

A Landscape Analysis of the International Cooperation Sector:

A Tale of Crises, Contestations,
and Transformation

February 2024

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Acronyms

Abbreviation	Definition
NGO	Non-government organization
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the deep waves, global in scope and long-term in effect, that in some shape or form are re-shaping our 21st century world. These shockwaves and the interactions between them significantly affect the relationships and partnerships between countries, organizations, and communities. In 2023, the vision of global solidarity that underpins the international cooperation sector does not seem to be in question. But the current **system** of international cooperation raises significant concerns and doubts. The international cooperation system designed six decades ago is facing a return of “older” risks – social instability, stubborn inflation, trade wars, capital outflows from emerging markets, and geopolitical confrontation, which this generation’s international cooperation actors may not have experienced. More importantly, new developments in the global risks landscape, such as the repression of rights and freedoms, shrinking operating space for civil society organizations, unsustainable levels of debt, slow growth in advanced economies, de-globalization, declining human development, and growing climate instability, converge. The outlook for international cooperation actors for the coming decades is both uncertain and turbulent.

What should international cooperation actors do in such an uncertain, shaky, turbulent global landscape?

Answering this question is at the heart of the initiative of which this environmental scan (e-scan) is the first major step. With support from the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC), Cooperation Canada launched its Global Cooperation Futures Initiative in 2023, which aims to contribute to global efforts to chart new avenues of international cooperation. The e-scan serves as an analytical foundation for the initiative, unveiling the stories of change affecting the international cooperation sector, stories made of crises and/or trends affected by social, technological, economic, environmental, and political factors. The interconnected nature of challenges (in the political, economic, environmental, technological, and social, categories) underscores the complexity of the 21st century global cooperation landscape. Hence, recognizing the unique insights in each category and the interplay between these factors is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, trends, and emerging issues highlighted in this report and summarized below.

Politics

In the global theatre of discord, the rising tensions and conflicts depicts a gripping narrative, where geopolitical drama unfolds on a stage fraught with uncertainty and the echoes of political thunderstorms reverberate. International cooperation actors are increasingly navigating a less secure world with the proliferation of conflict, geopolitical tensions, regional insecurity, and internal disputes. The growing presence of non-state actors and symmetric threats introduce new dimensions to security concerns with far-reaching implications for the world. Violence in all forms is reaching new heights and millions are being displaced from their homes as a result. Governments, driven by concerns about regional stability, national defense, and technological advancement in military, are allocating larger portions of their budgets to defense expenditures. Concurrently, the world is witnessing the rise of the far right, a trend increasingly accompanied by the repression of rights and freedoms and the shrinking of civil society space.

Economy

Inflation. Stagflation. Shrinkflation. Recession... You name it. We live it. Economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic is proving difficult and out of reach for most. Exorbitant food prices, astronomical interest rates, looming global sovereign debt crisis, alarming unemployment crisis, all are characteristics of a global economy on the verge of chaos as it grapples with the lasting imprint of the pandemic, rising insecurity, and wars. Yet, the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer. Global wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a privileged few while marginalized communities face growing disparities, unequal access to opportunities and resources. And somehow, the gap between official development assistance (ODA) commitments and actual disbursements is growing. Funding for civil society organizations is increasingly scarce and competition is getting fierce, even if non-traditional donors from emerging economies are entering the international cooperation scene.

Environment

In the ongoing saga of our planet's struggle against large scale environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate instability, the unwavering challenges persists, and each rising temperature is a chapter in a story we must rewrite for a sustainable future. Climate-driven resource conflicts and environmental migration are on the rise, and climate change is affecting the global economy, social security, food, and health systems. Much attention is being paid to the multiplier effect climate change has in creating new and exacerbating existing challenges. Environmentally concerned observers can't unhear the Code Red alert from the 2021 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading global authority on climate science. The report concludes that climate change is "widespread, rapid, and intensifying", which threatens all aspects of life on Earth, resulting in multi-dimensional vulnerability for low and middle-income countries.

Technology

An accelerating symphony of technological progress and a harmonization of risks and opportunities. Is this the story of the promise and peril of our fast-paced future? Digital transformation is a growing topic in international development cooperation conversations, presenting both opportunities and challenges. E-governance, digital financial services, and technology-driven solutions offer capacity to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and amplify the impact of development programs. However, there are also concerns about the digital divide, technological colonialism, data privacy, the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, and the ethical use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence.

Society

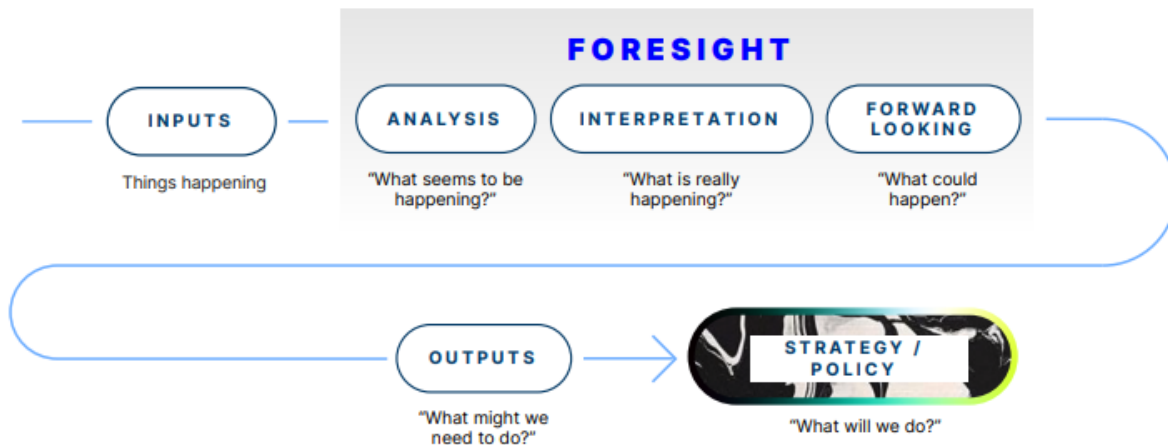
Hues of growing inequalities and unconceivable dichotomies: richer minorities, poorer majorities; privilege and disparity; unity and fragmentation. Despite progress in addressing inequalities, various communities continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their social, economic, and political inclusion. Culture wars, economic disparities, unequal access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and systemic biases contribute to a widening gap between different social strata. Moreover, recent demographic trends deepen these dynamics, creating new vulnerable groups and impeding overall societal progress. Aging populations in some regions and youth bulges in others are impacting labor markets, healthcare systems, and social services. These dynamics are expected to influence the demand for and delivery of development initiatives.

It is important to view the five categories above as simplifications. The stories of change presented in this e-scan are interconnected, which makes the proposed categorization, and the very definition of the five domains, more of a conceptual aid than a representation of reality. Some readers may recall that, in 2022, the Collins Dictionary declared “polycrisis” the word of the year to acknowledge the state of an ongoing global emergency characterized by overlapping and intertwined planetary threats. Readers should therefore keep in mind that the purpose of this scanning exercise is to inform the subsequent steps of this strategic foresight initiative - that is to prioritize the major trends and signals of change - then develop scenarios for the international cooperation sector at the horizon 2035.

About this Environmental Scan

What is an environmental scan?

Figure 1. Generic foresight framework



Source: UN Global Pulse¹ (frame added by the authors)

Environmental scanning is the foundation of a strategic foresight process. It is a structured evidence-gathering process, exploring the external strategic environment in a systematic way to identify potential challenges and opportunities. It aims to gather information about emerging trends and key drivers of change that could have an impact on the future.

Why did we produce this e-scan?

This environmental scan (e-scan) report is the main output from the data collection phase of Cooperation Canada's [Futures Initiative](#) launched in 2023 with support from the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC). The initiative aims to reimagine next-generation development cooperation by asking fundamental questions about emerging issues and trends with the potential to disrupt the future of global cooperation in the post-2030 era. This e-scan report compiles the inputs collected through desk review, focus groups, and regional dialogues, allowing to cast light on the planetary transformations underway, and their interlinked ripple effects that shape our economic, political, social, and environmental landscapes. This e-scan is a core element of the analysis phase, providing a seamless transition into subsequent foresight exercises, including research prioritization, scenario development and implications.

The report should not be understood as a finite set of predictions on global cooperation. Instead, this e-scan seeks to support institutions, academics, activists, and allies of international cooperation in efforts to rethink their strategies, map possible future scenarios, and collaboratively design transformative interventions. As the status quo threatens our planetary survival, the collective responsibility to design interventions that match the scope, the scale, and the urgency of our interconnected global crises, in accordance with the social justice ideals behind the most idealist interpretations of international cooperation, emerges as undelayable. This report seeks to inform such efforts.

¹ Horizon Scan User Manual. UN Global Pulse (2023). <https://foresight.unglobalpulse.net/blog/tools/horizon-scanning/>

How did we produce it?

The report is the product of a scanning process conducted in three phases:

- Phase One: co-development of a domain map at the inception workshop.
- Phase Two: global data collection through a desk review and focus group discussions.
- Phase Three: regional data collection through strategic conversations with development actors in five key regions (Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East)

The first phase of the process, led by Donna Dupont, strategic foresight consultant, and Andy Ouedraogo, Research & Program Officer, was conducted from June to August 2023. The domain mapping exercise, based on the initial consultations with sector during a global workshop, led to distinguishing the seven pillars below:

- 1) Governance for collective action (political)
- 2) Power dynamics: social equity, fairness, and human rights (values)
- 3) Emerging communities: inclusive leadership, resilience (social)
- 4) Instability, insecurity, and conflict: consequences and impacts (geopolitics)
- 5) Climate crisis: evolving, impacts and gender equality.
- 6) Funding and donor landscape: shifts, power dynamics, and localization (economic).
- 7) Technology landscape: new opportunities and challenges (technology).

Table 1. Categories and domains informing the environmental scan.

Categories	Domains
Politics	Governance for collective action and geopolitics
Economics	Funding & donor landscape: shifts, power dynamics, localization
Environment	Climate crisis: evolving issues, impacts and gender equality.
Technology	Technology landscape: opportunities & challenges.
Society	Values, Power dynamics: social equity, fairness, human rights

The seven pillars were then streamlined into five (global governance, funding, technology, social justice, and climate emergency) following the initial process of desk review. The table below captures the final five domains and their categorization into STEEP V factors determining trends and emerging issues (see Table 1).

