



THE POST 2030 LANDSCAPE:

A World of Asymmetry and
Realignment

Plausible Scenarios for Global Cooperation



**COOPÉRATION
CANADA**

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INTRODUCTION

Global cooperation has long been a cornerstone of human progress, embodying our collective aspirations to address shared challenges and achieve common goals. Over time, the reasons for and mechanisms of cooperation have evolved, shaped by shifting political landscapes, socioeconomic transformations and technological advancements. Yet underlying this evolution is a set of assumptions about why we cooperate: the belief that, through working together, we can achieve more than we can alone; that mutual interests can override individual concerns; and that global challenges require global solutions.

In our 21st century world, these assumptions are being tested as never before. The accelerating pace of change, coupled with deepening geopolitical tensions and increasing global crises, calls into question the structures and norms that have governed our interactions for decades. Competing interests, diverging values and growing skepticism about the benefits of global cooperation are increasingly blurring the once-clear lines of cooperation.

This shifting landscape has profound implications for the global commitments made under the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. Designed as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, the Sustainable Development Goals represent a vision of global cooperation that prioritizes equity, sustainability and collective responsibility. As we approach the 2030 deadline, the world is at a critical juncture. While significant progress has been made, some of this has been reversed, and the path forward is uncertain.

As we look beyond 2030, the questions surrounding global cooperation become even more pressing. Changing attitudes towards and perceptions of cooperation are reshaping the global agenda. For some, the urgency of transnational threats like climate change, pandemics and technological disruption reinforces the need for renewed solidarity and collective action. For others, the rise of nationalism, protectionism and unilateralism signals a retreat from the ideals of multilateralism, as the costs of cooperation are weighed more heavily against the perceived benefits.

These changing attitudes are mirrored in the evolving principles and values that underpin global cooperation. Where once the focus was on universalism and shared human rights, we now observe a fragmentation of values, with different actors advocating for diverse and sometimes conflicting visions of justice, development and governance. The re-emergence of regionalism, identity politics and alternative governance models challenges the liberal democratic ideals that have dominated global cooperation for decades.

Furthermore, the principles that guide cooperation are increasingly contested. The emphasis on equality, mutual respect and collective responsibility is being reinterpreted in light of new power dynamics and historical grievances. Calls for a more equitable redistribution of power and resources, especially from actors in the global majority, reflect a growing demand to recalibrate the mechanisms of cooperation to better reflect contemporary realities.

Global cooperation is thus at a crossroads. The principles and values that once united the international community are now subjects of intense debate and disagreement. As we look to the future, we must ask ourselves: What will cooperation look like in a world where we can no longer take for granted the foundational assumptions? How will changing attitudes and evolving values shape the ways we work together to confront global challenges?

This report explores potential futures for global development cooperation, examining how current trends might reshape our collective efforts beyond the 2030 horizon. It invites reflection on the fundamental principles of cooperation and the ways in which they might evolve to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Through this exploration, we aim to provide insights to inform and inspire those committed to building a more cooperative, just and sustainable global community in the years to come.

HOW TO READ THE REPORT: CONNECTING THE TRENDS, SCENARIOS AND STRATEGIES

This report is designed to guide global cooperation actors through the complex landscape of the post-2030 era. Chapter 1, Trends, Risks and Uncertainties Reshaping Global Cooperation, provides a comprehensive overview of the top 15 high-priority trends that are likely to drive change, alongside three high-risk and high-uncertainty trends that require careful attention. In addition, we outline two major forces that will shape the future of global cooperation, setting the foundation for understanding the evolving dynamics at play.

In Chapter 2, Bridging the Horizon: From Uncertainty to Plausibility, we present three plausible scenarios for global cooperation in 2035: Multipolar State-Led Cooperation, Multistakeholder Cooperation and Transactional Cooperation. These scenarios offer pathways for navigating the uncertain future, helping actors understand how different trends and forces might interact to shape the world in distinctive ways. Each scenario is developed with its own opportunities and risks, emphasizing the need for adaptable strategies in a rapidly evolving landscape.

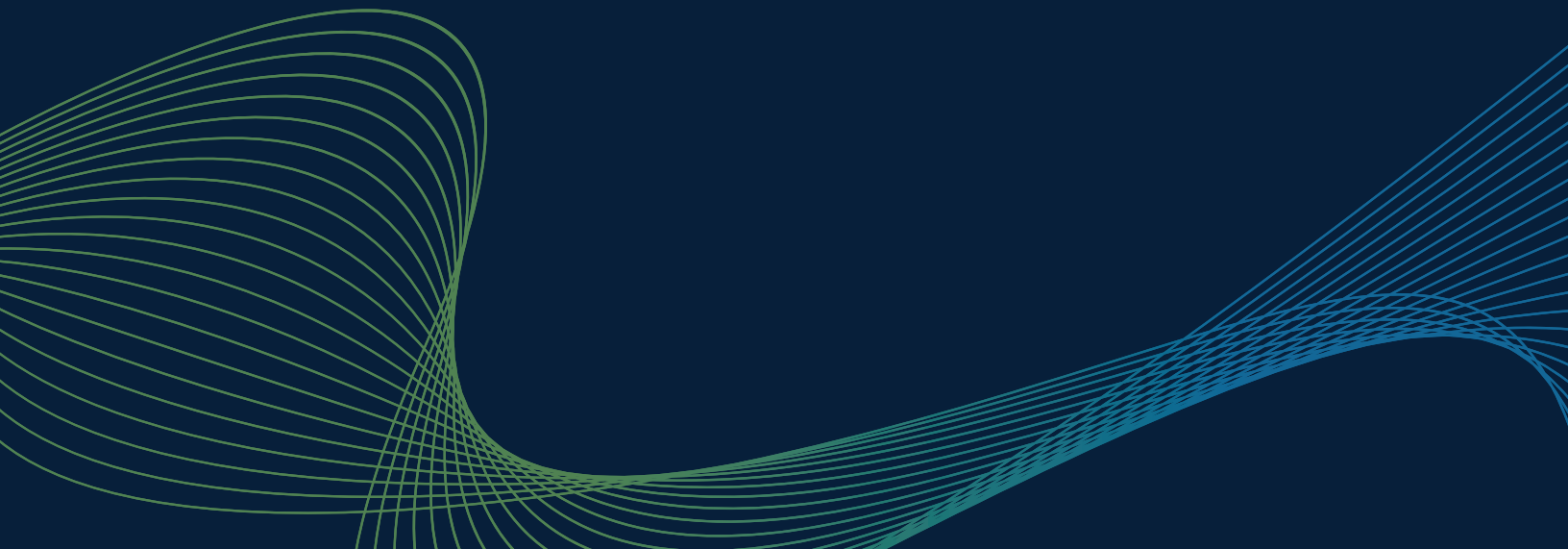
Finally, in Chapter 3, Rewriting the Story of Global Cooperation, we present three key strategies to transform global cooperation moving forward: rethinking existing assumptions, reversing systemic anomalies and reimagining key principles and values. This chapter challenges stakeholders to go beyond incremental change, encouraging bold rethinking and collaborative solutions that can address the root causes of current global challenges.

By reading the report in sequence, you will be able to link the key trends shaping global cooperation with the plausible futures we have developed and to explore the transformative strategies necessary for a more resilient and equitable global cooperation framework.



CHAPTER 1

TRENDS, RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES RESHAPING GLOBAL COOPERATION POST-2030



As we delve deeper into the forces shaping global cooperation beyond 2030, it is crucial first to examine the transformations reshaping global cooperation. The trends driving these transformations are not just emerging but accelerating, fundamentally altering the global landscape. This chapter therefore explores the high-priority trends, risks and uncertainties that are most likely to influence the future of cooperation. Understanding these forces will provide the foundation for the scenarios that follow, allowing us to envision how global collaboration might evolve in the face of increasing complexity and challenges.

1.1 HIGH-PRIORITY TRENDS IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Emerging trends and signals from our [Global Landscape Analysis](#)¹ reveal the ongoing transformations that are reshaping our world. Climate change continues to redefine global fault lines, while demographic shifts are having increasing impacts on resource distribution. Geopolitical tensions and conflicts are escalating. Concurrently, technological advancements are already revolutionizing communication and access to goods and services.

The Global Landscape Analysis identifies 15 trends that are poised to significantly influence global dynamics and reshape global development cooperation. These trends encompass a broad spectrum of societal, economic and technological changes, each with the potential to drive disruption and transformation on a global scale.

