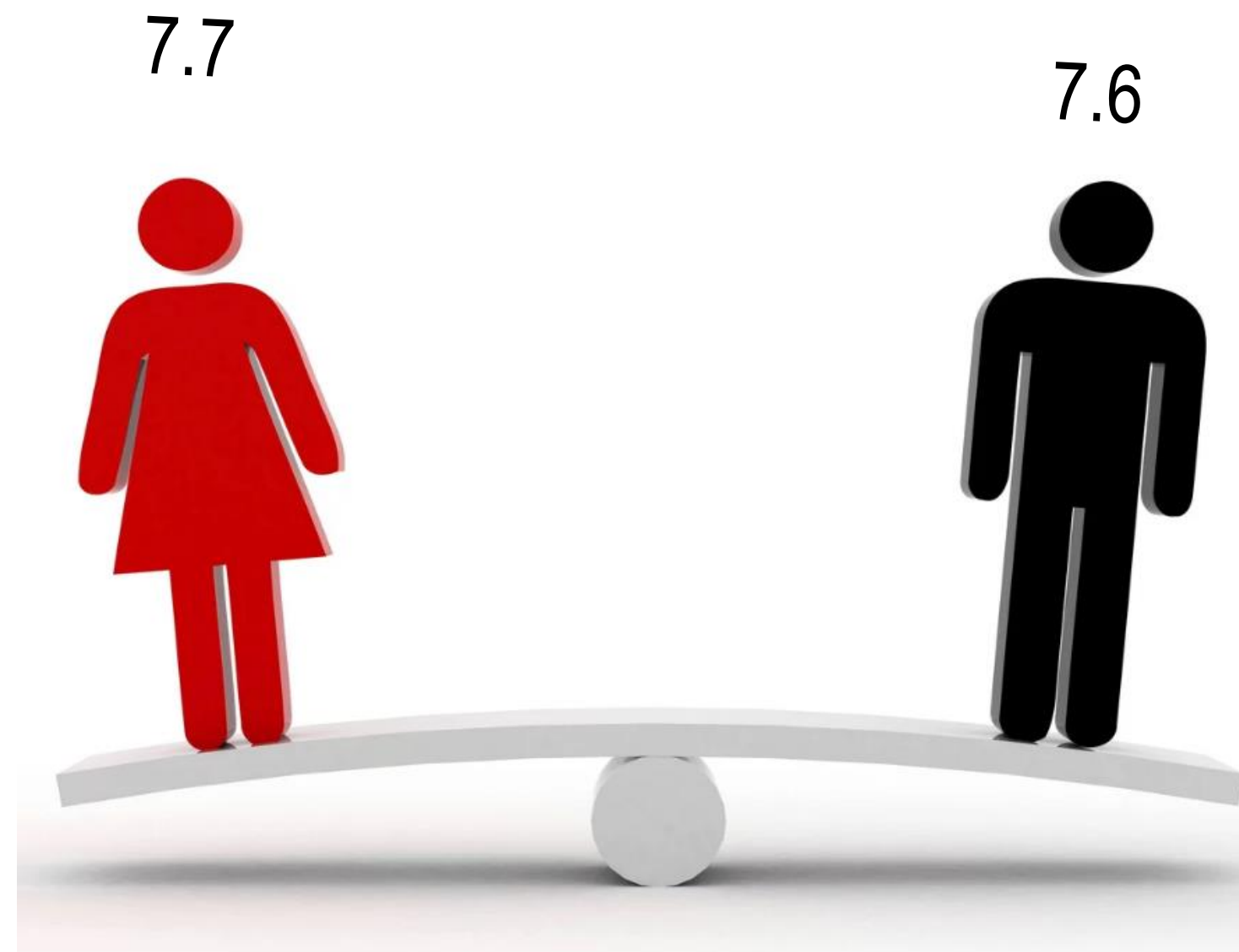
Do we know anything about life satisfaction of people in Fiji?

- UNICEF – Multiple Cluster Surveys programme (MICS).
 - Since 1990s ~ 118 countries ~ 355 surveys.
 - Major data source for more than 30 SDGs indicators.
- 2021 - first ever survey for Fiji.
 - Representative sample basis – 2017 Country Census of Population and Housing.
 - Focus groups: Women/Men (age 15-49) & children.
 - Household ~ 6,000.
 - Data collected by: Fiji Bureau of Statistics.



