



## **Lessons and learning in foresight use for international organizations**

As part of Canada’s foreign affairs and development efforts, IDRC champions and funds research and innovation within and alongside countries in the Global South to drive global change.

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## Executive summary

The global development landscape is undergoing significant changes and challenges that are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Social, environmental and technological challenges are intersecting in dynamic and unpredictable ways, amplifying volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) conditions around the world. This new normal requires international development stakeholders and policymakers to think beyond traditional short-term strategic planning and reactive responses to crises. Instead, they must adopt a more systematic understanding of potential, plausible and possible futures and desired visions of a collective future. This involves different models, mindsets, partnerships, skills and leadership across various organizations and sectors. As the UN Secretary-General's report, "Our Common Agenda," notes, the choices we make today could lead to either further breakdown or a breakthrough to a greener, better and safer future (2021). Yet, as many at the UN's Summit of the Future noted, the multilateral system is in desperate need of reform to tackle today's interconnected challenges and crises and to be fit for purpose for both current and future generations. Looking forward, engaging in strategic foresight and futures research will be essential for ensuring that international development cooperation is equipped to address emerging needs and challenges and be future-ready.

In 2020, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) started to engage in strategic foresight as part of its Strategy 2030 approach to better anticipate some of the research issues and areas it might need to address in the coming 10 years. This study is one such effort to more formally document and understand different experiences, perspectives and approaches in the use and utility of foresight among Canadian and global peer organizations involved in international development and/or research for development.

The findings seek to contribute to the ongoing debates about the use of strategic foresight in international development and are presented across three organizational streams – funding organizations, international organizations and governments, and academia – organized around four thematic questions relating to use, value and practice. From these insights, the report surfaces a broad set of lessons learned and a wish list of what foresight could look like for organizations across four different themes. The report concludes with a summary of the main points and underlines the importance of foresight for international development. An Annex to the report also includes select use-cases which surfaced out of the interviews.

## Key themes and ideas

### *A. Why organizations use foresight:*

1. Funding organizations use foresight to understand systems change and evolution over the longer term, generate a vision of change with targeted action-oriented steps, and unlock new narratives, ideas and opportunities to support a vision and agency for change.
2. International organizations and governments use foresight to embed medium- to long-term thinking in policymaking and planning, generate a better understanding of the horizon, stress test policy options and validate assumptions underpinning strategies and plans to inform decisions, support change and transformative work., and ultimately, support more effective and resilient public policy by identifying opportunities, challenges, risks and disruptions that may arise over the coming years

3. Academics highlight the importance of cultivating an anticipatory mindset and lens toward shaping policy and governance, supporting an openness of imagination toward multiple possible futures, and understanding the changing landscape and implications for collaborative efforts within and across disciplines.

*B. Value of foresight:*

4. Foresight supports the creation of a forward-looking strategic vision, underscores the quality and value of strategic thinking, and prioritizes actions to achieve that vision. It also facilitates conversations across different perspectives and expertise to explore and influence outcomes for positive change.
5. Foresight helps capture different types of knowledge, generate different intellectual and learning inputs for broader system understanding, and support public leadership and governance decision-making.

*C. How professionals use foresight:*

6. Foresight is used at the strategic level to identify opportunities, mitigate potential future risks, define or redefine future policy and strategy, foster collective dialogue and enable shared collective understanding of where an organization may be able to make a difference now and in the future.
7. The process requires humility for reinvention, considering people and culture, and knowledge generation and decision-making.

*D. Key lessons learned:*

8. Leadership – It is very important to have a champion at the leadership level to open up the space, configure a team, build a foresight culture and intentionally create opportunities for impact. Investing in foresight capacity is critical. Training staff on the basics of foresight gives the organization a base from which to work and build upon.
9. Partnership and collaboration – Taking a systemic approach with partners and community and using foresight to foster inclusive participation can help enable dialogue on different issues and break down barriers.
10. Organizational approach – It is important that organizations demystify the use of foresight by building the foresight capacity of staff at all levels across the organization in terms of futures literacy, grounding work in present challenges, trends or emerging issues, and then extrapolating forward. With that as a basis, organizations can engage internally and externally with an anticipatory mindset.
11. Process and tactics – Organizations should consider why they are using foresight and how best to integrate it within their distinct organizational settings, identify the scope of the topics they want to engage in, and which methods can provide the most value considering available resources. One way to achieve this is by co-designing a foresight learning journey, which can be an opportunity to build collective intelligence and learn together to generate outcomes.
12. Outputs and outcomes – Organizations should take time to prepare and consider their approach to generating knowledge outputs (and what outputs are best suited to their purpose and audience). They should also include evaluation in their processes, as continuous improvement of their strategic foresight approach will be important to ensure a continued focus on impact. With this in hand, organizations can also consider ways to demonstrate enhanced foresight capability and communicate success.

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## Glossary of terms

**Anticipatory assumptions:** Assumptions that generate different kinds of anticipatory processes of imagining the future.

**Anticipatory governance:** The systematic adoption and application of strategic foresight throughout the strategy and policymaking process.

**Back-casting:** A method of planning where one starts with a desired future outcome and works backward to identify the steps needed to achieve that outcome.

**Complexity science:** The study of complex systems and problems that are dynamic, unpredictable and multi-dimensional.

**Decolonial perspectives:** Among other things, decolonial scholars argue that the economic, political, cultural and epistemic violence of colonialism has entrenched systems of racism, patriarchy and economic extraction globally.

**Drivers of change:** Key factors or forces that influence or cause change within a system.

**Environmental scanning:** The process of gathering, analyzing and interpreting information about external influences that could impact an organization in its day-to-day operations.

**Forecasting:** The practice of predicting what will happen in the future by taking into consideration events in the past and present.

**Futures literacy:** The ability to understand and use the future to improve decision-making and strategy.

**Horizon scanning:** The systematic examination of potential threats, opportunities and likely future developments that are at the margins of current thinking and planning.

**Pathways thinking:** Pathway thinking is the development of routes to goal achievement. According to hope theory, the most hopeful individuals are those who use both pathway and agency thinking.

**Scenario planning:** A strategic planning method used to make flexible long-term plans based on the creation of multiple plausible future scenarios.

**Strategic foresight:** The practice of anticipating and preparing for potential future scenarios to inform decision-making and strategy today for the future.

**Strategic visioning:** The process of defining a clear and compelling vision of the future to guide strategic planning and decision-making.

**Systems thinking:** An approach to problem-solving that views problems as part of an overall system, rather than in isolation.

**Transformative change:** A profound and radical change that orients an organization in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness.

**Trend analysis:** The practice of collecting information and attempting to spot a pattern, or trend, in the information.

**VUCA:** An acronym for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous, describing the challenging and unpredictable nature of the modern world.

**Weak signals:** Early indicators of potential change that may become significant in the future.

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## Introduction

The global development landscape is undergoing significant changes and challenges that are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Social, environmental and technological trends and challenges are intersecting in dynamic and unpredictable ways, amplifying conditions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) and impacting development activities. These new conditions require international development stakeholders and policymakers to think beyond traditional short-term strategic planning and reactive responses to crises. Instead, they must adopt a more systematic understanding of the changing environment, potential plausible futures they may encounter and the desired visions of a collective future they want to shape longer-term. This involves different models, mindsets, partnerships, skills and leadership across various sectors. As the UN Secretary-General's report, "Our Common Agenda," notes, the choices we make today could lead to either further breakdown or a breakthrough to a greener, better and safer future (2021). As many at the UN's Summit of the Future noted, the multilateral system is in desperate need of reform to tackle today's interconnected challenges and crises and to be fit for purpose for both current and future generations. In an attempt to be future-fit, an increasing number of international organizations, national governments and civil society organizations are engaging with strategic foresight.