TREND	PRIORITY SCORE (OUT OF 165)	RANKING	CHANGE/GROWTH PHASE
Climate change	156	1	Decline/collapse
Food insecurity	146	2	Decline/collapse
Social asymmetry	134	3	Limits/discipline
Declining global peace	134	4	Decline/collapse
Artificial Intelligence growth	125	5	Transformation
Digital divides and rising inequalities	118	6	Transformation
Migrant stigmatization	109	7	Limits/discipline
Increased militarization	107	8	Decline/collapse
Shrinking funding for civil society	106	9	Limits/discipline
Artificial Intelligence governance concerns	106	10	Continuation
Rising health impacts of climate change	105	11	Continuation
Fractured world order	104	12	Transformation
Aging populations and youth bulges	103	13	Limits/discipline
Gender backlash	101	14	Limits/discipline
Growing criticism of traditional aid	100	15	Transformation

¹ The Landscape Analysis of the International Cooperation Sector synthesizes insights gathered from desk reviews, focus groups and regional dialogues. It highlights the ongoing planetary transformations and the interconnected ripple effects shaping the economic, political, social and environmental landscapes.

INTERPRETATION OF TREND GROWTH PHASES

Continuation:

Trend expected to maintain existing trajectory without significant disruption. Impact on global cooperation likely to remain the same.

Limits and Discipline:

Trend expected to pose significant constraints, requiring more disciplined and efficient management of resources. Impact on global cooperation likely to be significant as the system reaches its limits.

Decline and Collapse:

Trend expected to lead to a breakdown of the system if escalation continues. Impact on global cooperation likely to be devastating.

Transformation:

Trend expected to disrupt as new actors, models, technologies and movements emerge. High potential to alter the global cooperation system.

This framework is an adaptation of Jim Dator's Four Generic Alternate Images of the Future, reinterpreted to apply to the growth patterns of trends within the context of global development cooperation.

1.2

HIGH-RISK/HIGH-UNCERTAINTY TRENDS FOR GLOBAL COOPERATION

This section offers a comprehensive analysis of three critical high-risk and high-uncertainty trends in global cooperation: increased migration flows, demographic shifts and the rise of authoritarianism. For each trend, we delve into its underlying drivers, risks, opportunities and gaps, providing a nuanced understanding of the implications for international development and cooperation. The complexities and interconnections of these high-risk trends emphasize the need for coordinated, innovative and adaptive responses in global cooperation.

1.2.1. Increased Migration Flows

Several indicators signal a growing migration crisis. These include the increasing allocation of official development assistance (ODA) to [in-donor refugee costs](#); the overcrowding of refugee camps such as the Metche and Eastern Aegean Sea Camps in [Chad](#) and [Greece](#), respectively; and the rising frequency of climate-related migration, with [84%](#) of refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing from countries highly vulnerable to climate change in 2022.

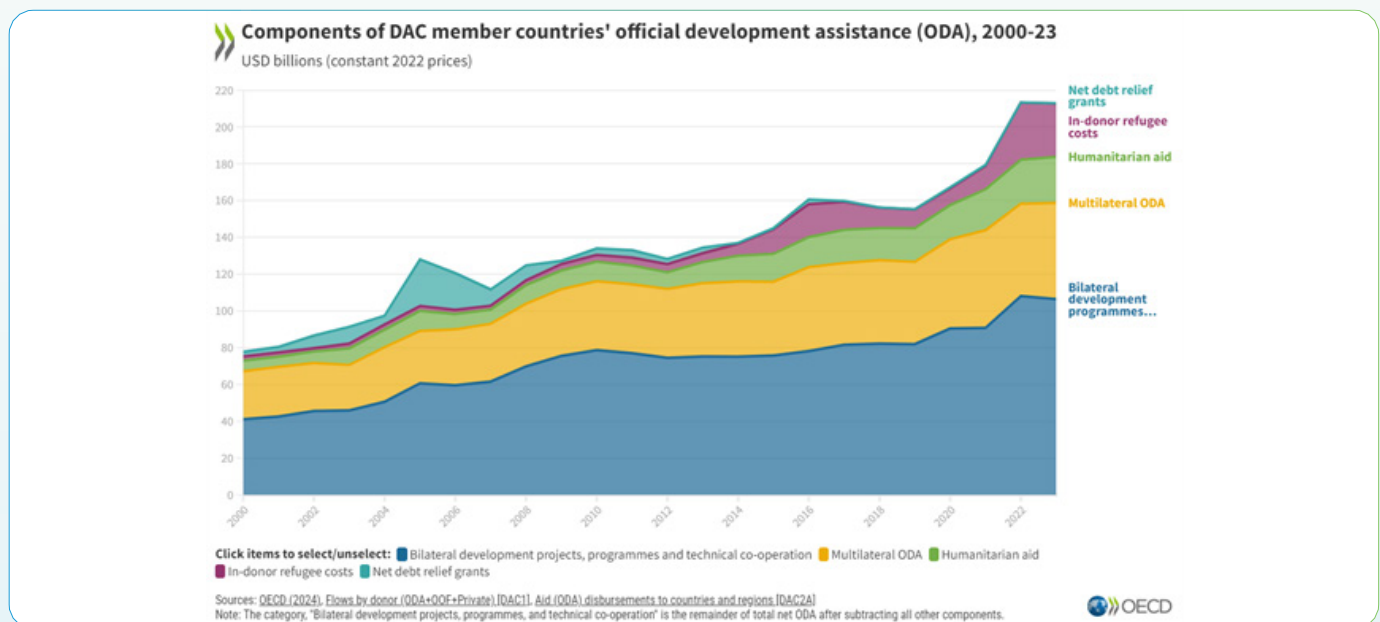
Climate Change in the Driving Seat

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a significant driver of migration. Increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme weather events are predicted to accelerate environmental degradation, threatening livelihoods and potentially driving migration from developing regions. The impacts of climate change on agriculture, fishing and herding are already [rendering these livelihoods unsustainable](#) in some of the world's [most vulnerable areas](#). A substantial number of forcibly displaced and stateless individuals are currently living in the world's most climate-vulnerable environments, lacking the resources and resilience needed to cope with climate impacts. This vulnerability is not limited to cross-border displacement; internal displacement caused by natural disasters, intensified by climate change, is also on the rise.

Overcrowded Refugee Camps: A Symptom of a Growing Crisis

The overcrowding of refugee camps highlights the worsening migration crisis. For example, by March 2024, Metche Camp in Chad faced financial collapse, worsening an already dire humanitarian situation caused by the spillover of conflict from Sudan. Likewise, by October 2023, the camps on the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean Sea were overwhelmed, with 17,500 new arrivals in just 3 months. The arrival of over 1,000 refugees on the small Greek island of [Gavdos](#), which has a population of just 70, in January 2024 further strained local authorities. Such overcrowding not only highlights the severity of the migration crisis but also underscores the inadequacies in the current global response.

Shifting Priorities for Official Development Assistance



Sources: [OECD \(2024\)](#), [flows by donor \(ODA+other official flows+private\)](#) [DAC1] and [ODA disbursements to countries and regions](#) [DAC2A].

The reallocation of ODA points to the increasing strain on international aid systems, as countries grapple with the perceived pressures of hosting refugees and responding to acute crises. Consequently, essential initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty, addressing climate change, supporting early childhood education, combating famines and providing healthcare to vulnerable populations worldwide are receiving less attention and funding.

This shift is exacerbating existing inequalities but also highlights the growing challenges involved in balancing short-term humanitarian responses with long-term development goals, ultimately intensifying the global migration crisis.

Risks: Growing Challenges in Managing Diversity

Increasing migration flows, driven by conflict, economic instability, climate change and violence, present a major challenge for host societies struggling to manage diversity. As these societies grapple with integration, migrants often face growing stigmatization and vulnerability. This issue is worsened by shifting public attitudes in many countries, where economic difficulties are leading to reduced support for international development initiatives. Civil society actors in regions like Latin America and the Middle East caution that such sentiments could further strain migrants' well-being, threaten regional stability and undermine international cooperation efforts aimed at addressing migration issues in a comprehensive and humane manner.

Opportunities

While the challenges of growing migration are significant, there are also opportunities that effective international cooperation can harness. Migrants often contribute to economic growth in host countries by filling labour shortages, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, construction and technology. Remittances sent by migrants to their home countries provide a crucial source of income, supporting families, improving living standards and stimulating local economies. For example, international remittances increased by more than 650% between 2000 and 2022, reaching USD 831 billion, with USD 647 billion sent to low- and middle-income countries. These remittances now surpass foreign direct investment in boosting gross domestic product in many developing nations. Moreover, migration can help counteract the threats of an aging demographic in developed countries, while also redistributing populations more evenly across regions and revitalizing rural or declining areas. Migrant communities also form strong transnational networks that can facilitate trade, investment and diplomacy, fostering cooperation and mutual understanding between countries.

