

Governing for the End of the Month or the End of the World?

Leverage Points to Overcome Governance Myopia

Discussion Paper

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Context

In 2024, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Olivier de Schutter, published a landmark report, *Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth*,¹ in which he critically reassesses the dominant assumption that economic growth (through Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expansion) is the primary pathway to poverty reduction. Rather than assuming that growth will eventually “lift all boats”, the report confronts the systemic and structural drivers of poverty: the growth paradigm itself. He argues that growth-led models are insufficient to tackle the multidimensional roots of poverty, unfairly distribute wealth and endanger our environmental ecosystem. To truly tackle poverty eradication, the Special Rapporteur proposes an unorthodox yet increasingly necessary approach to poverty eradication, through a structural transformation of economic and governance systems towards a human rights-based economy, with redistribution, universal basic services, social protection and ecological sustainability.

After the publication of his report, de Schutter launched a Roadmap for the Eradication of Poverty Beyond Growth; co-constructed with multiple experts, governments, United Nations agencies, trade unions and grassroots movements. The policies proposed are organized in five main pillars: (1) transforming economic systems, (2) labour, care and economic democracy, (3) universal basic services and social protection, (4) ecological justice, and (5) transforming the international economic order, with an overarching pillar on governance. This Discussion Paper outlines governance pathways, models and policy proposals for shaping the Roadmap’s pillar on governance for a just transition towards post-growth strategies to eradicate poverty.

Introduction

“Liberal democracies struggle to reconcile short-term political incentives with the long-term investments required to address slow-burning, intergenerational problems. This temporal governance gap means that urgent long-term challenges are too often deferred in favour of immediate pressures.” – Jonathan Boston.

Contemporary governance systems are structurally biased toward short-term decision-making, driven by electoral cycles, budgetary constraints and crisis management. Christian Gollier’s provocative framing, the dilemma between “the end of the month” and “the end of the world,”² aptly captures the heart of the contemporary governance challenge: policymakers must arbitrate between urgent challenges, such as rising poverty and disaster crisis response, and long-term strategies required in the Anthropocene, an era characterized by volatility, uncertainty and accelerating systemic risks. The scale of investment required to confront rising systemic threats such as climate instability, demographic pressures and social fragmentation has never been greater, yet public institutions are operating with under pressure fiscal spaces and eroding institutional capacity, trapping them in short-term responses. This locks policymakers in a “tragedy of the horizon”³, where long-term risks fall outside political and institutional mandates. In this context, growth is often seen as the condition for policy action and investment. But in practice,

¹ A/HRC/56/61.

² Christian Gollier, *Entre fin de mois et fin du monde: Économie de nos responsabilités envers l’humanité* (Paris, Fayard/Collège de France, 2022).

³ Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, “Breaking the Tragedy of the Horizon: Climate Change and Financial Stability”, speech at Lloyd’s of London, London, 29 September 2015.

growth does not reliably deliver the resources or stability needed over time. Instead, it can lock governments into short-term, resource and extraction-intensive choices that weaken their ability to invest in long-term resilience and poverty reduction.

This mindset has profound consequences for poverty eradication. Evidence shows that poverty is not only deepening but becoming increasingly multigenerational, as inequalities in income, education and opportunity reduce social mobility and entrench disadvantage over time. Even in middle- and high-income countries, where redistributive policies and social protection systems have a longer history, recent evidence shows rising inequality and decreasing social mobility. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report *To Have and Have Not*⁴ highlights how these dynamics create “stickier floors” and “stickier ceilings”, limiting upward mobility and reinforcing inheritance. Systemic shocks further expose these structural weaknesses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most vulnerable were disproportionately affected, while wealth continued to concentrate at the top, revealing both the fragility of existing systems and the shortcomings of post-market redistribution⁵.

Combined with demographic, environmental and economic pressures, this points to a trajectory in which poverty becomes more persistent and transmits across generations if not addressed through structural policies that de-center growth and prioritize long-term well-being outcomes. These patterns are closely tied to a growth-focused model that prioritizes aggregate expansion over distribution and resilience. The result is a widening gap between rising collective needs and constrained public resources in a growth-dependent model, increasing the risk that poverty today becomes locked in across generations in a context of more frequent systemic shocks.

Addressing this will require a shift in the structures, incentives and governance models that tie social progress to growth-dependent priorities. Moving beyond growth-centred approaches means shifting the deeper logic of governance itself. It demands that we change not only what policies are adopted, but how policymakers and citizens design, implement and account for them. It requires realigning with a critical duty in international law: ensuring policies are not only equitable across social groups and jurisdictions, but also to future people and planet. It requires reorienting policymaking toward long-term resilience, distributional outcomes and intergenerational justice, in line with the obligation to ensure that present decisions do not undermine the rights and opportunities of future generations.

The following set of proposals written by UNU-CPR are designed to shape the governance pillar. These proposals will not address those related to participation, inclusion and transparency in a direct way. This brief will instead complete those related to anticipatory governance. It proposes ways to overcome governance myopia by applying a simplified version of Donella Meadows’ leverage points framework.⁶ It argues for structural and systemic governance changes that incentivize policymakers to integrate long-term implications upfront and directly into policy design. This involves strengthening democratic planning capacities and early warning systems, establishing institutional guardians for future generations, integrating foresight and futures thinking into policymaking, and reconfiguring fiscal governance to prioritize intergenerational investment. These proposals aim to provide a solid foundation for post-growth strategies by embedding systemic levers that prioritize sustainability, well-being and equity over short-term economic expansion. At the heart of these proposals lie the core principles and actions identified in the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations adopted in September 2024.

Donella Meadows’ work offers one of the most powerful critiques to growth-dependent governance. In *Limits to Growth*⁷, and later in her work as a systems scientist, she demonstrates that social and ecological systems governed by short-term incentives inevitably overshoot their limits, generating instability, inequality and crises that compound over time. For Meadows, operating

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *To Have and Have Not: How to Bridge the Gap in Opportunities* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2025).

