



International
Civil Society
Centre



TOOLKIT FOR TOMORROW: ANTICIPATING CIVIL SOCIETY FUTURES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the 'Toolkit for tomorrow: Anticipating civil society futures' – designed to strengthen the civil society sector through practical futures thinking strategies.

In an era of unprecedented change, the future is increasingly unpredictable. Rapid technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, and socio-economic transformations are reshaping the world at an extraordinary pace. Civil society organisations are tasked with addressing multifaceted, interconnected, and constantly evolving issues. From climate change and global health crises to political polarisation and social inequality, the challenges facing civil society are diverse and dynamic.

Traditional methods of problem solving, and decision making are no longer sufficient in this rapidly changing world. Civil society must adapt to new realities and embrace innovative and agile strategies to remain effective and impactful. However, it can be challenging to think about and plan for a future that some have described as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). **Futures thinking and foresight** can help us grapple with uncertainty and change by revealing the complex interplay of dynamic trends around us, helping us to identify risks, opportunities, and innovations, and creating a collective vision of where we want to be.

We believe that, though the future is unpredictable, **we can shape it through our actions.**

Let's embark on this journey towards a stronger, more impactful, and future-proof civil society – together!

About this toolkit

This toolkit was developed specifically for the civil society sector and aims to address the medium-term future, roughly spanning **5–20 years from now** – a timeframe that is often challenging to consider. Termed by some as the 'actionable future,' this timeframe lies far enough ahead to be uncertain yet close enough to perceive how actions taken today may influence it.

The toolkit provides **tools, strategies, and resources to strengthen your ability to anticipate future challenges and opportunities, practice foresight, and build resilience** in the face of rapid change.

Whether you work in advocacy, community organising, policy development, or any other aspect of civil society, this toolkit acts as a guide to support your efforts in strengthening the civic and civil society operating space while gaining a deeper understanding of foresight methods and how they can be applied within the context of civil society.

We developed this toolkit for **civil society professionals** who work in international civil society organisations (ICSOs), national civil society organisations (CSOs), or civil society networks and focus on defending and expanding the civic and civil society operating space. However, the toolkit can be used by a broader civil society sector, including ICSO and CSO practitioners, networks, activists, and those who focus on issues other than civic space and are interested in engaging in futures thinking and putting it into practice. While the provided materials and examples focus on the civic and civil society operating space, they can be used more broadly or adapted to your needs and context.

This toolkit draws upon insights and lessons learned from the International Civic Forum 2023 as a testing ground and feeds into the 'Anticipating futures for civil society operating space' initiative, a three-year initiative (2022–2025) developed by the International Civil Society Centre (ICSCentre). This initiative aims to strengthen the anticipatory capacities and future readiness of civic space-focused civil society professionals by:

- Raising awareness about futures thinking and ways of anticipating future challenges and opportunities;
- Offering a convening and collaborative space for civil society professionals to develop future scenarios for civic space;
- Translating developed scenarios into concrete strategies and practices to strengthen capacities at the individual, organisational, and sector levels.

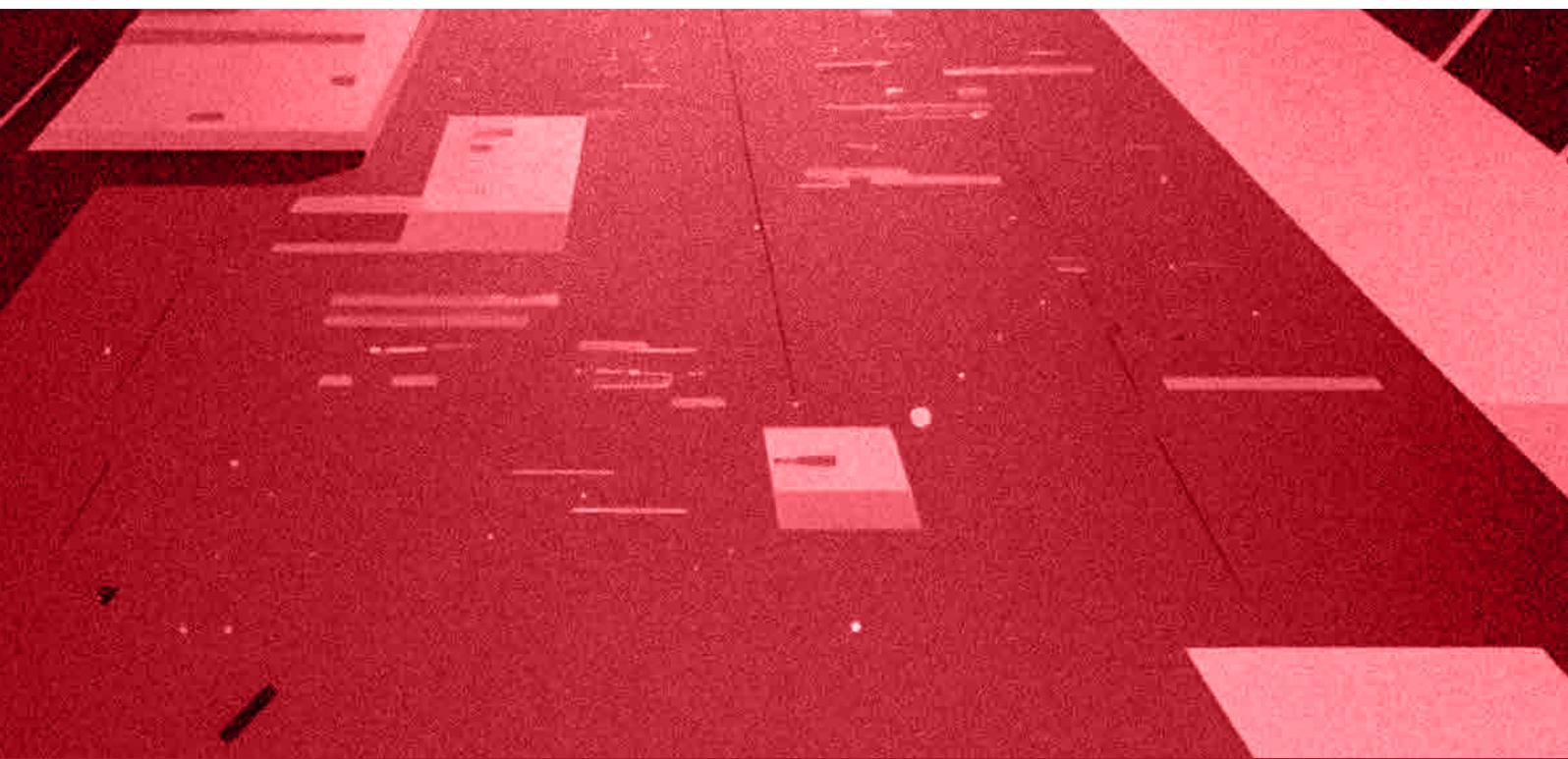
Building on previous steps of the 'Anticipating futures' initiative, this toolkit offers actionable guidance to enhance your ability to anticipate future trends, assess potential risks, and leverage opportunities for positive impact. By embracing foresight as a guiding principle, we truly believe we can collectively shape a future where civil society thrives and is resilient in the face of uncertainty.

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit offers structured activities and prompts designed to foster collaborative thinking, enabling you to navigate the complexities of envisioning and strategising possible futures. It can be **used by any staff member** who is eager to consider long-term plans within the organisation or across the civil society sector. The toolkit places you **in the role of a facilitator**, leading discussions, encouraging participation, and helping others explore diverse perspectives. You can use this toolkit **even if you have little or no previous experience** with futures crafting, as we explain the key concepts and methods used and guide you step-by-step through the activities.

You can use this toolkit to run a futures process **internally within your organisation**, ideally involving colleagues from different departments to ensure a diversity of roles and perspectives in thinking about the future. You can also run the futures sessions **with external stakeholders** as participants, such as partners or communities you work with. A foresight process involving a diverse range of perspectives, experiences, and roles allows for more voices to be heard and more inclusive futures to be explored.

The toolkit explains what futures thinking is and what added value it brings, and it provides six overarching exercises (and a follow-up exercise) that can be run as a series in a holistic strategy process or convened as individual sessions to serve your current requirements and capacities. The integrated menu of options provides guidance on how to combine the individual sessions to best suit your needs and preferences. The annex offers templates to use for the outlined exercises.



What is futures thinking and why practise it?

'To change the future, we need to change the story. Not just the story itself and who it is about, but also who imagines the story and who gets to tell it. These new stories must have the power to break the spell of the old ones.'

— *Pupul Bisht*

As individuals, we think about the future all the time. From mundane choices like deciding what to eat or wear to significant decisions about our careers and relationships, thoughts of what lies ahead shape our actions and perceptions. Whether the future feels imminent or distant, stories about it consistently influence our behaviours.

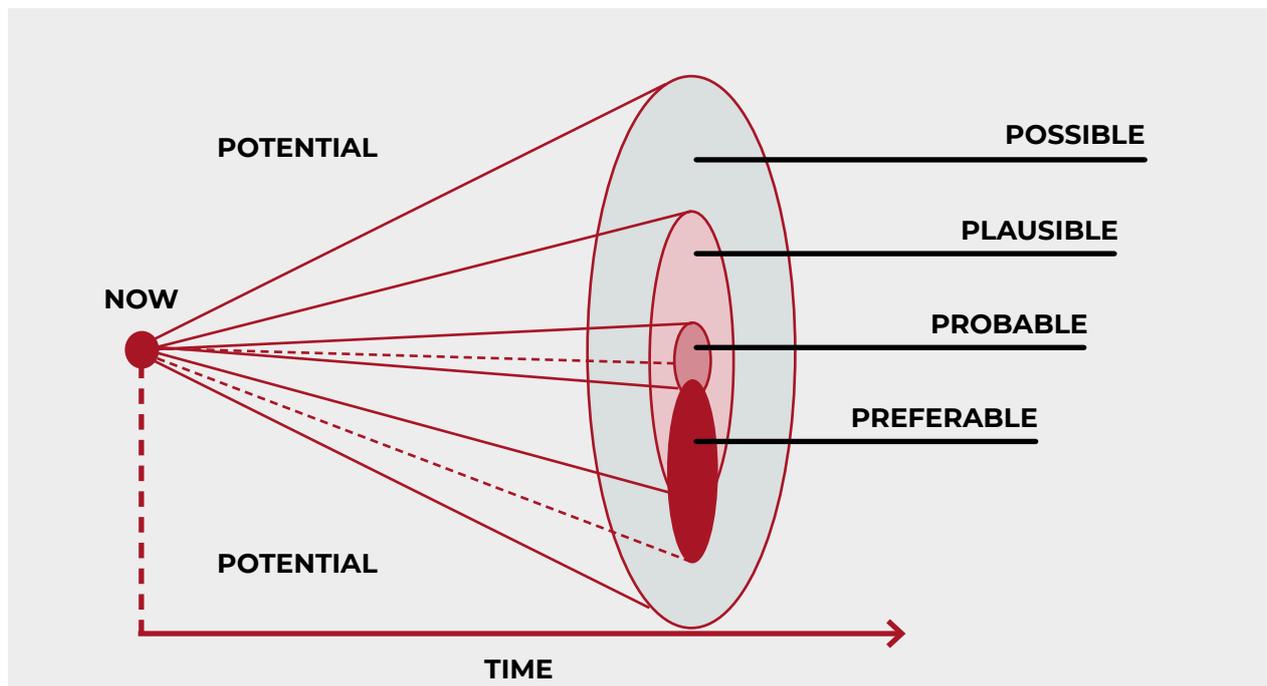
Similarly, civil society organisations (CSOs) engage in continuous future planning. We constantly think about the future when developing projects, assembling staff teams, or crafting strategic plans. However, given the challenges we confront and the external context we navigate, we often find ourselves caught in a cycle of prioritising short-term needs and reacting to crises rather than proactively shaping our future. Consequently, our long-term visions and stories of the future often remain abstract, relegated to mission statements and organisational aspirations.

What are futures thinking and strategic foresight?

- **Futures thinking** or **futures studies** is an interdisciplinary field concerned with researching, crafting, and instrumentalising visions of possible, probable, and preferred futures based on specific methods, models, and theories.
- **Futures studies** and **strategic foresight** are often used interchangeably. At their essence, both are the same, with futures studies more embedded in academia and strategic foresight more embedded in business and corporate contexts.

Throughout this toolkit, we will use the term **'futures'** (plural) to highlight the multiplicity of futures rather than the singular ('one future'). We do this for several reasons:

- First, there is no one specific future we are certain about; thus, we are not *predicting* through these exercises but rather *anticipating potential* changes.
- Second, just as people have varied experiences of the present, people will experience the future in different ways depending on who and where they are.



What are the elements of the futures cone?

- **Possible futures:** the future that might happen, including 'wild card' scenarios
- **Plausible futures:** given current knowledge, this future could happen
- **Probable futures:** given current trends, this future is likely to happen
- **Preferable futures:** given preferences and emotions, this is the future that people want to happen

Source: The 'futures cone' was developed by Hancock and Bezold in 1994 to indicate alternative futures over a specific timeframe. It visually demonstrates that there is often more than one single possible future to explore, with some of them plausible, fewer probable, and a small amount preferable. The preferable future can be dictated by how plausible it is, but also by the preferences of an individual or organisation – which future do they want to see happen? We redesigned the Forum for the Future's image of the futures cone for the purposes of this toolkit.

What does futures thinking help us to do?

