

Enabling Effective Voluntary Sector Participation in Sustainable Development

A REVIEW OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR ENGAGEMENT WITH WFG ACT IMPLEMENTATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

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This report was commissioned by WWF Cymru on behalf of the Sustainable Development Alliance in Wales to explore the structures and mechanisms required to enable effective voluntary sector involvement with Welsh Government's implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act. It has been prepared by Cynnal Cymru, with support from WCVA, and insight from a range of voluntary sector organisations.

We hope that it will serve as a contribution from a voluntary sector perspective to the current consideration of wider stakeholder engagement with sustainable development and in particular the recent commitment made by the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Jane Hutt, to establish a multi-stakeholder forum to assist the Welsh Government with its own Act implementation.

ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

Acronyms:

SD – sustainable development

WFG Act – Well-Being of Future Generations Act

WAG- Welsh Assembly Government

WG – Welsh Government

Definitions:

Whole-of-government response (to WFG Act): the changes made at a corporate level to the organisation and functions of the civil service,

government and legislative processes in order to embed the sustainable development principle and meet the requirements of the WFG Act

Expert Advice: Advising government and public bodies through advocacy, co-ordinating expert evidence and advice for effective delivery, which may include examples of good practice, innovation and constructive criticism where required.

Scrutiny: Holding government and other public bodies to account for action on SD through a recognised, coordinated process. This may include monitoring and assessment of implementation and more strategic challenge on the scope and ambition of SD policy (e.g. in the case of WFG Act, the Well-being Objectives and whole of government response.)

Mobilising Action: Mobilising whole-society action through awareness-raising, campaigns, education, leadership and sharing best practice

Citizen Voice: a dialogue enabling citizens to understand, review and shape policy (or vision) at a generalist level and having a channel through which to sense-check whether things are moving in the right direction. Also includes providing a channel for lesser-heard groups to make their views known

We: the report authors i.e. Cynnal Cymru-Sustain Wales, WWF Cymru, WCVA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Welsh Government's ambition to embed sustainable development as its central organising principle culminated in the passing of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act in 2015, which has been recognised internationally as ground-breaking legislation. A review of Wales's SD history suggests however that whilst Welsh Government has set a strong track record in terms of its pioneering legislation, it has started to fall behind the curve in terms of the extent to which it is enabling civil society to engage in its continued development and implementation. A review of the participatory processes that have existed for engaging the voluntary sector in this agenda since 2000 suggests that there has been a steady decline in the channels for involvement since 2009, which accelerated with the passing of the WFG Act in 2015.

The passing of the WFG Act coincided with the closure or redirection of several key mechanisms that had previously supported voluntary sector engagement with SD from both a policy perspective and in wider promotion and implementation. These included the SD Bill Reference Group for detailed policy expertise; the Climate Change Commission for Wales for cross-sector collaboration and consensus building around a key SD issue; and Cynnal Cymru – Wales's Sustainable Development Forum – which fulfilled a number of roles over its lifetime, including scrutiny, advice, mobilisation and latterly citizen voice. The time-bound 'Wales we Want' national conversation came to a close in 2015 and the Wales Youth Forum on SD and the SD Commission had both previously closed in the five years before this.

The Act created a Future Generations Commissioner but given its focus on public sector advice and monitoring it was not designed to provide a route to continue the same level of voluntary sector involvement in strategic SD policy and implementation as had previously existed. This left in limbo the huge momentum for supporting the Act that had been built up in the preceding few years across the voluntary sector, not least by the Sustainable Development Alliance that represented, at the time,

more than 30 voluntary organisations and was recognised as a key factor in helping shape and champion this pioneering legislation.

To help understand this change of approach, it is also worth noting the change of emphasis in the work of Cynnal Cymru – Wales’s sustainable development forum – from 2011 onwards that reduced its scrutiny and expert advice functions and increased its role in the emerging concept of citizen voice. Whilst its own policy work around the Act continued until 2015, it was no longer the focal point for external engagement or coordination of stakeholders. The focal point for engagement around policy became the SD Bill Reference Group in 2012, which meant that the key avenue by which the voluntary sector could engage with government around SD policy had changed from being a permanent to a time-bound mechanism.

In the absence of a dedicated institutionalised mechanism to engage with Welsh Government on its SD 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.’¹

SD Alliance members welcome the fact that the need for greater voluntary sector involvement in Act implementation has been recognised by WG and that a new multi-stakeholder forum to help advise WG on its implementation of the WFG Act is being scoped.

We have considered the various roles that a multi-stakeholder forum could take in light of those undertaken by both the SD participatory processes that previously existed in Wales and examples from other countries.

¹ All Together Report (WWF Cymru, 2018) p.4

Interviews with members have highlighted that, of the four functions highlighted in the report, the greatest deficit since 2015 has been in an institutionalised channel for voluntary sector input around Expert Advice and Scrutiny in SD implementation. We believe that a WG multi-stakeholder forum should focus on addressing this deficit.

We also believe that WG 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. The Commissioner is working with WCVA to create a regular forum for dialogue with voluntary organisations in recognition of their essential role in helping enable delivery of Wales's Well-being Goals. We are pleased that this contribution has been firmly recognised by all actors but believe that its potential to fulfil this role will only be maximised through structured, coordinated and expert capacity and resource.