Existing Gaps

Legal Protection:

Protections for refugees and asylum-seekers are inconsistent. Existing legal frameworks may not adequately address needs, especially for those displaced by climate change or economic factors. There are no international or regional refugee law instruments protecting communities affected by the increased frequency and intensity of climate change-related natural disasters.

Insufficient Public Engagement:

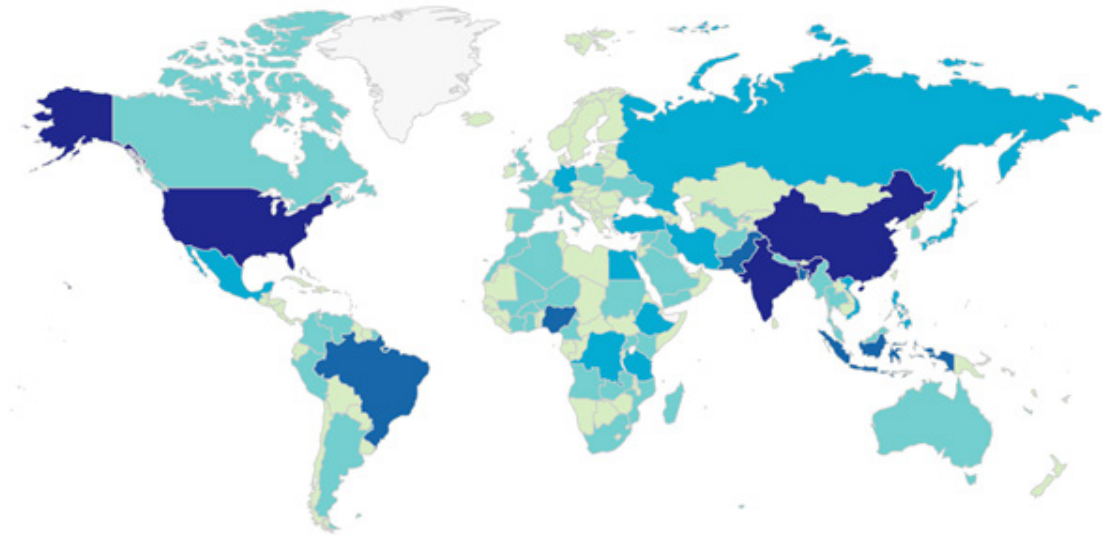
Policies often do not adequately engage or address public concerns and misconceptions about migration, which can hinder policy effectiveness and public support.

Transformative Action				
COMMUNICATION AND NARRATIVES	INNOVATIVE FINANCING	REMITTANCE OPTIMIZATION	INTEGRATED APPROACHES	CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION
International cooperation efforts should involve investing in public awareness campaigns that present a balanced view of migration, highlighting its positive aspects and economic benefits. This can help counter misinformation and reduce xenophobia.	Philanthropic foundations, international financial institutions and governments can collaborate to develop innovative financing mechanisms to support migration-related initiatives. This could include migrant bonds, diaspora investment funds and public-private partnerships focused on integrating migrants into host economies.	Governments and financial institutions can work together to reduce the costs of remittance transfers, ensuring more money reaches migrant families and communities in countries of origin, thereby contributing to development and poverty reduction.	To reduce the need for forced migration, international cooperation should focus on addressing the root causes of displacement, such as poverty, conflict and climate change. This requires coordinated efforts to promote economic development, peacebuilding and climate resilience in vulnerable regions.	International actors must collaborate on climate change mitigation strategies that target the environmental drivers of migration. This includes funding for climate adaptation projects in vulnerable regions and ensuring climate action is integrated into migration policies.

1.2.2. Demographic Shifts

POPULATION MID-2035 (MILLIONS)

■ N/A ■ 0.0 – 27.2 ■ 27.2 – 87.6 ■ 87.6 – 198.6 ■ 198.6 – 359.9 ■ 359.9 – 1567.8



Sources: 2023 World Population Data Sheet and the Population Reference Bureau's Mid-2035 World Population Projections based on official national data or analyses conducted by national statistical offices, regional organizations, the Population Reference Bureau, the United Nations Population Division or the International Programs of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Populations Growing, Shrinking and Diversifying

As the global population is projected to reach 8.6 billion by 2030 and 9.7 billion by 2050, signs of an impending demographic crisis are increasingly evident, with some regions facing youth bulges while others grapple with aging populations. As stipulated in our Global Landscape Analysis, there will be stark contrasts in the challenges that face older versus younger nations in the coming years.

By 2030:

- 1 in 6 people globally will be aged 60 or older, and the number of individuals in this age group is projected to rise from 1 billion in 2020 to 1.4 billion.
- The median age in Japan will be 52; in Nigeria it will be 19.

Downward Pressure on Existing Systems

Innovations in medical technology have significantly reduced mortality rates and improved quality of life for millions, enabling people to live longer and more active lives. However, this progress increasingly presents substantial challenges for social and governance systems worldwide, which are often ill-prepared to cope with the increasing pressures on labour markets and social and healthcare services as well as retirement and pension systems.

To meet the growing demands of aging populations, many countries are implementing policies and reforms, such as adjustments to pension systems. For example, China [recently](#) announced a gradual increase in the retirement age over the next five years to alleviate the looming pension crisis, with the state-run Chinese Academy of Social Sciences warning that the state pension fund could be depleted by 2035. Countries including the [United Kingdom](#) and [France](#) proposed or enacted pension reform laws in 2023.

Youth Bulges: a Belt of Brewing Instability?

Countries with young, rapidly expanding populations represent a belt of instability, with great potential to disrupt global cooperation in the next decade. In sub-Saharan Africa, where the population is expected to [double](#) by 2050, the working-age group (25–64 years) is growing more rapidly than any other demographic. By 2030, African youth is [projected](#) to make up 42% of the world's youth, with 75% under the age of 35.

As these young populations migrate to cities in search of education and employment, urban centres will continue to face unprecedented growth, often overwhelming existing infrastructure and services. This rapid urbanization, coupled with high unemployment rates, will pose significant challenges for governments, including related to managing the risk of social unrest and addressing the potential for increased crime and political instability.

Risks: Amplified Global Asymmetry

The contrast between countries grappling with aging populations and those experiencing youth bulges reveals critical gaps in global capacities to manage these demographic shifts.

Aging nations, particularly in high-income countries, will struggle with shrinking workforces and rising costs, risking economic stagnation and increased public debt.

Countries with youthful populations will confront different yet equally daunting challenges. In regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, where young populations are surging, the pace of urbanization is outstripping the development of infrastructure and services, leading to dire consequences for employment, social stability and environmental sustainability. In the absence of resources and institutional capacity to adequately address high youth unemployment and urban overcrowding, the associated risks of social unrest and political instability will be higher.

The widening gap in capabilities between these contrasting groups of nations will likely exacerbate global asymmetries, creating a volatile environment where disparities in economic and social resilience could undermine international cooperation and stability.

Opportunities

Demographic transitions offer unique opportunities for those able to harness them effectively.

For countries experiencing youth bulges, there is significant potential to leverage this demographic dividend by investing in education, vocational training and job creation. Rapid urbanization presents an opportunity to modernize infrastructure and develop smart and sustainable cities that can accommodate growing populations while fostering economic growth. Additionally, youth-driven innovation and social entrepreneurship could stimulate new industries and economic models, creating pathways for sustainable development.

In countries with aging populations, advancements in technology and healthcare provide opportunities to improve quality of life for the elderly while creating new markets for health tech and eldercare services.

Existing Gaps

○ Inadequate Social Safety Nets:

Gaps exist in social safety nets, including insufficient pension systems and healthcare services designed to accommodate the growing elderly demographic.

○ Limited Support for Technological Adaptation:

Both aging and youthful countries may face difficulties leveraging technological advancements to address demographic challenges, such as assistive technologies, digital skills training and tech-driven job creation.

○ Policy Gaps:

Policy frameworks currently lack mechanisms for cross-border cooperation to manage the impacts of older populations and youth bulges effectively.

Transformative Action			
GLOBAL RESEARCH AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS	COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS AND ADVOCACY	INTEGRATED DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION PLANS	FUNDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS
International organizations should lead efforts to coordinate global research and develop policy frameworks that address the implications of demographic shifts. They can facilitate cross-border research initiatives to better understand the impacts of aging and youth bulges on different regions.	Non-governmental organizations can drive impactful change by implementing community-based programs that address the specific needs of aging and youthful populations. This could include developing programs for eldercare, mental health support and youth empowerment in local communities.	Governments should develop comprehensive, forward-looking demographic transition plans that address the unique needs of both aging and youthful populations. This could include the creation of taskforces dedicated to demographic challenges, which would coordinate across ministries to implement policies on pensions, healthcare, education and employment.	Philanthropic foundations can drive significant impact by funding innovative solutions and pilot programs that address demographic shifts. They can also invest in scalable pilot projects that test new approaches to managing urbanization, employment and social services.