- Understand the big picture and the nature of change and set long-term goals going beyond reacting to immediate shocks
- Delve into the interdependence of issues and its influence on how change happens
- Surface and explore different perspectives and mindsets to ensure we are not building towards a dominant future for a few, but rather building on our collective imagination
- Think differently and engage differently with problems at hand
- Create space for collaboration on a shared future
- Practice coping with uncertainty
- Assess strategies and adapt them as needed to create more agile organisations

While this toolkit presents a series of futures tools, the overall aim is to practice embodying a **'futures mindset'**. Doing so would require us to adopt futures thinking as an integrated set of beliefs and patterns of thinking to truly create organisational and sector-wide change. A futures mindset **can help break us out of the frantic, frenetic pace of reacting to the present** by systemically addressing issues threatening our future and that of future generations. We live in a world of facts and data, but we also have lived experiences, ancestral knowledge, feelings, hopes, and values. To become futurists, we must tap into different ways of thinking that are creative, personal, and diverse to understand our present and elucidate possible futures. By constantly thinking about and developing our ideas of the future, **we can help ensure that the changes occurring do not cause paralysis but are anticipated and navigable.**

Key principles and considerations

Now that you have learned about the value of using futures, how can you best facilitate a futures process for your organisation or group of stakeholders?

When running the sessions outlined in this toolkit, we encourage you to adhere to the following nine principles to ensure a fruitful and impactful outcome:

1

Be open-minded: Embrace diverse perspectives and encourage participants to explore ideas freely. Foster an inclusive environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and insights.

2

Stay evidence-based: Ground discussions and decisions in empirical evidence and credible sources. This helps to ensure that the sessions are rooted in reality, which not only enhances the legitimacy of the session but also provides a solid foundation for future planning efforts.

3

Encourage collaboration: Facilitate collaborative exercises and discussions to harness the collective intelligence of the group. Encourage participants to build on each other's ideas and work together towards common goals.

4

Provide clear guidance: Clearly communicate the objectives, expectations, and agenda of the foresight activity to participants. This helps to keep everyone focused and ensures that the session stays on track.

5

Promote critical thinking: Encourage participants to question assumptions, challenge existing norms, and think critically about potential future scenarios. This helps to generate deeper insights and more robust strategies.

6

Foster innovation: Create a space that encourages creativity and innovation. Encourage participants to think outside the box and explore unconventional ideas and solutions.

7

Facilitate reflection: Build in time for reflection throughout the session to allow participants to process information, make connections, and draw insights. Reflection helps to deepen learning and inform future actions.

8

Be flexible: Remain adaptable and responsive to the needs and dynamics of the group. Be prepared to adjust plans and activities as necessary to ensure a successful outcome.

9

Encourage ownership: Foster a sense of ownership and accountability for the outcomes of the foresight sessions among participants. Encouraging participants to take ownership of the results and involving them in the decision-making process can increase the likelihood of meaningful action and impact following the sessions.

Bear in mind...

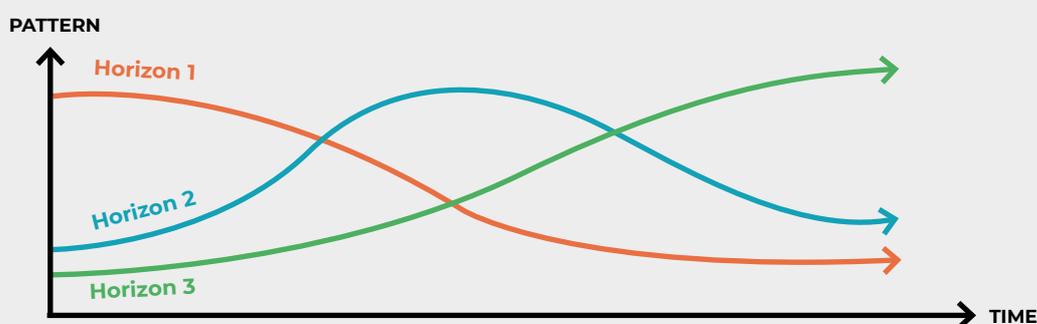
Cultural sensitivity and considerations play a crucial role in the successful execution of the activities suggested in this toolkit. Recognising the diverse cultural contexts and perspectives of participants is essential to fostering an inclusive and effective environment for futures thinking. As a facilitator, you are encouraged to structure activities in a manner that respects cultural nuances and preferences, ensuring that all participants feel valued and heard.

Futures methodology design

To provide a structure for futures thinking, the trajectory of this toolkit is designed to follow the broad principles of the futures process known as 'Three Horizons'.

What is the Three Horizons framework?

The Three Horizons framework is a simple and intuitive tool for thinking about the future. It helps groups explore systemic patterns to identify which of the dominant patterns are no longer fit for their purpose, how emerging trends can shape the future, and what visionary action is needed to collectively move us towards a viable future.

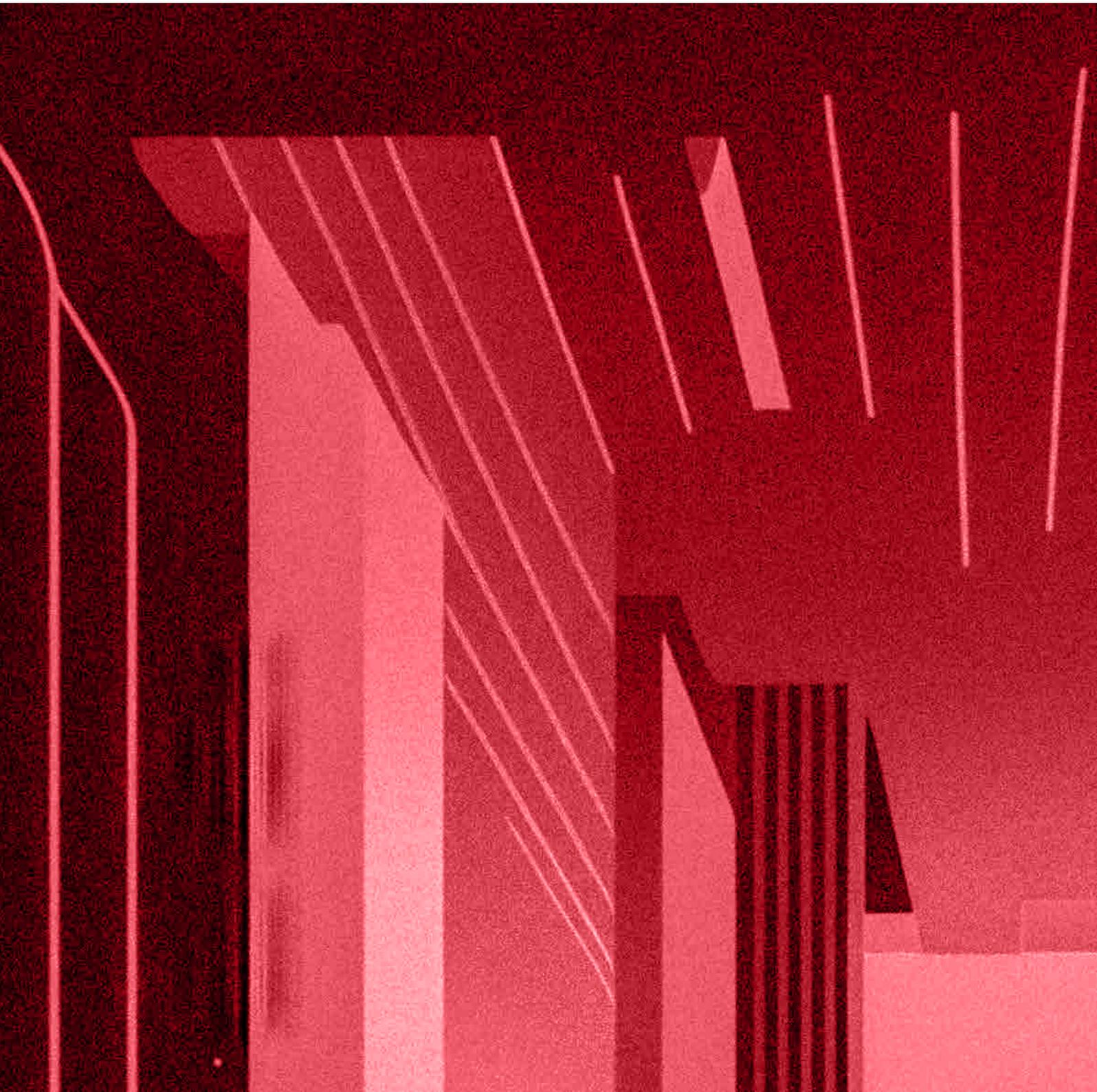


- Horizon 1:** This horizon looks at the current status quo: What are the key characteristics of the prevailing system? What is holding it in place? What values, cultures, laws, and events led to it? Are there any signs that it is not fit for purpose and is failing? What are these signs?
- Horizon 3:** This horizon focuses on the vision for the future we desire to bring about and its potential features. We consider what it might be like to be in those desired futures and the impact they could have on our lives and work. We begin to identify: Where might we see seeds of those futures in the present?
- Horizon 2:** This horizon is the transition zone, and it considers interventions that might bridge the present and future and transform the system currently in play. Horizon 2 is a critical stage, as it enables us to design pathways to the desired future described in Horizon 3 and identify which pathways may carry a risk of keeping the current system in power.

Source: Three Horizons (3H) is a framework for imagining a shared future and creating paths towards it that was first created by futurist Bill Sharpe. The educational charity H3Uni developed this image to provide guidance on frameworks for navigating upcoming uncertainties – redesigned here for this toolkit.

The activities in this toolkit were developed to guide you through a journey from exploring the present day (Horizon 1) to envisioning potential and possible futures (Horizon 3), and ultimately to considering actions that can bridge the gap between a vision of the future and the status quo (Horizon 2).

Before each session, you will find additional information about which aspect of the Three Horizons process the following activities relate to.



Menu of options

Following the entire methodology described here can produce more robust, inclusive, and nuanced inputs into your decision making and action planning, but it is not a requirement. While it is useful to have a full range of options at your fingertips, you must prioritise and select the tools based on your needs, capacities, and resources.

Session overview

Session 1 Trends exploration

Session 2 Futures wheel

Session 3 Scenario immersion

3.1: Scenario immersion - ParEvo

3.2: Scenario immersion - 2x2 matrix

3.3: Scenario immersion - External resources

Session 4a Brainstorming and prioritising sector-wide actions

Session 4b Moving from sectoral towards organisational actions

Session 5 Organisational action planning

Session 6 Individual action planning

Follow-up session Post-workshop check-in

We have organised the sessions into categories based on what you prefer to explore:

1. Focusing on individual futures

310–360 MINS

If you would like to focus on how individuals in your organisation think about the future, we suggest:

- a. [Session 2 \(Futures wheel\)](#)
- b. [Session 3.2 \(Scenario immersion - 2x2 matrix\)](#)
- c. [Session 6 \(Individual action planning\)](#)

2. Building quick visions and plans

120–160 MINS

If you would like a condensed version of vision building and action planning, we suggest:

- a. [Session 3.1 \(Scenario immersion – ParEvo\)](#)
- b. [Session 5 \(Organisational action planning\)](#)

3. Deep diving into futures exploration

200–350 MINS

If you want to prioritise exploring where we are today and a vision for the future, we advise prioritising the immersion exercises:

- a. [Session 1 \(Trends exploration\)](#)
- b. [Session 2 \(Futures wheel\)](#)
- c. [Session 3.1](#) or [3.2](#) (Scenario immersion - ParEvo or 2x2 matrix)

4. Integrating futures thinking into actions

500–720 MINS

If you want to explore the future and use those visions to shape individual and organisational actions, we recommend you go through all workshop components. Note that these can be done over several days.

- a. [Sessions 1–6*](#)
* For Session 3, choose one of the outlined options depending on your needs.
- b. [Follow-up session \(Post-workshop check-in\)](#) at a later date

We've included information on each of these specific tools in the following chapters. To find out more about an individual tool, skip to the listed section within the menu.

Please refer to the facilitator's guide below for an overview of how the flow could fit a workshop agenda, incorporating additional breaks and space for reflections. The templates we refer to can be found in the annex and printed out or filled out online. The templates are also hyperlinked in each corresponding session.



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Warm-up activities

Warm-up activities play a crucial role in setting the tone and fostering engagement in a strategic foresight workshop. These activities go beyond mere icebreakers; they are essential tools for creating an environment conducive to effective exploration and collaboration. Strategic foresight workshops can be filled with information, and warm-up activities provide a moment for participants to pause, recharge, and re-energise.

These activities, when selected thoughtfully, can lay the groundwork to help participants step into the space and understand that the future is not predetermined, facilitating a smooth transition into the exercises. While we suggest a few warm-up activities in this toolkit, we encourage you to consider asking participants if they know a warm-up activity that they would like to run, as this can be an opportunity to discover hidden talents and aspects of culture among participants.

For further warm-up activities, we encourage you to explore Chapter 12 of [The Strategic Foresight Book](#) by IFRC Solferino Academy. There, you'll find a variety of engaging warm-up exercises to energise and prepare participants for your strategic foresight journey.

Future headlines



Objectives

This activity helps participants tap into their imagination and begin thinking about potential future scenarios.



Tips

When forming groups, ensure participants are grouped with others from different departments or organisations, if possible, to enhance creativity.



How to run it?