Recommendations:

1. That WG invest in the Multi-Stakeholder Forum as a permanent, institutionalised, cross-sectoral forum for the purpose of coordinating expert advice and scrutiny from external stakeholders around Welsh Government's implementation of the WFG Act.
2. That the forum is chaired by the First Minister or Deputy First Minister to support more effective integration and collaboration across portfolios
3. That the workplans of the Forum align with the instruments and timetabled requirements of the WFG Act such as the setting of Well-Being Objectives, etc.

4. That the voluntary sector is supported to engage effectively with this Forum and other key channels – and potentially other activities relating to delivering the Act - through creation of a separate institutionalised civil society space in recognition of the fact that the potential benefits of this cannot be adequately realised under existing structures.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

In 2019 Jane Hutt, the Deputy Minister, confirmed an intention to establish a multi-stakeholder forum to support implementation of the WFG Act that would include voluntary sector representation. As part of its own work in supporting WFG Act implementation, and in support of the members of the SD Alliance that it currently chairs, WWF Cymru has commissioned research to explore the form and function that this forum could take to best enable effective voluntary sector involvement in Act implementation and in particular Welsh Government's whole-of-government response.

The research has looked at different models of civil society engagement with SD from both within Wales and internationally to understand the different functions that these can serve. This identified four main purposes of Expert Input, Scrutiny, Mobilisation and Citizen Voice which are referred to throughout the report.

To understand the factors influencing the decision to create a new multi-stakeholder forum, the research also looked at the history of civil society engagement with SD in Wales including the relationship with Welsh Government and the roles and functions that have been undertaken by the various participatory mechanisms that have existed since 2000. It has looked at the changes within this period that have increased, decreased or changed the nature of engagement. A summary of these reviews is contained in part one of the report: *A review of civil society engagement with Sustainable Development in Wales 2000 -2019*.

In part two, *The Impact on the Voluntary Sector* the research has also looked at some of the consequences of these changes in addition to the outcomes of other work led by WWF Cymru around improving voluntary sector engagement with WFG Act implementation. This work culminated in the *All Together* report and a subsequent workshop in May 2019 around taking forward its pointers for action. This workshop recognised and reiterated the value of effective voluntary sector involvement in Act implementation and particularly the whole-of-government response.

These reviews, along with consideration of the mechanisms in other countries and detailed discussions with SD Alliance members, have informed the recommendations about the form and function that a new stakeholder body could take contained in the third part of the report: *Moving Forwards*. This also looks at how effective involvement of the voluntary sector within, and alongside this, can be enabled.

A survey of Alliance members together with five structured interviews were also undertaken to explore how best voluntary sector organisations could engage with this new structure and whether this could be done through existing mechanisms or whether a new institutionalised civil society space was needed.

Throughout the report there is repeated reference to international guidance around best practise for engaging civil society in the SD Agenda, primarily the recommendation from the 2017 Concord report that states should develop a ‘permanent, cross-sectoral, structured and institutionalised’ participatory process for CSOs to engage in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.²

² [MONITORING AGENDA 2030 IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE EU](#)
Concord, 2017

A REVIEW OF CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN WALES 2000-2019

When the National Assembly for Wales was established in 1999, Wales became one of the few countries in the world with a legal duty relating to sustainable development. The duty contained in the Government of Wales Act (1998) required the Welsh Government to promote sustainable development in the exercise of its functions, and to publish, and report against, a sustainable development scheme, highlighting how principles had been translated into practice.

The first SD scheme *Learning to Live Differently* was published in November 2000 and under the section 'Working with Others' contained commitments to work with a number of different audiences to achieve its outcomes. These included local government, the public sector, business, the voluntary sector, communities and individuals. It also committed to calling on 'expertise and experience wherever it is available to us, including through establishment of a Sustainable Development Forum or Panel made up of experts or stakeholders or both³.

At this time, the Welsh Assembly Government already received – and provided a financial contribution towards - policy advice and expert input from the Sustainable Development Commission, which had been created in 2000 to be the independent advisor on SD to the UK government. Its aim was to build the organisational capability of government to put SD into practice through policies and work programmes. It was overseen by a multi-disciplinary Board of 16 Commissioners from academic, scientific and business backgrounds that met four times a year. They were supported by a large staff team (60 staff across four offices in 2011) for policy research and analysis and corporate support. The staff included a Wales team whose remit was to work closely with the Welsh Government to provide 'policy advice,

³ [Learning to Lead Differently](#): The Sustainable Development Scheme of the National Assembly for Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2000)

capability building and independent assessment to help make sustainable development the central organising principle.⁴

The commitment to establish and fund an additional mechanism was in part a response to widely articulated calls from civil society for more opportunity to influence government's delivery of the SD agenda. The emergence of a SD Forum for Wales open to multiple audiences, as opposed to a more discrete panel, suggests that these calls had been heeded and the benefits of a broader, more collaborative multi-stakeholder approach recognised. The result was the creation in 2002 of Cynnal-Cymru-Sustain Wales - an independent stakeholder body that in addition to advising the government on sustainable development and co-ordinating expert views for constructive criticism, would also be 'a catalyst for change across all sectors'.⁵ Its activities and governance reflected this remit, being an open membership network of organisations and individuals, representing a wider sphere of interest than the SDC, led by a board of Directors elected by its members and accountable to an AGM. Its activities were public-facing including a range of cross-sector engagement and knowledge-sharing as well as specific projects to exemplify SD in action.

