

## Intergenerational Equity Considerations in New Zealand



### Summary

Intergenerational equity focuses on ensuring that we, as the current generation, act as caretakers for the planet, "borrowing" it from future generations with a commitment to maintaining its health and resources. Intergenerational equity is also about ensuring human wellbeing, where future populations are free and able to continue to observe cultural practices and sustain their livelihoods.

Achieving intragenerational equity requires us to think about the decisions we are making today and how that may impact on future generations.

The three principles of intergenerational equity are:

- **Options:** Ensuring future generations have the same choices we do and are not unnecessarily burdened by the choices we make today.
- **Quality:** Passing the Earth on in as good, or better, condition than received.
- **Access:** Keeping natural and cultural resources accessible to all.

An example of this concept in action is our approach to global warming, which represents a challenge to intergenerational equity as it can disproportionately impact younger generations. For example, delaying making the necessary investments into adaptation measures now to address increasing climate risks which will place increased financial burden on future generations to deal with the heightened risk.

To achieve intergenerational equity, we must ensure that our actions today do not hinder future generations' ability to meet their needs, or burden future generations with today's decisions for creating or maintaining cultural, social, environmental, and economic equity, thus preserving their "options, quality, access and wellbeing".

### Which statement best describes the concept of intergenerational equity?

Intergenerational equity embodies care for future generations. It means that the current generation is merely "borrowing" the earth from future generations.

### What is the meaning of Intragenerational equity?

Intergenerational equity in economic, psychological, and sociological contexts, is the concept or idea of fairness or justice in relationships between children, youth, adults and seniors, particularly in terms of treatment and interactions.

intergenerational equity – United Nations Environment Programme

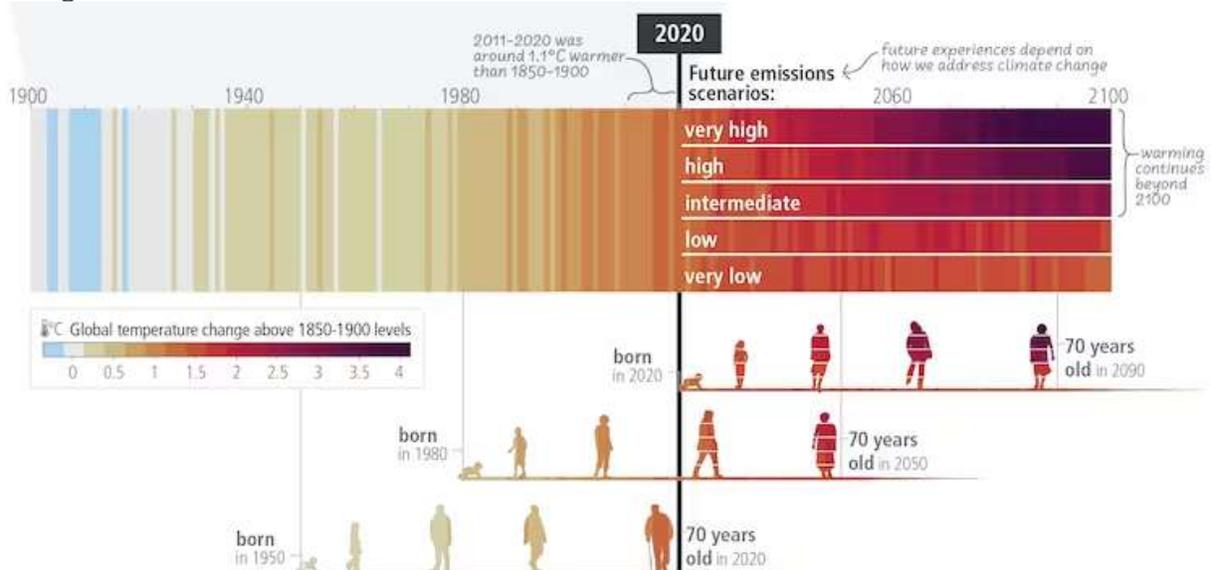
Intra-generational equity relates to notions of fairness and justice across the communities and states within the present generation. Inter-generational equity stipulates the rights and obligations of the current and future generations regarding the use of the environment.

### Why is it Important?

If we do not act soon, anthropogenic environmental changes will bring serious harm to the future. We have a moral obligation to avert harm to the future, to leave a world as rich in life and possibility as the world we inherited. Additionally, we cannot put off making decisions and acting in ways that will unfairly disadvantage future generations. We have a moral obligation to act, and act now, in a way that considers what risks and encumbrances we may be passing on to the future generations through our decisions.

### What is an example of an intergenerational equity environment?

Global warming is an example of intergenerational inequity, see climate justice. Intergenerational equity is often referred to in environmental contexts, as younger age cohorts will disproportionately experience the negative consequences of environmental damage.



How can we achieve intergenerational equity?

In New Zealand, achieving intergenerational equity requires a concerted effort across various domains.

