

Public Accounts Committee Inquiry: Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – WWF Cymru response

1. WWF Cymru very much welcome the Public Accounts Committee's inquiry into the implementation of the Act. An independent review will contribute greatly to the discussion and analysis around the Act's implementation. It is essential continued analysis on implementation takes place to reflect and review what is a complicated piece of legislation to interpretation and hence implementation is diverse which may affect overall impact of the Act in Wales. We hope this inquiry will identify common themes around good practice and challenges, recommendations for improvements and progress to improve the Act's impact in Wales and move us closer to a country fit for future generations. We also hope it will recognise the third sectors vital role in the Act's success.
2. WWF Cymru has been a leading third sector organisation in the development of the Act and also in the assessment of its implementation by Welsh Government and the Future Generations Commission. We have sought involvement and collaborated with stakeholders through these phases and developed evidence bases to support our work. These include:
 - established and chaired the Sustainable Development Alliance to enable a collaborative approach within third sector to the development and influencing of the Act
 - member of the Welsh Governments Reference Group in development of the Bill
 - undertook analysis of Welsh Governments Wellbeing Objectives and Programme for Government; analysis of Welsh Government fiscal budgets for impact of Act
 - involvement in content for The Future Generations Commissions 2020 Report
 - Senedd committee sessions on implementation of the Act including Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee session with Future Generations Commission
 - developed methodology and evidence base on implementation of the Act:

A 'game-changer' for future generations? Welsh Government's response to the Well-being of Future Generations Act (June 2017)

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/201811/Welsh%20Government%20WBFGA%20Annual%20Report%20Jan%202018%20web.pdf>

All Together: Pointers for action from the Wellbeing of Future Generations New Year Workshops (April 2018)

https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/201811/WFG%20Workshops%20Report%20FINAL%2035951_Enq_PRESS_QUALITY_WEB.pdf

Enabling Effective Voluntary Sector Participation in Sustainable Development (May 2020)

https://wcva.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Enabling-Effective-VS-Participation-in-SD-Report_final_Feb-2020.pdf

Wales Nature Crisis: Recommendations for an Immediate Emergency Response (Feb 2020)

https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/202002/WWF%20CYMRU_Report_Wales%20Nature%20Crisis_2020_0.pdf

A Welsh Food System Fit For Future Generations (March 2020)

https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-03/WWF_Full%20Report_Food_Final_3.pdf

This experience and evidence base will inform our response to the Committee questions.

Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.

Public

3. WWF Cymru anticipates the public knowledge of the Act is low because from what we know there has been limited public engagement programmes or campaign by Welsh Government. The Wellbeing Future Generations Act is closely related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and therefore a review of other countries approach to implementation of sustainable development highlights strategies and programmes that are possible.
4. This is highlighted by a recent review *Stakeholder Engagement and the 2030 Agenda* United Nations (April 2020)
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2703For_distribution_Stakeholder_Engagement_Practical_Guide_spreads_2.pdf
5. This includes an example of the Republic of Korea who encouraged raising public awareness and creating multi-stakeholder ownership of the SDGs through the inclusion of content addressing Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the SDGs in textbooks for primary and secondary school students. The Korea Foundation for Advancement of Science and Creativity, in association with the Ministry of Education, has supported 40 teams of Teachers' Research Associations of Education for Sustainable Development, in which teachers and students voluntarily form groups to study sustainable development. The government is also carrying out national campaigns for the SDGs and has expanded funds for sending more youth to the project sites of international development cooperation.
6. It would be very useful for the Welsh Government to provide a compendium of the work it has undertaken to engage with public on the Act and the SDGs, the impact and its plans for the future.