1.2.3. Authoritarianism: A Threat to Democracy

Globally, the appeal of stricter, centralized leadership (at the expense of principles like checks and balances, pluralism and civil liberties) is rising as democratic governance loses ground in many parts of the world. In 2023, [39%](#) of countries experienced declines in political rights and civil liberties, with nations regressing in democratic performance [outnumbering](#) those making progress.

This [erosion](#) of democratic support is often linked to growing disillusionment with democracies that are perceived as [failing](#) to meet people's expectations. The shift to right-wing politics has been marked by the erosion of institutions, increasing state control and restrictive laws. Our [Regional Perspectives Report](#) reveals that civil society organizations (CSOs) across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East and North Africa are increasingly alarmed by the surge in authoritarian governance, which has been paralleled by a troubling global trend of shrinking civic space.

The Security Rationale

As our [Global Landscape Analysis](#) indicates, conflict is on the rise. As a result, in regions plagued by rising terrorism, crime and national security threats, fear of instability is driving significant support for authoritarian leaders who vow to restore order and protect. However, the promise of decisive action against perceived threats often translates into increased surveillance, aggressive crackdowns on civil liberties and a heightened focus on law and order. Such measures are frequently justified under the guise of enhancing security but they also serve to consolidate power and suppress dissent.

In an increasingly insecure world, it is to be expected that citizens prioritize safety and stability over democratic freedoms. Authoritarian regimes can gain a foothold by capitalizing on instability and anxieties and embedding repressive practices under the banner of national protection. This dangerous shift will seriously undermine both individual freedoms and the broader principles of democratic governance, fostering an environment where authoritarianism thrives under the pretext of safeguarding security.

Constricted Civil Society

In an effort to consolidate power and control, some governments are increasingly enacting restrictive laws, imposing bureaucratic hurdles and leveraging advanced surveillance technologies to stifle dissent and limit the activities of CSOs. These measures not only curtail freedom of expression and assembly but also create a hostile environment where CSOs are labelled adversarial or subversive, leading to diminished funding and resources.

As this trend escalates, donors and philanthropic foundations, wary of political backlash, may reduce or withdraw financial support, further weakening the ability of CSOs to advocate for human rights, social justice and democratic accountability. As civic space contracts, the voices of marginalized and vulnerable communities are increasingly silenced, eroding the very foundation of participatory governance and threatening the progress made in global development cooperation.

Risks: Socioeconomic Asymmetry Driving a Shift in Political Values

Ongoing and future economic challenges such as inflation, rising living costs and unemployment will continue to intensify feelings of disempowerment and exclusion among those who feel the current global economic order has left them behind. These pressures exacerbate existing inequalities, fuelling resentment and eroding trust in traditional institutions, which are often seen as incapable of addressing these concerns. Public frustration often finds an outlet in the scapegoating of vulnerable groups, particularly immigrants, who are increasingly blamed for economic hardships. This growing disillusionment creates fertile ground for authoritarianism: politicians capitalize on anxieties by offering a narrative of stricter, decisive leadership that promises to protect national interests, secure jobs, control immigration and reverse economic decline. As challenges persist over the next couple of years, political values are likely to evolve towards favouring authoritative leadership, further sidelining democratic principles like pluralism and global solidarity.

Opportunity

The current wave of authoritarianism and democratic decline presents a crucial opportunity to reform global governance systems to better address the complexities of the 21st century. Recent calls for such reforms have multiplied over the past few years, driven by growing recognition of the limitations and inefficiencies of existing structures. Ignoring these calls will be costly for all, as failing to adapt risks exacerbating global instability, eroding international cooperation and perpetuating systemic inequities. Reforming global governance can introduce more inclusive, transparent and adaptive mechanisms that reflect the diverse needs and voices of a rapidly changing world. It offers a chance to strengthen multilateral institutions, enhance cross-border collaboration and develop innovative solutions to pressing global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality and human rights violations.

Existing Gaps

○ Limited International Support for Civil Society:

As governments increasingly restrict CSOs, there is a critical gap in international support mechanisms for these organizations. Insufficient funding, protection and advocacy for CSOs limits their ability to operate effectively, voice dissent and promote human rights and democratic values.

○ The Legacy of Colonialism:

Many regions are skeptical of democratic values, which are often perceived as Western-centric or imposed. This contributes to reluctance to embrace democratic principles, creating fertile ground for the rise of authoritarian regimes as alternative governance models.

○ Inadequate Safeguards for Democratic Institutions:

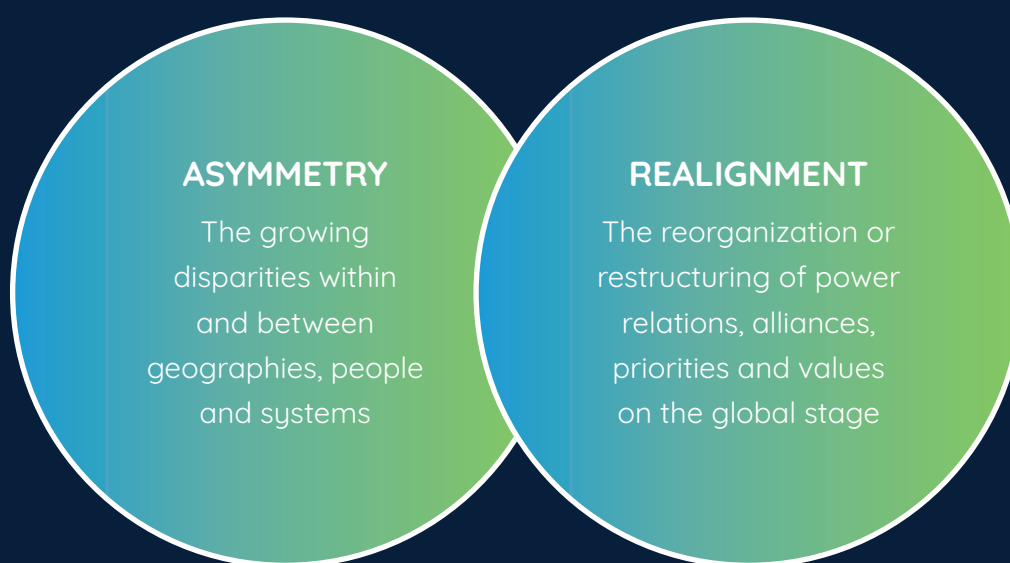
Many countries experiencing democratic backsliding lack robust mechanisms to protect democratic institutions and principles. Weaknesses in checks and balances, judicial independence and electoral integrity make it easier for authoritarian regimes to consolidate power and undermine democratic processes.

Transformative Action			
UNMUTE CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH TRUST-BASED FUNDING	EXPERIMENT WITH DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE MODELS	PROMOTE INTEGRATED POLICIES	DEVELOP ADAPTIVE MULTILATERAL PLATFORMS
Donors can counteract the contraction of civic space through trust-based funding models prioritizing unrestricted and flexible funding. This approach will reduce bureaucratic hurdles and foster long-term stability and innovation within civil society, enabling advocacy for and protection of democratic values.	Governments can pilot decentralized governance models that empower local communities and regions to have a greater say in their own governance. These could help address the disconnect between central authorities and local needs, reducing the appeal of authoritarian solutions by improving local responsiveness and accountability.	International and non-governmental organizations and governments can promote integrated policies that address the interconnected and multidimensional root causes of receding democracy, such as socio-political asymmetry. Policies should focus on creating equitable opportunities across all segments of society, particularly in regions experiencing severe economic disparities.	Establish new multilateral platforms that emphasize adaptive governance models and inclusivity. These platforms should integrate diverse voices, particularly from developing countries and marginalized groups, to ensure global policies reflect a broader range of perspectives and needs.

1.3

SYSTEM-WIDE DRIVERS: A WORLD OF ASYMMETRY AND REALIGNMENT

The next seven to ten years will likely see a world where power is more distributed yet more contested, where inequalities deepen and where cooperation becomes increasingly complex. The two forces shaping this world will be asymmetry and realignment, both of which will redefine global dynamics across socioeconomic, political, environmental and technological domains.