- Environmental protection is crucial, emphasising the need for sustainable management of its unique natural resources and a commitment to combat climate change.
- Economic policies should be designed with foresight to prevent future financial encumbrances.
- Social initiatives must ensure fair access to essential services like education and healthcare.
- Honouring the Treaty of Waitangi, protecting indigenous rights, and preserving the cultural heritage are vital.

Moreover, embedding these principles into day-to-day decision making, legislation, encouraging scientific advancement, and promoting inclusive dialogues with all communities, especially the youth, are key steps towards ensuring a balanced and equitable future for all generations in New Zealand.

### **What environmental obligations do humans need to keep for future generations?**

The present generations should ensure that future generations are not exposed to pollution which may endanger their health or their existence itself. The present generations should preserve for future generations natural resources necessary for sustaining human life and for its development.

### **What overarching factors should be applied to achieve intergenerational equity in New Zealand?**

Addressing intergenerational equity in New Zealand involves a holistic approach that touches on environmental, economic, social, and cultural facets. By considering the following factors, New Zealand can work towards achieving a fair and sustainable future for all generations:

1. **Environmental Stewardship:** Prioritise the conservation of New Zealand's unique biodiversity and natural landscapes. This includes active measures against climate change, pollution reduction, and sustainable resource management, all in line with New Zealand's commitment to becoming carbon neutral.
2. **Economic Sustainability:** Develop policies that avoid burdening future generations with excessive debt. Investment decisions, particularly in infrastructure and technology, should be evaluated for their long-term (whole of life) benefits rather than short-term gains.
3. **Social Well-being:** Ensure equitable access to quality education, healthcare, and housing. This includes protecting the rights of indigenous populations, such as Māori and Pasifika peoples, and upholding the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

4. Cultural Preservation: Safeguard and promote New Zealand's rich cultural heritage, including Māori and Pasifika traditions, languages, and arts, for future generations to understand and value their identity and history.
5. Government Policy and Legislation: Develop and implement governing laws and policies that embed intergenerational equity into decision-making processes, ensuring a balance between current interests and future welfare.
6. Science and Innovation: Invest in research and development to solve present challenges without compromising future generations' ability to do the same.
7. Public Participation: Engage communities in dialogue about long-term goals and ensure a diverse range of voices, especially youth, are included in discussions about the future.

### **What practical intergenerational equity interventions can Asset Managers Include in their work**

Integrating intergenerational equity into asset management requires a holistic and forward-looking approach. It involves balancing short-term priorities with the long-term sustainability of assets, recognizing that the decisions made today will have profound implications for future generations. By adopting this principle, asset managers can contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

Intergenerational equity interventions within an asset management context can be broken down into Three Key Levels:



#### **Strategic**

Sustainable resource management - Use principles to guide policies at different levels, such as AMPs (Asset Management Plan), SAMPs (Strategic Asset Management Plans), LTPs (Long Term Plan) (Long Term Plan), Infrastructure Strategies and Strategic Plans, to secure natural resources for the future. Include responsible practices like saving, using well,

protecting the environment, and using renewable resources in organisational and asset management goals.

Social and cultural heritage - Maintain, enhance, and safeguard social and cultural resources that enrich the identity and well-being of future generations. This includes conserving heritage sites, traditions, languages, and intangible cultural expressions within asset management planning policies and strategies, as well as promoting equitable and just social systems that provide equal opportunities for all.

## **Tactical**

**Financial sustainability:** Establish financial plans and objectives that balance present requirements with future responsibilities within financial business case, investment ranking and programme creation. This involves considering the impact of investment options, debt control, and fiscal policies on future generations. Avoid excessive borrowing, unsustainable spending, and intergenerational shift of financial burdens within ranking, demand & sensitivity analysis and criterion for investment decisions.

**Infrastructure planning:** Plan and manage infrastructure systems, masterplans and programmes that fulfill long-term social and economic goals while minimizing harm to the environment and society. Set realistic service levels, climate change resilience, technological innovations, and adaptability to future needs within yearly, three-yearly and long-term plans for infrastructure assets.

**Pass on knowledge through generations:** Preserve and share knowledge, skills, and technology over time to maintain and improve. Tangata whenua have valuable and ancient knowledge and know how to teach across generations. Asset managers should work with tangata whenua as partners and stakeholders to think long-term and include that in their asset management plans and strategies.

## **Operational**

**Implementation of Programmes –** Achieving performance target results through completion of works required under Asset Management Plans and annual Business Plans. The active measurement, analysis and monitoring of equity levels of service and associated budgets. Incorporating intergenerational equity lifecycle costs within annual capital, renewals, maintenance and operational forward works programmes. Measure compliance against environment, economic, societal and cultural mandated outcomes and those performance targets developed within asset management strategies.

