

The 7th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development
Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda
Implementation of the mandate and programme of work - Focused thematic discussion
Conference Room 6 UN HQ NY

The Right to Development and Future Generations
Tuesday 4 April, 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm

Concept Note

Dialogue on a Right to Development Approach for the rights of future generations and the contribution to the process in the lead up to the SDG summit.

Presented by Bonny Ibhawoh

Introduction:

Several UN agencies have noted that the decisions of living generations were “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 activity and inaction, particularly on climate change, technology, and peace and security. The need to consider the well-being of future generations in decision-making has been acknowledged in several international documents on sustainable development and the environment, as well as the 1997 UNESCO *Declaration on the Responsibility of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations*. However, this recognition has yet to result in meaningful steps to account for the interests of future generations, either nationally or within the multilateral system. Short-term calculations continue to dominate policymaking.

To address these gaps, the UN Secretary-General has proposed institutional approaches that will account for the interests of future generations in national and global decision-making and benefit future generations over the long term. A key theme in *Our Common Agenda* (OCA), the UN Secretary-General’s 2022 landmark Report, centres on the obligation of the present generation to future generations. OCA outlines a road map to a sustainable future for people, the planet, prosperity, and peace, united by partnership, international cooperation, and solidarity. OCA proposes a path forward, centred on the renewal of our social contract, adapted to the challenges of this century, taking into account young people and future generations.

Strengthened solidarity is long overdue with the existing generation of young people, who feel that our political, social and economic systems ignore their present and sacrifice their future. OCA calls for concerted steps to give young people a greater voice in designing their futures. This requires systematically considering the interests of the 10.9 billion people expected to be born this century, predominantly in Africa and Asia.¹

¹ UN [Our Common Agenda, Report of the Secretary-General](#), 2021

These imperatives have been framed as “Solidarity with future generations” and “intergenerational equity.” Future generations are, by definition, unrepresented in today’s decision-making and unable to articulate their needs. To translate the principle of intergenerational equity into practice, consideration must be given to forums to act on their behalf, as their trustees, as well as instruments to further protect their interests. Technological advances offer us the unprecedented capacity to forecast and understand the impact of current policies and activities on future generations.

As part of this vision of collective responsibility toward future generations, the Secretary-General has proposed a repurposed Trusteeship Council, a Futures Lab, a Declaration on Future Generations and a United Nations Special Envoy to ensure that UN policies and decisions take into account their impact on future generations. The envoy will serve as the voice of future generations suggesting content to inform a political declaration defining our collective duties to the future. Also planned are intergovernmental forums to share experiences and advance implementation. Accounting for the interests of future generations is part of the OCA’s goal of “turbocharging the 2030 Agenda and making the Sustainable Development Goals real in the lives of people everywhere.”² This is also the goal of the SDG Summit planned for September 2023, aimed at mobilizing investments and action across the core transitions required to achieve the Goals.

Purpose:

To engage relevant Member States and experts in examining the rights of future generations from the right to development perspective with a view to formulating EMRTD contribution to the process in the lead up to the 2033 SDG summit and the 2024 Summit of the Future.

Guiding questions:

1. What policy frameworks have been developed at national and multilateral levels to account for the interests of future generations in decision-making?
2. What are the critical sectors where present-day decisions are likely to impact the well-being of future generations (e.g. climate change, environment, technology, peacebuilding, and security)?
3. Why is it important to address the interests of future generations from the right to the development perspective?
4. What needs to be done or rectified from the right to development perspective to make it relevant to current calls to protect the interests of future generations?
5. What recommendations can be made to protect the well-being of future generations based on the right to development principles (e.g., intergenerational equity and the equality of opportunity for self-defined development).

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² United Nations, “[Today We Must Begin ‘Moving Recommendations in Our Common Agenda from Ideas to Action — from Abstract to Concrete’, Secretary-General Tells General Assembly](#),” 13 February 2023