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Global Governance Innovation Network

Governing AI for the Future of Humanity

Connecting the Declaration on Future Generations with the Global Digital Compact

By Nudhara Yusuf, Julian Mueller-Kaler, and Juliana Lozano-Jaramillo

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The UN adopted the Declaration on Future Generations and a Global Digital Compact at the 2024 Summit of the Future, focusing on equitable governance and AI sustainability. This GGIN policy brief explores AI governance for future generations, emphasizing multistakeholder partnerships and proposing a Global AI Foresight Network and Earth Stewardship Initiative.

On September 22, 2024, the United Nations adopted a Declaration on Future Generations as a key outcome of the UN Summit of the Future. The Declaration contained Principles, Commitments, and Actions on governing systems in ways that are equitable, sustainable, and in solidarity with future generations. The Summit also adopted a Global Digital Compact, with a dedicated focus on the sustainable governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This policy brief analyzes the landscape of national, regional, and international policies on AI governance and the safeguarding of future generations. It explores how these two ideas could converge to govern AI sustainably for future generations and unlock its potential for development in countries where the majority of these generations will be born. Critically, intentional multistakeholder partnerships, including through networks including the civil-society-led ImPact Coalitions launched at the 2024 Civil Society Conference in Support of the Summit of the Future, along with engagement across various governance fora based on common principles, are essential for sustainable global governance of emerging technologies without harming future generations. The brief puts forward concrete proposal for a Global AI Foresight Network and an Earth Stewardship Initiative to foster coordination across multilateral systems and govern AI in a way that protects the opportunities afforded to future generations.

I. Introduction

On September 22, 2024, the United Nations' 193 Member States adopted a Pact for the Future, which contained 56 action items toward a vision for a more inclusive and sustainable multilateralism, as well as two annexes, a Declaration on Future Generations and a Global Digital Compact.[1]

Sharing a collective need to safeguard future generations lies at the very heart of the UN's founding principles—"to save succeeding generations from the scrooge of war"—and development without harming future generations forms the central idea for sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda.[2] Still, it was not until the adoption of the Declaration on Future Generations that countries around the world debated what this commitment truly entailed, and developed a commonly understood framework of principles, commitments and actions to safeguard the wellbeing and opportunities afforded to those who will be born throughout the next century as well as those who will age into our institutions and societies (beyond just the youth of today).[3]

Also annexed in the Pact for the Future is the Global Digital Compact. This is the first attempt by the UN membership to develop a comprehensive, and consensus based, understanding of digital governance objectives. The objectives of the compact include: (i) closing digital divides, (ii) inclusion in the digital economy, (iii) safe and secure digital spaces in line with human rights, (iv) responsible and equitable data governance, and (v) enhanced international governance of AI for humanity.[4] Across these declared intentions, the fifth objective on AI governance regulation continues to raise the most questions, including uncertainty around the specific role of multilateral systems in the future of AI governance and how institutions and forums like the UN and G20 might make policy decisions now to set us on the most strategic and sustainable future pathways.

While the Pact for the Future generally recognizes the common applications of principles from its chapeau and the Declaration on Future Generations as "cross-cutting," there is yet to be an effort to reconcile its two annexes and broadly think about how this commitment from 193 countries could jointly play out in global governance efforts. Failing to consider the future of AI governance for humanity could lead to myopic decision making that concentrates power and authority in the hands of a few actors, which immensely expands inequalities, preventing even the remote possibility of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and much of the rest of the Pact for the Future commitments. Moreover, in the context of security risk, this may even pose an existential threat to future generations.[5]

This policy brief first maps out the current landscape of national, regional, and global regulation for governing the wellbeing of future generations, and AI governance. It then moves on to consider how the art of strategic foresight can be used in AI governance to support sustainable policy making, where there are strong overlays with the idea of safeguarding future generations. Finally, it provides concrete recommendations for how to triangulate existing governance structure and proposals both for governing AI and governing for the interest of future generations. We put forward recommendations for a Global AI Foresight Network and an Earth Stewardship Initiative to connect multilateral organizations' thinking on future generations and AI.