## **Where to Go for More Guidance:**

If you are seeking further assistance in this area look to the following resources:

- Sustainability experts' specialists in your organisation and internal documents e.g long term plans, national frameworks, strategic plans and spatial plans.
- Consultancies that specialise in intergenerational equity.
- New Zealand and International guidance
- United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)
- Local Government and Central Government Agencies
- Academia
- Cultural advisors – Te Ao Māori worldview is holistic and integrated in nature-based approaches.

## Resources:

### NZ (New Zealand) Specific

1. [Intergenerational Equity](#): Treatment of Infrastructure in New Zealand Local Government Financial Planning. Examines how New Zealand local government authorities prioritize intergenerational equity in their infrastructure planning and financing, despite challenges with valuation, depreciation, deferred maintenance, and financing. (2017). (PAYWALL)
2. [What's fair? Providing and paying for infrastructure](#). NZ Infrastructure Commission. *We're undertaking research into how infrastructure is funded and priced, as well as its implications for equity and the quality of infrastructure provision. Because infrastructure exists for generations, part of the discussion will also need to include **intergenerational equity** – how financing decisions can be made today that fairly share costs over generations. The findings from this work will help inform the next New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy and underpin the Commission's advice to local and central government and other infrastructure decision-makers.*

### International/General

3. IISD: [Rethinking Economic Systems for Sustainable Development](#) – What's Next? A central theme that resonated was: Do we serve the economy, or does the economy serve us? There was broad agreement that reimagining economic systems goes beyond mere measurement and entails a profound consideration of our societal priorities and values. (2023)
4. IISD: [Embracing a Beyond Growth Approach for Sustainable Futures](#) (2023). We need a transformation in how we define and measure economic value and in how we design economic systems to respect environmental boundaries of our planet and promote human well-being and prosperity within those limits. It is against this background that the SDG Lab is focusing on applying new lenses to sustainability, such as systems change and regenerative development. Complementing the 'What's Next' high-level event on 'Rethinking Economic Systems for Long-term Sustainable Development' of 31 October 2023, this article discusses the imperative to embrace a beyond growth approach for sustainable futures.
5. [FUTURES TOOLS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL EQUITY](#) website (UNESCO and UN Global Pulse). The tools in this collection are adaptations of well-established and

recently invented futures tools. All of them can help you develop capabilities which can help advance equitable, just and fair generational relations: both for currently living generations and for people yet to exist.

6. Call to Action for Human Rights: [Rights of Future Generations](#) (UN) Info Sheet. A clean, sustainable environment is a fundamental right. The impacts unfairly affect those who contributed least. This raises justice and equity questions within and between nations. All actors, including state and private entities, must take action. Brave individuals and human rights bodies defend the environment despite challenges and violence.
7. [Intergenerational Equity and the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (2018). The research connects the global consensus on intergenerational equity in international law scholarship to the SDGs. Includes a literature review of intergenerational equity theories and a textual analysis of the SDG resolution. Two main conclusions: the earth is viewed as a resource for present and future generations, and striking a balance between intergenerational and intragenerational equity is a key challenge.
8. Climate Change, Health, & Intergenerational Equity. WHO (World Health Organisation) Policy Brief [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/climate-change/who-unfccc-cop27\\_cchie\\_11122\\_lc.pdf?sfvrsn=f93abe44\\_6&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/climate-change/who-unfccc-cop27_cchie_11122_lc.pdf?sfvrsn=f93abe44_6&download=true)
9. [Understanding the effects of response measures on intergenerational equity, gender, local communities, indigenous peoples, youth and people in other vulnerable situations](#) (UNFCCC). Draft Technical Paper (2023).
10. Commonfund Institute: [Intergenerational Equity and Sustainable Investing](#). Intergenerational equity emphasizes fairness between generations and guides investment policies. Sustainable investing addresses these risks, creates opportunities, and contributes to a healthy planet for future generations. Challenges remain in defining standards and collecting quality data, but taking decisive action is crucial for a sustainable global economy.
11. [The Role of Social and Intergenerational Equity in Making Changes in Human Well-Being Sustainable](#) (2014). A sustainable world meets human needs equitably while considering future generations. Human well-being is influenced by basic, economic, environmental, and subjective factors. To achieve sustainability, social equity ensures fair treatment within society, while intergenerational equity considers the well-being of present and future generations. These concepts promote spatial and temporal sustainability in decision-making for overall well-being.
12. Virtual Workshop on the Promotion of Intergenerational Equity for Sustainable Development (UNDESA) – 2022, [YouTube](#).
13. Faster Capital. The [Importance Of Intergenerational Equity In Sustainable Development](#). The page is a digest about the topic and a compilation from various blogs.
14. [Computing for Sustainability: Abuse of intergenerational equity](#). (2011) Emphasizes responsible resource management and avoiding borrowing against the future. Abusing intergenerational equity involves depleting resources or running down capital, limiting options for future generations. Safeguarding intergenerational equity requires prudent resource management and proactive measures to improve resource stocks.