However, the evidence of use, usefulness and impact of foresight initiatives in international development is largely anecdotal (Bingley, 2016). There are several debates around the integration of strategic foresight into international development organizations.<sup>1</sup> What is clear in all of them, is looking forward, engaging in strategic foresight and futures research will be essential for ensuring that international development cooperation is equipped to address emerging needs and challenges and be future-ready. But how should foresight and futures approaches be integrated into global development work?

In 2020, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) started to engage in strategic foresight<sup>2</sup> as part of its [Strategy 2030](#) approach to better anticipating some of the research issues and areas it might need to address in the coming 10 years. New to foresight, the Centre has made it a priority to reach out to different actors in the strategic foresight space to learn from them and to better understand how it might enhance its own institutional practice.

This study is one such effort to contribute to the implementation debates by more formally collecting primary data and documenting knowledge to understand different experiences, perspectives and approaches in the use, utility and implementation of foresight among Canadian and global peer organizations involved in international development and/or research for

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<sup>1</sup> These debates can be characterized as adaptive vs. normative, dominant vs. decolonized, the implementation deficit and the dilemma of measuring foresight and evaluating impact. For further details see Reilly-King et al, 2024, p.9).

<sup>2</sup> Common to the various definitions of foresight that exist is the idea that it is an "applied approach to futures thinking—a methodological and systemic way of thinking creatively about the future to help anticipate and better prepare for upcoming challenges and avoid strategic surprise. [This] involves actively considering plausible and possible alternative future scenarios and opportunities that may arise and integrating these insights into organizational, management, and planning processes and action today." (Reilly-King et al., p. 4.

development. It is hoped that its findings will help to further shape and inform the use and utility of foresight at IDRC and in its work, and among other research funders, actors in the international development space and like-minded actors. It presents the findings from 11 interviews conducted with foresight experts working in international development, research or research funding. The research findings are presented across three organizational streams – funding, international organizations and governments and academic – organized around four thematic research questions relating to use, value, practice and lessons learned. The report also includes select use-cases that are organized to understand the goal of using foresight methodology, some steps taken to accomplish that goal and additional system supports that were needed to ensure success. The report concludes with a summary of the report’s main points, the importance of foresight for international development and some proposed next steps for consideration.

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## A brief note on the methodology of this report

The findings documented in this report are the result of 11 interviews, conducted over a period of two months between May and June 2024, with experts who have experience using strategic foresight in an international development, research and/or research-funding context.

The interviews, and findings in this report, sought to understand the following questions:

1. Why are these organizations using foresight?
2. What value does foresight provide?
3. How are professionals using foresight?
4. What are the top lessons learned?
5. What is your blue-sky vision to improve the use and utility of foresight over the next 10 years?

Following the interviews, the primary data was transcribed, analyzed and synthesized. Grounded-theory coding was used to capture the voice and perspective of interviewees in the data record as codes. This was analyzed to reveal relevant categories and themes that are culturally significant<sup>3</sup> to the global development sector.

A second cycle of analysis was done across organizational streams to understand differences in perspective and experience, to identify the value foresight provides and to map the basic structure and process of how development professionals have used foresight approaches relative to their organizational streams. These are presented at an aggregate level across streams.

Finally, the report was shared with interviewees to review the information to provide comments on the key findings to ensure the interpretations of the data are valid based on expert judgement.

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<sup>3</sup> Every profession/sector has a culture of language; the categories and themes in this report reflect this language, expressed during the interviews.

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## Why are organizations using foresight?

This section helps articulate different organizations' reasons for and experience around using strategic foresight and articulates some of the characteristics that seem to define their anticipatory lens (why they want to use the future). The findings have been captured and analyzed across each "organizational" stream (funding organizations, international organizations and governments, and academics) to better understand the different perspectives as well as commonalities and differences across these entities.

### Funding organizations

*Key points – Why foresight?*

1. It helps to understand systems change and evolution over the longer-term, allowing the organization to explore change and uncertainty more deeply.
2. It supports clarity in generating a vision of change with targeted action-oriented steps.
3. It uses collective approaches to unlock new narratives, ideas and opportunities to support vision and agency for change.

In conversations with funding organizations, having a long-term view is key; foresight provides this ability to anticipate plausible changes ahead and to understand how things may evolve over time. It also provides a way to work with and explore uncertainty through interaction with future scenarios. Interviewees also described experiences that came from working with foresight that allowed participants to have increased ability for cognitive flexibility, challenging biases and assumptions, opening their minds to new ideas and opportunities, and stretching their imaginations and creativity beyond what participants would have initially imagined.

Foresight assists in clarifying the vision of change they are framing within their strategy, complemented by the use of back-casting to identify key steps to pave a pathway forward, starting from the present to achieving that vision. This clarity resulted in the ability to move the needle on a few more select key issues and to target changes more precisely.

Among those interviewed in this category, the top three powerful benefits of using foresight methods include:

1. **MOBILIZING** different perspectives and views on a given topic or question;
2. **GENERATING** dialogue and facilitating collective approaches across organizations, partners and other stakeholders; and
3. **UNLOCKING** agency and hopeful messages, with a belief that we can change things for the better and can use a pragmatic community approach grounded in practice.

*Anticipatory lens*

Funding organizations tend to be involved in funding and financing of projects that require a longer-term view and diverse perspectives. They seek to explore the issues of today, with an interest in understanding how these issues and systems may evolve in the future. Their anticipatory lens is aligned with longer project life cycles, and they use a holistic approach for

environmental sense-making to support effective long-term planning. These organizations are interested in exploring what could or may happen over these longer time periods and what it could mean for the organization. This consideration also extends to considering necessary transitions as part of broader system transformations taking place.

## International organizations and governments

*Key points – Why foresight?*

1. It helps to embed medium- to long-term thinking into policymaking and planning.
2. It generates a better understanding of the horizon to inform the strategic planning and decisions to steer action in the near term.
3. It supports change and transformative work.

For international organizations and governments, foresight is more oriented towards embedding longer-term thinking into policymaking and planning today. Foresight can help enhance future readiness by creating conditions that allow agencies to begin to anticipate plausible future policy and programming challenges and identify opportunities to tackle those medium- to longer-term challenges today. In addition, foresight methods can be strategically used to connect different initiatives and practices across an organization to generate a more holistic vision or understanding. This includes deliberate efforts to coordinate scanning, which can help better understand the horizon from different vantage points, thereby informing the current strategic plan and supporting decisions to steer action and progress towards achieving more collective preferred futures for sustainable development.

The practice of foresight was also described as a type of “organizational therapy” to help break down silos to help understand people, organizations, culture and community. This occurs when organizations make foresight a routine practice; this in turn creates a cultural mindset about change that can also tap into the emotions and narratives of people engaged in these conversations, generating a better understanding of how people or organizations see the world. This internal perspective influences thinking patterns and assumptions about the future (often called “anticipatory assumptions”). It is very important to understand these different ways of thinking and assumptions when embarking on any change and transformative work, especially if such thinking and assumptions are markedly different among staff. This is because different anticipatory assumptions frame an individual’s perception and worldview, in addition to the types of futures they observe as potentially emerging or can imagine.