II. Existing Approaches to Future Generations and AI Governance

> *"At the national and subnational levels, countries across the world have put in place arrangements to safeguard the future"*
>
> —Antonio Guterres.[6]

Mapping Approaches to Governance with the interest of Future Generations

National approaches to governing with future generations in mind, range from commissions and ombudspersons to constitutional provisions, legislative efforts, parliamentary bodies, and official committees, with nearly half of all written constitutions addressing the long-term well-being of those yet to come. A few examples of different national approaches are highlighted below:

Table 1: Illustration of National Approaches to Governance for the Well-being of Future Generations

Approach	Countries	Initiatives
Parliamentary/ Executive [7]	Finland	The Finnish Parliament develops the Government Report on the Future, using strategic foresight to align decision-making across government departments and levels by anticipating future challenges and opportunities.[8]
	Hungary	The Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Future Generations in Hungary, established in 2007, protects the interests of future generations, particularly their right to a healthy environment as defined in the constitution.[9]
	Cameroon	The Mbessa Kingdom Commission for Future Generations exemplifies a parliamentary and indigenous-led approach that bridges global commitments with local needs, emphasizing sustainability, biodiversity, conservation, and social empowerment.[10] Their National Youth Policy also reflects institutional commitment to align policies with long-term global frameworks.[11]
	Singapore	Singapore's Centre for Strategic Futures adopts a parliamentary approach by focusing on identifying emerging trends and potential disruptions with significant strategic implications. It works to build anticipatory capabilities across the public sector, integrating efforts from various government institutions to ensure a forward-thinking response to future challenges.[12]

Approach	Countries	Initiatives
Legislative/ Judicial [13]	Kenya	The Kenya Senate Future Caucus reflects an effort to institutionalize long-term policy scrutiny within the Kenyan legislative framework. This effort signals a transition towards greater legislative oversight and accountability on policies affecting future generations.[14]
	Portugal	Portugal's Framework for Intergenerational Fairness aligns with global objectives and focuses on guiding institutional ownership for political legitimacy and public accountability, fostering national dialogue to shape a collective vision for the future, and providing a policy assessment toolkit that uses best practices to evaluate fairness.[15]
	Wales (UK)	The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is a legislative framework that requires Wales' public bodies to consider the long-term impact on their decisions. It established the Future Generations Commissioner[16], a statutory role with the authority to advise, review, and ensure compliance with the Act's sustainability.[17]
	New Zealand	The Public Service Act 2020 represents a legislative approach to modernizing New Zealand's public service, with a focus on improving accountability while also incorporating long-term thinking to ensure readiness for the future needs of its citizens. Also: New Zealand Climate Change Response Amendment Act 2019 (Zero Carbon) is a forward-looking piece of legislation.[18]
Reserve and Resilience	Norway	The Massive Sovereign Wealth Fund has grown into a crucial long-term revenue source that currently covers 20 percent of Norway's budget. This accumulated capital in this fund will continue providing a significant fiscal boost for future generations as Norway's oil and gas production declines.[19]

Source: Original table by authors.

Regional approaches vary from strategic planning and goal-setting strategies to initiatives strongly focused on legislative actions; these variations are largely influenced by the structure of the governance institutions and the decision-making processes within them.

Table 2: Regional Approaches to Governance for the Well-being of Future Generations

Approach	Regional Body	Initiatives
Strategic Planning & Goal Setting	African Union (AU)	The AU Agenda 2063 reflects a long-term vision for the continent's development, guiding policies and actions at the regional and national levels. While it influences legislative and parliamentary actions, its primary focus is on overarching strategic planning and setting development goals for the future.[20]
Legislative	European Union (EU)	The EU Future Generations Initiative acknowledges a moral obligation to future generations, though the legal framework is underdeveloped. It proposes the appointment of a Future Generations Commissioner with legislative powers to address situations where future generations are compromised.[21]

Source: Original table by authors.

Following the adoption of the Declaration on Future Generations in September 2024, these initiatives are gaining momentum, with the United Nations both supporting international coordination and catalyzing activity at regional and national levels, while maintaining accountability and forward-leaning approaches at the **global level.**

Table 3: Global Approach to Governance for the Well-being of Future Generations

Approach	Institution	Initiatives
Decentralized Accountability	United Nations	Establishing a UN Futures lab to build foresight capacity across the system.[22]
		Appointment of United Nations Special Envoy for Future Generations.[23]
		Appointment of Regional Guardians for Future Generations (Decentralized approach).[24]
		The Ombudsman for Future Generations holds a mandate to address and engage with citizens' concerns, bridging international policies with national implementation.[25]
		Engagement of ImPact Coalitions and other multistakeholder coordination networks.[26]

Source: Original table by authors.