These two defining forces are emerging as a common thread across nearly every trend and signal of change from our research. Whether we are looking at demographic imbalances between aging and youthful populations, the unequal impacts of climate change or the uneven distribution of technological advancements, these forces manifest consistently across socioeconomic, political, and environmental domains.

Asymmetry reflects the widening gaps in power, resources and capacity between nations and regions, making cooperation more challenging as disparities grow. Realignment, on the other hand, captures the shifting alliances, emerging powers and changing priorities that redefine who leads, who follows and how global challenges are addressed.

Together, these forces will either fracture or strengthen our ability to achieve collective global goals. This makes them critical to understanding the future of international cooperation. By identifying these forces, we provide a lens through which policymakers, non-governmental organizations and international agencies can better anticipate and navigate the complexities of collaboration in the post-2030 era.

CHAPTER 2

BRIDGING THE HORIZON: FROM UNCERTAINTY TO PLAUSIBILITY

Having identified the top trends and uncertainties reshaping global cooperation in Chapter 1, Transformations Reshaping Global Cooperation, we now turn to how these forces could materialize into different futures. In this chapter, the focus shifts to mapping three plausible scenarios that demonstrate how these trends might intersect and evolve in various ways. These scenarios offer a glimpse into different futures, each shaped by how we choose to address, or fail to address, the uncertainties that define our present. Whether this be the emergence of new poles of power, the rise of non-state actors in shaping global agendas or the unsettling possibility of global catastrophe, these scenarios reflect the critical junctures we now face. By exploring these scenarios, we can better understand the range of outcomes and challenges that lie ahead.

NOTE TO THE READER: REGIONAL VARIATIONS AND SCENARIO FLUIDITY

The scenarios presented in this report are not intended as predictions of the future, nor should they be viewed as static. Different regions may experience elements of each scenario at varying times, or even simultaneously, depending on their specific circumstances and responses to global trends.

For example, a region highly affected by climate change may initially encounter the fragmentation and realignment seen in the Multipolar State-Led Cooperation scenario before transitioning to the Multistakeholder Cooperation model in an effort to address challenges collaboratively. Similarly, regions facing severe socioeconomic disparities or political instability may find themselves moving directly into the tsunami of instability, characterized by increased fragmentation and self-interested alliances, under Transactional Cooperation.

It is also important to recognize that global developments, accelerators or disruptors could cause regions to shift between scenarios, given the dynamic nature of the global landscape and the interconnectedness of global challenges. As such, these scenarios offer frameworks for understanding possible futures rather than fixed outcomes.

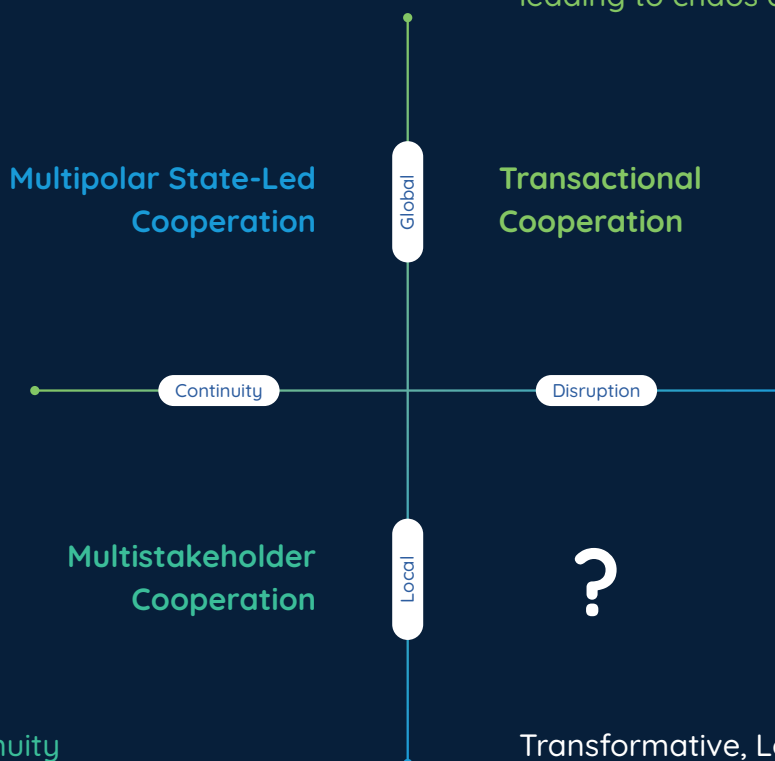
THE GLOBAL COOPERATION FUTURES INITIATIVE: SCENARIOS

Plausible, Global-Continuity

Scenario here suggests an evolution of the current global order, states continuing to play a central role

Plausible, Global-Disruption

Scenario depicts a world where global cooperation faces significant disruptions, leading to chaos and instability



Plausible, Local-Continuity

Scenario here envisions a shift towards a more collaborative form of cooperation, but within the existing framework

Transformative, Local-Disruption

UNDERSTANDING THE 4X4 MATRIX

X-AXIS: CONTINUITY VS DISRUPTION

CONTINUITY: Scenarios where global cooperation evolves incrementally, building on existing structures and practices.

DISRUPTION: Scenarios where significant changes or disruptions occur, altering the landscape of global cooperation.

Y-AXIS: GLOBAL VS LOCAL ORIENTATION

GLOBAL ORIENTATION: Scenarios where global institutions and multilateral cooperation dominate.

LOCAL ORIENTATION: Scenarios where power and decision-making are more decentralized, with a focus on local or regional cooperation.

2.1

MULTIPOLAR STATE-LED COOPERATION

By 2035, a new multipolar cooperation structure has emerged, with several country blocs exerting influence, each with its own ideology and set of rules. In this decentralized approach to cooperation, traditional multilateral organizations have lost their clout. These new poles of cooperation introduce new sources of capital, opportunities and mechanisms for influence, promising more inclusive and equitable governance and nation-to-nation dialogue.

While this configuration holds potential, skeptics express concerns about further fragmentation, competition between blocs and the duplication or undermining of efforts to reach consensus on shared issues and address global challenges collectively.

2.1.1. Trends Driving Change

“Common yet differentiated challenges”

- **Demographic shifts:** Aging populations in some regions and youth bulges in others reshape social dynamics, influencing migration patterns, labour markets and priorities. Nations facing similar demographic challenges are forming new blocs to align policies and address these shared issues collectively.
- **Accelerating climate change:** The disproportionate impacts of climate change and environmental degradation have spurred the formation of new alliances and blocs among nations, regions and organizations committed to climate mitigation, adaptation and justice.
- **Technological transformation:** Nations are increasingly viewing technological innovation as a key determinant of economic competitiveness and national security. As a result, there has been a surge in policies aimed at promoting indigenous technological capabilities, safeguarding critical technologies and restricting foreign access to domestic markets.
- **Socioeconomic asymmetry:** Faced with the failures of the global financial architecture, as well as growing inequalities among individuals and nations, disillusioned nations and marginalized groups band together to seek alternative solutions and mutual support.
- **Competing governance models:** As trust in liberal democratic institutions wanes, new coalitions are uniting around shared values of authoritarianism, nationalism and conservative policies.

2.1.2. Strategic Considerations

RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES	STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTIVE CAPACITY	OPPORTUNITIES AND NEW CHOICES
● Institutional inertia ● Fragmentation and competition between blocs, governance models and ideologies ● Duplication/undermining of efforts to collectively address global challenges	● Agile and context-sensitive responses to challenges ● Inclusive, trust-based interactions at regional and global levels ● Proactive in empowering CSOs	● Diversified and localized advocacy strategies ● Strong partnerships and alliances between international cooperation actors ● Robust accountability mechanisms

SCENARIO NARRATIVE

In 2035, the world has splintered into a complex web of alliances, each a pole of influence, each with its own ideology and set of rules. The old multilateral giants now stand as relics of a bygone era, overshadowed by these new power blocs that have redefined the rules of global cooperation.

In this new era, cooperation is decentralized and fluid, with nation-to-nation dialogue taking centre stage. Blocs are formed not out of convenience but out of necessity. Countries with aging populations partner with those facing youth surges, aligning policies to manage migration, labour markets and social security. Elsewhere, the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change band together, determined to push for climate justice on their own terms. They are no longer waiting for the world to act; they are taking matters into their own hands.

Technological innovation has become the new currency of power. Wary of foreign influence, nations invest heavily in their own technological capabilities, creating regional hubs where collaboration thrives but only within tightly controlled borders. The once-global marketplace is now fragmented, with each bloc protecting its own interests.