The top three powerful benefits of using foresight methods for international organizations and governments include:

1. **FUTURE READINESS** that helps in understanding challenges and identifying opportunities for change – both positive and negative;
2. **CONNECTING** different initiatives, ideas and practices, in a deliberate effort to consult and surface (in particular different) views, expertise and perspectives; and
3. **DEEPER UNDERSTANDING** of people, organizations, culture and community, as well as hidden biases and assumptions about the present and the future.

### *Anticipatory lens*

From the international organization and governmental perspective, foresight was identified as a useful approach to looking at plausible changes in the future because such changes are difficult to model and require more speculative methodologies and an exploratory mindset. Interviewees emphasized the need to be both aware of what is actually changing and of early weak signals of change, which may be pointing to potential plausible shifts in key areas of work. This ability to reflect, make sense of these changes and cultivate insights is a critical set of skills that need developing and nurturing if organizations are to successfully understand what these changes may mean in the future and the potential impact of these changes on the development sector.

Foresight was also identified as a tool for building engagement both horizontally across an organization, as well as from an interdisciplinary perspective, especially when working with complex and cross-cutting issues. Interactive participatory approaches for dialogue are helpful to identify and examine surprising changes at the intersection of multiple areas of expertise.

## Academic perspectives

### *Key points – Why foresight?*

1. It cultivates an anticipatory mindset and lens towards shaping policy and governance.
2. It supports an openness of imagination towards multiple possible futures beyond conventional thinking.
3. It understands the changing landscape and implications (and need) for collaborative efforts within and across disciplines.

From an academic perspective,<sup>4</sup> international development was acknowledged as a complex context, which requires deeper engagement about why and how to integrate futures thinking. There is a need to cultivate an anticipatory mindset and lens towards shaping more medium- and longer-term policy and governance, not just immediate reactive responses; this is a new way of thinking across the sector. Building anticipatory governance was identified as a methodology that is a good fit to support policy and governance needs. It is an approach that is amenable to consensus, and already provides a vocabulary that will most likely resonate with those in policy roles across development organizations. This governance lens can also be extended to include those involved in environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives, where the value of using horizon scanning to understand influential future trends shaping the next five, 10 and 15 years is valuable to understand the changing landscape and implications for policy and collaborative efforts across many stakeholders.

A mindset orientation for anticipatory governance is a learning journey grounded in pedagogy as well as intellectual and developmental inquiry. Future leadership will require this mindset-orientation and the ability to apply it across different contexts and time horizons. This is the

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<sup>4</sup> The academics interviewed for this study have practical experience using foresight in the development context, and actively publish, teach and engage with organizations and government agencies to also help them understand and use futures thinking and foresight. In this regard, they provide a unique perspective and may differ from other foresight and futures academics that don't specifically work with the global development sector.

mindset that is needed to explore decolonial perspectives and to allow for an openness to imagining futures beyond traditional conventional thinking and the immediacy of politics and political decision-making.

The top three powerful benefits of using foresight methods identified by this group include:

1. **CULTIVATING** the anticipatory lens of international organizations and governments to understand the changing horizon to inform future policies and governance in the medium to longer -term;
2. **SUPPORTING** ESG initiatives through horizon scanning and other foresight techniques; and
3. **SHIFTING** mindsets and orientations for future leadership to work across contexts and time horizons.

### *Anticipatory lens*

The academic perspective highlighted the importance of using an anticipatory futures lens to support future policies and governance. Foresight can assist organizations to think more broadly and bring different types of information and knowledge into the policy cycle to support policymakers and decision-makers when looking ahead to the future. Working with foresight and futures provides an opportunity to explore and think through trends not previously on an organization's radar; these can be blind spots. The process is rarely easy. It can take time to explain the difference between foresight and traditional forecasting approaches (with the latter, much more familiar to many organizations). Each organization also has a different ontology or way of viewing and understanding the world, with different anticipatory assumptions.<sup>5</sup> This can range from the need to anticipate the future to support planning and preparedness activities now to anticipating the emergence of plausible futures, which explores change, novelty and uncertainty, with the intent of supporting future agency to shape and transform the future.

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## Value of foresight

Table 1 below outlines the different uses of foresight and the role and impact across the three organizational streams. While Table 1 draws some distinctions between the values specific to each type of organization, common to them all is the idea of leveraging leadership and knowledge for positive change and impact.

Key elements include:

1. **Funding organizations:** foresight supports the creation of a forward-looking strategic vision, underscores the quality (and value) of strategic thinking and prioritizes actions to achieve that vision. Partnerships are considered a means to amplify opportunities for achieving impact towards that vision.
2. **International organizations and governments:** foresight is an enabling tool to support

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Futures Literacy – anticipatory assumptions

an integrated or holistic approach to complex problems. It facilitates conversations across different perspectives and expertise to explore and influence outcomes for positive change. Engaging in these types of conversations helps others see and unlock ideas on how they can make meaningful contributions to support change.

3. **Academic perspective:** foresight helps capture different types of knowledge (e.g., evidence based on trends driving change, and expert perspectives on emerging changes), and can generate different intellectual and learning inputs for broader systemic understanding – insights which can help support public leadership and governance decision-making. This knowledge and learning can help future-proof policies, as well as lead to new forward-thinking policy initiatives for impact.

**Table 1** – Value of foresight across organizational perspectives

<b>Organization perspective</b>	<b>Use of foresight</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Funding	Set forward a strategic vision	Futures thinking is an asset that can reinforce the quality of strategic thinking and setting of strategic priorities for action. It helps to reveal how we think, relate and use the future. It can unlock knowledge, insights and ideas to support decision-making, and empower future agency, actions and novel innovations.	Foresight allows for different conversations and greater imagination. It reveals convergent and divergent views around the future and can help to identify strengths and opportunities at the centre of the vision and how to work with partners to amplify impact.
International Organization/ Government	Support an integrated or holistic approach to complex problems, an enabling tool	It supports strategic conversations on issues that are often hard to discuss for political reasons and that may otherwise be ignored or neglected. It can facilitate a conversation to explore how we can act and influence outcomes for positive change and establish a shared language around it.	Advancing conversations can provide tremendous value as there are lots of feelings of despair in the development sector. With so many complex challenges and crises, people have difficulty seeing how they can meaningfully contribute to change.
Academic	Capture different types of knowledge (e.g., evidence-based trend research and expert insights through networking and dialogue)	Foresight can generate different intellectual and learning inputs, with a focus on horizon scanning to track important drivers of change and trends. The ability to learn, capture and integrate new knowledge inputs are important skills for public leadership and governance, as well as any organization working on providing public goods.	Improves the creation of new forward-thinking policy initiatives and can also be used to future proof policies by testing existing policies against anticipated future changes and shifts in the broader environment.

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## How are professionals using foresight?

Futures thinking and foresight are often used at the strategic level to define or redefine future policy and strategy. These methods can help leaders think about future world states, big trends and opportunities to create the most impact. The process can foster collective dialogue and enable shared collective understanding of where an organization may be able to make a difference now and in the future.

This process requires humility for reinvention as it can be challenging to think outside of one's comfort zone. To achieve this, two elements need to be considered: 1) people and culture; and 2) knowledge generation and decision-making.

People and culture: this includes being intentional about the culture you are building as you are convening a community and ensures you are capturing different perspectives to elevate strategic thinking. For many, this is a mindset shift from traditional ways of thinking. This cognitive element is important to cultivate in order to expand perspectives and the way one perceives the environment in which you work. This is an active way of learning, uncovering assumptions and making them explicit.