Duration:
~20 mins,
depending on the
number of groups

Materials:

- sticky notes
- markers
- flip chart

Setup:
Divide participants
into small groups, with
a maximum of four
people in each group

	Flow of activities
2'	Divide participants into small groups and provide each group with a stack of sticky notes and markers.
3'	Instruct the groups to imagine they are journalists from the future reporting on events taking place 10 or 15 years from today.
10'	Ask each group to write down 2 or 3 headlines that capture a significant event or trend they foresee happening in the future. <i>If they get stuck, encourage participants to brainstorm 'headline' events from today and think about how these events might play out in 10–15 years. You could also have them think about recent patterns in tech, social movements, or politics and what we might expect in the future should things continue in a similar direction.</i> Encourage creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.
5'	After a set time, have each group share their headlines with the rest of the workshop participants.

Zip-Zap count



Objectives

Promote participants' concentration while introducing an element of unexpected change that suggests the uncertain nature of the future. The goal is to count while following specific rules, remaining attentive to potential changes in the direction of the game.



Tips

For larger groups, demonstrate the activity with one or two test rounds after explaining the rules.



How to run it?

Duration:
~10 mins

Materials:
None

Setup:
Position the group in a circle

	Flow of activities
5'	Introduce the following rules: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The first player starts by saying aloud the number '1'. The second player continues by saying the next number (2), the third player the next one (3), and so on. 2. All multiples of 7 (7, 14, 21, 28, 35 ...) must be replaced with 'Zip'. The person whose turn it is says 'Zip' instead of '7' or a multiple of 7. 3. All numbers ending in 7 (17, 27, 37...) must be replaced with the word 'Zap', and the direction of the game changes. For example, if the game was going clockwise around the circle, it should now go counterclockwise. The game continues like this until someone makes a mistake either in counting or forgetting to say 'Zip' or 'Zap' when required. 4. If a mistake occurs, the game stops and starts over without the player who made a mistake, and the game continues as described above.
5'	Run the exercise and restart as much as you feel is needed to re-energise the group.

Exploring the present: Horizon 1

What is it about?

Sessions 1 and 2 immerse participants in the current state of play, with a focus on the current trends impacting civic space and the intended and unintended future consequences of those trends.

Intended outcome

The sessions allow participants to share and capture what they are observing and the direction of change emerging in the sector. The design encourages participants to begin to stretch their imagination, look for blind spots, and step into the headspace of strategic foresight.

Session 1: Trends exploration



Objectives

This session explores the key trends shaping civic space now and how they interact with one another. Participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of the evolving landscape, including the identified trends and any blind spots or gaps. This session fosters collaboration and critical thinking, empowering participants to navigate through the trends and equipping them with the insights needed to effectively engage with the challenges and opportunities ahead.



What are trends?

Trends are collections of signals and events – and their build-up into patterns – that indicate a likely direction of change. They do not act in isolation, and identifying interconnections allows us to unearth correlations and causations.



Tips

By identifying and analysing trends, you can gain insights into the forces shaping your organisation's operating environment. These trends provide the foundation for constructing scenarios, which are possible narratives that describe future states based on different combinations of key trends.



How to run it?

Duration:
~55 mins

Materials:

- trend cards
- empty trend card template
- pens
- markers
- paper

Setup:

Divide participants into groups of 4–6 people

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	Briefly introduce what trends are and how they interact with each other. Share 2–3 examples of trends.	Provide clarity on terminology and process
5'	Present an overview of trends affecting the civic and civil society operating space. Share the 'trend cards', including an empty card template, with the participants.	Provide a horizon scan of the current state of play
20'	Participants read and discuss the outlined trends in groups. Prompt them to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Which trends are the most disruptive to the current systems? ■ How do they interplay? 	Familiarise with already collected trends
10'	Groups identify any missing trends impacting the civic and civil society operating space using the empty trend card(s).	Identify blind spots or gaps
15'	Ask the groups to share back their thoughts on the trends and missing trends.	Recognise the group's expertise and experience

Session 2: Futures wheel



Objectives

The futures wheel exercise serves as a pivotal bridge from trend exploration to scenario development, empowering participants to effectively anticipate change and navigate complex futures. The futures wheel facilitates this transition by systematically examining the potential implications and interconnections of each trend. It allows participants to explore how trends may evolve over time, identify critical uncertainties, and envision alternative futures. Through this process, they can develop robust scenario narratives that enable strategic decision making and proactive planning in the face of uncertainty.

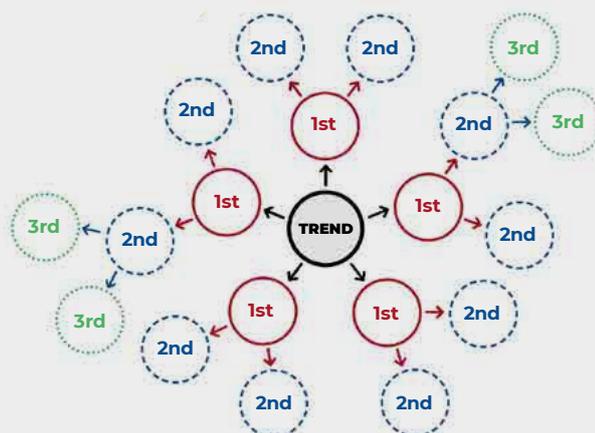


What is the futures wheel?

The **'futures wheel'** is a tool that enables us to systematically explore the direct and indirect impacts of important trends and issues. Such analysis also sheds light on various connections present in complex systems.

- **First-order consequences** refer to the immediate and direct impacts of a trend or event and are usually mapped in the circles directly connecting to the trend or issue to be explored.
- **Second-order consequences** refer to indirect impacts or outcomes that result from the first-order consequences of the trend or issue.
- **Third-order consequences** refer to the impacts or outcomes that arise as a result of the second-order consequences.

The futures wheel was originally developed by Jerome Glenn in 1971 and quickly became one of the favourite tools to help think about unforeseen consequences and make better decisions.





Tips

- This session explores a key prioritised trend, using the ‘futures wheel’ to help participants understand how the trend plays out over a specific time period and leads to unintended consequences. The visual map created in this exercise enables better anticipation of the risks and opportunities that may emerge because of a trend’s potential implications, whether direct or compounding.
- You can choose your own timeframe, but we advise using between 5–20 years in the future, as this timeframe works best with the activity. Once chosen (e.g., 5 or 10 years), keep the same timeframe for the following exercises.



How to run it?

Duration:
~60–75 mins

- Materials:**
- flip chart
 - sticky notes
 - markers
 - [‘futures wheel’ template](#)
 - [filled-out example](#)

Setup:
Divide the participants into groups of 4–6 people. The room should have enough space to ensure that groups are not working too close to each other. If you have already conducted the trend session, maintain the same groupings.

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	As a facilitator, assign one trend per group. In a bigger cohort, you can have 2–3 groups looking at the same trend in parallel.	
5'	Provide overview of futures wheel methodology with one prefilled wheel and explain how a trend has direct and indirect consequences. Share the ‘futures wheel’ template.	Provide clarity around terminology and process
30'	Ask participants to fill out the futures wheel template by identifying direct and indirect consequences of an assigned trend over a chosen time horizon (e.g., 5 or 10 years). All groups work within the same timeframe.	Consider consequences and interconnected impacts

HORIZON 1

	<p>Ask participants to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the assigned trend 2. Identify direct, first-order consequences 3. Identify indirect, second-order consequences 4. Identify indirect, third-order consequences <p>Examples of possible trends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AI tools are used by authoritarian governments to monitor civil society actors and undermine their actions. ■ State and non-state actors spread disinformation to discredit civil society organisations. ■ Internal divisions within civil society and polarisation between certain groups cause a lack of unity in the civil society sector. <p>You can use any trend, including one of the trends that the participants identified in the previous exercise. For clarity, try to formulate a chosen trend in a sentence (as demonstrated above).</p> <p>Prompt participants to fill out the template while considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is changing? ■ Who is affected by the change? ■ Where is the change taking place? ■ How do the individual impacts identified connect with other impacts? Do they compound or decrease in effect? <p>Encourage participants to analyse the identified impacts and implications.</p>	
<p>20'</p>	<p>If you have parallel groups discussing the same trend, ask groups to pair up with matching trend group(s) and discuss what emerged and which consequences were a surprise to them.</p>	<p>Allow for sharing insights and sensemaking</p>
<p>15'</p>	<p><i>Optional (if you end your workshop with this exercise):</i></p> <p>Ask participants to review the futures wheel implications, using the following prompt questions to help start conversations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How might these implications challenge your organisation? ■ How might the current structure and approaches of your organisation address these challenges? ■ What needs to be done in the short-term future to respond to this trend? In the longer-term future? 	<p>Review the futures wheel for your context</p>

Envisioning possible futures: Horizon 3

What is it about?

Imagining and immersing in possible futures can help participants identify desired futures, and the key characteristics of these futures can help shape and direct our efforts towards designing transformative pathways. It can provide fundamental motivation and hope among participants to see and experience futures they wish to bring about. Scenarios are a useful systemic tool to imagine and describe possible futures by exploring the connection between multiple factors that (may) shape those futures. By presenting possible futures, the scenarios help participants grapple with uncertainty and interconnectedness and act as a stimulus for a strategy or innovation process.

Intended outcome

These possible futures, made up of various stories, trends, and underlying factors, allow participants to consider systemic risks and opportunities that could emerge from a certain set of choices. This activity builds participants' futures muscle and prepares them to examine and more closely consider their actions, decisions, and processes in an anticipatory manner.

Session 3: Scenario immersion

This session builds on the insights gained from exploring key trends and the potential implications and interconnections of these trends through the futures wheel. It leads participants to create their own future scenarios or engage with already developed ones. By encouraging participants to consider the systemic opportunities and risks of these scenarios, alongside the trends at play and their manifestations, the session aims to broaden futures thinking and cultivate foresight capabilities.

What are scenarios?

Scenarios are stories that describe possible futures by exploring the interplay of different factors shaping those futures. By presenting different possible futures, scenarios offer an important way to grapple with future uncertainty.

We outline **two approaches** to exploring scenarios and offer **additional resources** for creating your own scenarios. As a facilitator, choose one of the below options based on your objectives and your group's capacity to engage. The activities vary in duration and level of intensity, so we advise you to read through them all before deciding which approach is the best fit.

- 1. Short version:** The first approach involves using three 'ParEvo' scenarios created from the outcomes of the exercise 'A history of civic space, 2024–2034'. These scenarios are designed to enable the participants to quickly delve into examining the opportunities and challenges facing the civic and civil society operating space and develop strategies accordingly. This approach allows newcomers to easily engage with the concept of futures thinking without needing to create their own scenarios.
- 2. Medium version:** The second approach provides a 2x2 matrix template to develop your own scenarios using key uncertainties that the participants identify. This exercise will help your group delve deeper into their unique challenges and develop tailored scenarios that address their specific needs. This approach is suitable for groups with more experience and time as well as an interest in creating future scenarios.
- 3. Long(er) version:** The third approach provides links to external materials that outline selected future scenario building techniques, offering different ways to design your own scenarios and expand your skills as a futures facilitator.

3.1 Scenario immersion using outcomes of the ParEvo exercise: 'A history of civic space, 2024–2034'



Objectives

This session is intended to allow participants to build on and work with already developed future scenarios from the ParEvo exercise 'A history of civic space, 2024–2034'. This approach enables participants to leverage existing scenario frameworks, which saves time and fosters a deeper exploration of future possibilities. Consider running this session if your goal is to allow participants to focus their efforts on analysis and strategic planning, leading to insightful discussions and decision-making processes.



What is ParEvo and 'A history of civic space, 2024–2034'?

ParEvo is a method of exploring possible futures (or histories) using a participatory evolutionary process ('ParEvo'). The process fed into creating ICSCentre's '**A history of civic space, 2024–2034**', which includes 109 unique generated stories about the future, each offering distinct possibilities, opportunities, and challenges. Written by a core group of 15 civil society participants and commented on by a group of commentators from a wide range of demographics and backgrounds, the storylines were created through eight iterations of storytelling. The [ParEvo report](#) outlines key themes that emerged across the stories, presents actionable ideas seeded by the stories, and outlines strategies for enabling futures thinking.

For this session, three scenarios were crafted by condensing three storylines from the ParEvo exercise 'A history of civic space, 2024–2034'. The participants in the ParEvo exercise were requested to tag their stories as likely or unlikely, as well as desirable or undesirable. We chose to create the scenarios from three storylines that were identified as: 1) likely and desirable; 2) likely but undesirable; and 3) unlikely but desirable. These scenarios serve as the foundation for the following discussion.



Tips

Each of these scenarios contains a lot of information; therefore, we recommend allocating enough time to read the selected scenario thoroughly. If possible, divide participants into three groups and have each group work on one scenario. If you have a large group, you can have parallel groups working on the same scenario.



How to run it?

Duration:
~85–95 mins

- Materials:**
- pens
 - flip chart paper
 - 'ParEvo scenarios' template

Setup:
Divide the group into teams of 4–6 people. If you have already conducted the trends exploration or the futures wheel session, maintain the same groups.

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	Introduce and summarise the selected set of scenarios with the caveat that they are not forecasts nor indicative of the future.	Provide clarity around terminology and process
5'	Share the scenarios with the groups (1 scenario per table). If you have a large cohort, you can have more than one group exploring the same scenario.	
40'–50'	<p>In groups, ask the participants to explore the scenarios using the following questions, and map the answers on flip chart paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What signs of this future do you see in the present? What trends are present? ■ What is different from today? What is missing? ■ What risks does this scenario hold for the civic space? ■ What opportunities does this scenario hold for the civic space? <p>Make sure that at least half the allotted time is spent on identifying risks and opportunities.</p>	Immerse and identify features of possible futures

HORIZON 3

<p>20'</p>	<p><i>Optional</i></p> <p>If you have more than one group working on the same scenario, ask the matching scenario groups to join tables and exchange insights and gaps.</p> <p>Ask the participants to jointly produce an asset on flip chart paper for each scenario that sums up the risks or opportunities of the scenario (e.g., a headline, a drawing, or a tweet). Encourage them to be creative!</p>	<p>Test assumptions</p> <p>Create an asset based on each scenario</p>
<p>15'</p>	<p>In plenary, ask the scenario groups to share back their key insights and present the asset they created.</p>	



3.2 Scenario immersion using a 2x2 matrix



Objectives

This session is designed to help participants generate scenarios using a 2x2 matrix and consider the potential impacts of these futures for them and their organisations.