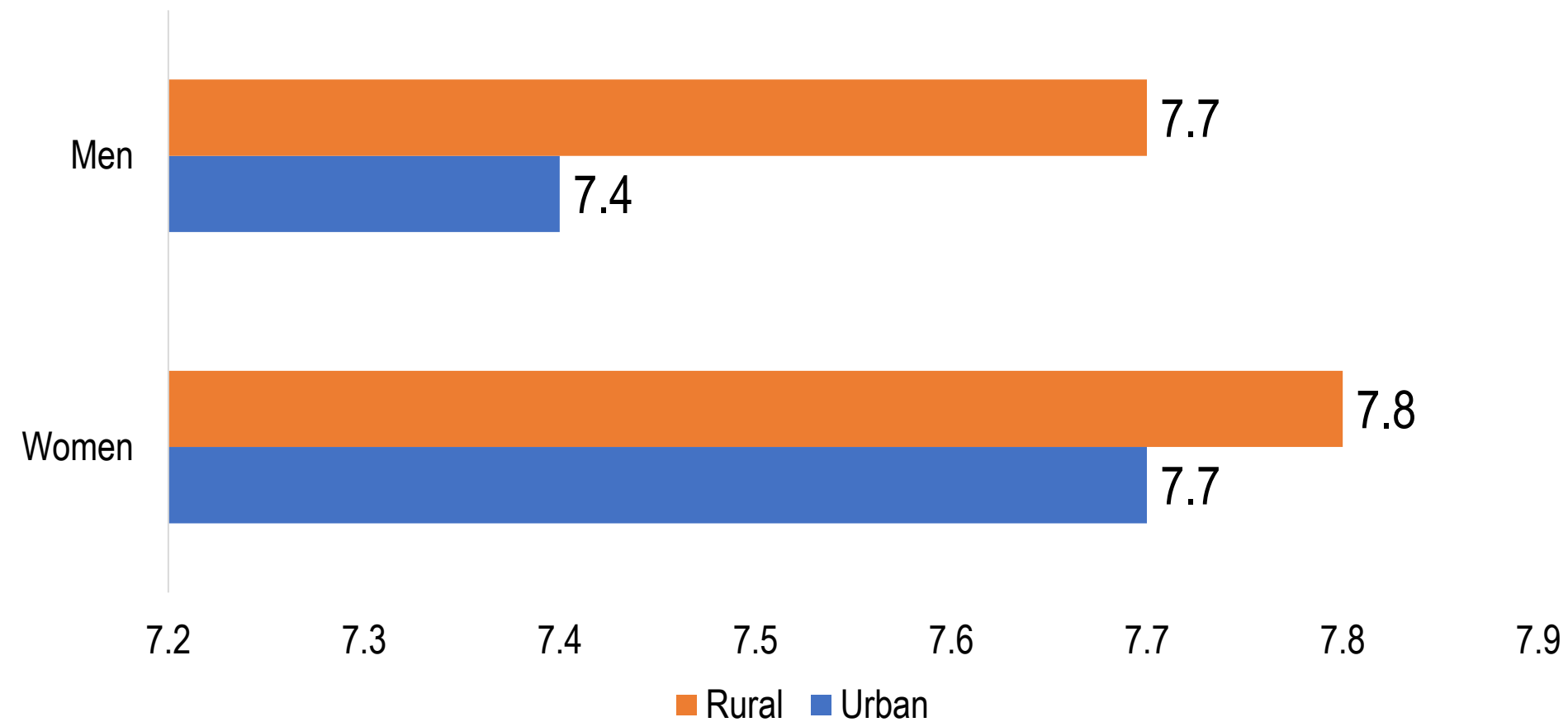
Do we know anything about life satisfaction of people in Fiji?

- Included a question about happiness and overall satisfaction with life.
- Asked as:
 - “Now, look at this ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. Suppose we say that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you stand at this time?”



