



Foresight for Strategic Planning Toolkit



**UNDP Strategy & Futures Team
2026**

If you use this toolkit we would value learning from your experience and suggestions for future editions. Email bronwyn.williams@undp.org with your feedback.

Foreword

In an era defined by complexity, volatility, and rapid transformation, organizations can no longer rely solely on past experiences to shape the future. The challenges we face today—from climate change to digital disruption—require us to look ahead, anticipate emerging trends, and prepare for multiple possible futures.

Strategic foresight allows us to do just that. It equips us with the tools to explore uncertainty, challenge assumptions, and design plans that are not just reactive but truly anticipatory.

UNDP has been at the forefront of integrating foresight into development practice. Across the UN system, we have pioneered efforts to embed futures thinking into our work, enabling teams to navigate uncertainty and complexity with greater confidence and agility. This toolkit is another step in that journey—an effort to support organisations in applying foresight to strategic planning, ensuring that strategies are forward-looking, resilient, and informed by a broad, participatory approach.

This toolkit is not a rigid framework but a **flexible toolkit**. We encourage you to engage with it in a way that best suits your context, drawing from the concepts, tools, and approaches outlined here and adapting them to your unique realities. It is meant to support teams in embedding a culture of anticipation in their work, making foresight an integral part of continuous and adaptive planning rather than a one-time exercise.

We invite you to put foresight into practice and to build more anticipatory, innovative, and transformative strategies. We look forward to seeing what you will imagine—and make possible.



Narue Shiki

*Head, Strategy & Futures Team
UNDP Executive Office*

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Introduction

Planning, Strategy and Strategic Planning in a Changing World

Organizations explore multiple futures because none is guaranteed, and they plan because the future does not arrange itself in desirable ways. With finite resources, the choices made today shape what becomes possible tomorrow. Planning is the disciplined effort to make those choices deliberately rather than by default.

What is strategy?

While planning is about organizing action, **strategy is about choice**. Strategy concerns the fundamental decisions an organization makes about:

- where it will focus its efforts and where it will not
- how it intends to create value or impact
- how it positions itself in relation to its environment and other actors.

Strategy is inherently *selective*. It accepts that not everything can be done at once, that trade-offs are unavoidable, and that success depends as much on what is deliberately excluded as on what is pursued.

What is planning?

At its most general level, **planning is the process of deciding in advance what an organization is trying to achieve and how it intends to achieve it**, including how progress will be monitored, how resources will be allocated, and how learning and adaptation will take place over time.

Planning is not a single document or a one-off exercise. It is a **continuous decision-making process** that helps organizations:

- clarify goals and priorities
- translate intent into coordinated action
- anticipate risks and opportunities
- and adapt as circumstances change

Good planning does not eliminate uncertainty. Instead, it **creates structure for acting under uncertainty**.

How do we define strategic planning?

Strategic planning is the process that connects strategy to action over time.

It sits between high-level strategic intent and day-to-day operations, translating directional choices into medium- to long-term objectives, coherent portfolios of initiatives or interventions, and learning and adaptation mechanisms.



Introduction

Strategic planning answers a specific set of questions:

Given the environment we are operating in, **what future outcomes are we committing to?**
What pathways could realistically lead to those outcomes?
What assumptions are we making about how the world will evolve?
How will we know if our strategy remains valid as conditions change?

In other words, strategic planning is not about predicting the future. It is about **making choices that remain robust across multiple plausible futures.**

This toolkit is designed to support **strategic planning** in contexts where uncertainty, complexity, and long-term change matter. It does not prescribe a single planning model, nor does it assume a specific sector or institutional setting. Instead, it provides:

- structured ways to understand changing environments,
- tools to connect situational analysis to strategic intent,
- methods to design pathways that remain viable under uncertainty,
- and approaches to embed learning and adaptation into planning.

Why use foresight in any strategic planning process?

Foresight shifts the focus from reactive problem-solving to proactive strategy-making, enabling plans to be:



Future-Fit

Addressing long-term trends and emerging risks while seizing new opportunities.



Adaptive

Ensuring flexibility to respond to rapid and unexpected changes in the landscape of the future.



Systems Oriented

Recognizing and addressing the interconnected nature of challenges and opportunities.

The advantages you gain by using foresight in strategic planning processes:



1

Enhanced Strategic Planning:

Foresight enables you to understand how national and global trends may evolve and interact, so you can set priorities that remain relevant and impactful — even as conditions shift.

Robust Risk Management:

Through tools like scenario planning and wind-tunneling, foresight supports the identification of risks and vulnerabilities, ensuring that your plans are resilient under multiple future conditions.

3

Innovation and Opportunity Identification:

Because foresight looks beyond the expected, it can uncover strategic opportunities that others — locked into a single view of the future — are likely to overlook.

Inclusive and Participatory Planning:

Foresight tools often enable the engagement of diverse stakeholders, fostering co-creation and ensuring that your planning reflects the aspirations and perspectives of all stakeholders.

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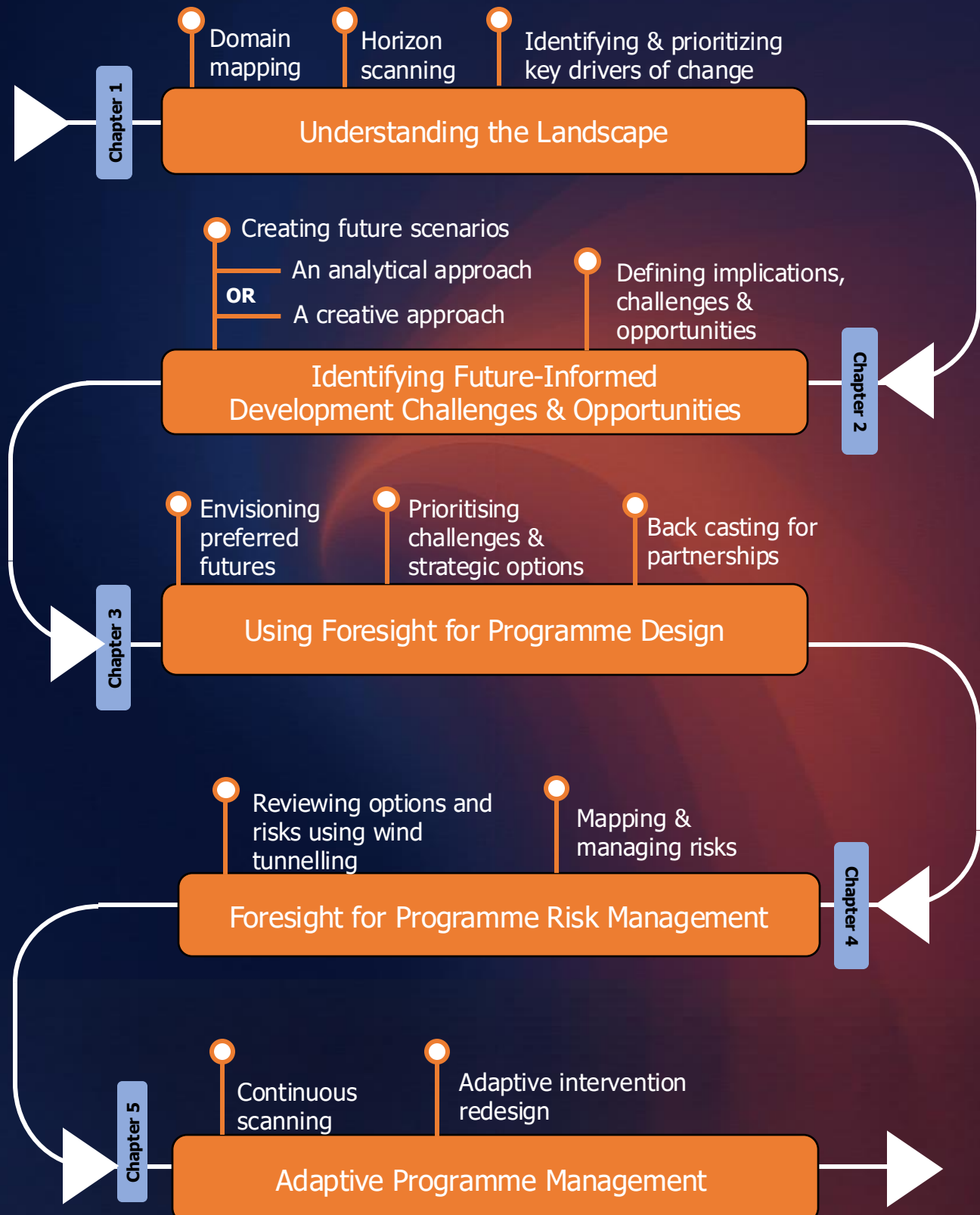
Foresight shifts your organisation's posture from **responsive to anticipatory** — enabling you to influence the conditions ahead, rather than merely adapt to them.

The future is uncertain, but with foresight, you can ensure that your organisation is prepared not only to navigate the unknown but also to shape it.

Let's get started!

Process Overview

This page provides a comprehensive **high-level overview** of the foresight-informed process outlined in this toolkit. Each chapter incorporates actionable methods, tools and templates to guide teams through both strategic and operational decision-making.



A Modular Approach

Use one chapter or all—this toolkit adapts to your needs

Each chapter is self-contained and can be used independently based on where you are in your planning process.



Introduction

A Quick Primer on Foresight

What is foresight?

Foresight is the systematic study of change.

It employs structured methodologies to explore multiple possible futures, enabling better decision-making in the present. Unlike prediction or forecasting, foresight does not claim to know what will happen or project today into the future. Both forecasters and foresight practitioners draw on present-day evidence to explore the future. Forecasters rely primarily on established data and quantifiable trends which they use to make predictions about the future, while futurists focus on weak signals, emerging issues, and nascent patterns of change that could challenge forecast assumptions. Foresight aims to:

1. **Understand Change:** Study trends, disruptions, and weak signals to understand how change is unfolding.
2. **Build Confidence:** Equip decision-makers to make informed choices by preparing for uncertainty.
3. **Enable Action:** Turn insights into actionable strategies to influence the future rather than merely react to it.

The seven phases of a general foresight process*



*This is the University of Houston Foresight process and also forms the basis of the UNDP NextGen Foresight for Development Learning Program.

The next chapter will guide you through specific foresight tools and their application in each phase of a strategic planning process, helping you turn these concepts into actionable steps.

Chapter 1

Laying the Foundations

Understanding the Landscape



Objective

This chapter helps your team ground its planning in an understanding of emerging trends, systemic challenges, and long-term opportunities — setting an anticipatory tone from the outset.



Expected outcome

An understanding of the development landscape, the emerging signals of change and a prioritised list of drivers of change.

Tip – *The team can choose to publish the outcome as a report.*

Key questions answered

What is the scope of the domain we are trying to influence?

What are the key emerging trends and drivers shaping the development landscape?

Is there something our team might be overlooking?

Where do the most critical uncertainties lie?

Prerequisites for the activities in this chapter:

None, as this is the starting point of the journey.

Note to senior management

- ✓ Motivate your team to leverage foresight for bold, future-oriented planning.
- ✓ Encourage them to explore trends and identify critical gaps they might be missing.
- ✓ Your support in convening and engaging external stakeholders will be crucial.



Steps:

Define your domain, conduct horizon scanning, identify drivers of change, and prioritize them through structured workshops.



Tools Used:

Domain Mapping
Futures Triangle,
Signal Scanning
(Method), Drivers
Prioritization
Framework.



Recommended Workshops:

1. Horizon Scanning
2. Driver Identification and Prioritization Workshop

Chapter 1: Laying the Foundations

Defining the Landscape



Defining your domain

Before you start a foresight project, you should always spend some time considering what and why the project is going to achieve. This ensures you spend your time and resources wisely on supporting your ultimate objectives.

To do this, start with defining the project domain and the extent – and limits – of the project scope.

A domain description is a clear statement of what we're exploring and why. It defines the agreed-upon territory for the foresight initiative, providing clarity for the team and alignment with stakeholders.

How to define a domain

A good domain description should include:

- ✓ **The focal issue or guiding question** – What's the central topic we want to explore? This can be either a strategic issue such as "should we invest in AI training" or exploratory, "what is the future of AI in risk assessment?"
- ✓ **The project context** – Why does this topic matter now?
- ✓ **The project type** – are you attempting to explore or broaden your understanding of an issue, or are you attempting to get clarity and focus on a particular strategic objective?
- ✓ **Geographic and sector scope** – Where and in what contexts will we focus our attention?
- ✓ **Client or stakeholder context** – Who will use these insights, and how?
- ✓ **Time horizon** – How far into the future are we looking?

Once you have a clear understanding of the fundamentals of your Domain Description, you can begin to map your futures exploration using a Domain Map. >>>

Chapter 1: Laying the Foundations

Defining the Landscape



Domain Mapping

A Domain Map is simply a categorized hierarchical diagram of all the topics that are in scope for your futures exploration.

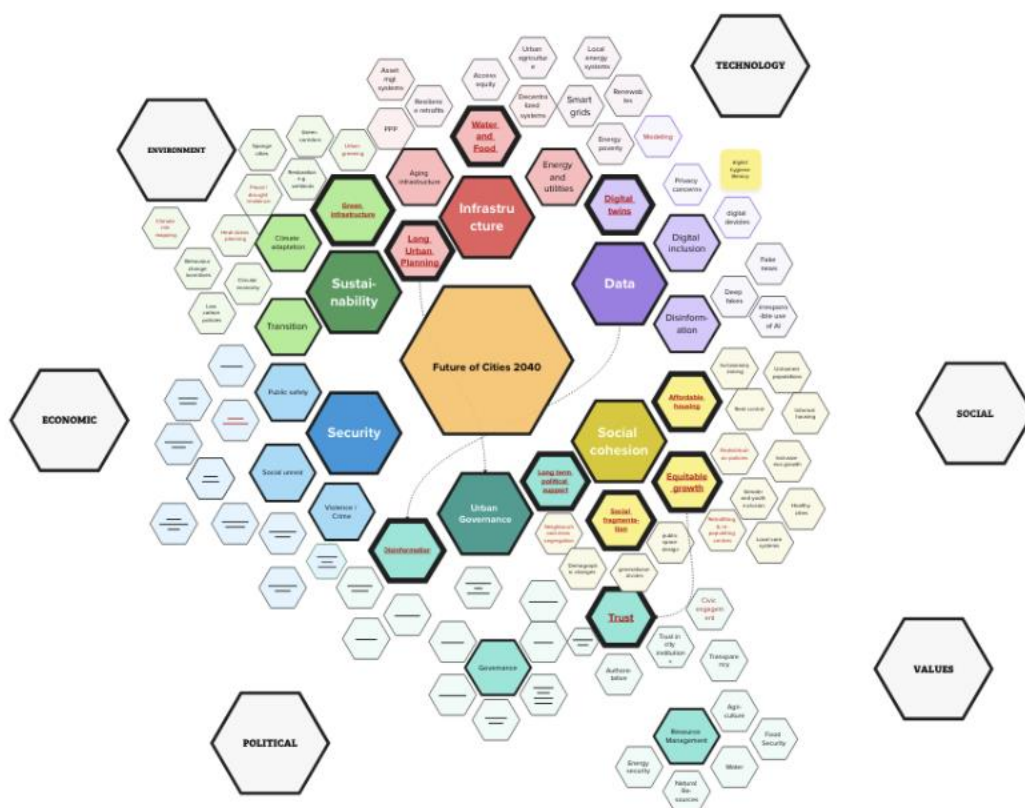
Domain maps start with the primary research topic in the middle, surrounded by the first level of topic categories. Thereafter, you build your map out by expanding on each first level idea, then expanding on each of the second level ideas that emerge, until you have a good understanding of the entire domain and the interconnections between each subtopic.

A good Domain Map should:

- ✓ Be a group process and include key stakeholders.
- ✓ Encourage brainstorming and free association.
- ✓ Not be too perfect! Exploration is messy.

Domain maps provide not only a point of departure from which to begin research but also serve as a “living map” that can, and should, be updated as the process unfolds.

Domain Map Example



Horizon Scanning

Horizon Scanning is a foresight methodology that systematically explores **emerging trends, signals of change, and uncertainties** across the **social, technological, economic, environmental, political and values (STEEP-V)** domains. The goal is to identify shifts that could impact the development context over the next 5–10 years. Horizon Scanning helps:

1. Recognize **weak signals** of change.
2. Map **trends and uncertainties** relevant to national and global development priorities.
3. Develop an **evidence base** for identifying key development needs.

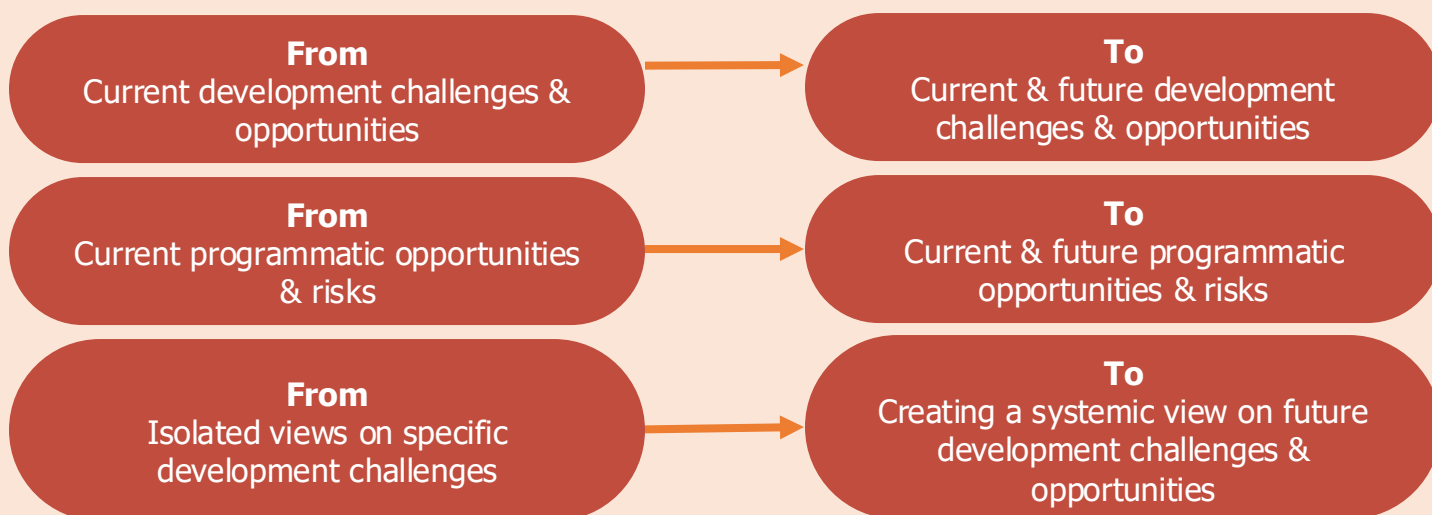
Why conduct horizon scanning for strategic planning?

In the context of strategic planning, horizon scanning provides the foundation for understanding how a country's development context might evolve in the future.

- Typical landscape analyses tend to catalogue what is already known — current challenges and well-documented trends. Horizon scanning goes further, systematically searching for weak signals and early indicators of change that could **disrupt assumptions** or **open new opportunities**.
- Although using current data is important, relying solely on data that is currently available may lead your team to overlook **long-term or systemic risks** that could impact development priorities. Horizon scanning helps put emerging risks on your radar- risks that may not appear in your quantitative data.

Essentially, Horizon Scanning transforms your strategic plan from focusing solely on today's development priorities into **one that considers tomorrow's development needs and priorities as well**. This equips teams to navigate uncertainty and drive sustainable development outcomes.

In summary, horizon scanning helps transform your focus ...



How to conduct a Horizon Scan

We suggest using a structured Signals Sprint approach to streamline the Horizon Scanning process. A signals sprint is a focused, time-bound exercise designed to rapidly collect and analyse signals of change that could significantly impact the future.

A signals sprint is most effective when there is **a clear need for fast, collaborative insight generation** and **when time is limited**. The sprint's compressed timeframe, typically 2-4 weeks, helps create focus and urgency while still allowing for meaningful exploration and analysis.

Key considerations

Before diving into a signals sprint, keep these considerations in mind:

Team composition: A diverse team is crucial for capturing a wide range of signals. Aim for participants who bring different perspectives, expertise, and stakeholder interactions. Consider bringing in external stakeholders. Diversity in the team enriches the insights generated during the sprint.



Timeframe and resources: A successful signals sprint balances speed with depth. While the recommended duration is 2-4 weeks, make sure the team has enough time and resources to conduct thorough scanning and analysis without getting overwhelmed.

Tool selection: Choose the right tools for collaboration and signal collection. Digital whiteboards like Miro, shared databases, and communication platforms should enable easy sharing, discussion, and organization of signals.



Phases of a Signals Sprint

A structured **Signals Sprint** approach involves **four key phases: Prepare, Launch, Conduct, and Conclude**.



Prepare

Defining objectives, assembling the team, setting a timeframe, and selecting tools. If your sprint is domain-specific, this phase also includes building a domain map.



Launch

The sprint kicks off with a brief alignment meeting to introduce the concept of signal scanning, clarify the objectives, and agree on sources to explore, establishing daily routines.



Conduct

This is a core phase where the team scans for signals, shares findings, and tags signals for analysis. Ongoing curation and mid-sprint reviews ensure relevance of the signals collected.



Conclude

As the sprint wraps up, the team engages in sense-making activities. The focus is on identifying emerging patterns, trends, and implications. The results are then documented in a format that aligns with sprint objectives.

UNDP's Future Trends & Signals System

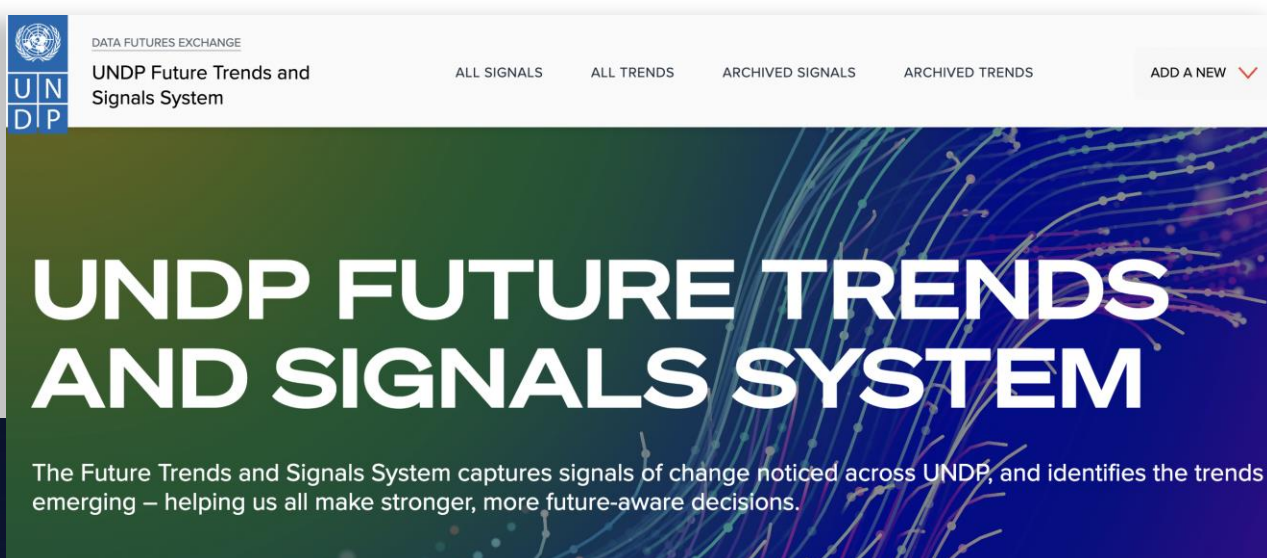
UNDP's **Future Trends and Signals System (FTSS)** is a powerful resource for teams conducting Horizon Scanning as part of their planning process.

The FTSS is a living repository of **trends and signals of change** curated from global and regional sources.

Designed by and for UNDP, the FTSS enables colleagues to observe, capture, and share signals of change from their operating environments — feeding frontline insights into organisational decision-making.

Consider developing a similar resource for your organisation to make horizon scanning an ongoing practice.

Teams should begin by scanning for signals and trends relevant to their country context. A framework like STEEP-V (Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, Political, Values) helps ensure systematic coverage across critical domains, drawing on sources such as global outlooks, regional analyses, government foresight reports, and expert networks.



What is a driver of change?

A **driver** is a major force that is shaping the future in significant ways.

Drivers of change are often underlying causes or catalysts that contribute to the emergence or acceleration of trends.

It's like a strong current in the ocean that is pushing things in a certain direction over time.

- **Ievgen Kylymnyk**
Innovation Specialist
UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub

What is a signal of change?

A signal of change is a small but meaningful indicator of change, hints of unexpected shifts, or novel things or phenomena that point towards an emerging change.

It can add color to a driver or indicate a strengthening or weakening of the driver of change as well. But it can also 'stand-alone' unrelated to any known driver of change.

Drivers are to signals as clouds are to raindrops.

Clouds, like drivers, overlap, converge, and consist of raindrops/signals.



Driver identification: from signals to drivers of change

Once signals have been identified and organized, the next step is to identify **drivers of change**. Drivers are **thematic clusters** of signals, trends, and TIPPOs (Trends, Issues, Plans, Projections, and Obstacles) that represent **major forces shaping the future**. Drivers provide a foundation for the next stage of foresight exercises such as scenario development and challenge/opportunity identification.

Using the Futures Triangle to identify drivers of change

The **Futures Triangle**, developed by foresight scholar **Sohail Inayatullah**, is a tool for analyzing and organizing forces shaping the future. By examining how the past, present, and future interact, teams synthesize signals into **drivers of change**. This triangulation process clarifies complex systems and ensures drivers reflect the full scope of forces influencing development pathways.

How the Futures Triangle works

The Futures Triangle has **three key dimensions**:

1. **Push of the present:** Current trends, forces, and dynamics driving change forward. An example of signals here would be on *current* topics - for example, signals around the rapid urbanization we see happening around us, technological advancements continuously taking place, and demographic shifts that are currently underway.
2. **Pull of the future:** Aspirations, visions, or preferred outcomes that pull the system toward a desired state. Examples of signals here would be solutions for the low-carbon economy, attempts being made towards digital equity or universal health coverage.
3. **Weight of the past:** Historical patterns, barriers, or inertia that constrain change or hold systems back. Examples of signals here would be signals that point to policy bottlenecks, legacy systems or social inequalities.

By mapping signals across these three dimensions, teams can identify **drivers**—the most critical forces shaping the future.

Once you have the signals from your signals sprint, we suggest using the Futures Triangle to **uncover patterns and drivers of change** from multiple perspectives. The value of this tool lies in its ability to enable us to explore the **drivers of change using a systems lens**.

Any major driver of change is likely to have multiple forces influencing it - from the past, present, and the future. For example, concerns around climate change (push of the present) are driving the momentum towards renewable energy solutions (pull of the future) but they are obviously meeting resistance from fossil fuel companies (weight of the past).

By using the **Futures Triangle**, teams can identify clear, actionable **drivers of change** that reflect the interplay of past inertia, present dynamics, and future aspirations. These drivers will serve as the foundation for scenario development and the identification of key development challenges & opportunities.

Chapter 1: Laying the Foundations

Understanding the Landscape



Using the Futures Triangle for identifying drivers

To start using the Futures Triangle, print out the A3 PDF template using the link below.

Step 1: Identify the signals that represent Push of the Present

Ask: What drivers of change are pushing us towards particular futures? What quantitative and qualitative signals of change? What is happening now? What is popular now?

Place the signals on that side of the triangle. Examples could be: Adoption of AI tools in education; extreme weather events etc.

Step 2: Identify the signals that represent Pull of the Future

Ask: What signals of change are pulling us towards particular futures? What are the compelling images of the future, those we can't overlook? Are there competing images of the future?

Place all such signals here to populate this side of the triangle. Examples could include the increasing use of nature-based technology, such as biomimicry, or increasing rates of climate migration.

Step 3: Identify the signals that represent Weight of the Past

Ask: What is holding us back as a barrier to change? What are the deep structures that resist change? What are the things we should protect and preserve from our past into our futures?

Signals on this side of the triangle could include increasing distrust in institutions and a backlash against gender equality.

You should now have a well-populated Futures Triangle that could look a little like the image to the right.

The next step is to look for patterns.

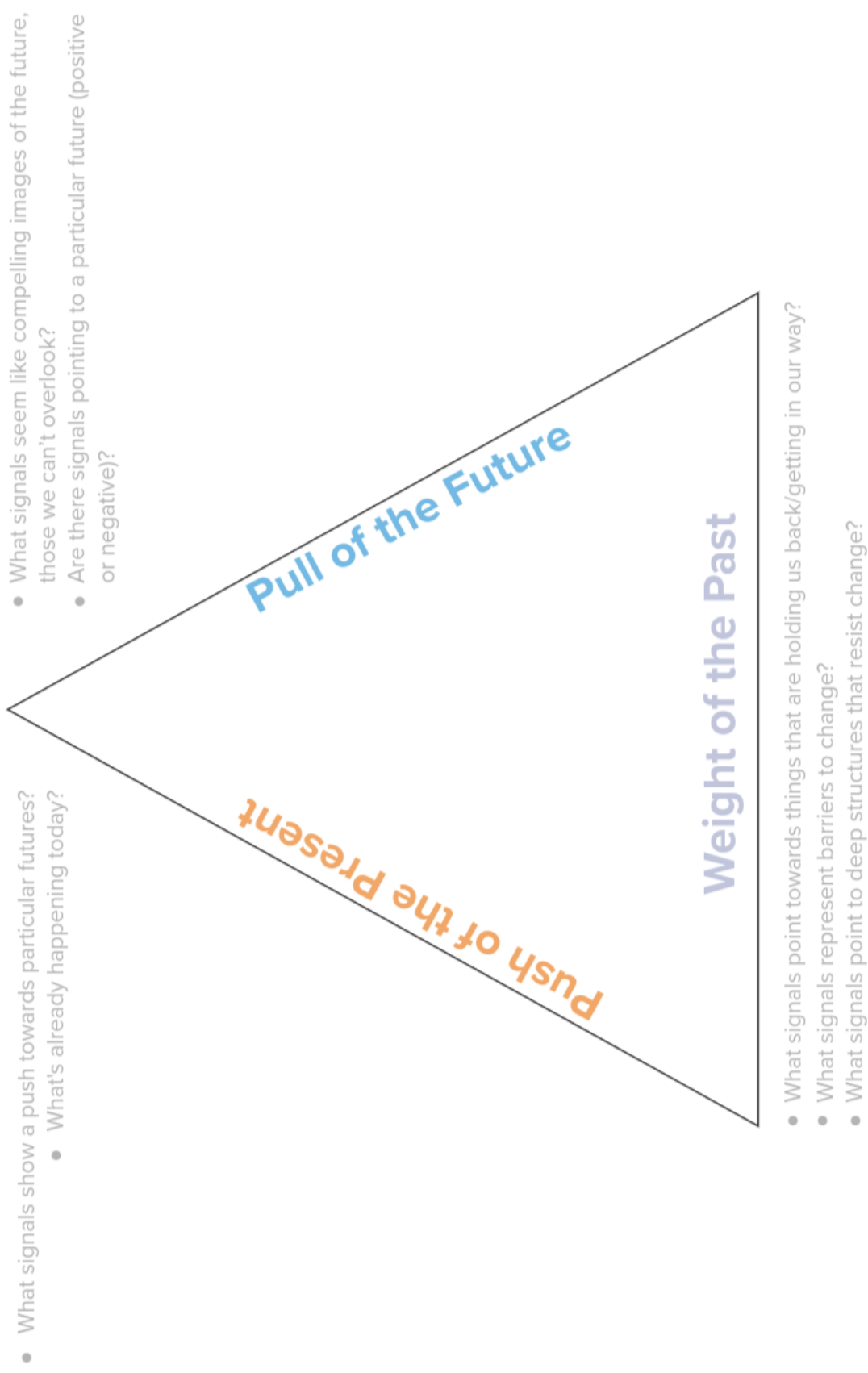
Group related signals across **Pushes, Pulls, and Weights** into coherent themes — these will become your drivers of change.