The second phase, led by Drs. Gloria Novovic and Nenad Rava consisted of a global review of policy and academic literature on the current and expected challenges of international cooperation, climate action, and social justice, complemented by two focus group discussions involving policy experts and development practitioners. Most of the documents consulted were published after 2015. This included, among others, academic books, and peer-reviewed articles, as well as reports issued by multilateral (particularly the United Nations) agencies, international and regional non-government organizations, think-tanks, and consulting groups. Given the global scope of the report and evidence-based approach, a significant portion of directly cited texts links back to the aggregated statistical analysis of the United Nations. That said, issue prioritization, framing, and thematic insight was drawn from resources reflecting institutional, geographical, and epistemic diversity.

Thirdly, the regional data collection phase, led by Andy Ouedraogo, entailed in-depth discussions on challenges, emerging issues and trends, signals of change and desired visions of the future of development cooperation. Dialogues were rolled out in five geographies namely in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa regions. The dialogues allowed for the validation of existing domains based on regional nuances, challenges and future aspirations and captures intra-personal observational knowledge, that is knowledge stemming from participants' own observations of change on the ground, their perceptions of the future of development influenced by events and trends at the local/ regional level.

How to read and use this report

The e-scan is divided into five categories: Politics, Economics, Environment, Technology, and Society. Each chapter first introduces the challenges and emerging issues pertaining to the category, highlights some insights collected through the regional dialogues, then presents some implications for international cooperation actors. Chapter Six concludes the report emphasizing the interconnectedness of the five categories and restating the purpose of the scanning exercise as part of the strategic foresight systematic approach.

The e-scan serves the purpose of knowledge inventory building, which does not offer an exhaustive analysis of any given pillar but highlights their interconnections and further areas of research and analysis. As a result, this is a resource for (instead of a finished product of) foresight thinking, that allows for cross-referential and non-linear reading. This report highlights the intersecting and compounding effects of key directions of international cooperation, without offering a narrow set of predictions about what the sector will look like. In other words, an e-scan as a precursor of further foresight analysis and generation of alternative scenarios.

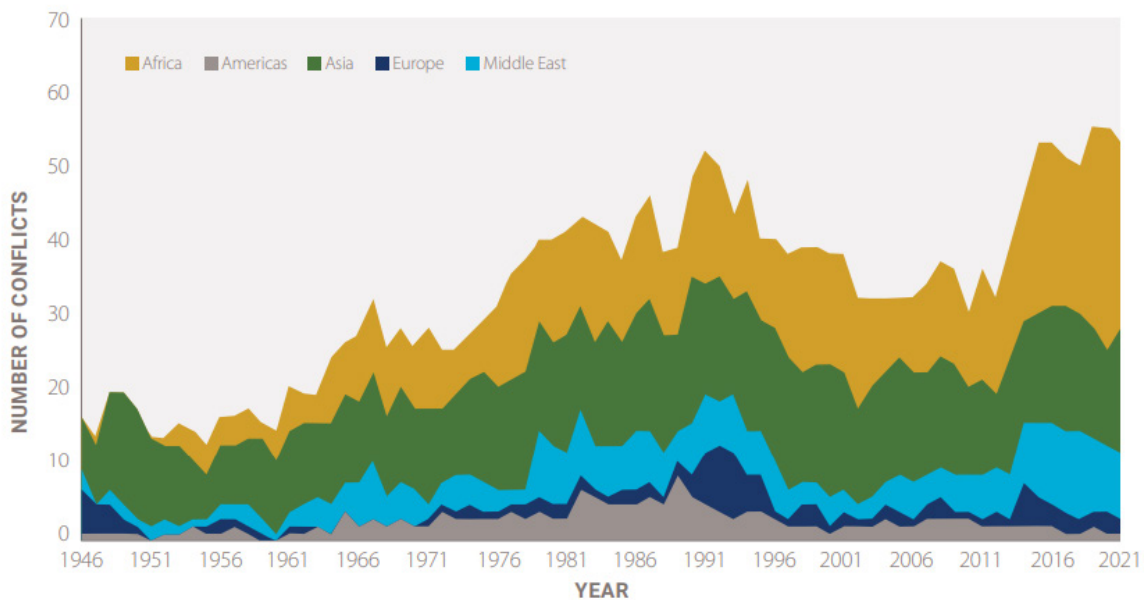
1 Politics

1.1 Challenges and emerging issues

1.1.1 Fragility and conflict

Peace is on the decline. Globally, the absolute number of deaths from war has been declining since 1946 yet, over the last 15 years, the world has become less peaceful and rife with more tensions², with conflict and violence on the rise. Unresolved regional issues, a breakdown in the rule of law, dysfunctional state institutions, and unequal access to resources have become dominant drivers of conflict. According to the latest Global Sustainable Development Report³, the world is currently witnessing the highest level of State-based armed conflicts seen since 1945. Current conflicts interlink political, socio-economic, and military issues, cross borders, while being more protracted and less responsive to traditional forms of resolution.

Figure 2. Number of State-based armed conflicts by region⁴



By the end of 2020, around two billion people were living in conflict-affected countries. Forced migration is at a historical high, with over 100 million people forcibly displaced⁵ as shown on Figure 3. The number of people forced to flee their homes due to conflict, war, persecution, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order is at a historical high since the World War II. Conflict forces people to take dangerous routes to flee their homes and this forced migration has highly gendered impacts, with women, children, men, and sexual minorities facing different risks.

2 Global Peace Index 2023, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GPI-2023-Web.pdf>

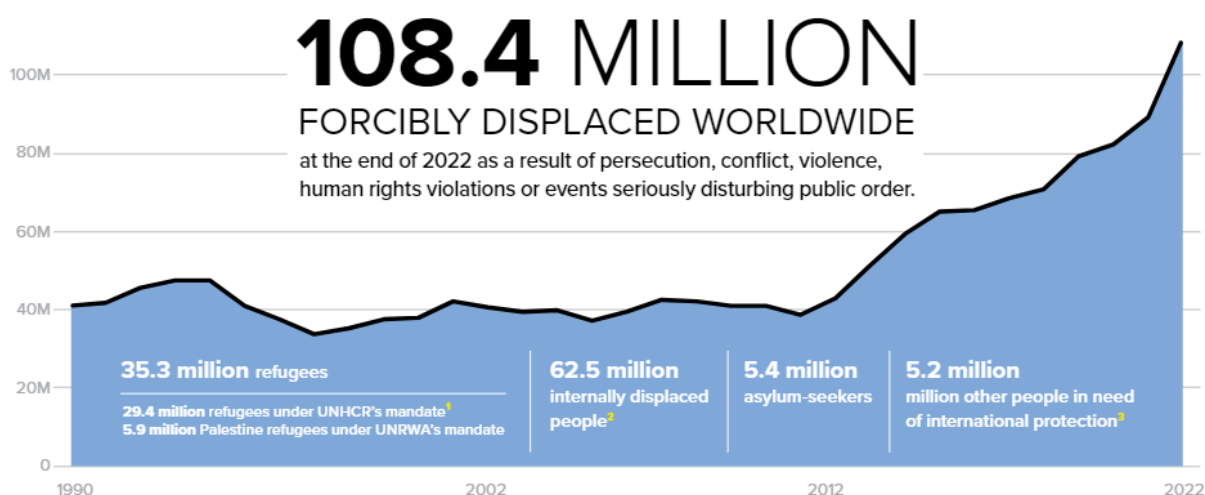
3 UN Global Sustainable Development Report (2023), https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FINAL%20GSDR%202023-Digital%20-110923_1.pdf

4 UN Global Sustainable Development Report (2023), https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FINAL%20GSDR%202023-Digital%20-110923_1.pdf

5 UNHCR's Global Trends report 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

Sexual violence and exploitation and the risk of being trafficked are very common among women and children fleeing war or persecution. Forced migration is increasingly protracted, with 76% of refugees (16 million) living in temporary forced displacement conditions for over five years⁶.

Figure 3. Forced displacement at the end of 2022⁷



As stated earlier, climate change is a threat multiplier and often triggers further international and intra-national conflict. There are growing concerns about conflict over resources as drought and weather disasters limit access to vital resources and jeopardizes people's lives and livelihoods. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts with high confidence that forced displacement will rise as a result of climate change related disasters in Africa, Asia, and North America, with small island states being disproportionately affected.⁸

Violence and conflict are expensive. The 2010s decade saw global military expenditure growing generally in line with GDP and government budgets (averaging 5% of expenditure, down from 12% in the early 1990s). However, in the current decade, global military expenditure as proportion of GDP is rising, driven predominantly by higher spending by the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia, India, China, and Saudi Arabia.⁹ In 2021, global military expenditure exceeded \$2 trillion.

6 Factsheet on UNHCR Global Trends 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/neu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2021/08/10-facts-about-refugees-2021-ENG_Vi2.pdf

7 UNHCR Global Trends Report 2022, <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022>

8 Summary for Policymakers. Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syrr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf

9 Global Risks Report 2023, World Economic Forum

Armed conflict, violence containment, or interpersonal violence, cost lives but also have a huge economic impact, defined as the expenditure and economic effect related to containing, preventing, and dealing with the consequences of violence. The global economic impact of violence was \$17.5 trillion USD in 2022, equivalent to 12.9 per cent of global GDP, or \$2,200 per person¹⁰. This represents a 6.6 per cent increase from 2021, owing largely to an increase in military and private security expenditure (estimated at \$7.6 trillion USD). The trend may continue as the proliferation of more destructive and new-tech military weaponry may enable newer forms of asymmetric warfare, allowing smaller powers and individuals to have a greater impact at a national and global level. For example, advances in biotechnologies could enable the creation of pathogens by small groups or even individuals. The UN warns¹¹ of a new era of conflict and violence more likely to be waged between domestic groups and non-state actors such as political militias, organized criminal gangs, and international terrorist groups.