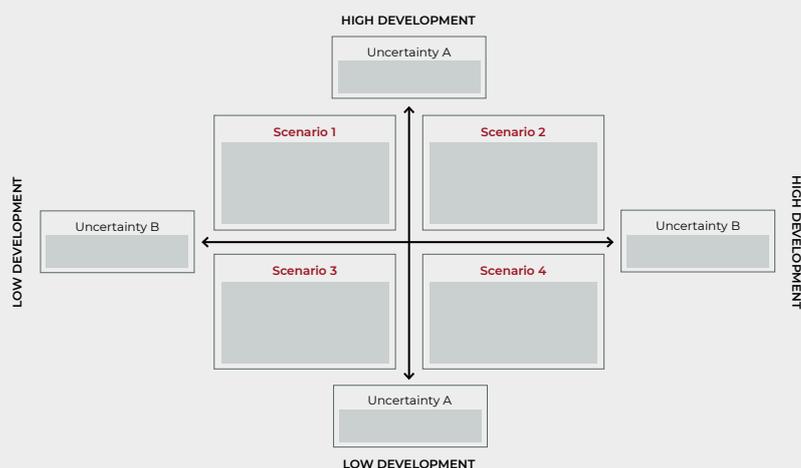


What is a 2x2 matrix?

The **2x2 matrix** is one of the most widely used methods to create scenarios in a strategic foresight process. It offers a simple yet powerful and structured approach to create a set of four possible futures that consider the interplay of critical uncertainties and their interconnections.

How to create a 2x2 matrix?

The 2x2 matrix is based on two uncertainties. The four cells of the matrix represent four different combinations of these uncertainties. Critical uncertainties can include issues such as civic space, centralised power, economy, or governance. This is the most challenging part of the exercise, as you can only pick two critical uncertainties to form the matrix. Aim to identify large societal forces which are both uncertain and have the potential to drive widespread change. Once you have identified the uncertainties, ask the participants to create a basic scaffolding of a scenario in each of four cells. Building on this scaffolding, the group can create scenarios as short as a couple of sentences or as long as a couple of pages, depending on how far you want them to develop the scenarios.



Why use the 2x2 matrix method?

- It generates scenarios that are qualitatively different from one another in a logical, deductive, non-random way.
- It assures that the critical uncertainties will drive change in all scenarios.
- It is best suited to explore macro-level uncertainties, such as economic growth, democratic space, technological change, or worldview.
- It allows for consistency of tone and subject matter across four scenarios.



Tips

- The scenarios should be simple but emergent and consider what events could have led to that future.
- Avoid “most likely” scenarios. While all scenarios should be plausible and nuanced, encourage the group to think outside the box and be imaginative.
- The scenarios generated in this exercise will be a first draft. The exercise should be followed by a few more iterations and scenario testing with a panel of colleagues/experts who were not part of the scenario creation process. We recommend looking at sets of scenarios created by other organisations to understand the potential breadth and focus of your scenarios.
- You can repeat this exercise to explore the interplay of different critical uncertainties.



How to run it?

Duration:
~200–220 mins

Materials:

- pens
- '2x2 matrix' template
- filled-out example

Setup:
Divide the group into four teams. If the group is large, split into eight teams.

HORIZON 3

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	Introduce the 2x2 matrix as a structured process to create future scenarios and the objective of the session, which is to explore the interplay of critical uncertainties.	Provide clarity on terminology and process
10'	Use the trends prioritisation process to identify the two critical uncertainties which will form the axes of your matrix. If you do not have two already in mind, brainstorm a list of critical uncertainties with the group and choose two you would like to explore further.	Create a list of critical uncertainties with two prioritised
15'	Define your axes. Place the two uncertainties along an x- and y-axis with a high end and low point to create two poles. You could look at weak vs. strong expression of the uncertainty or increased vs. decreased uncertainty. For example, central governance vs. decentralised governance or high economic growth vs. economic recession.	Map two uncertainties on the 2x2 matrix
20'	You now have four distinct quadrants, each with a different combination of uncertainties. For each scenario, do the following together with the participants: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Come up with a catchy title that makes the scenario in each quadrant distinct and memorable. 2. Write a sentence or two about each scenario – what does the interplay of the two critical uncertainties imply for the world? 	Develop a matrix with 4 permutations in the 4 quadrants Each quadrant provides the core logic for a distinct scenario
30'–40'	In each of the four groups, ask the participants to craft a story or narrative for one quadrant set within a chosen time horizon (e.g., 5, 10, or 20 years in the future), using the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What are CSOs working towards in this future? ■ What are some direct and indirect outcomes of the uncertainties? ■ What other trends are influencing this future? ■ Who are the main stakeholders impacted in this future? ■ What societal norms or values underlie this future? ■ What does the global political and environmental landscape look like? Ask participants to provide a title for the narrative.	Create 4 scenarios, one per group

HORIZON 3

15'	In plenary, ask the groups to share back the title and key features of the scenario created.	
20'	<p>Exchange scenarios between groups to allow a round of iterations and changes. Prompt groups to provide feedback by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Considering what might be missing in the scenario ■ Considering any biases/assumptions that are impacting the scenario ■ Considering any concerns with how the events of the scenario emerged – any missing developments/changes that would affect the scenario? 	Test assumptions and biases
20'	Return the scenario to the group that created it. In the original scenario creation groups, encourage participants to consider iterations and changes suggested and make edits to the scenario.	
30'–40'	<p>Once you have finalised the scenarios, create a new set of four groups and ask them to explore one of the created scenarios using the following questions. Map the answers on flip chart paper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What signs of this future do you see in the present? What trends are present? ■ What is different from today? What is missing? ■ What risks does this scenario hold for the civic space? ■ What opportunities does this scenario hold for the civic space? <p>Make sure that at least half the allotted time is spent on identifying risks and opportunities.</p>	Immerse and identify features of preferred futures
20'	Ask the participants to produce an asset on flip chart paper that sums up the risks or opportunities of their scenario (e.g., a headline, a drawing, or a tweet). Encourage them to be creative!	Create an asset based on each scenario
15'	In plenary, ask groups to share back their key insights and present the asset they created.	

3.3 Scenario immersion: External resources



Objectives

This section offers a range of external materials to support you as a facilitator to develop your own scenarios and expand your futures skills. The aim of these materials is to support you to employ a tailored scenarios process for your cohort and their needs while strengthening your capabilities to design and facilitate a futures session.



Tips

We have selected a few resources for you to explore and explained how you might wish to use them. Read through the list of methodologies and select the one(s) that most suit your needs.

1. Scenario archetypes developed by futurist Jim Dator

What is it?

Developed by Jim Dator, scenario archetypes are overarching images of four alternative futures: *continued growth*, *collapse*, *discipline*, and *transformation*. These can be described as follows:

- a. Continued growth: further status quo growth, also known as ‘business as usual’
- b. Collapse: system degradation or failure modes as crises emerge
- c. Discipline: behaviours to adapt to growing internal or environmental limits
- d. Transformation: new technology, business, or social factors that disruptively change the system

How can you use it?

These archetypal scenarios offer a base for developing your own scenarios and exploring the mindsets present, and they can be adapted based on your needs and context. Forum for the Future used these scenarios as inspiration for their ‘[Future of Sustainability 2020](#)’ report. In this report, the four futures were used to create possible trajectories and explore the worldviews and mindsets that could contribute to enabling a particular future.

2. The Strategic Foresight Book by IFRC Solferino Academy

What is it?

This toolkit helps you to apply strategic foresight tools, from writing scenarios to exploring tools such as future personas. You can use this book to explore more futures tools if it suits your needs.

How can you use it?

Chapter 18 of the toolkit is dedicated to preparing and writing scenarios and provides a 'recipe' for creating scenarios. It also outlines the following key principles to consider for a fruitful scenario crafting process:

- Scenarios must be plausible while challenging and stretching our imagination.
- They must be different from each other rather than building on one another.
- The narrative of the scenario must flow and be consistent, and it must not undermine itself.
- The scenario should be useful in supporting decision makers to answer their question(s).

3. Futures Thinking in Asia and the Pacific by Asian Development Bank

What is it?

This handbook compiles the experiences of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in running futures and foresight workshops with government experts. It includes various tools used in futures thinking and potential exercises, including scenario creation. ADB created the handbook based on their experience working with several governments and global organisations, such as the European Commission. This resource is useful if you are keen to understand how scenarios (and other futures tools) can be used with policymakers in different contexts.

How can you use it?

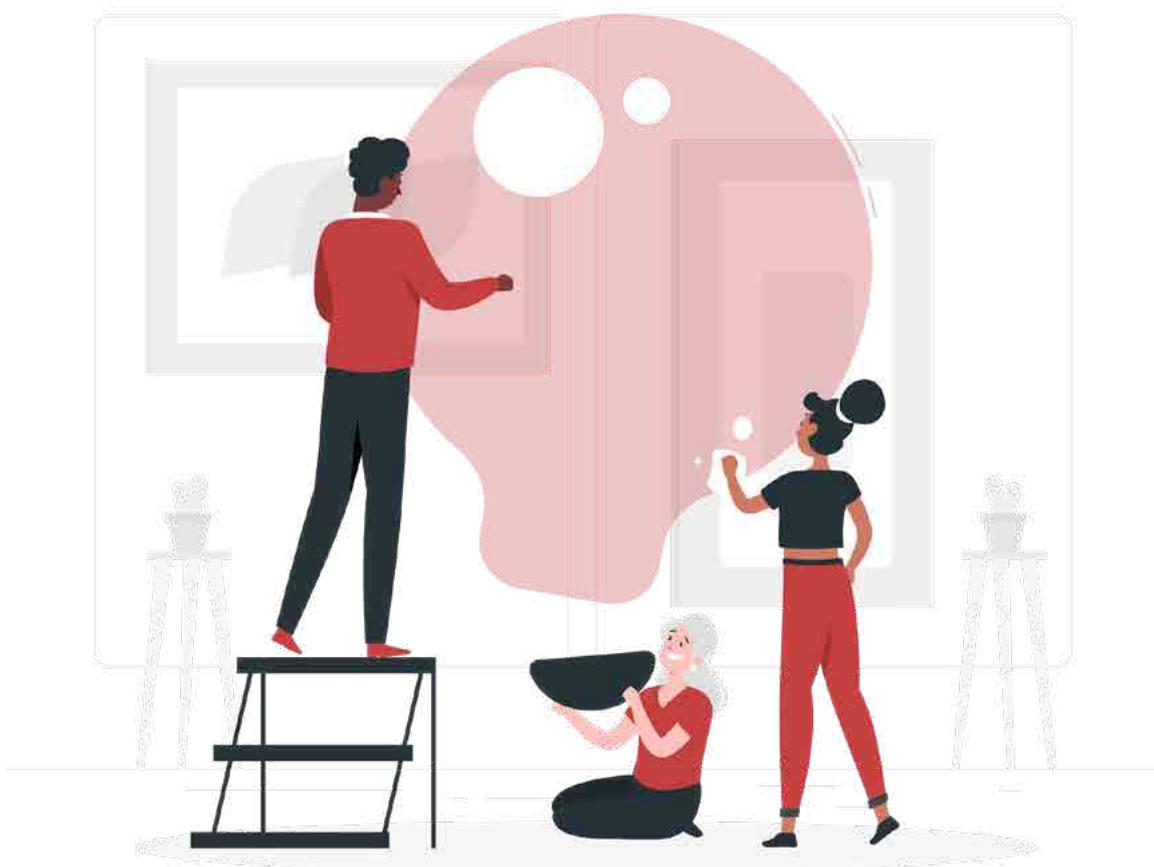
ADB divides scenarios into four categories similar to Dator's archetypal scenarios. Here, each scenario is defined by a progression of change to show how different each scenario is from the other scenarios.

You can use this structure to build a vision of the desired future and support potential strategic directions.

The four categories are:

- a. No change: A business-as-usual approach with no change to the status quo
- b. Marginal change: A small amount of change from the status quo, but not enough to shift systemic patterns
- c. Adaptive change: Changes are made and begin to adapt to the future we think might be occurring
- d. Radical change: Explores major disruptions and events which uproot and change the mainstream

Ask the groups to be as detailed as possible when writing their scenarios. This might involve describing the scenarios through role playing, pictures, or written descriptions. While writing the scenarios, it is important to consider which points of view have been left out in developed strategies and why. Consider whether these omissions were intentional.



Bridging the gap: Horizon 2

What is it about?

Sessions 4, 5, and 6 aim to bridge the gap between Horizon 1 and Horizon 3. They provide a three-layered approach to identifying actions at the sectoral, organisational, and individual level that would put civil society on a path to Horizon 3.

Intended outcome

These sessions help participants examine and identify opportunities within the civil society sector that they had not previously considered. The three-pronged approach allows participants to recognise the need for sectoral action that they and their organisations may directly or indirectly contribute to. Participants walk away from these sessions with agency, understanding certain actions they can take within their role and its constraints.