2002 also saw the creation of the Wales Youth Forum on SD, following a meeting of First Minister Rhodri Morgan with ten young people from Wales during the 2002 Earth Summit in Johannesburg. Persuaded by their calls to give young people who cared about issues of sustainability a way to have their voices heard and to be given the opportunity to change things, the WYFSD was founded in September 2003 on the principles of Education, Empowerment and Action for Sustainable Development⁶. It was run by and for young people under 25 with an open membership and, like Cynnal Cymru, had a role not only in sharing representative expertise and experience with government but in mobilising action amongst non-governmental audiences.

⁴ [SD Commission – Our Role](#) (Sustainable Development Commission, 2011)

⁵ [Our History](#) (Cynnal Cymru-Sustain Wales, 2019)

⁶ [A Sustainable Future for Wales?](#) (Positive News, 2005)

By the time of the second SD Scheme in 2004 *Starting to Live Differently* the role of civil society in promoting, interpreting and enabling SD became more prominent and the language around collaboration in its accompanying Action Plan changed. The intention to 'Work with others' in the first scheme had evolved into 'Delivering with partners' and the Action Plan itself documented that whilst the focus of the first SD Scheme had been on 'putting our own policy house in order' if Wales was truly to become a sustainable nation, then sustainable development 'needs to engage all parts of civil society'.⁷ The role of civil society in contributing to this change of focus was also recognised within the text:

'The Welsh Assembly Government has worked closely with leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Wales in promoting and developing its sustainable development duty. The Welsh offices of international NGOs have been especially valuable in linking us into wider networks and knowledge. We have also learned much from the practical experience of local and community groups and social businesses...'⁸

The Scheme's Action Plan set out a number of commitments to continue and enhance partnership working with civil society in both policy development and wider SD promotion and engagement. These included working closely with business and social partners on sustainable production and consumption and engaging partners more directly in policy testing and development, in conjunction with proposals for a policy integration tool. Cynnal Cymru would be a channel for promoting cross-sector best practise and learning through developing 'a virtual centre for SD'⁹ and also being entrusted to develop an Executive Leadership Programme across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

⁷ [The Sustainable Development Action Plan 2004-2007](#)p.23 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004)

⁸ Ibid p.20

⁹ Ibid p.20

Within the second scheme there was also a commitment for the WAG to draw on the views and experiences of partners in compiling both the annual reports and the next statutory effectiveness report to be compiled after the next election. Again Cynnal Cymru was referenced as a channel for drawing in experience and expertise from within Wales and from 2006 provided an independent commentary to the Welsh Assembly Government's Annual Report on Sustainable Development reflecting the views of its members and stakeholders.

At this point, the mechanisms for supporting voluntary sector participation in SD fulfilled a number of functions. Both Cynnal Cymru and the SDC were a route for expert advice and input to help decision-makers shape policy; they were a channel for dissemination of good practise and translation of policy to mobilise action on SD across different sectors; and there was also a recognised and supported role for scrutiny and assessment of government progress. Through the WYFSD there was also a dedicated route for engagement of young people. In their make up, the combination of the three structures above, and Cynnal Cymru in particular - also reflected the permanent, resourced, institutionalised and cross-sector participatory mechanisms that were later identified by Concord Monitoring Agenda 2030 report in 2017¹⁰ as being essential to enabling civil society to participate fully in SD implementation.

In 2006 the Government of Wales Act consolidated the ambition to embed SD in the exercise of all of the WAG's functions and the next few years saw several developments that reflected a continued commitment to civil society participation in its implementation. One was the launch of the multi-disciplinary Climate Change Commission for Wales in 2007 that included voluntary sector representatives as well as academia, business, scientists and the main political parties. This multi-stakeholder body was chaired by the SDC Wales Commissioner, Peter Davies, and also fulfilled expert advice, scrutiny and mobilisation functions around a key SD issue. There was also continued engagement with civil society to develop the

¹⁰ [MONITORING AGENDA 2030 IMPLEMENTATION ACROSS THE EU](#)
(Concord, 2017)

third SD Scheme for Wales *One Wales One Planet*¹¹, which was published in 2009.

One Wales One Planet was the first SD scheme to feature a foreword by the First Minister and to contain cross-Cabinet commitments to SD. The Scheme also began to explore in more detail a shared vision for a sustainable Wales. Although the overarching document set out the role that WAG would encourage other organisations to play in SD implementation, it was also accompanied by two supporting documents with one aimed at the wider public sector and the other at businesses, the third and voluntary sectors, communities, individuals and other organisations. The role of civil society was also articulated in several areas of the main document including within policy making, linked to WAG's core commitment to 'be inclusive in our involvement of all stakeholders in the development of our policies and programmes'¹² and there was continued commitment to support the work of Cynnal Cymru and the SDC.