Knowledge/decision-making: this includes sharing work for sense-making and generating insights for collective understanding, both within an organization and across stakeholders and partners. Ensuring a diverse array of perspectives is important, with a focus on weak signals, patterns of change and analyzing different perspectives on them, as well as how different people understand their implications and the future considerations that arise from them. Questions remain on how best to integrate knowledge and carry insights forward to mobilize action and change. Depending on the nature of the topic and scope of foresight inquiry, a customized process may be needed to ensure it aligns with the organization's work and is designed to readily allow any insights to be integrated.

Please refer to Table 2 below for specific details on the structure and process of how foresight is used across the three organizational streams.

See also the Seven use cases in the Annex.

**Table 2** – Professional use of foresight to support knowledge and decision-making across organizational perspectives

Organization perspective	People/Culture	Knowledge/Decision-making
Funding	<p><b>COMMUNITY CONVENING:</b> To explore opportunities together, to convene communities and leaders with a view to building relationships and trust.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Be intentional about the culture you are building and make it one that embraces a futures mindset. This is then reflected in behaviour and how we organize, communicate, show up and treat each other.</p>	<p><b>SENSE-MAKING and GENERATING INSIGHTS:</b> In areas in need of collective understanding, to assess opportunities to make a difference and identify under-funded areas. Share work broadly to collect ideas, feedback and risks.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Horizon scanning can help understand the broader landscape or big picture, and identify potential new fields, new partners (including to expand thinking) or new approaches that could be of interest to the organization’s mission. Foresight approaches, using scenarios and creativity, have been used to navigate the local political economy of organizations.</p>
	<p><b>FOSTERING COLLECTIVE DIALOGUE:</b> To get a sense of new collective ideas that can be promoted and financed.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> This requires a clear strategy with flexible policy and tactics to achieve it. An operational approach is needed to coordinate actors within the organization to support implementation.</p>	<p><b>ENHANCING PREPARENESS and DECISION-MAKING:</b> To assist organizations anticipate and manage new and urgent demands that may surface during crisis situations, re-direct funding and anticipate potential disruptions within the organization and in the external environment.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> It can be helpful to conduct different types of foresight mapping activities using scenario exercises to explore “what ifs” and ask questions to get people thinking differently within the organization.</p>
International Organization/ Government	<p><b>FACILITATING LEADERSHIP DIALOGUE:</b> To draw attention to key topics that may not be on the radar of senior management. Foresight is very collaborative, and the process intentionally seeks to</p>	<p><b>BRINGING A BROADER PERSPECTIVE, BUT WITH FOCUS:</b> With the ongoing challenge of different departments and divisions operating in silos, this represents an opportunity to infuse different perspectives</p>

Organization perspective	People/Culture	Knowledge/Decision-making
	<p>capture different perspectives, including those outside the organization to get a variety of views that may not be immediately obvious. The dialogue needs to be relevant, connect to the present situation and build towards a common strategy.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Scenarios can help leadership explore different ways futures could materialize and stress-test areas that need improvement or transformation. It elevates strategic thinking to a different level, by accepting ambiguity and uncertainty and being open to exploring different ways a situation may unfold. It is an opportunity for leaders to explore how they may operate in a different context and environment. It is an active way of learning and making assumptions explicit.</p>	<p>into these spaces. It allows groups to broaden their perspectives, addressing many topics, while still focusing on important trends and signals and responding to challenges at the same time. Trustworthiness of the data is key. It also requires people and groups to move away from restricting research to the trends or topics they find interesting and to what is believed to be actionable.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Horizon scanning allows senior leadership to understand the landscape. More attention to weaker signals of change from a wider variety of sources should be included. This evidence-based, sense-making approach can identify situations of change/uncertainty through a lens of "If this, then what could happen?". It then explores the implications and future considerations to support planning today. It also identifies areas (or gaps) where conversations may be needed to round out current research.</p>
International Organization/ Government		<p><b>INFORMING POLICY and STRATEGIC PLANNING:</b> To facilitate the various stages of policymaking and strategy development. Organizations can continue to build on insights, knowledge and research by identifying themes or develop a new lens to explore the system.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> This should be an intentional activity where the outputs from scanning and research are captured and organized in such a way that they can feed into priority strategic areas. Foresight requires analyzing different perspectives, assessing weak signals of change on the</p>

Organization perspective	People/Culture	Knowledge/Decision-making
		horizon (not just in your immediate environment) and understanding the patterns of change that are emerging and the potential implications. This makes it different from traditional literature reviews, which typically capture what observers are seeing in their immediate environment.
Academic	<p><b>TEACHING ANTICIPATION:</b> To re-imagine the design and delivery of a teaching/learning program that fosters capacities to anticipate for the future.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Provides an opportunity to re-design a new approach to teaching foresight literacy and skills to maximize use and practice (instead of the typical heavy methods/tools approach).</p>	<p><b>INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE FUTURES:</b> To surface ideas about the future(s) that may raise awareness, provoke new thinking and ideas, and generate follow-up questions and queries.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Building on the follow-up questions and insights captured, organizations will need to think about their process and how they can integrate queries, learning and/or new knowledge into their work.</p>
	<p><b>SHIFTING MINDSETS TOWARD AGENCY FOR CHANGE:</b> The development sector has a strong forecasting and predictive mindset (short-term, reactive and responsive). Programming and projects often work within a theory of change, but these are often poorly formulated and are an oversimplification of the change process, presenting limitations in addressing complex and rapid changes.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> Use foresight to tap into a growth mindset, exploring agency for change to shape the future. Having a growth mindset means you can change over time and are more open to reflect, learn and grow from challenges.</p>	<p><b>CURATING CUSTOMIZED PROCESSES:</b> To curate a customized foresight process that reflects the organization's work, where insights generated can be easily integrated for potential action.</p> <p><u>Process:</u> The use of futures/foresight approaches and methods can be tailored and aligned to an organization to help surface new visions and goals. The importance of having an ecosystem lens — to understand the changing landscape — can provide insights that identify opportunities to adapt and remain relevant moving into the future.</p>

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## Top 22 foresight lessons learned

The following lessons surfaced from discussions with the 11 interviewees, organized around the five themes of leadership, partnership and collaboration, organizational approach, process and tactics, and outputs and outcomes.

### Leadership

1. **CHAMPION AT THE LEADERSHIP-LEVEL:** To support the effective use of futures/foresight thinking within a big organization, a champion at the leadership-level is required to open up the space, configure a team and create an opportunity for impact. Leadership's involvement and understanding make foresight more prominent in the organization and can help define what success can look like. Look for allies, leverage alliances and find islands of creativity within the organization. Be willing to take a chance and invest in foresight.
2. **UNDERSTAND WHAT IS NEEDED TO BUILD A FORESIGHT CULTURE:** Important attributes that are necessary to embed foresight into an organization include open-mindedness, humility and curiosity about how things intersect. It is also important to nurture and encourage openness to other people's views outside of your area of expertise, humility about the things we do not know and a willingness to open our minds to things that make us both uncomfortable and point us in different directions. It is about working with people, culture and reflexivity,<sup>6</sup> all of which require methodological fluidity.
3. **SOURCE NEW IDEAS, DIMENSIONS AND INNOVATIONS:** Be intentional about sourcing new ideas, innovative funding and new cutting-edge dimensions. This requires you to extend beyond everyday thinking and accepted trends to consider new thinking emerging on the fringes.