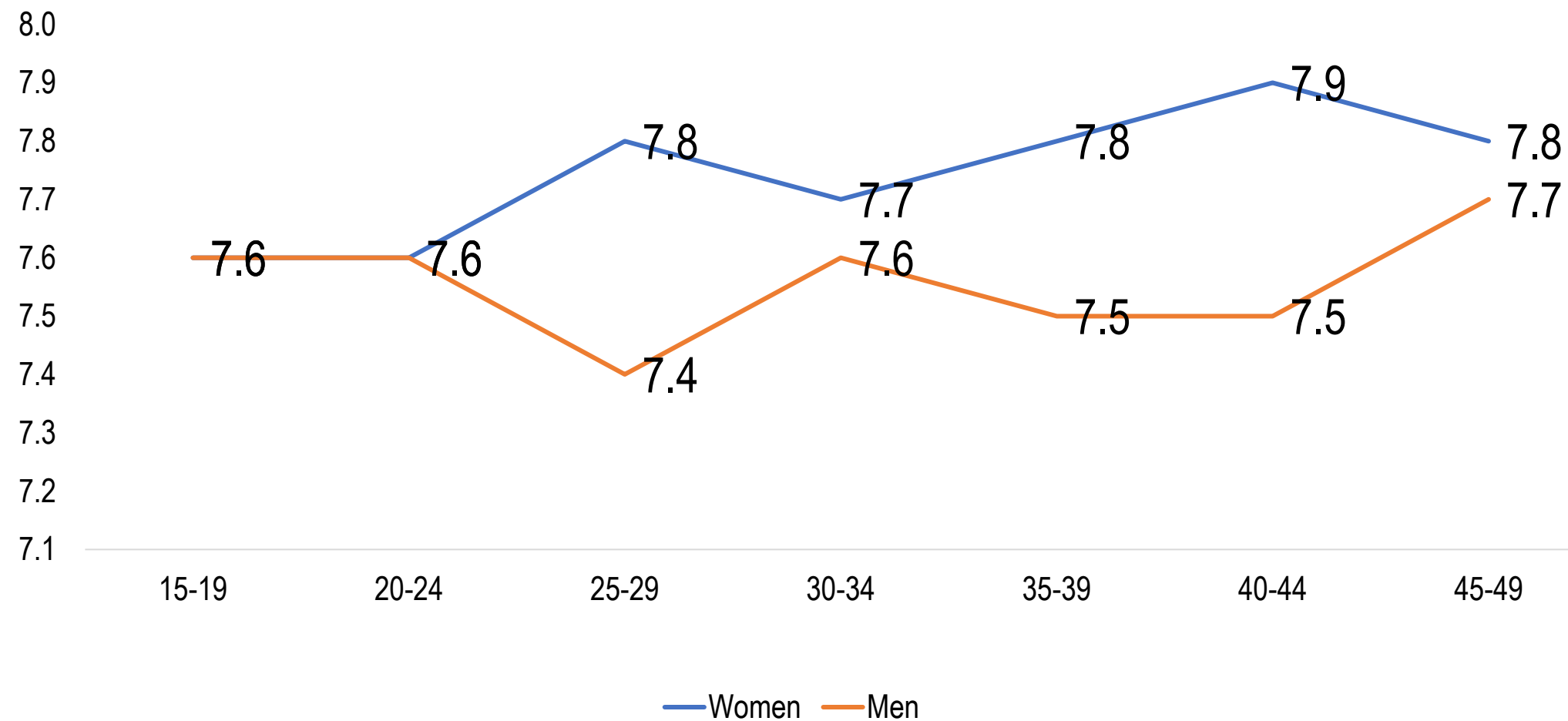
Do we know anything about life satisfaction of people in Fiji?

