

Future of Institutions

DIALOGUE SUMMARY

Title/topic:

How can new or renewed institutions enable intergenerationally fair transitions?

Organizers:

School of International Futures (SOIF)

Key takeaways:

The idea that responsible institutions and policymaking should meet the needs of the present without compromising the rights of future generations and future citizens — the intergenerational fairness (IGF) principle¹ — is rising on political agendas. As humanity addresses key climate and social transitions, the IGF principle can unify societies in navigating difficult decisions and trade-offs.

This Dialogue was convened to explore emerging practices, addressing the question, “What are the key elements of future institutions that are needed to support intergenerationally fair transitions, especially the environmental transition?” 16 individuals working in different contexts (i.e., policy practitioners, science-fiction writers, governance and technology innovators) and countries explored institutional solutions for holding decision-makers accountable for thinking about and acting on decisions in a way that is fair to future generations.

The challenge(s):

Decisions being made today will have distributional costs and benefits that play out over long timescales, with certain impact on future generations. Such decision-making requires an understanding of the impact of decisions and their distributional impacts over time (intergenerational assessment), an awareness of possible futures and what different generations and communities might want (intergenerational dialogues) and mechanisms to operationalise and institutionalize the principle (institutional accountability).

Insights for the Future of Institutions:

IGF is accelerating as an agenda. It appears that we may be at a watershed moment. Political leaders are starting to realize that our governance systems systematically under-represent future generations in conversations about navigating long-term transitions such as climate change. IGF has thus entered supranational agenda. The United Nations (UN) Secretary General’s *Our Common Agenda* has made a commitment to create a Special Envoy for Future Generations, whose role will be to review and assess policies and investments. The European Commission president also enshrined IGF as a central principle in the 2022 State of the Union: “Every action that our Union takes should be inspired by a simple principle. That we should do no harm to our children’s future. It is time to enshrine solidarity between generations in our Treaties.”

¹ The IGF principle is not new. It builds on decades of academic, philosophical, and practical work. American economist James Tobin put forward a theory of intergenerational justice in 1974. It was captured in the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report “Our Common Future.”

IGF is an issue that is likely to grow as countries navigate global and local shifts happening around demographics, the environment, representation in democracy, cycles of illegitimacy around investment and infrastructure. This is not just about youth or unborn generations, there is a focus on solidarity across all generations.

The IGF principle is an emerging, but very quickly changing area of governance and policy innovation. Mechanisms for embedding IGF into institutions (e.g., policy assessment, legislation, supreme audit) are emerging across national and local government. While there is significant experimentation, we are still in the early days of governments and organizations taking formal strategic action around IGF. For instance, a minority percentage of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries have mentioned IGF in their constitutions and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) strategies. 20 countries include IGF recent recovery plans.

Innovation is also happening in business. A recent poll shows that 25% of global CEOs see future generations (FGs) as key stakeholders, a number that has dramatically changed in the last few years. Companies and other organizations have experimented with approaches to support representation for future generations, for instance through shareholder or board representation, innovations around environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting for businesses or BRE mechanisms for governments.

Examples of mechanisms include:

- *The 2015 Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act*, which required public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions and established the FG Commissioner who is required to monitor and assess the extent to which well-being objectives are being met in legislation.
- *Other legislative and policy developments*, including the well-being budgeting beyond gross domestic product (GDP) in New Zealand, and President of the Portuguese Republic Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's steps to incorporate IGF assessment into their scrutiny process.
- *Commitments to establish Ministerial and Ombudsman for future generations*, including the UN Secretary General's commitment to a Special Envoy for Future Generations, and the European Union (EU) Ministers of the Future Network.
- *Young activists pursuing IGF in the judicial system across Europe and globally*, including an April 2021 German Constitutional Court case that tasks all German citizens and organisations with the duty to not constrain the freedoms of future generations.
- *Riversimple's future guardians approach* to ensure that the environment is represented through its governance structures.

Change cannot be a technocratic exercise but needs to be a democratic one. There was a strong sentiment in the Dialogue that bringing about "change cannot be a technocratic exercise, but a democratic one", requiring dialogue between decision-makers and the citizens and/or the people who will bear the future impacts. Intergenerational dialogues held at a national or community level will be necessary to help build solidarity and trust to unlock entrenched political views. There is a need for a shared long-term vision, or at least a reference point, framework, and shared language. This may be an existing framework such as the SDGs. In Wales, these were used and tailored through a collective vision-setting exercise to better represent national culture and views. SOIF's intergenerational framework sets out an approach to bring together participatory approaches, strategic foresight, and the IGF as part of a national or sub-national dialogue, that can then inform decision-making and assessment.

It is important that IGF dialogues are not at expense of current generations, particularly given

the potential risk of youth-washing. Dialogues need to support heterogeneity, no matter which communities are being considered. Other mechanisms exist that allow future generations to take part in democratic processes by proxy. For instance, deliberative democracy approaches that use statistical, representative random sampling, such as those being used by OECD.

Decision-makers need to be supported in decision-making and be held accountable. Institutions need to be able to assess and consider both current and future risks to make effective decisions. Formal mechanisms exist for considering the perspective(s) of future generations, and to better account for the varied perspectives of different generations who are alive today. However, there is a need to close the data gap on the long-term impact of most policies.