⁵ Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman (eds.), *World Inequality Report 2022* (Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2022).

⁶ Donella H. Meadows, *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system* (The Sustainability Institute/Donella Meadows Project, 1999).

⁷ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth* (New York, Universe Books, 1972).

change depends on acting at different layers of a system. She identified twelve leverage points to intervene in complex systems, ranging from deep transformations in mindsets and paradigms to shallow, technical adjustments. For policy purposes, this brief simplifies these points into four actionable categories that align with the governance challenge of eradicating poverty beyond growth with a long-term perspective. Each simplified leverage point will be addressed in one part of the brief, ranging from deepest to most technical, as follows:

(1) Intent: The deepest lever which represents the values, paradigms and normative goals that define what the system is aimed towards. Shifting intent involves rethinking dominant paradigms such as “growthism” and replacing them with intergenerational justice, well-being and ecological resilience.

(2) Design: Covers the institutional architecture of a system – the rules, procedures, laws, information flows and organizational structures. Changing system design involves promoting policies that simultaneously address present inequalities and future risks.

(3) Feedback: Refers to the mechanisms through which a system monitors itself, learns and reacts. This includes information flows, the delays between action and effect, and the loops that either stabilize the system (negative feedback) or amplify trends (positive feedback). When feedback functions well, governments can anticipate risks, correct course early and avoid shocks spilling over into long-term harm.

(4) Parameters: The most immediate and concrete levers in a system – tax levels, subsidies, benefits, budget allocations and other measurable settings that influence day-to-day outcomes. Parameter changes include strengthening safety nets or adjusting incentives, but they rarely change how the system behaves in the long run.

Table 1: Simplification of Meadows’ Leverage Points

	Meadows’ Leverage Points	Simplified Leverage Points
12	Constants, parameters, numbers	Parameters: Immediate and concrete levers that influence day-to-day outcomes
11	The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks	
10	The structure of material stocks and flows	
9	The lengths of delays	Feedbacks: Interactions between elements in the system
8	The strength of negative feedback loops	
7	The gain around driving positive feedback loops	
6	The structure of information flows	Design: Institutional architecture of the system.
5	The rules of the system	
4	The power to add, change, evolve or self-organize system structure	
3	The goals of the system	Intent: Underpinning values and goals that shape the system
2	The mindset or paradigm out of which the system arises	
1	The power to transcend paradigms	

I. Intent: Ground Governance in Long-term Well-being and Intergenerational Justice

Governing in the Anthropocene requires a fundamental shift in the way societies define progress and set priorities. When environmental, demographic and technological challenges unfold over decades, policies geared only toward periodic indicators cannot offer resilience or fairness. The eradication of poverty, understood not simply as an income threshold but as a multidimensional condition transmitted across generations, requires institutions to adopt long-term goals and to align institutions, incentives and social expectations around the pursuit of human and planetary well-being. This is the deepest leverage point in systems thinking: addressing the intent of governance. This section provides a review of principles and disciplines to shift intent towards intergenerational justice.

Intergenerational Justice as a Guiding Paradigm

Political philosophers define intergenerational justice as the responsibility of present generations towards future generations. This notion first arised in the 1970s/1980s, prompted by environmental and technological concerns that present consumption and production might leave future generations worse off. It shifts the moral lens of policymaking, stating that decisions must not only be judged by their immediate effects, but also by how they shape life prospects for at least one generation after – defined by most academics as generations born at least 25 years from now. Adopting intergenerational justice as a mainstream paradigm requires challenging deeply embedded assumptions that currently dominate policy thinking in liberal democracies, specifically related to social issues. It is also at the core of post-growth-centric economic models, such as the well-being economy.

One example of how intergenerational justice could shift growth-focused strategies is the focus on individual short-term outcomes. Central to liberal democracies' idea of freedom lies the myth of meritocracy, which holds that individuals' outcomes derive primarily from their effort and personal responsibility. Rewarding present efforts with personal outcomes gives legitimacy to policies that maximize the use of resources for short-term benefits, extracting ecological and social capital, under the assumption that future generations will ultimately benefit. In practice, social scientists have demonstrated how structural barriers, inherited disadvantages and the cumulative effects of inequality passed from one generation to the next determine social trajectories. As quoted previously, the OECD report *To Have and Have Not*⁸ also shows how this framing leads to concentration of wealth for those who have inherited capital. Anchoring intergenerational justice provides a normative framing for tackling inequalities in the present and beyond, which requires accounting for how these policies shape life prospects several generations after. This moral principle has been translated in international law as intergenerational equity, thanks notably to the legacy of the Brundtland Report.⁹ Its legal implications at the national and international level and its derivative principles such as the principles of prevention, precautionary principle, non-regression, conversation of options and sustainable use of resources will be developed later in part II of this report, with a specific focus on governance design.

While intergenerational justice provides a moral principle, intergenerational solidarity offers an analytical tool beyond moral obligations that accounts for social norms and practices. This aligns with Indigenous communities' principles, such as the Haudenosaunee Seventh Generation Principle and Kaitiakitanga in Maori, emphasizing a culture of guardianship on nature and intergenerational responsibility. Marianne Takle describes intergenerational solidarity as the mutual recognition of dependency and responsibility between generations past, present and future.¹⁰ Solidarity can be enacted through concrete mechanisms, such

⁸ OECD, *To Have and Have Not – How to Bridge the Gap in Opportunities* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2025). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/dec143ad-en>.

