

# THE GLOBAL COOPERATION FUTURES INITIATIVE

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# 2023

## REFLECTION REPORT



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# INTRODUCTION

Funded by the International Development Research Centre and led by Cooperation Canada, the Global Cooperation Futures Initiative is a strategic foresight project aimed at reimagining next global development cooperation in the post-2030 Agenda era.

In an era characterized by unprecedented complexity and interconnectedness, the need for foresight and strategic planning has never been more critical. As global challenges continue to mount, from climate change to political instability, the imperative to anticipate and prepare for the future becomes increasingly urgent. Nowhere is this need more pronounced than in the realm of global development cooperation, where the stakes are high, and the consequences of inaction profound.

Against this backdrop, Cooperation Canada is leading its first ever strategic foresight project, with support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The project, “The Global Cooperation Futures Initiative”, hereinafter referred to as the Futures Initiative, aimed at reimagining next generation global development cooperation. It is rooted in the recognition that the business as usual scenario is no longer tenable. The landscape of international development is evolving rapidly, shaped by emerging trends, shifting power dynamics, and an array of interconnected crises. To navigate this uncertain terrain effectively, we must quickly grasp the future in order to anticipate the challenges and opportunities ahead and strategically develop plans to respond to them.

The Futures Initiative goes beyond the mere exercise of foresight; it is a call to action—a rallying cry for those committed to building a more sustainable, equitable world. By analyzing the landscape, identifying emerging trends and signals of change, and capturing distinct visions of the future of development cooperation, we aim to equip Canadian and global stakeholders with the insights and tools they need to chart a course toward a brighter tomorrow.

## 2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The main goal of the Global Cooperation Futures Initiative is to help Canadian and international stakeholders develop three plausible future scenarios for global development cooperation in innovative and surprising ways, and consider current day governance, funding and policy implications domestically and internationally for reaching a preferred future.

1

### Primary objective

To use strategic foresight tools and methodologies to develop a better understanding of three plausible futures for global development cooperation and consider the implications domestically and internationally.

2

### Secondary objective - A

To raise awareness of civil society actors engaged in global development cooperation about the range of strategic foresight tools that can be used to imagine these new plausible futures.

3

### Secondary objective - B

To assess the utility of the different strategic foresight processes from a civil society perspective.

4

### Secondary objective - C

To determine how the outputs of strategic foresight can be best positioned for use by global and national Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working in different contexts.

## 3. 2023 ACHIEVEMENTS

The below highlights the Futures Initiative's major achievements during its first year.

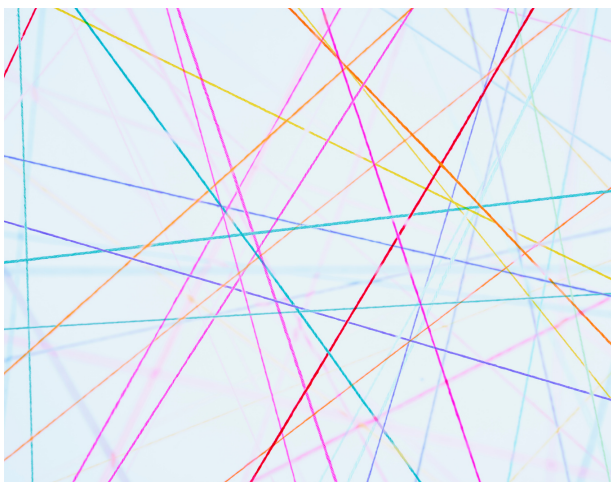


### 9 Workshops

Cooperation Canada with guidance from a Foresight expert, strategically designed workshops to engage stakeholders in a thorough examination of emerging issues, trends, and signals of change.

### 218 Stakeholders

The project has engaged a total of 218 Canadian and global stakeholders representing civil society organizations, academia, and private sector organizations, with various levels of understanding of strategic foresight.



### 7 Networks

We've engaged 7 networks of organizations working in international development in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, and the Middle East and North Africa regions.

## 4. PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

In its inaugural year, the Global Cooperation Futures Initiative has made remarkable progress in understanding the intricacies of the international development cooperation landscape, while actively engaging stakeholders in our journey forward.

### **Strategic foresight awareness**

- Through interactive learning methods and expert-led discussions, we are effectively raising awareness of strategic foresight among CSOs globally. This is also achieved by strategically incorporating a pedagogical component to provide a comprehensive understanding of foresight as a strategic planning tool.

### **Collective understanding of emerging trends**

- Our workshops serve as dynamic platforms for bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise to collectively explore potential future scenarios. This collaborative engagement not only enriches our understanding of emerging trends but also fosters a unified vision among CSOs for navigating the evolving landscape of global development cooperation.

### **Cultivating ownership in navigating uncertainties**

- The Futures Initiative cultivates a profound sense of ownership among development cooperation actors, fostering active engagement in all aspects of the project. Through interactive dialogues and collaborative exercises, stakeholders are equipped with tools to anticipate the future, leading to a proactive mindset and a collective sense of responsibility.

