The world does not just need new development goals. It needs an economic system capable of delivering them.

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Ask a young person almost anywhere in the world what they expect from the future and the answers will differ enormously. But there is an uncomfortable thread running through many of them: the bargain between generations is breaking down.

A child born today is entering a world which, on current government policies, is heading towards around 2.8°C of global warming this century. Nearly half of the world's children, 1.1 billion of them, are already exposed to at least three overlapping climate hazards. More than three quarters are exposed to drought and 1.5 billion to increasingly frequent, prolonged or severe heatwaves. And every generation in countries who have experienced wild fires, flooding and extreme weather have felt profound loss.

And those consequences are profoundly unequal. Many of the children facing the greatest climate risks live in countries that contributed least to creating the problem. In countries with weaker infrastructure and public services, extreme heat, drought or flooding does not simply make life uncomfortable. It can mean losing a home, missing school, losing a harvest, being displaced or going without safe water and healthcare.

But this is not simply a story affecting global majority countries.

Across many of the world's wealthiest economies, younger generations are discovering that economic growth does not necessarily translate into economic security. Rising house prices have made it increasingly difficult for younger and lower wealth households across OECD countries to become homeowners, contributing to widening wealth gaps between generations.

Globally, the transition into secure adulthood is becoming precarious for millions more. Around one in five young people are not in employment, education or training, and in low and lower middle income countries nearly nine in ten young workers are in informal employment, often without stable incomes or social protection.

The symptoms look different in London, Lagos, Jakarta or a Small Island Developing State. But underneath them lies the same uncomfortable question:

What kind of economic system leaves the generation with the longest future facing some of the greatest insecurity?

Climate breakdown. Housing insecurity. Extreme concentrations of wealth. Precarious work. Depleted ecosystems. Governments spending vast sums dealing with crises we could have prevented.

We tend to treat these as separate policy failures requiring separate policy solutions. But there is an elephant in the room. They are also symptoms of an economic system that is delivering exactly what we have designed it to prioritise.

For decades, governments have treated growth in GDP as one of the primary measures of economic success. Yet GDP tells us remarkably little about whether that growth is improving people's lives, whether its benefits are fairly shared, whether the natural systems on which our economies depend are being depleted, or whether today's prosperity is being purchased at the expense of tomorrow's generations.

We have built institutions that discount the future, political cycles that reward the immediate and economic incentives that can make extracting value today more profitable than protecting value for tomorrow.

Then we are surprised when the future loses. This is why the debate beginning now about what succeeds the Sustainable Development Goals matters so much.

What next?

In four years, the Sustainable Development Goals reach their deadline. The obvious question is: what comes next? But there is a more fundamental question we should be asking first.

What prevented us from achieving so many of the things we already agreed needed to change?

The world did not lack goals. We agreed to end poverty and hunger, reduce inequality, improve health and education, tackle climate change and protect nature.

Yet too often we have pursued those ambitions through an economic system pulling in the opposite direction: rewarding short term growth, extracting natural resources faster than they can regenerate, allowing enormous concentrations of wealth and treating many of the costs imposed on people, communities and future generations as somebody else's problem.

So as governments begin debating what succeeds the SDGs, simply negotiating another list of goals would be a profound missed opportunity.

The post-2030 debate needs to be about the operating system, not just the dashboard.

And there are signs that this conversation has already begun. Around the world, governments, cities and communities are experimenting with different ways of defining and delivering progress.

Some are building wellbeing into budgets and economic strategies. Others are developing institutions designed to protect the interests of future generations. Governments are experimenting with foresight, long term budgeting and new ways of assessing the consequences of today's decisions.

The wellbeing economy movement has grown from a relatively marginal proposition into an international network of governments, practitioners and communities asking a deceptively simple question: *what is the economy actually for?*

At the same time, the limitations of GDP as the dominant shorthand for societal progress are increasingly recognised. International work on Beyond GDP is asking how governments can measure what actually matters to people's lives, social resilience and planetary health.