Despite these intentions, it was at about this time that the number and nature of civil society engagement mechanisms began to change, beginning in 2009 with the reduction in Welsh Government funding of the WYFSD, which underwent a name change to Dyfodol and finally closed in 2013, signalling the loss of a youth voice specifically on SD. There was also a UK government decision in 2010 to withdraw funding from the SDC at the end of the financial year in line with what has been identified as a global trend at that time in disbanding national sustainable development bodies or councils.¹³

In response, the WAG took a decision to create a new body that would merge the functions of the previous SDC Wales team and Cynnal Cymru to be headed by a new Sustainable Futures Commissioner.¹⁴ The new

¹¹ [One Wales One Planet The Sustainable Development Scheme of the Welsh Assembly Government May](#) (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009)

¹² Ibid p.29

¹³ National Councils for Sustainable Development: Lessons from the past and present (SDPlanNet, 2014)

¹⁴ <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/news.php/393/minister-sets-out-plans-for-new-sustainable-development-body.html>

body would retain an independent advice and scrutiny function with the new Commissioner continuing to provide an independent commentary on progress within the Sustainable Development Annual Report. The Commissioner would also provide external leadership on SD to catalyse and support action across all parts of society including bringing different partners together to tackle difficult SD issues.¹⁵

In March 2011 the former SDC Wales Commissioner Peter Davies was appointed as the Sustainable Futures Commissioner (CSF) for an initial 15-month period whilst the form of the new body was being decided. Until then, the Commissioner would receive support from Cynnal Cymru, which now incorporated the former SDC Wales team, concentrating the two previous channels into one. This represented a reduction in the level of investment for participatory mechanisms in SD - it is noticeable that the CSF's first annual report commentary mentions that the merger of these two offices would continue service provision 'at a lower cost' – as well as a further reduction since 2009 in the number of institutionalised channels available.

In terms of the forms and functions of the new 'SD body for Wales', this was consulted on as part of the Sustainable Development Bill consultation and the proposals to legislate to make SD the central organising principle not only of the Welsh Government but all public bodies in Wales.

To support this process, two further participatory mechanisms were established, led by the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures. The first was a cross-sector external reference group set up in late 2012 to be 'a focal point for external engagement with the policy design process'.¹⁶ This group was a route for expert advice and input and met regularly with Welsh Government officials and its Project Board throughout the Bill's development until the WFG Act was passed in 2015.

¹⁵ [Commissioner for Sustainable futures Written Statement](#) , (Welsh Assembly Government, March 2011)

¹⁶ Formation of an External Reference Group for the Sustainable Development Bill, Invitation Letter from Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, August 2012

The second was the pilot national conversation on The Wales we Want. Led by the Commissioner and delivered through Cynnal Cymru, the aim was to ‘hear from the people of Wales and to improve our understanding of the long term issues that future generations might face’.¹⁷ This would inform the vision for a sustainable Wales that would be articulated in the new SD Bill and would ‘help set the agenda for action for the devolved public service in Wales’.¹⁸

From this point onward, the focus on citizen voice through the national conversation emerged as a core workstream for Cynnal Cymru defined through the ‘External Support for Sustainable Development in Wales’ contract that it held with Welsh Government from 2013 to 2016.¹⁹ Other workstreams included providing a secretariat for the Climate Change Commission for Wales, operation of the SD Charter and providing secretariat support, research and policy analysis for the Commissioner. The forum’s scrutiny role diminished as this function passed to the Commissioner and it no longer provided commentary on the Sustainable Development Annual Report. Cynnal Cymru’s structures also changed; it became less public-facing and stopped being a membership body. Whilst it retained its inhouse policy expertise, the new External Reference Group was now the ‘focal point’ for external engagement in policy design and Cynnal Cymru was now framed more as a support and secretariat body than the national participation mechanism for SD.

THE IMPACT ON THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

The increased focus on citizen voice arguably still fell within the initial objective of the stakeholder forum for SD in Wales – of enabling government to call on ‘expertise and experience wherever it is available to us’. However, the context around which this input was sought was shifting from discrete, tangible policy development to more holistic

¹⁷ Ministerial Statement by Jeff Cuthbert, Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, November 2012 included in [presentation by the Commissioner for Sustainable Futures](#) to the Public Health Wales Conference, October 2014.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ [New Directors at Cynnal Cymru](#) (Cynnal Cymru, 2015)

visioning, informed by insights from citizen's lived experience and perceptions. The national conversation focused on the destination of a sustainable Wales that its citizens would like to get to. However, for many voluntary organisations an equivalent priority was focusing on the changes in policy ambition, strategy and process that would be needed to get there.