Session 4a: Brainstorming and prioritising sector-wide actions



Objectives

This session intends to move participants from considering possible futures to considering how those futures could be realised or addressed through resources, actions, and mindsets in the present day. The immersive aspect provides a space for participants to surface ideas for increasing the civil society sector’s anticipatory capacity for shocks, and it also encourages thinking about newer opportunities, ways of doing, and collaborating.



Tips

This session was initially designed for a group of representatives from multiple organisations across the civil society sector (comprising of international and national civil society organisations working on human rights, humanitarian, development, and social justice issues, as well as civil society networks and philanthropic actors). If your group includes colleagues from a single organisation, we still encourage you to run this activity. It is important that the participants consider what the wider civil society sector is doing and what is needed from the sector as a whole before taking an organisational focus.



How to run it?

Duration:
~100 mins

- Materials:**
- pens
 - paper

Setup:
Divide the group into teams of 6–7 people

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	Reiterate key highlights captured by the groups from the scenarios. Ask participants to discuss what the civil society sector can do to strengthen capacity around transforming the sector in the present day, given the scenarios discussed.	Remind participants of key points from the scenarios

HORIZON 2

40'	<p>In groups of 6–7 people, ask participants to answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How could the civil society sector enable the opportunities or avoid the risks from the scenarios? ■ What would be needed to do this (e.g., resources, collaborations, actions)? ■ Are there any established opportunities or emerging ideas that civil society could draw on to enable opportunities or minimise risks? <p>Ask participants to be generative and diverge initially. After 20 minutes, ask groups to narrow down to three key high-level actions that have the most potential to transform the sector.</p>	<p>Provide generative space to surface existing and new ways of thinking and doing</p> <p>Prioritise actions with the most potential</p>
25'	<p>In plenary, ask groups to share the three key actions identified and why they selected them.</p>	
5'	<p>As a facilitator, capture and categorise key actions into sector-wide action areas that have emerged.</p>	<p>Identify action areas that organisations could align with</p>
5'	<p>Ask participants to choose an action area that they are keen to accelerate and that is relevant to their organisation's focus.</p>	
20'	<p>Move the participants into action groups based on their selected action area. In action groups, ask participants to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What can the civil society sector do to enable or realise the full potential of this action area? How? 	<p>Generative space to go deep and granular on a specific action area</p>

Session 4b: Moving from sectoral towards organisational actions



Objectives

This session intends to move participants from thinking about the role of the civil society sector as a whole towards what *their* organisation can do to drive efforts related to a particular action area.



Tips

If you are running this session with participants from a single organisation, we recommend ensuring people are grouped with individuals from different functions. Diversity of thought will support a more inclusive action planning process.



How to run it?

Duration:
~45–55 mins

Materials:

- pens
- paper

Setup:
Keep the groups organised in their action themes, as per the previous exercise. If an action group exceeds 5–6 people, divide it into two parallel groups.

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	Introduce the exercise; participants remain in their action groups.	
20'–30'	In action groups, ask participants to answer the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within the organisation you work for, what can you do to activate this action area and how? ▪ How are you engaging the people for whom you are working to create positive change (e.g., participatory processes, agency, needs, communication)? 	Participants position themselves and their organisation(s) to examine their agency and capabilities
20'	In plenary, ask groups to share key insights from their action area.	Provide an overview of possibilities and opportunities

Session 5: Organisational action planning



Objectives

This session aims to develop the ideas from the previous sector-level discussions (alternatively, this session can be used to build on the scenarios discussions in Session 3) and consider more tangible actions at the organisational level. It enables participants to think beyond what currently exists and offers a generative space to elicit and inspire new (and more ambitious) actions for their organisation(s). This session does not focus on committing to new ideas but on generating them.



Tips

When thinking about actions at the organisational level, ask participants to consider tangible outputs such as partnerships (existing and new), resources, value propositions, monitoring and impact evaluations, and timelines.

You can run this session even if you skipped the sector-level activity (Session 4). In that case, ask participants to discuss actions their organisation can take to enable the opportunities or avoid the risks from the scenarios.



How to run it?

Duration:
~35–65 mins

Materials:

- pens
- 'Organisational action planning A' template
(or 'Organisational action planning B' template if you skipped Session 4)

Setup:
Keep the groups organised in their action themes, as per the previous exercise. If an action group exceeds 5–6 people, divide it into two parallel groups.

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
5'	Introduce the exercise and organise the group into pairs or small teams of three people.	
30'	Ask participants to fill out the “Organisational action planning” template in their groups. Discuss potential actions which could be of interest to the organisation.	Generate organisational action(s)
30'	<i>Optional:</i> Each pair or small team shares their action plan summary with another pair or small team which provides peer review, feedback, and questions.	Provide peer feedback and ideas



Session 6: Individual action planning



Objectives

This session aims to further develop participants' thinking about the transformative actions needed and, importantly, what *their* role and agency is in enabling these actions. It provides a reflective space for participants to recognise what actions they can take and encourages a sense of accountability moving forward.



Tips

We encourage you to ask participants to reflect on their 1–2 immediate next steps. Ask them to consider what is feasible and a good fit for them to lead on, given their current role and capacity within their organisation. It is not necessary for participants to commit to a big action, but encourage them to commit to smaller activities that have a high likelihood of occurring and may lead to further impacts later.

As this is a reflective session, you may want to organise the room so people can spread out during the activity. For example, are they able to work outside? Can you play light music in the background?



How to run it?

Duration:
~50–65 mins

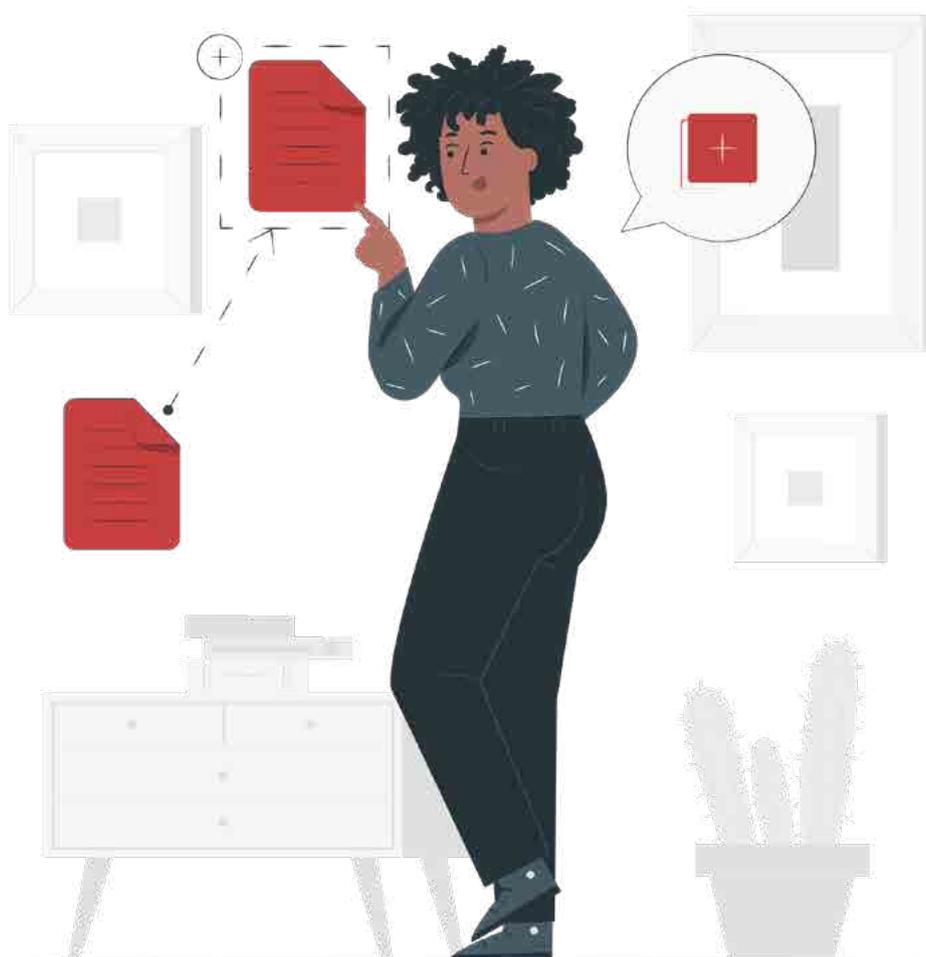
- Materials:**
- pens
 - sticky notes
 - 'Individual action planning' template

Setup:
None

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
40'	<p>Having explored actions at the sector and organisation levels, ask participants to reflect on individual action and agency.</p> <p>Each participant individually fills out the 'Individual action planning' template. They can discuss their actions in pairs or small groups if they want to.</p> <p>Ensure that the participants consider a timeframe for their actions (e.g., short, medium, or long-term).</p>	<p>Examine the participants' positionality and sphere of influence to capture actions they can contribute to</p>

HORIZON 2

<p>10'</p>	<p>Ask individuals to take a sticky note and write down 1-2 immediate next steps and when they will take them. Post the sticky notes on a wall so everyone can see and read them.</p>	<p>Capture the range of actions generated in the room</p>
<p>15'</p>	<p><i>Optional:</i> Cluster individual actions to form pairs or small groups for further peer exchange (after the event).</p>	<p>Provide peer support to help participants realise their actions</p>



Follow-up session: Post-workshop check-in



Objectives

The aim of this session is to check in with participants after the workshop to see if they are making progress on the individual and organisational actions captured in Sessions 5 and 6. If they are having difficulty taking action, this session provides a space to identify obstacles and seek assistance in addressing them.



Tips

- This is a session for participants to support one another in progressing their actions. The intent is not to make anyone feel bad or uncomfortable for not taking actions, but rather to offer peer support and resources. You may want to explain this purpose upfront and ask participants to reflect on their actions and potential positives and negatives regarding their actions prior to this session.
- Prior to the workshop, invite 2–3 participants who had expressed clear action plans for the next 3–6 months to share first to create a safe and brave space for others.



How to run it?

Duration:

~75 mins
in-person or
virtual

Materials:

- pens
- flip chart paper if in person or virtual whiteboard if online

Setup:

Plenary, then splitting into smaller groups

	Flow of activities	Outcomes
10'	Ask participants to bring their individual planning templates to this session. Start with a short reflection on the prior workshop. What has changed in their lives and the world since then?	Re-enter the workshop space after some time away and revisit actions

FOLLOW-UP

<p>15'</p>	<p>Ask individuals to share roses and thorns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Roses: What have been positive results of some of your actions ('roses')? ■ What have been some obstacles to taking actions ('thorns')? <p>Write these in general terms on a flip chart or a virtual whiteboard.</p>	<p>Identify obstacles to action</p>
<p>30'</p>	<p>Ask individuals to work on the problem statements/obstacles they find most challenging or most disruptive and form small groups around each of these.</p> <p>Task each small group with turning the problem/obstacle into a 'How might we?' (HMW) question and offering solutions to answer the HMW.</p> <p>HMW questions are small questions that open up ideation on a broad number of solutions. The problem is framed without proscribing a solution or assigning blame to enable discussion of a full range of options.</p> <p>Some examples of HMW questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ HMW get funders to design funding strategies in partnership with the civil society actors they fund to ensure a more systemic approach and funder-civil society alignment? ■ HMW design shared indicators of success and an adaptive and emergent road map that is shaped by all? ■ HMW create a culture in which CSOs actively share their learnings, failures, and perspectives? 	<p>Generate solutions to overcome obstacles</p>
<p>20'</p>	<p>Have each group share back their HMW and proposed solutions. In plenary, hold space for the group to discuss ways they might support each other or seek support from other organisations to implement their actions.</p> <p>One way to structure this conversation is through the language of asking/offering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What is each participant asking for in terms of support to achieve actions, either individual or group? ■ What can each participant offer in terms of help to individuals or the group? 	<p>Reinforce support to realise their actions</p>

NEXT STEPS

Now that you have explored the activities in the toolkit and started considering how you might implement them, it is crucial to think about how you can continue to develop a futures mindset and ensure its continuous presence in your endeavours.

The exercises included in this toolkit can be used separately or in combination to help you explore trends, visualise various future scenarios, and understand the implications of your thinking on the civil society sector and your organisation. How might you begin to embed this thinking within your organisation beyond the individual sessions? Remember, you don't need to be an expert to try out these methodologies.

Part of having a futures mindset means approaching things with an open mind, and that includes the design of your futures sessions. Start small by integrating futures thinking into your regular planning sessions or team meetings. Encourage open dialogue and diverse perspectives to enrich your understanding of potential risks and opportunities. As you become more comfortable with these practices, you will find that futures thinking becomes a natural part of your decision-making process. Remember that trial and error is a valuable part of the process, so we encourage you to experiment with the different activities and methods mentioned in this toolkit to see what works best for you and your group.

Engaging in futures practices does not require vast resources or deep expertise, but it does require us to build the muscle of keeping an eye on the horizon. Stay informed by consuming news, reading about local and global changes, and gathering information from a variety of sources. Pay particular attention to sources that can help you spot emerging trends and early indicators of changes, and consider how the world might be different in the years to come.