Mapping Approaches to AI Governance

As countries strengthen commitments to future generations, AI governance continues evolving along the broad spectrum of regulatory approaches (outlined in the *Future of International Cooperation Report 2023*),[27] aligning long-term societal goals with the need for effective, forward-thinking governance of

emerging technologies. States and regional bodies adopt approaches spanning voluntary principle-based guidance, the application of existing regulations, and the creation of new legislative and comprehensive frameworks (*see Table 4*).

Table 4: Overview of Existing AI Governance Approaches

Voluntary Principles-Based Guidance	Application of Existing Regulations	New Comprehensive Frameworks/Legislation
Proposing voluntary guidelines focused on safety, transparency, and privacy protections, with minimal penalties for non-compliance	Proposing the regulation of the use of AI and other emerging cyber-technologies, rather than the technology itself, while applying principles for copyright, intellectual property, and the production of critical medicine.	Targeted legislative approaches to governance, each grounded in different normative foundations
United States, Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace, Japan, African Union.	Australia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.	Russia, China, European Union.

Source: Table by authors, adapted from *Future of International Cooperation Report* 2023*: "AI Governance Spectrum."* 2023, p. 20. Accessed March 20, 2025.[28]

Following the adoption of the Global Digital Compact,[29] more countries are beginning to make initial statements regarding their AI governance strategies. These evolving developments help shape the spectrum of AI governance, as illustrated in Figure 1. Key examples of these developments include:

Brazil has joined the AI Governance conversation by adopting a risk-based approach,[30] which falls within the comprehensive framework outlined earlier. The Brazilian AI Act is a comprehensive piece of legislation that covers the entire AI lifecycle and applies to both public and private entities.[31] Additionally, it introduces regulatory sandboxes, promoting innovation through controlled experimentation under regulatory oversight.

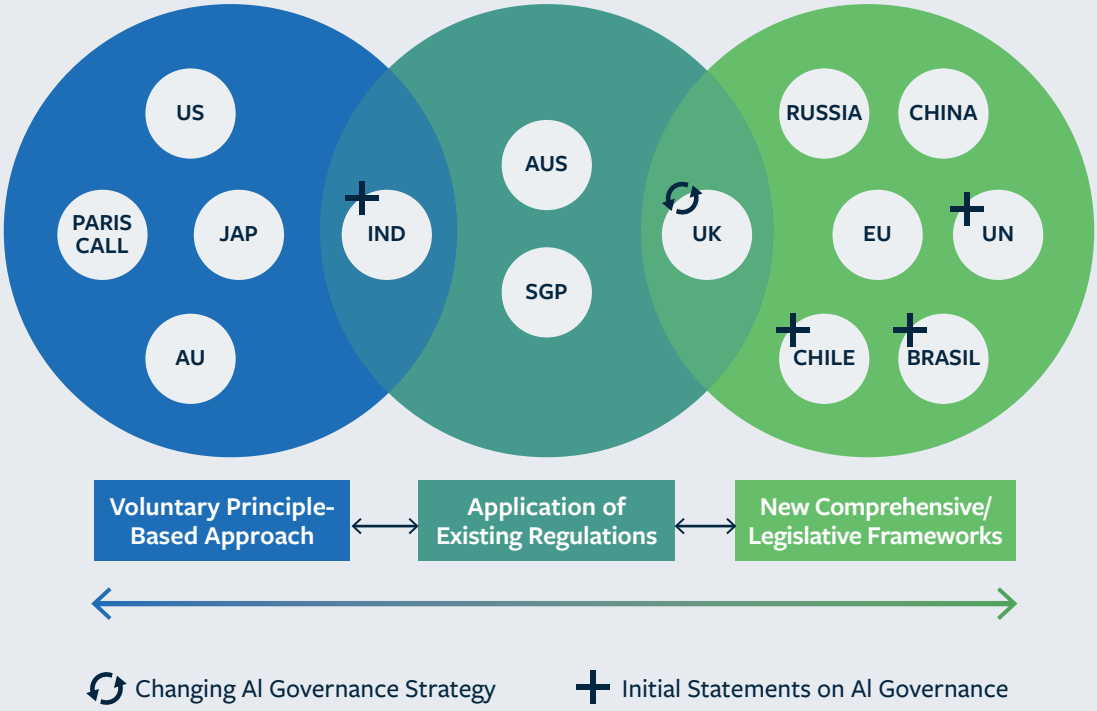
Chile has also issued a National AI Bill aimed at promoting the ethical and responsible development of AI technologies.[32] Similar to Brazil, it adopts a risk-based regulatory approach, which means a comprehensive framework with the primary goal of protecting human rights and aligning with international standards.[33]

The **United Nations,** as a global entity, has called for a more inclusive and distributed global AI governance architecture.[34] It suggests that Member States apply a unified framework that balances AI development with the protection of human rights. This framework should address issues such as accountability, transparency, bias, and ethical implications through the creation of light institutional mechanisms that complement existing regulations.