2014 therefore saw the formation of a separate voluntary sector Sustainable Development Alliance to provide a collective voice in engaging with the SD Bill Reference Group and the Welsh Government. The Alliance started with a core group of environmental and international development charities but expanded to more than 30 civil society organisations 'from environment and development charities to faith and belief, language, community and women's groups'²⁰ by the time the Act was passed. These organisations worked with each other and with lawyers to develop their own proposal for a Sustainable Development Bill. Although Cynnal Cymru was part of the Alliance, it was chaired by WWF-Cymru and with a secretariat provided by Wales Environment Link. **This represented a significant input of staff time and resource from the voluntary sector highlighting the continued appetite to support the SD agenda over and above the routes offered by the institutionalised channels available at the time.**

In 2015, Wales's sustainable development legislation was passed in the form of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the 'new SD body' was created in the form of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner. The budget that had previously resourced Cynnal Cymru, the Sustainable Futures Commissioner, the Climate Change Commission for Wales and the national conversation, was redirected to the new body and a number of Cynnal Cymru staff were TUPE'd across to the new body to provide continued secretariat, policy research and analysis support. The CSF role ended as did the 'SD Bill' reference group, and a decision was made not to continue the Climate Change Commission for Wales. The SD Charter was also suspended as Welsh Government took it in-house to review. Although Cynnal Cymru remained as an independent

²⁰ [Shaping our Future Who we are](#) (SD Alliance, 2019)

sustainable development charity, it was no longer an institutionalised participatory mechanism.

The combination of these factors, together with the end of the time-bound Wales we Want national conversation, reduced significantly the channels available for co-ordinated external participation by voluntary organisations in the Welsh Government SD journey across the four functions - of Citizen Voice, Expert Input, Mobilisation and Scrutiny – that have been discussed so far.

The primary channel that remained was the newly formed Office of the Future Generations Commissioner. This did not however have the remit to replace all the other involvement channels that had now closed and nor did the legislation that created it, with its predominant focus on public bodies, provide a guaranteed channel whereby the voluntary sector could continue to engage directly with Welsh Government around Act implementation.

As noted above, Cynnal Cymru had ceased to be an institutionalised mechanism in 2016 when its WG funding and remit ceased. It also changed focus from being a route through which to gather and share evidence and expertise to an organisation that used its own existing experience and expertise to work with others, mainly in the private sector, and on a much smaller scale.²¹

These factors meant that there was no longer a structured, permanent, institutionalised route for voluntary organisations that had played a prominent role in development of the Act to remain directly engaged with its implementation.

In 2017, WWF Cymru commissioned research into the progress made by Welsh Government in applying the WFG legislation. Discussions of the findings led to an agreement to hold a series of workshops in January/February 2018 involving senior officials from across Welsh Government and senior representatives of voluntary sector organisations ‘to forge a common understanding of how recognisable progress in

²¹ Interview Cynnal Cymru staff

Welsh Government's implementation of the Act can be achieved and clearly shown'.²² Part of the rationale for this exercise was also to 'lay the foundations for more effective and productive involvement of third sector stakeholders in future.'²³

The report produced after the workshops was published in November 2018. It captured key discussions and pointers for action around both policymaking and Welsh Government's own implementation of the Act. The value of voluntary sector input to the whole-of-government response 'perhaps by being part of a corporate advisory group' was explicitly recognised along with the need for adequate and sustained resourcing to enable this.²⁴ Elsewhere within the report are repeated references to the need to sustain and 'look after' stakeholder involvement for both strategic and policy-specific engagement and that 'in order to bring about improvements in involvement, Welsh Government should trial different models in key areas: advisory groups/ reference groups/citizens panels.'²⁵

A further workshop was held between Welsh Government and voluntary organisations in May 2019 to explore this further where the need to facilitate strategic voluntary sector input into the whole-of-government response to the Act *as a separate function* to mobilising whole-society action or engagement was again reiterated and recognised.

In 2019 Jane Hutt, the Deputy Minister, confirmed an intention to establish a multi-stakeholder forum (MSF) to support implementation of the WFG Act that would include voluntary sector representation.

Voluntary organisations have also raised these issues with the Future Generations Commissioner. This has resulted WCVA joining the Commissioner's Advisory Committee to provide a voluntary sector voice. The Commissioner has also developed a Memorandum of Understanding with WCVA which sets out her belief that voluntary organisations have a

²² All Together Report, p4 (Welsh Government and WWF Cymru, 2018)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid p10

²⁵ Ibid p20

key role in securing people's future well-being. It aims to support engagement, dialogue and communication between voluntary organisations and the Commissioner as well as opportunities for collaboration.

The following pages provide recommendations, based on insights from voluntary sector stakeholders as to how voluntary sector participation in the forum can best be supported.

MOVING FORWARDS: THE ROLE OF A NEW MULTI STAKEHOLDER FORUM AND ENABLING EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

a) Models and Learning from Other Countries

Although the precise make-up of WG's new multi-stakeholder forum is still being explored, Alliance members have already discussed the role and form that they think could best support implementation of the Act and create 'a permanent, structured, institutionalised and cross-sectoral' participatory mechanism.

We have also considered the approaches from other countries that have established mechanisms to enable structured cross-sector involvement with strategic SD implementation. For example:

Finland has a National Commission on SD that is chaired by the Prime Minister and brings together high-level ministers, government officials, business and industry representatives, local government, church groups, trade unions, NGOs and representatives from the scientific community²⁶. It co-operates with the Development Policy Committee and strives to integrate the strategic objectives of SD into the national policy, administration and social practices, including strengthening policy coherence and mainstreaming SD policy. This is supported by an expert panel on SD comprising ten senior academics whose role is to bring evidence-based understanding.

