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Equality and Social Justice Committee

Inquiry: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Evidence from: Oxfam Wales





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Oxfam Cymru's response to the Equality and Social Justice Committee's inquiry on post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

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Introduction

[Oxfam Cymru](#) is responding to this inquiry as we see the Well-being of Future Generations Act as a vital and world-leading piece of legislation that aligns closely with our mission to tackle poverty and inequality while promoting social and climate justice. The Act offers a powerful framework for building a fairer, more sustainable Wales—one that considers the wellbeing of both current and future generations and the planet.

As an international non-governmental organisation committed to amplifying the voices of marginalised communities, we work to bring global climate justice and humanitarian issues into Welsh policy and practice, while also sharing Wales's experiences and leadership with our global network. We believe it is crucial to evaluate how effectively the Act is being implemented and to advocate for a stronger, more inclusive approach to delivering its goals—particularly those related to global responsibility, equality, and climate justice.

1- How far the intended objective of the Act is being achieved?

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act was designed as a long-term, transformative tool to change how public bodies in Wales operate—encouraging them to plan, allocate resources, and deliver services with the well-being of future generations at the core. Since its inception, the remit of the Act has expanded to cover 56 public bodies, and it has helped galvanise a growing coalition of support across Wales.

The Act has successfully reframed the way many public bodies understand their responsibilities. There is increasing evidence that public services are beginning to shift their practices to align with the Act's ambitions. This in itself is a significant

achievement and reflects the Act's potential as a behavioural and cultural change mechanism within the public sector.

Importantly, the influence of the Act extends beyond those bodies directly bound by it. Many third sector organisations and private entities in Wales have voluntarily adopted the Act's principles, including Oxfam Cymru, Wales Overseas Agencies Group, Global Climate Justice Cymru, using it as a framework and foundation to guide their work and influence policy. Oxfam Cymru, for example, uses the Act to advocate for more progressive, long-term policymaking, helping to keep people and the planet at the heart of policy discussions, and achieve equality and climate justice in Wales and globally.

The Act is both principled and flexible, providing a robust foundation for cross-sector engagement and offering Wales a unique identity as a country committed to intergenerational justice. As the first piece of legislation in the world to embed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into domestic law, the Act has positioned Wales as a global pioneer in future-focused governance. While it remains an ambitious experiment from a small nation, it has opened up critical space for reimagining how public policy can be more inclusive, forward-looking, and accountable.

The Act has also introduced new tools for measuring progress, such as the seven well-being goals and national indicators, which have helped create a more coherent framework for tracking government actions and collecting data about the Welsh society. It has initiated valuable conversations about long-term thinking, collaborative policy design, and new models for governance and achieving sustainability and climate goals.

However, despite this progress, significant implementation gaps remain. While the Act has opened the door to systemic change, we are still far from fully realising its ambitions in practice.

At a governmental level, cross-departmental thinking remains underdeveloped. The siloed nature of departments limits the integration of the Act's ways of working across portfolios—particularly for issues that are inherently cross-cutting, such as achieving net zero or building a well-being economy. For example, the concept of a well-being economy—deeply aligned with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act—demands integrated, cross-government policymaking. However, this vision remains largely aspirational, with limited tangible progress toward the systemic change required. Oxfam Cymru believes that a just and fair transition to a green, net zero economy is only possible if the wellbeing of people and the planet is placed at the heart of all policy decisions. This means addressing existing inequalities—both within Wales and globally—and ensuring that efforts to achieve net zero do not exacerbate them. It also requires embedding equality mainstreaming across all departments of the Welsh Government, so that social justice is not treated as an add-on, but as a core principle guiding the transition.

Some of the Act's goals have seen more advancement than others. Notably, the Globally Responsible Wales goal is among the least understood and least actioned. Its breadth and complexity, combined with the constraints of devolved powers, have made it difficult to implement meaningfully. Despite being a central pillar of the Act, global responsibility is not consistently prioritised in national strategies.

For instance, while Wales has taken steps to promote ethical and sustainable supply chains, evidence suggests that we still consume significantly more than our fair share of the planet's resources ([The Welsh Doughnut 2020](#)), continue to [fund harmful industries through investment](#), and rely on [supply chains linked to deforestation](#). The Welsh Government's International Strategy, though it identifies global responsibility as a core principle, contains actions that are [not always aligned with that aim](#).

The globally responsible goal should encompass climate justice, fair supply chains, peacebuilding, and adherence to international humanitarian law. While foreign affairs are not devolved, Wales can—and should—be a vocal advocate for peace and global justice, calling on the UK Government to honour international law and treaties.

In conclusion, while the Well-being of Future Generations Act has achieved notable successes in reshaping policy frameworks and sparking culture change, it is not yet being fully delivered in practice. The promise of the Act—to create a Wales that prioritises the well-being of future generations and the planet—is clear and powerful. But to achieve its full potential, there must be stronger cross-governmental leadership, bolder implementation, and a greater willingness to embrace the systemic changes the Act demands.

2- Any action which should be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and its implementation, including any specific drafting issues?