# 5. THE PROCESS

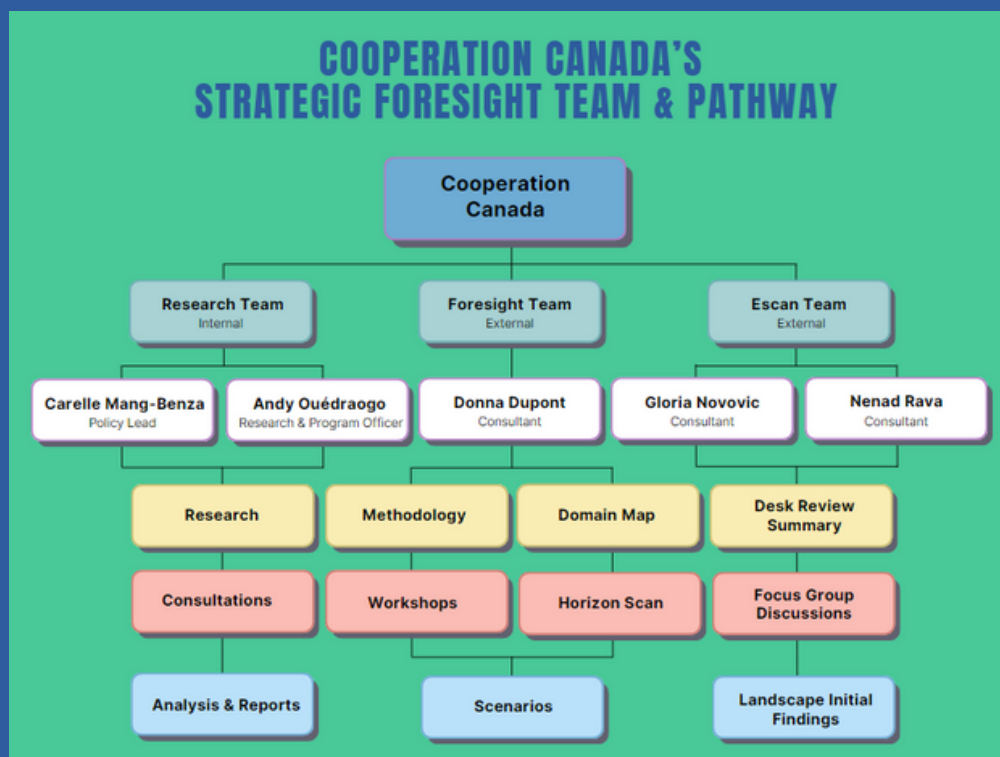
## What is Strategic Foresight

At its core, strategic foresight is the art and science of anticipating and preparing for the future. It's not about gazing into a crystal ball but rather about constructing a nuanced understanding of emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities for better anticipation, preparation and response.

This process typically starts with environmental scanning, which involves analyzing various factors such as social, technological, economic, environmental, and political trends.

Through collaborative workshops, brainstorming sessions, and expert consultations, organizations explore potential future scenarios and their implications. Scenario-building techniques are then used to develop narratives around different future states, which are rigorously analyzed for feasibility and impact.

The insights gained from strategic foresight help decision-makers develop robust strategies, policies, and action plans that enable the organization to navigate uncertainty, seize emerging opportunities, and address challenges effectively in a rapidly changing environment.



## 6. STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS

While a multitude of strategic foresight tools are available, below we offer concise definitions of the tools employed thus far for the Futures Initiative.



### **Domain mapping**

It involves visually representing the crucial domains or areas of interest pertinent to the strategic foresight project. Recognized as a fundamental initial stage of the Futures Initiative, Domain Mapping enabled us to establish the project's parameters, delineating its scope and clarifying the inclusion criteria (what is in and what is out).



### **Environmental Scanning**

It is the systematic gathering and analyzing of information from diverse sources to gain insights into the trends, challenges, opportunities, and potential risks that could influence an organization or a particular sector. Foresight experts rely on reliable facts and data to anticipate the future, and environmental scanning serves as the essential bedrock of evidence upon which informed decisions are built.



### **Trends Analysis**

It involves examining historical data and patterns to identify consistent changes or developments over time. This was used alongside horizon scanning to analyze the trends and emerging issues identified in our environmental scan.

# STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOLS & FRAMEWORKS ●●●



## Horizon scanning

While very similar to environmental scanning, horizon scanning differs in its scope and focus. Horizon scanning is a future-oriented analysis of emerging issues, trends, and potential disruptions that could impact an organization or industry in the future. It involves monitoring a wide range of sources to detect weak signals and early indicators of change.



## The Three Horizons Approach

The Three Horizons Approach is a strategic framework used to explore and navigate the dynamics of change over time. It involves envisioning three distinct horizons: the current state (Horizon 1), the transition period (Horizon 2), and the desired future state (Horizon 3). This framework has been used to capture existing challenges, emerging issues, and distinct visions of global development cooperation.