Third sector

7. The *Enabling Effective Voluntary Sector Participation in Sustainable Development (May 2020)* report highlights the journey of the third sector's involvement in the Act. Key findings included was there was an absence of a dedicated institutionalised mechanism for third sector to engage with Welsh Government on its legislation. WWF Cymru has led several initiatives seeking to ensure continued strategic voluntary sector involvement. These include its continued financial support and leadership for the SD Alliance to coordinate a collective voluntary sector voice around the Act and its development of a series of workshops with Welsh Government officials and voluntary sector stakeholders during 2018 and -19 to 'forge a common understanding' of how Act implementation by WG could be progressed and communicated. These workshops were intended to 'lay the foundations for more effective and productive involvement of voluntary sector stakeholders in future.'
8. The SD Alliance members welcome the fact that the need for greater voluntary sector involvement in Act implementation has been recognised by WG. Since that report the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip Jane Hutt made a commitment to setting up a stakeholder forum to advise Welsh Government on implementation. Welsh Government held a series of sessions on the scope and purpose however, there has been no publication that we know of on the outcome of that work. In WWF Cymru's view there still exists therefore a gap in the involvement of third sector in Welsh Government implementation of the Act.

Welsh Government

9. In July 2107 *A 'game-changer' for future generations? Welsh Government's response to the Well-being of Future Generations Act* report's overall assessment found that "Despite there being some pockets of good practice, the approach to the Act is inconsistent across Government activity. There is little evidence as yet, that the WBFGA frame is driving decision making, policy development or delivery across Welsh Government, or that traditional modes of operation are being altered as a result of the legislation. Overall, the findings of the research suggest **there is no systematic, coherent approach by WG to implementing the WBFGA**".
10. Consequently WWF Cymru collaborated with Welsh Government to explore via a series of workshops to "forge a common understanding of how recognisable progress in Welsh Government's implementation of the Act can be achieved and clearly shown. It was to involve a joint examination of **steps for improvement and to lay the foundations for more effective and productive involvement of third sector stakeholders in future**".
11. The workshops focused on the need for a 'whole government' response: requiring sustained effort through strong leadership and well co-ordinated management of crucial developments in:
 - policy processes, such as impact assessment
 - delivery tools, such as procurement
 - building teams' understanding and capability in the new approaches, such as consideration of future trends
 - tackling some of the difficult challenges associated with the Act, such as how to achieve stronger policy integration and effective collaboration across departments and Cabinet portfolios;
 - how to better involve people affected by policies and better collaborate with stakeholder organisations;
 - how to maintain focus and continuity of effort in areas where progress towards outcomes inevitably extends beyond Government terms; how to enable a shift towards primary prevention in policy approaches.
12. Since this report was published WWF Cymru is not aware of a formal update on what Welsh Government has been doing regarding these implementation improvements. We would welcome the Committee investigating how the Welsh Government has progressed on these areas.
13. Of particular importance to WWF Cymru was the finding that "Goals 2 and 7 (A Resilient Wales and A Globally Responsible Wales) are not widely enough understood or considered. This needs to be remedied, not least because of their importance for ensuring the long term wellbeing of future generations and environment on which they will depend. When levels of understanding in these areas are poor, teams will find it difficult to give a clear and credible account of progress towards them. As policy teams interact more with each other in their integration".
14. WWF Cymru and other environmental organisations consider the implementation of the Act, certainly in the first 3 years of implementation to have had too much focus on social sustainability aspects and not enough of environmental sustainability. In our view this undermines the purpose of the Act and internationally recognised definition of sustainable development.
15. The Oxfam Doughnut report 2020 findings would suggest that the Act has not yet made a significant difference to outcomes of environmental indicators: "it also shines a light upon the degradation of our local and global ecosystems. We live on a fragile planet which is under increasing stress to the extent that we

are transgressing a number of planetary boundaries – clearly, this cannot continue. Whilst for some of the environmental indicators considered in this report, discrete data does now exist at the Wales level, there are others where this is not the case. Whilst there have been encouraging improvements in the overall level of air quality across Wales (although these are likely to still be above the recommended upper limit in some urban areas of Wales) and in ozone depletion, in other environmental areas the picture is far from positive.