[Click here to download a PDF of the Futures Triangle](#)

An example of what a Futures Triangle might look like after the workshop.

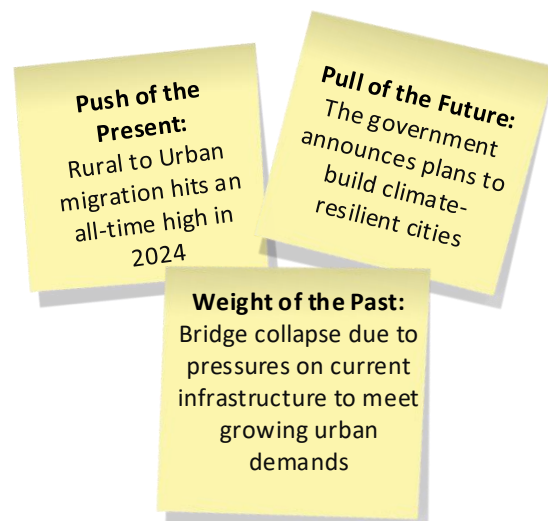
The Futures Triangle Template



Using the Futures Triangle to identify drivers

An example of a driver of change that emerges from a group of signals could be:

A signal from the 'Push of the Present': *"Rural to Urban migration hits an all-time high in 2024"*. This can be combined with another signal from the 'Pull of the Future', which is: *"The government announces plans to build climate-resilient cities and calls this a national priority"*. Finally, a signal from the 'Weight of the past' could be *"Bridge collapse points to the inability of current infrastructure to meet growing urban demands"*. Together, these signals could be brought together under the driver: ***"Urban migration intensifying pressure on cities."***



A note on Sensemaking

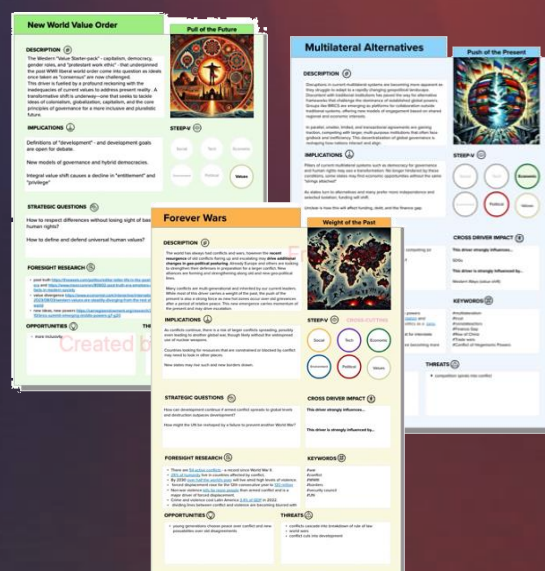
The term sensemaking can be used for any activity that involves finding insights from a collection of data. In this broad sense, identifying patterns in the different signals around the futures triangle to define a driver of change is a sensemaking exercise.

Sensemaking is as much art as science. While there is an overarching logic to finding patterns, the patterns that emerge will depend on the perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences of those involved. This is why defining drivers works best in a workshop setting with a diverse group — the same set of signals can be combined in very different ways by different people, and that diversity of interpretation is a strength, not a problem.

Example: Drivers of change that formed the basis for scenarios used for stress-testing elements of the UNDP Strategic Plan 2026-2029

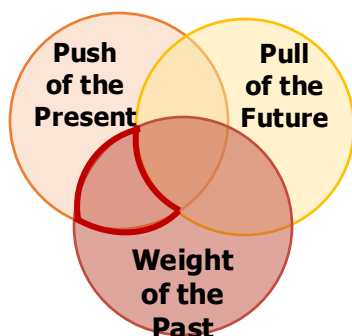
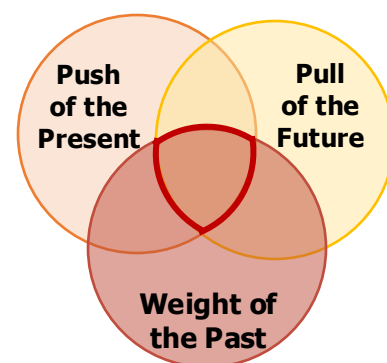
The **UNDP Strategy & Futures team** conducted a **6-week signal sprint** and the broader UNDP Signal Scanning community. Using the **Future Trends and Signals System (FTSS)** as a foundation, the team explored emerging signals and trends that could shape the future development landscape. The findings were supplemented with expert surveys, interviews and consultations with country offices and other stakeholders.

The signals identified were clustered using the Futures Triangle into **16 drivers of change**, each representing a significant force shaping the future.



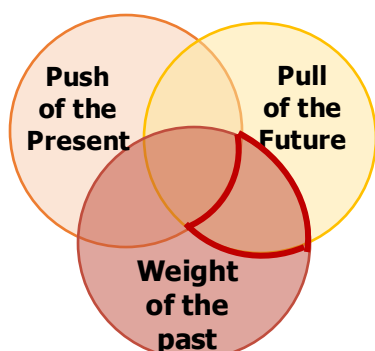
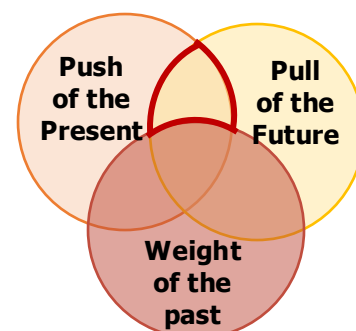
Some handy rules of thumb while identifying drivers:

Drivers that incorporate all three dimensions are often **stronger candidates for scenario development** because they capture the full dynamics of the system: the present-day momentum or forces driving change, the aspirations or opportunities that point to the future, and the barriers or challenges that must be addressed. Connecting all three dimensions can **enrich one's understanding of a driver**, but it is not mandatory for every driver.



A signal from **Push + a signal from Weight (No Pull)**: This occurs when strong present trends collide with significant barriers from the past, but there is **no clear aspirational vision** yet. For example, a **Driver** such as "*Youth unemployment in rural areas*" could have push-of-the-present signal/s related to 'Population growth and lack of job opportunities' and weight-of-the-past signals like 'Historical underinvestment in rural education and infrastructure', but there might be missing signals that represent the pull-of-the-future because there is an unclear or lacking future vision for job creation.

A signal from **Push + a signal from Pull (No Weight)**: This often happens with disruptive or transformative emerging trends or aspirations with no significant historical inertia. For example, a **Driver** like "*Biotech promises to increase lifespans globally*" could have the following signal clusters linked to it: **Push** of the Present: Increasing deaths due to preventable diseases + **Pull**: mRNA technology rapidly enhances vaccine development, but there is no signal from the Weight of the Past because there might be minimal historical inertia as this is a new technology.



A signal from **Pull + a signal from Weight (No Push)**: This could occur when strong aspirational visions exist but are hindered by entrenched historical barriers, with **no current momentum** driving progress.

For example, a **Driver** like "*Transition to climate-resilient agriculture*" could have signals related to the Pull-of-the-future like 'National plans for sustainable agriculture' and weight-of-the-past signals like 'Reliance on outdated farming methods and infrastructure' but there are no signals that represent any frustration on the part of farmers to adopt any new agricultural practices.

Prioritizing the Drivers of Change

Not all the drivers of change you come up with will be equally important to consider in the context of your strategic planning. Use criteria like **severity of impact** and **time to impact** to prioritize drivers that should be considered for further exploration. Also, make a special note of drivers that seem the most uncertain. These will be especially useful when developing scenarios.

"Which drivers have the greatest influence on the system? Which are the most urgent? And which are the most uncertain?"

Framing & refining the Drivers of Change

While we have only discussed drivers as a short, catchy phrase so far, once we have the most impactful and urgent drivers of change, we can start refining them to make them informative and thought-provoking.

A well-presented driver of change should offer some insightful information, including a description of the driver, the driver's associated signals, and potentially some high-level implications or strategic questions.

When defining drivers, try not to be too general in naming the driver, for example, "Technology," but also not too specific, like "water-based gravity batteries." Drivers should not have an "&"; instead find a single unifying force that captures the theme. As far as possible, drivers should not have a direction (such as increasing or decreasing), but you might see that the signals that constitute a certain driver are predominantly from one category of the Futures Triangle and, therefore, decide to label them as such. You will then have drivers of change that represent more of a Push of the Present, Pull of the Future, or Weight of the Past.

Validating the Drivers of Change

If time allows, it is always a good idea to share the drivers with stakeholders to ensure they resonate and are grounded in evidence. Try to ask stakeholders to **check for completeness**: Do the drivers reflect a balance of **Pushes**, **Pulls**, and **Weights**? Do they see a specific theme missing or under-represented?

Recap: Identifying Drivers of Change



Cluster

Group related signals from your signal scanning efforts into clusters that represent significant areas of change using the Futures Triangle.



Define

Try to combine clusters of signals from each 'side' of the Futures Triangle to define a driver of change in a short, catchy but descriptive phrase.



Prioritize

Evaluate drivers based on their impact, severity, urgency and uncertainty to focus on the most critical drivers of change shaping the future.



Refine

Revisit and sharpen the drivers by incorporating a description, some implications or questions. Validate them with stakeholders and ensure alignment with context-specific priorities.

Steps to use the Futures Triangle to identify drivers in a workshop

We suggest conducting a workshop with a diverse set of stakeholders and team members for driver identification.

A well-structured workshop can help participants map these drivers by analyzing the **Push of the Present**, **Pull of the Future**, and **Weight of the Past**, fostering a shared understanding of the dynamics influencing the development context.

Example Workshop Agenda

Your agenda should allow time for context setting, breakout group activities, and plenary discussions for synthesis. Here's an example agenda. Modify it for your own purposes.

Checklist of pre-workshop preparation:

- ❑ **Select Participants:** Aim for 10–15 participants with diverse expertise, representing internal teams and external stakeholders (eg. government officials, community representatives, thematic experts).
- ❑ **Prepare a Pre-Read:** Share an introductory document or presentation covering the workshop's main purpose: *"To collaboratively identify and analyze drivers of change influencing the country's development landscape."*
 - What is the Futures Triangle?
 - Definitions of **Push, Pull, and Weight** with examples.
 - Provide a summary of **signals or trends** identified during the Horizon Scanning.
- ❑ **Set Up Tools:** If you are conducting a physical workshop, prepare flip charts, sticky notes, and markers. If your workshop will be virtual, use the Mural template. Of course, you could also use other tools like Miro or Google Jamboard to facilitate collaboration.

Welcome and introductions (30 min)

Explain the objectives, outline the agenda, and introduce the Futures Triangle framework.

Context setting & signals review (30 min)

Present key outputs from Horizon Scanning and discuss how the input of the workshop will be used. Offer some time for participants to ask clarification questions about the signals.

Breakout sessions: Cluster the signals around the Futures Triangle (50 min)

In small groups, identify the signals that represent **current trends and forces** driving change (Push of the Present); represent **aspirations or visions** shaping the future (Pull of the future) and represent **barriers or historical constraints** limiting progress (Weight of the past).

Break (10 min)

Breakout Sessions: Define drivers of change by combining clusters of signals (50 min)

Prioritize Drivers based on impact and uncertainty (45 min)

Closing and Next Steps Summarize outputs, explain next steps.

Chapter 1: Laying the Foundations

Understanding the Landscape



Drivers of change: An example from UNDP Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the UNDP team leveraged foresight tools to support the country's transition to a green economy. This process incorporated tools like the Futures Triangle and Horizon Scanning to identify **drivers of change** and develop **scenarios** for strategic decision-making. The insights generated were used to align policy recommendations with the updated **Presidential Resolution No. 436** on green economic reforms.

Over **450 signals** were identified through a distributed scanning process engaging global futurists, local experts, and government partners. Using the Futures Triangle, signals were analysed and categorized into the Push of the Present, Pull of the Future, and Weight of the Past.

The team identified **22 drivers of change**, each representing critical forces influencing Uzbekistan's green transition. Drivers such as **"Demographic Dividend"**, **"Tech to the Rescue"**, and **"Fossilized Frameworks"** were framed with detailed descriptions, implications, and exploratory questions.



[Click here to view the Foresight Report](#)

[Click here to read more about the foresight process](#)

Push of the Present
 Возможности настоящего

B2

0001010111010...
 0001010111010...

Digitalization is a cross-cutting driver of change that is transforming all sectors, and it continues to boom.

How can Uzbekistan increase its online footprint while confronting the security and social challenges of further digitalization?

Цифровизация является сквозным двигателем изменений, который трансформирует все сектора, и она продолжает бурно развиваться.

Как Узбекистан может увеличить свое онлайн-присутствие, в условиях растущих проблем безопасности и социальных вызовов дальнейшей цифровизации?

Weight of the Past
 Тяжесть прошлого

A1

The [Infinite] Great Game...
 (Бесконечная) Большая Игра

Colonial legacies continue to influence regional development narratives and models, especially as some seek to capitalize on opportunities across the region.

How can (neo)colonial legacies be confronted and thwarted?

Колониальное наследие продолжает влиять на идеи и модели регионального развития, особенно когда некоторые из них стремятся извлечь выгоду из возможностей в регионе.

Как можно противостоять (нео)колониальному наследию и разрушить его?

Pull of the Future
 Притяжение будущего

C1

Tech to the rescue?
 Технологии спешат на помощь?

From agriculture to manufacturing, automation is expected to reshape the labour market, and, yet, Covid-19 showed the importance of essential workers and the fragility of supply chains in times of crisis.

What can Uzbekistan do to ensure that it anticipates the critical challenges emerging from the advancement and adoption of new and emerging technologies?

Ожидается, что автоматизация, от сельского хозяйства до производства, изменит рынок труда, и тем не менее Covid-19 показал важность работников жизненно важных отраслей экономики и хрупкость цепочек поставок во время кризиса.

Что может сделать Узбекистан, чтобы предвидеть критические проблемы, возникающие в связи с продвижением и внедрением новых и появляющихся технологий?

Making it Participatory



The foresight exercises outlined in the previous sections—Horizon Scanning and Driver Identification—can yield much richer insights and more actionable outputs when designed to be **participatory**. Engaging a diverse range of stakeholders ensures that different perspectives, lived experiences, and technical expertise are included, enhancing the quality, legitimacy, and relevance of the outcomes.

This section explores how to make these activities more participatory.

Why should we make these foresight exercises participatory?

A participatory approach brings numerous benefits:

1. **Richer Insights:** Stakeholders from diverse backgrounds contribute unique knowledge and experiences, helping to uncover overlooked signals, trends, and barriers. For example, local community leaders might highlight grassroots challenges & opportunities that are not visible in global datasets.
2. **Enhanced Buy-In:** When stakeholders are involved in the foresight process, they are more likely to engage with and act on the resulting insights. This fosters collaboration and trust.
3. **Validation and Refinement:** Involving stakeholders helps validate assumptions, challenge biases, and refine outputs like drivers and scenarios.

“I think [our partners] trust that we can do [foresight]. That's why we are getting all these requests from new partners, for example, the request to help apply foresight to the gender strategy with the Senate of Uzbekistan.

Also, the partners we have already worked with are interested in doing this again. I think this is the best result we could ask for.”

**–Farida Ahmatiy,
Head of Solutions Mapping,
UNDP Uzbekistan Accelerator Labs**

Making Horizon Scanning Participatory



Horizon Scanning, at its core, is about identifying **emerging signals of change** that may impact the future. Making this process participatory ensures that diverse perspectives are incorporated, resulting in richer insights and a broader understanding. Below are several ways to involve stakeholders in Horizon Scanning:

Involve Stakeholders in Signal Collection

You can invite diverse stakeholders as participants to join the Horizon Scanning team and contribute signals. Include them in the Signals Sprint launch workshop to enable them to be a core part of the process.

Host Sector-Specific Signal Sessions

You can convene thematic workshops or consultations with stakeholders from a specific sector to offer targeted domain-specific insights.

Conduct a Signal Review Workshop

Engaging stakeholders to review the signals collected by the [signals scanning](#) team will help **uncover blind spots and reduce bias** in your scanning efforts. You can organize a workshop where you present the signals in a participatory workshop format and facilitate dialogue around *"What trends might we be missing?"* or *"Which of these signals feel most significant?"*

Facilitate Signal Ranking and Reflection

Encourage stakeholders to reflect on the significance of collected signals, whether in a workshop setting or through an online survey.

Share a summary of signals with stakeholders and ask them to rate signals based on **relevance** or **impact** using digital tools.

Example Question: *"Which of these signals do you believe will most significantly shape the country's development landscape over the next 10 years?"*



Making Driver Creation Participatory



Driver identification involves clustering and analysing signals to create **thematic drivers of change**. Making this process participatory ensures that drivers reflect the expertise, priorities, and perspectives of key stakeholders. Here are ways to involve stakeholders effectively:

Include Stakeholders in Sense-Making Sessions

Invite stakeholders to **participate directly** in the workshops where drivers are being developed.

Involving stakeholders in activities like reviewing clustered signals, suggesting themes or patterns that may be missing and co-creating driver names and descriptions can build shared ownership of the outputs.

Stakeholder Consultations for Driver Rating and Ranking

Stakeholders who may be unable to attend in-depth workshops can provide input on draft drivers. After drivers are drafted, share them with stakeholders via surveys or focus group discussions. Discuss their relevance to the development context, alignment with national strategies, potential impact, and uncertainty. This will allow stakeholders to contribute flexibly, even if they are unable to participate in workshops.

Stakeholder Workshops for Prioritization

Involve stakeholders in selecting drivers to focus on. Presenting drivers in a workshop setting and facilitating a deliberative discussion to prioritize drivers will engage stakeholders in decision-making while ensuring transparency.

Validate Drivers through Stakeholder Feedback

Share the final list of drivers with stakeholders for validation and engage them in a structured discussion on the drivers they see as most critical or aligned with strategic goals. This ensures that the final list of drivers resonates with key decision-makers and builds credibility and alignment with national or institutional priorities.



Chapter 2

Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Objective

This chapter helps teams identify future-informed development challenges & opportunities that may emerge.



Expected outcome

A comprehensive list of development challenges & opportunities, offering insights into potential focus areas over the next 4-5 years.

Key Questions Answered

*What are the potential development **challenges & opportunities** that **we must address** to remain relevant in the future?*

*How can we **identify needs** that are not visible today but **may emerge**?*

*What tools or frameworks can we use to **analyse and prioritise these challenges & opportunities**?*

Prerequisites for the activities in this chapter:

- A deep understanding of the development landscape in the context in which your planning will be implemented
- A list of key drivers of change that will influence the future of your country context in the coming 5-10 years.

Note to Senior Management

- ✓ Inspire the team to think beyond immediate challenges & opportunities and consider long-term impacts.
- ✓ Advocate for inclusivity in the process by involving diverse internal and external stakeholders.
- ✓ Provide leadership by supporting bold and innovative thinking.



Steps:

Create a plurality of futures and identify future-informed development challenges & opportunities that your organisation can address.



Tools Used:

The chapter lays out two options: An **'Analytical' approach**, which uses the Futures Wheel, and a **'Creative' approach**, using scenarios.



Recommended Workshops:

1. Identifying Driver Outcomes + Challenge Identification Workshop
2. Scenario Development Workshop + Challenge Identification Workshop

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



One of the central tenets of foresight is that the future is not fixed; it is shaped by a range of forces, many of which are uncertain or unpredictable.

Through foresight techniques, we try to structurally imagine the possible, anticipate the unpredictable, and reduce the element of surprise.

The process of identifying development challenges & opportunities is a critical step in the foresight journey. It builds on insights from identifying drivers of change and imagining possible futures, enabling teams to articulate the key challenges & opportunities that will shape the development landscape over time. This step, while intellectually demanding, is one of the most important phases of the process because it provides the foundation for actionable strategies, policies, and programming. It requires teams to think beyond current issues, leveraging a forward-looking perspective to anticipate and prepare for challenges & opportunities that might emerge in the years to come.

Traditional planning processes often focus on **current challenges/opportunities** or use **forecasting** based on historical data to predict future needs. While valuable, these methods are inherently limited—they tend to assume that the future will unfold as an extension of the past. This can lead to a narrow understanding of the challenges ahead, leaving teams unprepared for **disruptions** or **emerging trends**.

By engaging in this process, teams develop a **future-resilient mindset**, which is crucial for navigating uncertainty and ensuring that development strategies remain relevant and impactful in a changing world.

Why should you think about multiple futures when identifying future development challenges or opportunities?



Broader Perspective: Exploring diverse futures allows teams to identify challenges and opportunities that may not be apparent when relying on current data alone.

For example, a scenario in which climate adaptation accelerates may present entirely different challenges than one in which adaptation lags.

Preparedness: Considering a range of plausible futures helps teams anticipate **disruptions** and design strategies that are robust under varying conditions. The disruptions may not be EXACTLY like you anticipated in your foresight exercises but the agility you will bring into your planning will help you nevertheless.



Avoiding Bias: Existing paradigms or short-term priorities often limit current data. Thinking about multiple futures helps teams avoid the trap of “presentism,” where planning is overly anchored in the present.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities

Once the prioritized drivers of change have been identified, the next step is to use them to uncover potential development challenges & opportunities that may emerge in the future. Depending on the team's expertise, and comfort level with creative thinking, this can be approached in two ways.

Option 1: Analytical Approach— Driver Outcomes & Futures Wheel

This approach is suitable for teams with limited time, resources, or expertise in scenario building. It directly leverages the prioritized drivers to explore their potential implications and identify challenges and opportunities.

Choose Option 1 if:

You have limited time, prefer a structured and direct approach, and need actionable outputs without delving into complex storytelling.

Pros of this option:

- 1. Time-Efficient:** This approach requires fewer steps and can be completed in a shorter timeframe, making it ideal for teams with limited resources or tight deadlines.
- 2. Accessible for All Team Members:** It does not require story-telling or qualitative creativity, making it more comfortable for participants who are less experienced with foresight.

The trade-offs you will make in this approach:

- 1. Lack of Systems Perspective:** This approach may miss the complex dynamic relationships between drivers, which often emerge in narrative-based methods.
- 2. Less Engaging for Stakeholders:** The lack of storytelling or creative narratives may make it harder to engage stakeholders who prefer visual or imaginative outputs.

Option 2: Creative Approach— Scenario Development

This approach focuses on developing scenarios to explore how drivers of change might shape the future. It allows teams to create narratives that can inform strategic planning with depth and imagination.

Choose Option 2 if:

You value the ability to engage stakeholders through rich narratives and have the time & resources to examine the interplay of drivers and uncertainties fully.

Pros of this option:

- 1. Systems Thinking Lens:** By developing scenarios, this approach brings out the complex interdependencies between drivers, providing a holistic view of possible futures.
- 2. Rich Insights:** Storytelling and scenario development often uncover hidden risks and opportunities that may not emerge through analytical methods.

The trade-offs you will make in this approach:

- 1. Requires Creativity and Facilitation Expertise:** This approach may be challenging for teams unfamiliar with qualitative methods or lacking facilitation experience.
- 2. Potential Stakeholder Resistance:** Highly technical stakeholders may find storytelling less credible or rigorous compared to more data-driven methods.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities: The two options at-a-glance

Option 1: Analytical Approach— Driver Outcomes & Futures Wheel

Identify & prioritize possible driver outcomes



In this approach, the team begins by identifying **potential future outcomes** for key drivers of change and prioritizing those with the **highest impact and uncertainty**.

Build Futures Wheels for the most impactful Driver outcomes



Using a **Futures Wheel**, they explore the **first, second, and third-order implications** of these outcomes to uncover **cascading risks and opportunities**.

Cluster implications to frame development challenges & opportunities



The implications are then **clustered into themes** to frame actionable development challenges & opportunities.

Option 2: Creative Approach— Scenario Development

Prioritize drivers of change



This approach involves developing **plausible future scenarios** based on the **key drivers of change**.

Develop scenario narrative



Teams craft detailed **scenario narratives** to explore the risks, opportunities, and systemic changes within each future

Explore, define & frame scenario narratives



Through a structured analysis of the scenarios, the team **identifies themes** and clusters them into **development challenges & opportunities** that your organisation *could* address.

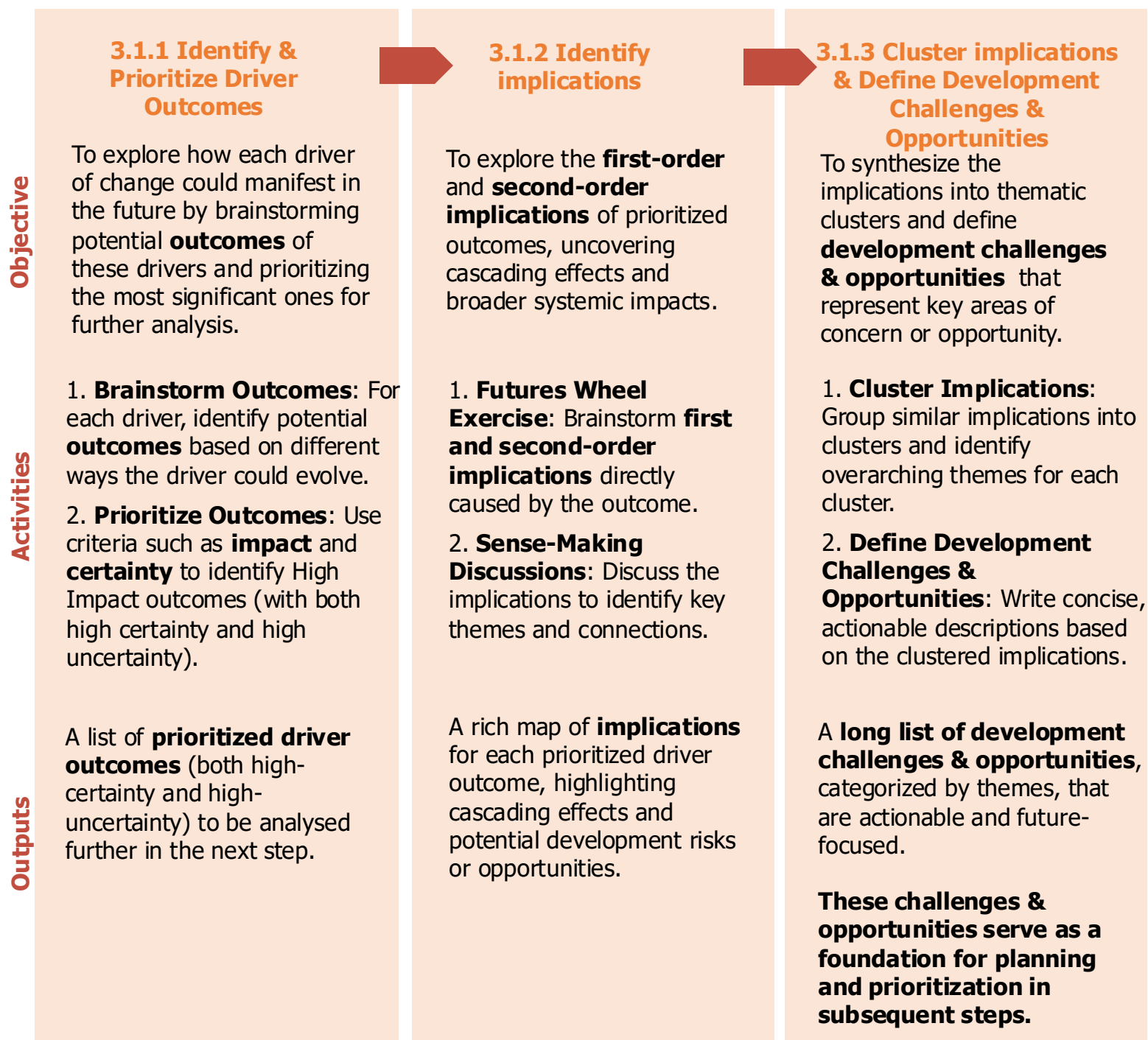
Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities: Option 1

If you've decided on Option 1, you will follow a three-step process that will lead to a 'long list' of development challenges and opportunities that could potentially emerge in the future, based on the signals of change you've collected in your horizon scanning and the drivers of change you've developed from them.



Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.1.1 Identify & Prioritize Driver Outcomes

The first step is to explore the **different ways a driver might manifest** in the future and prioritize those that are most critical for further analysis. Drivers of change are dynamic forces, and their evolution can lead to a variety of outcomes depending on contextual factors, societal choices, and external disruptions. This step helps the team articulate these possible outcomes and focus on the ones with the most potential impact.

During this step, it is crucial to **avoid self-censorship** and think freely, even about outcomes that might seem **unlikely or unconventional**. This is a common pitfall in foresight exercises—teams may focus only on “realistic” scenarios or those that align with current trends, inadvertently reinforcing **internal blind spots**. Encourage the team to consider “wild card” possibilities or surprising outcomes, as these can reveal biases and help uncover **hidden vulnerabilities or opportunities**.