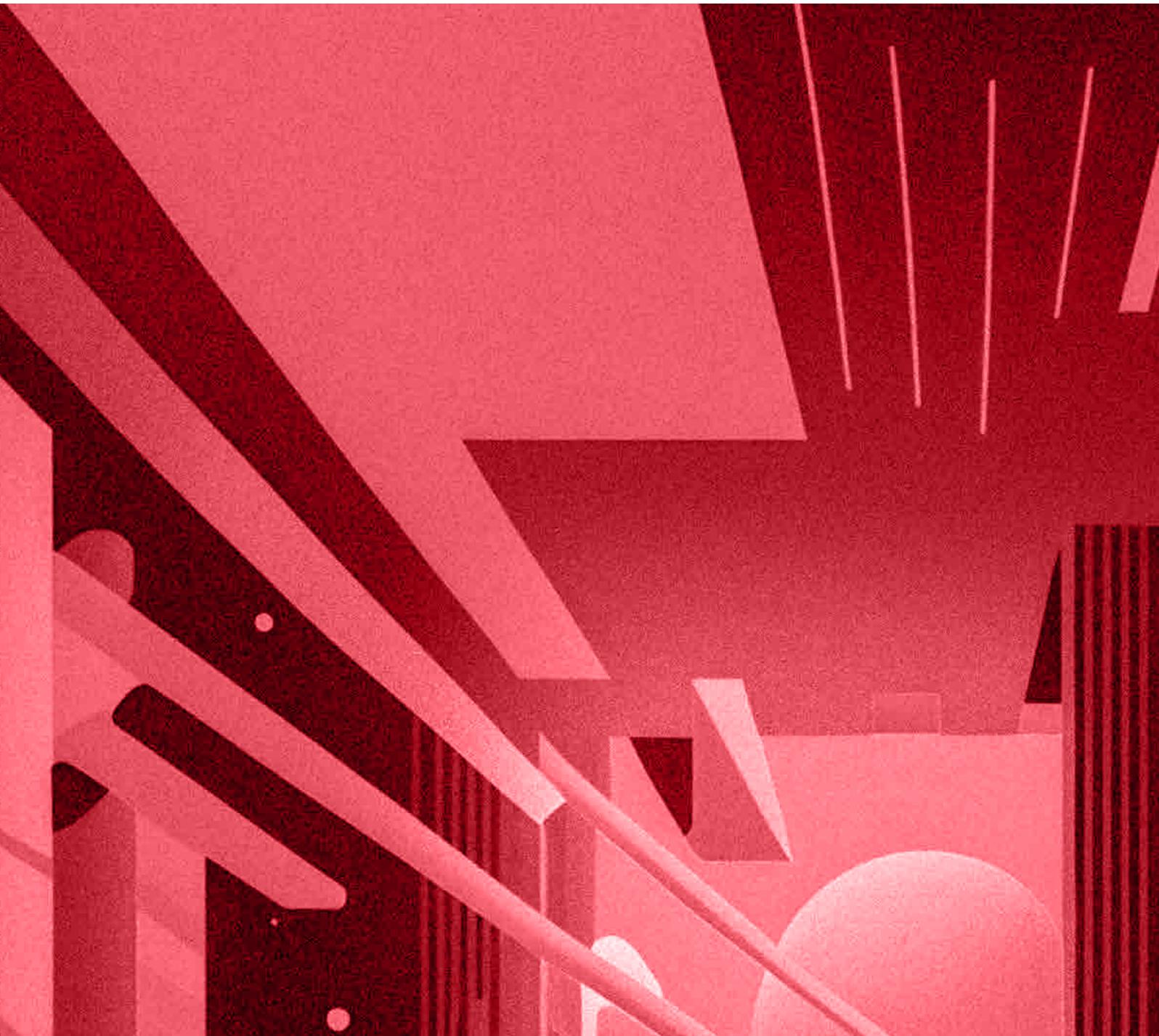
To ensure that you keep actively thinking about the future and envisioning a better one, continue to question dominant narratives or stories about the future, and think about who that future benefits and who it is for. What power dynamics do we need to be aware of? Whose voices are included and whose are left out? Who gets to imagine and plan for the future? Such questioning can ensure that we are creating a future that is just and equitable for all.

In the civil society sector, it is often easier to identify challenges or hurdles than opportunities. Similarly, futures thinking can lead us to be preoccupied only with managing risks and anticipating threats in our path forward.

However, futures thinking can also offer the powerful perspective of imagining all that is possible, bringing to life the larger missions we are working toward that may feel distant when dealing with immediate crises. Embrace this perspective of potential societal transformation, and use it to build your own agency and resilience in navigating this complex work.

*'Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.'*

— *Arundhati Roy*



ABOUT US

This toolkit was commissioned by the International Civil Society Centre within the framework of its initiative 'Anticipating futures for civil society operating space', part of the Solidarity Action Network (SANE). It was written by Siddhi Ashar, Mareyah Bhatti from Forum for the Future, and Patricia Mugenzi, an independent consultant. It was edited by Alisha Bhagat from Forum for the Future and Eva Gondor from the International Civil Society Centre.

The **International Civil Society Centre** was founded in 2007 to support international civil society organisations (ICSOs) in maximising their impact for a sustainable and more equitable world. The Centre's mission is to strengthen the impact and resilience of these organisations to support people changing their world for the better. It is owned by 14 of the largest ICSOs active in areas such as human rights, social justice, humanitarian, and environmental issues. The Centre focuses on strengthening futures thinking within its Scanning the Horizon community of civil society future thinkers and strategists and its initiative 'Anticipating futures for civil society operating space', developed by the Solidarity Action Network (SANE). SANE aims to strengthen resilience and solidarity among civil society actors when faced with civic space restrictions or changing operating conditions, which includes strengthening their anticipatory capacities and future readiness.



Forum for the Future is a leading international sustainability non-profit, founded in 1996 with offices in New York, Mumbai, Singapore, and London. It works in partnership with business, governments, and civil society to accelerate the shift towards a just and regenerative future in which both people and the planet thrive. Through using a unique blend of futures and systems change thinking, it aims to stretch the ambition of its partners in three key areas: food, energy, and the purpose of business. The Future Centre is Forum's creative hub for applied futures, provocative and creative thought leadership, and open-sourced futures materials. It helps individuals and organisations leading change in key transitions ensure that their efforts contribute to transformative and systemic change.



Patricia Mugenzi is an experienced consultant in strategic foresight, specialising in geopolitical analysis and advisory roles with governmental organisations and civil society organisations in the humanitarian sector. Patricia has coordinated strategic foresight initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and supported further organisations in acquiring and integrating strategic foresight skills.

ANNEXES

Session 1: Trends exploration

Discuss in your group if there are any key trends missing among the trend cards. If yes, add the missing trends to the list with a short description, using the blank template below.

© All trend card illustrations and icons made by Freepik from www.flaticon.com



Fill out the cards digitally or print them out

ADDITIONAL TREND

Trend:

Who is affected?

Where is it happening?

Description:

ADDITIONAL TREND

Trend:

Who is affected?

Where is it happening?

Description:





ESCALATING GLOBAL DISRUPTIONS, CONFLICTS, AND WARS

Global disruptions, conflicts, and wars will likely escalate in both frequency and intensity, leading to widespread instability, massive displacement, and severe humanitarian emergencies. Civil society will confront overwhelming challenges as resources become increasingly strained and the demand for support skyrockets. This relentless turmoil will severely hinder efforts to promote peace, human rights, and development.



CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM AND EROSION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

In the coming years, we may witness a trend of increasing geopolitical tensions and a growing disregard for international agreements and norms by states. This erosion of agreements could stem from various factors, including shifts in global power dynamics, rising nationalism, and distrust in multilateral institutions. As countries prioritise their own interests over collective agreements, longstanding diplomatic frameworks and alliances may face strain. Treaties related to arms control, trade, climate change, and human rights could be undermined, leading to heightened tensions and instability on the international stage.



BACKSLIDING OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

The backsliding of liberal democracy is sweeping across all continents, manifesting in various forms such as shifts to the political right and the election of populist leaders with authoritarian tendencies. The erosion of democratic norms and the rise of authoritarianism could further restrict freedom of expression, association, and assembly, leading to an increase in threats and attacks on activists, and a decrease in the ability of civil society organisations to operate effectively. The voices of marginalised communities could be increasingly silenced, posing a serious challenge to the preservation of open and inclusive societies.



GLOBAL ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

A global economic downturn may further spark protests against rising prices and unemployment, potentially met by violent police or military responses. Fiscal crises may further prompt government narratives of “growth first” to justify regressive and repressive policies. Some civil society organisations will likely continue experiencing funding cuts from the government as anti-development sentiment will strengthen with the rising cost of living in donor countries.





GROWING INEQUALITY

Economic downturns are expected to impact civic space by exacerbating inequality, particularly among marginalised groups.

As these groups bear the brunt of economic hardships, including unemployment, reduced access to essential services, and increased poverty rates, civil society will face mounting pressure to advocate for targeted policies that address the specific needs of these communities. Moreover, the widening socio-economic gap will necessitate robust efforts from civil society to defend the rights and interests of marginalised groups, ensuring their inclusion in decision-making processes and policy development initiatives.



DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

While some regions face the challenge of rapidly aging populations, others experience significant youth bulges. Advocacy efforts will be crucial for developing policies that support healthy ageing, provide comprehensive elderly care services, and foster social inclusion. Simultaneously, it will be imperative for countries experiencing youth bulges to set policies to mitigate potential socio-economic issues.



CLIMATE INJUSTICE

The world will increasingly see large-scale environmental degradation, extreme weather events, food and water insecurity, and rising conflicts linked to the impacts of climate change. This crisis will inherently embody a dimension of climate injustice, as certain groups and regions are disproportionately affected by these challenges and possess limited resources to address climate change.

These disparities will exacerbate existing inequalities and underscore the urgent need for equitable solutions to tackle climate change.



FOOD AND WATER INSECURITY

Changes in climate patterns will continue to impact agricultural productivity and water availability, leading to increased food and water insecurity in many regions. This trend will exacerbate poverty and malnutrition, creating urgent challenges for civil society.

Civil society will need to advocate for sustainable, innovative agricultural practices, improved water management, and equitable resource distribution to support affected communities and build resilience to future climate impacts.





CLIMATE MIGRATION

Climate migration will escalate as climate change intensifies, displacing millions due to rising sea levels, extreme weather, and droughts. This mass movement will strain resources and infrastructure in receiving regions, creating significant social, economic, and political challenges. Civil society organisations will need to address migrants' needs, advocate for their rights, and promote sustainable solutions.



SECURITISATION

Securitisation – framing non-military issues as matters of national security – leads to a raft of regulations to control, curb, or crush civil society organisations, including prohibiting overseas funding in the name of countering terrorism or any other perceived foreign or internal security threat. Securitisation will likely impact civil society directly as well as indirectly through changing funding priorities.



DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

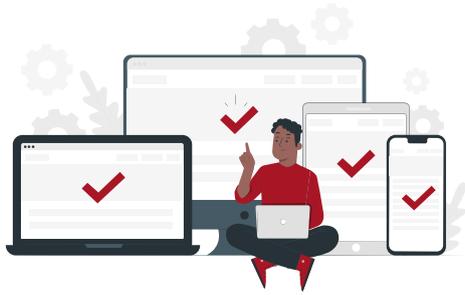
Digital authoritarianism will continue to rise as authoritarian regimes will use information technology to survey, repress, and manipulate domestic and foreign populations. The civic space will be further impacted by attempts to control free and open digital discourse, such as blocking access to the internet, censoring content, spreading disinformation, and co-opting social media and other online platforms.



TECH SOLUTIONISM

Tech solutionism manifests as the belief that every problem can be solved by using technology. In the face of complex systemic challenges, tech fixes and innovations in technology are promoted as a response. This trend also includes solution automation (i.e., handing solution generation over to artificial intelligence). Tech solutionism can prevent people from taking accountability for a problem and addressing its root cause.





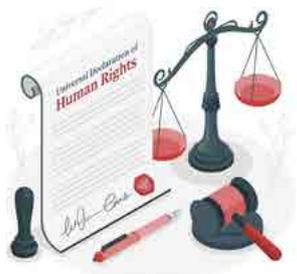
TECH ETHICS AND REGULATION

As technology continues to shape society in profound ways, civil society will play a crucial role in advocating for the ethical use of technology and the regulation of tech companies. Issues such as data privacy, algorithmic biases, and the impact of automation on jobs will be central to civil society's agenda.



DISINFORMATION

The spread of disinformation (false information intended to mislead) will increasingly be used to serve the divisive agendas of populist leaders. This tactic will aim to discredit civil society organisations and activists, hinder advocacy efforts, erode public trust, and exacerbate social divisions.



ANTI-RIGHTS GROUPS

The influence and power of civil society actors who advocate for regressive agendas (anti-rights groups) is becoming increasingly prominent. These groups often co-opt the language of rights to advance policies that restrict social justice causes. For instance, "freedom of speech" is used to justify hate speech against marginalised communities or "religious freedom" to oppose LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality. Specific instances include lobbying against anti-discrimination laws, spreading disinformation to undermine reproductive rights, and organising campaigns to roll back protections for immigrants and refugees. These tendencies also create a hostile environment for activists and organisations working to promote equality and protect these rights.



INFLUENCE OF CORPORATIONS

There is a rising impact of corporations supporting states to enforce crackdowns on civil society (for example, refusing bank accounts to civil society organisations or providing surveillance technology to governments) and replacing civil society organisations at public policy decision-making tables.





DECOLONISATION AND REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER

Demands for decolonisation and redistribution of power across the civil society sector are going beyond equality and diversity in the workplace to call for re-thinking the relationship between international and local civil society organisations and re-shaping the role of international civil society to empower and resource locally led decision-making.



NEW GENERATION OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A new generation of social movements is leaderless, youth-led, issue-based, and politically engaged, with massive mobilisation online and offline. Movements such as Black Lives Matter, MeToo, and the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests illustrate the power of civil society and the resilient plasticity of civic space. They also comprise and reflect the shifting landscape in which traditional civil society organisations could struggle to remain relevant.