1.1.2 Geopolitical reconfiguration

The world order is fundamentally shifting to a multi-nodal model, and some would say fracturing. As more nation states are competing for influence, the number of spheres of interest increase with new blocs forming around new global or regional powers. This has wide-ranging political, economic, and social consequences. In many global debates about the reconfiguration of a global order long deemed natural or logical, some states are perceived as destabilisers and others as influencers.¹² “Destabilisers” are portrayed as having as primary political goal to disrupt other countries and existing systems, creating danger and threats to the world. On the other hand, “influencers” seem to be those determined to prove the superiority of their political, economic, or societal model. Both categories of countries contend for influence and resource control in other parts of the world. Figure 4 illustrates how the sphere of influence of six major powers evolved between 2000 and 2020. It contrasts the relatively stable US sphere with the dwindling influence of France and the United Kingdom. China has clearly eclipsed the traditional donors in South-East Asia and Africa.

1.1.2.1 The world is moving East...

As China rises as a systemic actor in many areas (technology, space, energy, etc.), the competition between China and the United States has sharpened. Each superpower is seeking to solidify its sphere of influence and pressure third countries to align on key issues.

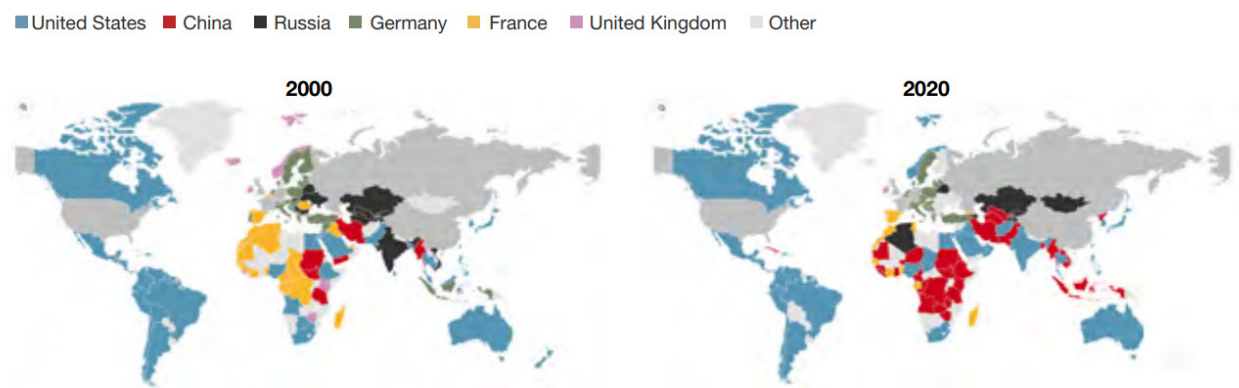
Intensifying coverage of tensions between China and Taiwan underscores the geopolitical complexities in the Asia-Pacific region and signals potential challenges for the future. Media outlets are increasingly focused on military posturing, diplomatic maneuvering, and regional responses to the China-Taiwan relationship which reflects a heightened global awareness of the strategic importance and potential consequences of these tensions.

¹⁰ <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GPI-2023-Web.pdf>

¹¹ A new era of conflict and violence, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>

¹² Megatrends Report, PWC (2022), <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/assets/pdf/pwc-megatrends-october-2022.pdf>

Figure 4. Evolution of the spheres of influence between 2000 and 2020¹³



Box 1. News stories: Growing fears of a potential war between China and Taiwan¹⁴

Conventional Washington wisdom holds that Beijing’s best strategy toward Taiwan is an imminent D-Day-type assault and conflict with the US

News | Conflict

Taiwan says China’s increased military drills ‘abnormal’, risks accident

Taiwan’s Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng says frequency of Chinese military drills increases risk of accidental clash.

TAIWAN STATEMENTS

What is Beijing’s Timeline for “Reunification” with Taiwan?

United States

Xi told Biden Taiwan is biggest, most dangerous issue in bilateral ties

By Jeff Mason and Trevor Hunnicut

November 15, 2023 11:02 PM EST · Updated 8 hours ago

Air Force general predicts war with China in 2025, tells officers to prep by firing ‘a clip’ at a target, and ‘aim for the head’

13 Megatrends Report, PWC (2022), <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/assets/pdf/pwc-megatrends-october-2022.pdf>

14 Kelter, Frederick. “A small fish in a sea of sharks”: The isle caught between China and Taiwan”. Aljazeera. September 15, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/9/15/a-small-fish-in-a-sea-of-sharks-the-isle-caught-between-china-and-taiwan>

‘A small fish in a sea of sharks’: The isle caught between China and Taiwan

Amid China tensions, people on the longtime Taiwanese frontline island of Kinmen warn against a return to war.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/9/15/a-small-fish-in-a-sea-of-sharks-the-isle-caught-between-china-and-taiwan>

“He says it is time to listen to those on the front line – before it is too late”

The story of 43-year-old Lu from Taiwan, featured in the Conflict rubric of Qatari newspaper Al Jazeera raises eyebrows on a potential disruptor in geopolitics with severe implications for global development cooperation.

Lu, a resident of Kinmen, a small Taiwanese island caught between China and Taiwan. Lu, working both as a tourism office administrator and a rubbish collector, witnesses the environmental impact of waste from China washing up on Kinmen’s shores. The island, located near Xiamen, faces challenges from tides, weather, and ocean currents that expose it to large amounts of debris, particularly from the polluted Jiulong River in China.

Lu sees the matter as symbolic of the broader tensions between China and Taiwan. The decline in Chinese tourists visiting Kinmen, attributed to travel restrictions and strained Taipei-Beijing relations, has led to a significant economic loss for local businesses. This decline is part of the broader geopolitical context, with Beijing considering Taiwan a part of China and tensions escalating, raising concerns about possible military actions.

The story emphasizes the unique perspective of Kinmenese residents, who not only contend with the environmental consequences of cross-strait dynamics but also experience the economic fallout of strained relations between China and Taiwan.

As the current tensions raise concerns about Kinmen being caught between China and Taiwan, the local understanding is encapsulated in the saying: “War is ruthless, peace is priceless.” Lu reflects on the long-standing impact of the Taiwan conflict on Kinmen, emphasizing the need to listen to those on the front line before it’s too late.

1.1.2.2 ...and moving South

Amid intense geopolitical rivalry between Washington DC and Beijing, many emerging and developing states in the so-called Global South, including influential ones like India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Indonesia, etc., seek to hedge relationships and maintain multi-vector foreign policies. The new relationships are not guaranteed to be fairer but do demonstrate the appetite of emerging economies and traditionally recipient countries for new forms of co-operation outside the traditional North-to-South paradigm.¹⁵

¹⁵ Development Co-Operation Report: Debating the Aid System. OECD. 2023. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-report-2023_f6edc3c2-en

Individual countries, like China, the Russian Federation, India, and Turkey, regularly showcase through visits, strategies, and summits their interest in redefining and strengthening partnerships with countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. At the same time, several Global South leaders, like Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Mottley who in 2021 led her country out from under the British monarchy, are openly demanding fair and respectful international relations. Prime Minister Mottley also made concrete recommendations for a new global financial architecture that would include the voice and recognise the agency of developing nations.

1.2 Regional spotlight: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa

Politics and civil society organizations across five regions

Consultations with African Civil Society Organizations reveal concerns about the politicization of CSOs in parts of the continent. CSOs are at times automatically associated with the opposition. Participants also disclosed the co-optation of certain organizations to align with official policies, while others face restrictions and scrutiny for advocating dissenting views. These affiliations threaten CSOs ability to operate independently and objectively, hence hindering their effectiveness as agents of societal progress. Moreover, they shared concerns for insecurity-driven restrictions of movement and operational challenges for CSOs in the region.

Similarly, the Asia regional dialogue reveals forms of politicizations ranging from the enactment of laws and regulations to constrain CSO activities to the criminalization of certain forms of association, censorship, as well as surveillance and intimidation tactics aimed at curbing freedom of expression. Participants further denounced anti-devolution policies that concentrate resources at the central level, making it challenging for CSOs to access funds and collaborate on projects that directly address the needs of local communities.

Caribbean CSOs deplore heightened violence and insecurity related risks continues to impact their ability to conduct fieldwork, engage with communities, and implement projects aimed at fostering social progress. Dialogue participants also mentioned the presence of barriers preventing advocacy for restorative justice, noting resistance from entrenched interest and political elites with roots in the colonial past.

In Latin America, CSOs disclose the impact of narco states on vulnerable populations, noting the exploitation by criminal organizations of these communities, exacerbating existing challenges related to poverty, violence, and limited access to essential services. They reveal that CSOs face threats and censorship, inhibiting their ability to communicate their messages and advocate for social change. Kidnappings, intimidation, and violence against civil society representatives are growing risks, which may compel CSOs to invest in security. The participants of the dialogue Participants also warn of a crisis of democracy, a notable rise in far-right governments with a discernible pattern of the closing of civic space, where civil society engagement and activism are increasingly restricted.

In parallel, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional dialogue participants evoke challenges associated with repression and intricate political landscapes. They denounced the targeting of civil society organization through the repression of women's rights, as well as restrictive legislations aimed at curbing the influence of these organizations. As with the other regions, participants warn of the rise of authoritarian governance with implications for the operating space and funding of civil society organizations.

1.3 Implications for international cooperation actors

As we navigate a complex global landscape, it becomes imperative to identify and respond to key political dynamics that may impact efforts to address global challenges.

Fragility, Conflict, and Violence:

By 2030, a significant portion of the world's extreme poor may reside in settings characterized by fragility, conflict, and violence. This not only jeopardizes poverty alleviation efforts but also drives 80% of humanitarian needs. Addressing this requires a thoughtful allocation of private and public resources, balancing the imperative of defense spending with the need for reconstruction and human development.

Weapons Proliferation and Global Security:

The potential spread of conventional or unconventional weaponry to rogue actors' challenges governments' monopoly on violence. This scenario could lead to increased state vulnerability, fuel migration, corruption, and cross-border violence. International cooperation actors must grapple with the implications of such shifts in global security dynamics.

Geopolitical Volatility and Complexity:

Geopolitics and international development issues are converging, creating a more volatile and complex global development landscape. As the world divides into spheres of influence, political discourse narrows, making it challenging to tackle global challenges collectively. The focus on optimizing individual spheres may hinder solidarity and cooperative efforts.

Reform and Innovation Pressures:

Global competition necessitates reforms and innovations for bilateral and multilateral partners, including International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). Traditional recipient countries gaining more bargaining power may force a re-evaluation of practices and strategies to remain relevant in the evolving international development arena.

