

FDSD history and achievements

FDSD started life as the Environment Foundation in 1983. It was set up with an endowment from the international insurance industry and was probably the City of London's first major initiative to address environmental impact, catalysing change in markets and in the minds of decision-makers and opinion-formers. For example, we worked with the *Financial Times*, the RSA Group Plc and Shell on award schemes such as the [Better Environmental Awards](#) for industry to celebrate and encourage replication of the best technologies and practices. Seed funding was also provided for research projects, and travelling fellowships.

From 1992-2006, the Foundation organised high-level consultations at St George's House in the grounds of Windsor Castle. The last of these focused on the challenges of sustainability in rapidly developing countries such as India and China. Events like this, made it increasingly apparent that there was a need to address the wider context in which environmental decisions are made, and with a recognition that other groups and organisations were taking on the remit of environmental action within the economy. Our activities therefore shifted towards encompassing the wider and interrelated environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

As the Environment Foundation widened its remit, it had to persuade the [Charity Commission](#) for England and Wales to accept that "[promotion of sustainable development for the benefit of the public](#)" should be accepted as a charitable objective, which led to a legal battle. In 2003, the Charity Commissioners reconsidered. We are proud that other charities can now adopt sustainable development as their goal.

In 2008, the Environment Foundation hosted a [public event](#) at the Dana Centre to explore the links and tensions between sustainable development and democracy. It was clear that this issue was receiving very little attention. We therefore refocused our mission and changed our name to the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development (FDSD) in July 2009. The organisation also adopted a new mission, Memorandum and Articles.

The initial finance came partly from the existing reserves of the Environment Foundation, as well as a three-year grant from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to undertake research into climate change and democracy, supplemented later by the Foundation for the Future, as well as a core grant from the Tedworth Trust.

One of the first activities of FDSD was to write an [open letter to the UN Secretary General](#) in 2010 on the [International Day of Democracy](#) (15th September) to argue that that this should become an “*opportunity for reflection on the democratic challenge of climate change; for this is at once one of the most significant failures of democracy to date, and one of the greatest challenges that the world’s democracies have ever faced together*”. “*As citizens, we must empower our elected representatives to embrace longer-term objectives, even if that sometimes impacts short-term self-interests.*”

These statements reflected the focus and rationale of the early years of FDSD, based on an underlying premise that climate change might lead to restrictions or limitations on democracy and freedoms. A large piece of research focused on [The Future of Democracy in the Face of Climate Change](#) creating four future scenarios to 2050: ‘transition democracy’; ‘post authoritarian democracy’, ‘technocratic democracy’ based on authoritarian hierarchies and expert commissions and ‘rationed democracy’.

FDSD also held high level meetings, created media impact and responded to UK Government consultations. This engagement included being part of the development of the Welsh Sustainable Development Bill which subsequently became the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#). FDSD was acknowledged by the first Welsh Sustainable Futures Commissioner, Peter Davies, as influencing the direction of the Office for Future Generations.

In 2010, FDSD co-convened a visit of [Sándor Fülöp](#), then Green Ombudsman for Hungary, to the UK together with the UK Environmental Law Association, and the Government Legal Service Environment Group. This event inspired the creation of the Alliance for Future Generations, co-founded by the three groups. This network included large and small NGOs, and individuals: “*to find ways to bring long-termism and regard for the needs of future generations into UK policy processes and democracy, in order to safeguard the environment and secure intergenerational justice.*” It took formal shape in December 2010, with membership including [Friends of the Earth](#), [World Future Council](#), Public Interest Research Centre ([PIRC](#)), and [Think2050](#). Specific working groups focused on legal and constitutional reform, framing and narratives, [UK input to Rio + 20](#), and instilling futures thinking and culture change.

Along with other members of the AFG, our proposal for a [UN High Commissioner for Future Generations](#) became part of the official UN [Rio+20’s ‘Zero Draft’](#) document. This thinking was further developed in ‘[Committing to the future we want: a High Commissioner for Future Generations at Rio+20](#)’ and ‘[The Mandate of a UN High Commissioner for Future Generations](#)’. Other outputs included a paper on the [policy implications of planetary boundaries by Peter Roderick](#), and on [Guardians for Future Generations](#) by Rupert Read.

Taking the message to younger people, the then director of FDSD, Halina Ward, spoke at a [TEDx event in 2011](#) with a speech from a Minister for Future Generations.

This initial phase of FDSD's work culminated in a public-facing [Manifesto for Democracy and Sustainable Development](#) in 2013 which was developed through inputs from people from around the world. The consultation was launched at Rio+20 and finalised at a [stakeholder event with Salzburg Global Seminar](#). By the conclusion of the consultation in December 2012, around 340 people in 37 countries had submitted ideas through workshops, exhibition stands and online consultation forms. The Manifesto included a [set of principles](#), as well as encouraging commitments to action. Despite the inability to resource its continuing roll-out, the participatory process behind the Manifesto focused many minds and informed debate, with the Manifesto remaining an important statement of collectively-designed principles underlying the connection between democracy and sustainability.

In 2015, FDSD relaunched with a new website and focus on seeding ideas and connecting people together to address the challenges of how democracy can adapt to achieve sustainable development. A launch [event at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Westminster University](#), considered lessons learned from the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act, and how these might be relevant for elsewhere, particularly the UK. We also commissioned think pieces from academics and thinkers, a themed newsletter, and brought our insights and convening power to groups who were relatively new to these issues, through a [joint event organised with the Institute for Actuaries](#).

We also undertook a specific campaign to bring a [Committee for Future Generations into the House of Lords](#). Its aim would be to examine current and draft legislation from a long-term perspective, considering the impact on future generations and suggesting amendments to protect their interests; carrying out reviews into specific issues; and publishing an annual report on long-term trends. Whilst receiving cross-party and wide ranging support, this Committee failed to gain enough support to go forward, but the activity again seeded thinking amongst new audiences.

Other impactful activities included taking FDSD's thinking on incorporating, among other policies, a futures' capacity within the EU and increased participation, to the [Independent Commission for Sustainable Equality](#), instigated by the S&D group of the European Parliament; as well as working with [Lord Bird's](#) office in the House of Lords to bring stakeholders together to help draft a Bill which adapted the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act for the UK](#) parliament. We [co-hosted an event in the House of Lords to launch the Bill](#) in 2020 and continue to be part of the Steering Group for its passage [through both Houses of the UK Parliament](#).