INTERNAL DIVISION WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

Internal division within civil society and polarisation between certain groups are harming the advancement of nuanced and inclusive discussions and diminishing the power of the movement. In some cases, these divisions are leveraged by states to deflect criticism and discredit civil society, for example, by pitting climate activists against cost-of-living campaigners by blaming climate policies for rising energy costs.



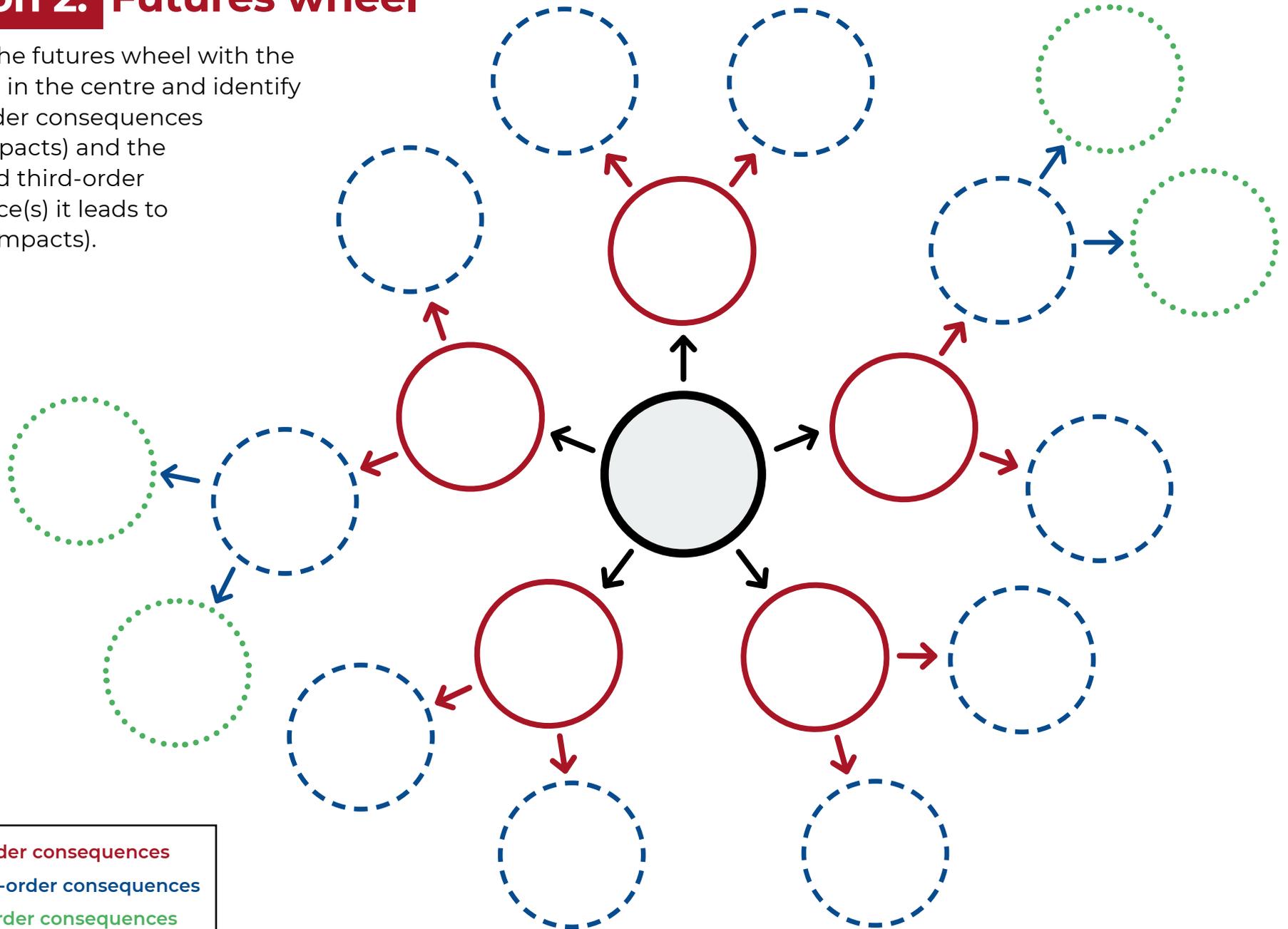
GROWING MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

In times of polycrisis, mental health is expected to decrease at the individual level, with a multitude of individual and societal impacts. Awareness of mental health issues and the importance of mental well-being will continue to grow, driven by factors such as increased advocacy for mental health services and the destigmatisation of mental illness. Additionally, the psychological well-being of activists facing harassment, intimidation, and violence for their work will receive increased attention, underscoring the need to integrate mental health into broader public health agendas and ensure access to mental health support for those at the forefront of social change.



Session 2: Futures wheel

Complete the futures wheel with the given trend in the centre and identify the first-order consequences (= direct impacts) and the second- and third-order consequence(s) it leads to (= indirect impacts).



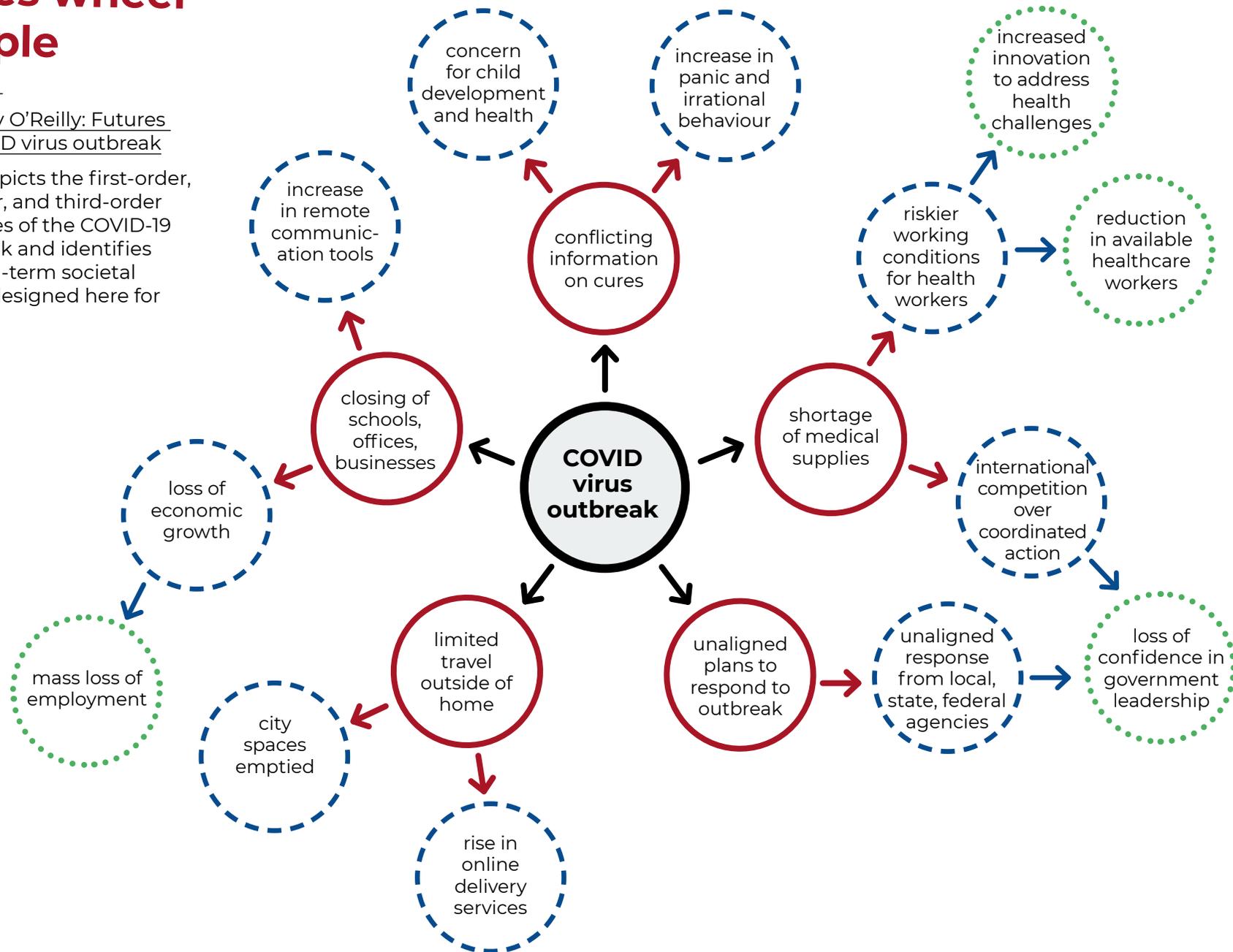
- first-order consequences
- - - second-order consequences
- ... third-order consequences



Futures wheel example

Source: Barry O'Reilly: Futures wheel – COVID virus outbreak

The visual depicts the first-order, second-order, and third-order consequences of the COVID-19 virus outbreak and identifies possible long-term societal impacts - redesigned here for this toolkit.



Session 3: Scenario immersion

Exercise:

Read through the given or developed scenario and explore the following questions in your group:

1

What signs of this future do you see in the present?
What trends are present?

2

What is different from today?
What is missing?

3

What risks or opportunities does this scenario hold for the civic space?

4

Produce an asset on flip chart paper that sums up the risks and opportunities from your scenario (e.g., a headline, a drawing or a tweet). Be creative!



Scenario 1: Fractured horizons

This is a world in which civil society found itself grappling, in 2024, with a severity of crises and mounting pressure to respond effectively. Despite civil society's efforts, resources to support social change remained scarce, often addressing only the symptoms rather than the root causes of problems. While growing networks of solidarity offered hope in crisis-stricken areas, governments in many regions challenged civil society, imposing regulations that hindered their work and fostered distrust.

These challenges prompted civil society actors to reflect on their approaches and seek better strategies for social change. However, in 2027, government and corporate use of artificial intelligence intensified, leading to increased surveillance of activists and disinformation campaigns. Communities became divided between those advocating for change, those choosing to remain silent, disinformers, and those succumbing to despair.

Divisions within communities were exacerbated, and this fragmentation was mirrored within civil society. Various factions emerged, each pursuing its own agenda, while some individuals, dispirited and discouraged, saw no value in organising at all. Dialogue between different groups was at a minimum.

However, a significant turning point occurred in May 2027, when the news of another global pandemic emerged. Initially dismissed as fake news, the pandemic served as a catalyst, compelling divided groups to reassess their roles and unite in response. By 2028, the pandemic had reignited a sense of purpose within civil society, reviving the motto of 'think globally, act locally'.

Civil society rapidly mobilised to respond to the pandemic, drawing upon lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis. This time, resources were efficiently allocated to local response efforts and advocacy initiatives aimed at influencing decision makers. As a result, early 2028 saw a decline in the pandemic's spread, instilling renewed confidence in civil society's capacity to learn and adapt.

In 2029, civil society actors remained optimistic, believing they could confront any challenges that arose and apply lessons learned to mitigate their impact. However, a series of mega-tsunamis that swept across the planet's entire coastline presented a humbling setback, causing widespread devastation and displacement of populations.

The process of recovery from the tsunamis proved arduous, with physical and social infrastructure alike in disarray. Yet, amidst the chaos, opportunities arose to reshape emerging societies. While some succumbed to the rule of warlords and gangs, others embraced a new form of governance known as 'social governance'.

In this model, former civil society organisations took on governing roles, combining direct democracy with self-government and prioritising community-led initiatives. By 2033, the world had undergone a profound transformation, with power decentralised and shared among local communities, social organisations, and international actors.

By 2034, new trends emerged, including community-led small states and institutionalised governments open to citizen participation. Valuable lessons were learned about the importance of flexibility in governance, community involvement in decision making, and the responsible use of artificial intelligence. Regional institutions emerged as a viable option for addressing regional disparities.



Scenario 2: From crises to collaboration

This is a world in which civil society faced, in 2024, a world plagued by crises and struggled to respond effectively amid mounting pressure. Scarce resources hindered efforts to address the underlying causes of issues, prompting a collective introspection to develop more inclusive and impactful approaches. This period marked the beginning of discussions on transformation and the imperative for action.

By 2025, civil society recognised the need for systemic changes to dismantle entrenched privileges, inequalities, and conflicts perpetuated by existing social and economic frameworks. Despite prevailing social systems rife with hierarchies and discrimination, progressive forces within civil society, business, and politics emerged as catalysts for change. Civil society formations delved into critical issues, proposing frameworks for systemic transformation and fostering global solidarity.

By 2027, the decolonisation of development empowered civil society to engage in open and honest discussions, highlighting the devastating impact of decisions made by wealthy nations on marginalised communities worldwide. Armed with irrefutable policy analysis and evidence, civil society advocated for sustainable strategies to build a more equitable world. Virtual technology and social media platforms facilitated communication with decision makers outside their traditional spheres, garnering recognition from stakeholders in the private sector and media.

However, the optimism of progress was abruptly interrupted in 2029 by a worldwide tsunami devastation, plunging affected regions into chaos and panic. Authoritarian regimes rose to prominence, offering immediate relief and control in exchange for reassurance and safety. In regions spared from the direct impact of the tsunami, defence mechanisms tightened as physical borders shifted, exacerbating divisions and retreating to negative tendencies amidst collective panic.

Despite the devastation, the catastrophe spurred innovation and resilience. New communication systems emerged, fostering community cooperation and support. In 2033, amidst rebuilding efforts, young people led initiatives prioritising environmental conservation and sustainable practices. Coastal cities implemented resilient structures, and a renewed emphasis was placed on renewable energy sources and equal rights.