⁹ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Marianne Takle, *Showing Social Solidarity with Future Generations* (London, Routledge, 2024).

as pension arrangements that balance demographic realities fairly, sustainable resource management that does not deplete future options, and participatory processes that bring younger voices into policymaking. This aligns with the broader literature on long-term governance, which stresses the need to embed future-oriented responsibility in institutional innovation, participatory foresight and temporal checks and balances.¹¹ Solidarity emerges when societies understand themselves as extended communities in time, where present well-being depends on the stewardship of past generations and the care we show for those who will come after us. Anchoring intergenerational solidarity requires redefining fairness in ways that include responsibility for future living conditions, as well as the recognition that preventing today's inequalities from becoming tomorrow's structural traps is in itself an act of intergenerational care.

Futures Literacy for Behavioural Change

If intergenerational justice frames collective and individual responsibilities towards future generations, implementing this principle requires imagining and interacting with different possible futures, defining what is desirable and less desirable. Futures thinking refers to the set of methods and practices that help people explore multiple possible futures, understand how change happens, and reflect on the assumptions shaping today's decisions.

Sohail Inayatullah, a leading futures thinking scholar, argues that looking at multiple possible futures helps people challenge the habitual stories that keep systems locked in short-term patterns.¹² His Six Pillars framework demonstrates how scenario building, causal layered analysis, and visioning processes help reveal deep cultural stories, surfacing the myths and metaphors underpinning current policy paradigms. Research shows that this shift in imagination can lead to concrete behavioural change. When decision-makers are exposed to long-term scenarios, they identify temporal trade-offs more accurately, become more willing to question short-term incentives, more open to structural reforms and more likely to prioritize resilience over immediate gains.¹³ This fundamental competence and mindset change is captured in the concept of futures literacy, defined as the capability to understand how and why future is used to prepare, plan and interact with complex systems. To spread this core competence, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has developed over 34 Futures Literacy Chairs since 2014 across the world. These Chairs encourage the use of futures methods and provide a space to experiment with uncertainty. Ultimately, this core competence builds long-term thinking in the day-to-day practice of policymakers and citizens and strengthens the cultural foundation for long-term governance. Part II will provide examples of the institutional practice of foresight methods.

II. Design: Institutionalize Long-term Governance

Changing system design involves creating mechanisms for long-term oversight and revising/leveraging constitutional and legal frameworks for future generations, to ensure that policies do not create structural poverty traps for future generations. This section examines legal and institutional mechanisms designed to extend time horizons in policymaking in line with a human-rights based economy. It draws on practical examples to identify the conditions for their effectiveness and their limitations.

¹¹ Iñigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries (eds.), *Institutions for Future Generations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹² Sohail Inayatullah, "Six pillars: Futures thinking for transforming", *Foresight*, vol. 10, No. 1 (2008), pp. 4–21. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1108/14636680810855991>.

¹³ Lauren Rickards, John Wiseman, Tim Edwards and Colleen Biggs, "Learning from the Future: Using Anticipatory Governance to Develop Resilient Strategies", *Public Administration Review*, vol. 74, No. 5 (2014), pp. 647–659; Martin Rhisiart, Riel Miller and Simon Brooks, "Learning to use the future: Developing foresight capabilities through scenario processes", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, vol. 101 (2015), pp. 124–133. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2014.10.015>.

Develop and Implement Legal Frameworks Coherent with Intergenerational Equity

International law

Multilateral treaties and human rights conventions increasingly recognize obligations toward future generations. Since the 1970s, the principle of intergenerational equity has emerged at the intersection of environmental, human rights and sustainable development law, responding to concerns that present patterns of consumption and resource use undermine the life prospects of those not yet born. It has three core components:

- (1) Conservation of options:** Each generation must preserve a diversity of natural and cultural resources so that future generations retain meaningful choices about how to use the Earth.
- (2) Conservation of quality:** Each generation must maintain the environmental quality of the planet so that it is passed on in a condition no worse than the one it inherited.
- (3) Conservation of access:** Each generation must ensure equitable access to the Earth's resources and benefits, so that future generations are not unfairly excluded from their use and enjoyment.¹⁴

This principle now informs binding commitments governing global commons, such as the Paris Agreement (2015) and the High Seas Treaty on Marine Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (2023).

Recent jurisprudence strengthens these obligations. The International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on Climate Change (2024) reaffirms States' duties of cooperation, prevention and precaution. The Maastricht Principles on Human Rights of Future Generations (2023) offer a comprehensive interpretation of how international human rights law applies to future persons. The General Comment 27 on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also supports the recognition of obligations towards future generations. As a result, national courts increasingly rely on international jurisprudence to hold governments accountable for long-term harms, using customary international law principles and rules related to intergenerational equity such as:

Sustainable use of resources (Convention on Biological Diversity): States must ensure that natural resources are used at a rate and in a manner that does not exceed regeneration capacity, or does not irreversibly deplete non-renewables to maintain its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

Precautionary principle (Rio Declaration 1995, Principle 15): States have a due diligence obligation to prevent serious or irreversible environmental damage when there is foreseeable risk, including harm that will affect future generations, and lack of scientific certainty cannot constitute a reason to postpone preventive measures.

No significant harm principle (Stockholm Declaration, Principle 2): States must prevent, reduce and control the risk of activities within their jurisdiction to cause significant harm beyond borders of space and borders of time.

The non-regression principle: States must not take deliberate steps that reduce the existing level of human rights protection unless such measures are strictly justified, temporary and proportionate in response to exceptional circumstances. Environmental treaties and human rights interpretation increasingly imply that States should not weaken existing protection standards where this would undermine long-term environmental integrity.

¹⁴ Edith Brown Weiss, *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony, and Intergenerational Equity* (Tokyo, United Nations University, 1989).

Progressive realization of human rights (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights): States must take deliberate, concrete and targeted steps to achieve full realization of economic, social and cultural rights over time, rather than being required to fulfil them immediately.