Although the **United Kingdom** has relied on applying existing regulations, it appears to be moving along the spectrum toward a more comprehensive and direct framework. By early 2025, the UK has shown signs of leading efforts for the responsible development of AI through a more regulatory approach, such as the AI Safety Institute as an effort to boost innovation while preserving safety.[35]

Although **India** adopted the *AI ForAll Strategy*, which seemingly promotes a voluntary and principle-based approach focused on capitalizing on AI to enhance human capabilities, inclusion, and social growth,[36] it also acknowledges existing barriers that need to be addressed, such as the lack of formal regulations around "anonymization of data", privacy, and security.[37] Therefore, India falls somewhere along the spectrum between the Voluntary Principle-based approach and the Application of Existing Regulations approach, Figure 1 therefore uses a bidirectional arrow for India, reflecting its ambivalent position between both approaches.

Figure 1: Illustrative Example — Spectrum of AI Governance Approaches



Source: Original figure by authors.

Regulation of both future generations and the use of AI is rooted in a common set of fundamental principles—such as safety, sustainability, inclusion, and transparency—designed to address and manage an increasingly uncertain world. In this context, the governance of AI and future generations shares a long-term perspective aimed at mitigating risks and ensuring sustainability, which necessitates the adoption of a precautionary approach that encourages proactive action. This cross-fertilization between the two regulatory areas presents an opportunity to create strategies that promote technological innovation without compromising the well-being of future generations. By integrating these principles and methodologies, it is possible to develop a framework that allows technological progress to evolve in harmony with future needs, ensuring that current advancements do not come at the cost of long-term social, economic, and environmental stability.

III. Building Resilient Global Frameworks—The Art of Foresight in the Development of AI Governance Structures

As artificial intelligence continues to advance at an exponential pace, its responsible governance remains one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century. AI's rapid evolution necessitates adaptive, forward-looking governance structures that anticipate risks, identify opportunities, and ensure that technological progress benefits future generations equitably. Therefore, traditional governance models which are often reactive and slow to adapt, might be ill-suited for managing the uncertainties associated with emerging technologies. This is where the art of foresight becomes a helpful tool, as its methodology offers a structured approach to analyze plausible futures, assess risks, and shape governance frameworks that are robust, inclusive, and sustainable—in other words, beneficial for generations to come.

The Role of Foresight in Global AI Governance

It is important to note that foresight is never about predicting the future; rather, it is about preparing for multiple possible futures through systematic scenario analysis, trend mapping, and risk anticipation. Applied to AI governance questions, foresight enables policymakers and multilateral institutions to identify emerging risks and opportunities, develop resilient regulatory frameworks, foster multi-stakeholder engagement, and bridge the gap between short-term decision-making and long-term impacts.

The governance of AI must thereby take into account a range of risks, from algorithmic bias and economic disruption to cybersecurity threats and the potential weaponization of AI technologies. Applying foresight methodologies enables global stakeholders to better anticipate such challenges and proactively design governance structures that mitigate harm while unlocking AI's transformative potential. Moreover, AI regulatory frameworks must be adaptive, capable of evolving alongside technological advancements rather than lagging behind them. By integrating foresight into adaptable governance, forums such as the G20 and the United Nations can devise regulatory mechanisms that remain relevant and effective over time.

A key asset, particularly for scenario building exercises, is multistakeholder engagement. Given AI's global impact, it is essential that governance frameworks incorporate perspectives from governments, the private sector, academia, and civil society groups. Engaging these diverse voices through foresight-driven processes ensures that AI governance questions align with ethical, social, and economic considerations. Furthermore, a future oriented mindset can help policy-makers reconcile immediate economic and geopolitical concerns with long-term sustainability imperatives. Too often, AI policies are shaped by short-term priorities, such as economic competition or intellectual property rights, at the expense of broader, intergenerational considerations. By illustrating alternative futures, governance structures can ensure that today's policy choices do not compromise the rights and opportunities of future generations.