- By Urban vs Rural areas:



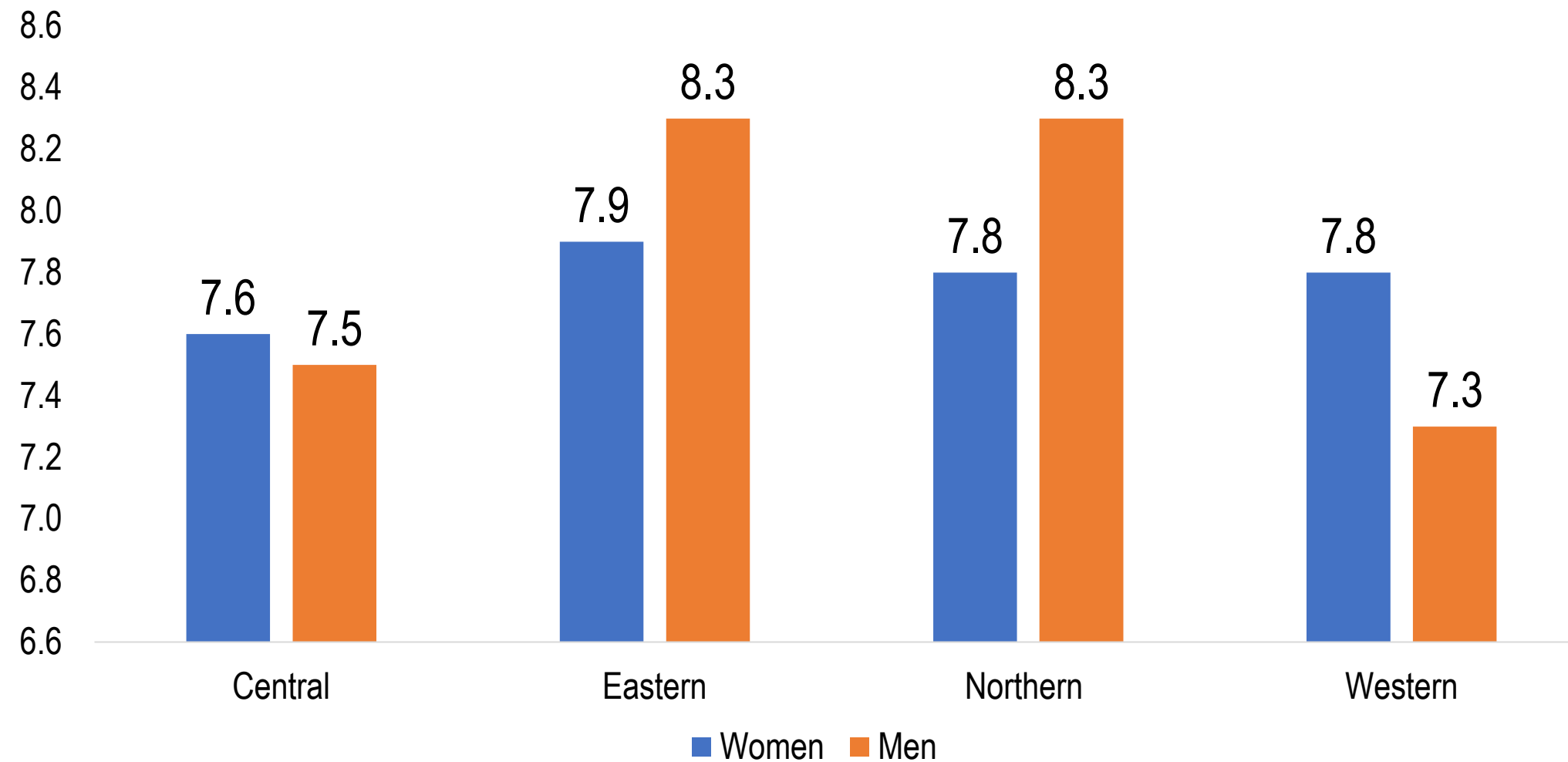
Do we know anything about life satisfaction of people in Fiji?

- By Age groups:



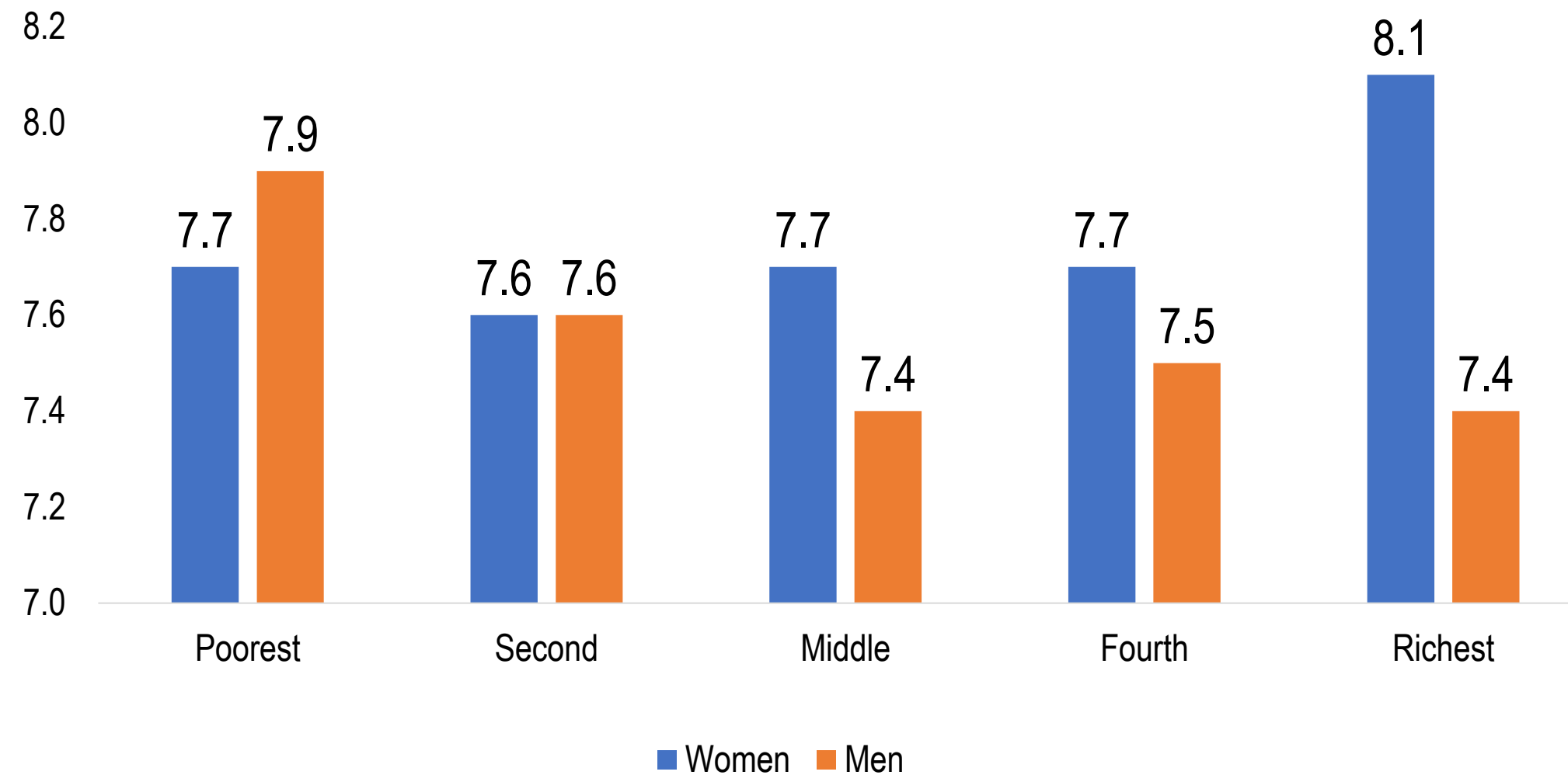
Do we know anything about life satisfaction of people in Fiji?

- By Regions:



Do we know anything about life satisfaction of people in Fiji?

- By Wealth index quintiles:



How does wellbeing index for Fiji may look like?

- **Consultation on this process is needed for an inclusive approach.**
- What does **Chat GPT** think when asked “What is life satisfaction in the context of Fiji” ?
 - Social connections and community.
 - Cultural values and identity.
 - Economic wellbeing.
 - Physical and mental health.
 - Natural environment.
 - Sense of safety and security.

How is the government of the day positioned to provide leadership on this?

- Already making strides to listen to the people and put people at the centre of policy decisions (transparency and consultation is the key).
- Unique opportunity for the current Fijian government – not wealth creation but of wellbeing creation.
- And for all this to happen, the time is '**now**' to start work on this aspect of measuring outcomes and to '**talanoa**' on how this may look like for Fiji.

Acknowledgment

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Vinaka !!!

Appreciate your discussion 😊

Happy to be connected on:

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