Constitutional provisions

National constitutions provide a sustainable mechanism to anchor intergenerational equity. Recent research shows that over 41 per cent of national constitutions now include explicit provisions addressing future generations.¹⁵ According to UNU-CPR's current available data,¹⁶ a large majority of these provisions are related to environmental protection and natural resource management, while a smaller part addresses management of public debt and fiscal responsibility. For example, Bhutan's Article 14 requires public debt to "not place an undue burden on future generations".

As a result, national courts increasingly integrate intergenerational equity in their rulings. In 2024, South Korea's Constitutional Court found that a provision of the country's Framework Act on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth violated the constitutional rights of future generations and failed to meet the State's duty to "elevate the quality of life of all citizens and posterity". Similar cases in Germany (Neubauer et al v. ENI), Hungary (through the constitutional courts' amendment of the Climate Protection Act), and Colombia (Demanda Generaciones Futuras v. Minambiente) highlight how constitutional clauses can serve as legal guardrails supporting long-term obligations.

Overall, countries that have integrated intergenerational equity into their constitution have established a durable legal basis for accountability.¹⁷ However, engaging in constitutional reform (for countries that adopt such a legal structure) has proven challenging and could even be risky. One persistent difficulty is the need for bipartisan consensus: long-term provisions are most effective when they are broadly shared across political parties and social groups. The case of Italy's constitutional reform in 2022 demonstrates the power of bipartisanship, with two-thirds of the Chamber of Deputies approving a reform for the first time since 1948. In the current context of erosion of human rights, critics warn about "opening a Pandora box" that might render any tentative constitution modification counter-productive. Finally, embedding intergenerational equity in constitutions, while important, can remain symbolic without strong institutional reform and robust monitoring.

Italy's Pathway to Embedding Intergenerational Equity

The most recent example of including intergenerational equity in a constitution can be found in Italy, where two-thirds of the Chamber of Deputies approved a constitutional reform in 2022 for the first time since 1948. The main purpose was to introduce into the constitution explicit language on environmental and intergenerational equity. Following the constitutional reform, Greenpeace Italy filed suit in the Civil Court of Rome against the energy company, ENI, and its public shareholding entities. It also prompted Italy's Parliament to adopt a law in October 2025 rendering Generational Impact Assessments mandatory as a preventive measure for any government normative acts with potential effects on socio-economic conditions, public debt burdens, future generations and the environment.

National Law

Beyond constitutional provisions, a growing number of laws and bills at the national and subnational level addressing the well-being for future generations are being adopted or pushed in parliaments. These laws require public institutions to assess long-term impacts, enforce intergenerational equity and balance social, environmental and economic objectives, which supports a

¹⁵ Ricardo Araujo and Laurent Koessler, "The Rise of the Constitutional Protection of Future Generations", LPP Working Paper No. 7–2021 (Institute for AI Policy and Strategy and RV Institute of Technology and Management, 2021).

¹⁶ See the UNU-CPR Future Generations Platform: futuregenerations.online.

¹⁷ Iñigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries, *Institutions for Future Generations*.

defocus on growth as a primary policy objective. In Australia, Ireland, Uruguay, Scotland, the Balearic Islands and Maharashtra India parliaments work to create accountability mechanisms on well-being for present and future generations.¹⁸ Although diverse in design, these laws share key objectives: long-term and participatory planning, cross-sector coordination, strategic foresight and explicit consideration of future generations in public decision-making. The Government of Wales Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) is one of the most advanced long-term governance frameworks globally, mandating that all public bodies assess the sustainability and equity impacts of their policies, including effects on poverty and inequality.

These emerging well-being frameworks enable governments to integrate multidimensional poverty indicators, environmental protection and social equity into planning, budgeting and reporting. They also enhance transparency and civic participation, as policymakers must justify how their actions contribute to intergenerational fairness. This also provides civil society with stronger tools to hold governments to account. However, the ambition of such laws renders implementation challenging when not supported by a dedicated body. Well-being frameworks depend heavily on data availability, measurement practices and cross-sector coordination, which proves challenging without a durable institutional structure. Scholars warn that such laws risk becoming symbolic or technocratic if they lack strong oversight bodies, independent evaluation and meaningful participation, especially from groups disproportionately affected by long-term risks, including children, low-income communities and Indigenous peoples.¹⁹ Finally, Boston (2017) highlights that these new mechanisms require stable bipartisan support and sustained investment to endure electoral cycles, otherwise they are subject to political volatility.

Create Dedicated Oversight and Implementation Bodies

Implementing the legal commitments outlined in Part II.A requires institutions that can translate long-term principles into everyday practice. This section examines two institutional approaches that have emerged in response to political short-sightedness: independent commissions and ombudspersons for future generations, and parliamentary committees for the future. Independent Commissions, Centres or Ombudspersons for Future Generations

Independent bodies play a critical role as guardians of long-term governance. Unlike ministries tied to electoral cycles, these institutions are designed to provide evidence-based advice to ensure that long-term risks are not sidelined by short-term political incentives. Such structures emerged to bridge the absence of future generations in decision-making that may affect them. Forms may vary, from commissions to independent ombudspersons, but their primary role is to support policymakers in integrating non-existing constituents, future generations, in policy design. However, with the exception of Hungary, they generally do not hold decision-making power.

The European Union Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness: A Beacon of Hope

In 2024, the European Union (EU) appointed a Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sports, after a long campaign led by civil society groups. This Commissioner published a Strategy in March 2026, which was designed through a participative process with policymakers, civil society organizations and citizens across the region and beyond. This groundbreaking regional experience might be an avenue for targeted actions to implement the Special Rapporteur's Strategy, specifically in areas such as participative democracy.

One of the most cited models is Wales' Future Generations Commissioner, as it combines research, advocacy and advisory roles. Established under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), the Commissioner's mandate oversees the performance of public bodies, provides advice on long-term impacts and reports publicly on progress. After 10 years of operation, the

¹⁸ Find more examples on the UNU-CPR Future Generations Platform: futuregenerations.online.