Navigating Conflicting Rules and Regulations:

Operating in a world with conflicting rules and regulations poses challenges for organizations committed to delivering public goods and supporting local development. Adherence to the laws of one country may inadvertently lead to violations of another, requiring international cooperation actors to navigate complex legal landscapes.

Multilaterals' Efficiency Challenges:

Multilateral organizations face increased challenges in avoiding or resolving conflicts due to a less clear basis of international cooperation. The evolving geopolitical context calls for adaptability and strategic thinking to ensure the continued effectiveness of multilateral approaches.

Taiwan-China Conflict Implications:

The potential for conflict between China and Taiwan holds profound implications for global actors. This scenario could disrupt regional stability, impacting international trade routes, supply chains, and financial markets. Humanitarian concerns, mass displacement, and geopolitical fallout may necessitate concerted diplomatic efforts to mediate a peaceful resolution.

2 Economics

2.1 Challenges and emerging issues

2.1.1 Contestation of the global financial architecture

The existing international financial architecture and current system of development co-operation are “failing the test” of global challenges, despite some positive developments. Developing economies face unsustainable debt burdens and a liquidity crisis, as they are often unable to borrow from multilateral development banks that were set up for the very purpose of providing affordable capital. The unsustainable cost of borrowing forces countries to adopt austerity measures at the expense of public services (education, healthcare, social protection, etc.).¹⁶

Despite clear mandates to address existing ecological threats, food security, socio-economic inequality, conflict, public health challenges, to name just a few, the global financial regime struggles to demonstrate its effectiveness and mobilize funding at scale. Official development assistance (ODA) is deeply inadequate and consistently falling behind commitments made decades ago, notwithstanding that certain funding relationships perpetuate dependency.¹⁷ Optimistic forecasts put ODA in 2030 at \$264 billion, up from \$162 billion in 2019, which is largely insufficient compared to the promises made soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁸ The financing gap for the SDGs is estimated at USD\$ 2.5-3 trillion a year.¹⁹ As a result, the mainstream financial architecture is criticized and its legitimacy is under growing contestation, contestation that mirrors geopolitical tensions.

Those tensions are connected to and exacerbated by the climate emergency and urgent need to reform the climate finance system. The 2023 Bridgetown Agenda (Bridgetown 2.0), brainchild of Barbados, is predicated on the recognition that the international financial architecture had structural deficiencies at the time of its conception, a time when most of today’s member states were not independent and climate risks were not eminent.²⁰

The Agenda thus aims to accelerate progress towards the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on climate change by increasing liquidity support to developing countries, restoring debt sustainability, ensuring fair trade agreements, in addition to reforming the governance of post-war financial institutions.

¹⁶ End Austerity, A Global Report on Budget Cuts and Harmful Social Reforms in 2022-25. Eurodad. 2022. https://assets.nationbuilder.com/eurodad/pages/3039/attachments/original/1664184662/Austerity_Ortiz_Cummins_FINAL_26-09.pdf?1664184662

¹⁷ Development Co-operation Report 2023: Debating the Aid System, OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/development-co-operation-report-2023_f6edc3c2-en

¹⁸ The future of Official Aid Flows, Center for Global Development. 2023. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/future-official-aid-flows.pdf>

¹⁹ The future of Official Aid Flows, Center for Global Development. 2023. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/future-official-aid-flows.pdf>

²⁰ Bridgetown or bust – why Barbadian PM Mia Mottley’s agenda for reform of the global economic governance is essential for Africa’s prosperity. ODI. 2023. <https://assets.bwbx.io/documents/users/iqjWHBFdfxIU/rqUFt2H4YNsw/v0>

Given the planetary scope of the most pressing crises, the concepts of global public goods (global health, climate, financial stability, etc.) and global public investment strike a chord of recognition amongst a growing group of donors, practitioners, and academics.²¹ Proponents of global public investment posit that international cooperation, including concessional international public finance, has never been more needed, but the current system of “aid” is outdated and ineffective. The concept of Global Public Investment (GPI) is a new paradigm of fiscal policy for the 21st century, one that needs to be truly global, built with public money, and intended to realise social, economic, and environmental returns, like building social infrastructure and providing for global and regional public goods that would otherwise go under-supplied (if left to individual nations and private actors alone).

There are connected conversations about a new international tax structure to curb the pervasive corporate tax evasion and abuse. In November 2023, the Africa Group at the United Nations put forward a proposal of a Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation, seen as a statement against historical imbalance, a recognition of the voice of all countries, regardless of their size and economic power, and an opportunity to increase domestic resource mobilization for critical public sectors, thus reducing dependence on international assistance flows. Some say that a UN Convention on Tax could be the SDGs’ greatest legacy by allowing to recapture hundreds of billions of dollars currently lost each year in tax abuse.²²

2.1.2 Cost-of-living crisis

Around the globe, people face a severe cost-of-living crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery pushed up food and energy prices, which rose further because of the war in Ukraine and remain at historic high. Between June and September of 2022, around 89 per cent of least developed countries, 93 per cent of landlocked developing countries and 94 per cent of small island developing States had food inflation above 5 per cent, with many experiencing inflations in the double digits.

The cost-of-living crisis is pushing an additional 78–141 million into poverty. Women and urban poor are at greatest risk of facing hunger and deprivation. Central banks face the classic trade-off between controlling prices and supporting growth. Several countries have responded to inflationary pressures by tightening monetary policy, which have dire impacts on those already living on the margins of society.

21 Building a better system: Making Global Public Investment a reality. Recommendations of the Expert Working Group on Global Public Investment 2022. <https://globalpublicinvestment.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Building-a-better-system-Making-GPI-a-reality.pdf>

22 Draft resolution brings world one step closer to UN tax convention. Tax Justice Network. 2023. <https://taxjustice.net/press/draft-resolution-brings-world-one-step-closer-to-un-tax-convention/#:~:text=A%20framework%20tax%20convention%20would,to%20cross%2Dborder%20tax%20abuse.>

2.1.3 Economic warfare

Economic warfare is becoming the norm, with increasing clashes between global powers and state intervention in markets over the next two years. Economic policies are being used both defensively, to build self-sufficiency and sovereignty from rival powers, and offensively to constrain the rise of others. The intensification of economic weaponization parallels the geopolitical reconfiguration discussed earlier and clashed with the patterns of interdependence encouraged by globalization.

Whether geopolitics trumps economics is not clear, but observers take seriously the risk of seeing multi-domain conflicts arise, with economic tensions coupled with arms race.²³

2.1.4 New sources and channels of development funding

The combination of acute development challenges and strain on the public coffers of traditional big donors prompts the search for, and emergence of new source of capital. In addition to new flows of public funding from emerging donors (such as China, Brazil and India, and new institutions like the New Development Bank), private funding takes a growing place in cooperation debates. The private sector is recognised as a crucial actor economic growth and innovation.²⁴ In many countries, the private sector has managed to deploy lobbying and advocacy strategies on development issues and become a point of reference for governments in the implementation of Agenda 2030. However, the trend to promote big businesses as strategic agents of development raises concerns. Over the past decades, the roll-out of public-private partnerships have exposed the challenges and limitations of involving the private sector to finance development needs, especially regarding upholding human rights, protecting ecosystems, and conducting transparent and ethical financial transactions.

Private foundations are mobilizing significant financial resources that make them strong interlocutors able to play a leading role in the international development assistance sector. Private philanthropy for development has been rising since 2010, reaching USD 9.6 billion in grants in 2020, which represented the equivalent of 6% of ODA.²⁵ The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided around half of the philanthropy total, but its share has been decreasing in recent years, mainly due to increasing grant making by the Mastercard Foundation and other private providers.

Almost half of region-allocated funds was earmarked for the African continent, with India, Colombia, and Nigeria emerging as top recipients of philanthropic disbursements. The UN goals on good health and well-being (SDG 3), partnerships for the goals (SDG 17), no poverty (SDG 1), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and gender equality (SDG 5) were among the most targeted SDGs by private providers.²⁶

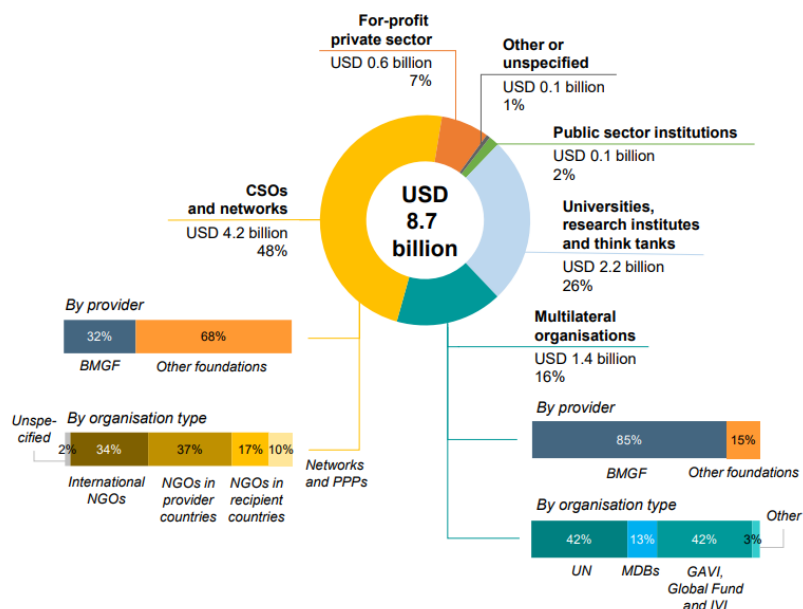
23 Global Risks Report 2023

24 Private Sector Watch - Global Synthesis Report. The reality of Aid. 2022. <https://csopartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Private-Sector-Watch.pdf>

25 Private philanthropy for sustainable development, 2018-20: Data and analysis, OECD. 2023. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/private-philanthropy-sustainable-development.pdf>

26 Ibid

Figure 5. Channels of delivery of private foundations (2018-2020 average, 2020 prices)²⁷



In terms of delivery, CSOs and their networks were the largest recipients of private funding in the 2018-2020 period (see Figure 5). This could be because philanthropic foundations in HICs are increasingly committing to justice-oriented approaches.²⁸ However, there is not always a clear direction identified to ensure people-centered accountability or the international principle of self-determination, which raises some concerns on the legitimacy of private foundations. Studies of private foundations in the United States²⁹ and Canada³⁰ showed racial disparities both in terms of racial and gender representation within these institutions and their funding. Racial justice, as a social issue, and organizations led by Black and even more so Indigenous, leaders remain vastly underfunded.