²⁶ [Global Network of National Councils on Sustainable Development \(2019\)](#)

Denmark's 2030 Panel is a multi-stakeholder advisory board to the Danish Parliament's all-party group on the SDGs representing the private sector, civil society, unions, academia, municipalities and other sectors. It supports the group (the 2030 network) through dialogue, recommendations, evidence-based analysis and reports. Global Focus, a unifying platform for Danish civil society organisations engaged in development, environmental and humanitarian activities is funded to provide secretariat support.

Estonia's Coalition for SD brings together companies, state agencies and NGOs with a goal of becoming a cross-sectoral platform to jointly influence and shape political, social and personal decisions. Goals include input into policy making and monitoring, raising awareness of SD and enhancing cooperation through knowledge exchange, shared media campaigns, training etc. Members also sign a 'Goodwill Memorandum' to show their commitment to helping Estonia towards SD.

Ireland's National Stakeholder Forum provides a mechanism for key stakeholders to engage on an ongoing basis in the national implementation of the SDGs including informing development of the national implementation framework. It is led by the Minister for Communications, Climate Change and the Environment who has lead responsibility for whole-of-government approach. The Irish Government also funds a Civil Society Coalition calling for an ambitious whole-government national action plan, an inclusive monitoring forum and increased financing for development. Both above mechanisms were established under Ireland's SDG Action Plan.

There is more detailed analysis of the roles and functions of these, and other mechanisms, at Appendix A.

Having studied these models and undertaken interviews and discussion with members, we have developed a clear vision as to the forms and functions we believe a new multi-stakeholder forum for Wales could take.

b) A Multi-Stakeholder Forum for Wales

Model

Our preferred model is that the forum has **Expert Advice** and **Scrutiny** as its core functions to enable continued strategic input into WG's implementation of the Act rather than a **Mobilisation** role to catalyse whole-society action on SD or a 'The Wales we Want' type role to enable **Citizen Voice**, although these could also be overseen by this forum if they did not detract from the core mission.

We would anticipate the forum bringing in expertise and evidence from all sectors to help Welsh Government review and improve its effectiveness in delivering SD through both its outward-facing policy and its internal mechanisms – its 'whole-of-government response'. In interviews and discussions with SD Alliance members there was overwhelming consensus that this was the area of greatest deficit, where the stakeholders could have greatest impact, and was the over-riding priority given sustainability pressures and the limited time, capacity and budgets available.

For example, we would see the Forum having:

- early sight of key policy developments from all portfolios (e.g. major national or sector development policies, and 'mechanisms of government' such as procurement and budgeting and planning processes) with the ability to meet individual Ministers to discuss these.
- input into the setting and reviewing of WFG Act strategies and statutory requirements (e.g. Well-Being Objectives, National Indicator Milestones)
- the ability to highlight examples of poor practise in policy or process and recommend changes
- a role in providing independent review, commentary and analysis to WG reports, including its annual reporting on implementation of the Act

- a space to share innovation and transformational change (policy and mechanisms of government) which can be utilised for future working
- the ability to act potentially as a voice for future generations – considering the long-term impacts of work with future generations impact in mind
- and a key role in supporting WG’s development and implementation of its ‘whole government’ approach

Internationally, these advice and scrutiny roles have often been undertaken by National Councils on SD and the UNDP has concluded that this role of examining SD issues and advising on the evolution and success of SD strategy and policy ‘has clearly been one of the most productive areas of NCSA activity’.²⁷ This is also where Alliance members have identified the greatest gap in voluntary sector involvement with the Act since 2015 and is the role we feel would best fulfil the recommendations of the All Together report.

Leadership

In terms of leadership of the Forum, the UNDP guidance highlights that locating such advisory bodies within specific ministries can result in them having insufficient ‘political clout’ to be effective in terms of influencing cross-portfolio policy and process. Conversely, the benefits to effective coordination of ‘higher-level positioning’ through locating these under the office of the president or prime minister are also noted.

There may be benefits to the Forum having an independent chair, such as the Future Generations Commissioner. There are also drawbacks. The chair cannot then be held to account for delivery of the workplans or priorities agreed by the Forum in the same way that a government

²⁷ *Institutional and coordination mechanisms* Guidance Note on Facilitating Integration and Coherence for SDG Implementation UNDP 2017

<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/institutional-and-coordination-mechanisms---guidance-note.html>

minister would or have direct influence over the machinery of government. Given the expectation that the Forum will also assist the Welsh Government in its own whole-of-government response to the Act, we believe that a senior government figure is more appropriate to lead this.

We would therefore anticipate the Forum being chaired by the First Minister or Deputy Minister and Chief Whip.

We would also advocate for a 'SD co-ordination network' within the Senedd (either cross-Cabinet or cross-party or both), and potentially a special cross portfolio committee that would work with the Forum to maximise its reach and influence. This is similar to the approach adopted by parliamentarians in Finland and Denmark.

Representatives

In terms of make-up, we assume that the Forum will be similar to structures in other countries with representatives from across civil society (voluntary sector organisations, trade unions, academia) along with business and public bodies, similar to the former SD Commission or the Climate Change Commission Wales.