### Partnership and collaboration

4. **EXPLORE TAKING A SYSTEMIC AND STRATEGIC FORESIGHT APPROACH WITH PARTNERS/COMMUNITY:** Foresight is participatory and is powerful if practiced collectively. Working with a wide range of partners/organizations in a strategic way can be useful, especially if exploring similar systemic risks (and being able to share these risks can help get endorsement from leadership). Foresight activities and exercises can generate new ideas and uncover values that were never previously considered but may also generate conflicting opinions and different ideas which will need to be navigated. Nevertheless, the products that surface from such collective work can become a vector for new partnerships and opportunities to collaborate as part of a larger community.

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<sup>6</sup> Reflexivity is the act of examining one's own assumption, belief and judgement systems, and thinking carefully and critically about how they influence the research process.

5. **USE FORESIGHT TO FOSTER INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION AND ENABLE DIALOGUE:** An important aspect of successful strategic foresight initiatives is knowing who to include and be part of the process. While end-users of the foresight work may be decision-makers, it is important to not just include them; you also need to have the right voices from across society (or your organization) involved in the process, people who also have a right to be involved in the conversation. Foresight work can also make people uncomfortable but do not let that be an excuse for not engaging them. Respect and sensitivity are required when confronting a topic that may be considered 'immune' from questioning or critique within a culture. Handled carefully, these conversations can lead to understanding, compromise and resolution. Inclusive participation must be considered with care to ensure voices are heard and decisions made together in a manageable way. Foresight is a powerful tool to bring people together and discover common areas of interest.
6. **BREAK DOWN BARRIERS THROUGH INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT:** An in-house foresight unit can work in smaller teams, collaborating with other departments that may be foresight curious. Engagement can be on a thematic topic and/or methods basis. This cross-cutting/matrix foresight approach focused on a topic or method allows others with expertise to contribute, share knowledge and have a sense of ownership over the process. It is also a way to embed the input of others outside of the foresight unit. Staff can practice foresight within the unit, but they should involve other branches and senior managers in the process to break down barriers and foster goodwill. It is important to live the process and not just have others read the final report.

## Organizational approach

7. **UNDERSTAND TIME COMMITMENT TO EMBED FORESIGHT CAPACITY:** Many people are surprised at the amount of time, energy and often financial and human-resource commitment foresight requires to be done properly. Supporting and embedding foresight capacity within an organization requires a clear understanding of this resource commitment. In practice, this can mean that organizational expectations of quick wins from foresight may not translate effectively into practice, since this will not easily accommodate involved processes and longer-term thinking. That does not mean that all foresight exercises are resource-heavy, but it does mean that when undertaking an exercise, always consider the resources and constraints at hand, including timing and expectations. At the same time, protect any foresight unit's time to effectively accomplish this work. Public administrations in both the developed and developing countries are facing stubborn capacity constraints. International organizations and governments need practical tools and 'space' to experiment, learn and adapt to deal with the challenges of SDG implementation in the volatile reality of the 21st century (GCPSE, 2018).
8. **DEMYSTIFY FORESIGHT:** Foresight is a systematic way of thinking about the future to help anticipate and better prepare for upcoming challenges today. When pitching the practice of foresight, it is helpful to ground it in present challenges, trends or emerging issues, and then extrapolate forward with a focus on generating new insights and select the foresight tools that are best suited for what you are seeking to learn. Avoid getting

too technical at the start with complex tools or overwhelming people with science-fiction views or ideas that seem too far removed. Capacity building workshops can help by providing an opportunity for people to experience foresight directly.

9. **BUILD A FUTURES LITERACY AND FORESIGHT STANDARD:** It is not easy to make futures literacy<sup>7</sup> a standard within an organization's short-term business cycle and with the daily management of urgent situations and constraints. A report on Canada's (then) newly emerging foresight units and initiatives highlighted the structural, institutional and organizational challenges to their long-term success, including concretely measuring foresight outcomes (Wilner, Roy, 2020). The nature of foresight is long-term; steps should be taken to protect this activity from being sidelined during acute situations requiring immediate actions. It requires an intentional and ongoing investment of engagement opportunities to allow people to step back and see the big picture, reflect and consider the future. The effort is often worth the time and outcome
10. **ENGAGE WITH MINDSETS AND FOSTER AN ANTICIPATORY CULTURE:** There can be a lot of skepticism around the use of foresight, leading to its use being limited or altogether removed from within the organization. The core characteristics of classical public administration are rationality, predictability and hierarchy. Many of its structures, procedures and outputs are based on these principles (GCPSE, 2018). It is important, therefore, to try and engage people early on in thinking about the future (see above) and demonstrate the value of strategic foresight to unlock new understandings and insights about plausible futures. Building an understanding of the discipline of anticipation (at an ontological level) and doing so through opportunities to discuss emerging disruptions (positive and negative) and plausible futures, as well as the implications for policy and practice, is an important avenue for generating support for foresight and a futures-oriented culture. The excitement of generating real epiphanies or moments when you suddenly feel that you understand, or become conscious of, something that is very important can open the imagination and creativity, which in turn can be highly engaging and transformative.
11. **BRIDGE FORECASTING WITH FORESIGHT AND DIGGING INTO ASSUMPTIONS:** There can be an unnecessary tension between foresight and forecasting within an organization. It is important to dispel this false dichotomy early on and bridge the two functions — since in many ways, foresight (medium- to long-term) begins where forecasting (near-term) ends. Both methods are forward looking and use different variables and time horizons to generate different types of knowledge. The difference between forecasting and foresight can often be made clearer by exploring assumptions. Forecasting will often project current data, albeit using sound mathematical models, directly into the near future, often keeping assumptions the same. Foresight will explore weak signals, emerging trends and drivers of change to challenge current day individual and organizational assumptions, testing them to see if they still stand true, and assessing plausible futures that could emerge as a result. When thinking about testing assumptions, explore what holds true and what is changing — more specifically, consider

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<sup>7</sup> According to UNESCO's definition, futures literacy helps people understand why and how we use the future to prepare, plan and interact with the complexity and novelty of our societies.

the institutional culture at play and the identity, narrative, story and understanding of an organization's and individual's mental models, and how this shapes their perspective and worldview.

## Process and tactics

12. **DETERMINE HOW YOU WANT TO INTEGRATE FORESIGHT:** Complexity, uncertainty and a demand for meaningful citizen engagement are profound challenges. Foresight is emerging as an essential addition to conventional planning and policy tools (GCPSE, 2018). Understanding why you are using foresight and the type of methods that can meet that use and provide value is important. This use case is every organization's individual journey; but understanding and being clear on how you want to use it and how to integrate foresight into your organization so that it is relevant to one's organizational context and needs is the fastest route to potentially generating the most useful insights. The OECD has published a working paper of an emerging exploratory government framework to assist decision-making using strategic foresight. It consists of four parts: (i) framing strategic foresight, (ii) building its fundamental components in governments, (iii) fine-tuning foresight interventions to specific contexts, and (iv) undertaking concrete activities to solve specific policy challenges (OECD, 2023).
13. **BE OPEN-MINDED TO THE PROCESS AND PRODUCTS:** Many people believe the process has to look a certain way and follow a very structured series of activities, but it can also just be as simple as an improved theory of change. Do not get too bogged down about the process. Be open-minded about how you can use interim deliverables, like draft reports and insights captured, as part of the foresight journey (this forms part of your toolkit), not just the final product. Fostering such open-mindedness requires time and energy, especially communicating with those who may be skeptical about the process or any of the insights and products generated. Be sure to blend in the right mix of communication within your foresight work, helping bring people along in the process.
14. **LEVERAGE RESOURCES AND DEFINE SCOPE:** Take the opportunity to draw on strategic foresight studies and resources already generated and decide where you can add value to the existing space. Define your scope: depending on your goals and objectives, it may be more effective to focus on more narrow topics that are more data driven or hypothesis looking and do not duplicate the work of others. Consider present situations, projections, areas of uncertainty and the different types of data/information that can be generated.
15. **CO-DESIGN A LEARNING JOURNEY:** Especially for organizations new to this field, foresight affords a tremendous opportunity to learn and grow. A foresight process can be an opportunity to build collective intelligence, co-design a process and outcome and learn together — something that can be very empowering, democratizing and generative of new ideas and insights. While that might suggest you need the perfect process and tools, do not worry about getting it perfect. This also moves the experience

beyond one of facilitating a process into one of co-generative dialogue<sup>8</sup> and multi-disciplinary discovery, which can be much more useful.