Oxfam Cymru believes that the Well-being of Future Generations Act remains a globally pioneering piece of legislation, but its implementation must be strengthened to deliver on its transformative potential. To improve the effectiveness of the Act, we recommend the following key areas for action:

2.1. Stronger alignment between goals and delivery: There remains a disconnect between the high-level goals, objectives, and national indicators of the Act, and the actual implementation by public bodies. Strategies often fail to clearly map out how they contribute to specific well-being goals, especially those such as A Globally Responsible Wales and A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language, which are frequently underrepresented. More robust alignment between strategic planning and the Act's goals is essential for meaningful impact.

2.2. Investment in capacity of public bodies and services: Cuts to public sector funding are undermining the ability of public bodies to deliver the Act and hindering scrutiny of government action. Without adequate investment, the wellbeing of future generations risks being sidelined. For example, [childcare provision in Wales](#) – an essential area for future well-being – has seen limited investment, budget allocation and expansion in recent years. As a result, Wales now has the most expensive childcare for children under two in Great Britain. This failure to invest reflects broader systemic issues and must be scrutinised through the lens of the Act.

2.3. Understanding the Welsh context, its challenges – and building a new narrative: Wales continues to face deep-rooted challenges, including high levels of poverty and inequality, a fragile labour market, and the lingering impacts of deindustrialisation. At the same time, climate change is hitting communities hard—through flooding, shifting seasons, and rising sea levels. These domestic pressures are urgent, but they must not overshadow one of the most progressive principles of the Act: the globally responsible Wales goal.

Critically, domestic and global justice are interconnected. We cannot address inequality at home without pushing for fairness and sustainability globally. Wales’ global responsibility should not be viewed as an optional extra but as a core part of building a fairer and more resilient nation.

2.4. Making global responsibility a reality: Public bodies and the Welsh Government must better understand how to operationalise the Globally Responsible Wales goal. This includes learning from best practice, both within Wales and from other nations. Greater action in this area would allow Wales to lead on the global stage in areas such as climate justice, tackling inequality, and peacebuilding.

2.5. Greater participation and accountability: We recommend more support for public bodies to involve third sector organisations and the public—especially young people—in implementing the Act and holding government to account. Civil society plays a vital role in ensuring that the Act delivers meaningful change and that future-focused policymaking is transparent and inclusive.

2.6. Clearer delivery plans with measurable outcomes: Many strategies lack concrete action plans or measurable targets, making it difficult to track progress. The 2024 [Tackling Child Poverty Strategy](#) is one such example—it was published without clear targets or a measurement framework, prompting criticism from across civil society, including the [Children’s Commissioner for Wales](#). While there was a process of engagement in preparing the strategy, it was delayed and resulted in a fragmented, inconsistent approach.

2.7. Embedding long-term thinking: One of the biggest challenges to the Act’s success is limited long-term thinking within government and public bodies. While we acknowledge the serious financial constraints and the limitations of devolved powers in areas like taxation and welfare, short-term, reactive policymaking is becoming the norm. As highlighted in [one of the recent reports](#) from Citizens Advice Wales, many policies are designed to “firefight” rather than address root causes.

To fully realise the promise of the Act, Wales needs both short- and long-term strategies running in tandem. Long-term budget certainty is essential for strategic planning, and further devolution—particularly over taxation and welfare—should be considered to give Wales the tools it needs to build a just and sustainable future.

2.8. Clarifying and simplifying delivery: Finally, the principles, goals, and well-being objectives of the Act could be clarified and simplified into actionable areas, making it easier for public bodies to embed them in their work. More accessible delivery methods and clearer guidance would help bridge the gap between ambition and action.

3- Whether the review and reporting requirements under the Act are being met

4- The effectiveness of guidance made under the Act

5- How far the Act has been legally binding and enforceable

From Oxfam Cymru’s perspective, a core weakness of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act lies in its limited enforceability. While the Act sets out a progressive and visionary framework, its lack of binding legal mechanisms undermines both its effectiveness and public trust in its delivery.

- **Weak Accountability and Non-Binding Recommendations:** At present, the recommendations issued by the Future Generations Commissioner or the Auditor General are not legally binding. Public bodies are under no statutory obligation to act on these recommendations, resulting in inconsistent implementation of the Act across Wales. This weakens accountability and creates a two-tier system—where committed bodies embed the Act meaningfully, but others can opt out without consequence.
- **No Legal Redress or Right to Challenge:** Crucially, the Act does not provide for judicial review or legal redress when public bodies fail to comply with its principles. Individuals and organisations cannot challenge decisions that clearly contradict the sustainable development principle or the seven well-being goals. This leaves a

significant accountability gap and limits the ability of communities and civil society to ensure public bodies are upholding their obligations.

- **Insufficient Enforcement Powers and Capacity:** While the Commissioner can conduct reviews, the role lacks the enforcement powers necessary to compel compliance.
- **Ensuring Resources Match Responsibilities:** Any expansion of legal powers and enforcement tools must be accompanied by sufficient funding and resourcing for the Future Generations Commissioner. Without adequate capacity, even the most robust legal tools will be ineffective. Resourcing the Commissioner's Office appropriately is a prerequisite for ensuring that the Act's ambitions are turned into practice.

Strengthening the enforceability of the Act must be a key priority for the next Senedd, including equipping it with the necessary legal powers and resources to ensure public bodies can be effectively held to account.

6- how far the Act has represented, and will continue to represent, value for money.