Remittances are both overlooked and untapped as source of private funding. Anti-migration discourses rarely acknowledge that, when well-governed, migration can contribute to alleviating poverty and inequality and advancing sustainable development. Remittances proved resilient despite COVID-19, reaching \$605 billion in 2021 and overtaking foreign direct investment and official development assistance to low- and middle-income countries, excluding China.

There are few topics in the international cooperation sector as popular in 2023 as shifting power. Along with locally led development and localization, the power shift concept refers to addressing power imbalances, colonial prejudice, racism, and paternalism in relationships between “donor” and “beneficiaries” of international assistance. One important metric in the powershift agenda is the level of funding, including charitable donations, going directly to affected groups and communities. Though there is mental assent of this agenda, its operationalization is challenging and fraught with tensions.

²⁷ Private philanthropy for sustainable development, 2018-20: Data and analysis, OECD. 2023. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/private-philanthropy-sustainable-development.pdf>

²⁸ Meet Maverick Philanthropists With New Models for Tackling Climate Change, Racial Inequality and More. 2021. <https://robbreport.com/lifestyle/news/philanthropists-on-climate-change-race-and-more-1234648560/>

²⁹ Mismatched. Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity. 2021. https://racialequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/0912_PRE_Mismatched_PR_11-1.pdf

³⁰ Unfunded: Black communities overlooked by Canadian philanthropy. <https://www.forblackcommunities.org/assets/docs/Unfunded-Report.pdf>

2.2 Regional Spotlight: Asia

Challenges exacerbated by the escalating cost of living crisis in Asia.

The escalating cost of living crisis in Asia poses considerable challenges for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operating in the region. As the cost of essential goods and services rises, individuals and communities, particularly those already marginalized, face heightened economic pressures and increased vulnerability.

Our Asia regional consultation reveals that CSOs in the region find themselves navigating a landscape where the needs of the communities they serve intensify.

The implication of the crisis includes reduced philanthropic contributions and donations to CSOs, operational challenges which could force CSOs to scale back programs, limit outreach efforts, and reduce the scope of their initiatives. The need for financial support and grants becomes greater and places an additional strain on CSOs as they navigate a landscape with heightened demand for funding. Moreover, the shrinking pool of funding could mean intensified competition among CSOs for limited resources.

The strain on resources and the potential for widening socio-economic disparities would demand agile and innovative responses from development actors to address the multifaceted impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on the most vulnerable populations.

2.3 Implications for international cooperation actors

The evolving landscape of international cooperation presents dynamic challenges and opportunities for actors involved. This section delves into the implications that arise as private actors play an increasing role in collaboration and as the international development sector navigates shifts in perspectives, fiscal constraints, and donor dynamics.

Collaborative Dialogue with Private Actors:

As private entities assume a growing role in cooperation initiatives, it becomes imperative to establish mechanisms fostering dialogue between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the private sector. Creating spaces for alignment of positions and priorities is crucial, alongside the clarification of governments' core mandate in providing essential goods and services for their citizens. Such dialogues are vital for ensuring synergy among diverse stakeholders and reinforcing the shared commitment to sustainable development.

Challenges to Country Ownership and Locally Led Response:

Amidst varying perspectives within the international development sector, particularly concerning commitments to country ownership and locally led responses, fiscal constraints and a shrinking pool of donors pose significant challenges. The risk of CSOs entering a survival mode is heightened, potentially leading to the reneging of commitments and intentions. This demands a nuanced approach to balance the imperative of local empowerment with the pragmatic realities of funding limitations.

3 Environment

3.1 Challenges and emerging issues

In the Anthropocene age, humans have, for better or for worse, become the dominant geological force on the planet, accelerated economic and technological progress at the cost of ecological destruction. Addressing environmental challenges requires a fundamental socio-political and economic transformation that prioritizes collective environmental targets over economic gains. Many believe the choices humanity will make by the end of the 2020 decade will lay the groundwork for either a sustainable world or an era of ecological catastrophe.

3.1.1 Climate change

There are three Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda that are directly focused on natural ecosystems: Goal 13 – Climate action; Goal 14 – Life below water; and Goal 15 – Life on land. Though being the focus of just one goal, climate change is a threat multiplier, as it exacerbates existing threats on all ecological systems, causing rising sea levels, water stress, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, to name just a few, with obvious dire consequences on human well-being and economic stability. Consequently, climate change dominates most environmental talks and finds its way in many news headlines.

Out-of-control wildfires. Scorching temperatures. Record precipitations. Super storms. The list of qualifiers used to describe the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events is getting longer and longer. The 2021 Working Group 1 report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was dubbed a code red for humanity by the United Nations (UN) Secretary General. The report notes that, with greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at record levels, global warming has accelerated in recent decades, impacting all aspects of our lives, every segment of the economy, and each region of the planet, although the impacts will vary between locations. The IPCC places approximately 3.5 billion people in contexts of high vulnerability to climate change, most of those people having pre-existing social or economic vulnerabilities.

Most countries recognize the urgent need for humanity to reconfigure all production and consumption models, yet they face significant challenges to transition to more sustainable ways of life that limit negative impacts on ecosystems. Far from being orderly, the transition has unintended consequences, causing heated political debates and societal tensions between groups demanding greater corporate accountability and responsibility for GHG emissions and those concerned about behavioral changes, possible commodity shortages, and price volatility. While the business sector is pressured to assess and respond to these hazards throughout their value chain, the low-carbon transition is also opening avenues for some corporations to engage in a new scramble over resources of the new carbon economy such as critical minerals (e.g., lithium, coltan, cobalt, etc.), scramble that is already making winners and losers in several parts of the world.

3.1.2 Global energy crisis

Energy is a key item on the climate and environment agenda because of its central place in the global economy and the contribution of energy activities to greenhouse gas emissions. Energy also becomes the site of proxy wars, as evidenced in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and previous conflicts with and in oil-producing countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The geostrategic importance of energy cannot be denied as energy shortage leads to high energy costs, which drive inflationary pressures across all economic sectors.

3.1.3 Global food crisis

Climate crisis exacerbates existing fault lines in the global food system born of the agricultural revolution. Modern agri-food systems are highly vulnerable to climate change, conflict, and economic shocks, which have led to increasing challenges in the capacity of agri-food systems to deliver nutritious, safe, and affordable diets for all.

The global food crisis is manifested by hunger levels far above pre-pandemic levels. Between 2019 and 2020, globally, the proportion of people living with hunger increased from 8.0 to 9.3 per cent, and in 2021 to 9.8 per cent.³¹ Up to 205 million people were expected to face acute food insecurity and need urgent assistance, over the period October 2022 to January 2023, including in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.

Box 2. News stories: A Global Rice Crisis³²

Business News > News > Economy > Agriculture > Against the grain: The many pressures that are cooking up a rice crisis

Against the grain: The many pressures that are cooking up a rice crisis

By Rakshanda Sharma, ET Online • Last Updated: Oct 24, 2023, 01:12 PM IST

More than just rice: Asia's food supply anxieties

INVESTING | Commodities | Company News | News Wire Sep 8, 2023

Rice Crisis In the Philippines Sounds a Global Inflation Alarm

Ben Sharples, Anuradha Raghu and Manolo Serapio Jr., Bloomberg News

AGRICULTURE

Global rice shortage is set to be the biggest in 20 years

PUBLISHED TUE, APR 18 2023 8:12 PM EDT | UPDATED WED, APR 19 2023 1:23 AM EDT

BUSINESS

A rice shortage is sending prices soaring across the world. And things could get worse

A global rice crisis is unfolding, sending shockwaves through agricultural markets, and impacting food security worldwide. The crisis is fueled by a confluence of factors, including extreme weather events, disruptions in supply chains, and geopolitical tensions. Prolonged droughts, floods, and other climate-related challenges significantly reduce rice yields in major producing regions, leading to a sharp decline in global rice stocks.

Compounded by logistical challenges and trade restrictions, the crisis strains the availability of rice, a staple food for billions of people. Governments and international organizations worked to implement emergency measures to address food shortages, but the crisis highlights the vulnerability of global food systems to a complex interplay of environmental and geopolitical factors.

31 https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FINAL%20GSDR%202023-Digital%20-110923_1.pdf

32 Lee, Yin Shang. "Global rice shortage is set to be the biggest in 20 years". CNBC. April 18, 2023. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/04/19/global-rice-shortage-is-set-to-be-the-largest-in-20-years-heres-why.html>

NEWS EXPLAINER | 31 October 2023

Dengue is spreading in Europe: how worried should we be?

Analyst Comment

Dengue fever could become epidemic in Europe as temperatures soar

The temperatures in countries in Southern Europe at this time of year are optimal for the transmission of the disease.

DENGUE FEVER OUTBREAK DECLARED IN JAMAICA

Health Alert: Dengue Fever Outbreak Declared in Jamaica MASCOT Message

HEALTH CARE

Dengue fever sweeps through Asia, helped by hotter and wetter weather

More than 1,000 die in Bangladesh; major outbreak hits Taiwan

HEALTH

Chad's first dengue fever outbreak: What you should know

Chad doesn't have necessary public health preparedness and response capacities, so the risk is high

Dengue spreading, rain or shine

News | Health

Bangladesh dengue deaths cross 1,000 in worst outbreak on record

At least 1,017 die and nearly 209,000 are infected, making 2023 the deadliest year since the first recorded epidemic in 2000.

15:13 21.10.2023

BREAKING

Dengue Fever Kills Over 200 People in Burkina Faso in 2023 as Number of Cases Surges

Painful Dengue May 'Take Off' In United States—What To Know About The 'Breakbone Fever' Virus

The above headlines appeared in newspapers between October and mid-November 2023.

A potential Disruptor: A Global Dengue Pandemic on the Horizon?