16. **BE FLEXIBLE ON TOOLS:** Determine the amount of time and resources available to you, and what would be useful and meaningful to explore given this situation. Be open-minded with toolboxes and approaches and select those that can provide valuable insights. Consider using time as a tool. This can be a practical way to create distance from issues and constraints in the present and can be used to build psychological safety when engaging in conversations about the future.
17. **DOCUMENT YOUR PROCESS:** This is an important part of building a foresight business case within an organization. Document your process to keep track of your work to ensure it can continue to grow and evolve within your organization.

## Outputs and outcomes

18. **PREPARE AND CONSIDER APPROACH FOR GENERATING OUTPUTS:** Consider whether an inductive or deductive research approach should be taken (inductive reasoning aims at developing a new theory, while deductive reasoning aims at testing an existing theory). Clarity on the content and outputs that will be created will help ensure that it is in line with expectations and better received within the organization. Foresight is transformative work that needs leadership endorsement and authority for conducting the work and mobilizing insights.
19. **ESTABLISH A FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH BASE:** To understand the potential impacts of trends within a system boundary or sector, having a collective intelligence research base can serve as a source of information to generate initial discussion on the current realities of today and what it may mean for potential plausible and possible future operating environments. This can include information on civil society needs and evidence from practitioners in the field, each capturing different experiences in context and knowledge.
20. **EVALUATE AND APPLY A COMBINATION OF PROCESS AND OUTCOME METRICS:** Intentionally include evaluation of foresight activities, both process and outcome evaluation that is linked to your foresight activities, to measure the success and impact within your organization over time. Make process adjustments, as needed, to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. It is important to keep showing the value of foresight by outlining what you are learning, as this assists in maintaining momentum and engagement of key actors. The findings from the Foresight Evaluation Capacity Survey, administered by Association of Professional Futurists (APF) members in September 2021, confirmed the observation that many foresight practitioners do not evaluate and/or do not know how to evaluate. However, more foresight practitioners said that they do or can do more to evaluate their work (APF, 2022). While there are no established metrics to measure foresight activities, consideration should be given to metrics that can lead to actionable outcomes or tangible results. Examples of process-

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<sup>8</sup> Co-generative dialogue refers to a conversation among a group of people who come together to reflect on a shared experience and ways to improve it. The goal of the dialogue is to co-generate a shared action plan.

oriented metrics may include: stakeholder engagement, capacity building, resource allocation efficiency and integration into policy and strategy. Examples of outcome-oriented metrics may include: scenario-to-action translation, resilience and adaptability, innovation and risk-taking, social and economic impact, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals.

21. **MOBILIZE INSIGHTS:** Go beyond the surprising “aha” moments to mobilizing insights based on a more accurate and deep intuitive understanding. This requires strong, courageous leadership, stepping into the unknown and paving a new pathway forward.
22. **COMMUNICATE ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH AND SUCCESS TO BUILD SUPPORT:** Consider ways to demonstrate foresight capability and communicate success. What value do we gain in having these skills? What type of metrics can be used to support your work? For foresight to be better understood, it is important to document where progress is being made. Foresight findings can be uncomfortable, as it forces individuals and organizations to think outside of the box and question truths and core tenets within an organization. Consider appropriate ways to communicate findings and challenge assumptions safely, while maintaining interest and support.

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## Blue-sky thinking – A foresight vision wish list

This section provides a summary of actions from our 11 interviewees to improve the chances of successful use and utility of foresight in international development and/or research over the next 10 years.

Actions are organised into four elements:

- Leadership and organizational change
- Building a foresight ecosystem
- Deep integration of foresight in development organizations
- Inclusive futures literacy learning model

### Leadership and organizational change

International development needs to consider how it can enrich and diversify itself to obtain the benefits from foresight sooner. There is a demand for change.

Futures and foresight leadership can include the following:

1. **Enter boldly with the intent to change the game:** Be willing to embark on new directions, learning and iterating while managing the day-to-day ongoing activities.
2. **Invest in capability to facilitate dialogue:** Recognize the value of strategic foresight by elevating futures literacy and foresight as an essential skill to facilitate dialogue and build cohesion across an entire organization. The facilitation of foresight to engage in dialogue as part of the broader sustainable development agenda can help uncover shared objectives within a society.
3. **Build a strong foresight culture:** Work to embed foresight and futures thinking to fuel strategies or major public policies. Integrating foresight into an organization can help promote change and challenge the 'status quo'. Mandatory foresight training can build knowledge at the cultural level, while on-the-job mentoring can build practical anticipatory governance skills. This can help empower and strengthen the capacity of local staff to courageously think about the future and consider their work setting/environment.
4. **Have dedicated roles and responsibilities:** Have a senior futurist or chief strategist responsible for the application of strategic foresight within an organization.

Strategic and tactical ideas to move ideas into action may include:

5. **Focusing on underfunded areas:** Have a system in place to collect evidence in real-time of what is happening, how things are changing in communities, the impact on improving people's lives and the level of connection with non-profits. This can unlock agency to people in the organization by providing feedback on what is working, the progress of actions and overall improvement.

6. **Having a flexible mechanism to source new ideas quickly with key partners:** This can support dialogue to confront and explore challenges and ideas. Capturing insights from the broader outside world can help fuel our thinking and reduce the echo-chamber effect.
7. **Creating a futures idea bank:** This would capture and translate viable ideas from futures thinking activities into innovation projects and outline the path to move the ideas forward. This would include assembling collaborative teams to put ideas into actions and continue to expand conversations.
8. **Exploring the future of democracy:** This is a shifting global trend, and society is becoming more critical and demanding due to the perceived lack of change, made ever more acute by increasingly inexorable global challenges. In this context, what is the future of democracy? We need to start talking about this and exploring weak signals of change and implications.

## Building a foresight ecosystem

A foresight ecosystem can function to bring people together across public, private and academic institutions, and can include pillars of foresight for defence, international development and economics/trade. The intent would be to cultivate understanding and practice of foresight. This inclusive model would be designed to enhance visibility of foresight, including perspectives from the Global South. Building upon the existing foresight systems in international development at the global and national levels, this model would function to empower, convene and hold space for conversations with intersecting perspectives from different communities. This would support big-picture thinking and provide an opportunity for people to do contemplative work together as part of a knowledge-exchange platform.

This ecosystem can also provide an opportunity to democratize foresight through informal networks. This could help to break down barriers in the practice of foresight based on credentials, seniority or prior experience, by instead providing those championing foresight within institutions the support they need to successfully integrate foresight in their work and projects. This has the potential to expand openness and readiness in the use of futures and foresight within organizations and the contribution to the imagination of the future.

## Deep integration of foresight in development organizations

The ideal vision would be that every international development organization fully integrates foresight into all their strategic and planning activities, with minimal constraints. Organizations would have a dedicated team to work on and nurture foresight within their organization and learn from others. This would include building foresight capacity internally and ensuring the team has access to senior leaders and important decision-makers.