For example:

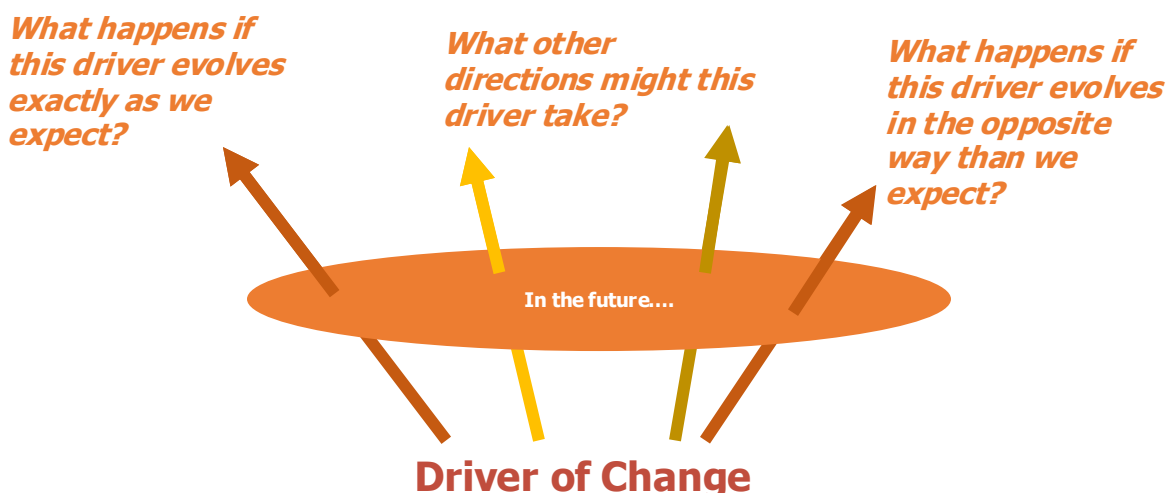
- A team focused on urban migration might overlook the possibility of **reverse migration** to rural areas due to unexpected breakthroughs in rural development technologies or policies.
- A driver like “emerging technologies in governance” could yield an unexpected outcome, such as AI-driven decentralization, which could completely reshape political systems.

Thinking beyond what seems immediately likely ensures a **broader exploration of possibilities** and prepares the team for a wider range of futures. This openness can help mitigate bias and bring previously overlooked but important dynamics into the conversation.

Thinking Through Driver Outcomes

To explore driver outcomes, consider asking the following questions for every driver:

- *What happens if this driver evolves exactly as we expect?*
- *What happens if this driver evolves in the opposite way than we expect?*
- *What other directions might this driver take?*



Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



For example:

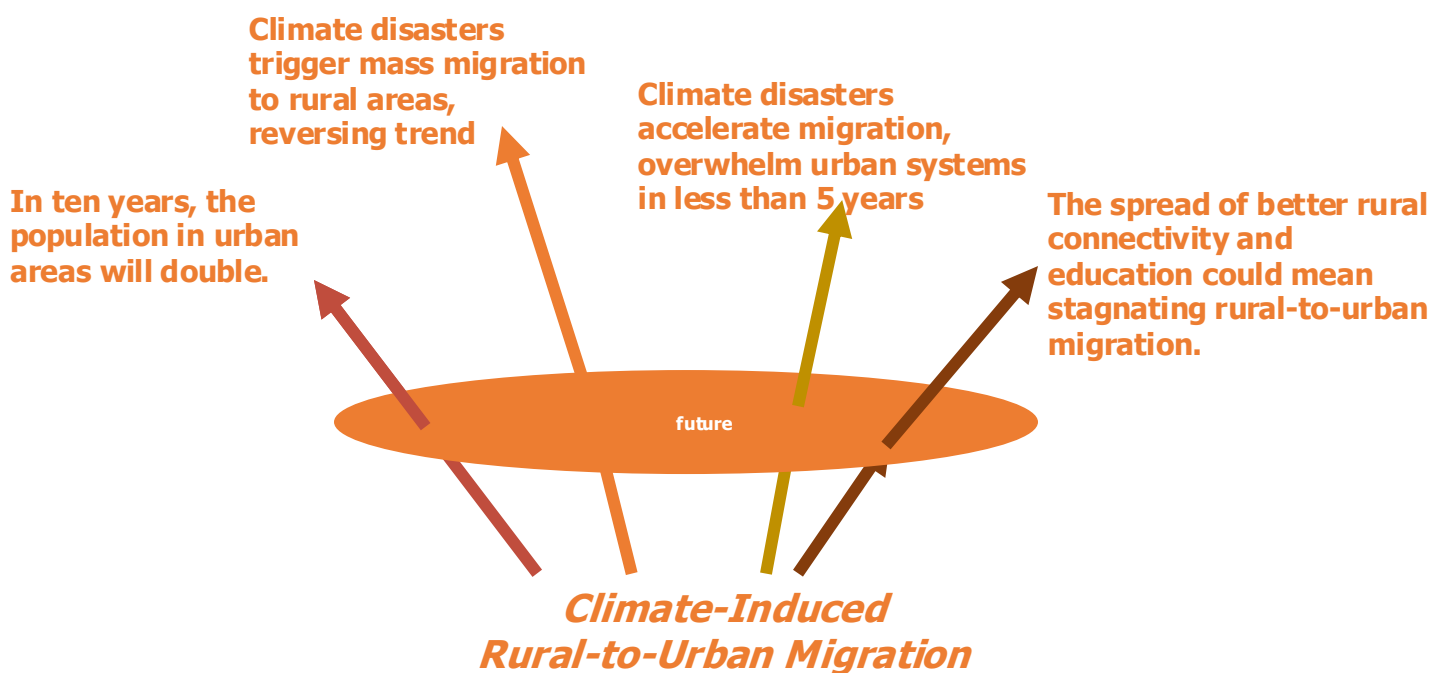
Suppose you are a part of a team at an NGO considering a driver of change “*Climate-Induced Rural-to-Urban Migration*”.

The mainstream thought within your organisation could be that **migration to urban areas will continue increasing steadily, putting pressure on housing, jobs and services**. So in ten years, the population in urban areas would double.

We urge you to consider what would happen if the *exact opposite* of your expected outcome occurred. Could it be possible that over time, the lack of adequate housing and employment opportunities slows down migration? Or, with the spread of better rural connectivity and education, urban migration could become unnecessary, which could mean that rural-to-urban migration stagnates.

It is natural to consider these ‘alternatives’ implausible, but think back to the signals from your horizon scan. Is there any evidence that something like this is happening—if not in the country context, then in the regional or global context—that might be a harbinger of possible things to come?

Consider other alternatives, too. What if change happens in the same direction you expect but twice or thrice faster than you expect? Is it possible, for example, that climate disasters accelerate migration, overwhelm urban systems, and create unplanned settlements?



This step may be the most challenging for many team members. However, avoiding self-censorship is critical to achieving the true value of this exercise.

In the next step, each of these outcomes will be evaluated to determine whether it truly represents a risk to development and whether any of them should be dismissed.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Prioritizing & Categorizing High-impact Driver Outcomes

Select High-Impact Outcomes

In this step, outcomes of the prioritized drivers are assessed based on **impact** and **certainty** to determine their relevance for further exploration. Both **high-impact, high-uncertainty** outcomes and **high-impact, high-certainty** outcomes must be prioritized because they contribute to different dimensions of planning:

1. **High-Impact, High-Uncertainty Outcomes:** These outcomes are less predictable but could cause significant disruption or transformation. Exploring their implications helps identify **potential needs** that may arise under different future conditions.
2. **High-Impact, High-Certainty Outcomes:** These outcomes are predictable and likely to occur. Understanding these helps frame **specific and relatively certain development needs** that your organisation must prepare to address proactively.

How to Prioritize Driver Outcomes: Impact X Uncertainty

To prioritize effectively, teams must assess outcomes based on **Impact** and **Certainty**. Each parameter has its own nuances, and understanding these will help teams navigate this step with clarity and purpose.

Defining Impact

'Impact' refers to the **significance or magnitude** of an outcome's effect on the development landscape. An outcome with high impact is one that could create widespread, long-lasting change—whether positive or negative.

To determine the impact of a driver outcome, teams should assess its potential to:

- **Affect large populations** or critical systems.
- **Trigger cascading changes** in other areas (e.g., political, economic, social, environmental, or technological systems).
- **Challenge or reinforce existing development priorities.**
- **Introduce new opportunities** or vulnerabilities that may not be part of current strategies.

Prompting Questions to Determine Impact:

- ***Who or what will be affected by this outcome?*** For example, If rural-to-urban migration accelerates, will it primarily impact urban infrastructure, public services, or marginalized communities?
- ***How widespread could the effects of this outcome be?*** Will it affect only urban centers, or will it ripple out to rural areas through reduced labour supply or changes in agricultural productivity?
- ***Will the outcome create systemic change?*** Could rapid urbanization lead to long-term socioeconomic shifts, such as smaller families, a larger burden on women, etc.?

Key Tip: Focus on the **breadth and depth** of the outcome's impact.

Outcomes that could influence multiple sectors, affect large groups of people, or lead to far-reaching systemic changes should be rated as high impact.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Prioritizing & Categorizing Driver Outcomes

Understanding Certainty

Certainty is not about **predicting the likelihood** of an outcome occurring—as you know already, no one has a crystal ball. Instead, certainty is about the **degree of agreement** among team members regarding the plausibility of the outcome. If there is significant disagreement, this indicates **high uncertainty**.

Outcomes with high certainty are those that:

- **Align closely with current data or trends.**
- Are seen as **plausible and uncontroversial** by most team members.
- Have been observed in similar contexts or are well-documented in research.

In contrast, outcomes with low certainty:

- Are characterized by **disagreement or debate** among team members.
- Reflect situations where **data is ambiguous** or **trends are highly volatile**.
- Are influenced by complex or poorly understood dynamics.

Prompting Questions for Certainty

- *Is there consensus among the team about this outcome being plausible?*
- *What data or evidence supports this outcome? Are there trends or signals pointing to this outcome, or is it largely speculative?*
- *What factors contribute to uncertainty about this outcome?*
- *What assumptions underlie this outcome, and are they contested?*

Key Tip: Treat disagreement within the team as a sign of **high uncertainty**. If some members strongly believe an outcome is plausible while others are skeptical, this indicates that the outcome's uncertainty is high and warrants closer attention.

By carefully assessing **impact** and **certainty**, teams can prioritize outcomes to balance foresight and practicality, ensuring that critical challenges & opportunities are neither overlooked nor underestimated.

This framework helps ensure that planning efforts are comprehensive, proactive, and adaptive to future uncertainties.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

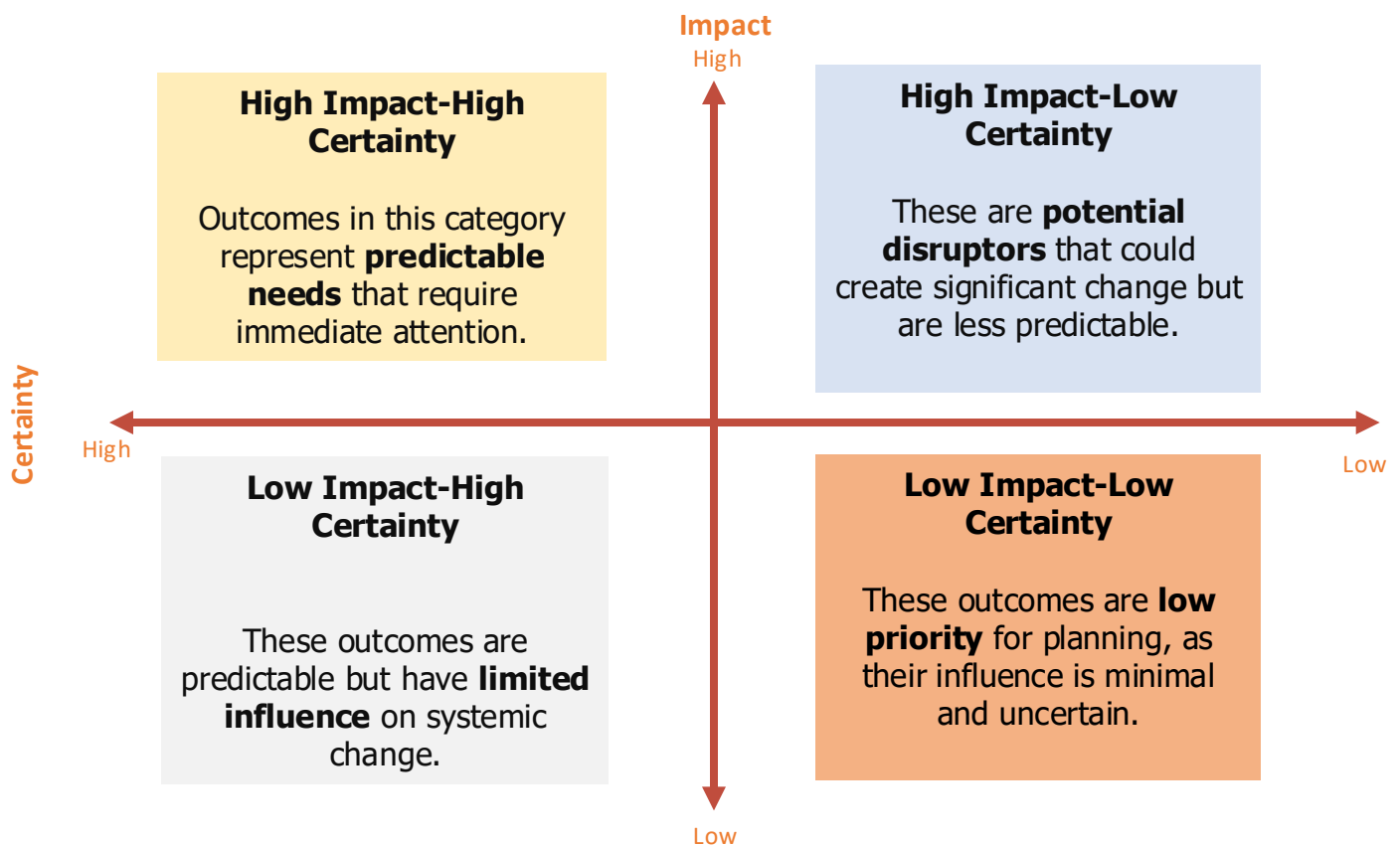
Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Prioritizing & Categorizing Driver Outcomes

The 2X2 Impact-Certainty matrix

Once impact and certainty are assessed for each outcome, teams can place outcomes into the following categories to guide prioritization:



The two main categories of interest that we will take to the next step:

High impact, High Certainty Outcomes represent the outcomes that we expect in the future and that we need to plan for. The development needs that arise out of these outcomes would be the ones we would have likely identified with or without foresight exercises, and we would have plenty of data to support them.

High Impact, Low Certainty Outcomes: These outcomes may not have strong data to support them, but they have a few signals of change that offer qualitative evidence regarding the possibility of occurring. The developmental needs that emerge from these outcomes, when incorporated into the planning process, will enable teams to be better prepared for 'surprises'.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.1.2 Identify Implications

Introduction to the Futures Wheel

The **Futures Wheel** is a foresight tool designed to map the cascading implications of a specific event, trend, or driver outcome. Developed by Jerome Glenn, it helps teams visualize the ripple effects that might emerge from a driver outcome, revealing both direct and indirect consequences. By organizing these implications into concentric layers, the Futures Wheel provides a structured way to think about the broader impacts of change.

In this step, the Futures Wheel will be applied to the **prioritized driver outcomes** identified earlier. Each prioritized outcome will serve as the central focus, and the team will collaboratively explore its implications. The goal is to generate a comprehensive understanding of how the outcome might shape the development context, ultimately helping the team identify potential **development challenges & opportunities**.

Why Use the Futures Wheel?



Uncover Hidden Implications:

While some implications of a driver outcome may seem obvious, others may be less apparent but equally important. The Futures Wheel allows teams to **think**

systematically, ensuring that no key impact is overlooked.

Identify Opportunities & Risks:

By exploring both positive and negative implications, teams can identify potential opportunities to leverage and risks to mitigate.



Visualize Complexity:

The tool's structure helps teams understand the cascading nature of change, showing how first-order effects can lead to second- and third-order consequences.



Facilitate Collaborative Thinking:

The visual and participatory nature of the Futures Wheel makes it an excellent tool for group discussions, encouraging diverse perspectives and collaborative brainstorming.

The Futures Wheel is an essential step in foresight, helping teams systematically explore the broader impacts of prioritized outcomes.

Mapping implications visually and collaboratively ensures that all dimensions of a driver outcome are considered, leading to richer insights and more robust development challenge identification. This structured process not only uncovers risks but also highlights opportunities, enabling teams to build proactive and future-ready strategies.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.1.2 Identify Implications

How to use the Futures Wheel in a workshop:

Step 1

Place the Driver Outcome in the Center: Start by writing the **prioritized driver outcome** in the center of the Futures Wheel. For example, let's say you've chosen to start with the high impact, high certainty outcome: "In ten years, the population in urban areas will double". Place this in the centre of the Futures Wheel.

Step 2

Ask participants to brainstorm the **direct consequences** of the driver outcome. These are the **first-order implications**, which result immediately from the driver.

Prompting Questions:

- *What happens directly as a result of this outcome?*
- *Who or what is affected immediately?*

Step 3

From the first-order implications, brainstorm their **second-order impacts**, or what happens as a result of the first layer of change.

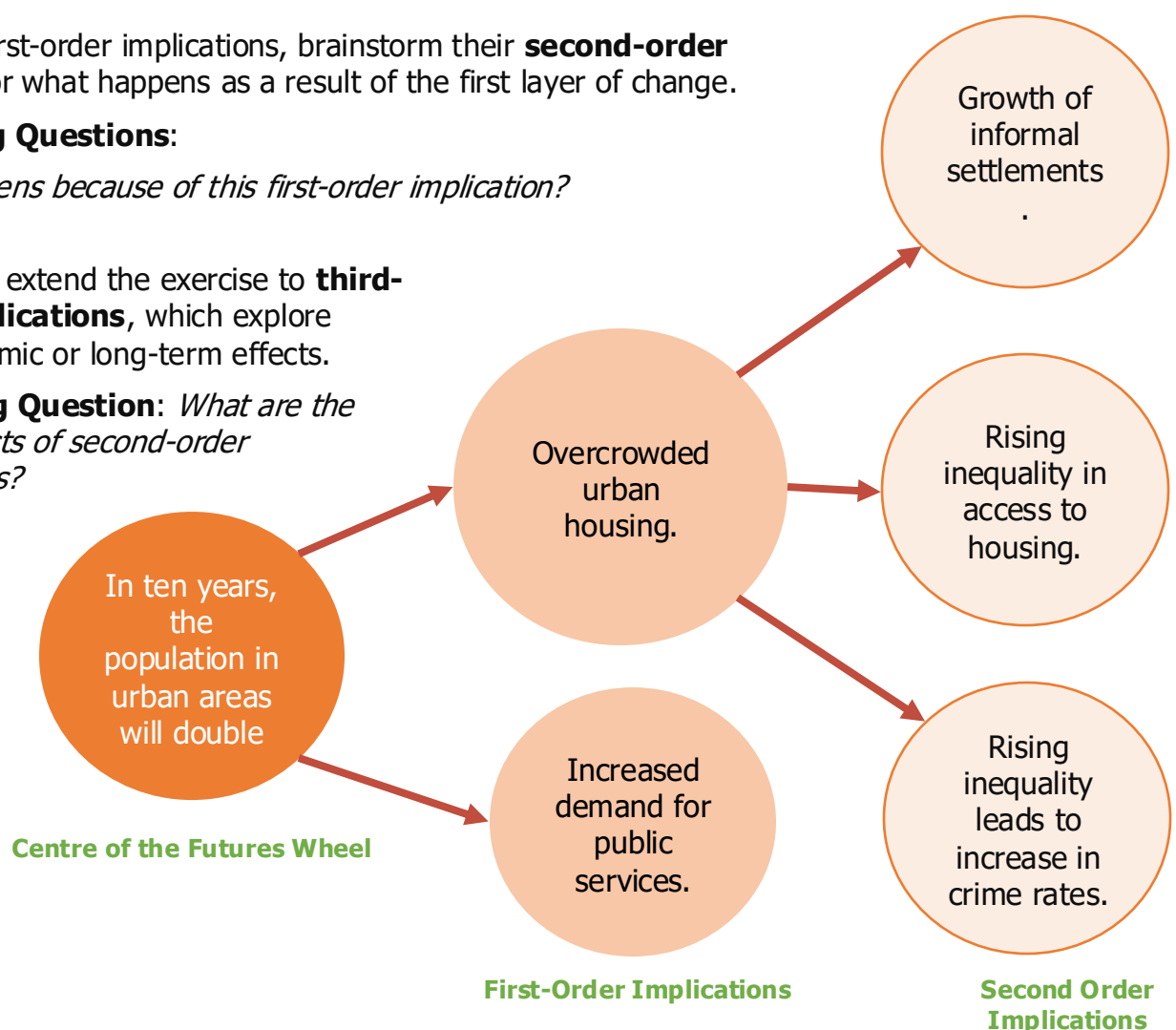
Prompting Questions:

What happens because of this first-order implication?

Step 4

If possible, extend the exercise to **third-order implications**, which explore more systemic or long-term effects.

Prompting Question: *What are the ripple effects of second-order implications?*



Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities

Example of a Futures Wheel

Below is a slightly edited version of a Futures Wheel created in a 'Strategy Check-In' session conducted by the UNDP Strategy and Futures Team for a high-impact, low-certainty possibility.



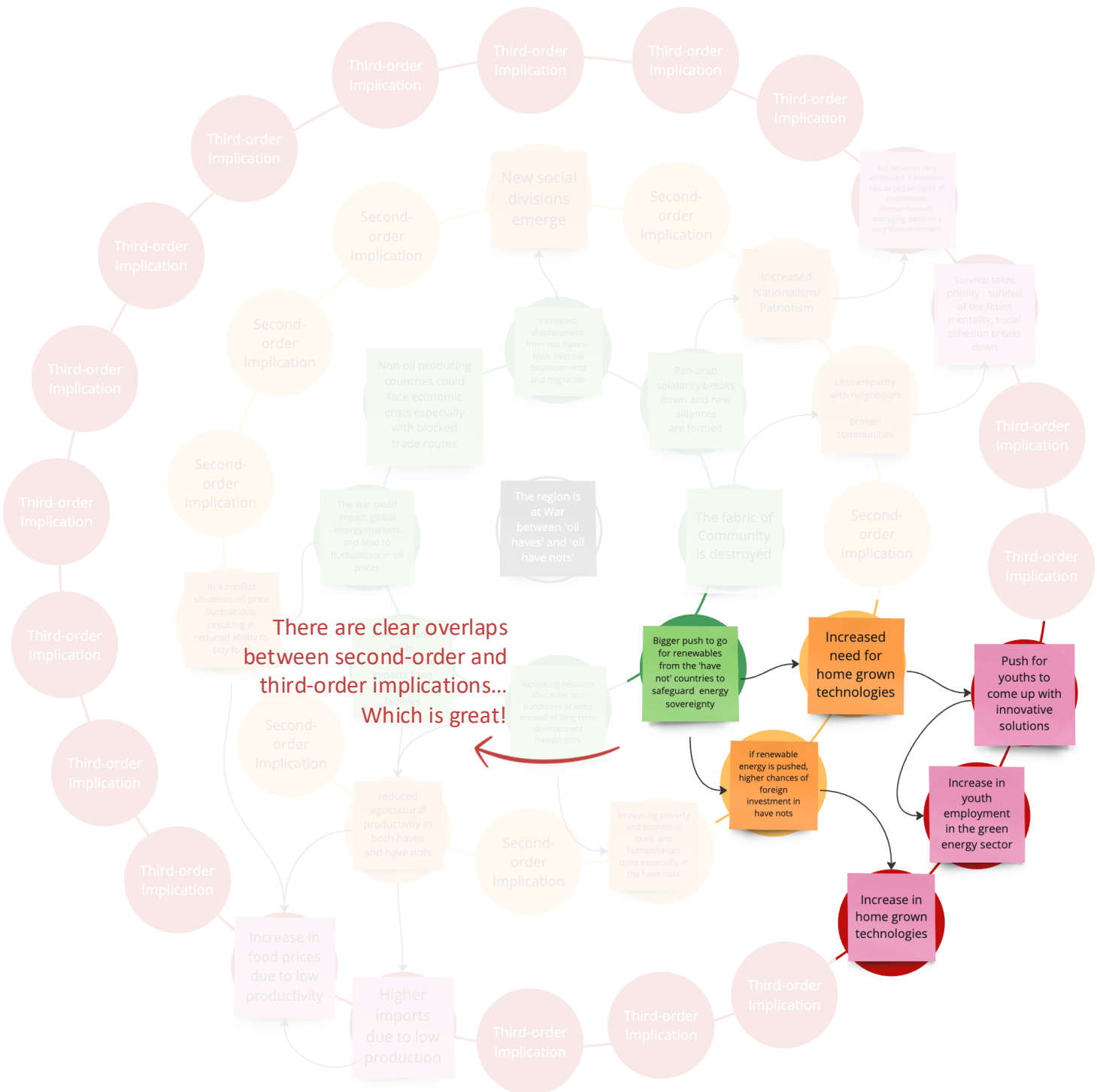
Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



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Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities

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Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities

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Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.1.2 Identify Implications

Tips and Tricks for Using the Futures Wheel

The Futures Wheel is a versatile tool enabling teams to systematically map the cascading implications of prioritized driver outcomes. Here are some important tips and tricks to maximize its effectiveness:

1 Assume Each Implication Happens and Build Forward

Begin by **assuming the first implication is true**, then ask: *"What happens as a direct result of this?"* This mindset ensures the exercise builds logically from one layer of implications to the next.

For example, the **Driver Outcome**: Urban migration accelerates would lead to > **1st Order Implication**: Overcrowding in housing, which would lead to > **2nd Order Implication**: Growth of informal settlements, which, in turn, would lead to > **3rd Order Implication**: Increased inequality and health crises.

2 Think of both Positive and Negative Implications

Aim to identify at least one **positive implication** and one **negative implication** for every layer. This balance prevents participants from focusing solely on risks or benefits and ensures a nuanced view.

For example, a positive third-order implication could be that informal settlements might create vibrant, self-sufficient communities with innovative micro-economies. A negative Implication could be that these settlements might exacerbate social exclusion and strain public resources.

3 Be Specific and Concrete

Use precise language when articulating implications. Avoid vague terms like *"affects"*, *"changes"*, or *"impacts"*. Abstract or general implications will trigger even more abstract & general implications, resulting in a fuzzy, indistinct final product lacking clear insights. Instead, specify **what changes, how, and for whom**.

For example, a vague implication would be, "Overcrowding affects education". Instead, a better, more specific implication would be "Overcrowding in informal settlements reduces school attendance rates due to long travel distances and lack of resources".

4 Repetition and Contradictions are Okay

Repetition: If the same implication arises from multiple outcomes, this could indicate a systemic challenge that warrants extra attention. This is good and it means you might be narrowing in on a development challenge.

Contradictions: Conflicting implications can coexist, highlighting areas of uncertainty or potential tipping points.

For example, you might have one first-order implication as "Urban migration reduces rural labour supply," while another first-order implication could be "Rural innovation attracts reverse migration." Both implications could be useful to consider when looking at the development challenges and opportunities of the future.

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Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.1.3 Cluster Implications and Define Development Challenges & Opportunities

After completing the Futures Wheel, document all implications. Using a participatory process, group similar or related implications into clusters or thematic groups. When clustering, it is usually a good idea to work with second or third-order implications.

Identify patterns, overlaps, or recurring themes to uncover **potential development challenges & opportunities**.

For the Rural-Urban Migration example, some clusters that could emerge are **Urban Resilience**: Challenges related to infrastructure, service delivery, and environmental sustainability or **Social Equity**: Risks of exclusion, marginalization, and inequality.

Draft Development Challenges/Opportunities

Use the clustered implications to articulate **development challenges or opportunities** in clear, actionable terms. When framing a development need, it is important to provide clarity on:

- **What the need is** (concise name).
- **Why it matters** (connection to drivers and outcomes).
- **How it affects the development context** (implications).

[Click here to download the Development Challenge/Opportunity Card](#)

A Working Template to Frame and Name the Development Challenge/Opportunity

Challenge/Opportunity Name Use action-oriented, specific language that communicates the core issue clearly.	
Challenge/Opportunity Description Briefly describe the development challenge and why it is important. This is a good place to link to the driver of change and the signals of change supporting the specific outcome analyzed in the Futures Wheel.	Driver of Change Mention the Driver of Change linked to this development challenge/opportunity.
	Outcome of Driver of Change Mention the specific outcome placed at the center of the Futures Wheel.
Challenge/Opportunity Implications Outline key implications for sustainable development, sharing the first, second and third-order implication ripple effects.	Strategic question Provide a brief recommendation or guiding question to address the challenge.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.1.3 Cluster implications and define development challenges & opportunities

Development Challenge/Opportunity Framing Example

Challenge/Opportunity Name <i>Insufficient Urban Infrastructure to Meet Growing Migration Demands</i>	
Challenge/Opportunity Description <i>Rapid rural-to-urban migration, driven by climate-induced pressures on agriculture, is significantly straining urban infrastructure, leading to overcrowding and inequitable access to housing and services.</i>	Driver of Change <i>Climate-induced rural-to-urban migration</i>
	Outcome of Driver of Change <i>In ten years, the population in urban areas will double.</i>
Challenge/Opportunity Implications <i>Increase in informal settlements and slums.</i> <i>Pressure on urban public services, including health, education, and transport.</i> <i>Growing inequalities and social tensions.</i>	Strategic question <i>How can we design urban resilience programmes that address housing, service delivery, and environmental sustainability in rapidly growing cities?</i>

Key Takeaways

By using the Futures Wheel, teams can:

1. Systematically map the ripple effects of driver outcomes.
2. Uncover systemic risks and opportunities that may not be immediately apparent.
3. Generate actionable insights that can be synthesized into development challenges/opportunities.

This structured approach ensures a thorough exploration of each driver outcome, creating a robust foundation for identifying challenges & opportunities and informing strategic planning.

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Example of a development need emerging from the Futures Wheel

In the process of 'implication synthesis', the team might see that food insecurity repeatedly emerges as a second- and third-order implication.

It's interesting to note that irrespective of whether the driver outcome (an all-out conflict, in this case) manifests in the future, this exercise could highlight the poor state of agricultural productivity or the vulnerability of trade routes in the region.



Challenge Name

Ensuring Food Security Amid Disrupted Trade and Agriculture

Challenge Description

This challenge involves addressing the effects of reduced agricultural productivity and trade disruptions on food security. As productivity declines, food prices increase, exacerbated by fluctuating oil prices and economic crises, leading to higher imports and greater dependence on external markets. This creates vulnerability in already resource-constrained regions.

Challenge Implications

- Increasing war-related pollution and reduced development spending could lead to a fall in agricultural productivity.
- The war will disrupt trade routes, and fluctuating oil prices could make it even more difficult for the region to access adequate food supplies.