¹⁹ Mihnea Tanasescu, *Environment, political representation and the challenge of rights for future generations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Commissioner has successfully socialized government representatives to the well-being goals, including in audit, monitoring and evaluation policies. However, the 2025 report notes that functions such as workforce planning, asset management and financial planning are still running behind on implementation. This type of independent structure requires a tremendous policy and advocacy effort to put in place, and many remain inactive, underfunded or symbolic.²⁰ For example, Tunisia's 2019 organic law creating a Commission for Sustainable Development and Rights of Future Generations remains largely unimplemented due to political deprioritization.

To overcome this structural challenge, governments adopt lighter structures to inform and advise on future impacts using strategic foresight. In Singapore, the Centre for Strategic Futures operates within the Prime Minister's Office since 2009 to scan emerging risks and produce future scenarios that inform national planning. While not a Commission in a legal sense, the Centre's independence from line ministries and its systematic engagement with foresight methods has created space for a whole-of-government foresight ecosystem and built capabilities in public service. These foresight and future centres/offices are spreading across governments, including in Peru (2008), Canada (2010), Spain (2020), the Balearic Islands (2024), Colombia (2021), Portugal (2021) and Iceland (2021).

Overall, these flexible and think tank-like structures elevate long-term and cross-sector concerns, translate expert knowledge into policy debates, and provide public reporting that strengthens accountability. They often bring qualitative materials drawing on expert input, public consultation and foresight methods to make visible the future implications of current decisions. But their advisory role can also be a limitation, as they might face variable political support, and uncertain funding for structures perceived as nice-to-have. The most successful bodies are embedded in broader governance ecosystems linking their work to budgetary oversight, regulatory review (for example, audit) and strategic planning cycles.

Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development within the Office of General Auditor provides an example of embedded practice. The Commissioner provides parliamentarians with independent analysis and recommendations of government efforts to foster sustainable development since 1995. In its latest report *Lessons learned from Canada's record on sustainable development*, the Commissioner states that "Government planning cycles favour short-term thinking at the expense of long-term planning." It further recommends: "[T]he federal government needs to enhance the consideration of the needs of both present and future generations," and challenges parliamentarians to consider how the Federal Government can "ensure that the interests of future generations are included in decision making?".

From Executive Order to Multi-stakeholder Implementation

In 2021, the State of Washington adopted one of the most comprehensive examples of well-being and participative policies targeting poverty through a statutory and executive pathway. The 2021 Executive Order on Reducing Intergenerational Poverty directs the state's action toward creating equitable social, economic and environmental conditions that support the well-being of both current and future Washingtonians. The Order is implemented through a ten-year plan co-created with communities most affected by poverty, and supported by an Intergenerational Poverty Group. Delivery is coordinated by the Washington Economic Justice Alliance, a multi-stakeholder platform committed to ensuring equitable well-being "for the next seven generations". The Alliance has collectively advanced more than 275 policy, programme and funding actions, contributing to a recorded decline in poverty rates in 2024.

Parliamentary Committees for the Future

Where independent commissions offer external advice and support, parliamentary committees for the future embed long-term thinking directly within the legislative branch. Over the past three decades, a growing number of parliaments have recognized

²⁰ Find more examples on the UNU-CPR Future Generations Platform: futuregenerations.online.

that traditional committee structures, designed to address immediate sectoral needs, are poorly equipped to assess long-term risks or consider intergenerational implications. This has led to the emergence of parliamentary committees for the future: specialized bodies tasked with integrating foresight and anticipatory governance into legislative processes.

The most established example remains Finland's Committee for the Future, created in 1993 during a severe economic recession to evaluate the Government's first Report on the Future. Its early success in linking foresight with legislative scrutiny led to its institutionalization as a permanent committee in 2000. Scholars widely frame it as the global benchmark for legislative foresight, illustrating how parliaments can cultivate anticipatory capacity in the face of accelerating systemic change.²¹ Following Finland's leadership, at least 15 committees or foresight bodies have been created across Latin America, Europe and Asia. These include Scotland's Futures Forum (2005), Chile's Senate Committee on Future Challenges (2012), Brazil's Senate Futures Commission (2013), the Iceland Committee for the Future (2018), the Philippines Senate Committee on Sustainable Development and Future Thinking (2019), South Korea's Parliamentary Foresight Commission (2020) and Lithuania's Futures Commission (2020).

Some early initiatives, such as Israel's Commission for Future Generations (2001) or Mexico's Futures Comisión (2004) did not endure for political reasons, but the recent emergence of new bodies in Uruguay (2021), Paraguay (2022) and Kenya (2024), in addition to parliament groups on future generations in Australia and the UK points to a recognition that legislatures need permanent structures capable of confronting long-term risks.

These committees differ from standard parliamentary bodies by focusing on emerging trends and intergenerational implications rather than immediate policy demands. In Chile, the Senate Committee for the Future has introduced debates on neurolaw and cognitive rights, topics that sit outside traditional committee mandates but are essential for long-term human rights protections. As Hale²² and González-Ricoy and Gosseries²³ argue, such institutions help close the "temporal governance gap" by strengthening the capacity of elected bodies to act before crises materialize rather than after harm has occurred.

Opportunity for Dissemination: World Summit of Committees for the Future

Since 2022, the World Summit of Committees for the Future has convened parliamentary foresight bodies from around the world, starting in Finland and later hosted in Uruguay (2023) and Chile (2025). More than 70 parliamentarians have participated, debating shared long-term challenges such as artificial intelligence governance, ocean degradation and social inequity. These summits have produced common motions calling for stronger anticipatory governance capacities, periodic long-term reporting and alignment with global frameworks such as the United Nations Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact.

