

Evaluating good governance for future generations

Summary

This paper outlines a model for evaluating governance for future generations. The model aims to guide best practice, evaluation and accountability among countries, enabling the development of indicators which could be scored to measure progress towards better governance for future generations. Drawing on agreed principles and country practice, it identifies and outlines six elements or 'domains' that together track critical aspects of protection and representation for future generations. The domains are:

1. A formal institutionalised/legislative commitment
2. Long-term governance mechanisms
3. Integration across government
4. Monitoring and reporting
5. Representation for future generations and participation by children and youth
6. Policies addressing critical policy areas for future generations

Authors:

Kipp Mann Benn, Gabrielle Joyce, Graham Long, Nici Mulkeen - Newcastle University

Lilei Chow - Save the Children UK

Introduction

World leaders will meet at the Summit of the Future in September 2024 to adopt a Pact for the Future and Declaration on Future Generations, aiming to strengthen global governance for present and future generations.

This paper contributes to that effort by proposing a practical approach to evaluating good governance for future generations. While the Summit will emphasise key principles, this paper takes a step further by outlining what governance for future generations might look like in practice. It offers a foundational model that governments, stakeholders, and citizens can use to evaluate existing institutions and practices, inform debates on improvements, and establish accountability mechanisms for intergenerational injustice.

The importance of evaluation—particularly through indicators of good governance—is well established within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, SDG indicator 17.14.1 provides a framework for assessing a country's governance in terms of policy coherence for sustainable development, assessing eight key areas.¹ Similarly, the UN Committee on Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has defined three core components of good governance for sustainable development, each supported by more specific domains and exemplary practices.² Our model, in contrast to these broader accounts of good governance, reflects a new and narrow focus on governance *for future generations*.

The paper is informed by the principles outlined in the Declaration and Pact, as well as international human rights frameworks, including the Maastricht Principles on Human Rights of Future Generations.³ It builds on our existing work, which includes a policy brief that identifies key principles for guiding the Summit outcomes, a compendium of country practices, and a review of stakeholder positions and literature.⁴ Together, these resources establish a foundation for evaluating and enhancing governance to better serve future generations.

In this paper, we propose six 'domains' (inspired by SDG indicator 17.14.1) to assess the quality of governance for future generations. Each domain can be developed further, through specific indicators and metrics that allow for detailed evaluation of governance practice. This proposal is intended as a starting point for broader discussions that would refine these domains and specify indicators within each. The aim is to contribute to the ongoing debate among states and stakeholders on how to implement the principles outlined at the Summit and define roles and responsibilities in achieving effective governance for future generations.

¹ [Metadata for SDG indicator 17.14.1 \(UN\)](#)

² [Principles of effective governance for sustainable development \(CEPA\)](#)

³ [Rights of Future Generations- Maastricht Principles](#)

⁴ [Realizing Intergenerational Justice for Children and Future Generations \(Save the Children\)](#)

Governance for Future Generations - 6 Domains:

The core of the model is an account of six elements or ‘domains’ which together constitute an account of good governance for future generations. This account is intended to be universal and practicable, with elements that are mutually supporting. Formal high-level commitments (domain 1) are reflected in policymaking mechanisms for ensuring consideration of impacts on future generations (domain 2), and of impacts *across sectors* that might benefit or harm future generations (domain 3). Monitoring and reporting processes make these impacts visible (domain 4); processes for representation, including through children and youth, extend the idea of political participation to future generations (domain 5). Policy areas with especially critical implications for future generations and intergenerational justice are identified as focuses for action (domain 6).

1. Formal institutionalised political commitment

The country has made a public commitment towards equitably safeguarding the needs and interests of future generations at the highest political central/federal level (e.g. in constitution or law).

Formal political commitment at the highest level recognises the importance of this agenda and, as an initial step, is vital in triggering the establishment and/or the enhancement of other elements critical to future generations-oriented governance.⁵

2. Long-term governance mechanisms

The country has mechanisms in place to ensure that the needs and interests of future generations are consistently integrated into key aspects of governance, including policies, plans, programmes, projects, budgets, decision-making, policy development, and planning. These mechanisms support a long-term perspective, emphasising sustainability and forward-thinking in government actions.

Examples include alignment processes, impact assessments and legal frameworks that set constraints or provide remedies to account for long-term effects. Indicators in this domain could track mechanisms which aim to constrain existing policy processes, build the capacity of officials, and promote consideration of future generations.⁶

⁵ Wales' Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) is one leading example of legislative commitment to future generations - [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

⁶ One model could be a notion of the “best interests” of future generations, similar to the “best interest of the child” test found in Article 3 of [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). Ombudsmen or Commissioners (as in Hungary, Gibraltar or Wales) are one set of mechanisms that promote considerations of future generations; Finland's [Committee for the Future](#) is a parliamentary approach to similar questions.