Driver of Change

Oil induced conflicts

Outcome of Driver of Change

A regional war breaks out between oil 'haves' and 'have nots'.

Strategic question

How might we ensure food security, enable resilient agricultural systems and diversify trade mechanisms in the regional oil-dependent economy?

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Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities Workshops

We suggest going through these steps with your team in **two workshops**, with a break between them to give participants time to reflect on the drivers and their possible outcomes. Below is a detailed outline of the possible workflows for each workshop.

Workshop 1: Identifying & Prioritizing Driver Outcomes

Pre-Workshop Preparation

❑ Prepare a Pre-Read for Participants:

Develop a brief, accessible document or presentation covering:

- **What are drivers of change?**
- **How were these drivers identified?**
- **What is the purpose of the workshop?**

Share the drivers in advance and encourage participants to consider:
What outcomes might result if this driver develops in different ways?

❑ Clarify the Objectives: For Workshop 1, focus on brainstorming the outcomes of prioritized drivers and classifying them as high-impact, high-certainty, or high-impact, low-certainty outcomes. For Workshop 2, explore the **implications** of prioritized outcomes using the **Futures Wheel**.

❑ Set Up Tools: Digital tools (if virtual) eg. Miro, MURAL, or Jamboard for real-time collaboration. Physical setup (if in-person): Provide sticky notes, flip charts, and markers.

Between Workshop 1 / Workshop 2 Preparation

❑ Synthesize Driver outcomes: Review the workshop's output and combine any 'related' outcomes or remove overlaps, preparing the different outcomes for the next workshop.

❑ Synthesize Driver Prioritization rationale: The discussion generated during the prioritization exercise is critical to capture. The potential impact of the different driver outcomes could represent the rationale behind why your organisation chose to tackle one specific development need rather than another.

❑ Share the synthesized output of the workshop: For the next workshop, it is important for participants to acclimatize themselves to the different outcomes discussed in Workshop 1, especially if certain outcomes were more contentious.

❑ Set Up Tools for Workshop 2: Digital tools (if virtual) eg. Miro, MURAL, or Jamboard for real-time collaboration. Physical setup (if in-person): Provide sticky notes, flip charts, and markers.

Workshop 1 Resources

Driver Outcome Brainstorm Template

[Click here to download the Driver Outcome Brainstorm Template](#)

Driver Outcome Prioritisation Matrix

[Click here to download the Driver Outcome Prioritization Matrix](#)

Futures Wheel Template

[Click here to download the Futures Wheel Template](#)

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Example Workshop 1 Agenda

Look at the example agenda provided below and modify it for your own purposes.

Welcome and Introductions (20 min)

Explain the objectives and outline the agenda.

Context Setting (20 min)

Present the drivers of change and explain how they were developed. Clarify what the participants will be doing. Also, encourage participants to avoid self-censoring and explore seemingly 'outlandish' driver outcomes.

Make sure to offer plenty of examples of what a 'driver outcome' looks like

Breakout Sessions: Brainstorm Driver Outcomes Part 1 (40 min)

In small groups, identify the possible outcomes for each driver. Each group could work on 2-4 drivers.

Have the facilitator play the role of the challenger and push participants to think about extreme outcomes- based on the relevant signals of change

Break (10 min)

Breakout Sessions: Brainstorm Driver Outcomes Part 2 (40 min)

Rotate groups to review and add to the outcomes brainstormed by others.

Remember to offer clear guidance on assessing Impact and Certainty- you might have to offer a reminder at regular intervals in the exercise.

Prioritize Outcomes (60-75 min)

In the plenary session, rank driver outcomes on Impact and Certainty.

Next Steps & Closing (15 min)

Explain next steps and prime participants to consider implications for different driver outcomes.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Example Workshop 2 Agenda

If possible, allow for at least **3–5 days** between Workshop 1 and Workshop 2. This gives participants time to process the outcomes and reflect on potential implications.

Welcome and Recap (20 min)

Recap Workshop 1 and review the prioritized driver outcomes.

Introduction to the Futures Wheel (20 min)

Explain the Futures Wheel, how to use it.

Make sure to offer plenty of examples of how to fill in a Futures Wheel.

Breakout Sessions: Futures Wheel Part 1 (60-75 min)

Divide participants into small groups and assign 5-6 driver outcomes to each group.

Break (10 min)

Breakout Sessions: Futures Wheel Part 2 (60 min)

Rotate groups to review and add to the implications brainstormed by others.

Clustering Implications into Development challenges & opportunities (60 min)

In the plenary session, cluster the second and third-order implications into themes that coalesce into specific development challenges & opportunities.

Next Steps & Closing (15 min)

Clarify that the outcome of this workshop will be shared for additional input for finalization.

Although you may not address all the development challenges, you will identify the most apparent patterns together.

Ask teams to write their notes briefly and clearly to ensure that other teams can understand what's written

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Shareout & Validation

Circulate the refined clusters and development challenges & opportunities with **your stakeholders** to validate their relevance and alignment with their priorities.

Once development needs are finalized, they can serve as the foundation for the next section of your planning: Programme or Intervention design.

The Process so far: You and your team have...



If you opted for Option 1, you can now move to the next chapter...

The outputs from this process offer a comprehensive view of the complexities and opportunities of the future. These development needs reflect risks and invitations to innovate, collaborate, and strategically position your organisation's work in an uncertain world.

However, not all challenges & opportunities can be addressed at once. The next step in this process is to prioritize these needs, ensuring that the focus is aligned with your organisation's mission, comparative advantages and strategy.

With a long list of development needs now identified, the focus shifts to determining which ones your organisation should prioritize.

In Chapter 3, we'll explore tools, frameworks, and methodologies to systematically prioritize these needs, ensuring that your organisation is both impactful and future-ready.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Identifying Development challenges & opportunities: Option 2

In this approach, the team develops detailed scenarios to explore how drivers might interact and shape the future. This method is ideal for teams with more time, resources, or experience in foresight exercises. Two commonly used methods for scenario development are the **2x2 Matrix** and the **Scenario Archetypes** approach.

What are scenarios and why are they important?

Scenarios are **structured narratives about the future**, designed to explore a range of possible outcomes by projecting key drivers of change and uncertainties into alternative futures. They are not forecasts or predictions; rather, they are tools to help teams **learn from the future** to take informed actions in the present.

Why Scenarios Matter

Scenarios challenge traditional ways of thinking and force teams to grapple with complexity, uncertainty, and interconnected systems. They are particularly valuable in identifying development challenges & opportunities that might not be visible through current data or linear analysis. By encouraging creative exploration, scenarios expand strategic thinking and foster innovation.

According to Pierre Wack, one of the pioneers of scenario planning, forecasts are dangerous because they tend to fail when **unexpected changes or major shifts** occur. Scenarios mitigate this risk by presenting **multiple plausible futures**, helping teams prepare for a range of possibilities rather than relying on singular predictions.

Scenarios enable teams to explore **development challenges & opportunities** in ways that analytical approaches might not:

1 Challenge Assumptions: Scenarios disrupt the “we’ve always done it this way” mindset, allowing teams to challenge their assumptions and broaden their perspective.

2 Explore Complex Interactions: Scenarios reveal how drivers interact with each other, often creating new challenges & opportunities or amplifying existing ones.

3 Surface Unconventional challenges & opportunities: By exploring futures that deviate significantly from today’s trajectory, scenarios bring to light **unconventional development needs** that might otherwise be overlooked.

Scenarios are critical for **anticipating future risks and opportunities** and designing development programs that are **resilient, innovative, and forward-looking**. By using scenarios, teams can:

- Align their work with **plausible future conditions**, making strategies more anticipatory.
- Prepare for **high-impact uncertainties** by addressing challenges & opportunities that might arise in multiple scenarios.
- Inspire **new ways of working** by embedding creativity and systems thinking into development planning.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Identifying Development challenges & opportunities: Option 2

Scenarios are more than just creative stories—they are tools for surfacing hidden challenges & opportunities, imagining transformative possibilities, and building resilience to future uncertainties.

If you've chosen Option 2, you'll embark on a **creative approach** to identify development challenges & opportunities by exploring **scenarios**. This method enables teams to consider how different drivers interact across plausible futures, surfacing challenges & opportunities that may not be immediately apparent in today's context.

The process is structured into **two steps**, each designed to guide you from building scenarios to defining actionable development challenges & opportunities.

3.2.1 Develop Scenarios



3.2.2 Explore & Define Development Challenges & Opportunities

To create **plausible futures** by exploring how key drivers of change interact under different conditions.

To identify potential development challenges & opportunities by analysing how drivers manifest and interact within each scenario and distil key insights into an actionable list of development possibilities.

- 1. Scenario Framework Selection:** Choose a scenario-building method, such as the 2x2 Matrix or Scenario Archetypes, to structure your exploration.
- 2. Build Narratives:** Develop rich, detailed narratives for each scenario that explore the implications of driver interactions.

- 1. Scenario-Based Analysis:** Ask key questions for each scenario: What are the main risks? What opportunities arise? What systemic challenges & opportunities emerge?
- 2. Cluster Themes Across Scenarios:** Look for recurring challenges or opportunities in multiple scenarios and articulate the development needs.

A set of **3–4 well-defined scenarios**, each illustrating a different plausible future and highlighting key uncertainties and interactions.

A **refined list of development needs**, informed by scenario analysis and ready for input into the strategic planning process.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Option 2: Developing Scenarios

While there are **many methodologies for building scenarios**, this toolkit focuses on two widely used and practical techniques: the **2x2 Matrix Method** and the **Archetype Technique**. Each approach has its strengths and is suited for different team needs and contexts. Below, we'll provide an overview of each method, including when to use them.

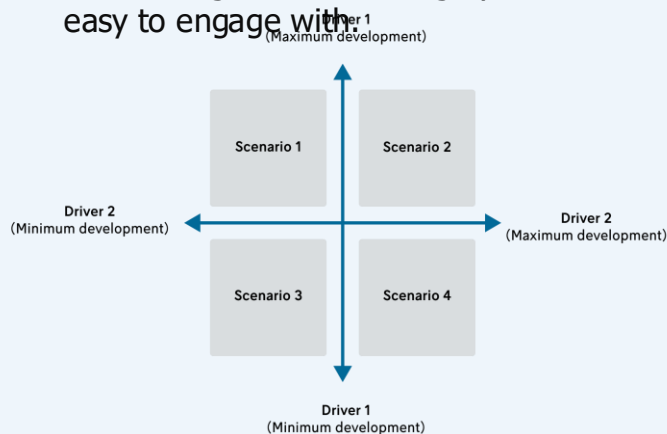
The 2x2 Matrix Method

What It Is

The 2x2 Matrix Method is a **structured scenario-building approach** that explores future possibilities based on two critical uncertainties. By placing these uncertainties along two axes, the method creates four quadrants, each representing a distinct and plausible future.

When to Use the 2x2 Matrix

- When the team has **limited time** and needs a relatively quick way to generate scenarios.
- When two **key uncertainties** are particularly important in shaping the development landscape.
- When **stakeholder input is needed**, as the visual grid format is highly intuitive and easy to engage with.



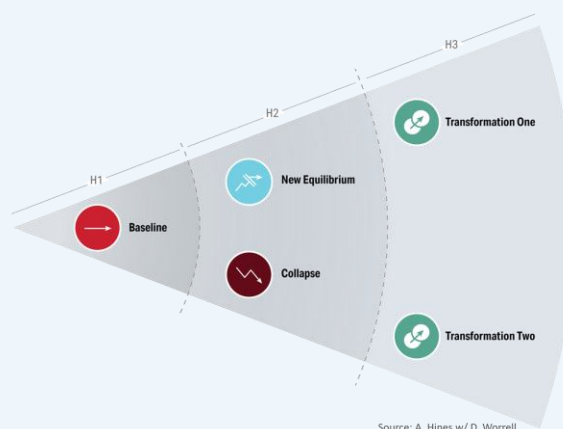
The Archetype Technique

What It Is

The Archetype Technique is a **narrative-driven approach** that builds scenarios using predefined archetypes to explore a wide range of future possibilities. These archetypes are recurring patterns that describe how the future could unfold.

When to Use the Archetype Technique

- When the team has **more time** and wants to explore **systemic challenges & opportunities** across a broader range of possibilities.
- When creativity and narrative depth are priorities, enabling a rich exploration of complex, dynamic systems.
- When the goal is to explore **extreme or unconventional futures**, beyond current trends.



By selecting the approach that best suits their objectives, teams can build scenarios that not only reflect plausible futures but also uncover **innovative development needs** across these contexts. In the following sections, we'll provide step-by-step guidance for applying both methodologies effectively.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.2.1 Developing Scenarios: the 2X2 Matrix method

The **2x2 Matrix Technique** is a structured and efficient way to develop scenarios by prioritizing key drivers of change and exploring their interaction across different conditions. Below is a detailed, step-by-step guide to help teams create scenarios using this technique.

Step 1: Start with Prioritizing the Drivers of Change

Review the **list of drivers of change** identified in the previous sections. These drivers represent forces shaping the future development landscape. As a team, you will need to prioritize two drivers of change to focus on.

Ask the following questions to narrow down the list:

- *Which drivers have the most significant potential impact on the development context?*
- *Which drivers are characterized by high uncertainty?*
- *Which drivers are interdependent or have cascading effects on other forces?*

Prioritize two key drivers that are **both high impact and high uncertainty** and **independent of each other** (i.e., they don't overlap in scope or effects).

Defining Impact

Impact refers to a driver's potential significance in shaping the future development landscape. A high-impact driver is one that could create **substantial changes** across sectors, systems, or populations, whether through risks, opportunities, or cascading effects.

1. Consider Breadth and Depth:

- **Breadth:** How many people, sectors, or regions will this driver affect?
- **Depth:** How profound or transformative will the changes caused by this driver be?

2. Evaluate Systemic Effects: Does this driver influence other drivers or systems? High-impact drivers often have cascading effects.

For example: *Climate change* affects migration, agriculture, health, and urban development, making it a high-impact driver.

Defining Certainty

Certainty refers to the level of **agreement** about whether and how a driver will manifest in the future. It's not about predicting likelihood with precision (no one has a crystal ball), but rather about assessing the **degree of consensus or ambiguity** surrounding the driver.

1. Gauge Team Agreement: If most team members agree that the driver will evolve in a specific, predictable way, then it's likely that the driver is highly certain. If, however, significant disagreement exists about how or whether the driver will evolve, it could be a highly uncertain driver.

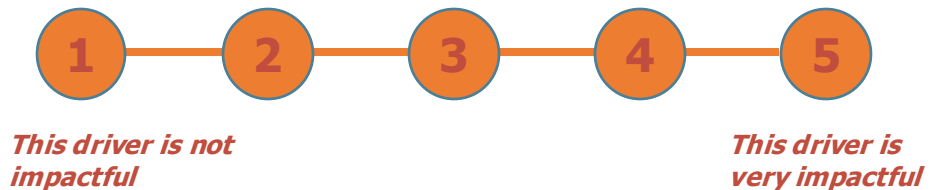
2. Examine Data and Trends: Drivers with strong, observable trends or robust evidence are typically more certain, while drivers influenced by unpredictable dynamics (e.g., political shifts) are less certain.

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities

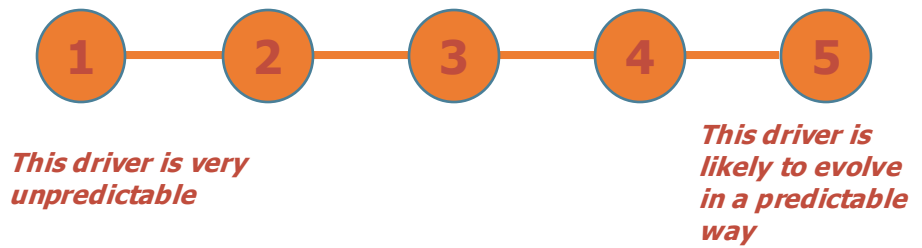
Tips for Assessing Impact and Certainty of Drivers

- 1. Use a Scoring System:** Rate each driver on a scale of 1 to 5 for impact and certainty, using team discussions to reach a consensus.

How would you rate the potential impact of this driver on the development context?



How would you rate the certainty of this driver?

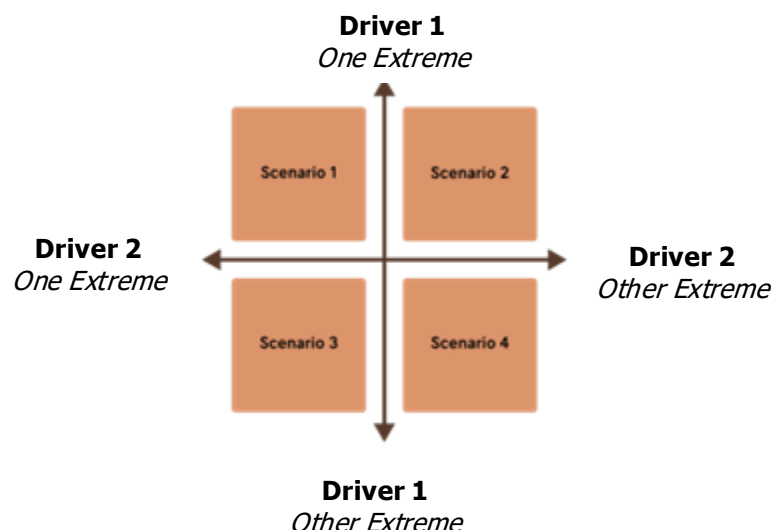


- 2. Facilitate Team Discussions:** Use structured conversations to surface assumptions, disagreements, and different perspectives. Ask team members to explain why they perceive a driver as high or low impact/certainty.
- 3. Avoid Overconfidence:** Be cautious of biases, such as assuming high certainty simply because a driver aligns with current trends.
- 4. Consider Interdependence:** Look at how drivers influence one another. Drivers with many interdependencies are often high-impact but may also introduce more uncertainty.

Step 2: Define the Two Axes of the Matrix

Place the two selected drivers on the **X and Y axes** of a blank matrix. For each driver, define the **two ends of the spectrum** (i.e., opposite conditions or extremes). Ensure the extremes are **clear and specific**, avoiding vague or overly broad terms.

For example, for *Pace of AI Adoption*, one end could be "*Rapid, equitable adoption*" and the other "*Slow, uneven adoption*."



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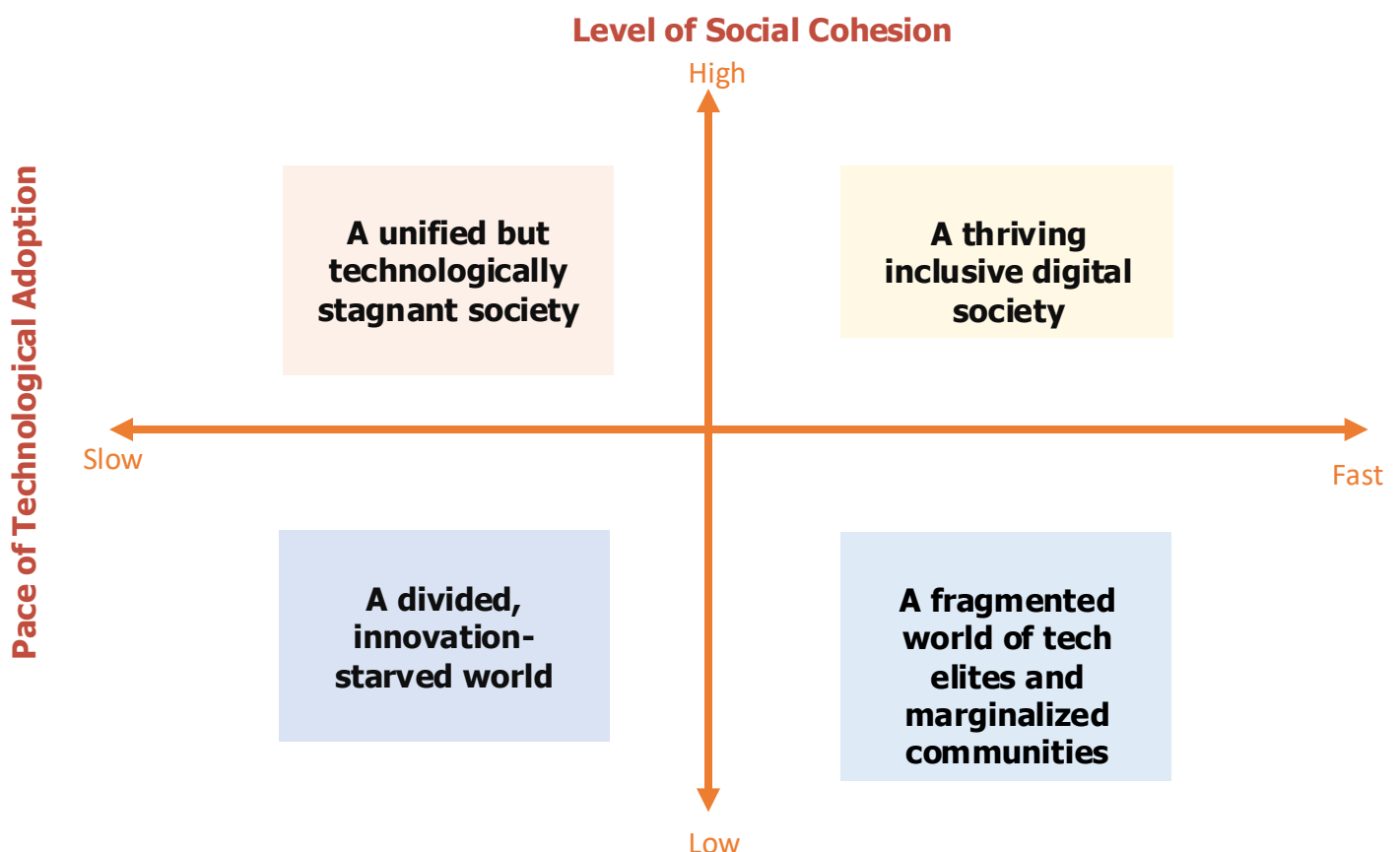


Step 3: Populate the Matrix with Four Scenarios

The matrix's **four quadrants** represent the interplay of the two drivers' extremes. Each quadrant becomes a **distinct scenario**.

For example, if the two drivers being considered were 'Pace of Technological Adoption (Fast vs. Slow)' on the X axis and the 'Level of Social Cohesion (High vs. Low)' on the Y axis the example scenarios would be:

- **Quadrant 1 (High Cohesion, Fast Tech Adoption):** A thriving, inclusive digital society.
- **Quadrant 2 (Low Cohesion, Fast Tech Adoption):** A fragmented world of tech elites and marginalized communities.
- **Quadrant 3 (High Cohesion, Slow Tech Adoption):** A unified but technologically stagnant society.
- **Quadrant 4 (Low Cohesion, Slow Tech Adoption):** A divided, innovation-starved world.



Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Step 4: Build the Narrative

Once the 2x2 matrix is populated with four distinct quadrants, it's time to bring each scenario to life through a compelling and detailed narrative. This step aims to describe a plausible future world for each quadrant by exploring the interplay between the two key drivers of change and incorporating other drivers that may influence the scenario indirectly. These narratives help contextualize development challenges and opportunities, making them more actionable and relevant for planning.

To start, focus on one quadrant of the matrix at a time.

Begin by describing the world in this specific future based on the intersection of the **two extremes of the selected drivers**. For instance, if your drivers are *Pace of Technological Adoption* (fast vs. slow) and *Level of Social Cohesion* (high vs. low), you would explore how these two forces interact to shape a unique world in each quadrant.

In a scenario where technological adoption is rapid and social cohesion is high, the narrative might describe a thriving, inclusive digital society where technological advances are widely accessible and used to improve livelihoods. In contrast, a quadrant with slow technological adoption and low social cohesion might describe a fragmented world where innovation is stalled, and inequality is widespread.

As you develop the scenario, incorporate additional context from other drivers of change, especially **the high-impact, high-certainty ones** identified earlier in the foresight process.

Although these drivers were not prioritized for the matrix, they still play a role in shaping the future. For example, a high-tech world will still be influenced by climate-related migrations to urban areas, straining even the most advanced smart cities. Including such dynamics enriches the narrative, making it more multi-dimensional and reflective of systemic interdependencies.

To ensure the scenario is robust, reflect on its implications for different stakeholders. How might businesses and communities respond to this future? For example, in the low-tech, low-cohesion scenario, businesses might exacerbate the social fragmentation for financial gain.

Tips and Tricks for Developing Scenarios

- 1. Balance Creativity and Plausibility:** Stretch your imagination but ensure the scenarios remain grounded by **signals** collected in your research.
- 2. Use Anchors from Signals:** Project existing signals of change identified during horizon scanning into the future and incorporate them to add depth and evidence to your narratives.
- 3. Engage Diverse Perspectives:** Include participants from different disciplines or backgrounds to ensure the scenarios reflect a wide range of viewpoints.
- 4. Focus on Decision-Relevance:** Each scenario should highlight **key uncertainties and challenges & opportunities** relevant to your organisation's work.
- 5. Avoid Overcomplication:** Keep scenarios simple enough to be understood and actionable, focusing on the **essentials**.

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Scenario Development Template with an example

Scenario Name

A short, engaging name for the scenario.

Summary

2–3 sentences describing the essence of the scenario.

For example, in the previous example of Pace of Technological Adoption (fast vs. slow) and Level of Social Cohesion (high vs. low), the summary of the top right quadrant could be simply: In this future, rapid technological adoption aligns with high social cohesion, creating a world where innovation is accessible, inclusive, and transformative.

Communities and institutions work together to harness technological advances for addressing global challenges, from climate change to economic inequality. A shared sense of purpose drives collaborative action, ensuring equitable benefits for all.

Key Features of the Scenario

Main Drivers:

Describe the two key drivers and their interaction.

For example:

High Pace of Technological Adoption:

Breakthroughs in AI, renewable energy, and digital governance have transformed economies and societies.

- *High Level of Social Cohesion:* Communities, governments, and stakeholders work together with shared goals, ensuring inclusive and equitable growth.

State of the World:

What does this scenario look like? Imagine a world where these key features are present, what would it look like? Don't worry about HOW you got there, we aren't looking for solutions. But think about what a destination like this could look like.

Example:

Smart cities flourish as digital technologies enable efficient urban planning, public service delivery, and energy management.

- Innovations in healthcare, education, and agriculture enhance quality of life and address systemic inequalities.
- Global collaboration on climate change leads to significant advances in sustainability, such as carbon capture technologies and circular economies.

Other Drivers:

What other forces or dynamics are present?

Example: Climate Resilience. Climate-induced migration is well-managed through smart urban design and international collaboration, ensuring the successful integration of displaced populations.

- *Governance Evolution:* Digital tools like blockchain enhance transparency and public participation, increasing trust in institutions.
- *Migration Patterns:* Strong social systems ensure migrants are welcomed and supported, reducing societal tensions and enriching cultural diversity.

[Click here to download a copy of the scenario template](#)

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Example Workshop Agenda for Developing Scenarios using the 2X2 Matrix

Look at the example agenda provided below and modify it for your own purposes.

Welcome and Context Setting (20 min)

Introduce the workshop objectives and the importance of scenario planning to the strategic planning process. Explain the 2x2 Matrix technique. Review the list of drivers, explaining their context and significance.

Focus the discussion on determining the top **two** high-impact and high-uncertainty drivers.

Driver Selection (60 min)

Discuss the longlist of drivers and encourage participants to share their views on each driver's potential **impact** and **uncertainty**. Plot drivers on a 2x2 grid with **impact** on one axis (low to high) and **uncertainty** on the other (low to high).

Finalize the **two axes' extremes** for the matrix, ensuring clarity and agreement.

Break (10 min)

Breakout Sessions: Develop Scenarios (60 min)

Introduce the blank 2x2 matrix with the selected drivers and axes. Divide participants into four groups, assigning each group one matrix quadrant.

Each group develops a high-level description of their quadrant's future, focusing on the Scenario Template.

Ensure that groups don't jump into 'solutioning' trying to define HOW this world came into being. The focus should be on WHAT this world looks like.

Present and Discuss Scenarios (45 minutes)

Each group presents its scenario narrative to the plenary. Participants identify cross-cutting themes and connections between scenarios and highlight any gaps or overlooked dynamics.

Next Steps & Closing (15 min)

Outline next steps, including post-workshop refinement of scenarios. Mention the next workshop, where the scenarios will be used to identify development needs to be considered in your organisation's next strategic planning cycle.

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



3.2.1 Developing Scenarios: The Scenario Archetype Technique

The **Scenario Archetype Technique** is a narrative-driven approach to scenario development, grounded in recurring patterns or “archetypes” that describe plausible future pathways. Unlike the 2x2 Matrix Method, which focuses on the interplay of two key uncertainties, the Archetype Technique provides a broader exploration of possible futures through four main archetypes. These archetypes—**Baseline, Collapse, New Equilibrium, and Transformation**—reflect distinct ways in which the future could unfold, offering a creative and systemic way to identify risks, opportunities, and development challenges.

Understanding the Four Archetypes

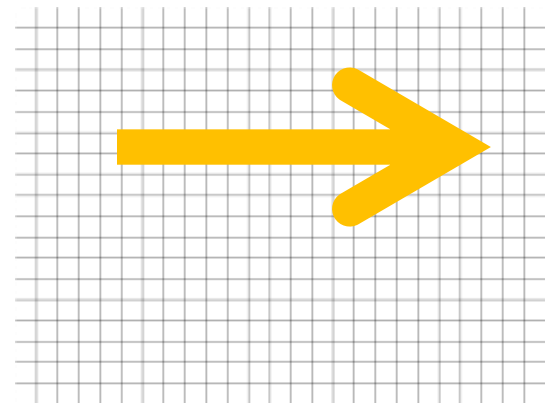
Baseline

The world continues to evolve along current trajectories, with steady improvements in technology, governance, and social systems. Challenges are addressed incrementally, and systems remain largely intact.

Rules of Thumb:

- Focus on *incremental progress* based on trends observed today.
- Assume no major disruptions or paradigm shifts occur.
- Reflect gradual improvements but also persistent challenges.

Example: Technological adoption spreads steadily, reducing inequalities, but systemic inequities remain unresolved.



Collapse

What It Stands For: Systems break down due to crises, such as environmental, social, or economic disruptions. Progress stagnates, and societies struggle to maintain order and stability.

Rules of Thumb:

- Explore what happens when key systems (e.g., governance, infrastructure) fail.
- Consider the cascading effects of crises like climate change or resource shortages.
- Highlight vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms.

Example: Unmanaged climate migration overwhelms cities, leading to resource conflicts and social unrest.