It would require creating an environment of psychological safety<sup>9</sup> to ensure the best work

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<sup>9</sup> Psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. In teams, it refers to team members believing that they can take risks without being shamed by other team members.

possible — in essence, an open space for people to express their thoughts, ideas and to build social cohesion by envisioning a collective future that counters the issues of polarization

Foresight integration can include:

- **Integrating activities into the different elements of the policy and organizational planning cycles:** This can include a preliminary phase for observing change, evaluating impact of change and projections on the top programs, assessing how the program may be challenged in different evolving environments, and over different time horizons, and capturing opportunities to adjust and adapt to enhance future fitness (future proofing).
- **Connecting to an organization's goals and support tangible outcomes:** This can be done by connecting to current problems, challenges or issues an organization is managing. Include a focus on working to shift mindsets and explore different ways of thinking and exploring the future that may provide new insights that are not apparent at the surface level.
- **Building an evergreen foresight process:** This could continuously engage with established scenarios, monitoring the trajectory of trends/signals or assessing the pathways or signposts that then flag implications to support decision-making or mobilize new designs to move new ideas of foresight into action.
- **Creating a dedicated foresight research and development team:** Insights and outputs from foresight activities would feed into decisions, with proximity to strategy development to provide a strategic advantage in the way services are delivered within the shifting environment (similar to the private sector). This can be part of the organization's structural setup and function as an independent and integrated team that stress-tests and potentially uncovers opportunities for further exploration or innovation. This can help to address the challenge of split focus (common when resources are constrained) between the day-to-day management of issues and the ability to immerse in the long-term future.

## Inclusive futures literacy learning model

- This element would focus on building a new inclusive learning model to develop futures literacy skills to help development professionals learn how to relate to and use the future and navigate and confront challenges towards shaping the future. The intent would be to democratize and scale up futures mindsets based on co-learning and co-evolution over a 10-year period.
- A range of options to engage in foresight from beginner to advanced would be available, and resources and training would be allocated to ensure it represents the voices, perspectives and needs of the Global South.
- This would require building the language and technical knowledge of participants and creating a psychologically safe environment. This model would provide an opportunity for broader dialogue and exchanges and having brave, uncomfortable and creative conversations as part of an empowering creative process. A foresight train-the-trainers course could be part of the delivery model, designed to engage on a large scale and engage across a variety of professional roles within development.

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## Summary of key research findings

Futures and foresight cultivate an anticipatory mindset and lens towards shaping policy and governance. It helps to embed medium- to long-term thinking in policymaking and planning and allows an organization to explore change and uncertainty more deeply. Foresight helps to generate a better understanding of the horizon and changing landscape. This helps understand systems change and evolution over the longer-term and potential implications for collaborative efforts within and across disciplines. In addition, the use of collective approaches can provide an openness of imagination towards multiple possible futures beyond conventional thinking. This can serve to unlock new narratives, ideas and opportunities to support vision and agency for change across organizations, partners and other stakeholders. These approaches can help gain clarity in generating a vision of change and transformation, and inform proactive policies, strategies and decisions to steer targeted action in both the near-term and longer-term.

Cultivating a longer-term anticipatory lens provides a mindset and orientation that is important for future public leadership and governance, the ability to work across contexts and time horizons and having a broader systemic understanding to leverage knowledge for positive change, decision-making and impact.

Foresight approaches provide the ability to intentionally facilitate conversations and surface different expertise, perspectives and views on a given topic or question. Powerful benefits include generating an understanding of what is changing in the environment and within organizations, communities and people, as well as their hidden cultures, biases and assumptions. This can unlock agency and hopeful messages that things can change for the better and potential opportunities for change to ensure future readiness.

Foresight use-cases in global development organizations exist along a continuum and include the following: building the foundations of futures literacy across an organization; providing research and an evidence-base on the changing landscape for policymaking and strategy development; exploring underfunded areas and new opportunities and roles; aligning with organizational strategy to influence change; and supporting strategic-level conversations that build consensus and assist in establishing a longer-term vision.

Key lessons learned are organized around five main themes:

1. **Leadership:** Have a champion at the leadership-level to open up the space, configure a team, build a foresight culture and intentionally create opportunities for impact.
2. **Partnership and collaboration:** Take a systemic approach with partners and community and use foresight to foster inclusive participation, enable dialogue and break down barriers.
3. **Organizational approach:** Seek to demystify the use of foresight by grounding work in present challenges, trends or emerging issues, and then extrapolate forward. Build future literacy and engage with the mindsets of anticipation, including bridging forecasting and foresight, and provide sufficient time and commitment to embed foresight capacity.
4. **Process and tactics:** Consider why you are using foresight, how best to integrate it

within your organization and consider which methods that can provide value. Have an open mind to different processes. Leverage existing resources and think about where your organization can add value to the existing futures/foresight space. Consider co-designing a foresight learning journey, which can be an opportunity to build collective intelligence and learn together to generate outcomes. Be flexible on your foresight tools and be sure to document your process as part of building a foresight business case within your organization.

5. **Outputs and outcomes:** Take time to prepare and consider your approach to generating knowledge outputs. Establishing a foundational research base may provide value to initiative discussions. Include evaluation of your processes as a continuous improvement measure to ensure impact. Tap into the courage to mobilize insights and opportunities to pave new pathways forward. Consider ways to demonstrate foresight capability and communicate success.

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## Conclusion

This study aimed to document and explain different experiences, perspectives and approaches in the use and utility of foresight among Canadian and global peer organizations involved in international development and/or research for development. This project sought to learn how a foresight and futures approach can be integrated into global development work, including opportunities for IDRC to enhance its own institutional practice of foresight.

The report concludes that the practice and integration of futures-thinking and foresight provides value for international development organizations in shaping medium- to long-term thinking in policymaking, strategy and governance. It helps to anticipate emerging needs and challenges, and explore change and uncertainty. It emphasizes the importance of collective approaches and an openness to imagination beyond conventional thinking to unlock new narratives, ideas and opportunities to support agency for change.

Engaging in strategic foresight and cultivating a futures mindset, which engages with uncertainty and complexity, as well as anticipates signals of change to support adaptive capacity and transformation, is important for future public leadership and governance to be future-ready. This differs from the traditional organizational management mindset that is short-term focused, risk adverse and seeks to maintain the status quo or business-as-usual. This report contains use-cases and lessons learned that highlight the need for different models, mindsets, partnerships and skills along with strong leadership and collaboration across various organizations and sectors to unlock agency and hopeful messages for positive future outcomes.

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## Annex - Seven use cases – stories of change

The use cases featured in this section are based on stories from some of the interviews. They are structured to help identify the organization’s specific goal in using foresight within the story, key process steps and system supports that were deemed essential to achieving their foresight goal. Each use case represents a different use and utility of foresight within the broader international development ecosystem. These use cases are not intended to fully capture an organization’s internal foresight process but rather to share a chapter in their story of using foresight. Some of the use cases identify the specific organization. Others are anonymous.