Members stress that it is essential that this membership is balanced and not dominated by any other particular sector and that, for example, voluntary organisations are represented to at least the same extent as e.g. commercial interests. Transparency would also be needed in terms of how members were selected and the expectations on them to involve broader audiences.

Resource

The need for a permanent and resourced secretariat for the Forum was repeatedly highlighted to coordinate and drive action between meetings and to ensure that these were solution- or product-focused. Security of funding was noted as essential for the long-term planning that would be

required for effective scrutiny and advice around key points in Act implementation.

Other requirements noted by members were the need for a strong Chair, clear Terms of Reference and a periodic review mechanism to ensure that the Forum remains fit for purpose.

The ways in which this Forum would engage with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for mutual benefit and enrichment would also need to be explored and clearly articulated.

HOW WILL THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR ENGAGE WITH THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM?

Whilst Alliance members welcome the decision to establish this cross-sector vehicle we also echo the Concord recommendation that countries ensure a structured participation process for voluntary sector to engage in the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda ‘permanently and continuously, as an actor in its own right’ and ‘both sectorally and cross-sectorally’.

Voluntary sector representatives will engage with this agenda cross-sectorally through the MSF. However, to engage effectively, and to provide a mechanism for broader voluntary sector engagement specifically around WFG Act implementation we believe that civil society also needs a separate ‘sectoral’ space to come together on its own terms. A sectoral forum would allow voluntary society organisations to set their own agenda and have perhaps more critical or focused discussions than would be possible at a cross-sectoral forum that may be geared more towards collaboration and consensus building.

Civil society has often been at the forefront of driving social change, paving the way for later institutional change, and it is important that there is still space to come together to challenge, agree priorities and push for action. As noted by several respondents, the need for these two spaces is vital, even if it might on paper appear to be largely the same people from the sector that would be present at both. It is almost inevitable that there will be more areas for discussion, collaboration or scrutiny than the Forum will be able to address and that there will therefore be work in addition to the Forum’s workstreams or action plans that the sector would want to consider. This will increase the contribution voluntary organisations can make to both the MSF and broader Act implementation.

This would also be the space for knowledge-sharing, feeding back from the MSF, and providing a sounding board for MSF representatives to scope proposals and gather intelligence, thereby further legitimising the representation role. A separate sectoral space could also bring in a

greater diversity of voices than perhaps the MSF could accommodate – including young people and other audiences historically under-represented in decision-making - in line with the 2030 Agenda commitment to ‘leave no-one behind’.

Ireland is one country that has adopted this approach through a Civil Society Coalition created and funded by the Irish Government as part of its first SDG Action Plan. This has a specific advocacy purpose, with Terms of Reference, a Steering Group and action plans developed by its plenary membership. It also hosts two working groups for Public Engagement and Policy. Its Coordinator, though funded by the Irish government, is hosted by a civil society organisation. This sits alongside the cross-sectoral National SDG Stakeholder Forum which was also created under the SDG Action Plan to ‘provide a mechanism for key stakeholders to engage on an ongoing basis in the national implementation of the Goals’. It is chaired by the Irish Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, who has lead responsibility for the whole-of-government approach.

Denmark also has various sectoral and cross-sectoral engagement mechanisms including a funded multi-stakeholder advisory board (The 2030 Panel) which provides analysis, challenge and knowledge sharing support to the Danish Parliament’s all-party group on the SDGs (The 2030 Network). The Ministry for External Affairs also supports Global Focus, a civil society coalition focusing on SDG implementation as well as the current and future role of civil society, leadership and development. Global Focus provides secretariat support for the 2030 Panel creating further links across all actors.

Interestingly there is another civil society coalition in Denmark focused on SD implementation – the Danish 92 Group. This appears to have a slightly different function with more of a focus on advocacy and coordinating policy processes for civil society organisations. This might be because, although all Danish civil society organisations with development, environment and humanitarian activities can participate in the general meeting of Global Focus (which sets its workplans and priorities), only paying members have the right to vote. (Given budgetary pressures on most organisations we know that a membership fee will

exclude some actors.) It could also be that some organisations preferred to maintain independence from institutionalised structures – reflecting comments from respondents that the sector needs to come together ‘on its own terms’.

DOES THIS CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE REQUIRE A NEW STRUCTURE?

a) Relationship with the Third Sector Scheme

We welcome the approach of the Welsh Government Future’s Team to work with stakeholders to review existing mechanisms and conduct a gap analysis of the participatory processes that exist for different sectors. This report is intended to contribute to this analysis and, as part of this, WCVA has also shared learning from its involvement in the Welsh Government’s Third Sector Scheme.

The Government of Wales Act (1998) placed a statutory responsibility on the government to develop a voluntary sector scheme setting out how it would promote the interest of voluntary organisations in Wales. The scheme sets out permanent, structured and institutionalised mechanisms for engagement between the government and voluntary organisations, that are currently coordinated between WG and WCVA. Key to this is a Third Sector Partnership Council and biannual meetings between voluntary organisations and each Minister.