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Understanding the Four Archetypes

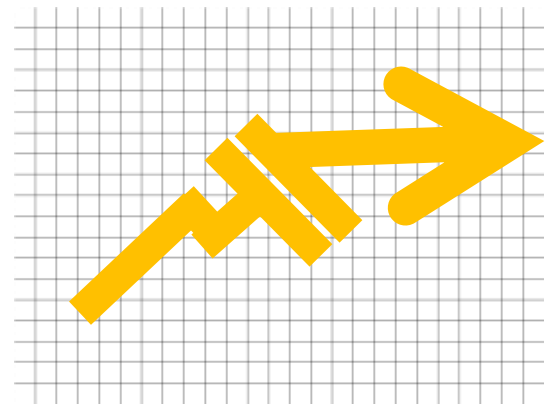
New Equilibrium

What It Stands For: Societies reorganize under new rules or constraints, often imposed by external forces (e.g., regulatory systems, cultural shifts). The focus is on sustainability, stability, and managing limited resources.

Rules of Thumb:

- Assume stricter rules and systems are put in place to address emerging challenges.
- Highlight trade-offs between progress and control.
- Consider how constraints impact freedom, innovation, and equity.

Example: The government imposes strict regulations on urban migration and resource use, fostering resilience but limiting personal freedoms.



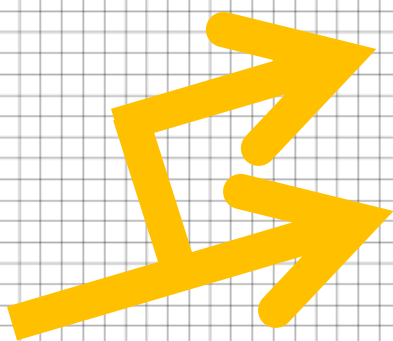
Transformation

What It Stands For: Radical changes occur, disrupting current systems and creating entirely new paradigms. Innovation and adaptation lead to breakthroughs in addressing complex challenges.

Rules of Thumb:

- Emphasize revolutionary changes and systemic shifts.
- Explore opportunities for renewal and the emergence of new norms.
- Highlight risks of inequality during transition phases.

Example: AI-driven governance and decentralized urban systems redefine cities as hubs of equity and innovation.



The **four scenario archetypes—Baseline, Collapse, New Equilibrium, and Transformation—stem from decades of futures studies and scenario planning research.**

These archetypes were popularized by systems theorists and futurists like Peter Schwartz and Jim Dator, who observed that certain patterns consistently emerge when exploring possible futures. They represent fundamental dynamics that societies and systems experience as they evolve, making them versatile tools for scenario building.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Step 1: Build the Narrative

Refer to the **drivers of change** identified earlier in the foresight process. These drivers will help shape the narrative and dynamics of each archetype. Choose the ones that are the most relevant to the development context. Try to focus your attention on a handful of 6-8 drivers to ensure that the scenarios don't get too complex for the team to create.

Tips for selecting key drivers:

1. Choose drivers that are **directly relevant to the focus of your organisation** and reflect the unique challenges and opportunities in your context. Consider questions like '*Which drivers are most critical to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in this context?*' and '*Which drivers reflect key national priorities or strategies?*' to help choose the right drivers.
2. You can use a voting system or ranking survey technique to reach a consensus but do ensure that you allow for discussion and debate within the team to **ensure that diverse perspectives are heard and considered** in the final vote.
3. Additionally, it's a good idea to focus on **high-impact, high-uncertainty drivers**, as these are most likely to shape diverse scenarios.
4. Finally, try to select drivers that reflect **different dimensions** of change (e.g., political, economic, technological, environmental, social). This ensures scenarios are **multidimensional** and not overly focused on a single aspect of the future.

Translate the drivers into the four archetypes. How would these drivers manifest if we were to apply the Rules of Thumb mentioned in the previous pages, in each of these archetypes?

For example, if your chosen drivers were 'Rural-Urban Migration', 'Technological Adoption', 'Climate Resilience' & 'New Governance Models', then the highlights of the scenarios could be:



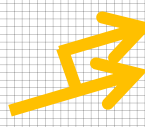
Baseline: High Pace of Technological Adoption allows for steady expansion of renewable energy systems and efficient urban infrastructure. **Effective Governance Models** ensure resources are distributed equitably, while **moderate Climate Resilience** supports incremental progress.



Collapse: Unmanaged Urban Migration Patterns overwhelm cities, leading to resource shortages and infrastructure strain. **Low Climate Resilience** exacerbates crises, and governance systems fail to respond effectively.



New Equilibrium: Governance Models impose stricter regulations to control urban migration and manage limited resources. **Moderate Technological Adoption** supports sustainability goals, but constraints limit individual freedoms and innovation.



Transformation: Decentralized, Community-Led Governance Models empower local communities to implement innovative solutions for urban resilience. **High Climate Resilience** and **Rapid Technological Adoption** create sustainable, equitable urban systems.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Scenario Development Template

Craft a rich, plausible narrative for each archetype that describes how the future unfolds. Use the following Scenario Template to develop your scenarios:

Scenario Name

A short, engaging name for the scenario: E.g. The Great Fragmentation (Collapse)

Summary

2–3 sentences describing the essence of the scenario.

Key Features of the Scenario

Main Drivers:

Describe the drivers and how they manifest in this archetype.

For example:

- 'Rural-Urban Migration'
- 'Technological Adoption'
- 'Climate Resilience'
- 'New Governance Models'

State of the World:

What does this scenario look like? Imagine a world where these key features are present. What would it look like? Don't worry about HOW you got there; we aren't looking for solutions. But think about what a destination like this could look like.

Role of Stakeholders:

Explore how important stakeholders like governments, communities, and private sectors respond

[Click here to download the Archetype Scenario template](#)

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Example Workshop Agenda for Developing Archetype Scenarios

Please look at the example agenda we have provided below and modify it for your own purposes.

Note: For this technique it might be especially important to share a pre-read explaining the 4 archetypes and offering examples of how they are used in building the scenarios.

Welcome and Context Setting (45 min)

Introduce the workshop objectives and the importance of scenario planning. Explain the Archetype technique and the relevance of scenarios to the strategic planning process.

Driver Selection (60 min)

Discuss the longlist of drivers and encourage participants to share their views on each driver's **relevance**, potential **impact** and **uncertainty**. Share the tips included in this toolkit and facilitate a decision on the top 6-8 key drivers.

Break (10 min)

Breakout Sessions: Develop Scenarios (60 min)

Divide participants into four groups, assigning each group one archetype.

Each group develops a high-level description of their scenario, using the Scenario Template.

Present and Discuss Scenarios (45 minutes)

Each group presents its scenario narrative to the plenary. Participants identify cross-cutting themes and connections between scenarios and highlight any gaps or overlooked dynamics. Identify any areas needing further refinement.

Next Steps & Closing (15 min)

Outline next steps, including post-workshop refinement of scenarios. Mention the next workshop, where the scenarios will be used to identify development needs that can be considered as options for input into the strategic plan of your organisation.

Offer an overview (with examples) of the 4 archetypes when explaining the technique

Ensure that groups don't jump into 'solutioning' trying to define HOW this world came into being. The focus should be on WHAT this world looks like.

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Validate the scenarios

As a final step, validate the scenarios by revisiting the signals of change and drivers that informed the process. Check whether the narrative aligns with evidence from your horizon scanning and ensure that it is plausible and distinct from the others. Encourage feedback from team members or stakeholders to refine and strengthen the narrative.

By creating these rich, detailed scenarios, teams gain a deeper understanding of how futures might unfold. These narratives form the foundation for identifying development needs in the next step, ensuring that your strategic planning reflects both current priorities and emerging dynamics in the development landscape.

3.2.2 Step 2: Explore & Define Development challenges & opportunities

By envisioning plausible futures through the lenses of diverse scenarios, we can explore how key drivers of change might interact, amplify, or contradict one another to shape the future landscape. Scenarios create a **systemic and dynamic framework** that allows teams to identify development needs not just for today but for emerging realities, making them particularly valuable for the strategic planning process.

Once scenarios are developed, the next step is to mine them for insights into **potential development needs that emerge**. This process involves systematically analysing each scenario to ask critical questions about risks, opportunities, and systemic issues that emerge in these futures enabling teams to frame actionable development needs that address both **present** and **future uncertainties**.

Analysing Scenarios to Identify Development challenges & opportunities

To extract meaningful challenges & opportunities from scenarios, teams must interrogate each scenario with a set of guiding questions designed to uncover risks, opportunities, and systemic issues that arise in each plausible future.

Risks:

What are the major risks that arise in this scenario for development?

Consider how these risks could disrupt sustainable development goals, exacerbate inequalities, or create new vulnerabilities. For example, in a scenario where urbanization accelerates without adequate governance, risks might include overcrowded cities, infrastructure collapse, or heightened social tensions.

Opportunities:

What opportunities for development progress could this scenario offer?

Identify areas where innovation, partnerships, or policy interventions could make a transformative impact. For example, a scenario with rapid technological adoption might highlight opportunities for inclusive digital governance or job creation through green technology.

Development Priorities:

What development priorities are most critical in this future?

Consider which areas demand immediate action versus those requiring long-term systemic change.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Framing Development Challenges & Opportunities

The insights from scenario analysis can then be synthesized into clear, actionable development needs. Using the template provided earlier, teams can articulate these challenges & opportunities by linking them to specific drivers, outcomes, and implications.

This structured approach ensures that challenges & opportunities are grounded in evidence and aligned with strategic priorities.

After analysing individual scenarios, it's essential to look for recurring themes or development needs that appear across multiple futures. These recurring issues often represent the most critical development challenges & opportunities, as they are robust across different uncertainties.

For example, challenges around urban resilience or climate adaptation might emerge in both "Collapse" and "Transformation" scenarios, albeit in different forms.

Clustering these themes provides a streamlined, prioritized list of development possibilities that reflect systemic risks and opportunities. This consolidated list becomes a foundational input for **determining the focus of your strategic planning** and guides intervention design in later stages.

A Template to Frame and Name the Development Challenge/Opportunity

Name

Provide a short, action-oriented title that clearly communicates the challenge/opportunity. Focus on the **core issue** or thematic area.

Description

Briefly describe the development challenge/opportunity in **specific terms**. Highlight why it is important in the context of plausible futures.

Scenarios linked to this challenge/opportunity

List the scenarios where this challenge/opportunity was identified. Specify how it manifests differently in each scenario.

Systems Implications

Detail the **broader systemic effects** of this development issue across social, economic, environmental, and political domains. Include cascading risks or interconnected issues.

Relevant Partners or Stakeholders

If the discussion allows, already enumerate which stakeholders are going to be critical to addressing this challenge.

[Click here to download a copy of the Development Challenge/Opportunity Card](#)

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Example Workshop Agendas for Scenario Analysis and Identification of Development Needs

These two workshops guide teams through analysing scenarios, extracting key insights, and framing development needs using tailored templates. They balance collaborative discussions, structured activities, and time for synthesis. Look at the example agendas below and modify them for your own purposes.

Workshop 1 Agenda: Scenario Analysis

Welcome and Context Setting (45min)

Introduce the purpose of the workshop and outline the agenda. Explain the role of scenarios in identifying development needs. Briefly review the scenarios, ensuring all participants understand their key features.

Scenario Analysis (60 min)

Divide participants into small groups, assigning each group one scenario. Provide guiding questions (e.g., risks, opportunities, systemic challenges to development) to structure their analysis.

Break (10 min)

Present and Discuss Scenario Insights (1 hour)

Step 1: Group Presentations (40 minutes):

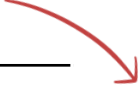
Each group presents its findings to the plenary, highlighting key risks, opportunities, and systemic challenges.

Step 2: Plenary Discussion (20 minutes):

The facilitator leads a discussion to gather inputs from the other participants and identify cross-cutting themes and patterns emerging across scenarios.

Next Steps & Closing (20 min)

The facilitator summarizes the session's key insights and gives a brief overview of how the outputs will feed into the next workshop for clustering and framing development needs.



It will be handy if you share the scenarios before hand in a pre-read and explain the process to be followed in the workshop.

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Workshop 2 Agenda: Identification of Development Needs

Welcome and Recap (45min)

Briefly recap the outputs of Workshop 1. Explain the objectives of this session: clustering insights and framing development challenges & opportunities.

It will be handy if you share a consolidated list of risks, opportunities, and challenges identified in the first workshop.

Refine and Finalize Clusters (1 hour)

Divide participants into small groups, give each group the same long-list of risks, opportunities and challenges identified in the previous workshop. Groups create clusters and assign themes.

Encourage participants to go through the different clusters prepared by each group during the coffee break.

Break (20 min)

Present and Discuss & Prioritize Clusters (1 hour 20 minutes)

Step 1: Group Presentations (20 minutes):

Each group presents its clusters and themes to the plenary.

Step 2: Plenary Discussion (40 minutes):

The facilitator leads a discussion to gather other participants' input and identify cross-cutting themes and patterns emerging across scenarios.

Step 3: Prioritize clusters (20 minutes)

The group votes on the clusters they would most like to 'leave out' due to lack of relevance, overlaps or other reasons.

The objective of this step is to ensure teams do not spend time on clusters that are most obviously not 'worth' spending time on.

Frame Development Needs (1 hour 10 minutes)

Step 1: Challenge Framing (50 minutes):

Groups use the development challenge template to frame challenges & opportunities

Step 3: Present and Discuss challenges & opportunities (10 minutes):

Groups present their framed challenges & opportunities to the plenary.

Next Steps & Closing (20 min)

Summarize the key outputs: finalized clusters and framed challenges & opportunities. Outline how these outputs will inform the strategic planning process.

Chapter 2: Future informed planning

Identifying Development Challenges & Opportunities



Conclusion

The outputs from this process offer a comprehensive view of the complexities and opportunities of the future. These development needs are not just reflections of risks but also invitations to innovate, collaborate, and strategically position your organisation's work in an uncertain world.

However, not all challenges & opportunities can be addressed at once. The next step in this process is to prioritize these challenges & opportunities, ensuring that the focus is aligned with your organisation's mission, comparative advantages and strategy. Prioritization is critical to translating foresight insights into impactful action.

With a long list of development needs now identified, the focus shifts to determining which ones your organisation *should* prioritize.

This step involves evaluating the challenges & opportunities based on strategic criteria, such as alignment with your organisation's strategy, capabilities, national development goals, and the potential impact. Through this process, the most critical and actionable development needs will emerge, guiding the programme priorities in your strategic planning.

In the next section, we'll explore tools, frameworks, and methodologies to systematically prioritize these development needs, ensuring that your organisation's contributions are both impactful and future-ready.

Chapter 3

Future-fit programming

Foresight for Programme Design



Objective

This chapter helps teams prioritise the most relevant development challenges & opportunities, translate them into actionable programmes, and identify relevant partnerships to ensure success.



Expected outcome

A year-by-year roadmap of programmes and partnerships with actionable initiatives to put in place to address chosen development challenges & opportunities effectively.

Key Questions Answered

*What do we want? What are the transformative **opportunities we can focus on** to address prioritised development needs?*

*How can we **structure programmes** to achieve these goals?*

*What should **our vision** be for the future, and how can we work towards this vision?*

Prerequisites for the activities in this chapter:

- A shared understanding of your organisation's strategic priorities.
- Willingness to engage stakeholders in visioning and strategy development.

Note to Senior Management

- ✓ Ensure that the team takes a systems perspective while discussing programmes, overcoming their own biases.
- ✓ Encourage teams to develop transformative solutions and creative approaches.
- ✓ Encourage teams to be ambitious in developing your organisation's vision.
- ✓ Advocate for stakeholder engagement throughout this process to enhance ownership and sustainability of the outcomes.



Steps:

Prioritise challenges & opportunities, use a systems approach to design programmes, and use visioning and backcasting to build actionable roadmaps.



Tools Used:

- Challenge Prioritization Framework
- Causal Layered Analysis
- Visioning
- Backcasting



Recommended Workshops:

1. Challenge Prioritization Workshop
2. Visioning Workshop
3. CLA Workshop(s)
3. Back casting Workshop(s)

Chapter 3: Future-fit programming

Foresight for Programme Design



Introduction

In this chapter, we will walk through how to transition from a **long list of development needs**—identified through foresight activities—to **prioritizing the most critical challenges & opportunities** that your organisation should focus on in your strategic planning. This section is essential for ensuring that your work is **strategically aligned, future-ready, and impactful**. This process includes **three key steps**:

	Challenge & Opportunity Prioritisation	Using Foresight for Programme Design	Visioning & Backcasting
How	Using a custom scoring mechanism , your team will prioritize the development needs identified through earlier foresight activities.	We suggest using Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) , a foresight tool that helps to uncover the deeper, systemic causes of development needs.	Visioning helps teams imagine a positive outcome & backcasting allows teams to work backwards from that envisioned future to identify the steps, actions, and partnerships needed to achieve it .
Why	This structured approach helps to facilitate discussion and bring objectivity to the prioritization process	The CLA allows teams to think beyond surface-level symptoms and design innovative, transformative interventions .	Backcasting can be an effective way to create a realistic plan because it shifts focus to the steps along the way to a vision , rather than just focusing on the end goal.
Output	A prioritized list of challenges & opportunities for your organisation to address which have the greatest impact and are aligned with the strategy, the mission, and other stakeholder priorities .	A layered, futures-oriented approach that considers cultural narratives, worldviews, and systemic structures influencing the challenge/opportunity.	This exercise will help map out milestones, identify key stakeholders, and plan strategic partnerships .

Together, these three components will equip your team with a **pragmatic and visionary programme strategy for the future**, ensuring that your strategic planning remains **relevant, resilient, and impactful in an uncertain world**.

Challenge Prioritization

Selecting which development challenges & opportunities to address when doing your strategic planning is inherently complex.

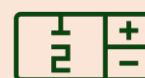
Without a structured framework, prioritization can become **subjective and biased**, influenced too much by the urgency of current issues. The **custom scoring mechanism** introduced in this toolkit helps to bring **objectivity and structure** to the process by:



Evaluating each challenge across multiple parameters, such as alignment with strategy, national & stakeholder priorities.



Encouraging diverse perspectives through a structured scoring and discussion process.



Quantifying what is traditionally a qualitative decision, making prioritization more evidence-based.

This mechanism is designed to **foster debate, discussion, and consensus** within your team, leading to selection of the **most relevant and impactful development challenges & opportunities**.

Iterative Scoring: Balancing Individual Perspectives with Group Consensus

When making decisions about which development challenges & opportunities to prioritize, **each team member brings their own unique insights and experiences**. Some may have expertise in specific thematic areas, while others may have a better understanding of **local contexts or political dynamics**. Allowing team members to **score the challenges & opportunities individually first** ensures that **all voices are captured without bias** or influence from dominant personalities in the room.

However, **development priorities are never purely objective**, and **no single perspective has the full picture**. That's why the second step—**group discussion and debate**—is critical. It allows team members to **defend their scores, share insights**, and **gain new perspectives from their colleagues**. This process helps surface **blind spots, mitigate biases**, and **build consensus**, leading to **better, more robust decisions**.

The **iterative process** also ensures that **groupthink is avoided**. Groupthink can happen when individuals are reluctant to voice dissenting opinions or when a dominant personality sways the group toward a particular decision. By starting with an **individual assessment**, team members can express their honest opinions. Then, during the **group discussion**, they have the opportunity to **listen to alternative perspectives** and **adjust their views** if needed, based on new information.

Before going into the details of how to facilitate this iterative scoring process, we will walk through a suggested set of parameters for scoring development challenges & opportunities.

Prioritization parameters and the ranking system

Below, we list some **core parameters** that can apply across different contexts. However, your team may wish to include **additional context-specific parameters** to reflect **local priorities**. We also include **tips for developing custom parameters**. The scoring will be done on a scale of **1 to 5**, where **1** indicates a lower score and **5** indicates a higher score.

Strategic Fit

The extent to which the development need aligns with **our organisation's strategy**.



National Strategy Fit

The extent to which the development need aligns with the **country's national development strategy**.



Donor/Other Stakeholder Fit

The extent to which the development need aligns with **stakeholder priorities** and has potential funding opportunities.



Level of Urgency

The **time-sensitivity** of the development need, including the potential impact if not addressed.



Low urgency:

Impact will manifest in the distant future.

Moderate urgency:

Impact is foreseeable within the next 3-5 years.

High urgency:

Immediate impact or risk if not addressed.

The Scale of the Challenge

The **number of people impacted** by the challenge.



Affects a **small** portion of the target beneficiaries.

Affects a **significant** portion of the target beneficiaries.

Affects the **majority** of the target beneficiaries.

Resource Effectiveness

Does addressing the challenge have a **high impact to resource investment ratio**?



High cost with low impact.

Average cost-impact ratio.

High impact for relatively low investment.

Custom Parameters

Your team may wish to add **custom parameters** that reflect **local contexts or unique priorities**. You can and should adapt these parameters to your needs.

The Iterative Scoring process

The **development need scoring** proposed in this toolkit is designed to be **iterative**. It allows for both **individual reflection** and **group discussion** before arriving at a final decision on which development challenges & opportunities should be prioritized in your strategic planning.

This two-step process ensures that **diverse perspectives are heard and incorporated** while promoting **collaborative decision-making** that leads to stronger, more future-focused outcomes.

Step 1: Individual Scoring (Pre-Workshop)

Each team member receives the **list of development needs** and the **scoring table** with the agreed-upon parameters (e.g., Strategic Fit, National Strategy Fit, Stakeholder Fit, etc.). Team members **score each challenge independently** on a scale of 1 to 5, based on their knowledge and understanding.

We suggest that these **individual scores are collected anonymously** to ensure that people feel comfortable sharing their honest opinions without fear of judgment.

Why This Step Is Important:

- Allows quieter team members to contribute fully.
- Captures a wide range of perspectives.
- Prevents dominant personalities from steering the discussion.

Step 2: Group Discussion and Consensus Building (Workshop)

- The **facilitator presents the aggregated individual scores** for each challenge, highlighting any **areas of agreement or significant disagreement**.
- For challenges & opportunities where scores vary widely, team members are encouraged to **explain their rationale** for scoring a particular way.
- The discussion focuses on **unpacking disagreements**, with participants sharing **their insights, data, or contextual knowledge** to support their views.
- After the discussion, team members **re-score the challenges & opportunities collectively** based on the new information and perspectives shared.

Why This Step Is Important:

- Encourages healthy debate and dialogue.
- Surfaces valuable insights and new perspectives.
- Mitigates bias and blind spots.
- Builds shared ownership of the final prioritized list.

The Final Scoring

At the end of the **group discussion**, the team should repeat the **scoring exercise**. **This can be done in the workshop itself, or through another survey similar to the pre-workshop survey.** Encourage participants to consider and incorporate the **insights and perspectives** gained during the workshop in their rating.

This final scoring will reflect a **shared consensus**, ensuring that the prioritized development needs are based on **collective wisdom** rather than individual biases.

Tips for facilitating the Scoring process

To make the iterative scoring process effective:

Provide clear instructions for the individual scoring exercise and ensure all team members understand the parameters.

Encourage constructive dialogue, focusing on **why** individuals scored the way they did, rather than just the scores themselves.

Present the aggregated individual scores visually during the workshop (e.g., using a chart or spreadsheet) to make it easy to identify areas of agreement and disagreement.

Create a safe space for discussion, ensuring that all voices are heard and that no one feels pressured to change their scores without reason.

Conclusion

The **iterative scoring process** ensures that the **prioritization of development needs is both objective and collaborative**. By combining **individual assessments** with **group discussion and consensus-building**, teams can **surface valuable insights, reduce biases**, and **make more informed, evidence-based decisions**.

This process strengthens the quality of the strategic plan, and the discussions around the scoring offer valuable material to include in the final documentation that explains the rationale.

Ensure that a notetaker is on hand to capture the insights, perspectives, and rationale behind scoring the different development needs. Last but definitely not least, this process **builds shared ownership and accountability** among team members, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

Using Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) for Programme Design

When designing programmes to address complex development challenges & opportunities, it's easy to fall into the trap of focusing on **surface-level problems** and **short-term fixes**. Traditional tools like the **Problem Tree Analysis**, often used in the **Theory of Change (ToC)** process, do a good job of mapping **cause-and-effect relationships**, but they tend to focus on **immediate causes and direct solutions**. While this is helpful, it **doesn't always uncover the deeper, systemic, and cultural barriers** perpetuating the challenge over time. This is where **Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)** comes in.

CLA was developed by futurist **Sohail Inayatullah** and is widely used in **foresight and futures thinking**. It helps teams **identify transformative solutions** by breaking down challenges & opportunities into **four layers of analysis**:



Litany (Surface-Level Symptoms): The visible, often simplified issues reported in the media or public discourse.

Systemic Causes: The underlying social, economic, political, and institutional factors contributing to the issue.

Worldview: The deeper beliefs, ideologies, and assumptions that shape how the problem is perceived and addressed.

Myth/Metaphor: The underlying cultural stories and narratives that shape societal attitudes toward the issue.

One key advantage of CLA is that it helps **surface transformative solutions**. Instead of simply reacting to the current state of the world, CLA invites teams to **question existing narratives, reframe problems, and envision alternative futures**. This makes it particularly well-suited for work in development, where innovation and adaptation are essential to achieving sustainable development goals in an uncertain, rapidly changing world.

For example, while a **Problem Tree Analysis** might identify a lack of job opportunities as a cause of **youth unemployment**, CLA would take this further by asking 'What **institutional systems** contribute to this lack of opportunities?', 'What **societal beliefs** about education or work might limit young people's choices?', 'What **cultural narratives** reinforce ideas around success and employment?'

By answering these questions, teams can design programmes that address systemic barriers, change perceptions, and create opportunities that are better aligned with future needs and realities.

Overview of the CLA Tool: Layers, Prompting Questions, and Tips

Causal Layered Analysis involves exploring a challenge through **four distinct layers**. Each layer provides a **different perspective**, helping teams move from **immediate symptoms** to **deeper, systemic causes** and **transformative solutions**.

Here's a breakdown of the four layers, with **prompting questions** to guide the exercise and **facilitation tips** to make the process more effective.

Layer 1: Litany (Surface-Level Symptoms):

The **litany layer** represents the **visible, immediate problem**—how the issue is discussed in the media or public discourse. This is often **reactive** and focused on **short-term solutions**.

Questions to ask:

- How is this issue typically framed in public discourse?
- What statistics or headlines describe the problem?
- What short-term solutions are currently being proposed?

For example: For **youth unemployment**, the litany might be: "Youth unemployment rates are rising due to a lack of jobs."

Layer 2: Systemic Causes (Underlying Structures): The **systemic causes layer** explores the **social, economic, political, and institutional factors** contributing to the problem. This is where **root causes** are identified.

Questions to ask:

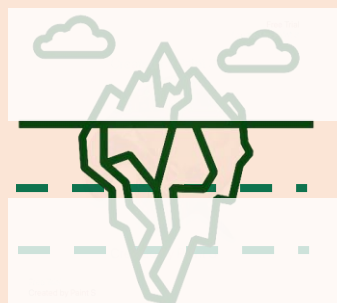
- What policies, institutions, or systems are contributing to the issue?
- How do economic, social, or political factors reinforce this problem?
- Are there structural barriers that make it difficult to address this challenge?

For example: For **youth unemployment**, systemic causes might include a mismatch between the education system and labour market needs or discrimination against certain groups in hiring practices.



Facilitation Tip

Encourage the team to **start with the obvious**—what they hear in the news or see in government reports. This will help everyone **ground their understanding of the problem** before moving deeper.



Facilitation Tip

Use **mind-mapping tools** to capture **multiple systemic causes**. Encourage participants to **consider both direct and indirect factors**.

Overview of the CLA Tool: Layers, Prompting Questions, and Tips

Layer 3: Worldview (Deeper Beliefs and Assumptions): The **worldview layer** examines the **cultural and ideological beliefs** that shape how the problem is understood and addressed. This is where **hidden biases and assumptions** are uncovered.

Questions to ask:

- What beliefs or assumptions are influencing how this problem is framed?
- Are there ideological positions that make this issue harder to solve?
- How might these worldviews limit possible solutions?

For example, for **youth unemployment**, worldviews might include the belief that **a university degree is necessary for success**.

Layer 4: Myth/Metaphor (Cultural Narratives): The **myth/metaphor layer** explores the **deep cultural stories and narratives** that shape societal attitudes toward the issue. These narratives often operate **subconsciously** but have a powerful influence on behaviour and decision-making.

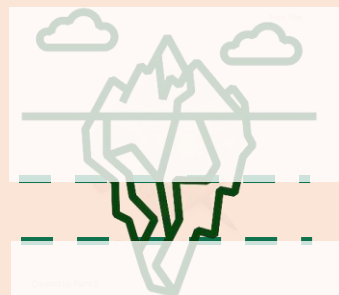
Questions to ask:

- What cultural stories or metaphors are associated with this issue?
- How do these narratives shape people's perceptions of the problem?
- Are there alternative narratives that could inspire different solutions?

For example, for **youth unemployment**, a myth might be **you're not successful until you find a corporate job**.

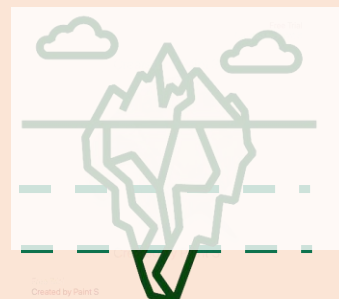
Programme Design Insights Derived from CLA: Youth Employment Example

Let's take **youth unemployment** as our development challenge and see how insights at each layer of the **Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)** can lead to **innovative programme design ideas**. Each layer will uncover **different types of interventions**—some focused on **immediate, short-term solutions** and others on **long-term, systemic change**. The resulting insights can help your organisation design **future-ready, transformative programmes** that go beyond **surface-level fixes**.



Facilitation Tip

Encourage participants to **question their assumptions and consider alternative perspectives**. Although **this can be uncomfortable**, it is essential for uncovering **new insights**.



Facilitation Tip

Use **storytelling exercises** to explore myths and metaphors. Ask participants to **share cultural stories** that relate to the challenge.

Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) for Programme Design Template (Download PDF)

CLA

Litany

- What are the visible, immediate problems associated with this development challenge?
- How is this issue framed in public discourse?
- What short-term solutions are commonly proposed?

Systemic Causes

- What policies, institutions, or systems contribute to this challenge?
- What economic, social, or political factors reinforce the issue?
- What barriers make it difficult to address this challenge?

Worldviews

- What beliefs or assumptions influence how this problem is perceived?
- Are there ideological positions that shape the current approach to the issue?
- What societal values impact the challenge and its solutions?

Myths & Metaphors

- What stories or metaphors are associated with this challenge?
- How do these narratives shape societal attitudes toward the issue?
- What alternative narratives could inspire different solutions?