But this new world is not without its shadows. Fragmentation breeds competition, and with competition comes conflict. Rivalries between blocs fuel regional insecurities, and the erosion of trust among nations weakens the foundations of global governance. Non-state actors exploit these cracks, and the space for civil society continues to shrink as authoritarianism and nationalism gain ground in some regions.

Despite the potential for more inclusive governance, the world of 2035 is fraught with challenges. The very structure that promises new opportunities also threatens to undermine collective efforts to tackle the most pressing global issues. In this multipolar world, the future of cooperation hangs in the balance, teetering between the promise of a more equitable order and the peril of deeper fragmentation.



2.2 MULTISTAKEHOLDER COOPERATION

By 2035, the landscape of global development cooperation has evolved into a decentralized constellation where traditional state actors have made space for a broader array of stakeholders to share decision-making power. Emerging powers, regional organizations, civil society groups and grassroots movements now play pivotal roles in addressing development challenges and investing in global public goods such as climate action and sustainable development. This shift promises a more inclusive and equitable governance model but also raises concerns about the effectiveness and motives of the new actors involved.

2.2.1. Trends Driving Change

“Geopolitical reconfiguration and changing world order”

- **Changing global order:** The once-unipolar world order has dissolved. Emerging powers and previously marginalized countries now wield significant influence in global decision-making, introducing fresh perspectives and innovative approaches to development cooperation.
- **Powershift:** Momentum from the Global South’s powershift agenda has raised imbalances in traditional North–South relationships, to tackle colonial prejudices, racism and paternalism. Leaders from Indigenous groups and emerging economies are driving essential changes.
- **New sources of funding:** The entry of new businesses and philanthropic organizations into international development cooperation has introduced additional financial streams, broadening the base of contributors and reducing reliance on traditional aid donors.
- **Digital empowerment:** Amid tightening civic space, CSOs leverage technology to advocate for social justice, circumvent restrictions and hold governments accountable. Digital platforms facilitate broader participation in development processes and enhance global collaboration among them.
- **Polycrisis:** The convergence of multiple global crises, exacerbated by governmental failures to address the root causes, is intensifying pressures for multistakeholder approaches in development cooperation. Economic instability, climate change, social inequality and political unrest demand holistic and collaborative solutions. No country, organization or business can weather the storm alone. Collaboration is more appreciated than ever.

2.2.2. Strategic Considerations

RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES	STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTIVE CAPACITY	OPPORTUNITIES AND NEW CHOICES
● Concerns about the legitimacy and motives of non-state actors ● Limited understanding of CSOs’ ability to maintain influence and operate effectively in an increasingly restricted environment ● Potential threat to democratic processes and public trust	● Careful consideration of the roles and responsibilities of state and non state actors ● Robust collaborative mechanisms that facilitate the alignment of diverse stakeholders’ goals, ensuring efforts are coordinated and resources are efficiently utilized	● Investing in digital infrastructure and tools for more inclusive and transparent development processes, enabling broader participation and collaboration across borders ● Holistic, collaborative solutions that address the root causes of global crises, rather than fragmented, short-term fixes

SCENARIO NARRATIVE

By 2035, the world of global development cooperation looks vastly different. The days when a few powerful states called all the shots are over. In their place, a new constellation of voices has emerged – one where emerging powers, regional organizations, civil society groups and grassroots movements all share the stage.

Imagine a world where countries that were once marginalized now lead the way in global decision-making. Leaders from the Global South have taken centre stage, challenging the old dynamics of power. They have pushed back against the colonial legacies and imbalances that have long defined North–South relations. Indigenous voices and leaders from emerging economies are not just participating; they are setting the agenda, ensuring development cooperation reflects a broader array of perspectives.

But it is not just states that are driving this change. Businesses and philanthropies, once on the sidelines, are now key players. They have brought in new streams of funding, reducing reliance on traditional donors. Their involvement comes with a twist, however: while they bring resources and innovation, there are questions about their true motives. Are they in it for the greater good or are there strings attached?

Civil society has found a powerful ally in technology. Even as governments tighten their grip on civic spaces, activists and organizations have turned to digital platforms to amplify their voice. These platforms have become the battlegrounds for social justice, allowing civil society to sidestep restrictions and hold the powerful accountable. Collaboration across borders is now easier than ever, with grassroots movements gaining momentum on a global scale.

Yet this new world is not without its storms. The planet is caught in the grip of a polycrisis: economic instability, climate change, social inequality and political unrest all converge, threatening to overwhelm the systems designed to keep them in check. No single actor can tackle these challenges alone. The need for multistakeholder cooperation is more urgent than ever, as the world struggles to navigate these turbulent waters.

In 2035, the global community stands at a crossroads. The promise of a more inclusive and equitable model of governance is within reach but this will require a delicate balance. The diverse array of stakeholders must learn to work together, aligning their varied motives and goals for the common good. If they can, they might just steer the world towards a more just and sustainable future.



2.3 TRANSACTIONAL COOPERATION

By 2035, global cooperation has shifted dramatically. The division between nations is entrenched, and there is very limited global collaboration. Traditional global governance has weakened significantly, and transactional cooperation has become the norm, with new alliances of convenience brokered between countries based on narrow interests. This shift away from multilateralism and cooperative frameworks is exacerbating existing global challenges and creating new, complex crises that are increasingly difficult to manage.

Competition for power, resources and control has intensified, fuelling further institutional mistrust, social polarization, political unrest and insecurity, with funds redirected towards mitigating unintended consequences and away from efforts to achieve sustainable development.

2.3.1. Trends Driving Change

“A tsunami of instability in a fractured world”

- **Political fragmentation:** Nations increasingly prioritize their own interests over collective global goals, fostering transactional alliances of convenience that lack long-term vision and solidarity. The focus shifts to securing advantages that directly benefit nations' own economies and security, at the expense of broader global cooperation.
- **Growing complexity:** The complexity of global crises is overwhelming global governance mechanisms, prompting countries to adopt inward-looking policies aimed at mitigating immediate domestic impacts rather than contributing to comprehensive global solutions.
- **Rise in authoritarianism:** Authoritarian regimes have expanded political repression and state violence, eroding human rights and freedoms globally.
- **Decline in civil society funding:** Reduced funding for CSOs has heightened competition and weakened their collective influence, allowing aid to become increasingly politicized on a global scale.
- **Rising youth unemployment:** High rates of youth unemployment have exacerbated societal tensions and contributed to destabilization. With limited opportunities, disempowered youth are increasingly turning to informal and illegitimate activities and violence.
- **Climate apathy:** Lack of robust international collaboration and a prevalence of alliances based on narrow interests have led to weakened commitments, and climate change has been sidelined. Apathy is growing globally despite the increasing frequency and severity of climate-induced disasters, exposing and worsening vulnerabilities everywhere.
- **A shift in attitudes:** In developed countries grappling with economic hardships, public sentiment is shifting towards prioritizing domestic needs over international cooperation. This has led to reduced support for international development initiatives and growing stigmatization of migrants, who are unfairly blamed for exacerbating economic challenges.
- **Digital divide:** Wealthier nations leverage digital tools to monopolize market access, exacerbating the digital divide and intensifying inequalities. Protection of digital identities becomes crucial amid rising cyberattacks and privacy breaches.

2.3.2. Strategic Considerations

RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES	STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTIVE CAPACITY	OPPORTUNITIES AND NEW CHOICES
○ Aid politicization leading to inflexible, conditional assistance ○ Fragmentation of advocacy efforts ○ Increased competition among international development actors owing to reduced funding	○ Human rights-centred responses ○ Enhancing civil society legitimacy and redefining CSO operating models to remain aligned with core values	○ Approaches grounded in balance and integrity ○ Exploring new governance models that prioritize collaboration on shared challenges, even within a transactional framework ○ Reimagining resource allocation to prioritize future readiness

SCENARIO NARRATIVE

Picture a world where the grand halls of global governance are now eerily quiet, their influence faded. The spirit of multilateralism, once the glue that bound nations together, has all but vanished. Instead, countries are turning inward, driven by a fierce need to secure their own interests. The idea of working together for the greater good has been replaced by cold, transactional bargains. Alliances are no longer about solidarity or shared values; they are about survival, forged in the heat of competition and mistrust.

In this fractured world, political fragmentation is rampant. Nations, once allies, now view each other with suspicion, prioritizing short-term gains over long-term stability. The global stage has become a chessboard, where every move is calculated for immediate advantage, leaving broader issues to spiral out of control. The crises facing the world – climate change, economic instability, social unrest – have grown more complex, and the weakened structures of global governance can barely keep up. Instead of taking part in collective action, countries retreat behind their borders, hoping to shield themselves from the growing storm.

