The Pursuit of Human Well-Being was a three year landmark book project of Halloran Philanthropies which tells the remarkable story of the journey of human wellbeing throughout the world. The Pursuit of Human Wellbeing uncovered extraordinary findings in human wellbeing which have occurred primarily since the end of World War II.

The Human Development Index (HDI), developed by the United Nations, was the primary metric used to assess the social and economic development of countries over time. The gains in wellbeing throughout the world were particularly dramatic from 1980 to 2014, and the driving forces behind the gains were many and varied. All the regions in the world experienced significant improvements in life expectancy, health, education and poverty reduction.

One of the greatest achievements was that in 25 years extreme poverty was cut in half.
Health, education, income and happiness are key indicators used to measure human wellbeing. Each indicator reveals unique qualities in the human condition among countries around the world. The indicators provide information that help monitor and measure the progress of countries in their efforts to improve the social and economic life of their citizens. The editors and authors of The Pursuit of Human Well-Being collected data and information from every country in the world to conduct the extensive research documented in the book.

Most countries in the world experienced significant improvements between 1980 and 2014. These gains were particularly dramatic in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The unparalleled acceleration of progress in human wellbeing is partly due to significant investments made by business, government and philanthropy.

In a world beset with social, political and economic problems, it is easy to focus on the negative aspects of global development. Such a perspective tends to report the bad news about people and societies and fails to capture the positive developments that have reshaped our world. The Pursuit of Human Well-Being tells many of the “good news” stories of human progress.
Extreme poverty was reduced to 10% by 2013 according to the United Nations. It was 40% in 1981.

2 billion people lived in extreme poverty in 1981. By 2013 poverty declined by more than 1 billion people. A great human achievement!

In recent times, more and more countries have industrialized and embraced technologies that have positively transformed their economies and many aspects of civil society. These achievements are particularly remarkable when one considers that the population of the world has more than doubled since 1960, from 3 billion to 7.4 billion. During this time of unprecedented population growth, the world community has managed to create more prosperity and lift more people out of poverty than at any time in history. More work needs to be done to eradicate poverty from the earth.

* Poverty in the context of this report refers to “extreme poverty”, i.e., people living on incomes of less than $1.90 per day.
Public and private initiatives have proven successful in reducing poverty particularly in countries of East and South Asia where literally millions of people have benefited. Progress in wellbeing has been achieved as a result of public policies, philanthropy and business activity that have together expanded housing, social, and economic opportunities for the growing numbers of urban and rural residents. The media is challenged to tell the story of what’s really happening in global development, particularly when it comes to celebrating the successes. In a recent survey in the US and the UK, the majority of respondents indicated that poverty is increasing. In fact, two-thirds of those surveyed in the US stated that poverty has doubled in the world.
The changes we see today in global health would have been unimaginable for our ancestors. The health conditions of our ancestors were so bad that many children died before their 5th birthday. The dramatic increase in life expectancy during the 20th century ranks as one of society’s greatest achievements. Most babies born in 1900 did not live past age 50. Recently life expectancy rose to 71.5 years in 2014, an increase of almost 20 years from 1960.

Governments and the private sector are making major health investments in nutrition, urban sanitation, and vaccinations. World expenditures in health have increased to 10% of national gross domestic product. Health care increases in the public and private sectors were most notable in Latin America and the Caribbean, North America and Sub-Saharan Africa. Extraordinary achievements have been made in infant, child, and maternal mortality.

Between 1970 and 2012:

- Infant deaths declined by 6.8 million: a 58% reduction.
- Child deaths declined by 10.7 million: a 62% reduction
- Maternal deaths declined by 140,000: a 27% reduction

These achievements confirm how life has changed for basically all of humanity.
None of the improvements in wellbeing would be possible without the expansion and access to knowledge. Education is a driving force that improves health, increases political freedom and reduces poverty. The public and private sectors today invest significant resources in the education of their citizens.

Education is a powerful cornerstone to advance individual and community wellbeing. Enrollment in primary education has become near universal today, and secondary education has reached 74%. Major progress has also been achieved in the enrollment of women and girls in formal education.

Governments are joined in these efforts by private citizens, business, and private charities. The most dramatic shifts in education have occurred in North Africa, West Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa.

One of the most encouraging results of the investment in education is the progress in adult literacy which reached 85.3% in 2012. Adult literacy has essentially become the norm in the contemporary world.
THE PURSUIT OF HUMAN WELL-BEING

SUMMARY

The amazing story of human wellbeing covered in The Pursuit of Human Well-Being is the foundation for creating “the world we all want” for future generations.

We are fortunate to be the beneficiaries of a healthier, richer, and better educated world. These remarkable improvements must be shared widely to continue expanding upon the growth and impressive trajectory of human wellbeing.