Programme Design Insight

Prompt Questions for Programme Design:

- What short-term interventions can help alleviate the immediate symptoms?
- Are there any quick wins that can show immediate progress while we work on long-term solutions?
- How can we address misinformation or oversimplified narratives in public discourse around this issue?
- What systems, policies, or institutions need to change to address this challenge?
- Are there policy gaps that we need to fill?
- What social or economic structures are reinforcing this issue?
- What capacity-building interventions are needed to support systemic change?
- What societal beliefs or assumptions are perpetuating this challenge?
- How can we challenge harmful assumptions through education or awareness campaigns?
- Are there alternative worldviews that we can promote to change attitudes?
- What cultural stories or metaphors are shaping attitudes toward this issue?
- How can we introduce new metaphors or stories to change these attitudes?
- What communications strategies can we use to reshape societal narratives?

CLA insights translated to Programme Design: an example

CLA Output



Programme Design Insight

Litany

"Rising youth unemployment rates", with common solutions being **job creation schemes** and **vocational training programmes**.

Create **short-term job placement programmes** that connect young people with **existing job openings** in growing sectors like **renewable energy, digital services, and agriculture**.

Systemic Causes

- Education systems are **outdated** and do not prepare young people for **modern job markets**.
- **Limited access to finance** prevents young entrepreneurs from **starting businesses**.
- **Rigid labour laws** prevent employers from **hiring young people** on a flexible basis.

Work with the **ministries of education and labour** to **modernize curricula** and **update labour policies**. Design programmes that focus on **entrepreneurship** and provide young people **access to credit and business development services**.

Worldview

- There is a widespread belief that **formal employment** (e.g., working in an office or government job) is **superior** to **entrepreneurship** or **freelance work**.
- Success is only achieved through a **university degree**.
- **Manual labour or vocational skills** are seen as '**lower status**'.

There is a cultural belief that **"success is climbing the corporate ladder"** or **"security comes from government jobs."**

- **Promote alternative career paths** such as **entrepreneurship, freelancing, and vocational trades**.
- Launch **awareness campaigns** to change societal perceptions about **what success looks like**.

Change the **narrative around success and stability**. Introduce **alternative metaphors** that emphasize **innovation, adaptability, and resilience**.

Myths / Metaphors

- **Myth:** The metaphor of **"stability equals safety"** drives people to pursue **safe, formal jobs** instead of taking **risks as entrepreneurs**.
- **Myth:** **"Mother Earth will always provide"** is a narrative in some communities that discourages youth from exploring **innovative agricultural practices**.

Tips for Translating CLA Insights into Language for your Strategic Plan

Once you've completed the **CLA** and generated insights across the four layers, it's important to **translate these insights into actionable content** for your strategic planning. Here's how:

1. **Summarize the Key Insights:** Write a brief summary of the **litany, systemic causes, worldview, and myth/metaphor** insights for each development challenge.
2. **Link the Insights to Programme Design:** For each insight, describe **how the proposed programme will address the issue** at that layer.

For example, the **litany layer** insights will inform **short-term interventions**. The **worldview and myth layers** will inspire **transformative, long-term strategies**.

Example strategic planning input from the CLA analysis

*Youth unemployment remains a pressing challenge. Rising rates of joblessness among young people are due to **economic transitions, technological advancements, and a mismatch between education systems and labour market needs**.*

*The most visible symptom of youth unemployment is **rising joblessness due to a lack of formal job opportunities**. Traditional responses often include **job placement schemes and short-term vocational training**. Outdated education systems, rigid labour market regulations, and limited access to finance for young entrepreneurs perpetuate youth unemployment. The analysis revealed that **deep-seated societal beliefs** around success and work limit young people's career choices. There is a widespread assumption that **formal employment** (e.g., government or corporate jobs) is **superior to entrepreneurship or freelance work**. At the deepest level, the analysis identified **cultural narratives** that shape perceptions of work. For example, the belief that **"stability equals safety"** pushes young people toward **safe, formal jobs**, while **manual labour or vocational trades** are often seen as **low-status professions**.*

*[Our organisation] will provide **youth with in-demand digital skills** for **remote work opportunities**. We will partner with **ministries of education and vocational institutes** to **modernize educational curricula**, incorporating **future-ready skills** such as **digital literacy, AI applications, and green technology**.*

*The key objectives of the programme are to (1) **Equip youth with future-ready skills** to thrive in an evolving job market. (2) **Promote alternative career paths** such as entrepreneurship, freelancing and non-traditional sectors. (3) **Address systemic barriers** in education, finance and labour markets. (4) **Shift societal perceptions** around success and work through public awareness campaigns.*

Key Takeaways:

The **CLA-based approach** used to design this programme ensures that:

- You address **both short-term and long-term challenges & opportunities**.
- The programme is **holistic and future-ready**, focusing on **transformative solutions**.
- The insights generated are **actionable and can be used as input for your strategic planning documentation**.

Using Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) for Programme Design in a workshop

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating a **CLA workshop** to help your team design **future-ready programmes**. The goal of the workshop is to ensure that programmes address **both surface-level challenges** and **deep, systemic barriers**, leading to **sustainable, transformative solutions**.

Workshop Objective

Generate **inputs for your strategic plan** that are **forward-looking, innovative, and impactful**.

1. Have a **layered analysis** of a specific development challenge using the **CLA tool**.
2. **Programme design** that addresses both **immediate needs** and **long-term systemic change**.

Example Workshop agenda

Welcome and Objectives (15 min)

Introduce the agenda and expected outcomes of the session.

Introduction to CLA (15 min)

Provide a brief overview of the four layers of CLA and why it's useful for programme design.

Development Challenge CLA (120 min)

Explore Litany: Identify surface-level symptoms of the development challenge. (30 min)

Explore Systemic Causes: Explore the underlying structures and systems contributing to the challenge. (30min)

Explore Worldviews: Discuss societal beliefs, ideologies, and assumptions that shape the issue. (30 min)

Explore myths & metaphors: Explore cultural narratives and stories related to the challenge. (30 min)

Break (15 min)

Programme Design Brainstorm (45 minutes)

Brainstorm possible interventions for each layer of the CLA.

Next Steps & Closing (15 min)

Summarize key insights, outline next steps, and discuss drafting the outputs into content for the strategic plan.

Workshop Output

A set of **programme design insights** for each **development need**, structured across the **four layers of CLA**, with clear **recommendations for interventions** to include in the strategic plan.

[Click here to download the CLA template](#)

Use real-world examples to illustrate each layer.

We suggest tackling one development challenge for 2 hours to ensure rich discussions.

Ideally, each workshop tackles one development challenge. Subsequent workshops can be 3 hours instead of the ± 4 hours workshop agenda here.

Visioning Introduction

Visioning is a **strategic foresight tool** that helps teams **articulate a desired future** and imagine **what success looks like** in addressing a development challenge or opportunity. In the context of the strategic planning process, visioning is a critical step in moving from problem identification (through tools like Causal Layered Analysis) to solution design by **defining a future state that your organisation wants to achieve**.

Visioning helps your team **clearly define the future outcomes it aims to achieve** through its interventions. This makes your planning **forward-looking** and **impact-driven**, demonstrating a **clear pathway to the sustainable development goals (SDGs)**. By imagining the **desired future state** of a country or community, visioning helps anchor your programmes in long-term impact rather than short-term fixes.

The importance of Visioning

Clarifies the End Goal: Visioning clarifies **what success looks like** for a particular development challenge, ensuring that programmes are **impact-focused**.

Drives Innovation: By focusing on **desired future outcomes**, teams are encouraged to **think creatively beyond immediate constraints**.

Aligns Stakeholders: It provides a **shared vision** for your team and stakeholders, creating **alignment** around common goals.

Sets the Stage for Backcasting: Visioning provides the **destination**, while **backcasting helps map the pathway** to get there.

Overview of the Visioning Methodology

The **visioning process** starts by asking participants to imagine a **future where the development challenge or opportunity has been successfully addressed**. It involves answering key questions such as:

- **What does success look like?**
- **What positive changes can we observe?**
- **What are the key outcomes of our organisation's interventions?**

The process typically involves **four steps**:

- 1. Define the Vision Scope:** Clarify the specific development challenge or area of focus for the visioning exercise.
- 2. Articulate the Vision:** Participants describe the desired future state in detail, considering social, economic, political, and environmental factors.
- 3. Identify Key Changes and Impacts:** Highlight the key changes that would need to happen to achieve the vision.
- 4. Consider Partnerships and Stakeholders:** Identify partners and stakeholders required to achieve the vision.

Visioning Tools

There are many engaging tools that enable creativity and help participants articulate **future outcomes** in a way that feels tangible and relatable. These methods also encourage participants to **step out of the present constraints** and imagine **bold, transformative possibilities**.

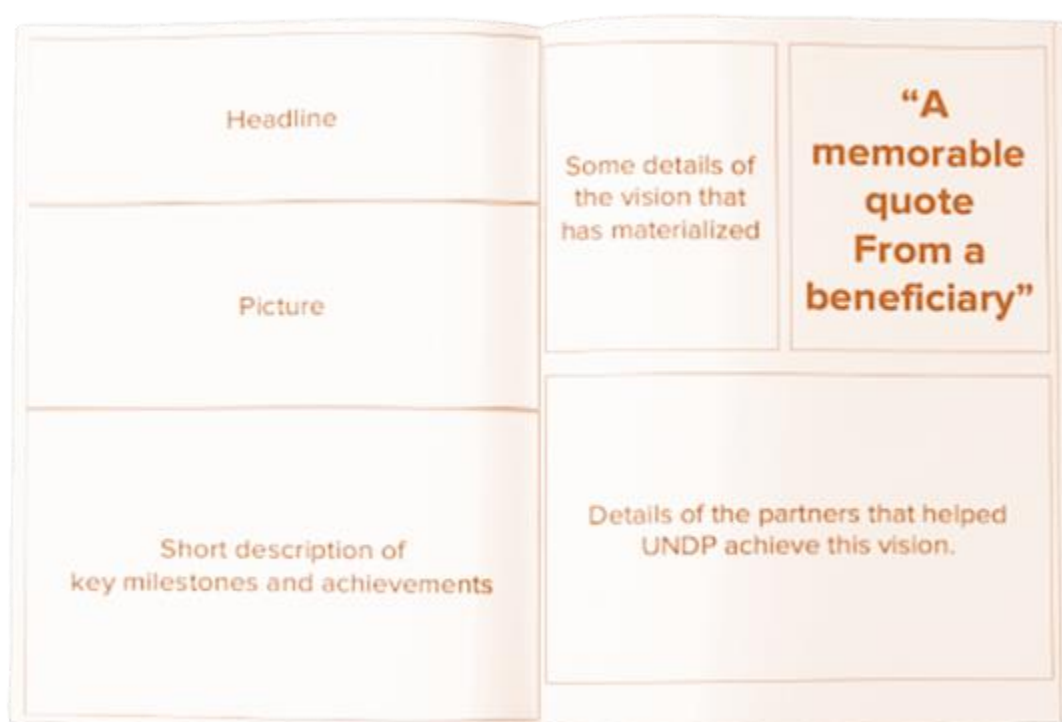
One such tool we recommend is the 'Future Cover Page'. This tool uses **visual storytelling** to articulate a vision. Participants design a **magazine or report cover page depicting a desired future state**.

How It Works:

1. In a workshop setting, provide participants with templates for a magazine or report cover (real or digital). Include placeholders for:
 - A **title** (e.g., "The Future of Youth Employment").
 - **Cover images or illustrations** that represent the vision.
 - **Headlines** or **key features** that highlight milestones or achievements.
2. Ask participants to **design their cover page**, representing the **future they want to see**.
3. Share the cover pages in plenary and use them to discuss **key elements of the vision**.

Why It Works:

- Allows participants to **visualize success**.
- Combines **creative expression** with **strategic thinking**.
- Produces **artifacts** that can inspire discussions and next steps.



Facilitation of a Visioning workshop with the Future Cover Page tool

To get the most out of the visioning workshop, we suggest tackling one development challenge/opportunity per workshop instead of trying to work on several in a single workshop. Visioning can be an extremely engaging exercise that creates buy-in and excitement in the team for the work they will embark on for the next programme cycle. It merits rich discussion and careful consideration of multiple perspectives, which requires time.

Encourage Imagination: Remind participants to **think boldly** and focus on **what they want to achieve**, not what they think is possible today.

Use Visuals: Provide materials like **sticky notes, markers, or online collaboration tools** (e.g., Miro, MURAL) to make the exercise more interactive.

Create Energy: These tools are inherently fun, so lean into the creativity to foster **engagement and enthusiasm**.

1

Headlines & Short Description

Create a headline and a short description that capture the desired future state for the development challenge.

Prompt Questions:

- What headline would appear in a national newspaper if this challenge was successfully addressed?
- What image or photo would accompany this story?

By completing the **visioning workshop**, your team has achieved a significant milestone in the **strategic planning process**. You have collaboratively articulated a **clear and inspiring vision** for each prioritized development need.

2

Key Milestones & Achievements

Identify the milestones that led to achieving the vision. Write a short narrative connecting the milestones to the overall vision.

Prompt Questions:

- What specific programmes or initiatives contributed to this success?
- What policy or system changes were crucial?
- How did cultural attitudes shift?

3

Partnerships and Collaboration

Identify the partnerships and collaborations required to achieve the vision. Write a brief description of the role of each partner in achieving the vision.

Prompt Questions:

- Which stakeholders played a critical role in driving change?
- Who provided funding or advocacy?
- How did partnerships enhance the impact of interventions?

These visions reflect your aspirations, grounded in bold ideas and shared consensus.

Visioning Example for UNDP

July 23, 2030 Empowered Youth Drive Nation's Innovation Boom



In 2030, youth unemployment in [Country] has **decreased by 70%** as young people thrive in a future-ready economy.

The education system now equips students with practical, in-demand skills in areas such as **digital literacy, AI, and renewable energy**.

Entrepreneurship is thriving, with youth-led startups creating jobs and driving inclusive economic growth. **The cultural narrative around success has shifted, celebrating freelancers, innovators, and creators as key contributors to society.**

1. **Modernized Education:** Future-ready curricula has been implemented in 80% of schools, focusing on digital skills, AI, and entrepreneurship.

2. **Youth Startup Fund:** Over 500 youth-led businesses launched through grants and mentorship programmes.

3. **Cultural Change Campaigns:** Nationwide campaigns that reshaped perceptions of work, celebrating entrepreneurship and freelancing.

4. **Partnerships:** UNDP collaboration with private sector companies led to 10,000 paid apprenticeships in non-traditional sectors.

*“I never thought I could turn my passion for technology into a career, but with the support of UNDP and its partners, I’ve launched my own green tech startup. Now, I’m creating jobs **for** others and helping build a more sustainable future.”*

– Amina, 24,
**Entrepreneur and
Programme Beneficiary**

This vision was made possible through close collaboration with diverse partners.

- The **Ministry of Education** played a pivotal role in implementing curriculum reforms and rolling out nationwide digital skills training programmes, ensuring that young people are equipped for the jobs of the future.
- **Private sector companies** partnered with UNDP to offer mentorship opportunities, funding, and paid apprenticeships in non-traditional sectors, helping young people gain hands-on experience and build their professional networks.
- **Financial institutions** were instrumental in providing seed funding and accessible loans to youth entrepreneurs, enabling them to start businesses and scale their ventures.
- Meanwhile, **media organizations and civil society groups** worked closely with UNDP to run cultural campaigns, amplifying stories of youth success and shifting public attitudes toward non-traditional career paths.

These partnerships underscore the importance of a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach in tackling complex development challenges like youth unemployment.

A structured, actionable vision

In public-sector foresight, visioning is usually treated as a structured method, not just a creative one: it is anchored in the scenarios and drivers already identified, and paired with backcasting so it is actionable. Reputable guides — such as the UK's GO-Science and the OECD — follow this approach, though each institution adapts it to its context.

Avoid the extremes: the real future mixes desirable and undesirable features. If the discussion tilts to one extreme, ask for **both what is appealing and what is troubling about that same future**.

Include diverse perspectives: a wider range of voices produces a more **robust** vision and reduces **groupthink**; bring in **external stakeholders** to the exercise.

Connect to action: always pair the vision with **backcasting and a roadmap** so it does not remain an aspiration without a pathway.

1

Where it fits in the process

A typical flow: driver mapping → horizon scanning → scenarios → vision → design

In practice:

- The vision builds on Ch.1–2, not from a blank page.
- You can start from existing scenarios to save time.

2

Probable, possible, preferable

Futures work distinguishes probable, possible and preferable futures: the vision articulates the preferable one.

In practice:

- Define the preferable future without losing sight of the plausible.
- Test the vision against the scenarios to avoid wishful thinking.
- Revisit the vision as the scenarios change.

3

Why it is actionable

The vision is translated into steps: backcasting, roadmaps and testing against scenarios (wind-tunnelling).

In practice:

- Derive priority actions from the shared vision

The workshop detail — anchor the vision, build the shared statement and backcast — is on the next slide.

Running the visioning workshop

This is the practical workshop detail. Work on a single challenge or opportunity per session and move through three steps, starting from the scenarios and drivers already identified in the previous chapters.

Allow time: a rich vision needs discussion and multiple perspectives. Work on a **single challenge per workshop** to go deep.

Use visual materials: cards, sticky notes or online tools (Miro, MURAL) to capture and **cluster ideas**.

Close with a synthesis: document the **shared vision** to communicate it and feed the backcasting.

1 Anchor in scenarios & drivers
Start from the drivers (Ch.1) and scenarios (Ch.2). Describe the preferred future as a state consistent with that set of scenarios.

Prompt questions:

- What future do we want given the scenarios we explored?
- Which drivers must the vision harness or counter?

2 From individual to shared vision
Each participant drafts the preferred future across social, technological, economic, political and environmental factors; the group then agrees a common vision.

Prompt questions:

- What does success look like in each of those dimensions?
- What do our individual visions share?
- What shared statement integrates them?

3 What needs to change?
Identify and describe what needs to change. For each preferred future attribute described in step two, describe what needs to change (transform, shift, pivot) in order for your vision to materialise.

Prompt questions:

- What systemic and technical barriers would prevent this change?
- What partnerships and investment would be required to facilitate this change?

Output: **a shared vision statement** for each prioritised challenge, **anchored in the scenarios** and ready for **backcasting**.

Combine it with the Future Cover Page to add a creative expression of the same vision.

Example Visioning Workshop Agenda

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating a **Visioning workshop**. The objective of the session is collaborative visioning and aligning the team around a shared vision for each challenge. We recommend visioning for one development challenge per session to ensure deep reflection and discussion to develop the team's vision for success.

[Click here to download a PDF of the Visioning Template](#)

Welcome and Objectives (15 min)

Introduce the agenda and expected outcomes of the session.

Introduction to Visioning (15 min)

Brief explanation of the visioning process and how it fits into programme design.

Group Work (Headlines and Short Descriptions) (45 min)

Break participants into groups to work on creating a headline and a short description that captures the desired future state for the development challenge.

Group Work: Key Transformational Milestones and Achievements (30 min)

Brainstorm transformational milestones that mark progress toward the vision. Write a short narrative connecting the milestones to the overall vision.

Break (15 minutes)

Group Work: Partnerships and Collaboration (30 min)

Identify 3–5 key partners across government, private sector, and civil society or any other group that's relevant to your work. Write a brief description of the role of each partner in achieving the vision.

Plenary Discussion and Alignment (30 min)

Groups present their outputs (headlines, milestones, partnerships) for the challenge. The facilitator leads a discussion, encouraging feedback and highlighting common themes.

Participants vote on the most compelling elements of the vision and refine it into a final, shared version.

Closing & Next Steps (15 min)

Summarize the workshop outcomes and discuss next steps for moving further into the details using the back-casting exercise.

This will need to be done only once, for the first development challenge

Backcasting: Mapping Pathways to Achieve the Vision

While visioning articulates **where you want to go**, backcasting helps you determine **how to get there**.

It is a **foresight method** that involves working backward from a **desired future vision** to identify the steps, actions, and conditions required to make that vision a reality.

Unlike traditional planning, which starts from the present and extrapolates forward, backcasting starts with the **end goal in mind** and ensures that all activities are strategically aligned to achieve it.

The importance of Backcasting for strategic planning

Connects vision to action: It translates the aspirational vision statements created in the previous step into a **practical and actionable roadmap**.

Sets priorities: By identifying the sequence of interventions, backcasting helps your organisation focus on **what needs to happen first**, ensuring effective allocation of resources.

Aligns partnerships and timelines: It helps identify the **partners** and **timing** required to enable success.

Informs the results framework: The outputs of backcasting provide content for your strategic plan's **programmatic goals, milestones, and indicators**.

"Backcasting also needs to be understood as a reaction against forecasting."

The basic idea is that we need to move away from extrapolating what is likely to happen and responding to that, to trying to get a better handle on determining where we want to be and proactively shifting things in that direction."

- Dave Snowden
Creator of Cynefin Framework

Backcasting: Overview of the methodology

Backcasting typically follows a **three-step process**, starting with the vision and working backward to the present. Below is a step-by-step guide:

Step 1: Define the Future Vision (Starting Point)

The backcasting process begins with the **finalized vision statement** created in the visioning workshop. This statement serves as the destination for your roadmap, so we recommend revisiting it to ensure clarity on the desired outcomes, key milestones, and overall context.

Step 2: Identify Key Milestones (Backward Steps)

Work backward from the future vision to identify **major milestones** that must occur to achieve the vision. These milestones are typically placed in **1 year intervals** to ensure manageability.

Prompts:

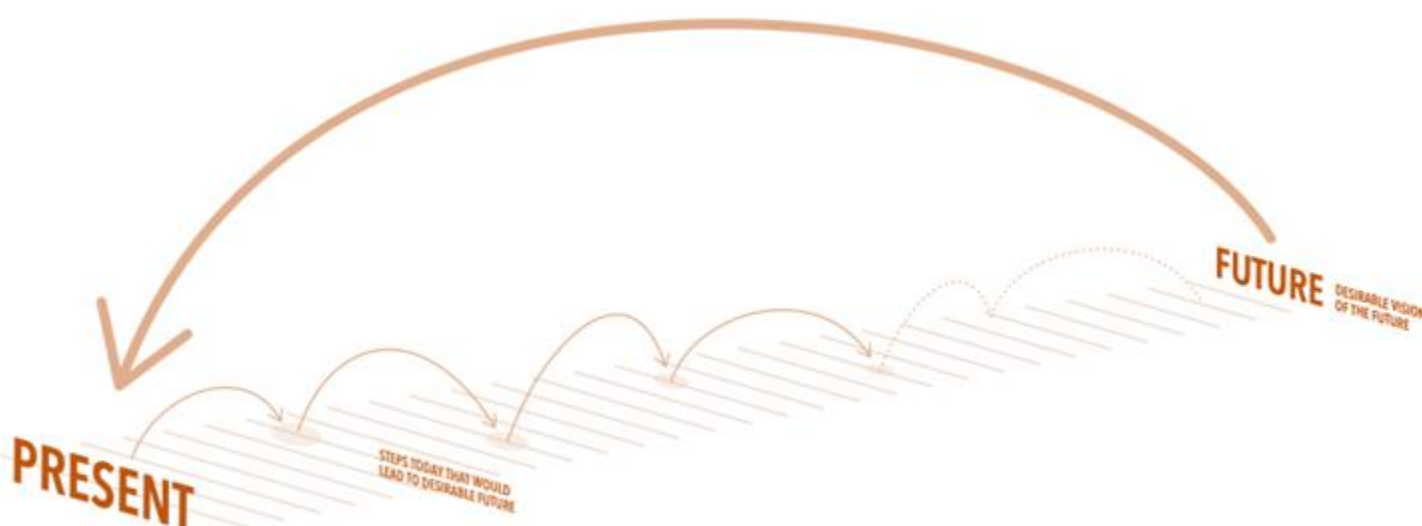
- What **systems, policies, or structures** must be in place in [year] to achieve this vision?
- What **programmes or initiatives** must be implemented to ensure the vision is fully realized?
- Which **barriers** need to be removed at each stage?

Step 3: Map Required Actions and Partnerships

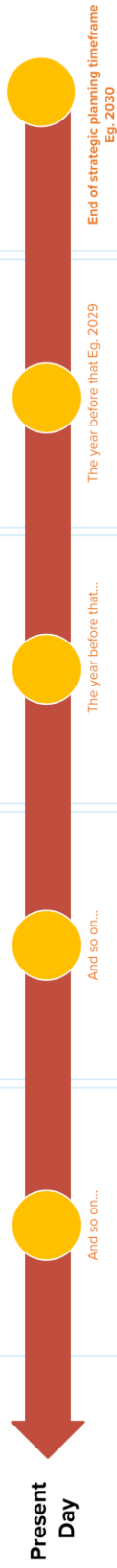
For each milestone, identify the **required actions and interventions and map the stakeholders and partners** involved.

Prompts:

- What specific actions need to be taken to achieve each milestone?
- What **resources or capacities** will be required?
- What will your organisation's role be at each stage?
- Who are the key **partners** needed for each action?
- What is the role of these partners at each step?



Backcasting Template



What needs to be achieved

What systems, policies, or structures must be in place in to achieve this vision?

What milestones need to be achieved in each year?

Are there any barriers that need to be removed at each stage?

Our Role

What resources or capacities will be required to achieve the milestones above?

What will our organisation's role be, in achieving these milestones at each stage?

Partners Role

Who are the key partners we will need to work with to achieve the milestones above?

What will their role be, in achieving these milestones at each stage?

Example Input for strategic planning –derived from Visioning & Backcasting

*The theory of change for addressing youth unemployment posits that **fostering dynamic employment ecosystems**, grounded in sustainable entrepreneurship, green economic opportunities, and inclusive access to digital technologies, will create a **resilient labour market that effectively integrates youth**, particularly those from vulnerable groups. This hypothesis assumes **active participation** from youth, **private sector engagement**, and **institutional capacity to provide equitable opportunities** for skills development and employment.*

*The overall vision of this programme is to **reduce youth unemployment by fostering an ecosystem of opportunity, adaptability, and resilience**. [Our organisation] aims to create a more inclusive, resilient job market for young people by addressing systemic barriers, challenging societal assumptions, and reshaping cultural narratives.*

*We will provide **youth with in-demand digital skills** for **remote work opportunities**. We will partner with **ministries of education** and **vocational institutes** to **modernize educational curricula**, incorporating **future-ready skills** such as **digital literacy**, **AI applications**, and **green technology**.*

*We will also partner with **private sector companies** to create **apprenticeship opportunities** that provide **hands-on experience** in **non-traditional sectors** such as **renewable energy**, **creative industries**, and **tech startups**. Additionally, we will work with **community leaders** and **media partners** to **reshape cultural narratives around success**.*

Causal Layered Analysis Versus Backcasting for Programmatic design

When looking at the potential 'input for the strategic plan' that results from the backcasting exercise, you might have noticed an overlap with the output of the CLA exercise. This is because both tools, CLA and backcasting, aim to design programmes that address development challenges. However, there are significant **differences in the approach and the type of output:**

Causal Layered Analysis allows for a **multi-dimensional understanding** of the development challenge, exploring its underlying systemic causes, narratives, and worldviews.

It helps design transformative change by addressing not just surface-level symptoms but also deeper structural and cultural dynamics.

Backcasting helps you develop a **time-bound roadmap** of actions, milestones, and partnerships leading to the envisioned future.

It offers clarity on the **sequence of activities** and the partners/resources needed at each stage.

Both **Causal Layered Analysis (CLA)** and **Backcasting** are powerful tools for programme design, but they serve different purposes and yield distinct outputs. We recommend using **CLA first** to identify **transformative interventions** that address the root causes and systemic barriers of a development challenge. Once these interventions are designed, use **Backcasting** to create a **structured roadmap** that translates those interventions into actionable, time-bound steps.

Example Backcasting Workshop Agenda

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating a **backcasting workshop**. The objective of the session is to collaboratively create a time-bound roadmap for achieving the vision for a selected development challenge using the backcasting methodology.

[Click here to download an A3 PDF of the Backcasting Template](#)

Welcome and Objectives (15 min)

Introduce the agenda, the backcasting methodology and the expected outcomes of the session.

Revisiting the Vision (15 min)

In order to establish a shared understanding of the vision created in the visioning workshop, present the finalized vision for the selected development challenge.

Invite participants to ask for any clarifications or refinements, if necessary.

Identify Key Milestones (45 min)

Participants fill out the “What needs to be achieved” column in the backcasting template for each milestone year.

Define Your Organisation’s Role (30 min)

Identify your organisation’s contributions and responsibilities for achieving each milestone.

Break (15 minutes)

Define Partners’ Role (30 min)

Map out key partners and their roles in achieving the milestones.

Discussion and Alignment (30 min)

Finalized backcasting roadmap for the selected development challenge and fill any gaps.

Closing & Next Steps (15 min)

Summarize key outputs and insights from the session and explain how the roadmap will feed into the strategic planning process.