Authoritarian regimes have flourished in this environment, tightening their grip on power with little regard for human rights. Civil society, once a powerful force for change, has been silenced. With funding drying up and space for activism shrinking, the voices that once held governments accountable are now barely a whisper. Aid, once a lifeline for the vulnerable, has become a tool for political maneuvering, further entrenching inequality.

Across the globe, youth unemployment is a ticking time bomb. Frustrated and disillusioned, young people are turning to the shadows – joining informal economies or, in the worst cases, resorting to violence. The future that once seemed so full of promise now feels out of reach for an entire generation, feeding the flames of unrest and instability.

Meanwhile, the planet continues to warm but the world has grown indifferent. Climate apathy has set in as nations focus on their own economic woes. The grand pledges of the past have been replaced by half-hearted measures that do little to stem the tide of climate disasters. Even as floods, fires and storms wreak havoc, the response is fragmented, leaving the most vulnerable to fend for themselves.

In wealthier nations, the mood has turned inward. Economic hardships have fuelled a surge in nationalist sentiment, with people demanding that their governments prioritize domestic issues over international commitments. Migrants, caught in the crossfire, are increasingly scapegoated, blamed for problems they did not create. Societies are growing more divided, with fear and resentment on the rise.

The digital world, once a realm of endless possibility, has become a battleground. Wealthier nations use their technological prowess to dominate markets, deepening the digital divide. Cybersecurity risks loom large, with digital identities under constant threat. As the world moves deeper into this digital age, the inequalities only grow sharper.

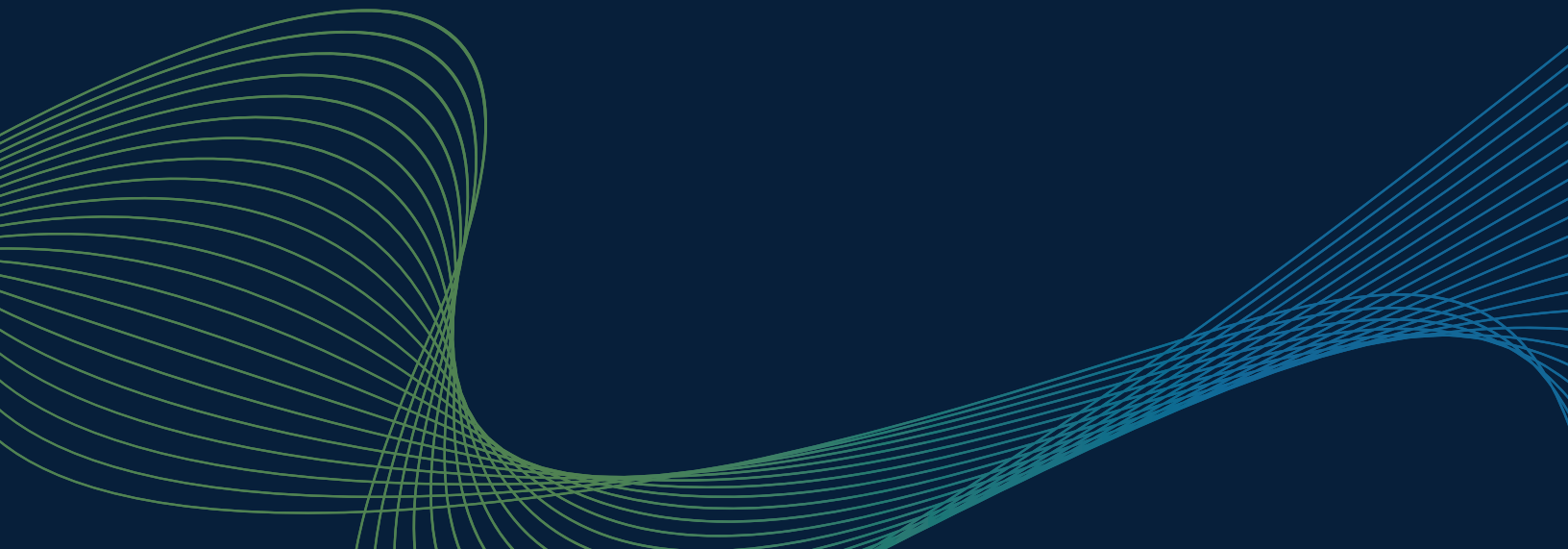
Comparison of Future Scenarios for Global Development Cooperation: Key Features

	MULTIPOLAR STATE-LED COOPERATION	MULTISTAKEHOLDER COOPERATION	TRANSACTIONAL COOPERATION
GOVERNANCE MODEL	State-led, with multiple influential blocs	Decentralized, led by states and non-state actors like civil society and regional organizations	Fragmented, with weakened traditional governance structures
MAIN ACTORS	States and regional blocs with distinct ideologies	Non-state actors, grassroots movements, civil society, emerging powers	States, transactional alliances, corporations
KEY TRENDS	Demographic shifts, climate change, technological transformation, competing governance models	Geopolitical reconfiguration, powershift to the Global South, digital empowerment, polycrisis response	Political fragmentation, authoritarianism, digital divide, climate apathy
OPPORTUNITIES	Potential for more regional cooperation, better governance at bloc level	Diverse stakeholder participation increased local innovation and resilience	Opportunistic alliances for short-term gains
RISKS	Fragmentation, rivalry between blocs, weakened global consensus	Effectiveness concerns, potential co-optation by vested interests	Rising instability, authoritarianism, worsening polycrises
TRIGGERS	Socioeconomic and political instability pushing countries to form blocs to safeguard their interests	Waning influence of traditional powers allowing regional/local actors to fill the void Digitalization sparking growth in decentralized movements	Hyper-nationalist movements gaining momentum in many countries Widespread climate migration overwhelming unprepared countries, exacerbating conflict
INCLUSIVITY	More inclusive at the bloc level but risks exclusion of non-bloc members	Highly inclusive with diverse actors at various levels	Minimal inclusivity, driven by self-interest



CHAPTER 3

REWRITING THE STORY OF GLOBAL COOPERATION



As we transition from the plausible futures outlined in Chapter 2, we move from envisioning potential scenarios to designing proactive strategies. The futures described earlier underscore the importance of preparing for uncertainty, and this final chapter provides a roadmap for action. Here, we focus on transforming global cooperation by challenging current assumptions, addressing systemic imbalances and reimagining the principles that underpin our international systems. By integrating these strategies, actors can actively shape the future of global cooperation rather than merely reacting to unfolding events.

3.1

RETHINKING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT GLOBAL COOPERATION

As we confront an era defined by unprecedented challenges and complex interdependencies, it is imperative to rethink the foundational assumptions that have long underpinned global cooperation. These assumptions are increasingly being called into question, as the world becomes more multipolar, the issues more intricate and the stakes higher than ever before. To navigate this shifting landscape, we must critically reassess our approach to global cooperation, embracing new paradigms that are better suited to the realities of the 21st century and beyond.

Assumption 1:

State-centric models are the most effective for global cooperation

The traditional assumption that state-centric models are the most effective way to achieve global cooperation is no longer sufficient in today's world. Historically, nation-states have been the primary actors in international affairs, with global cooperation largely orchestrated through intergovernmental organizations. However, this assumption overlooks the growing importance of non-state actors – CSOs, the private sector, philanthropic foundations and local communities– in shaping global outcomes.

Rethinking this assumption means recognizing that multistakeholder models, which include a diverse range of actors, are increasingly essential for addressing complex global challenges. These models encourage more inclusive governance structures, ensuring that decision-making processes hear and consider the voices of those whom global issues affect directly. The future of cooperation requires a departure from state-dominated frameworks towards more collaborative and participatory approaches.

Assumption 2:

Economic growth is the primary indicator of success

The assumption that economic growth is the primary indicator of success in global cooperation has long been dominant. Traditionally, metrics like gross domestic product growth, trade balances and foreign investment flows have been used to gauge the effectiveness of global efforts. However, this narrow focus on economic indicators often overlooks the broader dimensions of human development and well-being, leading to policies that may drive growth but fail to address inequalities, environmental degradation and social unrest.

To challenge this assumption, we must broaden our understanding of success to include social, environmental and human well-being. This involves adopting alternative metrics that reflect the true quality of life and the sustainability of development efforts, such as the Human Development Index and the Social Progress Index. By expanding our definition of success, we can ensure global cooperation efforts align with the goals of equity, sustainability and holistic human development.

Assumption 3:

Global cooperation requires rigid, structured processes with predictable outcomes

The entrenched assumption that global challenges can be managed through linear, predictable processes is fundamentally flawed. This belief is embedded in many conventional approaches to global cooperation, in which rigid – and often difficult to amend – texts and resolutions anchor strategies in detailed planning, standard procedures and a focus on control and predictability. However, the rapidly changing, complex and uncertain nature of today's world is increasingly rendering this assumption untenable.