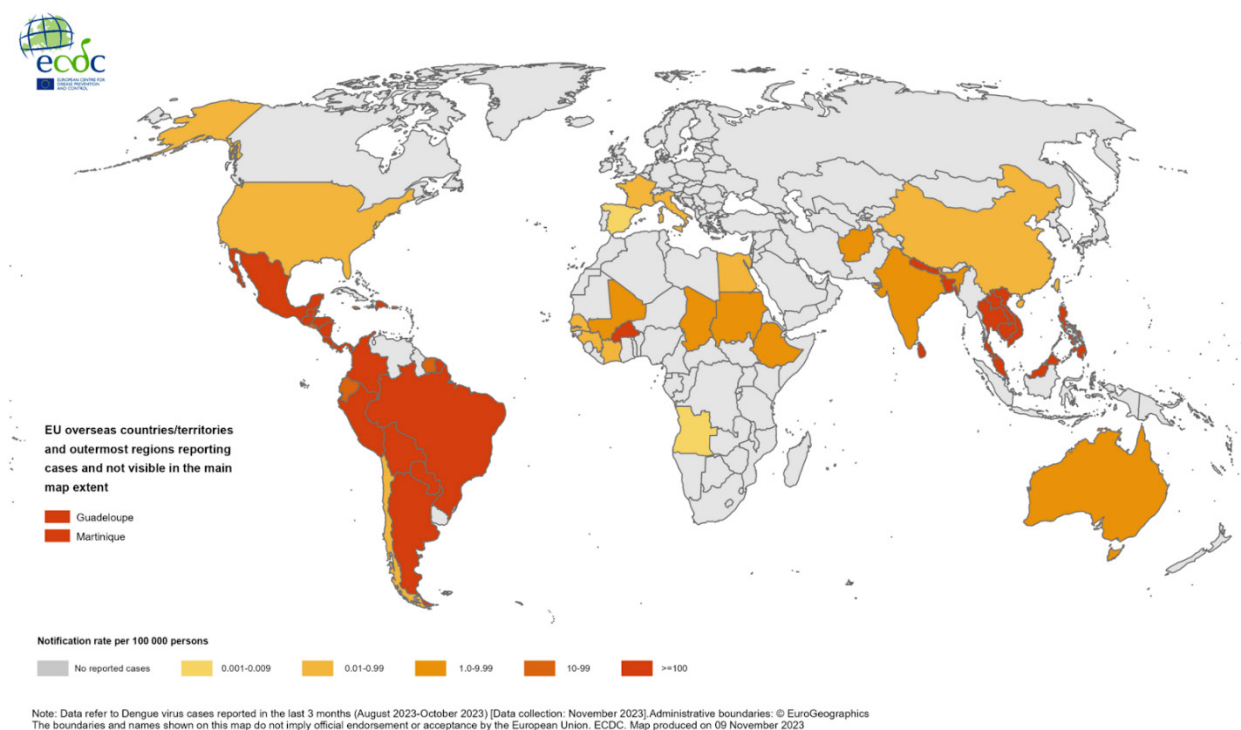
The incidence of dengue cases is on the rise, and the epidemiological situation is described as having the potential to develop further. From the start of 2023 until early November, more than 4.5 million cases and over 4,000 deaths related to dengue have been documented across 80 countries/territories worldwide.

The number of dengue cases is also steadily increasing throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, with a total of 3,407,921 cases reported to date. Particularly notable spikes in cases have been observed in Central America, Peru, Brazil, and Bolivia, attributed to warm, dry conditions and extensive flooding.

The growing link between climate change and health epidemics underscores the intricate relationship between environmental conditions and public health. Climate change-induced alterations in temperature, precipitation patterns, and the frequency of extreme weather events contribute to the spread of infectious diseases, vector-borne illnesses, and the emergence of new health challenges. Rising temperatures create favorable environments for the proliferation of disease-carrying vectors like mosquitoes, expanding the geographical range of diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. Additionally, disruptions to ecosystems and water sources can compromise sanitation and lead to waterborne diseases.

³³ Naddaf, Miryam. "Dengue is spreading in Europe: how worried should we be? : The post-COVID travel boom combined with a warm summer have led to dengue outbreaks in Italy and France. Nature. October 31, 2023. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-03407-6>

Figure 6. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control captures Dengue virus cases between August and October 2023 across the world.³⁴



3.2 Regional spotlight: Climate change and energy accessibility in Africa

Challenges related to energy accessibility in Africa.

Conversations with regional Civil Society Organizations reveal heightened concerns surrounding the impact of climate change on their ability to deliver projects and programmes to vulnerable communities.

In Africa for example, participants cite energy accessibility as one of the most prominent issues connected to climate change, besides the known consequences on agricultural production, weather patterns, and temperature shifts. Energy supply and access is seldom part of development interventions undertaken by INGOs who fail to see energy as a development enabler. However, dialogue participants whose organizations rely on electronic devices, and technologies for data collection and communication warn that without a stable energy supply, the future and sustainability of their organizations and operations is threatened.

³⁴ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. “Dengue Worldwide Overview”. Accessed November 2023. <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/dengue-monthly>

3.3 Implications for international cooperation actors

International cooperation actors play a pivotal role in addressing global challenges, necessitating a fundamental re-evaluation of their practices and a heightened emphasis on demonstrating relevance. This section outlines the multifaceted implications for these actors, encompassing procurement strategies, program interventions, and environmental stewardship.

Rethinking Operations:

In light of escalating environmental challenges (e.g., extreme weather events), international cooperation actors must reassess procurement systems and interventions. The impact of resource scarcity on supply chains, including production sites, warehouses, assets, and transportation routes, demands a proactive approach to ensure resilience and sustainability.

Environmental and Social Amplifications:

The interplay of environmental degradation and climate change amplifies critical issues, notably water stress, food insecurity, and livelihood challenges. This exacerbates social inequalities and contributes to escalating local/regional tensions and conflict, underscoring the need for cooperation actors to consider broader implications in their initiatives.

Health System Vulnerabilities:

Climate change poses severe threats to health systems, manifesting in the resurgence or atypical spread of diseases such as dengue fever and malaria. These challenges compound existing issues related to healthcare access, emphasizing the urgent need for international cooperation actors to incorporate adaptive measures into their programs.

Human Resource Constraints:

The complex intersections of development needs and humanitarian contexts often surpass the available human resources within organizations. Crises, intertwined through physical, economic, and social strands, intensify one another, necessitating strategic investments in personnel and training to effectively navigate and address these challenges.

Critique of Climate Finance Practices:

Several bilateral donors face criticism for repackaging existing funds as climate finance, maintaining apparent levels of official development assistance (ODA) while diverting resources away from life-saving programs. This practice highlights the importance of transparent financial practices and underscores the need for increased investments specifically tailored to address climate change.

4 Technology

4.1 Challenges and emerging issues

4.1.1 Digital transformation

Digital transformation involves both digitization and digitalization. Digitization is the process of converting analogue information into a digital format so that it can be electronically stored, processed, managed, and transmitted, e.g., converting analogue music to MP3 files. On the other hand, digitalization is the process of using digital technology and data to improve business processes, models and productivity. Both digitization and digitalization involve many disruptive technologies that are being deployed at breath-taking speed, drastically changing the context of development.

Digital technology offers opportunities to enable value creation, accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, and deliver previously limited services to remote or vulnerable groups, from small farmers using mobile phones to buy and sell crops to doctors remotely monitoring and treating health conditions in rural villages. As costs drop, it unleashes demand across sectors and geographies, which encourages even more (and faster) innovation. Digital connectivity has been shown to increase countries' resilience to shocks and crises and has been identified as a key accelerator for an equitable COVID-19 response and recovery. At the same time, the digital transformation, often called a revolution due to its scale and pace, is still uncertain in its trajectory, which raises concerns about human development, mental health, employment security, equity, and human rights.

Institutions are struggling to keep up with the pace of technological change and face a mismatch between the context in which people and businesses operate and what is feasible from a technologically. While digital technology enhances the capacity of individuals and organisations, it also overlaps with what humans do and blurs the notion of what it means to be human. More studies are showing that technology, and social media in particular, has serious consequences on global security (exposure to cyber-attacks), mental health (especially among youth).

4.1.1.1 Digital divide

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformations, with digital solutions developed and used to facilitate economic and social activities from a distance. Sixty-six per cent of the global population or 5.3 billion people used the Internet in 2022, up from 54 per cent in 2019.³⁵ However, with over 60 per cent of the world's population now online, digital divides are becoming the new face of inequality, and many are left behind.

35 https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/FINAL%20GSDR%202023-Digital%20-110923_1.pdf

Older persons are less connected than young people. Fewer women than men have access to Internet, 234 million fewer women than men use mobile internet.³⁶ Also, Internet access is much higher in high-income than in low-income countries due to bandwidth limitations and lower rates of electrification. Digital divides also exist within developed countries. While 94 percent of Canadians enjoy stable internet access at home, only 24 percent of households in Indigenous communities have access to quality, high-speed internet.³⁷ As education, work, and public services move onto digital platforms, divides in access to crucial services could deepen.

4.1.1.2 Digital rights

As digital public infrastructure grows, there is growing pushback against the relentless capture of people's data. There are reports of digital ID systems failing to ensure data privacy. The pressure to feed digital platforms (AI in particular) with real-life data, and the availability of the technology to capture, process, and combine data in real time make it increasingly difficult for people to protect their digital identities. Individuals are increasingly exposed to the misuse of personal data by the public and private sector alike, as sophisticated data analysis heightens the risk of misusing personal information even through legitimate legal mechanisms. Even in democratic regimes, invasions of privacy can be justified by public safety considerations, national security concerns, or health emergencies.³⁸

4.1.1.3 Digital currencies

As digital currencies and blockchain gain mainstream acceptance, there is a rising interest in directing a portion of the wealth generated in cryptocurrency toward charitable purposes, extending beyond individual donations. Consequently, the number of nonprofits accepting cryptocurrency is also growing. NGOs and multilateral organizations are leveraging blockchain technologies to generate innovative tools for fundraising, financial transparency, and operational efficiency. Some examples include the Human Rights Foundation's cryptocurrency program for global human rights activists; Oxfam [Project Unblocked Cash](#) program for disaster victims in Vanuatu; World Food Programme's [Building Blocks](#) project for refugees; and UNICEF [Crypto-Fund](#), the first cryptocurrency-denominated financing vehicle within the United Nations.