3. Integration across policy sectors and levels of government

The country has institutional mechanisms that periodically bring together relevant government entities across different policy areas to ensure policy coherence, and recognise the impacts on future generations as a dimension of that coherence.⁷

Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development is concerned with the impacts of policies elsewhere and, importantly, in the future.⁸ Mechanisms for integration aim to ensure that governments understand the impact of policies in one sector on other sectors, enabling them to potentially address and mitigate negative impacts on future generations, including those not easily foreseen. The presence, but also the quality of these mechanisms – e.g. in terms of how participatory they are – could be scored through indicators.

4. Monitoring and reporting

The country has mechanisms in place to systematically monitor the effects of policies on future generations, and to report in ways that can inform resulting adaptive or corrective action. This supports the kinds of long-term and integrated policymaking envisioned above.

Monitoring that allows for effective evaluation and accountability is critical to governance. Using a future-focused lens has implications for the measurement agenda. First, these domains and their indicators set the scope of what should be measured. Second, in terms of data disaggregation that ‘leaves no-one behind’, this agenda demands a focus on disadvantage across generations as well as within them.

5. Representation for future generations and participation by children and youth

Representing future generations in current political processes is essential for safeguarding their rights and interests. However, future generations cannot participate directly in today’s political processes, making it crucial to involve children and youth as their closest proxies. Children and Youth share many of the same long-term interests and face similar threats, such as climate change, which positions them to represent future needs.

Respect, inclusion, and the right to be heard are fundamental to effective representation. By creating avenues for youth and children to meaningfully participate in governance, we not only protect their immediate interests but also uphold the rights of future generations. Integrating the voices of children and youth into the political landscape fosters a more inclusive, forward-looking approach that respects the needs of all generations and actively tackles the challenges they will

⁷ For example, Germany’s State Secretaries’ Committee for Sustainable Development is a governance instrument for cross-sectoral integration, helping to ensure sustainability considerations are embedded into decision-making across government departments (see [Germany’s Sustainable Development Strategy](#)): indicators in this domain would examine how far considerations of future generations were present in such institutions.

⁸ See, e.g., [Unleashing Policy Coherence to Achieve the SDGs \(OECD\)](#)

face. Excluding children and youth means losing a critical voice that can influence policies, hold leaders accountable, and advocate for a just society.⁹

6. Future generations-sensitive policy areas

This domain assesses the presence and delivery of policies that respect and fulfil the rights of future generations, and also that underpin the institutions addressed in other domains. Three elements are critical to this assessment:

- a. **Climate and environment:** Future generations' right to a clean, healthy and safe environment, and their exposure to long-term environmental threats, are reflected in assessment of efforts to preserve and restore ecosystems, limit global climate change, and address loss and damage.¹⁰
- b. **Debt and inequality:** Some long-term social problems burden generations long into the future. For example, long-term national debt and inequalities significantly impact future generations. In the global South, unresolved debt and persistent inequalities can leave future generations facing greater challenges and significantly reduced opportunities. These inequalities (both within and between societies) can, in turn, undermine equitable participation in governance.
- c. **Education:** Education is vital to equipping youth with the skills and knowledge to protect their own interests and those of future generations. By promoting understanding of governance processes and fostering long-term thinking, education empowers younger generations to advocate for sustainable and equitable policies.¹¹

No system of governance can claim to be future-generations sensitive without policies addressing areas that are critical to the wellbeing, rights and representation of future generations. Whilst domains 1-5 are focused on processes and institutions, domain 6 focuses on the policy areas that reflect fundamental rights of future generations and enable effective governance.

Conclusion and next steps

This paper has outlined the rationale for an evaluation framework for governance that respects and protects future generations, constructed around six domains. Each of these mutually supportive domains is vital to an evaluation of how well governance addresses the agenda arising from the Summit of the Future. This is not, it should be stressed, an unrealistic or utopian framework - many good practices exist in traditional and indigenous knowledge, and countries across the world are taking actions in all these domains right now.

⁹ The 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes children and youth as critical agents of change. See [A/Res/70/1](#)

¹⁰ [UN - The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#). South Africa's [Constitution](#) is an example of explicit protection of future generations' rights, particularly with respect to environmental sustainability (article 24).

¹¹ New Zealand's Child Impact Assessment Tool promotes future-focused education, equipping youth with the knowledge and skills to advocate for their own interests and those of future generations - [Child Impact Assessment Tool - Ministry of Social Development](#).

The next stage in the use of this evaluative approach is to develop the indicators and more detailed accounts of best practices in each of these domains through inclusive dialogue with states and stakeholders. Taking up the commitment to development of such an evaluative framework, and to the integration of this framework into state and global practice, would be a meaningful step in translating the principles of the Summit into practice.