Rethinking this assumption demands we embrace uncertainty and complexity as inherent features of global cooperation. Instead of striving for rigid control, we must develop more flexible and adaptive approaches capable of responding to emerging challenges in real time. This shift requires placing a greater emphasis on resilience, innovation and the capacity to learn from and swiftly adapt to failures.

Assumption 4:

The private sector will save development

The assumption that the private sector will be the major actor driving global development and addressing pressing social and environmental challenges is increasingly problematic. While the private sector plays a crucial role in economic growth, innovation and job creation, it is insufficient to rely on private actors to lead the effort to tackle development issues. The profit-driven nature of private enterprises means they often prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability and equity. Moreover, the complexities of global development require more than just market solutions; they demand integrated approaches that include public sector leadership, regulatory frameworks and collaborative efforts with civil society.

Rethinking this assumption involves recognizing that development challenges are best addressed through a balanced approach that combines private sector dynamism with public accountability and multistakeholder collaboration. A sustainable and inclusive development agenda requires leveraging the strengths of various sectors while ensuring the needs and rights of marginalized communities are safeguarded.

Assumption 5:

Technology alone can drive development

The prevailing assumption that technology alone can drive development overlooks the nuanced and polarized nature of technological impacts. While technology holds transformative potential, relying solely on technological solutions will make it difficult to address the broader socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts in which these innovations are deployed.

The science, technology and innovation approach offers a more balanced perspective, recognizing that technology must be integrated with supportive policies, inclusive practices and local needs to be effective. It acknowledges that, while technology can accelerate progress, its benefits are not evenly distributed and it can exacerbate existing inequalities. Thus, a rethinking of this assumption is crucial, to advocate for a holistic approach in which technology is one component of a broader strategy that includes equitable access, stakeholder engagement and contextual adaptation to ensure sustainable and inclusive development outcomes.

3.2

REVERSING SYSTEMIC ANOMALIES

To meet the complex challenges ahead, we must address and reverse systemic anomalies that have long hindered progress. This section explores critical opportunities and new choices, drawing on key anomalies inspired by [William Braun's archetypal patterns](#): Eroding Goals; Growth and Underinvestment; Fixes That Fail; Limits to Growth; and the Tragedy of the Commons.

3.2.1. Eroding Goals: Restoring Ambition and Vision

Over time, global ambitions have diminished in the face of obstacles, leading to complacency. Reversing this trend requires a renewed commitment to transformative goals, such as reimagining the Sustainable Development Goals post-2030, ensuring our collective vision remains bold and impactful.

3.2.2. Growth and Underinvestment: Building Capacity for the Future

Underinvestment in key areas like technology, healthcare and education has led to stagnation. Prioritizing strategic investments that build capacity and infrastructure is essential for addressing emerging challenges and driving progress.

3.2.3. Fixes That Fail: Moving Beyond Short-Term Solutions

Quick fixes often exacerbate problems, leading to a cycle of dependency on ineffective solutions. Moving beyond short-term measures to holistic, long-term strategies is crucial for addressing the root causes of global challenges.

3.2.4. Limits to Growth: Navigating the Boundaries of our Planet

Recognizing the natural and structural boundaries of our systems is vital. Embracing sustainable practices that respect ecological limits, such as circular economies and renewable energy, is necessary to prevent collapse and ensure long-term viability.

3.2.5. Tragedy of the Commons: Collective Action for Shared Resources

Collective action is required to safeguard shared resources and avoid collective loss. Innovative governance models, stronger international agreements and a shift towards shared responsibility are key to protecting our global commons for future generations.

3.3 REIMAGINING KEY PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

As we envision the future of global cooperation, it is evident that a transformative approach must tackle present challenges while paving the way for a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient world. Through strategic discussions with global development actors, it has become clear that this transformation must be founded in integrated thinking, a shift in power dynamics towards localization and a strong commitment to human-centred, solidarity-based cooperation.

3.3.1. Integrated Thinking and Approaches

In an increasingly interconnected world, traditional siloed approaches to global cooperation are no longer sufficient. Integrated thinking requires us to consider the complex interdependencies between social, technological, economic, environmental and political systems. By adopting an integrated approach, we can better anticipate the ripple effects of our actions and craft solutions that address multiple challenges simultaneously.

Integrated thinking also encourages collaboration across sectors and disciplines, fostering partnerships that leverage diverse expertise and perspectives. By breaking down barriers between fields/sectors and encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation, we can create more comprehensive and effective strategies for global development.

3.3.2. Powershift and Localization

The dynamics of global power are shifting, and with this comes the need for a more localized approach to cooperation. Localization emphasizes the importance of empowering local actors and communities, recognizing that those closest to the issues often have the most relevant insights and solutions. This shift from top-down decision-making to more decentralized, participatory processes allows for greater ownership and accountability at the local level.

Powershift also involves recognizing and addressing historical imbalances in global power structures. By amplifying the voices of marginalized and historically underrepresented groups, we can create a more equitable framework for global cooperation. This requires not only redistributing power but also rethinking the very foundations of how we engage with one another on a global scale, moving away from paternalistic models and towards genuine partnerships.

3.3.3. Human-Centred and Solidarity-Based Cooperation

At the heart of transformative global cooperation is a commitment to human-centred and solidarity-based approaches. This principle places the dignity, rights and well-being of individuals and communities at the forefront of all efforts. In practice, this means designing policies and programs that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable.

Solidarity-based cooperation goes beyond transactional relationships to foster a sense of global unity and shared responsibility. It emphasizes mutual respect, empathy and recognition of our interconnected destinies. By embracing solidarity, we can build bridges across divides and work together towards common goals, acknowledging that our collective future depends on the well-being of all.

In rewriting the story of global cooperation, it is crucial to recognize social equity as a foundational principle that intersects with all key themes. The assumptions we challenge and the systemic anomalies we address must be examined through the lens of social equity to ensure our strategies are inclusive and just. By incorporating social equity into the core of our reimagined approaches – whether through integrated thinking, shifting power dynamics or embracing new forms of cooperation – we ensure no group is left behind and all voices are heard. This comprehensive focus on social equity not only strengthens our global cooperation efforts but also paves the way for a more equitable and sustainable future for all.



CONCLUSION

Our research, as laid out in this report and [other outputs of the Global Cooperation Futures Initiative](#), has established that global cooperation is undergoing a profound transformation. The three scenarios explored in this report – Multipolar State-Led Cooperation, Multistakeholder Cooperation (non-state-led) and Transactional Cooperation – offer plausible illustrations of the potential trajectories of global cooperation in the post-2030 era. Each scenario underscores the need to adapt to a rapidly changing world but also the risks of complacency, fragmentation and shortsightedness.

The scenarios are not merely informed predictions; they are also a call to action. They highlight the urgent need to rethink how we collaborate across borders, sectors and ideologies. The systemic archetypes explored in this report – such as Eroding Goals; Growth and Underinvestment; Fixes That Fail; Limits to Growth; and the Tragedy of the Commons – offer critical insights into the patterns that can either hinder or propel our progress. They remind us that the future is not a distant inevitability but a consequence of the choices we make today.

Rewriting the story of global cooperation will require that we challenge deeply entrenched assumptions, particularly the belief that global challenges can be managed through linear, rigid processes with predictable outcomes. Instead, global cooperation actors will be required to embrace uncertainty and complexity as inherent features of our global reality. It will also require a renewed commitment to ambitious goals; strategic investments in capacity-building; and a focus on long-term, holistic solutions that respect ecological boundaries and promote collective action.

In this context, the principles for transformation take on renewed importance. Integrated thinking challenges us to break down silos and recognize the interconnectedness of our world. Powershift and localization urge us to redistribute power and elevate the voices of those who have been historically marginalized. Human-centred and solidarity-based cooperation calls for a renewed commitment to the dignity and well-being of all individuals, fostering a spirit of shared responsibility.

Yet, as compelling as these principles are, the path forward is fraught with risks and uncertainties. The rise of authoritarianism, demographic shifts and escalating climate change are just some of the challenges we must navigate. But within these challenges lie opportunities for innovation and resilience. Strengthening civil society's legitimacy, experimenting with new governance models and rethinking resource allocation in favour of future preparedness are not just strategies for survival; they are the building blocks of a new global cooperation framework.

As we move forward, it is imperative that we keep our eyes on the key trends driving change. These forces will shape the contours of global cooperation in the years to come, and our ability to adapt to them will determine our success.

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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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