Crypto donations, including proceeds from Non-Fungible Tokens (NFT) projects, enable borderless giving, allowing to decentralize both finance and philanthropy. However, not everyone is onboard with the use of blockchains in humanitarian and development contexts. Critics highlight glaring concerns such as blockchain colonialism³⁹ that could subject developing nations to experimental gambles, regulatory uncertainties surrounding blockchain technology (data protection, cross-border transactions, legal status of blockchain-based assets, etc.), volatility in cryptocurrency markets affecting the predictability of assistance funding, and environmental concerns associated with energy-intensive mining practices.

36 The mobile gender gap report 2022. https://www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2022.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=download-button&utm_campaign=gender-gap-2022

37 Digital Equity for Indigenous Communities. <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/digital-equity-for-indigenous-communities/> 2020. <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/digital-equity-for-indigenous-communities/>

38 Global Risks Report 2023. World Economic Forum

39 Climate Crises and Crypto-Colonialism: Conjuring Value on the Blockchain Frontiers of the Global South. 2020. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fbloc.2020.00022/full>



Figure 10: Newspapers coverage of cryptocurrency in humanitarian and development sector. ⁴⁰

4.1.2 Artificial intelligence (AI)

Generative artificial intelligence, a type of technology that can produce various types of content, including text, imagery, 3D renderings, and audio, very similar to human-produced content, is growing exponentially. Generative AI is particularly prone to cultural biases, to exclusion and discrimination of vulnerable populations, including women and certain groups or ethnicities. ⁴¹

There are also growing concerns about AI's impact on conflicts and its potential to transfer responsibility over life and death from human moral systems to complex data systems, devoid of an ethical compass.⁴² This bears the risk to enhance cyber, physical, and biological attacks as small groups or 'lone wolves' acquire more easily the necessary technology, e.g., biological weapons, autonomous weapons, etc.

⁴⁰ Steinhauer, Jason. "Can crypto and blockchain reprogram humanitarian aid?" Devex. March 21, 2023. <https://www.devex.com/news/can-crypto-and-blockchain-reprogram-humanitarian-aid-105176>

⁴¹ [How AI bots and voice assistants reinforce gender bias](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-ai-bots-and-voice-assistants-reinforce-gender-bias/). 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-ai-bots-and-voice-assistants-reinforce-gender-bias/>

⁴² A new era of conflict and violence, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence>

4.2 Regional Spotlight

4.2.1 The Middle East & North Africa

Growing concerns associated with digitalization and emerging technologies.

Participants in our Middle East and North Africa Regional Dialogue reveal that “new developments in technology are creating constraints on communication and challenges for media outreach”.

The growing presence of information channels, social media platforms, and digital content has resulted in a substantial influx of data. This means that CSOs are increasingly confronted with the task of cutting through this extensive information landscape to guarantee that their messages effectively reach their intended audiences amidst a vast array of competing content. This coupled with the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation online presents CSOs with the challenge of combating falsehoods that can undermine the credibility of their messages.

Moreover, CSOs must increasingly contend with digital divides, varying levels of technological literacy, and disparities in internet access that limit the inclusivity of their communication efforts, particularly in marginalized communities.

Reflecting on technological developments and in particular Artificial Intelligence, some participants bemoan the overconfidence in the applicability and use of such technologies in different contexts, flagging that they haven’t been reflective of local priorities.

4.2.2 Africa & Latin America

Existing and emerging challenges related to the lack of access to innovative technologies.

Adopting innovative technologies often requires specialized skills and capacity building that many CSOs in the Global South do not have. Regional dialogue participants in Africa and Latin America evoked the lack of access to innovative technologies and challenges related to digitalization as major impediments to their work today and most likely in the future.

While CSOs in the two regions have demonstrated creativity in leveraging ‘low-tech’ solutions and simple yet effective tools, such as community radio broadcasts, SMS messaging, and basic mobile phone application, access to innovative technologies would help mitigate challenges related to gathering accurate and timely data as well as acquiring and developing their technical expertise. This would improve their ability to conduct comprehensive needs assessments, monitor project progress, and make informed decisions based on real-time information. It would also broaden the reach and impact of their valuable work.

4.3 Implications for international cooperation actors

From disruptions in employment patterns to the challenges of information reliability and the potential for enhanced capacities, the digital age presents a complex landscape for consideration.

Disruption in Employment:

The ongoing digital transformation brings both opportunities and challenges. While it generates new jobs and demands fresh skill sets, the transition also poses a massive disruption for individuals. Many face the imperative to upskill to remain employable. Navigating this transformation requires a strategic approach to minimize the adverse effects on the workforce.

Information Integrity Challenges:

The proliferation of digital content and the influence of social media algorithms present a significant challenge in distinguishing between truth and misinformation. In a world where anyone can publish content, discerning credible information becomes increasingly difficult. This reality underscores the importance of critical media literacy and the need for mechanisms to combat disinformation.

Capacity Enhancement through Technology:

Technology's role in making information universally accessible and facilitating cross-border collaboration holds the promise of significantly enhancing operational efficiency. Organizations stand to benefit from leveraging technology for more effective and streamlined operations, emphasizing the potential for positive transformations.

Localized Technology Applications:

The strategic deployment of technology, rooted in local knowledge and tailored to address specific needs, offers the potential for leapfrogging towards resilient solutions for local challenges. Embracing a localized and balanced approach ensures technology is harnessed to address real-world issues while respecting cultural nuances and community dynamics.

Digital Currencies and Blockchain-for-Good:

The emergence of digital currencies and the market logic behind “blockchain-for-good” initiatives introduces new considerations for organizations. The benefits of borderless contributions must be carefully weighed against organizational value systems. Striking a balance between embracing innovative financial technologies and adhering to ethical standards is crucial for organizations navigating this evolving landscape.

5 Society

5.1 Challenges and emerging issues

Social issues are becoming more prevalent and pernicious across all facets of the 21st century society, facets that can be summarized under the categories of Asymmetry, Age, Polarisation, and Trust.

5.1.1 Asymmetry

Asymmetry in society is growing, driven by disparities between remuneration, stagnation in labor wages, and cumulative benefits of generational wealth (providing high returns on assets and other forms of wealth that are accessible to fewer people). Wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and older people and the top 1% of the richest global population owns half of the world's total income wealth. This situation is exacerbated by global crises. As a matter of fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the wealth of billionaires grew by USD\$5 trillion, while 160 million additional people got pushed into poverty. The wealth transfer (from the already poor to the ultra-rich) is markedly gendered: women collectively lost USD\$800 billion in earnings in 2020 alone. In this asymmetric society, despite the promise of the 2030 Agenda, too many groups are left behind, including Indigenous communities and people living with disabilities.

Across the globe, approximately 370 million individuals [identify](#) as belonging to Indigenous peoples. Despite making up for 5% of the global population, Indigenous persons account for 15% of the world's poor. Most of them continue to be excluded from political and economic decision-making spaces and worse, are directly persecuted or targeted by state-sponsored land alienation, contamination of natural resources, and forced displacement in the name of development and resource extraction projects. Indigenous communities remain underserved by governments around the world, which translates in poor housing, healthcare, sanitation, transportation, and other public services, and face greater risk of natural disasters. Indigenous women are in addition disproportionately [targeted](#) as victims of violence, they are more likely to perform unpaid labour, and be discriminated against within and outside of their communities.

Persons with disabilities [make up](#) 15 percent of the global population, and eighty percent of them [live](#) in LMICs. Persons with disabilities around the world remain disproportionately subjected to poverty and barriers to accessing public and private services such as health, education, employment and financial inclusion. This group of people is also significantly underrepresented in political and other formal decision-making processes. While 186 countries have signed the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (with the Optional Protocol counting 104 ratifications), only 45 countries have legislation in support of anti-discrimination of or protection for persons with disabilities. Existing [legislation](#) is also often geared towards the so-called “negative rights,” protecting persons with disabilities against discrimination; more rarely is legislation in the form of “positive rights,” which would guarantee access and services persons with disabilities have been traditionally denied.

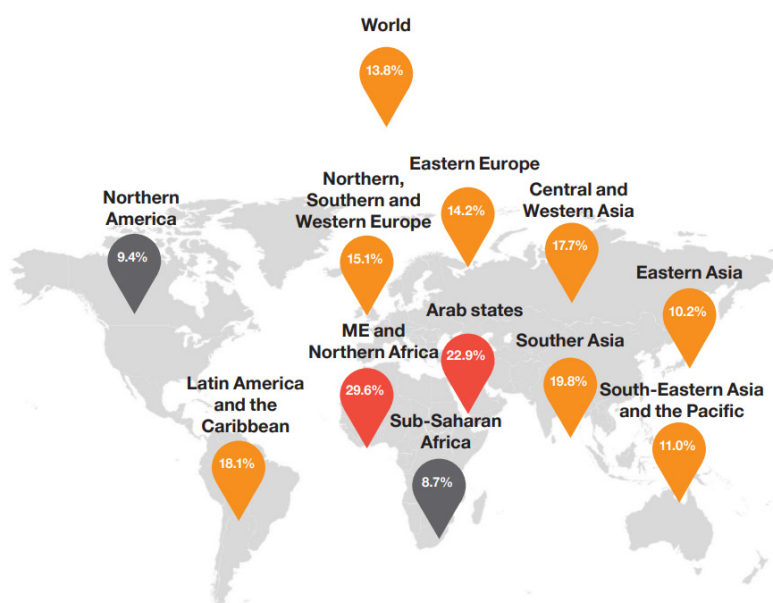
5.1.2 Age

The global population continues to increase and is on track to reach 8.5 billion in 2030, and possibly 9.7 billion by 2050.⁴³ While the average age is globally increasing as people are generally living longer, the growth rates vary greatly across regions. Projections indicate that nine countries (eight of them from the Global South) will make up more than half the population growth by 2050, and: India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Indonesia, Egypt, and the United States of America.

There will be stark contrasts in the challenges faced by older versus younger nations: by 2030, the median age in Japan will be 52, while in Nigeria it will be 19.⁴⁴ Age becomes an issue in most countries, as nations with older populations struggle to keep up with labour, health, and tax needs from an ageing population. Older workers sometimes need to work longer and learn new skills to remain relevant and make a decent living. Governments find themselves in need to push back retirement age to supplement the workforce or attract migrant populations. The increasing numbers of the very old are putting a strain on healthcare, pensions, entitlement programmes and public debt.