Existing tools that support assessment can be applied in different contexts. These tools encourage policymakers and decision-makers to consider current and future generations' needs when introducing or monitoring the impact of legislation, policy, budgetary or other decisions. At their most basic, they provide a practical check that longer-term considerations have been made about the impact on current and future generations. When supported by dialogue or other participatory approaches they can better represent their needs. SOIF's assessment approach developed with Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is one example that has been used for policy assessment in Portugal and in the UK (i.e., adapted version for the Parliament called Future Check). The OECD is also introducing new practices to enhance the elements of their current policymaking system.

Dialogue participants emphasized the existence of a significant amount of disaggregated data in areas and institutions. This data could be harnessed for assessments. There is a need for credible metrics for assessing how well institutions are doing from an IGF perspective. Some audit tools (e.g., Resolution Foundation) are currently being used.

Institutions matter, but we also need cultural change and to see this as a social movement. Cultural change and mindset shifts are incredibly important. There needs to be a culture and shared mindset that truly values IGF. Real power and authority must support this mindset.

From a societal perspective, there is the opportunity to build a burning platform. Civil society and behavioral institutions can create the burning platform needed to hold the political institutions accountable and to gain their support. This "outside-in" pressure is critical for driving accountability and change. Storytelling, metaphors, and emotional connection will be essential. There is also need and opportunity for awareness- and movement-building around the issue of IGF, and to re-think education and skills to include futures literacy.

From an organizational perspective, there needs to be support for cultural change. This includes ensuring that decision-makers and policymakers are futures-literate and can make decisions based on the intergenerational principle. For example, in Malaysia, future climate policy analysts are proactively trained, which yields positive impacts on their national strategic thinking. Engaging with those who are not yet convinced, or who disagree that we need to restructure current organisations to create future ready organizations, was mentioned several times.

From an institutional perspective, change requires an ecosystemic perspective that weaves institutions together to support accountability. There is a real yearning for network- or community-building, through which we can create the social movements needed to support intergenerationally fair transitions, especially the environmental transition. Various Dialogue participants expressed commitment to continue weaving a global network of IGF activists and advocates. These participants are open to continue this Dialogue with anyone interested in discussing the mental

model shifts that will drive IGF over the next two decades.

In the absence of institutional change, change can be supported by new technologies and institutional forms that decentralize authority. In the absence of a large-scale political appetite to respond to the challenges, civil society could become the ombudsman for change. Civil society can create governance examples and role-model organizations as a first step (e.g., a civil society “shadow ombudsman” instead of a formal government ombudsman)

Decentralised Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) were also highlighted as an innovation that is not waiting for permission to encode their values and rights in institutional structures. DAOs offer possibilities to create more collaboration across generations in existing institutions. There is the potential to create new forms of institutions altogether, which integrate IGF from the get-go. This is particularly important in political settings where there is not enough political will to drive a focus on IGF through formal government institutions.

7 practical next steps. The Dialogue generated a broad set of ideas for future institutions to operationalize the IGF principle. In the short-term, there are a practical set of actions supported by The Rockefeller Foundation which can be taken by institutions to help advance this agenda

- *Integrate approaches that can mitigate the risks of short political mandates* by embedding the IGF principle into policy, legislation, financing, taxation, audit planning and scrutiny.
- *Build the IGF principle into existing work streams or agendas* (e.g., Covid-recovery, better regulation, climate, or digital transitions).
- *Appoint an institutional champion for IGF.* Whether incorporated into a current institution or creating a new institution, one body should be appointed to assess, champion, and hold the rest of the institutions accountable as they integrate IGF into existing workstreams (e.g., policymaking process, legislation, finance, institutional auditing processes).
- *Invest in intergenerational dialogues informed by intergenerational assessment* to build solidarity, respect current and future generations, and provide scrutiny.
- *Communicate in a way that empowers all generations*, helping citizens to have a voice and engage meaningfully with both legislators and policymakers, to build IGF and futures-literacy while adopting advocacy approaches.
- *Explore alternative models of governance*, harnessing approaches that support civil society to drive accountability, or to create new institutions that embrace but decentralize authority around IGF.
- *Nurture and weave strong international and local network*, by investing in building a community and knowledge resource to support interested citizens, businesses, politicians, and civil societies. Dialogue participants eagerly exchanged contacts to continue this conversation, particularly to speak about lessons learned, best practices, and keeping one another accountable in future endeavours.

Participants:

- Moritz Adler, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- Paricha Duangtaweesub, Next Generation Foresight Practitioner
- Heather Grabbe, Open Society European Policy Institute
- Erika Gregory, NSquare Collaborative
- Sam Hilton, UK All Party Parliamentary Group
- Sophie Howe, The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales
- Arun Maira, HelpAge International
- Suzette Masters, BetterFutures project, Democracy Funders Network
- Agata Maysner, Generation Climate Europe

- Karthick Ramakrishnan, California 100 and UC
- Kim Stanley Robinson, Ministry of the Future
- Cat Tully, School of International Futures
- Darja Vrščaj, School of International Futures
- Klara Wyrzykowska, Our Common Agenda Team, UN Secretary General's office
- Layla Zaidane, Millennial Action Project