



Oxfam Cymru written submission to Public Accounts Committee into the implementation of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 November 2020

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1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.

Despite five years passing since the enactment of the pioneering Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, ending the Act's first implementation and reporting cycle, our systems are still failing to deliver human more needs to be done to realise the significant potential of the Act and ensure compliance and accountability. The world to embed the protection and prevention of harm to future generations in law but

If the WFG Act is to be effective, then we must push the boundaries of the Act further to create a wellbeing economy for Wales. We all need to play a role in inspiring civil society to step up and challenge government to realise the opportunities the WFG Act holds for rebuilding an economy in Wales that works for people and for the planet. Political leaders in Wales must be brave and empower the people of Wales to take ownership of the WFG Act as a 'people's act' through raising awareness and active conversations. This will help gather the wealth and breadth of experience of people in Wales on how to tackle the multiple challenges we face.

How can Wales can be a home to thriving people, in a thriving country whilst respecting the wellbeing of all people and the health of the whole planet?¹

Raising awareness of the Act will help inform transformative and inclusive action and empower people to challenge public bodies. We want our political leaders to hold the public sector to account, for example by withholding funds, for non-compliance with the WFG Act. We need more participatory democracy processes such as people's / citizens assemblies as a core part of policy making to ensure the rights of future generations are protected.

2. The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed.

3. Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner.

The Future Generations Report 2020 is a comprehensive document but at 803 pages long it is difficult to navigate for even the most ardent of policy makers and totally inaccessible to ordinary people. It's safe to assume that most people in Wales do not know the Future Generations Commissioner exists or what her role is, or what potential the legislation has for our society. The Future Generations Commissioner role is advisory only and so there are no powers to enforce compliance with the Act or for members of the public to complain and challenge a lack of compliance by public bodies. There are calls for the Act to become a

'people's act' to raise awareness and better enable individuals to challenge public sector bodies on compliance, but a considerable amount of work would need to be done to realise this ambition. There are ways this could be achieved see for example the [British Institute of Human Rights tour](#) approach or through a national conversation as indicated in question 1.

Where attempts have been made to use the Act as a basis for challenging decisions made by public bodies, senior barristers have claimed it is '[virtually useless](#)'. Legal advice is needed on how to make the legislation more robust and how to bestow powers of enforcement on the FG Commissioner.

4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

Culture change is incredibly slow.

In 2017, WWF Cymru published [commissioned research](#) into how well Welsh Government was responding to the Act. This resulted in a series of workshops between senior Welsh Government civil servants and stakeholders to develop actions outlined in the [All Together](#) report to improve understanding and implementation of the Act. This led to another WG led workshop exploring the possibility of a cross sector advisory group established to assist with implementation of the Act across Welsh Government. Almost three years on, this is yet to be established. Although, some issues the sector had with the implementation of the Act and the role of the Commissioner have improved, progress is painfully slow, and together we should seek to go further, faster.

In [July 2018 WG announced](#) the plan to implement milestones (a requirement in the legislation) as a tool to show progress. The consultation was eventually published in [Jan 2019](#) and over a year later we are still waiting for the outcome. A further update was promised in Autumn 2019.

5. Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act (e.g. Brexit, COVID, etc.).

Systemic change is needed

Our economic system is failing to deliver human and ecological wellbeing. The current economic system responds to the common needs of humanity and the planet in ways that do not address the heart of problems and do not make life better for all. In fact, often problems are made worse or at best responses act as 'sticking plasters'. In a wellbeing economy, responses should be person-centred, geared towards environmental protection and regeneration, positive and long-term. Short term political cycles, party politics and political football between local, devolved and national government do not lend themselves to dealing with the global challenges we face or the urgency with which we need to act.

We cannot continue to trade off long term gain for short term gain in decision making. All decision making needs to be evidence based and made on the principle of 'do no harm'. For example, it is easier to manage inequalities created by unemployment resulting from a decision to close a carbon intensive industry than it is to deal with the consequences of climate change. In such instances, investment could be made in retraining people for work in the other sectors and ensuring people have access to a basic level of income whilst retraining.

The basis of the FG Commissioner's recommendation to establish a cross-party, cross-sectoral Commission to create a long-term vision and strategy for the Welsh public sector of 2050 specifically focusing on key future trends is a good one. We would also argue that more work needs to be done on future visioning at all levels of Welsh society to help encourage empathy for future generations and motivate action.

Implementation gap

Political support for the Act remains mixed and there is a significant gap between the aspiration that went into developing the legislation, how much the Act is valued as a policy framework and how effectively it is being delivered in practice. In some instances, the existence of the Act has been used to support difficult decisions, for example on the [M4 relief road](#). Often, the vision and goals of government strategies are good and fit well under the Act but the detail within action plans don't stack up e.g. a focus on international student recruitment as a means of supporting the globally responsible Wales goal.

6. How to ensure that the Act is implemented successfully in the future.

We are encouraged by Welsh Government's statement of response to the FG Commissioners report in which they confirmed they have joined the Well-being Economy Government ([WEGo](#)) Network and will be working with Scotland, Iceland and New Zealand on a shared ambition to deliver and improve well-being through their economic approach. This is a positive step forward. Oxfam Cymru are part of a civil society group developing a parallel [Wellbeing Economy Alliance Cymru](#)

There needs to be better alignment between equalities and environmental legislation in terms of wellbeing/equalities, environmental impact assessments, engagement and reporting for example. Also, if Wales decides to introduce a Human Rights Bill then this could help ensure a rights-based approach to the delivery of the wellbeing goals, for example public sector responsibilities under the UNCRC help add further weight to the need for action to support the wellbeing of children.

Today, there is a greater need than ever to stop colonising future generations and to stop using resources that should be available to people yet to be born. Could including future generations as a protected characteristic in equalities legislation for example be a way of reinforcing the WFGAct, protecting future generations from harm and giving future generations some redress?

Oxfam Cymru has recently published a [Welsh Doughnut 2020](#) in collaboration with partners in the Wales Anti-Poverty Coalition and the Wales Environment Link. The 2020 Welsh Doughnut shows that Wales exceeds planetary boundary emission limits for CO₂ by 455% and in land-use change the UK figure is 200%. We are also facing an ecological emergency with one in six species in Wales at risk of extinction.

The key recommendations from the 2020 Welsh Doughnut report are for the next Welsh Government to urgently tackle the poverty and environmental crises by:

1. Producing a tackling poverty strategy which delivers a decent standard of living for everyone whilst living within our environmental limits.
2. Reviewing the effectiveness of the Well Being of Future Generations Act to ensure that everyone in Wales has a decent standard of living whilst living within our environmental limits. This includes a National Conversation with our current and future generations.

We also recommend that Welsh Government work with the Wellbeing Economy Government Network and international institutions to harmonise 'beyond GDP' accounting frameworks and terminology linked to delivery of the SDGs. We would like to see Welsh Government report on wellbeing and sustainability metrics with higher frequency and timeliness than GDP.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ <https://www.kateraworth.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/20200406-AMS-portrait-EN-Single-page-web-420x210mm.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/WeAll-BRIEFINGS-Measuring-the-Wellbeing-economy-v6.pdf>