While promising, these institutions remain vulnerable. Their strengths lie in creating formal legislative spaces for long-term thinking spaces that cannot be crowded out by the urgency of daily politics. They also play a bridging role in translating scientific knowledge into legislative debates before risks become crises. But without strong cross-party support, they risk dissolution, as seen in Mexico, or marginalization within parliament for political reasons, like in Israel. Despite these challenges, parliamentary committees for the future mark a significant evolution in democratic governance. In the context of poverty eradication and post-growth transitions, they represent an institutional mechanism to expand the political time horizon and put beyond growth legislation at the heart of the national agenda.

²¹ Paula O. Aceituno, "Parliamentary committees for the future: A legislative movement to overcome political myopia", UNU-CPR, 9 July 2025. Available at <https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/parliamentary-committees-future-legislative-movement-overcome-political-myopia>.

²² Thomas Hale, *Long problems: Climate change and the challenge of governing across time* (Princeton University Press, 2024). Available at <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691238128/long-problems>.

²³ Iñigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries, *Institutions for Future Generations*.

Legal and institutional innovations demonstrate the increase of intergenerational considerations in policymaking. The strongest outcomes are the result of the combined effect of normative and legal foundation and sustained institutional structures. But their effectiveness depends on the political systems in which they operate. Long-term governance mechanisms interact with fiscal constraints and electoral incentives in complex ways. Understanding these feedbacks is essential to assess how long-term mechanisms can support post-growth transition.

III. Feedbacks: Build Adaptive and Preventive Systems

As numerous scholars emphasize,²⁴ long-term governance lacks implementation not only because institutional settings are absent, but also because governments lack the feedback capacity needed to recognize emerging risks, respond early and adjust policies over time. Political systems often fall into path dependence: once a policy trajectory is set, short-term incentives, information delays and administrative inertia reinforce it, even when it produces long-term harm. To avoid such lock-in, governance systems require adaptive and preventive mechanisms. This is especially vital for poverty eradication beyond growth, as low-income groups are the first affected by crises and the last to recover.

Feedback mechanisms function as the “nervous system” of long-term governance: they gather information, detect early signals and enable course correction. This section explores two core components of such a system: integration of beyond GDP metrics into policymaking and strategies for risk management, resilience and preparedness.

Strategic Alliances to Move Beyond GDP

Simon Kuznets, one of the instigators of GDP himself, noted in 1934 that: “The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income.” The political momentum on Beyond GDP has increased since the 2008 financial crisis, prompting several governments to adopt metrics capturing well-being, equity and sustainability. Apart from well-known examples such as Bhutan, countries such as Costa Rica, Finland and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) now integrate social equity, environmental perseverance and well-being at the individual and community level in national metrics. They illustrate that alternative progress indicators can shape policy, but only when certain structural conditions are in place.

Studies show that such frameworks only influence economic policy when supported by cross-partisan alliances and high-level political leadership. When this commitment fades, such as in the UK after 2016, progress on implementing such frameworks loses visibility. They also tend to endure more when they are perceived as meaningful and legitimate. Tremmel et al.²⁵ show that a narrative on justice and long-term benefits helps overcome short-term political resistance, as the case of Wales demonstrates. When integrated in systems of national accounts, budget processes and regulatory assessments, they have potential to move away from incentives towards narrow economic performance.

They prove challenging to put in place, however, as they require robust statistical infrastructure. Research from OECD, the United Nations Development Programme and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean shows that countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia that lack data coordination often struggle to make these frameworks operational. This data gap might justify why some of the frameworks remain outcome rather than input focused. Monitoring institutional inputs such as

²⁴ See for example Jonathan Boston, *Governing for the future: Designing democratic institutions for a better tomorrow*; Thomas Hale, *Long problems: Climate change and the challenge of governing across time*.

²⁵ Joerg Chet Tremmel, *Handbook of Intergenerational Justice* (Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006).

public spending, infrastructure availability and incentive programmes is essential for understanding why outcomes improve or deteriorate.

The Interim Report of the High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP

Following adoption of the Pact for the Future, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP to work on a comprehensive set of metrics addressing limitations of GDP. In November, at the World Summit for Social Development, the Group published an interim report outlining the direction of its work toward the final framework to be presented in May 2026. This initial report proposes adjustments to GDP that account for inequality and negative externalities, and it sets out a complementary well-being framework designed to emphasize outcomes in equity, inclusion and sustainability rather than economic outputs alone. The framework articulates an interesting response to a difficult dilemma: should we move beyond GDP by getting rid of it, changing it or complementing it? Reforming GDP to account for externalities, and complementing it with a well-being framework, creates an opportunity for both early adopters and more hesitant Member States to modernize their national accounting systems.

Embed Early Warning Systems: The Challenge of International Cooperation

Early warning systems are a critical feedback mechanism for shifting from reactive to anticipatory governance. Rooted in States' duty to prevent harm – reaffirmed by the International Court of Justice in its Advisory Opinion of July 2025 – such systems enhance the capacity to detect emerging risks and enable early course correction. They fulfil this anticipatory function by aggregating diverse data sources and translating early signals into actionable intelligence, thus triggering preventive responses at both political and administrative levels. Their effectiveness depends on three core elements: continuous monitoring of relevant indicators, rapid transmission of alerts to decision-makers and established protocols that convert warnings into timely action.

In the Anthropocene, the nature of risk is shifting from localized shocks to diffuse, interconnected and unevenly distributed threats. Most contemporary early warning challenges require cross-border coordination and data sharing, as starkly illustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, efforts to adapt and strengthen the International Health Regulations' early warning framework encountered resistance, as an increasing number of States restricted access to national data on grounds of sovereignty. This experience exposed a deeper structural problem: early warning systems remain chronically underfunded at both national and global levels, despite a compelling economic case for preventive investment. Beyond technical capacity, the pandemic also revealed persistent political barriers to data sharing. Reluctance by many States to provide timely national-level information delayed the detection of variants, weak coordination and complicated negotiations on the Pandemic Agreement, which seeks to strengthen global preparedness and information-sharing for future health emergencies.