On the other hand, in younger economies, governments are faced with chronically high youth unemployment, regardless of education levels achieved, which plants the seed for violence and social unrest, as unemployed youth are likely to fall prey to criminal or terrorist groups. In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and COVID-19, youth employment became more volatile (with a 8.7% job loss rate compared to 3.7% for adults) and youth were slower to recover, particularly in LMICs. Young women suffered higher job losses during covid in high- (13.9% compared to 11.2% for young men).

Figure . Rates of unemployment among youth (2021)⁴⁵



⁴³ World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights, https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/wpp2019_10KeyFindings.pdf

⁴⁴ Five urgent global issues and implications. PWC. 2019. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/assets/pdf/pwc-adapt-five-urgent-global-issues-and-implications-march-2022.pdf>

⁴⁵ <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/assets/pdf/pwc-adapt-five-urgent-global-issues-and-implications-march-2022.pdf>

The significant growth of the creative (also called orange) economy is worth noting, as it could present substantial employment opportunities for youth. The creative economy can be loosely defined as the aggregation of individuals and businesses that produce cultural, artistic and innovative products and services. The value of the global market for creative goods has more than doubled over the past decade, from US\$208 billion in 2002 to US\$509 billion in 2015.⁴⁶ (UNESCO 2021a). Young people (aged 15–29 years) are slightly more likely than adults (aged 30+) to be employed in the creative economy, which accounted for around 2.1 per cent of adult employment in 2020. Within the orange economy, moreover, young people made up 25 per cent of total employment (figure 3.15), whereas they accounted for 23 per cent of employment in non-creative sectors, indicating that they are slightly over-represented in the orange economy.

5.1.3 Polarization

Polarisation in society grows as people feel a disconnected from their governments, becoming increasingly distrustful and intolerant of others who are different, and unable to achieve a quality of life they expect. Societal polarisation paired with the erosion of social cohesion have been climbing in severity in recent years. The fracturing of communities, triggered by a gap in values, the cost-of-living crisis, absence of social safety nets, acute inequalities, and state instability, compromises social stability, individual and collective wellbeing, and economic productivity across the globe. The polarization is self-perpetuating in that it incentivizes the adoption of short-term, more extreme policy platforms to galvanize one side of the population and perpetuate populist beliefs.⁴⁷

As people become disillusioned, the impacts of globalisation, automation and economic shifts favor a rise in populism. This is typically manifested as a resistance to multilateralism or an opposition between the self-defined “common people” and elites believed to be in control of national and international governance.

5.1.4 Trust

The erosion of trust grew gradually in the neoliberal world, as organisations and governments grew larger and became increasingly detached from the societies they represent. This trend accelerated with the financial crisis and the increasing politicisation of institutions. This makes governance increasingly difficult and more fractured. The erosion of trust in institutions has had profound implications on the intensification of culture wars. As confidence in traditional establishments such as government, media, and educational institutions wanes, people tend to pivot to alternative sources of information and identification. This is a fertile ground for the fragmentation of societies into competing cultural factions, each asserting its own narrative and truth.

⁴⁶ Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022 - Investing in transforming futures for young people. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_853321.pdf

⁴⁷ Global Risks Report 2023

The 2017 Human Rights Watch report [sounded](#) the alarms about the rise in populism and authoritarianism, threatening the rule of law, respect of international human rights and national constitutions, as well as shrinking civil society space. Populist extremism remains a key driver of intra-national conflict and human rights abuse. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR), human rights defenders, journalists, and environmental activists [face](#) heightened threats, as arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and killings are on the rise.

Box 5. News stories: Social polarization and culture wars⁴⁸

Growing Social Value Polarisation Harms Economic Development

International | Views of the Middle East

The culture war over the Gaza war

The conflict is raging on streets and screens in the West

A new way to classify individuals delivers insights on social divisions and the culture war

'Very wonderful, very toxic': how AI became the culture war's new frontier

The Brief — Culture war politics are coming to Europe

The Americas | Pronoun politics

The culture wars have come to Canada

FORBES > LEADERSHIP > DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Is The 'War On Woke' A War On Our Country's Future?

Culture wars: How identity became the center of politics in America

Across the political spectrum, Americans fight to define national culture.

48 King's College London. "Public increasingly see politicians as stoking culture wars, study finds" November 03, 2023. <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/public-increasingly-see-politicians-as-stoking-culture-wars-study-finds>

5.2 Regional Spotlight: Asia

A correlation between the rise of the far right and shrinking civil society space.

A concerning trend of rising authoritarian governance in various Asian countries was observed by participants in the Asia Regional Dialogue. Attendees report this trend to be increasingly accompanied by a shrinkage of civil society space. Development actors fear exacerbated challenges in the future as their advocacy for inclusive policies and protection of minority rights is met with resistance from the state.

Growing apprehension that state repression would likely extend to restrictions on online assembly and digital advocacy efforts, limiting the ability to organize and campaign virtually is also alarming.

5.3 Implications for international cooperation actors

As economic factors and societal dynamics undergo transformations, international organizations must proactively address challenges to maintain trust, sustain philanthropy, and fulfill heightened responsibilities toward their stakeholders.

Impact on Charitable Donations:

The declining ability of individuals to afford a decent life, coupled with stagnating labor wages, poses a potential challenge to charitable donations. As people find it increasingly challenging to accumulate wealth, international cooperation actors must recognize the shifting economic realities and strategize to sustain philanthropic support.

Trust Erosion in Institutions:

A decline in trust towards institutions, including governments and large NGOs, necessitates heightened transparency from international cooperation actors. Stakeholders, now more than ever, seek detailed information on how organizations address their concerns. Managing reputational risk requires a proactive approach to expanding reporting mechanisms and investing in trust-building initiatives to resonate with taxpayers.

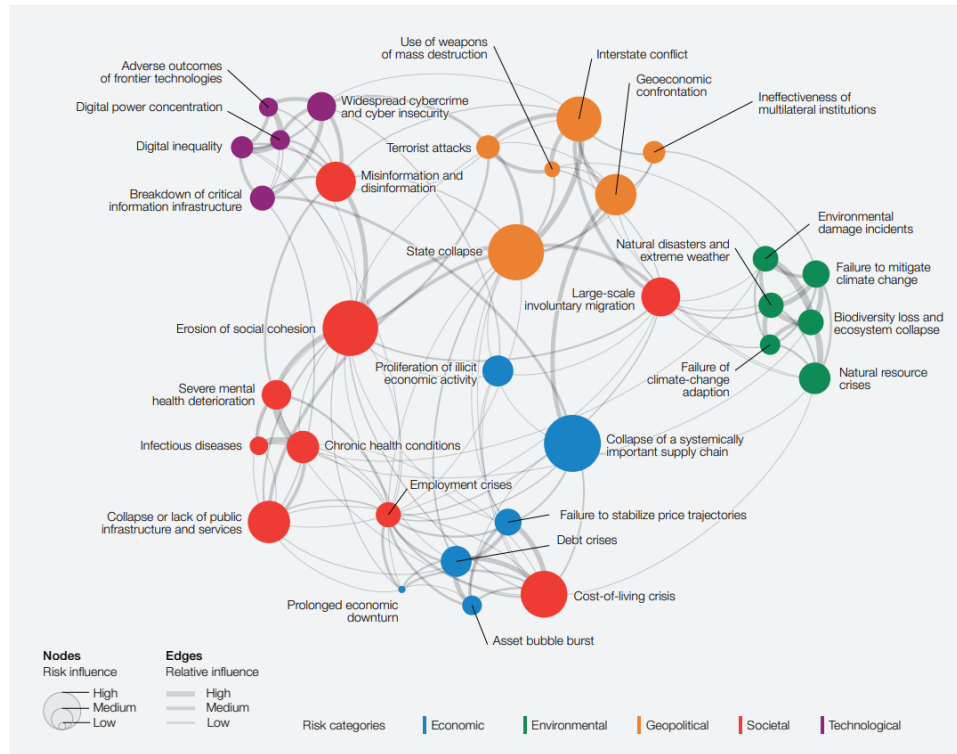
Expanded Employee Responsibilities:

International cooperation actors face an increased responsibility to address the holistic needs of their employees. With social safety nets dwindling due to financially strained governments, organizations are stepping into a more prominent role. Ensuring employees can maintain a decent standard of living, access healthcare, and save for retirement becomes an integral aspect of organizational responsibility.

6 So What?

Global crises do not impact everyone equally, but they are interlocked and exacerbate each other, as illustrated below.

Figure 8. An interconnections map of global risks⁴⁹



This environmental scan provides a comprehensive overview of the dynamic landscape shaping development cooperation. The interplay of political, environmental, social, economic, and technological factors presents a complex tapestry that demands nuanced and adaptive strategies to maneuver efficiently. As geopolitical dynamics shift, environmental challenges intensify, social issues evolve, economic paradigms transform, and technology continues to disrupt, international cooperation actors must leave at bay reactive approaches and opt for proactive, future-oriented strategic planning. Organizations will need to be hyper vigilant to emerging trends, weak signals of change and embrace foresight as tool for better future preparedness.

Through the Futures Initiative, Cooperation Canada is taking a step in this direction, travelling into a world of plausibility while asking the question: what might be? This environmental scan represents the first and very important step towards defining three transformative scenarios for global development cooperation. Subsequent studies of the maturity of these trends will allow for the prioritization of signals and potential disruptors for further monitoring ahead of scenario building. It is through proactive engagement with these trends that development cooperation can continue addressing pressing challenges and contribute to a fairer, safer, and more sustainable world.

49 Global Risks Report 2023, World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2023/>

About Cooperation Canada

Cooperation Canada brings together Canada's international development and humanitarian organizations and advocates for them by convening sector leaders, influencing policy and building capacity. Together, we work with partners both inside and outside Canada to build a world that's fair, safe and sustainable for all.

Land Acknowledgement

Cooperation Canada acknowledges the historical and ongoing oppression and colonization of all Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and lands in what we now know as Canada. The land on which Cooperation Canada's office is located is the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabe People. We believe that social justice in Canada and globally depends on reconciliation with all Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, who are the original guardians of the land we are grateful to be sharing.

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