## The Foresight Diamond

The Foresight Diamond, proposed by Popper (2008), is a framework that categorizes foresight methods based on their primary sources of knowledge: creativity, expertise, interaction, or evidence. It has been useful in ensuring that our overall process is driven by a combination of factual data (environmental scan), expertise (expert consultations), imagination (visioning exercises), as well as interactions (workshops/dialogues).

## 7. REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNED...

### 1

#### **Strategic Foresight expertise in the international development sector.**

Recognizing that the international development sector has often grappled with a notable lack of foresight, and the resulting low demand and supply of foresight experts with expertise in development cooperation, we anticipated a difficulty in finding a strategic foresight partner capable of producing a qualitative environmental scan report to inform the development of the scenarios

This assumption was the pull factor to our decision to contract two teams of consultants, each tasked with the part of the process they were most familiar with.

Our concerns proved valid as we found ourselves compelled to extend the deadline for the submission of proposals twice due to a lower-than-expected level of interest in the initial request.

### 2

#### **Risks associated with diverging methodologies in collaborative projects.**

One of the risks associated with our decision to have two different teams conduct the environmental scan and the foresight exercises was the possibility that we would end up with diverging methodologies and a report that would be impractical for the development of the scenarios.

To mitigate this risk, we set to have the two teams work collaboratively to identify a common ground and ensure that the two methodologies were complementary and mutually reinforcing.

Several meetings were organized between the research team, the environmental scan team, and the foresight team to create a unified framework that met the objectives of the project.

# REFLECTIONS & LESSONS LEARNED

## 3

### **Incorporating diverse perspectives in Strategic Foresight initiatives.**

Despite efforts at geographic inclusion, the lack of Global South perspectives highlighted a blind spot in the initial approach. This realization underscored the need for targeted regional dialogues to ensure meaningful engagement and capture regional nuances, challenges, and aspirations.

By conducting these dialogues, the team was able to tap into intra-personal observational knowledge, enriching the insights with on-the-ground experiences and perceptions from diverse stakeholders.

This lesson emphasizes the significance of inclusivity and the value of incorporating diverse perspectives to enhance the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of strategic foresight efforts.

## 4

### **Strategic Foresight Partner & Methodologies**

Strategic foresight is not a one-size-fits-all discipline. An adaptable foresight partner would be well-versed in an array of methodologies and is willing to customize their applications to the context.

Whether it's scenario planning, trend analysis, or horizon scanning, the foresight partner should select and integrate methodologies that best suit the organizational goals and challenges.

The Futures Initiative has benefited from the flexibility of our Foresight partner, hence allowing us to tailor our workshops and initiatives to suit our needs.

## 8. NEXT STEPS

Over the next few months, The Futures Initiative will be entering its scenario development phase.

### A

#### Scenario Creation Workshop

An interactive experiential skills building session using foresight and strategic thinking methods to map change, effects to anticipate future challenges and disruption. Our strategic foresight partner will engage Canadian and global stakeholders in the co-creation of the three transformative scenarios for global cooperation. Participants will identify interdependencies of emerging issues, interesting patterns, influences or connections. The workshop will also capture scenario insights of change over time, tensions and conflicts and opportunities.

### B

#### Scenario Implications Workshop

To explore three plausible scenarios of global development cooperation futures and provide an opportunity to discuss implications and identify new strategic opportunities to prepare, mitigate, and adapt. Participants will also discuss new strategic directions and goals needed to re-organize system structures, rules, and information flows of cooperation actors to meet the preferred vision of the future.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report is authored by Cooperation Canada's Research and Program Officer and lead of the Futures Initiative, Andy Ouédraogo.

# 10. CONCLUSION

One year into the Futures Initiative, strategic foresight has proven to be a truly valuable approach to understanding the complex interplay across and between the political, economic, environmental, technological, and social domains of international development cooperation.

As we reflect on our journey, several lessons have emerged, including the importance of promoting foresight awareness through educational workshops, fostering collective understanding of emerging trends through collaborative engagement, and cultivating ownership among stakeholders to navigate uncertainties effectively. Additionally, the significance of flexibility in methodologies and the value of an iterative learning process have become evident, guiding our foresight activities.

## WHAT'S TO COME IN 2024

Looking ahead, the strategic foresight process enters an exciting phase, with global stakeholders set to engage in the co-creation of transformative scenarios for global cooperation. The anticipated outcomes include greater clarity on future cooperation dynamics, a prioritization of top trends and drivers of change, use of additional foresight methodologies and tools to co-create plausible future scenarios and study their implications.

Finally, our project reflection reaffirms the critical role of strategic foresight in shaping the future of international development cooperation. By fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and adaptability, we remain committed to empowering CSOs to anticipate, adapt, and thrive in a rapidly changing world.



**WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER.**