

Contributions to the SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future

Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development's [Annual Report 2023 - A/HRC/54/41](#)

Right to Development and future generations

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Protecting the interests of future generations is an essential aspect of sustainable development. Sustainability implies a long-term approach to development that links the well-being of people living today to the well-being of future generations. Several United Nations agencies have noted that the decisions of living generations are rapidly closing the options for future generations and have called for drastic action to protect them. Future generations will have to live with the consequences of our activities and inaction, particularly on climate change, technology, the economic order and peace and security.

The commitment to protecting the interests of future generations is embedded in the Charter of the United Nations, which contains the promise to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Similar commitments are also outlined in the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations, adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1997, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

These commitments have yet to result in meaningful steps to protect the interests of future generations nationally and within the multilateral system. The Secretary-General's report on Our Common Agenda addressed this gap by centering the obligation of the present generation on future generations. The report outlined a road map to a sustainable future for people and the planet, prosperity, and peace, underpinned by partnership, international cooperation, and solidarity. The Summit of the Future offers an opportunity for concerted multilateral action to strengthen global governance for both present and future generations.

Solidarity with future generations is anchored in the principle of intergenerational equity, which recognizes that the actions and decisions of current generations can have long-lasting effects on the well-being and opportunities of future generations. It requires the benefits and burdens of economic, social and environmental decisions to be shared equitably among different generations.

Future generations are, by definition, unrepresented in today's decision-making and unable to articulate their needs. To translate intergenerational equity into practice, consideration must be given to forums to act on their behalf, as their trustees, and to instruments to further protect their interests. Technological advances offer the unprecedented capacity to forecast and understand the impact of current policies and activities on future generations.

Protecting the interests of future generations requires paying more attention to the voices and aspirations of young people, who are the closest to future generations. The report on Our Common Agenda contained a call for concerted steps to give young people a greater voice in designing their futures. This requires the systematic consideration of the interests of the 10.9 billion people expected to be born in this century, predominantly in the developing world.



The right to development pertains to both present and future generations. The provision for the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals set out in the Declaration on the Right to Development extends to future generations. It is a recognition of the continuity of development processes across generations.

Future generations have as much right to development as present generations. The right to development of future generations imposes duties and obligations on current generations in critical sectors in which present-day decisions are likely to affect the well-being of future generations. A right-to-development approach enables the contemplation of what needs to be done or rectified by present generations to ensure that the right to development of future generations is protected and assured.

Protecting the environment and addressing climate change are crucial aspects of intergenerational equity. The inclusion of the right to development in the Paris Agreement, the first universal, legally binding global climate change agreement, underscores the links between the right to development and intergenerational equity. Trends in global population growth indicate that most members of future generations will be born in what are currently low- or middle-income countries. Addressing inequality within and between States by supporting vulnerable communities through social investments will also benefit future generations.

Failure to take appropriate action today can lead to irreversible damage, affecting the quality of life for future generations. Sustainable practices, such as reducing carbon emissions and conserving biodiversity, are necessary to ensure a healthy planet and protect the right to development of present and future generations. The right to development offers a framework for balancing the commitment of today's generation to future generations with its duty to the present generation. As stated in the Our Common Agenda policy brief on thinking and acting for future generations, what we do for future generations is also what we need to do for ourselves. The right to development provides a valuable framework for ensuring that the interests of future generations are considered in decision-making processes that affect the environment, the economy, society and culture.

