

SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE SIGNALS DEFINING SHIFT IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

BY CAT ZUZARTE TULLY

As someone who came into foresight from a background in strategy and policy, and from the perspective of citizen empowerment, the events of the past year have been exceptionally exciting. The 2024 UN Summit of the Future, particularly with the signing of the Declaration on Future Generations (DFG), signals a defining shift in global governance – one that places the wellbeing of future generations at the forefront of decision-making.

The ambition for the Summit was set out in the UN Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* in 2021, which, among many other things in updating multilateral governance to be fit for the 21st century, also promised to catalyse a wider conversation around foresight and anticipatory governance globally. This year, it has been my privilege to spend time leading and participating in citizen consultations around the world – and these reveal a clear and widespread desire for change. The future and the wellbeing of Current and Future Generations proves to be a powerful framing that inspires hope, energy, agency and re-engagement.

Let us take Cameroon as an example, which had an important role to play in the Summit under the stewardship of His Excellency Ambassador Philemon Yang as UN General Assembly President. At a pre-summit public consultation, this framing unlocked an inspiring level of interest and commitment – 25 civil society representatives, eight members of parliament and the senate, traditional leaders, many ministries – not least led by the Minister of Youth and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – came together to champion this agenda. This range of voices highlights a powerful determination to both shape the Summit conversation and ensure it reflects the aspirations of Cameroonian society but also to unlock stuck policy conversations with this much more hopeful and collective framing.



The UN Summit of the Future marked a defining moment in re-shaping the role of long-term thinking in global and local governance.
Photo credit: School of International Futures (SOIF)

What stands out in these consultations, both in Cameroon and beyond, is the dual sense of hope and urgency in shaping a brighter future. Citizens are energised and determined, yet they express legitimate concerns about misinformation, mistrust in democracy, employment challenges, energy transitions and tech governance. These issues underscore why it is critical to adopt long-term governance and to think differently about the world in which we live.

This is why the 2024 UN Summit of the Future was a once-in-a-generation opportunity – a catalytic moment for multilateralism, for building a hopeful future, a moment of rebirth that calls for the skills needed to achieve it. This also was an opportunity to turbocharge the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Pact for the Future – agreed at the Summit – sets an ambitious goal of reaching a global consensus on key priorities for sustainable, just, and equitable development.

The 193 signatories to its annex Declaration on Future Generations underscores a new norm – the undeniable fact that our decisions today must respect the interests of future generations. Sustainable development and wellbeing for current and future generations cannot be achieved without intergenerational fairness.

The challenge now is translating these ambitious goals into concrete actions. How do we build long-term governance capabilities and prioritise intergenerational equity in the face of resource constraints?

The good news is that we don't need to start from scratch. We can learn from the many innovative approaches already taking shape around the world, both within governments and in civil society.

Yet, one pressing question persists: how do we make these aspirations truly actionable?



During a pre-Summit consultation in Cameroon, civil society, parliament, traditional leaders and ministers convened to discuss long-term governance.

LONG-TERM STRUCTURES ARE EMERGING

The School of International Futures (SOIF) has dedicated more than a decade supporting leaders, organisations and communities worldwide to transform the present by employing structured thinking about the future, emphasising participation throughout and weaving global networks of impact to drive systemic change. Our theory of change comes from our research and practice in multiple sectors across more than 50 countries. We are a collective dedicated to inspiring change through futures thinking at local, national, and global levels. We have worked with organisations such as the UN, Omidyar, NATO, the Royal Society and national governments to make the world fairer for current and future generations. We also support a growing network of [Next Generation Foresight Practitioners](#).

But this collective mission – held by our wonderful community who are without exception – is also a personal mission. Before founding SOIF, I served as Strategy Project Director for the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and as the Senior Policy Adviser in the Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. In these roles, I was focused on shaping policies and long-term planning to address key challenges and opportunities facing the UK. Through this experience, I was struck by the importance of not only moving beyond vision and ambition to concrete, measurable impacts – but also the critical need to build institutional settings and governance ecosystems to enable this to happen consistently over time. It’s this insight that drives our focus at SOIF on practical foresight approaches and informs our values for powerbrokering and institutionalised incentives as core components of actionable change for future generations.

We’re already seeing inspiring examples of long-term governance structures emerging worldwide.

- In Wales, the Well-being of Future Generations Act has laid a foundation that integrates long-term thinking across different levels and across the governance system;
- In Portugal, President, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, has promoted intergenerational solidarity, and the intergenerational fairness assessment to scrutinise policies is used by his office as well as university students;
- The EU has appointed both a Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness and supports foresight leads / futures ministers across its member states – similar to Singapore’s approach of embedding foresight into the civil service; and
- Countries such as Kenya have set up a Kenya Senate Futures Caucus and Zambia is incorporating foresight into National Development Planning.