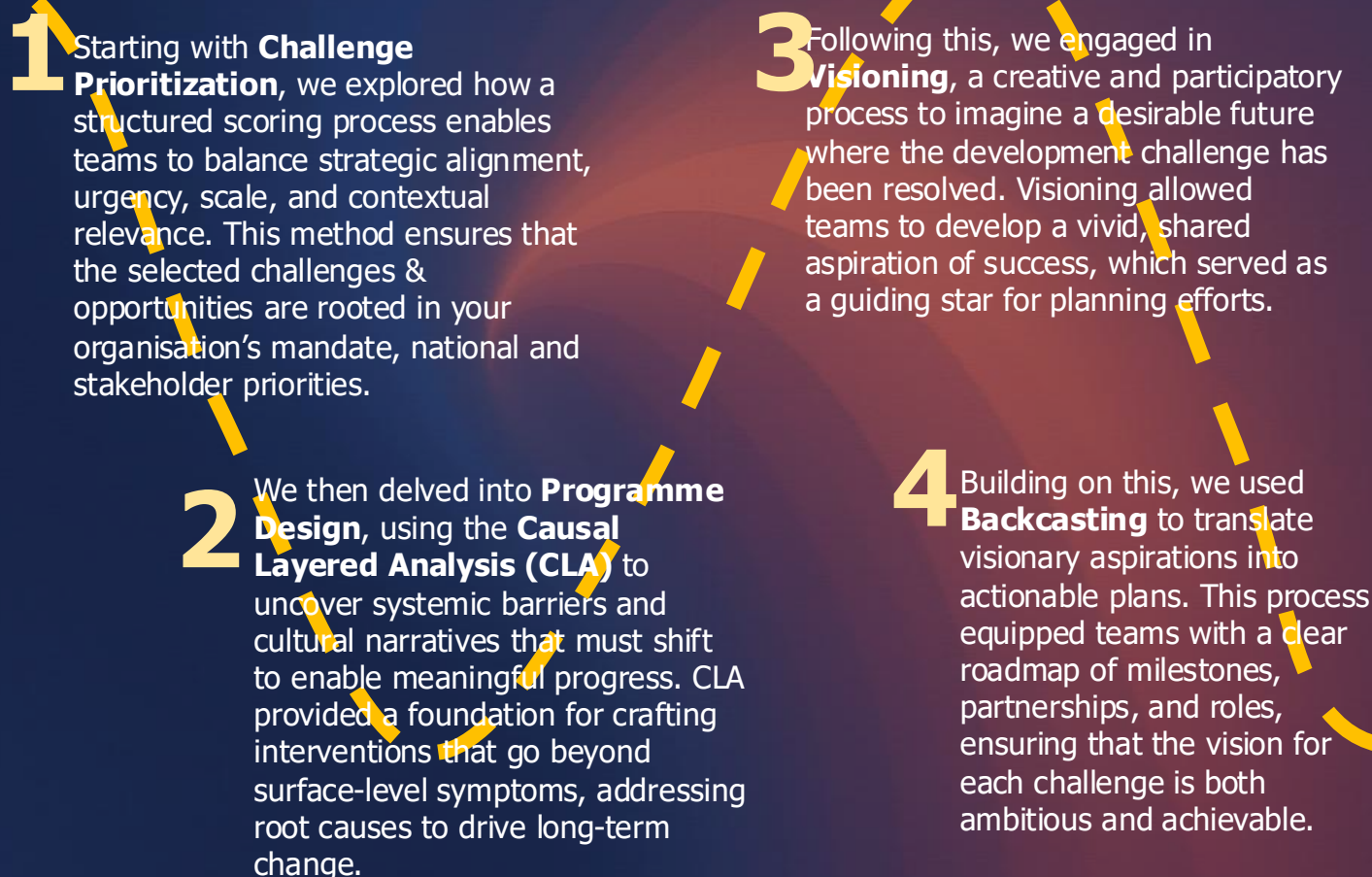


Ask if the roadmap looks feasible?
Balanced? Are there any risks being overlooked?

Recap of the Chapter

In this chapter, we have taken significant strides in designing impactful, forward-looking programmes to address the prioritized development challenges & opportunities identified earlier.

With these tools and methodologies, you have created a comprehensive blueprint for tackling development challenges & opportunities, aligning your programmes with both future aspirations and immediate needs. These outputs will form the backbone of your strategic planning, ensuring your efforts are both strategic and actionable.



What's Next?

In the next chapter, we will turn our attention to **Programme and Risk Management**.

We will introduce **Windtunneling**, a foresight technique designed to assess the robustness of your programmes against diverse scenarios and identify potential risks. This will enable teams to strengthen their strategies proactively.

By the end of the next chapter, you'll have a fully developed risk-informed approach to implementing your programmes, ensuring they deliver impact in an ever-changing world.

Chapter 4

Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Objective

This chapter helps teams take a structured approach to identifying, evaluating, and managing risks to ensure a risk-informed strategic plan.



Expected outcome

A mapping of the potential risks to your organisation achieving its intended outcomes and a plan for managing the different categories of risks identified.

Key Questions Answered

*What **risks** could **derail success**, and how can they be identified?*
*How **can risks be classified** to identify which ones are more urgent or important to focus on?*
*What **strategies** can our organisation implement for the different types of risk we identify?*

Prerequisites for the activities in this chapter:

- A clear understanding of your organisation's programmes and their objectives.
- Stakeholder engagement to provide diverse perspectives on risks.
- Access to scenarios (if using the Wind-tunnelling method).

Note to Senior Management

- ✓ Promote critical thinking and encourage transparency in risk identification and management.
- ✓ Lead by example in emphasizing the importance of preparedness.
- ✓ Facilitate stakeholder engagement to ensure unbiased risk assessments.



Steps:

Use Wind-tunnelling to classify risks, and develop mitigation strategies.



Tools Used:

- Wind-tunnelling using Scenarios
- Risk Radar



Recommended Workshops:

1. Wind-tunnelling workshop
2. Risk Mapping & Management Workshop

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Introduction

This section helps teams identify potential risks, both internal and external, that could hinder the achievement of development results. It also emphasizes the need for robust risk management mechanisms to address these challenges & opportunities while enhancing the programme's resilience and effectiveness.

Foresight tools like **backcasting** and **windtunneling with pre-developed scenarios** directly support this section by providing structured methodologies to identify, classify, and address risks in a future-oriented manner. By integrating these tools, teams can ensure that their risk management plans are not only grounded in the present but also responsive to emerging uncertainties.

The importance for strategic planning

Specific Risks to the Programme's

Objectives: Foresight tools enable teams to identify risks through a combination of introspective and scenario-based methods.

Governance Mechanisms: Foresight tools can help teams assess how governance structures might need to adapt in different futures to mitigate risks effectively.

Social and Environmental Risks:

Foresight methods highlight these risks by considering the ripple effects of external trends, such as climate change or economic shifts, on programme goals.

Innovative Programming

Instruments: Insights generated through foresight can guide the use of adaptive programming approaches that are resilient to uncertainty.

Wind tunneling is a foresight method used to assess how well a **programme performs under different future scenarios**. Teams begin with pre-developed scenarios and evaluate their programme's strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities in each future.

This approach offers **a structured way to test the robustness of programme goals** and assumptions against a wide range of uncertainties.

The team will need to either build **scenarios** to test against (if they haven't created them already) or use pre-developed scenarios from another source.

- Windtunneling is particularly effective for teams that have **already developed scenarios** as part of earlier foresight work. It allows them to connect these scenarios directly to programme planning, ensuring that risks are contextualized and specific.
- This method is also useful for **identifying opportunities** that may arise in certain scenarios, enabling teams to refine their programmes to capitalize on these possibilities.

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Wind-tunneling

Wind-tunneling is a foresight methodology designed to test the resilience of a strategy, plan, or programme against various future scenarios. Named after the aviation industry practice of testing aircraft designs in wind tunnels, this method evaluates how well a strategy can withstand or adapt to external pressures. In the context of development planning, wind-tunneling helps ensure that programmes are robust and adaptive, enabling teams to identify potential risks, weaknesses, and opportunities before implementation.

This exercise is particularly useful in complex environments where uncertainty about future conditions could undermine well-intentioned plans. In development planning, wind-tunneling helps uncover risks by testing a programme's assumptions and components against diverse scenarios.

By analysing what might fail, thrive, or need adjustment in different contexts, teams can identify specific risks to programme success. For example:

1. **Scenario Interaction:** The method reveals how external factors such as economic downturns, political instability, or environmental crises could influence outcomes.
2. **Programme Flexibility:** It identifies areas where strategies may need to adapt to meet changing conditions.
3. **Gap Analysis:** Wind-tunneling highlights gaps in resources, partnerships, or assumptions that could compromise a programme's objectives.



The result is a clearer understanding of what might disrupt a programme and the strategies needed to mitigate those disruptions.

Prerequisites: Scenarios for Wind-Tunneling

Wind-tunneling requires detailed future scenarios to test programmes against. Teams may choose one of three options:

Option 1

Use Existing Scenarios:

If scenarios were developed as part of Chapter 1 (e.g., through the archetype or 2x2 matrices), these can be used directly.

Option 2

Develop New Scenarios:

Teams can create scenarios by following the steps of driver identification, prioritization, and scenario building. This ensures the scenarios are tailored to their specific context.

Option 3

Leverage Off-the-Shelf Scenarios:

There are many [organisations](#) that publish scenarios for different contexts. If relevant you can use these ready-made scenarios for the purpose of stress-testing your programmes.

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Wind-tunneling Method Overview

Wind-tunneling involves testing a programme or strategy against multiple plausible futures (scenarios) to identify potential risks, opportunities, and areas for improvement. The process ensures that the programme design is resilient, adaptable, and robust across a range of future contexts.

Step 1: Clarify the Programme or Strategy

Before diving into the scenarios, ensure the programme's objectives and desired outcomes are clearly articulated.

This provides a solid foundation for the analysis.

Prompting Questions:

- What is the primary goal of the programme? (e.g., reducing youth unemployment by equipping young people with future-ready skills)
- What are the assumptions underlying the programme design?

Step 2: Test the Programme Against Each Scenario

For each scenario, evaluate the programme's ability to achieve its goals.

Prompting Questions:

- Will the programme achieve its goals in this scenario? If not, why?
- What risks or barriers emerge in this scenario? (e.g., limited access to digital tools in rural areas)
- Which aspects of the programme are vulnerable in this scenario?
- What external factors might derail the programme?
- Are there risks specific to partnerships, technologies, or beneficiaries?

Expected Outcome: Risk List from Windtunneling

The wind tunneling exercise is designed to yield a **comprehensive list of risks** based on how the programme performs in different scenarios. These risks provide critical input for the next steps:

- **Risk Mapping:** Placing these risks on the Risk Radar based on Impact vs. Influenceability to prioritise risks that need addressing.
- **Risk Management:** Develop targeted mitigation or adaptation plans for high-priority risks based on their categorization.

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Wind-tunneling Example

Below you will find a fictional example of the outcome of a wind-tunneling exercise: a high-level list of risks that could emerge when running the youth employment programme against a set of fictional scenarios.



This scenario emphasizes decentralized governance, local solutions, and strong grassroots movements. Risks identified include:

1. **Competing Agendas:** Diverse community-led approaches might conflict with the programme's overarching goals, slowing progress.
2. **Capacity Gaps:** Grassroots actors may lack the capacity to implement large-scale employment initiatives, requiring additional investment in capacity-building.



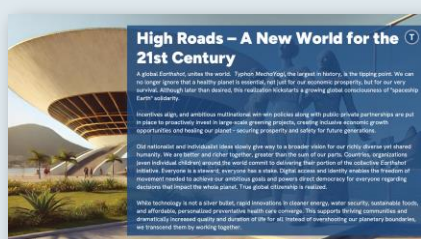
This scenario depicts a world where institutions are weak, resources are limited, and conflict or economic crises are prevalent. Risks identified include:

1. **Economic Instability:** High inflation or a recession may render the programme's job creation efforts ineffective due to limited market opportunities.
2. **Stakeholder Resistance:** Weak governance and societal distrust could hinder programme implementation, with communities resisting UNDP interventions.



This scenario envisions a steady but slow recovery with uneven progress across sectors. Risks identified include:

1. **Uneven Access:** Regional disparities may result in certain areas benefiting from the programme more than others, undermining equity goals.
2. **Slow Technological Uptake:** The slow pace of technological progress may limit opportunities for innovation-driven job creation.



In this scenario, society is thriving due to equitable access to technology and strong collaborative systems. Risks identified include:

1. **Skill Mismatch:** Training programmes may lag behind the rapid pace of technological advancement, leaving participants with outdated skills.
2. **Private-Sector Overdependence:** Heavy reliance on private-sector partnerships could create vulnerabilities if corporate priorities shift or partnerships dissolve.

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Example Windtunneling Workshop

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating an **Windtunneling workshop**. The objective of the session is to test the programme against multiple scenarios, identify risks and opportunities, and document actionable insights for risk mapping and management.

Welcome and Objectives (15 min)

Introduce the agenda, the workshop objective, ensuring all participants understand the wind tunneling process.

Ensure you share the scenarios at least a week before the workshop and offer a quick refresher of the scenarios, if time permits.

Breakout Groups: Scenario Immersion (15 min)

Divide participants into groups and assign each group to work on one scenario. Ask participants to go through their scenario and ensure they understand the dynamics of the scenarios.

Testing the Programme Against Scenarios (45 min)

Using the prompt questions, evaluate the programme under their assigned scenario and identify risks and vulnerabilities.

Break (15 minutes)

Breakout Group Rotation (15min + 45 min)

Keep the breakout groups intact but now assign a different scenario to the group. Allow 15 minutes for scenario immersion and task groups to identify risks and vulnerabilities in the newly assigned scenario.

This step enables multiple groups to identify risks for each scenario, producing a richer list of potential risks.

Plenary Report back & Discussion (45 min)

Proceed scenario by scenario and have the 2 groups report the risks they identified. The other participants offer feedback or refinements - adding to the 'laundry list' of risks.

Closing & Next steps (15 min)

Discuss how these findings will feed into the risk mapping exercise (using the risk radar) and management strategies.

End on a positive note, emphasising the value of foresight in strengthening programme resilience.

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Mapping Risk: Classifying Risks for Effective Management

By systematically evaluating risks based on their impact and the degree to which they can be influenced or managed, teams can make informed decisions about where to focus resources and interventions. This process is essential for a few key reasons:



Focus on What Matters

Most: Not all risks are created equal. Risk mapping helps teams distinguish between high-priority risks that could derail the programme and those that require monitoring but pose less immediate threat.



Encourage Strategic Thinking

Thinking: Risk mapping moves beyond reactive problem-solving by encouraging teams to anticipate and prepare for potential challenges proactively.



Enable Transparent

Decision-Making: The visual and structured approach of risk mapping fosters collaboration and accountability, ensuring all stakeholders have a shared understanding of key risks and their implications.

The Risk Radar

We suggest prioritising the risks you have just identified using the Risk Radar. This Radar maps the risks based on 'Impact' and 'Influenceability'. For simplicity we suggest classifying each risk on a 'High-Moderate-Low' scale.

Impact: Assess the severity of the risk's consequences if it materializes. Does it threaten the programme's objectives, credibility, or stakeholders significantly?

- **High Impact:** Directly undermines the core objectives of the programme or damages your organisation's reputation.
- **Moderate Impact:** Affects secondary outcomes or creates manageable challenges.
- **Low Impact:** Has minimal or localized effects on the programme.

Influenceability (Control): Evaluate the extent to which you can influence, mitigate, or control the risk.

- **High Influenceability:** Your organisation has significant levers to prevent or mitigate the risk (e.g., design adjustments, proactive communication).
- **Moderate Influenceability:** You can partially influence the risk by leveraging partners or modifying activities.
- **Low Influenceability:** The risk is largely external or systemic, requiring adaptation or long-term monitoring rather than direct mitigation.

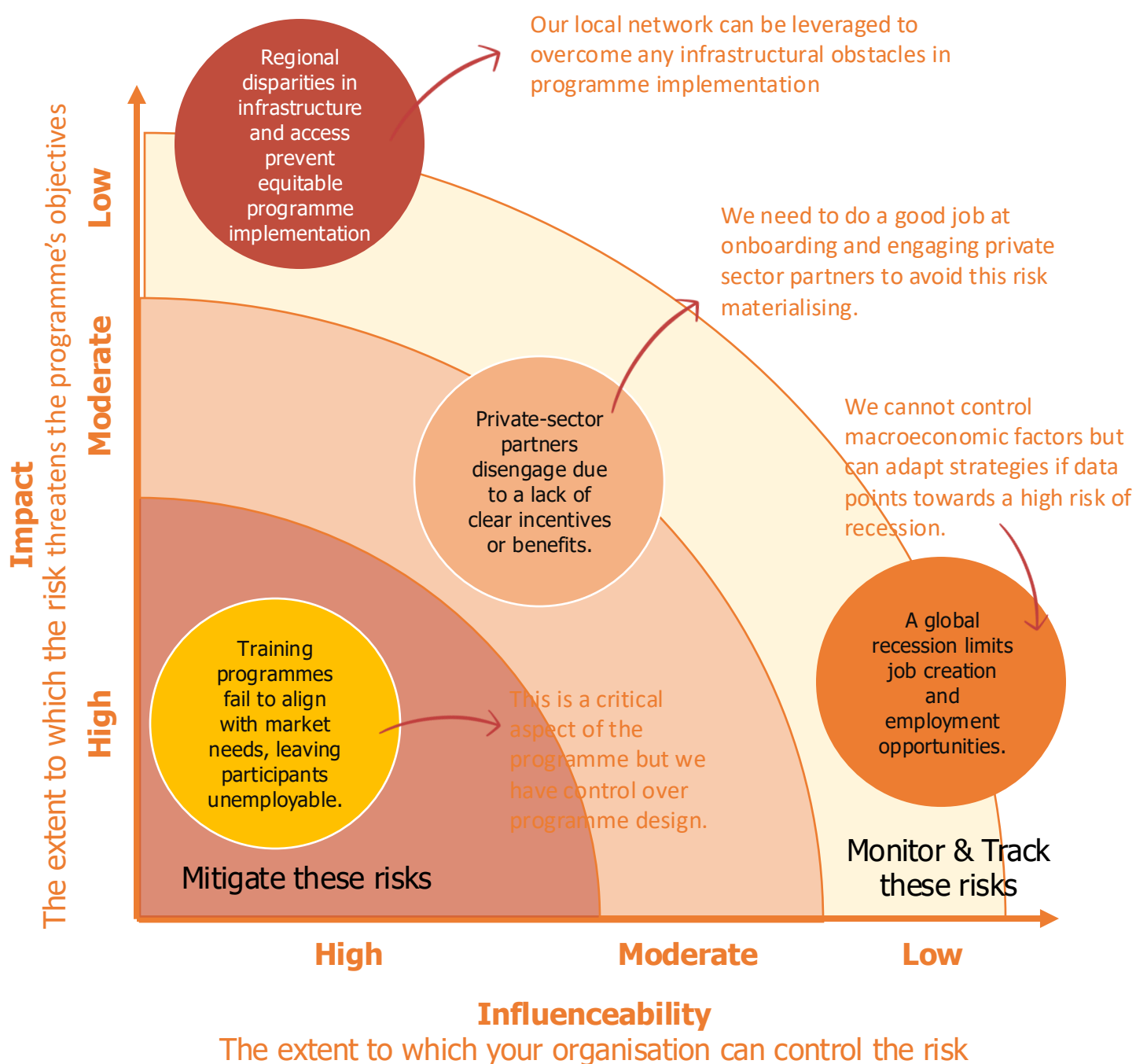
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Mapping Risk: Classifying Risks for Effective Management

Based on these two parameters, discussion and debate can help teams map the identified risks, as illustrated in the example below. The rationale for the mapping should be carefully captured.



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Managing Risk: Mitigate, Avoid or Develop Contingency Plans

Once risks have been mapped based on their impact and influenceability, it's essential to develop strategies to mitigate, avoid, or manage these risks effectively. Through the mapping, we have identified the high-to-moderate impact risks which deserve consideration in your strategic planning. The risk management strategies you will likely employ will depend on the influenceability of those risks. Below is a proposed template and approach to guide teams in crafting responses for each risk.

High/Moderate Impact and High/Moderate Influenceability Risks

For these risks, it's important to ask, **"What can we do to mitigate or avoid this risk?"**

Some prompt questions could include:

- Can programme design be adjusted to eliminate the root cause of this risk?
- What specific actions or interventions can reduce the likelihood of this risk occurring?
- Are there resources or partnerships we can leverage to strengthen our position?
- Are there operational safeguards (e.g., flexible programme structures) that can be built in?

For the risk, *"Training programmes fail to align with market needs,"* you could consider:

- Conducting regular consultations with private-sector employers to ensure alignment with current job market trends.
- Incorporating feedback loops and adjusting training curricula based on participant and employer inputs.
- Using pilots to test alignment before scaling initiatives.
- Establishing a quarterly review mechanism with stakeholders to monitor programme relevance and make rapid adjustments as needed.

High/Moderate Impact and Low Influenceability Risks

Since your organisation will not be able to exert much influence on these risks, it's important to ask,

"How can we monitor this risk? And what contingency plans can be developed?"

Some prompt questions could include:

- What data sources or indicators can provide early warning signals of this risk materializing?
- Are there external partnerships or collaborations that can help track relevant trends or risks?
- Can alternative programme approaches be designed to ensure continuity in achieving objectives, should this risk materialize?

For the risk, *"A global recession limits job creation,"* you could consider:

- Monitoring macroeconomic trends and forecasts.
- Developing dashboards that track key indicators, such as unemployment rates, GDP growth, and external shocks.
- Developing contingency plans focused on entrepreneurial skills and self-employment opportunities for youth, which are less sensitive to macroeconomic conditions.

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Foresight for Risk Management



Example Risk Classification & Management Workshop

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating The Risk Management Workshop. The objective of the session is to classify identified risks based on impact and influenceability and develop management strategies.

[Click here to download an A3 PDF of the Risk Radar](#)

Welcome and Review (15 min)

Recap risks identified in the wind tunnelling exercise and the purpose of this session.

Ask if participants thought of any other risks since the last workshop that they might want to add to the list.

Risk Classification (60-75 min)

Participants collaboratively place risks on a Risk Matrix (Impact vs. Influenceability). Ensure discussion, debate and finally, alignment on classifications. Make sure the facilitator or note taker documents the rationale for placement.

Break (15 minutes)

Break Out Groups: Developing Risk Management Strategies (60 min)

Divide the risks between the different groups, ensuring 'diversity' of risks to work on for each group. Using the prompt questions, each group develops mitigation, monitoring, or contingency plans.

Report back & Feedback (45 min)

Groups share their strategies with the plenary session and participants provide feedback to refine plans.

Closing & Next steps (15 min)

Facilitator summarizes the key takeaways and next steps for integrating risk strategies into the strategic planning of your organisation.

Chapter 4: Managing uncertainty through foresight

Foresight for Risk Management



Conclusion

This chapter has taken us through a comprehensive journey of using foresight methods to strengthen programme resilience against potential risks. By embedding tools such as Windtunnelling, Risk Mapping, and Risk Management, we have laid the foundation for creating resilient, forward-looking programmes that are prepared to navigate an uncertain future.

Looking Ahead

With a clear understanding of the potential risks and a well-thought-out strategy to manage them, we now transition to the next section of the toolkit: **adaptive programme management**.

Recap of the Chapter



We began with **risk identification**, Wind-tunnelling provided a structured approach to testing programme designs against multiple scenarios, helping teams uncover risks and opportunities unique to different plausible futures.



Next, we turned to **risk mapping**, where the identified risks were prioritized based on their impact and influenceability. By categorizing risks, teams gained clarity on where to focus their mitigation efforts. This step ensured that resources and attention were directed to the most critical vulnerabilities.



Finally, the chapter emphasized **risk management**, where mitigation strategies were developed for each identified risk. Teams were guided to take concrete steps—whether through programme adjustments, strategic partnerships, or enhanced monitoring mechanisms—to address risks effectively.

Chapter 5

Operationalising foresight

Adaptive Programme Management



Objective

This chapter helps teams establish a continuous practice of horizon scanning and **stress-testing programme design** so that adjustments can be made early, deliberately, and with confidence.



Expected outcome

A repeatable **adaptive programme management approach** that generates adaptation options, decision triggers, and a light governance mechanism for anticipatory programme redesign.

Key Questions Answered

*What emerging signals matter most for our programme's **continued relevance and effectiveness**?*

*What risks and opportunities become visible when we link signals to **day-to-day implementation**?*

*What would we change first if early signals suggested our assumptions are **no longer holding**?*

Prerequisites for the activities in this chapter:

- A **clearly articulated** programme or intervention portfolio design
- A good **understanding of what horizon scanning** is, and a team equipped to collect signals of change

Note to Senior Management

- ✓ **Protect time and attention** for ongoing scanning and periodic stress tests, especially for programme staff who are already stretched.
- ✓ Encourage teams to surface uncomfortable signals early, including contradictory evidence, **without fear of blame**.
- ✓ Back adaptive redesign as a sign of rigour, not indecision: when signals change, sticking to an **outdated plan is the real risk**.



Steps:

Implement continuous scanning, translate priority signals into stressors, map intervention sensitivity, and use agreed triggers to adapt interventions through a redesign cycle.



Tools Used:

- Continuous signal scanning
- Sensemaking and prioritisation of signals
- Intervention sensitivity mapping



Recommended Workshops:

1. Signals-to-Portfolio Translation Workshop
2. Intervention Vulnerability Mapping & Adaptive Redesign and Governance Workshop

Introduction

In many organisations, foresight enters the process during strategy and design, then quietly exits once delivery begins. Programmes are launched, workplans are finalised, and teams move into execution mode, often under intense pressure to deliver. At that point, “the future” can start to feel like a luxury topic, while the programme becomes increasingly anchored to the assumptions that were true at the moment of design.

Programmes are designed in a moment. They are implemented across time.

Between those two moments lies the central challenge of strategic execution: the assumptions that shaped the design rarely remain fully intact throughout delivery. Contexts shift and small signals accumulate before they register in performance data. Adaptive programme management exists to respond to this reality.

This chapter treats foresight differently: as an **operational discipline** that strengthens implementation. The purpose is not to continuously rewrite programmes, nor to chase every new trend. The purpose is to keep a steady finger on the pulse of change, so teams can spot early signals, test whether core assumptions still hold, and adapt interventions before small shifts harden into programme underperformance.

Why adaptive programme management needs foresight:

Monitoring performance is not the same as monitoring context

Traditional programme monitoring tells you whether the programme is doing what it said it would do. However, it doesn't tell you whether it's still the right thing to be doing.

Adaptive programme management requires:

Performance monitoring (Are we delivering as planned?)

Context monitoring (Is the environment shifting in ways that affect our logic?)

Signals appear before indicators change

Systemic change rarely begins with dramatic events. It begins with weak signals of change.

Collectively, these signals indicate directional movement.

If programmes only adapt once formal indicators shift, they miss the early window where redesign is easiest.

Foresight reduces surprise by increasing sensitivity to pattern formation.

Adaptation is much more effective when done proactively than defensively.

There is a persistent misconception that adaptation signals failure. In practice, failure lies in rigidity.

Organisations that adapt well update theories of change in response to credible signals.

Foresight reframes adaptation from emergency response to ongoing capability.

Introduction

Embedding foresight into programme management is not about producing more reports. It is about establishing:

- A cadence of scanning and sensemaking to surface weak signals
- A mechanism for linking context shifts to design choices
- Clear decision triggers and governance pathways

Over time, this becomes a capability: the ability to adjust direction while preserving purpose. In volatile environments, this capability becomes a core source of organisational resilience.

Adaptive programme management strengthened by foresight does not require constant reinvention. It requires structure, rhythm, and clarity about where attention should be focused.

Adaptation without foresight becomes reactive.

It waits for indicators to deteriorate before intervening. By the time outputs are off track or outcomes are underperforming, course correction is more expensive, politically difficult, and institutionally disruptive.

The following section outlines a step-by-step approach for embedding continuous scanning, stress-testing, and adaptive redesign into ongoing programme delivery.



Foresight changes the timing of adaptation. It moves redesign upstream.

Process Step-by-Step

Adaptive programme management begins with attention. Before a programme can be stress-tested or strengthened, teams need structured awareness of how their operating environment is evolving. This awareness must be cultivated through horizon scanning.

Step 1: Horizon scanning for signals and emerging drivers of change

Objective: Detect emerging drivers of change that could affect programme delivery and enable proactive adaptation rather than reactive correction.

As described in Chapter 1 of this toolkit, horizon scanning is the systematic practice of identifying weak signals of change in the environment and connecting them into meaningful patterns. In Chapter 1, scanning served to identify long-term drivers and trends that shape direction. In adaptive programme management, the **key difference is time horizon and purpose**.

In Chapter 1, signals were clustered to identify long-term drivers shaping strategic direction. Here, the aim is to add to that set proactively by identifying new shapes of change. The drivers identified may be shorter-lived or newly emergent. They may reflect emerging shifts in the next 6–24 months. **They could also reinforce the deeper drivers of change you have already identified.**

They are meant to inform programme adaptation, not redefine strategy.

Horizon scanning: from a one-off exercise to an ongoing practice

Horizon scanning is a core element of becoming anticipatory. In volatile environments, the question is not whether change will occur, but whether the team will notice it early enough to respond.

To institutionalize scanning:

Embed scanning into existing rhythms

- Dedicate 15 minutes in weekly team meetings to “signals of the week.”
- Rotate responsibility for bringing one signal to the group.
- Encourage staff to log signals when they encounter them in daily work.

Make scanning relevant to programme outcomes

Explicitly link signals to programme assumptions. Ask: “If this signal strengthens, what does it mean for our intervention?”

When colleagues see the connection between signals and impact, scanning becomes self-interest, not extra work.

Establish a minimum cadence

- Signal collection: continuous, informal, and distributed.
- Formal signal compilation: once every three months.
- Sensemaking workshop: quarterly where possible.

We recommend a minimum cadence of once every six months, especially in volatile environments.

Step 1 (continued): Horizon scanning for signals and emerging themes

This phase consists of two tightly linked components:

- Signal collection and curation.
- Clustering signals into programme-relevant themes that point to emerging drivers of change.

Collecting signals is only the beginning. On their own, signals are fragments. They are interesting, but they do not yet guide action. The real value of scanning emerges during sensemaking, when teams step back and ask: ***What do these signals mean together?***

Clustering signals into themes is a disciplined conversation. It requires teams to move from individual observations to shared interpretation.

1. First, gather the signals collected over the past quarter. These should already be curated and stripped of duplicates. Each signal should be clear, concise, and specific. Ideally, each is written on a separate card or in a digital equivalent so that they can be moved around easily.
2. Then, working in small groups, participants review the signals and begin to cluster them. The task is to look for a “red thread” running through multiple signals. Participants should ask:
 - Do any of these signals appear related?
 - Are they pointing to the same underlying development?
 - Are they describing shifts in the same direction?

Clusters will begin to form. Once a cluster emerges, the group articulates a short phrase that captures the pattern behind it. This phrase becomes the **driver of change**.

A Practical Example

Imagine a team has collected the fictional signals on the right.

Individually, these signals may appear isolated. One relates to digital policy. Another to civil society space. When placed side by side, however, a pattern becomes visible. The signals can be clustered into a theme such as: **“Intensifying scrutiny and politicization of public engagement.”**

The red thread across the signals is not digital regulation alone, nor civil society pressure alone. It is a broader shift toward heightened sensitivity around public participation and externally funded initiatives. The direction is important. The driver is not simply “public engagement.” It is “intensifying scrutiny,” which implies acceleration and increasing constraint.



What makes a strong driver of change?

Not every cluster of signals qualifies as a useful driver theme. A strong driver usually:



Is supported by more than one signal. A single observation may be noise. Three or more related signals suggest directional movement.



Expresses directionality. Words such as *increasing*, *accelerating*, *declining* or *reversing* signal that something is shifting rather than remaining static.



Is neutral and descriptive. A theme is not an advocacy statement. It captures change as it appears, not as the team wishes it to be.

The output of this step is a shortlist of 5–10 clearly articulated drivers of change. These drivers represent contextual shifts that warrant attention. Some may fade. Others may intensify. What matters is that the team has surfaced them early.