Experience over recent decades also demonstrates that countries investing in robust early warning systems have substantially reduced both human and economic losses from disasters. Globally, however, disaster costs continue to rise. As the latest Global Risk Assessment Report observes, "[j]ust as the costs of disasters have been under-estimated, so have the benefits of investing now to reduce disaster risk".²⁶ Politically, anticipatory systems are difficult to prioritize because their success is largely invisible: when crises are avoided, benefits are diffuse and rarely attributed to early action.

The result is a global landscape in which early warning capacities remain uneven, fragmented and poorly integrated across borders. Leading think tanks and scientific institutions from the Stockholm Resilience Centre to the International Science Council now argue that national systems alone are insufficient in an era defined by climate tipping points, zoonotic spillovers, and cascading systemic

²⁶ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), *Global assessment report on disaster risk reduction 2025: Resilience pays: Financing and investing for our future* (2025). Available at <https://www.undrr.org/gar/gar2025>.

risks. They call for the development of planetary-scale early warning systems capable of monitoring Earth-system destabilization, integrating ecological and social indicators, and translating global signals into national preparedness triggers. These proposals confront the same political/economic constraint: States systematically undervalue investments in resilience because the benefits extend to long-time horizons and are often delegated to future administrations.

IV. Parameters: De-incentivize Fossil Fuel Dependent Budgets

In systems thinking terms, parameters are the stocks, buffers and stabilizing resources that determine how much stress a society can endure without collapsing into deeper inequality. For poverty eradication beyond growth, strengthening these buffers is essential as low-income groups face the highest exposure to crises and the weakest capacity to recover, meaning that absent strong safety nets, each shock compounds into long-term disadvantage. This section outlines how fiscal rules, sovereign funds and future-oriented budgets can be transformed to correct incentives towards short-termism.

Reforming Sovereign Wealth Funds to Strong Sustainability Models

In the last decades, countries have adopted fiscal rules mostly for economic reasons, often with an underlying intent to prevent the transfer of debt to future generations or to ensure savings.²⁷ Sovereign wealth funds are an example of such rules. They transform short-term, volatile revenues, often from natural resources or fiscal surpluses, into stable, long-term assets. They operate as intergenerational transfer mechanisms that future generations can inherit. There are at least 100 sovereign wealth funds²⁸ across the world, with Norway ranking as the largest in total asset value.

Norway's Government Pension Fund Global (or Petroleum Fund) is used to fund public expenditures, and more recently to provide an assumed fair distribution of wealth between generations. The Alaska Permanent Fund (APF) offers a different model of intergenerational distribution. Established in 1976 to manage oil revenues, it pays an annual universal dividend to residents. Research shows that these payments reduce poverty, especially child poverty. For a low-income country like Timor-Leste, the Petroleum Fund has helped reduce volatility in public spending. The Fund has enabled long-term investments in education, health and infrastructure. A recent World Bank Report,²⁹ however, shows that, with oil production halted, the country relies on withdrawals from the Fund, which could be depleted by 2038 (World Bank, 2025).

This demonstrates the fragility of such a model in a context of depleting resources. They rely on weak sustainability models of wealth redistribution, treating financial capital as a substitute for natural capital. This model does not account for how present consumption of non-renewables is irreversible and damaging to the ecosystems future generations will inherit. A stronger sustainability model for sovereign wealth funds should imply that present generations have a duty to preserve stocks of critical natural capital, and a duty to prevent the growth of their consumption as it might cause irreversible damage. These models can therefore de-incentivize countries to respect their international engagement to phase out fossil fuels, especially at COP30. Moreover, by nature, these national models only redistribute wealth among one territory and rely on production and exportation of non-renewables. Reforms to such powerful mechanisms can include investment in renewables and redistribution of wealth across territories and populations most affected by climate change, especially in global majority countries. While some sovereign

²⁷ Marianne Takle, *Showing Social Solidarity with Future Generations*.

²⁸ Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute, *Sovereign wealth fund rankings* (2025). Available at <https://www.swfinstitute.org/fund-rankings/sovereign-wealth-fund>.

²⁹ World Bank, *Timor-Leste public expenditure review: Managing petroleum wealth for long-term development* (2025).

wealth funds, including Norway's, have begun shifting investment portfolios toward renewables, these reforms rarely confront the deeper dependency on extractive revenues. More transformative approaches would include directing a portion of these funds' returns to climate-vulnerable communities outside the country and aligning fund governance with obligations to reduce resource depletion.

The Petroleum Fund Challenged by a Citizen Assembly

From January to April 2025, 56 randomly selected Norwegians have met seven times over to gain insights from experts, discuss the issues together and reflect individually and in groups before coming together to consider 19 recommendations and address a key question: Norway is one of the richest countries in the world. How can Norway use its wealth for the rest of the world, ourselves and future generations? The discussions emphasized ethical responsibility towards future generations in using the country's Petroleum Fund and the need to increase the share of investment in renewables. In the recommendations, the Assembly proposed the establishment of a Commissioner for Future Generations to ensure that long-term perspectives are prioritized in political decisions, and ensure that future generations have a voice in decision-making processes.

Account for Trade-offs in Public Budget

Public budgets remain one of the most direct indicators of how a country balances their resource allocation between short-term needs and long-term well-being. Interestingly, in 2024, Canada and the UAE branded their national budgets around intergenerational fairness and empowerment, emphasizing housing plans, increased education and healthcare budgets, and economic development.