Foresight Tools for AI Governance

Several foresight methodologies offer valuable insights for shaping AI governance. Scenario planning, for example, allows policymakers to envision multiple AI futures, ranging from cooperative global governance models to fragmented regulatory landscapes shaped by national interests. These scenarios, which can imagine quite far-reaching futures, provide a foundation for strategic decision-making that is responsive to uncertainty as well as complexity. Horizon scanning is another critical foresight tool, systematically monitoring emerging AI trends, regulatory gaps, and technological breakthroughs to establish early warning mechanisms that inform and necessitate policy adjustments.[38]

In addition to scenario planning and horizon scanning, backcasting can also be a powerful approach to AI governance questions. Unlike forecasting, which projects future trends based on current data, backcasting begins with a desirable future—such as an ethically governed global AI ecosystem—and works backward to identify the necessary policy steps to achieve that vision. The opposite can, of course, also be applied, imagining a dystopian future to showcase steps on how to prevent it from materializing. Deliberative visioning further strengthens foresight efforts by engaging experts, civil society, and policymakers in structured dialogues that align AI governance strategies with global sustainability goals, including those outlined in the UN's Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact.

Embedding Foresight in Multilateral AI Governance

To underscore the importance of both a forward-looking and global approach to AI governance, it is helpful to acknowledge AI as a global public good.[39] Box 1 below outlines the traits of artificial intelligence that make it so, acknowledging that it is both a "good" and a "risk" at the global level.

Box 1: AI as a Global Public Good

Universal Benefits and Risks: both positive and negative uses and impacts transcend sectors, regions, and national boundaries.

Built on Shared Knowledge: AI, especially when open-source, is built on shared datasets and global knowledge systems.

Non-excludable: while regulation may exist, the transboundary nature of AI means its main barrier to access is digital infrastructure, but once online, it is freely accessed. Thus, for regulation to be fully effective it must happen globally.

Not zero sum: though rivalry exists in development and integration of AI technology, unlike a global common, increased use of AI by one country or company does not prevent away use by another. This allows for racing to the top on innovation but runs the risk of racing to the bottom of safety and regulation.

To manage this global public good effectively, foresight should be systematically incorporated into AI policy development. For example, the G20's Digital Governance Task Force and other multilateral discussions on AI should embed foresight methodologies into regulatory deliberations, ensuring that AI governance remains proactive rather than reactive. Additionally, AI foresight must be aligned with broader global development goals, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governance strategies should be assessed against these priorities to ensure that AI serves as a tool for advancing human rights, equity, and sustainability rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

As the international community works to implement the principles outlined in the Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact, foresight must be recognized as an essential component, helping with the establishment of responsible AI governance frameworks. By leveraging a future oriented mindset, AI can be steered toward a vision that prioritizes collective progress over unchecked disruption.

IV. International Institutional Recommendations

Maintaining a future and foresight-oriented approach to AI governance will require intentional coordination efforts through institutional structuring. While changing geopolitical climates may make coordinated multilateral efforts more challenging, both the interest of future generations and sustainable AI governance require international coordination. At the same time, when resources are being channeled into regional and national capacities, it is crucial to ensure implementation of international commitments transcend silos and coordinate across agendas to generate innovative reform ideas. This is key to decreasing redundancy and inefficiency in the international system. A balance must be struck between utilizing existing mechanisms, taking into consideration the global reach of tech developments, and filling gaps in governance systems.

The following section briefly outlines two recommendations for connecting the implementation of object five of the Global Digital Compact—focused on AI governance—with the future generations oriented principles, commitments, and actions of the Declaration on Future Generations.