Step 2: Prioritising drivers by impact (relevance) and uncertainty

Once drivers have been identified, not all of them deserve equal attention. Some may be interesting but peripheral. Others may be directly connected to programme delivery. Some may appear highly consequential but predictable. Others may be both consequential and deeply uncertain. Prioritization helps teams decide where to invest their adaptive energy.

Objective: To distinguish between drivers that require immediate operational mapping and those that require structured exploration of uncertainty.

The Impact–Uncertainty Matrix

Themes are assessed along two dimensions:

1. Impact (or relevance):

How significantly could this driver affect programme objectives?

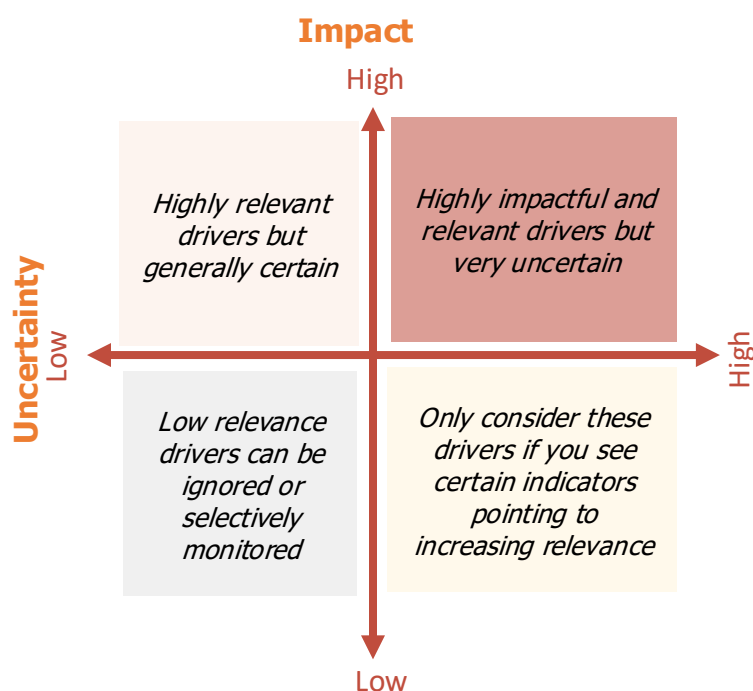
2. Uncertainty:

How unclear is the future evolution of this drivers of change over the next 1–3 years?

Without this prioritization step, teams risk:

- Reacting prematurely to uncertain themes.
- Ignoring highly certain but highly impactful shifts.

The matrix creates clarity.



A practical example

Imagine an organization focused on digital inclusion and access to public services in a lower-middle-income country.

After clustering signals, the team has identified the following drivers of change:

- **Accelerating adoption of mobile-based service delivery.**
- **Intensifying regulatory scrutiny of digital data governance.**
- **Increasing climate-related disruption to physical infrastructure.**
- **Declining donor appetite for multi-year institutional reform programmes.**

The team now assesses each driver along the two axes.

Theme 1: Accelerating adoption of mobile-based service delivery

The team observes that multiple signals — government pilot programmes, telecom expansion, new fintech partnerships — point strongly in one direction. Mobile penetration is increasing. Investment is accelerating. There is little ambiguity about direction. This driver is highly relevant to the organization's mission. It is also relatively certain in its trajectory.

Theme 3: Increasing climate-related disruption

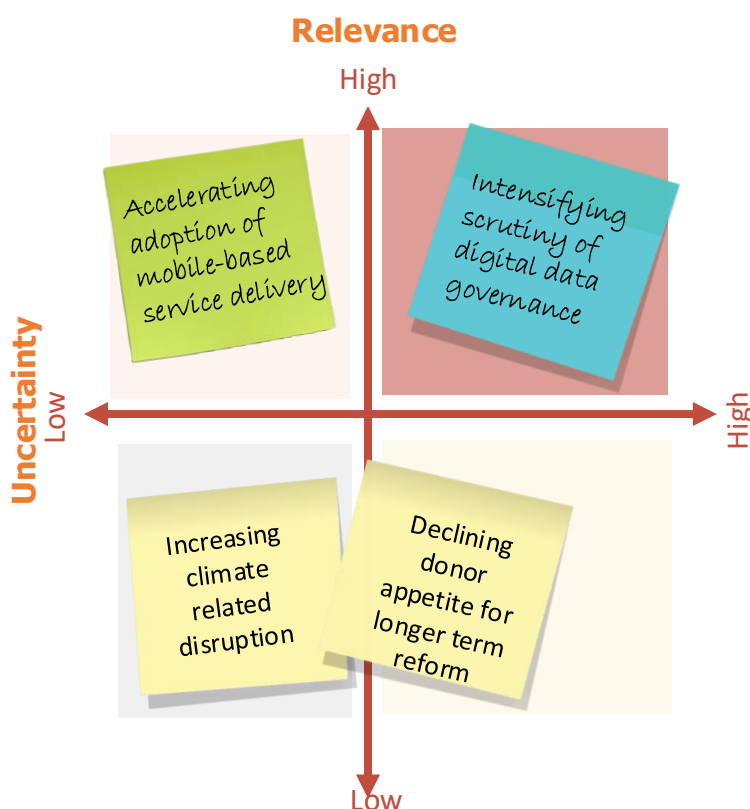
The organization's core programmes are digital. Climate disruption matters, but only indirectly unless physical infrastructure collapses. Relevance is moderate. This may fall in the left side of the matrix.

Theme 4: Declining donor appetite for long-term reform

If the organization relies heavily on such funding, this may be highly relevant. If funding models are already diversified, it may be less so. The placement depends on internal exposure.

Theme 2: Intensifying regulatory scrutiny of digital data governance

Signals indicate draft data protection bills, public debate about surveillance, and growing civil society pressure. However, it is unclear whether the regulatory environment will become enabling, restrictive, or fragmented. The direction and speed remain uncertain. This theme is highly relevant. It directly affects digital programme delivery. But its evolution is uncertain.



Step 3: Treating Drivers in the Bottom-Right Quadrant (High relevance, low uncertainty)

These are themes where the team has reasonable confidence about direction. The question is not "Will this happen?" but "**How should we respond?**"

Objective: To make visible where emerging contextual shifts strengthen, weaken, or bypass existing interventions. The output is a vulnerability map that supports deliberate redesign rather than reactive correction.

Before the workshop, the team should prepare a clean and agreed list of interventions.

Interventions may include:

- Standalone projects.
- Components within a larger portfolio.
- Delivery mechanisms.
- Policy support initiatives.

The key is clarity. Each intervention must be specific enough to assess independently.

These can then be placed in a table where each row represents a distinct intervention, project, or initiative.

Next, the columns of the table should list the drivers identified in Step 2 that fall into the **top left quadrant**: high relevance and relatively high certainty. These are drivers that are already moving in a clear direction and are most likely to affect delivery.

	Driver 1	Driver 2	Driver 3	Driver 4
Intervention 1				
Intervention 2				
Intervention 3				

The Traffic Light System

Each cell in the matrix represents a structured discussion: **How does this driver affect this intervention?**

In a workshop, the team assigns one of three ratings:

Green – The intervention directly addresses or benefits from the driver. It is aligned with the direction of change.

Amber – The intervention is indirectly affected or partially exposed. The driver may require adjustment but does not fundamentally undermine the intervention.

Red – The intervention is vulnerable. The driver may weaken feasibility, relevance, or effectiveness.

This is not a technical scoring exercise. It is a structured conversation. The value lies in open and honest discussion, especially where assumptions are challenged.

	Driver 1	Driver 2	Driver 3	Driver 4
Intervention 1	Green	Amber	Amber	Red
Intervention 2	Amber	Red	Green	Red
Intervention 3	Green	Amber	Green	Green

Once completed, the map reveals two types of vulnerability:

1. Driver-Level Vulnerability: If multiple interventions show red or amber against the same theme, the portfolio is broadly exposed. In the visual above, interventions seem particularly vulnerable to Drivers 2 & 4. This suggests potential need for redesign of some interventions.

2. Intervention-Level Vulnerability: If a specific intervention shows multiple red or amber ratings across drivers, that intervention is fragile.

The Vulnerability mapping of a digital inclusion portfolio of interventions

Taking forward the example from the previous step, let's say a fictional organization focused on digital inclusion has identified two highly relevant and relatively certain themes:

- **Accelerating adoption of mobile-based service delivery**
- **Intensifying regulatory scrutiny of digital data governance**

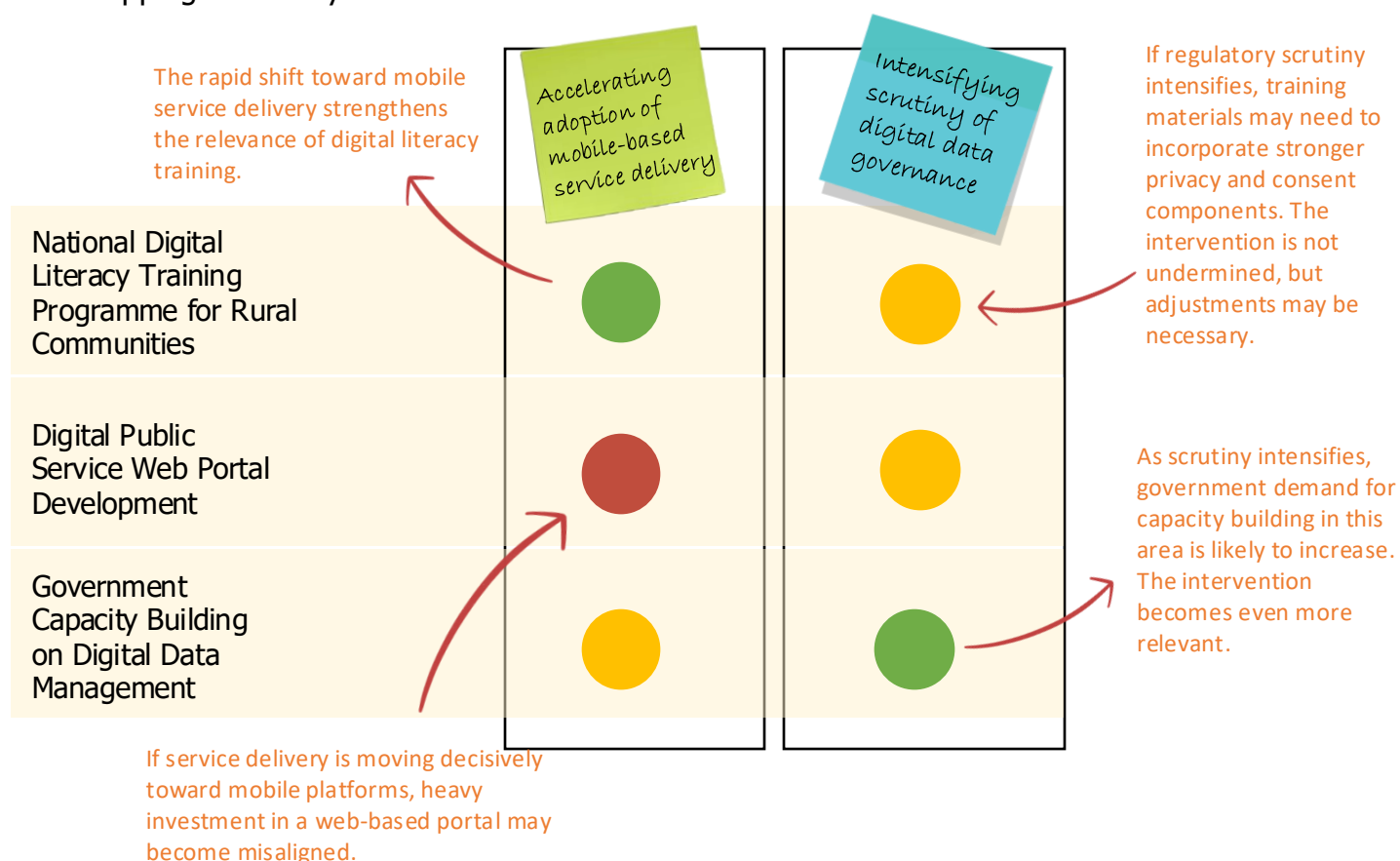
The team lists three active interventions:

Intervention A: National Digital Literacy Training Programme for Rural Communities

Intervention B: Digital Public Service Portal Development (web-based interface)

Intervention C: Government Capacity Building on Digital Data Management

The mapping table may look like this:



Reading the Vulnerability map above

1. Driver-Level Vulnerability: The mobile adoption driver exposes the web portal intervention significantly. This suggests potential need for redesign.

2. Intervention-Level Vulnerability: The web portal intervention appears most exposed. This does not automatically require cancellation. It prompts structured redesign questions: Should the portal shift to mobile-first architecture? Should resources be reallocated? Should partnerships shift? Etc.

Step 4: Exploring Highly Uncertain Drivers (High relevance, high uncertainty)

When a driver is highly relevant but uncertain, immediate redesign may be premature. The environment has not yet shifted decisively in one direction. Acting too early may create unnecessary disruption or misallocate resources. At the same time, ignoring such themes leaves the programme exposed if one possible pathway materializes suddenly.

The purpose of this step is to introduce structure into uncertainty.

Rather than attempting to predict which outcome is most likely, the team identifies a small number of plausible but meaningfully divergent ways in which the driver could evolve over the medium term. The aim is not to assign probabilities, but instead, to surface vulnerability under different plausible conditions.

This approach offers several advantages:

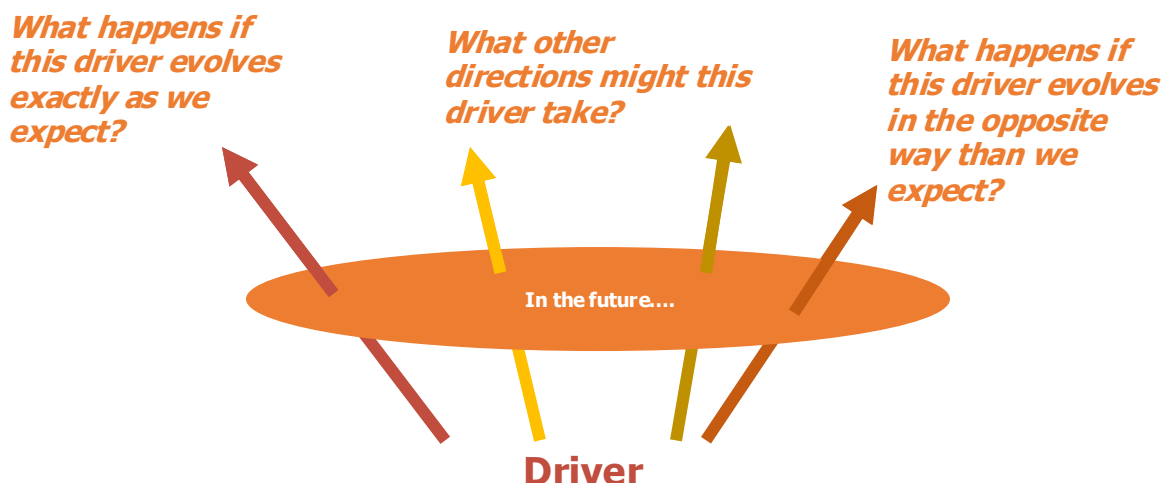
First, it prevents reactive adaptation. By stress-testing interventions in advance, teams are not caught off guard when a shift begins to crystallize.

Second, it reveals robust improvements. Some adaptations will strengthen the programme regardless of which plausible outcome materializes. These can be implemented proactively.

Third, it clarifies contingent actions. Instead of designing for one assumed future, the team identifies specific measures that should be activated only if particular signals accumulate.

Fourth, it integrates foresight into programme governance. By defining early warning indicators associated with each plausible pathway, the team builds a clear bridge between scanning and decision-making.

Step 4.1: The team conducts a structured brainstorming session to imagine plausible but distinct outcomes. Using the simple template from Chapter 2, teams can discuss 'How could this theme evolve in the next 2–3 years?'



Step 4.2: Each plausible outcome is then used to stress-test the programme portfolio.

The question is: If this driver evolves in different plausible directions, where does our programme become vulnerable?

Once multiple plausible outcomes of the driver have been identified, the same interventions can be stress-tested against each of these outcomes. The goal is not yet to redesign the programme, but to understand where vulnerability lies.

This mapping exercise reveals two types of insight:

1. First, there could be certain adaptations that appear robust across all plausible futures. These adaptations increase resilience without overcommitting to a specific outcome.
2. Second, some adaptations are contingent. They only become necessary if the theme evolves in a specific direction. These actions need not be implemented immediately. They can form part of a prepared contingency plan.

Practical example

Continuing the digital inclusion example, recall one of the drivers placed in the top-right quadrant: **"Intensifying regulatory scrutiny of digital data governance."**

This driver is highly relevant to the organization's work. However, its trajectory is uncertain. Regulatory scrutiny could evolve in different ways.

Restrictive regulation:

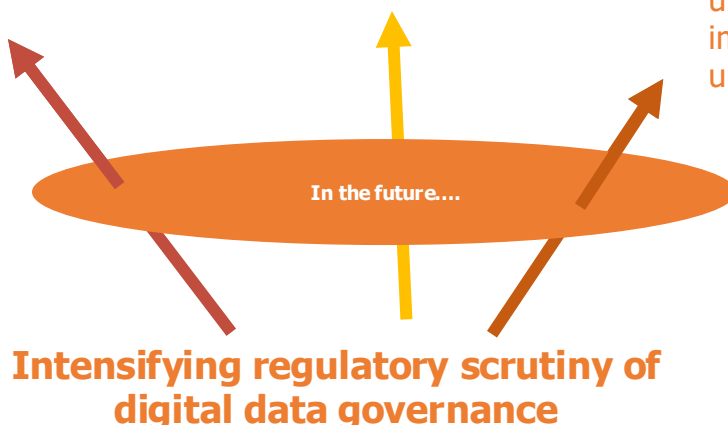
Regulatory scrutiny intensifies into a restrictive regime. Strict data localization laws are enacted, compliance burdens increase, and digital service providers face heavier oversight.

Regulatory reform:

Regulatory reform produces a balanced framework. Standards rise, but they are clear and predictable. Trust increases, and the regulatory environment stabilizes.

Fragmented regulation:

Reform efforts stall and regulatory fragmentation emerges. Different agencies interpret rules inconsistently, uncertainty persists, and implementation becomes uneven.

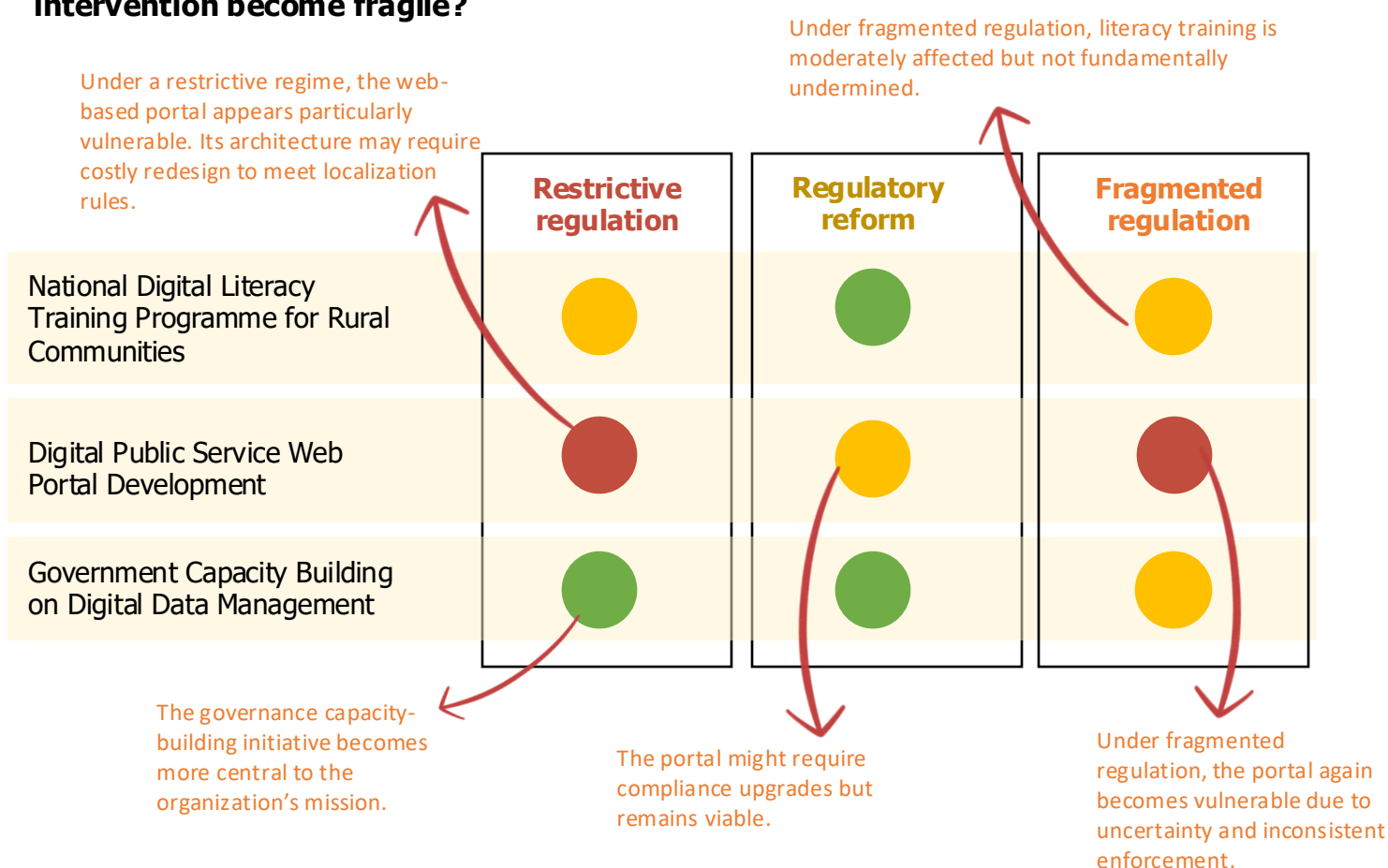


Practical example

These outcomes should be distinct enough to represent different operating environments, yet realistic enough to be credible. The goal is divergence, not extremity.

Step 4.3: Evaluate each intervention against each plausible outcome.

This can be done through discussion, or by reusing the vulnerability mapping logic from Step 3. The question remains the same: **under this plausible condition, where does the intervention become fragile?**



Step: 4.4: Designing Programme adaptations

Exploring plausible futures is intellectually stimulating. The next step - translating that exploration into action without triggering defensive reactions or redesign fatigue - may prove harder for many teams.

When teams have already invested substantial time and energy in designing a programme, even the suggestion of change can feel destabilizing. There may be internal resistance rooted in sunk costs, institutional approval processes, or concern about appearing indecisive. It is therefore important to approach this stage not as a critique of past design choices, but as a strengthening exercise. It is important to remind teams that:

The goal is not to undo the programme. It is to increase its resilience.

Step 4.4: Designing Robust Adaptations

Robust adaptations are adjustments that strengthen the programme across multiple plausible futures. They are not tied to one specific outcome. Instead, they increase flexibility, optionality, or resilience regardless of how the uncertain theme evolves.

These adaptations are often not radical redesigns. They are frequently structural improvements that enhance agility. They may involve modularity, diversification, sequencing adjustments, capacity strengthening, or improved monitoring mechanisms.

When teams struggle to generate robust adaptations, it is often because they are thinking in binary terms: keep the programme as is, or redesign it completely. The objective here is different. The task is to look for design refinements that reduce vulnerability without committing to a single forecast.

Prompts:

- If we had known that this uncertain theme would become highly volatile, what small design choices would we have made differently at the start?
- Which parts of this intervention are rigid, and where could we introduce modularity or flexibility without changing the core objective?
- What capabilities would make us more comfortable operating under any of the plausible futures we just discussed?

These questions redirect attention from defending past design decisions to strengthening future readiness. They also normalize adaptation as foresight-informed improvement rather than correction of error.

Step 4.5: Defining Early Warning Indicators

Where robust adaptations are not sufficient, contingency thinking becomes necessary. In such cases, it may not be prudent to redesign immediately. Instead, the team defines **early warning indicators** that signal directional movement toward one plausible outcome.

The purpose of early warning indicators is to create clarity about when adaptation should be triggered. Without them, teams may hesitate too long, waiting for certainty that rarely arrives.

Early warning indicators should be observable, concrete, and specific. They may also include qualitative data like policy drafts, budget allocations, enforcement actions, stakeholder behaviour shifts, etc.

Prompts:

- What would we expect to see first if this plausible outcome were beginning to materialize?
- Which concrete decisions, announcements, or behavioral shifts would confirm that the direction is solidifying?
- At what point would we feel uncomfortable continuing with our current design unchanged?

Conclusion: Bringing it all together

By identifying robust adaptations, the team strengthens the programme across multiple plausible futures. By defining early warning indicators, the team builds clarity about when contingent measures should be activated.

Together, these two stages transform uncertainty from a threat into a managed variable.

The programme remains stable, but not static. It becomes designed not just for today's environment, but for tomorrow's possible conditions. This is the essence of adaptive programme management strengthened by foresight.

Workshops for Adaptive Programme Management

This chapter does not include fully timed workshop agendas in the same format as earlier sections of the toolkit. The duration and design of these sessions will depend heavily on two variables:

- The number of interventions under consideration.
- The number of high-impact themes emerging from the scanning process.

A small portfolio with three interventions and two themes may require only a half-day session. A large portfolio with multiple thematic clusters may require several shorter workshops or a full-day format.

Rather than prescribing fixed timings, this section outlines the recommended structure of two core workshops:

- Intervention Mapping Against Highly Certain, High-Impact Themes
- Adaptive management for Highly Uncertain, High-Impact Themes

The emphasis in both cases is on structured discussion, clarity of vulnerability, and explicit assignment of responsibility.

Example Intervention mapping workshop (High Certainty-High Impact themes)

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating the Intervention mapping workshop for the high certainty-high impact drivers. This workshop translates clear directional shifts in the environment into operational insight.

Opening & Framing

- Begin by briefly restating the drivers identified as highly relevant and relatively certain.
- Explain why proactive alignment is preferable to reactive correction.
- Emphasize the purpose of the exercise: strengthening interventions, not critiquing them.

Clarify that this session is about identifying exposure and resilience.

Intervention listing and clarification

Ensure that all interventions to be mapped are clearly articulated. Each intervention should have defined objectives, a brief description of scope and clarity on intended outcomes.

This prevents ambiguity during mapping.

Mapping Exercise (Breakouts for larger portfolios or Plenary)

Using the traffic-light framework, each intervention is assessed against each high-certainty, high-impact driver. For each cell, the group discusses: Does this theme strengthen, weaken, or bypass this intervention?

Identifying Driver-Level and Intervention-Level Vulnerabilities (Plenary)

Once mapping is complete, the facilitator guides reflection:

- Which themes expose the largest portion of the portfolio?
- Which interventions are vulnerable across multiple drivers?

The discussion is as important as the actual rating.

Adaptive Actions (Plenary or Breakouts)

For interventions marked red or amber, the team identifies practical adaptive measures. The key question becomes:

What adjustments would increase resilience without overhauling the programme?

Without accountability and cadence, insights risk remaining theoretical.

Assigning Responsibility and Follow-Up

For each agreed adaptation:

- Assign a responsible person or unit.
- Define a realistic timeline.
- Clarify what evidence will demonstrate completion.
- Establish a reporting cadence.

Example workshop agenda for Adaptive management for Highly Uncertain, High-Impact Themes

Below you will find **step-by-step instructions** for facilitating the workshop for the high uncertainty-high impact themes. This workshop helps the team prepare for multiple plausible evolutions without prematurely redesigning the programme. **The objective is structured preparedness.**

Opening & Framing

Reiterate:

- The driver under consideration and why its direction is uncertain.
- The purpose of the session: to explore vulnerability across plausible futures, not to forecast probabilities.

Brainstorming Plausible Outcomes (Plenary or Breakouts)

Participants define two to three distinct but plausible ways the driver could evolve over the medium term. Outcomes can be refined in plenary discussion to ensure clarity and distinction.

Mapping Interventions Against Plausible Outcomes (Breakouts)

Each intervention is assessed against each plausible outcome. The guiding question is: **Under this plausible future, where does this intervention become vulnerable?**

Groups document vulnerabilities and return to plenary for synthesis.

Use the prompt questions from this toolkit to avoid the pitfalls of defensiveness.

Identifying Robust Adaptations (Plenary)

The facilitator asks: Which adaptations would strengthen the programme across all plausible outcomes?

These adaptations are prioritized because they increase resilience regardless of uncertainty.

Identifying Early Warning Indicators (Plenary)

For each plausible outcome, the team defines observable indicators that would signal directional movement toward that future.

Participants should specify:

- Concrete events, policy decisions, behavioural shifts, or structural developments.
- Who is responsible for monitoring them.
- Where they will be logged and reported.

This ensures that foresight feeds into governance.

Assigning Responsibility and Establishing Cadence

Assign owners for robust adaptations.

Assign monitoring responsibility for early warning indicators.

Establish a reporting rhythm.

This prevents the exercise from becoming static.

From planning for the future to shaping it

Strategic planning in today's world cannot be static. The environment in which organisations operate is shaped by accelerating change and systemic interdependencies that rarely unfold in linear ways. Plans built only on historical data and current assumptions risk becoming outdated before they are fully implemented.

This toolkit has proposed a different approach.

It has shown how foresight strengthens strategic planning by grounding choices in a structured understanding of change.

By scanning for signals, identifying drivers, exploring plausible futures, defining development challenges & opportunities, stress-testing programmes, and embedding adaptive management, teams move from reacting to events toward anticipating and shaping them. Planning becomes a dynamic capability rather than a fixed document.

Across its chapters, the toolkit has emphasised four core principles:



Future-informed thinking

Strategies must be designed with an awareness of emerging risks, opportunities, and systemic shifts.



Plurality of futures

Robust strategies remain viable across multiple plausible futures.



Participation and co-creation

Diverse perspectives enrich analysis, challenge blind spots, and build ownership.



Adaptation as a continuous practice

Foresight continues through ongoing scanning and adaptive redesign.

At its core, foresight is not about predicting the future. It is about expanding awareness of what could unfold, clarifying the assumptions that underpin today's choices, and designing actions that remain resilient as conditions evolve. The future will not wait for perfect information. But with disciplined foresight, it does not have to catch us unprepared.

The work now begins with you.

Apply the tools. Convene diverse voices. Monitor weak signals. Revisit your strategy when context shifts. Treat planning not as a document to be completed, but as an ongoing capability to be cultivated.

By doing so, your organisation moves from navigating uncertainty to shaping the conditions in which it operates.

That is the true promise of foresight-informed strategic planning.