Some countries have adopted fiscal rules on how to balance present investments and future burdens. In Germany, the Budget Basic Law restricts the amount of allowed net borrowing for länder (regions) and at the federal level against GDP (except during exceptional crises, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic). It is grounded in the idea that present generations should not borrow and spend at the expense of future generations (Ministry of Finance, 2022). Although the amounts allowed and parameters for waivers have evolved across time, the character of such a fiscal law is challenged by the growing need for debt-based investments to build sustainable infrastructures for societies capable of absorbing shocks. The 2024 Report from the German Council of Economic Experts concludes that substantial new investments are needed in Germany. When long-term investments are expensive, politically risky and bound entirely by current taxpayers, fiscal rules may unintentionally discourage transformative action. This dynamic illustrates a key tension: mechanisms designed to protect future generations from excessive debt may also weaken the State's capacity to invest in the future they will inherit. Simon Caney argues that future generations could share the investment burden by paying some of the debt back in the case of climate change.³⁰ This has been taken into account through the 2025 German reform of budget amendment – "the Big Berlin Bill" – to increase spending on infrastructure modernization and defense capabilities³¹.

Reforming budgets for future generations requires treating public spending as an intergenerational investment. Effective fiscal frameworks must both safeguard future generations from unsustainable debt and enable governments to finance the transitions necessary for long-term resilience such as fossil fuel phase out, climate mitigation and adaptation, social protection and universal basic services. The challenge is to align budgets, fiscal rules and sovereign funds with a post-growth perspective that reconceives costs and investments beyond monetary terms, taking into account the fair distribution of social and ecological burdens and benefits across generations. Generational impact assessments, including generational accounting, are promising tools that can

³⁰ Simon Caney, "Climate Change and the Duties of the Advantaged", *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 13, No. 1 (2010), pp. 203–228.

³¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, "The Potential Economic Impact of the Reform of Germany's Fiscal Framework", in *European Economic Forecast: Spring 2025* (Brussels, European Commission, 2025).

support policymakers in informing solutions to these trade-offs, and ensure that financial burdens and profits are shared fairly across generations.

Exploring Generational Impact Assessments

Generational (or intergenerational) impact assessments are policy tools designed to evaluate how proposed laws, budgets or reforms affect different age cohorts over time, particularly future generations. They work by systematically analysing the long-term distribution of costs, benefits and risks across generations, often using demographic projections, fiscal sustainability analysis and scenario modelling. Several countries have institutionalized such assessments in different forms: Finland and Sweden apply long-term fiscal and sustainability analyses linked to ageing; Wales uses a statutory Future Generations Impact Assessment under the Well-being of Future Generations Act; New Zealand incorporates intergenerational well-being analysis into its Wellbeing Budget; and Germany regularly conducts generational accounting to assess long-term fiscal burdens. Lessons from these experiences suggest that generational impact assessments are most effective when they are legally mandated, embedded early in the policy cycle and supported by independent analytical capacity. Where they remain voluntary or purely technical exercises, their influence on political decision-making tends to be limited, hence the importance of institutional backing and clear links to accountability mechanisms.

V. Implementation Roadmap

A growing body of research suggests that reforms aimed at strengthening long-term governance rarely emerge as comprehensive system-wide transformations from the outset. Instead, they often begin as “pockets of innovation” within otherwise short-term policy systems, driven by motivated individuals, specialized units or reform-oriented political leaders. These early initiatives create experimental spaces where new governance tools such as foresight practices, intergenerational impact assessments or parliamentary committees for the future can be tested and gradually institutionalized. Studies on anticipatory governance and institutional change indicate that the most durable outcomes tend to emerge from gradual and integrated reform pathways, where initial innovations are progressively embedded across institutions and policy processes.³² A sustainable implementation pathway therefore typically relies on several mutually reinforcing conditions:

- Early experimentation through foresight and strategic planning. Initial reforms often begin experimenting with futures thinking with tools such as horizon scanning, scenario planning or futures literacy exercises to inform strategic policy design. These early prototypes frequently create momentum for establishing dedicated foresight units or strategic futures bodies that provide continuous horizon scanning and long-term policy analysis.
- Strong connections with national and international networks. Successful initiatives are often embedded within broader networks that facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Participation in national, regional and global networks helps policymakers maintain policy relevance, strengthen institutional learning and build trust among actors involved in long-term governance reforms.
- Anchoring reforms in concrete policy challenges. Long-term governance mechanisms gain political support when they are linked to policy questions that resonate with political constituencies such as climate resilience, fiscal sustainability or poverty reduction rather than presented solely as abstract institutional reforms.

³² Jonathan Boston, *Governing for the future: Designing democratic institutions for a better tomorrow*; Thomas Hale, *Long problems: Climate change and the challenge of governing across time*.

For example, in 2024, a few Kenyan Senators took an opportunity presented by the United Nations Summit of the Future preparation to create a Senate Caucus on Future Generations. Since then, they have built a standing committee and are willing to host the next World Summit of Parliamentary Committees for the future, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Similarly, the EU has embedded strategic foresight units within the Commission for 10 years now, leading to the creation of an Intergenerational Fairness Commissioner.

While external factors such as political change or crises can disrupt reform processes, they may also create windows of opportunity for long-term governance innovations by highlighting the limits of short-term policymaking and increasing demand for preventive approaches. Rather than introducing rigid veto players or narrowly scoped institutions at the outset, such a strategy prioritizes reforms that embed long-term thinking across governance systems and progressively strengthen demand for deeper transformation.³³ This gradual approach helps decentre growth as the dominant metric of progress by shifting governance toward long-term well-being, resilience and distributive justice as the primary reference points for policy design and evaluation. It also empowers civil society organizations in participation and accountability mechanisms, and finally, accelerates the deeper implementation of existing legal State duties for future generations.

³³ Jonathan M. Hoffmann, *Democracy, Justice, and the Long Term: Designing Institutions for the Future* (University of Warwick, 2022).

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