16. In two of the planetary boundaries that can be downscaled to a UK or Welsh level – climate change and land-use change – we not only fail but fail spectacularly. In the case of climate change planetary boundary emission limits in Wales are exceeded 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”.<https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620979/rr-welsh-doughnut-2020-sustainability-social-justice-010320-en.pdf?sequence=1>
17. We have noticed over the last year or so more visibility of environmental issues within Future Generations Commissions messaging and Welsh Government has placed more value on environment in it’s decision making. The decision not to proceed with M4 relief road and prioritising biodiversity and climate in budget process are indicators of this. We hope this continues and strengthens (see response Q6).

Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner.

18. Whilst support has been provided to public bodies there has been little support or resourcing for third sector from either Welsh Government or Future Generations Commission. The development of understanding of the Act and capacity to support its implementation has to be generated from within the third sector. WWF Cymru for example has used considerable resources to develop evidence base and push for involvement of third sector in implementation to be recognised as valuable. We feel this should be something that is resourced by Welsh Government and Future Generations Commissions as we see in many other countries. More details on how this has been achieved in past in Wales see *Enabling Effective Voluntary Sector Participation in Sustainable Development (May 2020)* and for how other countries fund and support this see *Stakeholder Engagement and the 2030 Agenda* United Nations (April 2020)

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

19. *Oxfam Welsh Doughnut 2020* recommendations

The implementation and governance of policy should consider:

- The implications of current economic policies such as regional economic strategies including City Deal and Growth Deal which may not be either desirable or sustainable.
- A greater role for the foundational economy.
- The appropriateness of traditional economic metrics such as Gross Domestic Product and GVA.
- Place-based approaches as a means of involving citizens in developing local democratic solutions.
- Empowering young people and other disenfranchised groups, including providing them with political education.

- Improving the accessibility of existing datasets that collect discrete Welsh data

20. Calls to Action

Wales' anti-poverty coalition calls on the next Welsh Government to urgently tackle the poverty and environmental crises by:

- Producing a tackling poverty strategy which delivers a decent standard of living for everyone whilst living within our environmental limits
- 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
- Focus economic policies on well being economics to address our poverty and environmental crisis

21. Enabling Effective Voluntary Sector Participation in Sustainable Development calls for

Institutionalised channel for voluntary sector input around Expert Advice and Scrutiny of Wellbeing Future Generations Act implementation preferable via a expert multi stakeholder forum to advise Welsh Government.

22. Welsh Governme support for an independent voluntary sector (or civil society) coalition focussed on the well-being of future generations is the best way to enable voluntary organisations to contribute into the Forum. These actions would address the pointers for action of the All Together report for more effective, transparent communication and collaboration between Welsh Government and voluntary sector stakeholders. It would also increase capacity within the voluntary sector to engage with other key partners in support of SD including the Future Generations Commissioner.

23. A Welsh Food System Fit For Future Generations demonstrates creating a sustainable food system is essential for delivery of the goals of the Act. One of the first steps in achieving this is the establishment of a Food Commission to bring stakeholders together and design a strategy.

24. Setting of Milestones Vital for implementation of the Act is the setting of milestones. The Act Clause 10 states:

(3) The Welsh Ministers must set milestones in relation to the national indicators which the Welsh Ministers consider would assist in measuring whether progress is being made towards the achievement of the well-being goals.

(4) In setting a milestone the Welsh Ministers must specify—

(a) the criteria for determining whether the milestone has been achieved (by reference to the value or characteristic by which the indicator is measured), and

(b) the time by which the milestone is to be achieved.

25. 5 years into the Act implementation these have still not been set. This is a significant gap in the Welsh Government's approach its essential this gap is addressed. We recommend that these are set in collaboration with third sector and other stakeholders. The recommended expert stakeholder forum would provide an effective way of undertaking this collaboration in setting milestones.