Years later, in the aftermath of the tsunami, regional collaborations and youth-led civil society initiatives thrived, adapting to new operating models and prioritising tech-enabled solutions. While economic recovery was slow, localised funding sources reduced dependency on global donors.

Years later, in the aftermath of the tsunami, regional collaborations and youth-led civil society initiatives thrived, adapting to new operating models and prioritising tech-enabled solutions. While economic recovery was slow, localised funding sources reduced dependency on global donors. Some governments spearheaded global climate change reforms, while some countries, like China, pursued their own approaches, exerting significant influence on the global stage.

Despite setbacks, the post-tsunami era symbolised humanity's capacity to overcome adversity and build a more sustainable and equitable world. Through collaboration and innovation, civil society continued to champion social change, reaffirming its role as a driver of progress and resilience in the face of uncertainty.



Scenario 3: Echoes of turbulence

In 2024, the world was politically and socially unstable. Major elections in Russia, India, Mexico, the European Union, and the United States diverted attention from ongoing humanitarian crises like the conflict in Ukraine. Conservative and nationalist views were becoming more popular. Civil society was struggling because its usual supporters in the West were providing less support. But at the same time, there was a growing group of young people who were excited to make changes and didn't like how things were run by the current governments.

In 2025, young people shared ideas and organised themselves via internet. They even published a manifesto suggesting radical ideas like green dictatorships to fix environmental problems. Governments responded by watching young people more closely online and giving more money to youth-focused civil society organisations (CSOs) to stop protests. But when people found out that the government was funding some CSOs, their trust in these organisations dropped. The United States and the European Union started working together to create artificial intelligence tools to watch what people were doing online, putting civil society in a tough spot as they tried to defend human rights and democracy. Young people, climate activists, and tech experts worked together to make online spaces safe to organise.

By 2027, the green dictatorships were in place and had implemented major changes, but they came with problems nobody expected. In many countries, young green leaders took over and quickly made crucial changes to protect the environment, like shutting down coal plants. But these changes caused a lot of people to lose their jobs, and some countries had trouble getting enough energy.

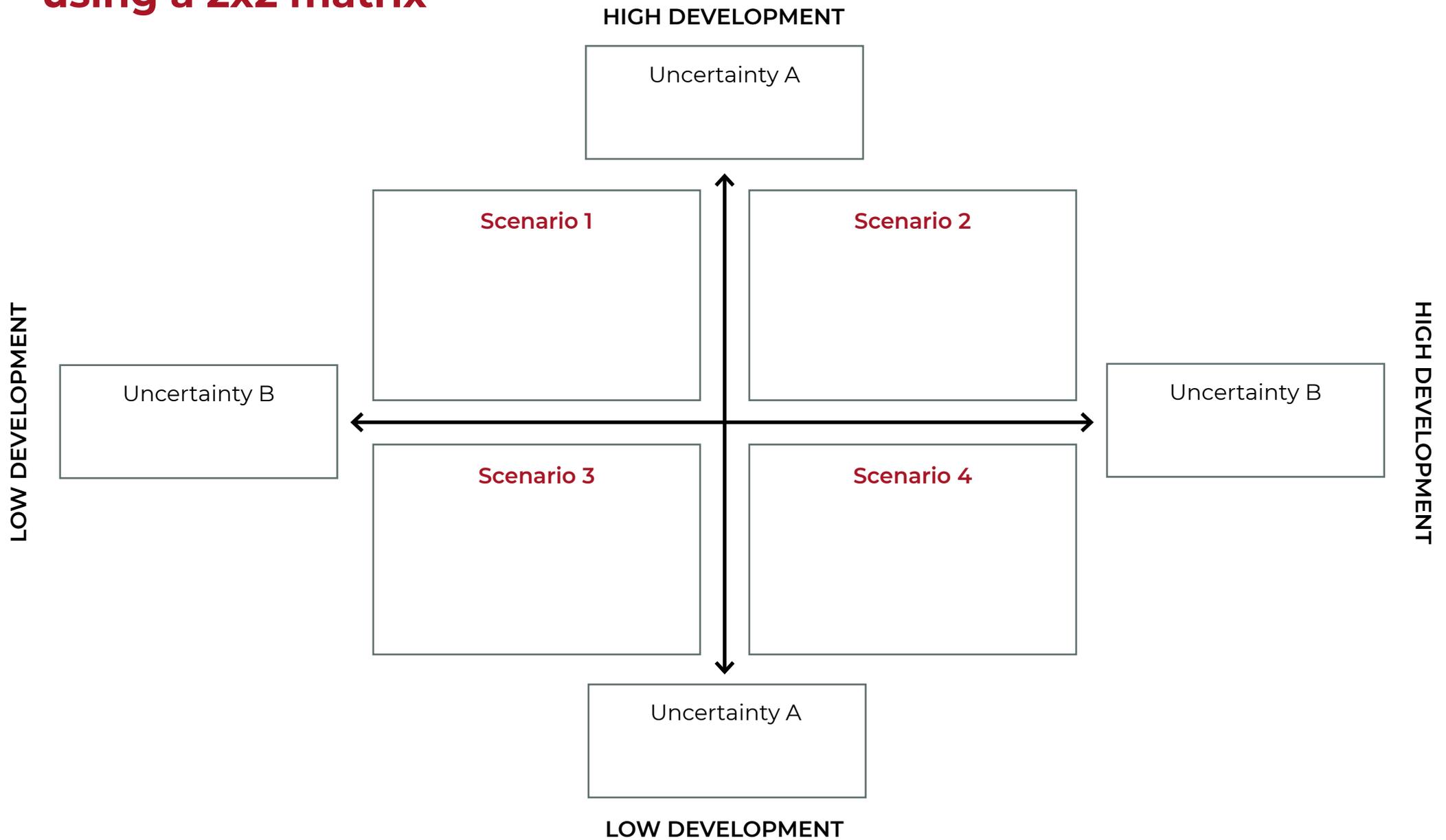
In 2028, even though some authoritarian governments let social enterprises operate, they still tried to stop civil society groups. But these groups used their connections and technology to keep fighting for human rights and democracy.

The catastrophic mega-tsunami of 2029 devastated coastal areas, destroying infrastructure and prompting a global reflection on life's fragility. While some communities united to rebuild, creating their own governments, others reverted to a feudal system, and city-states re-emerged. Some adopted primitive forms of democracy with direct community participation. Civil society changed: Some CSOs transformed into local governments, others specialised in meeting specific needs, and many disappeared. Those that survived became collectives, driven by the spirit of collective action for the public good.

By 2034, the major events of the past decade had led to a rise in populism and increased polarisation, primarily between the Global North and South but also within the evolving political landscapes of the East and West. Technology became the main tool for organising and responding to these challenges. However, CSOs struggled to balance the digitisation of networking with the need to localise efforts to serve immediate community needs. This tension was highlighted by their response to the tsunami, forcing them to rebalance their strategies. While global solidarity and transnational movements grew, young leaders faced the challenge of enacting change within historical power structures and often turned to radical approaches. Despite the need for leadership with a clear vision for the future, the individuals who filled these roles threatened the foundation of a hopeful future, casting a shadow over the prospect of global unity and progress.

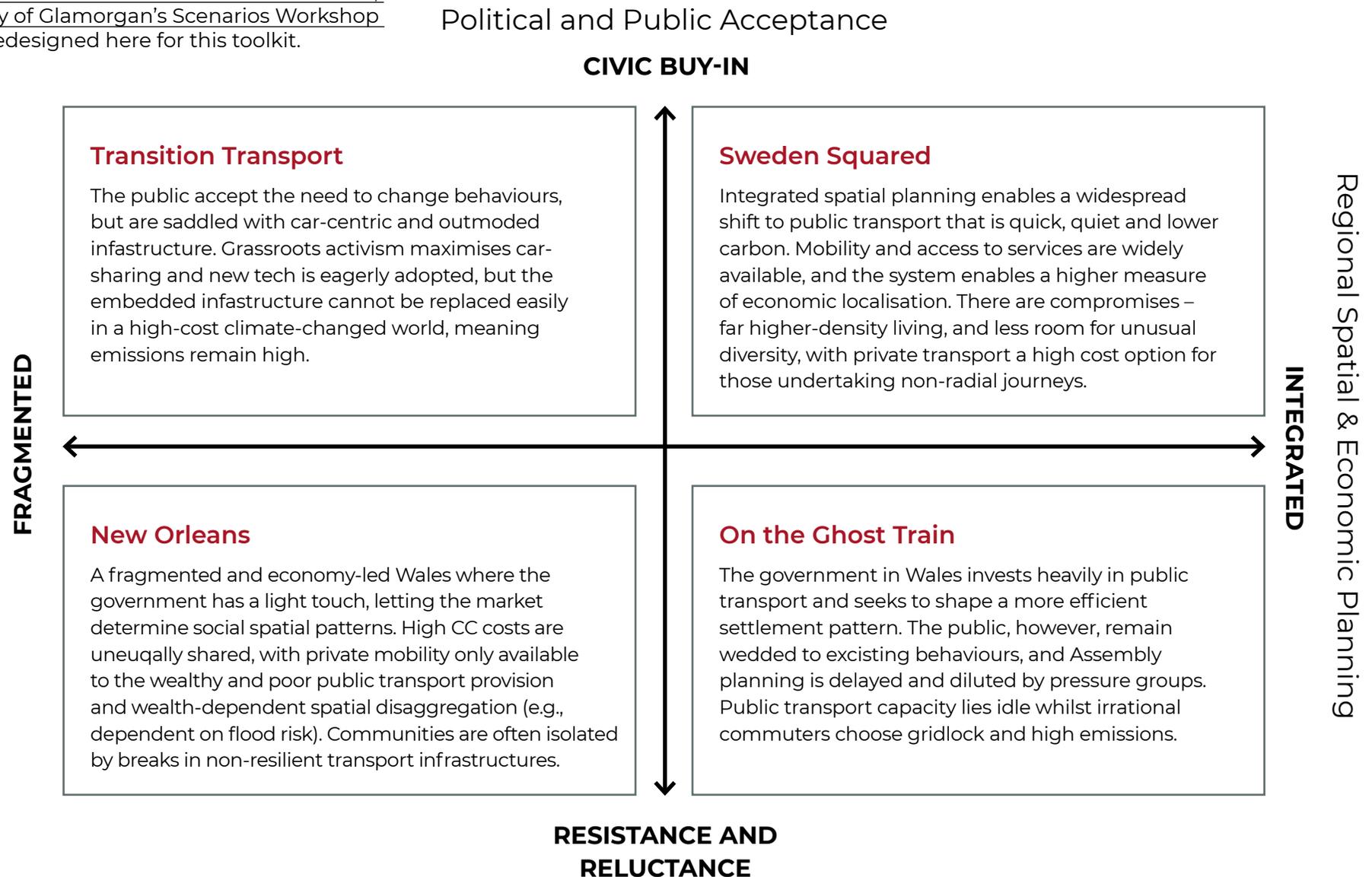


Scenario immersion using a 2x2 matrix



2x2 matrix example

Source: This 2x2 matrix was developed for the Climate Change Adaptation Conference in 2007 in Wales, and was created by the Wales Futures Network. It was provided as an example within Centre for Research in Futures and Innovation, University of Glamorgan's Scenarios Workshop Guide. Redesigned here for this toolkit.



Session 5: Organisational action planning A

Name(s) and organisation:

Exercise:

In pairs or small teams, discuss the following questions for your organisation and write down answers to the questions:

1

Given your organisation, which action mentioned in the last activity of Session 4 resonates the most?

2

Develop this action further:

What does success look like?

How would it be measured?



What needs to take place on a short-term and long-term basis?

3

Who needs to be involved internally and externally (e.g., colleagues or partners)?

4

Are there any existing barriers or risks?

5

How can you overcome these barriers or mitigate these risks?



Session 5: Organisational action planning B

* If you chose to skip Session 4 in the toolkit, please use this template for the activity.

Name(s) and organisation:

Exercise:

In pairs or small teams, discuss the following questions for your organisation and write down answers to the questions:

1 What actions can your organisation take to enable the opportunities and avoid the risks from the scenario discussed in Session 3?

2 Develop this action further:

What does success look like?

How would it be measured?



What needs to take place on a short-term and long-term basis?

3

Who needs to be involved internally and externally (e.g., colleagues or partners)?

4

Are there any existing barriers or risks?

5

How can you overcome these barriers or mitigate these risks?



Session 6: Individual action planning

* If you completed Session 5, please use this template to develop those ideas further as an individual. If you have not completed Session 5, please create a list of actions that you think might be needed. After that, prioritise from your wider list and refine.

Name:

Exercise:

Individually answer the following questions. Feel free to discuss in pairs or small groups!

1

What action(s) do *you* want to focus on and contribute to?

What action(s) feel the most impactful to maximise the potential of an opportunity or minimise a certain risk?

Once identified, consider the feasibility of them given your role in your organisation and sector. (Remember to consider short-, medium-, and longer-term actions)



2

What can you do in your role to drive this action(s)?

3

To what extent does this action align with your organisation's existing efforts?

If it doesn't align, what conditions are needed to enable this action?

4

What support will you need?

Who would you collaborate with to drive this action? (This could include individuals within your organisation, external actors, or even a fellow participant!)

5

Two next steps that you will take forward and when this will happen:

Step 1

Step 2

Date

Date





International
Civil Society
Centre

TOOLKIT FOR TOMORROW: ANTICIPATING CIVIL SOCIETY FUTURES

June 2024

IN COOPERATION WITH



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Get in touch

If you have any questions or feedback regarding the toolkit or are interested in collaborating with us, get in touch with Eva Gondor from the International Civil Society Centre at egondor@icscentre.org.