The structures established under the Third Sector Scheme play a significant role in enabling dialogue between WG and the voluntary sector; building trusted relationships; and ultimately enabling better policymaking. However, these structures do not currently have the function of coordinating specialist dialogue and analysis of SD policy or its implementation; nor do they have the remit or capacity to take on this task without additional resource. We believe therefore that there is still a clear gap in terms of facilitating voluntary organisations to come together with the specific focus of working collectively around WFG Act implementation and being a strong source of expertise on this within the sector. This is because:

- Currently, the mechanisms for dialogue under the Third Sector Scheme are primarily focused on the relationship between WG and the voluntary sector and not on the implementation of a specific piece of legislation and its statutory instruments.
- WFG Act implementation is such ‘a broad and ongoing issue’ that there is a clear work programme for several years ahead in addition to the TSPC’s existing commitments under its Shared Improvement Plan. It would be unrealistic to expect the TSPC to accommodate this in the short term without its existing work programme suffering.

We anticipate that a structure with a more accessible and flexible membership mechanism than the TSPC would be required to maximise opportunities for voluntary organisations to engage with the MSF.

Most respondents agreed that, despite concerns around capacity and the plethora of existing fora that voluntary organisations are asked to attend, a separate structure was still needed to enable the voluntary sector representatives on the MSF to perform their role effectively. Critically, this structure could also support other emerging involvement channels either those that are time-bound – e.g. the recent engagement around the Voluntary National Review of progress on the SDGs – or longer-term. In particular, we welcome the fact that WCVA has recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner to enable better partnership working with the third sector including six-monthly meetings between the Commissioner and voluntary organisations. The Commissioner has also written to the First Minister to request that a representative from the voluntary sector be included on the Commissioner’s Advisory Group. We anticipate that this civil society forum would therefore provide the broad base of experience, insight and expertise to support the representatives engaged with these mechanisms and work programmes as well as those of the MSF.

The creation of such a specialist resource could also support existing engagement mechanisms under the Third Sector Scheme, such as the TSPC, to understand how its work can adapt to support ongoing delivery of the Act, including across different policy and portfolio areas

b) Is there a future role for the SD Alliance?

In terms of members' thoughts around a future for the SD Alliance, most respondents felt that it is the only voluntary sector structure coordinating strategic intelligence and advocacy around overall Act implementation and that this role is not duplicated anywhere else. It is therefore a 'ready-made' group for supporting voluntary sector reps on the MSF.

However, the SD Alliance is currently a small group and a wider voluntary sector coalition to support voluntary sector MSF representatives and to mobilise for action on SD would be highly desirable. Demonstrations of wider public support for certain changes can add credibility and legitimacy to the 'inside-track' advocacy that members currently engage in and also increase the whole-society ownership of a country's SD policy and ambition. However, as recognised by the separate working groups on Ireland's civil society coalition, this outward-looking mobilisation function requires a separate focus, different skill sets, audiences and communication techniques than the more inward-looking function linked to expert input on strategy and policy.

At this point, the overwhelming need identified by both members and all the engagement workshops to date, is for expert advice and strategic input. Just as the MSF is anticipated to focus on Expert Advice and Scrutiny, any support group for the voluntary sector reps on the MSF would need this focus as well. An independent voluntary sector support structure could have broader aims in addition to this, which could be resourced through WG or through attracting other funding. In particular, such a forum would be well-placed to catalyse action around the Well-Being Goals through campaigns, information-sharing and other mobilisation, as has been successfully trialled in Scotland. The extensive reach of the voluntary sector to citizens across sector and across Wales

could also be harnessed through this structure to promote and coordinate national engagement around well-being and the WFG Act Goals. This could provide a permanent forum for the collection and analysis of Citizen Voice to better understand the impact of WFG Act implementation and how to accelerate its progress.

However, in the immediate term, Alliance members were clear that these should **sit alongside, rather than be instead of**, the primary purpose of enabling continued strategic involvement of the voluntary sector in supporting and monitoring WG's WFG Act implementation.

c) Resourcing

There is consensus amongst members that a support body for voluntary sector representatives would need to be resourced with a funded secretariat able to coordinate activity and workplans. The expectation that a voluntary sector organisation would step into this role unfunded is likely to result in it being done 'on top of the day job' leading not only to staff burn-out but a failure to capitalise on the potential value that such a group could offer. WEL's experience of providing the secretariat for the SD Alliance is that there has always more appetite amongst members for work (position papers, consultation responses, information gathering etc) than the capacity of the secretariat to support this. In terms of finding resource, a membership fee model was felt to be unrealistic in the face of shrinking budgets and, although there are some involvement mechanisms that are self-financing - such as UKSSD which is supported by several large NGOs - there is not the same resource amongst Welsh partners to be able to fund an equivalent model at a Wales level. External financing through e.g. trusts or foundations is another option, as per the Scotland model, but this does not provide security around longevity and will limit the scope of the activities that such a Forum could undertake.

We therefore believe that WG financing of this support role should therefore be seen as a necessary investment in its own efficacy of Act delivery.

d) Recommendation:

We recommend Welsh Government invest in a broad civil society coalition, such as the Ireland model, where coordinating expert advice and scrutiny from the sector is a core function alongside other activities to mobilise action around SD.