And in 2024, every UN member state adopted the Declaration on Future Generations, recognising the need to safeguard the needs and interests of generations yet to be born. These developments matter. But there is a problem. They are still too fragmented.

The people working on Beyond GDP are not always connected to those implementing future generations governance. Those developing new economic models are not always connected to the officials negotiating international development frameworks. National pioneers can remain invisible internationally, while global declarations can remain disconnected from the practical realities of government.

We need to start joining the dots. That is why Earth4All, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance and the School of International Futures are coming together to build a new high-ambition global coalition for economic systems change and future generations.

Our organisations come from different parts of this landscape.

- Earth4All brings economic modelling and systems analysis showing how economies can deliver wellbeing within planetary boundaries.
- WEAll connects governments, movements and practitioners already building wellbeing economies in countries and communities.
- SOIF works with governments and institutions to embed long-term thinking and the interests of future generations into the machinery of decision-making.

Together, we want to help build the connective infrastructure this transition currently lacks.

Start with what is already working

We should not begin by designing another global framework in conference rooms in New York. We should begin by asking what countries and communities are already learning.

- Where are governments changing what they measure?
- Where are budgets being aligned with wellbeing and long-term outcomes?
- Where are institutions giving future generations a meaningful voice in today's decisions?
- Where are new economic approaches improving people's lives while reducing pressure on the planet?

And crucially: **how do we know whether a country is genuinely making the transition?**

The next few years should become a period of intensive global learning and experimentation. We need credible demonstration countries and regions. We need better ways of measuring the transition. And we need much stronger mechanisms for successful approaches to travel between countries.

Connect the pioneers

Successful ideas rarely spread by themselves. They need networks, political champions and institutions capable of carrying them. That means building a high-ambition coalition of governments willing to move faster, alongside cities and regions, civil society, economists, business and other influential actors capable of expanding the political space for change.

Not every country needs to move simultaneously. History suggests that new norms often emerge through groups of pioneers. They demonstrate that something previously considered unrealistic is possible. Others adapt it. Coalitions form. Eventually what was once marginal becomes normal.

Regional leadership will matter enormously. African countries, Small Island Developing States and other groups should not simply be invited to endorse an agenda developed elsewhere. They should be among those shaping what a new global economic and development settlement looks like.

Build scaffolding around the UN

The United Nations matters enormously. But the UN cannot deliver this transition by itself. The post-2030 negotiations will be influenced by what is happening around them: national politics, regional blocs, the G20, international financial institutions, business, civil society, academia and public expectations. We therefore need to build scaffolding around the formal process.

National implementation creates evidence. Evidence gives political leaders confidence. Coalitions give individual governments cover to act. International recognition strengthens domestic reformers. And each successful reform creates another demonstration that change is possible.

That is how systems change actually happens: not as a straight line from an idea to an international agreement, but as a reinforcing loop between ideas, institutions, political power and practical experience.

Bring the global conversations together

There is another opportunity we should not miss. Beyond GDP, future generations and post-2030 are often discussed as separate agendas. They are not.

Beyond GDP asks what we value.

Future generations ask whose interests count.

Long-term governance asks how institutions make decisions across time.

The wellbeing economy asks what our economies should ultimately be designed to deliver.

And post 2030 provides an opportunity to bring those questions together in the architecture governing global development. That does not mean creating one enormous institutional process. It means recognising that they are different parts of the same transition.

Change the operating system

By 2030, success should not simply mean that the words “wellbeing” or “future generations” appear in another UN document. We should be able to point to countries actually changing the way they govern and manage their economies.

We should see governments measuring progress differently, investing preventatively, considering long-term consequences, protecting natural systems and assessing whether economic activity is genuinely improving people's lives.

We should see a geographically diverse coalition of governments championing these approaches internationally. And the framework succeeding the SDGs should reinforce this transition rather than force governments back into an outdated conception of progress.

The SDGs helped the world articulate many of the outcomes we want. The task now is harder.

We need to build the economic and governance systems capable of delivering them.

That transition is already beginning. The opportunity of the next few years is to connect its pioneers, build its political power and move it from the margins to the mainstream.