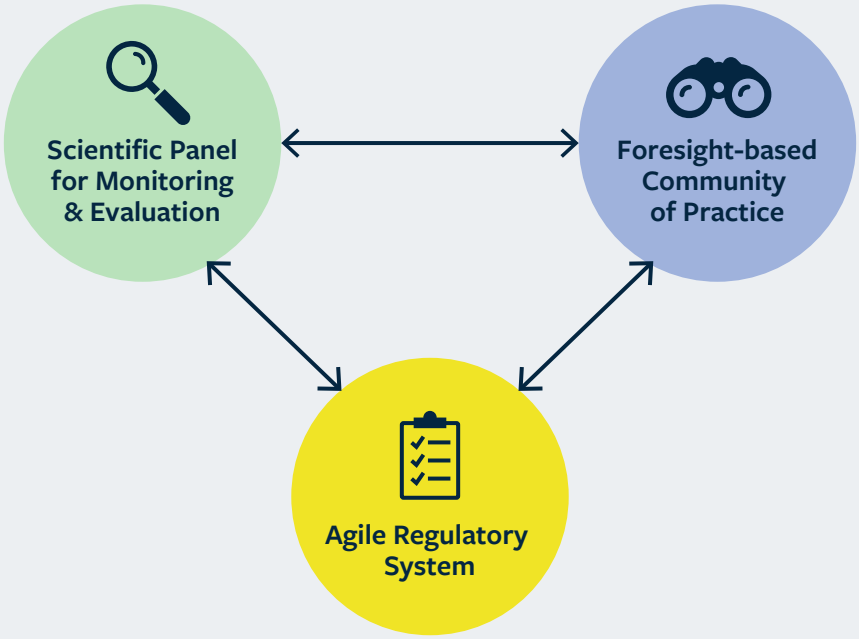
Global AI Foresight Network

To institutionalize foresight-driven AI governance, international bodies such as the UN should take concrete steps to support the integration of foresight methodologies into policymaking. One approach would be the establishment of a Global AI Foresight Network (GAFN), a multilateral initiative dedicated to fostering continuous exchange between governments, businesses, and researchers. Such a network would ensure that global governance frameworks remain adaptable to technological shifts and emerging challenges.

This network would serve to complement the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI proposed in the Global Digital Compact to enable a more agile and future-oriented global AI regulatory environment (Figure 2).[40]

As a community of practice, the GAFN would improve knowledge sharing across sectors, build direct access to expertise, create an enabling environment for innovative solutions, and bridge regulatory silos while allowing for the desired autonomy of governance forums, which is often a main barrier to developing shared best practices.

Figure 2: A Global AI Foresight Network as a foresight-based community of practice in AI regulation



Source: Original figure by authors.

Earth Stewardship Initiative

Previous research by the Global Governance Innovation Network has proposed the concept of an *Earth Trusteeship Council (ETC), focused on applying the principles of the Declaration on Future Generations to governance of the Global Commons.*[41] The recommendation considers how the United Nations could host the ETC as a high-level forum on Future Generations to support governance of global commons. Here, we suggest that the proposed council expand its focus to global public goods, including AI. The UN80 Initiative presented by Secretary-General Antonió Guterres to increase UN efficiency and ways of working,[42] presents a prime opportunity to repurpose the antiquated Trusteeship Council to an ETC focus on supporting governance of the commons and public goods.

The expanded initiative would primarily support reviewing governance of global public goods such as AI, from a foresight focused lens, mapping the current institutional landscape and illustrating scenarios based on decisions made or lack thereof. This would increase the visibility of long-term consequences of decision making around global public goods, and should serve as input to both G20 summits and the UN system, as well as inform regional and national approaches worldwide.

Across both these proposals, multistakeholder inputs from existing entities such as the UN Futures Lab, previous T20 task forces, the UN Envoys for technology and future generations, and civil society-led ImPact Coalitions would be key. This ensures both knowledge sharing and coordination to prevent duplicative efforts, and allows for resource pooling through these two platforms as coordinating mechanisms.

V. Conclusion

The combined implementation of the Declaration on Future Generations and the Global Digital Compact represents a crucial step toward ensuring a just, sustainable, and technologically responsible future. The Declaration underscores the ethical responsibility of present generations to safeguard the well-being of those yet to come, while the Global Digital Compact provides a framework for governing the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Together, these initiatives create a powerful synergy—aligning long-term foresight with concrete digital governance measures to address pressing global challenges.

Key to this combined approach is stronger coordination across multilateral forums and sectors of the economy. As digital transformation accelerates, implementing these Pact for the Future annexes in tandem will be essential for shaping a future world that is not only technologically advanced but also fair, inclusive, and sustainable. Governments, businesses, and civil society must work together to ensure that digital progress aligns with long-term human well-being—securing a future that is both innovative and just.

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[40] The triangulation of these three functions is further elaborated on in Ponzio, Richard, Nudhara Yusuf, Natika Kantaria, and Henrietta Skareng. *Future of International Cooperation Report 2024, 29.* The Stimson Center, Doha Forum, and Global Institute for Strategic Research. Washington, D.C, USA and Doha, Qatar.

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[42] United Nations Secretary-General. "The Secretary-General Press Encounter on the UN80 Initiative." United Nations in Bahrain. March 12, 2025.

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