



Taking Future Generations into account in Voluntary National Reviews for the High Level Political Forum

The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations. We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible.

- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 53

Introduction

There is a moral imperative to ensure that future generations of humanity can live full and healthy lives, underpinned by the dignity and rights promised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, due to climate change, unsustainable resource exploitation and worsening global inequality, the window of opportunity to leave a safe and fair world to future generations is rapidly closing. Future generations are the only cohort discussed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that are not represented through any mechanism in the UN System. In order to consider their needs, we must look upon the decisions we take today through the eyes of future generations and allow our actions to be guided by the concept of intergenerational equity.

Intergenerational equity, understood as fairness between generations, is a universal concept across the world and across cultures. It is a principle that informs constitutions, international treaties, economies, religious beliefs, traditions and customs. Sustainable development is grounded in the concept of fairness between generations, meaning that the needs of present generations are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Within the UN System, the need to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations is well established and is recognised as a guiding principle in many fora including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), the Declaration of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (2012), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015).

In agreeing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, world leaders committed to implement the Agenda for the full benefit of all, for today's generation and for future generations. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which take place at the annual meetings of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Member states can use this opportunity to indicate how the actions being taken under the 2030 Agenda are addressing the needs of current generations while ensuring that future generations will be able to meet their needs. This briefing paper sets out how countries taking part in VNRs can report on efforts being undertaken at a national level to ensure the wellbeing of future generations. For information regarding the Global Guardians for Future Generations, a prospective initiative to give voice to future generations within the UN System, please see <https://www.mrfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Global-Guardians-A-Voice-for-Future-Generations-Position-Paper-2018.pdf>.

Applying an intergenerational lens when drafting Voluntary National Reviews

In the process of drafting a VNR, consider including references to intergenerational equity when discussing institutions, mechanisms, policies or other ongoing work that provides evidence of a national commitment to future generations. The list below contains some suggestions on how to reflect a concern for future generations in VNRs.

- **Constitutional references to future generations**

References to future generations exist in the constitutions of Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Belgium, Bhutan, Bolivia, Brazil, Burundi, Cuba, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Estonia, France, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Malawi, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia and, Ukraine. Costa Rica's constitutional abolition of the army and subsequent divestment of funds into environment, education and health represents a very strong commitment to future generations.

- **Institutions to facilitate long term policy making¹**

Institutions or committees established to focus on future generations or sustainable development demonstrate efforts to operationalise intergenerational equity. Examples of such institutions are the Ombudsman for Future Generations in Hungary; Committee for the Future in Finland; the Inter-ministerial Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria; the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development in Germany; the inter-ministerial committee on Sustainable Consumption and Production in Chile; the Commissioner for Future Generations in Wales; and Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development in Canada.

- **National policies for sustainable development²**

National sustainable development strategies or roadmaps which seek to balance the needs of present and future generations demonstrate an awareness of the importance of intergenerational equity. For example; Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan which is closely linked to the Climate Resilient Clean Economy Strategy; Australia's Indigenous Protected Areas Programme; Niger's 3N Initiative: 'Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens'; and Namibia's rights-based Marine Resources Act which has contributed to an ecologically and economically sustainable fishing industry, created jobs and fostered food security.

- **Economic strategies that incentivise long term decision making**

The interests of future generations can be incorporated into economic strategies by government or the private sector. For example the Canadian Province of British Columbia's Carbon Tax reduces carbon emissions in a way that avoids putting the cost on low income families now and reduces the impacts of climate change on future generations; the divestment of state funds from fossil fuels in Ireland indicates a commitment to protect the environment for future generations; the successful reform of fossil fuel subsidies in Ghana, Kenya and Namibia, with resources redistributed to prevent negative effects on poor communities, demonstrates a commitment to balancing the needs of current and future generations.

¹ For further information on institutions for future generations, please visit www.futureroundtable.org (Accessed: 24/01/2018)

² For more examples of policies and strategies that help to balance the needs of present and future generations, please visit www.futurepolicy.org (Accessed: 24/01/2018)

- **Legislation that protects the wellbeing of future generations³**

Many countries have already developed legislation based on long term thinking that catalyses action to protect future generations. Examples include legislating efficiency efforts to reduce the financial burden on households while reducing emissions to protect the global climate (Andorra's Law N. 21 on energy efficiency in buildings and to promote the use of renewable energies; Greece's Law 3851/2010 on accelerating the development of renewable energy sources to address climate change), efforts to safeguard the environment through legislative acts (Bhutan's National Environment Protection Act (NEPA) 2007; Albania's Law no. 91/2013, "On Strategic Environmental Assessment"), legislation to enhance education on sustainability (El Salvador's Amendment to General Education Law (Legislative Decree No.714). Of particular note, the EU Directive 2014/95/EU, requires certain large companies to disclose information on policies, risks and outcomes as regards environmental matters, human rights and other social measures. This will help to ensure the private sector play their role in safeguarding the needs of present and future generations.

- **Funding research to inform long term decision making**

Government funded research on sustainable development lays the foundation for developing policies and programmes that balance the needs of present and future generations. Research hubs like the African Climate Policy Centre - a joint initiative of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union Commission, and the African Development Bank - and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network – operating under the auspices of the UN Secretary General – help to build the knowledge base for sustainable development and inform long term policy making.

There are a number of opportunities within the voluntary common reporting guidelines where referencing examples like those listed above will demonstrate a commitment to balancing the needs of present and future generations. This include sections: 1. Opening Statement; 2. Summary; 3. Introduction; 5. Policy and Enabling Environment and 9. Conclusion. A further opportunity for promoting a discussion on intergenerational equity during the VNR process arises during the questions to presenting member states. Member states could pose questions to reporting countries to learn from their experience balancing the needs of present and future generations in sustainable development policy and action.

By reporting or raising questions during the VNR process on how ongoing work in pursuit of sustainable development can benefit future generations, reporting countries can help to share important insights into long term policy making and help to deliver on the commitment in the 2030 Agenda– to “implement the Agenda for the full benefit of all, for today's generation and for future generations”.

³ The London School of Economics' Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment maintains a useful reference database of policies and legislation relating to environmental sustainability. It can be found at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/climate-change-laws-of-the-world/> (Accessed: 24/01/2018)