Youth engagement is a critical component of these initiatives, both participating in meaningful engagement in dialogues and policy making, but also in leading the energy and dynamism behind this work. Leaders such as Thays Prado, who works with Plan International on the Girls Pact for the Future, and two young Cameroonian futurists, Kwamou Eva Feukeu and Dr. Nsah Mala embody this leadership. Dr. Mala’s work on Congo Basin futures with young people – the first Cameroonian NGFP working at Bridges UNESCO – includes plans to connect futures conversations at COP30 across the three basins of the Congo, Amazon, and Mekong.

With the Cameroonian regional youth councillors, parliamentarians and other strong youth infrastructures there is a solid foundation to build upon.

We left Cameroonian leaders focused on crafting their roadmap for long-term governance post-Summit. The country's Vision 2035 and SDG progress offer key entry points for integrating the Summit's outcomes to boost development and advance long-term governance in progressive and meaningful ways. This includes ideas for a National Dialogue for the Cameroon we want, building foresight capabilities, intergenerational fairness assessments and appointing community representatives for future generations.

These examples, as well as many others, are included within the [Wales Future Generations Protocol](#), a document commissioned by the Wales Future Generations Commissioner's office, from SOIF, at the moment of their Cardiff Summit aimed at supporting countries in implementing the Declaration on Future Generations by tapping into their and many other countries' experiences.

GOVERNING FOR THE LONG-TERM

This is the key message: Yes, governing for the long-term is increasingly becoming mainstream. However, although this agenda is new for the UN, many innovators worldwide – both in government and across society – have already been working on it for years. By using strategic foresight to challenge assumptions, they're moving away from business-as-usual approaches to a different set of outcomes—building preparedness, challenging assumptions, opening up positive futures, activating youth and indigenous knowledge, building intergenerational coalitions for how we actually approach distributing fairly the costs and benefits of the big transitions ahead. Their work embodies the concept of *midwifing the new and hospice-caring the old*.

Exploring participatory futures exercises at Future Days 2024 in Lisbon with a focus on intergenerational fairness and actionable insights for shaping the future. Photo credit: School of International Futures (SOIF)



SOIF has been working with early adopters of long-term governance through two communities: the [Pledge Network](#), a global network of more than 450 civil society advocates dedicated to foresight and wellbeing, and the [Futures Pioneers Network](#), a coalition of civil servants and politicians from more than 50 countries, all exchanging knowledge and ambitions around futures work. Together, these networks connect into a “what works” movement, advancing actionable insights to realise the goals of the Declaration on Future Generations.

At the UN Summit of the Future in New York, we convened two events to showcase the best and inspiring examples from this movement, showing that change is not just possible – it is already happening.

The **Building Hopeful Futures Festival** held space for civil society early adopters to collaborate, exchange ideas and explore innovative solutions to shape a better future for all. This gathering featured insightful talks and interactive group sessions with groundbreaking discussions on creating hopeful futures. A global community of changemakers, visionaries and leaders came together to ignite optimism, sharing transformative yet often unheard projects.

These seeds of change are hopeful, powerful and already taking root. The festival brought these projects to a wider audience with 150 participants in New York and more than 650 joining virtually from over 60 countries.

At the **Roundtable on Long-Term Governance**, policymakers and government representatives received technical insights from research and cross-country comparisons, as SOIF launched the [Implementation Handbook for the UN Declaration on Future Generations](#). This event was designed to help policymakers identify ways to move the needle on long-term governance over the next two years, including how to drive impactful change at national levels, through the UN, and in collaboration with international networks such as the G7, G20, COPs and FFD.

With insights from attendees, the Roundtable underscored the urgency of the next 12-24 months for moving the needle on long-term governance, stressing the need for clear, actionable standards to avoid performative approaches. Establishing what “good” governance looks like is essential to meet the Declaration's ambitious goals. The Implementation Handbook stands as a practical tool, translating these global commitments into real-world, transformative practices for a sustainable and equitable future.



Hands-on collaboration at the Building Hopeful Futures Festival in New York– exploring creative ways to shape better futures together.
Photo credit: School of International Futures (SOIF)

MAKE A TANGIBLE IMPACT

Our work now is to continue nurturing this community of vanguard countries and actors, aiming to make a tangible impact on key intergenerational challenges – such as housing, climate and tax / debt – and to share and disseminate insights on what makes governance truly transformative. By the 2028 review of the DFG, we aim to show that it has brought about a measurable positive difference, both in people’s lives and across governmental and multilateral levels.

Cat Zuzarte Tully is the founder of the The School of International Futures (SOIF) a not-for-profit international collective of practitioners based in the UK who use futures thinking to inspire change at the local, national and global levels. Her mission is to inspire individuals, communities, organisations and governments to reinvigorate democracy by designing, scaling and embedding a range of innovations incorporating thinking about the future



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