

National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
WFG 19
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill
Response from National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales



National Federation of Women's Institutes-Wales

**Response to the Environment and Sustainability Committee consultation on
the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill**

Background

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) is an educational, social, non-party political and non-sectarian organisation. It was established to ensure that women are able to take an effective part in their community, to learn together, widen their horizons, improve and develop the quality of their lives and those of their communities and together influence local, national and international affairs. The WI has an unrivalled reputation as a voice of reason, integrity and intelligence on issues that matter to women and their communities.

The WI is a grass-roots, member-led organisation and is the largest voluntary women's organisation in the UK with more than 210,000 members in 6,600 WIs. In Wales there are 16,000 members belonging to 13 Federations and over 600 WIs based in local communities across the country.

Since its inception in 1915, the WI has been at the forefront of sustainable development and a commitment to sustainable development is a cross-cutting theme that underpins all its work. Over the years, NFWI-Wales has developed a number of initiatives promoting sustainable development. The Pathway to the 21st Century: Celebrating Our Communities established in 1998 showed members playing an active and visible part at the heart of their communities and at the same time fulfilling the aims of the organisation "to improve the quality of life of the community". In 2005, a range of sustainability projects were developed in response to the WI's 90@90 report which looked at how consumer behaviour had changed over the WI's 90 years existence and the effect our actions were having on the environment and climate.

General principles of the Bill

NFWI-Wales welcomes the Welsh Government's commitment to introducing legislation to improve the response of the public sector in meeting the needs of future generations. This Bill provides a unique opportunity for Wales to introduce ground-breaking legislation and to become a world leader in sustainable development.

We do not believe that the current duty on public bodies is strong enough. The principles of sustainable development need to be embedded across all areas of decision-making. We support the wording suggested by the Sustainable Development Alliance that “*every public authority must exercise their functions in order to achieve sustainable development*”. We are disappointed that the Bill does not define sustainable development. The Bill must include a clear definition of sustainable development that public bodies can aspire towards achieving.

The sustainable development principle in the Bill is weak and is diluted by the inclusion of the words ‘*seeking to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*’. The wording of the principle must be strengthened if the legislation is to be taken seriously by public bodies.

Well-being goals

We welcome the setting of well-being goals. However we are concerned that the current goals are very broad and suggest that more specific goals are set. We feel it will be difficult to measure success in relation to the current goals.

International obligations

We are disappointed that there is no mention on the face of the Bill of Wales’ international obligations in relation to sustainable development. We believe that this undermines the credibility of the legislation. The current Bill does not take into account the impact of decisions made by Welsh Government and other public bodies in Wales on countries across the world. It is vital that the impact of Wales’s actions on a global level are recognised within the legislation. Through this legislation, we believe that Wales has the opportunity to take the lead in addressing global issues such as food security and climate change.

Food security is a global issue. Ensuring people have a safe, sustainable and nutritious supply of food is likely to be one of the most significant public policy challenges of this century. As fast-developing countries grow wealthier and their populations continue to expand, demand for food will grow ever-more pressing. By 2050 it is expected that the current population of 7 billion will have grown to 9 billion. Individual consumption is also on the rise and consequently demand for food is increasing at a much faster rate than the population. Combined with more frequent extreme weather such as drought and floods, there are already signs that food shortages are becoming a very real issue.

Climate Change

NFWI-Wales is disappointed that climate change is not specifically addressed in the Bill. Addressing climate change and reducing Wales’ carbon emissions are central towards achieving a sustainable Wales.

Climate change is the single biggest threat to both people and the planet. Although we may escape the worst of the effects of climate change in our generation, it is future generations which will be hit – our children and grandchildren.

Climate change is already have a disproportionate impact on people in developing countries and it’s women that are being hit hardest. Globally, women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to our different social roles and status. In the UK and other developed countries, increasing costs for energy, transport, healthcare, and nutrition are likely to affect women more than men.

Tackling climate change is crucial to achieving sustainable development. Through this legislation, Wales has an opportunity to make a difference and reduce Wales' impact on climate change by the incorporation into the Bill of targets to reduce Wales' emission of greenhouse gases. If greenhouse gas emissions continue unchecked, we will see more natural disasters.

The establishment of a Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

We welcome the establishment of a Commissioner however we have grave concerns over the power and duties of the Commissioner as currently drafted in the Bill.

The wording of the Commissioner's responsibilities is weak in many areas, for example, point 17 (ii) '*encourage* public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things that they do' and section 19 on '*recommendations*' to the Ministers and to public bodies.

The power of the Commissioner must be strengthened. The Commissioner must be independent of the Government and should have the power to scrutinise delivery and hold Welsh Ministers and public bodies to account.

To truly make an impact in embedding the principle of sustainable development, the Commissioner must have the power to influence change. Over the years, there have been examples of current Commissioners speaking out strongly on behalf of the groups they represent and they have been able to use their powers to press for change and to carry out inquiries. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales should be granted power in line with current Commissioners.

Public Services Boards and local well-being plans

We welcome the establishment of Public Services Boards and the preparation and publication of local well-being plans.

It is will important to ensure that women are involved in the Public Services Boards. Women are powerful agents of change and have a unique role in leading the way to achieving sustainable development as guardians of natural resources, primary decision-makers in household consumption, educators of the next generation and key voices within communities.

Even though commitments were made as far back as 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio, women's contribution to sustainable development continues to be undervalued and goes unrecognised.

Women are significantly under-represented in decision-making. For sustainable development to become a reality, we need to see more women involved in leadership and decision-making positions at all levels of society.

National indicators

We welcome the publication of national indicators. In developing national indicators, it will be important that Welsh Ministers consult with the third sector in addition to the Commissioner and other public bodies.

Guidance

It is vital that strong guidance issued by Welsh Ministers to support the delivery of the Bill by public bodies.

Potential barriers to the implementation

We fear that the omission of a strong definition on sustainable development and a weak sustainable development principle could hinder the impact of the Bill. Strong legislation is needed to embed the principles of sustainable development at all levels of public life, however the Bill in its current form does not deliver that.

The powers of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales also need to be strengthened. It is vital that the Commissioner can hold Welsh Government and other public bodies to account. The Commissioner should also have a key role in scrutinising the well-being objectives set by public bodies and the local well-being plans of public services boards.