<b>USE CASE #1</b>	BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL FUTURES LITERACY
<b>GOAL</b>	To build futures literacy across the organization.
<b>KEY STEPS IN PROCESS</b>	<p><a href="#">Open Society Foundations</a>’ approach to building futures literacy was done by showcasing the usefulness of the work and encouraging people to explore their own fields of interest through a futures lens. We selected a few specific topics based on internal requests and gathered people around a table to discuss, for example, climate-induced migration within Africa and what it could mean for societies in Africa.</p> <p>We took a close look at the big trends and published a cornerstone report. For each trend, we asked 10-20 questions to help build a deep understanding of the issues and generate insights. This allowed us to do an analysis around these trends at the macro level, looking specifically at the rise of authoritarianism, new technology disruptions and developments, rising inequalities and climate change.</p> <p>We also looked at the trends around democracy and human rights to gain insights into what the future could bring and to reflect on what our field could say about these changes.</p>
<b>SYSTEM SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS</b>	We instilled the idea that we cannot rely on our individual and organizational perspective alone. To support broader change within the organization, we need to have a bird’s eye view of our role and impact within the broader ecosystem.

<b>USE CASE #2</b>	DEVELOPING A STRONG SCANNING BASE AND INTEGRATED APPROACH
GOAL	To incorporate long-term thinking and new approaches to policymaking and organizational planning processes.
KEY STEPS IN THE PROCESS	<p>Horizon scanning: <a href="#">Global Affairs Canada</a> (GAC) engaged in a process which ultimately underscored the importance of scanning for both stronger and weaker signals of change from a wider variety of sources/perspectives to analyze emerging change drivers, and potential implications in the short, medium and long-term. This process can help to identify actions needed in the present.</p> <p>It is important to understand what the big reports from centres of foresight excellence around the world are saying in terms of global mega trend analysis. This information provides an initial overview. Scanning various reports, and looking at consistency across reports on particular trends, can also help to validate and confirm the big trends. To avoid the echo-chamber effect, (one report echoing and citing another report's trends), it is also important to broaden the search.</p> <p>While scanning, GAC included research articles and published reports to blogs, media and cultural phenomena, and informal interviews with experts from academic, public, private and civil society organizations from around the world. In selecting which sources to include, we also tried to ensure geographical and gender diversity of authors.</p> <p>To separate signals of change from purely anecdotal pieces of information, we used inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the data, for example, setting a date limit to avoid including outdated information and considering whether the evidence is validated by at least two other different sources.</p>
SYSTEM SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS	<p>A thorough and rigorous approach to horizon scanning is important because it ensures that the next steps in the foresight process will be informed by sufficient quantity and quality of data. Such an approach requires a significant commitment in terms of time, and hence human resources (or a combination of human and AI resources). Organizations working on similar foresight topics can save time and avoid duplicating efforts by collaborating on scanning activities. Such collaboration can also help to keep a pulse on common areas of interest.</p> <p>An evergreen scanning process from different sources can help to capture new strong and weak signals of change and uncover patterns over time.</p>

<b>USE CASE #3</b>	DISCOVERY RESEARCH WITHIN SPHERES OF INFLUENCE
GOAL	Use foresight to identify new opportunities for action, influence change in funding early-stage discovery research (e.g. science in relation to health) and proactively identify and track associated regulatory, ethical and societal risks and opportunities.
KEY STEPS IN PROCESS	<p>The process used by this philanthropic foundation required taking a systemic approach. First, to identify the parts of the system we are actively working in and would have the ability to support or influence. Second, to explore and understand the future evolution of these parts of the system to build intelligence around anticipated changes. This helped to frame the anticipated shifts in the environment and helped inform the potential future roles we may need to play as a research funder and global foundation, which can be broad (e.g. global health), or more specific (e.g. mental health). The focus on priority areas allowed us to interpret some of the insights that were generated from this work, and where we might need to leverage our internal expertise to understand the future needs of our key projects.</p> <p>Foresight assisted our thinking about future ethical, societal and political questions to pose for research, and the technical expertise needed for discovery research within our spheres of influence.</p> <p>The utility of foresight to achieve strategic alignment can also be done from an internal organizational perspective. Our organization applied foresight to navigate divergent and convergent views on strategic direction and priorities within the organization, before looking at the outside world. This helped to clarify organizational intent and goals, which allowed us to move from a traditional path-dependency approach to an impact-driven strategy process.</p>
SYSTEM SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS	For areas outside the sphere of influence, we looked to our partners working in those areas for insights to understand the potential future of those spaces. It was helpful to leverage the thinking of others and then piece together what it may mean for our organization.

<b>USE CASE #4</b>	COLLECTIVE REFLECTION ON FUTURES BASED ON POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS, AUGMENTED BY FUTURES LITERACY
GOAL	To support a pilot program focused on Tunisia and the Future of Old City Centres, which carried out a collective exploration of how these cities could evolve in the future.
KEY STEPS IN PROCESS	<p>Today, with layers of urbanization and modern developments, old city centres are partly abandoned. To augment and enhance the political-economic analysis of why this is, the <a href="#">Agence française de développement</a> (AFD), in collaboration with the Plurality University and the Futures Literacy program of UNESCO, explored questions around the 'ingredients' behind the different visions of the future that different stakeholders have for city centres. This helped build an understanding of the foundational elements around which cities are built.</p> <p>Stakeholders were brought together for a collective reflection on the futures they imagined for their cities. The experimental and creative approach for dialogue involved the deconstruction and reconstruction of their visions, which was helpful to generate new elements of dialogue between stakeholders.</p> <p>It was interesting to observe how our visions of the future can lead to different priorities across stakeholder groups. Prior to this futures activity, most of the discussion was focused on the built infrastructure and what to do with the physical buildings. By the end of the pilot program, we discovered that the most important aspect was not the material elements, but the non-material elements that all stakeholders valued, such as keeping spaces for intergenerational exchange, in which several generations of families come to meet.</p> <p>We are now working to replicate this pilot program in other cities.</p>
SYSTEM SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS	Diverse stakeholder involvement revealed different cultural aspects and perspectives. All stakeholders felt they needed to keep these spaces no matter what. Despite the stakeholders' different points of view, many agreed on this common value. Another value was to make sure older cities continue to remain attractive, including to perpetuate the collective memories of everyone. This can take a variety of forms. Keeping the scent of jasmine, as a non-material example, was deeply valued by stakeholders.

<b>USE CASE #5</b>	BUILDING A FORESIGHT ECOSYSTEM
GOAL	To foster anticipation for the common good and build futures thinking capacity in the philanthropic field.
KEY STEPS IN PROCESS	The first step involved listening to the philanthropic community on what would bring real value, followed by an extensive horizon scanning of over 350 trends impacting philanthropy and society in the next decade. <a href="#">Philea</a> conducted the Exploring 21st century philanthropy survey, with 238 responses that provided insights into the changing landscape, areas that are unfunded, risks and opportunities. The experience opened a discussion on the images of the future we see emerging in the philanthropic sector. Philea organized a series of events where creative futures thinking methodologies were applied, such as futures literacy experiments, three horizons model, futures triangle, vision building, scenario planning sessions and others. Futures thinking methodologies help understand how to take proactive actions and opportunities that can be taken to shape a more preferred future, not just focusing on the challenges alone. These results were published in Futures Philanthropy: Anticipation for the Common Good report, prepared by Philea in cooperation with the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies.
SYSTEM SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS	We created a futures philanthropy community to experiment with futures thinking and foresight methodologies. It was a broad engagement and, where possible, we provided support to create ripple effects. Peer inspiration was important, with concrete examples of other organizations doing this type of work. Our gatherings of leaders provided space for people to connect on a deeper personal and professional level and build trust. Futures thinking created a base for opening up conversations about the broader need for transformation and change in the philanthropy field. Foresight is not easy to be integrated deeply within an organization; it is not only about gathering evidence and applying methods but about changing mindsets and culture. There are many changemakers and philanthropic leaders who are already doing transformative work and who live this new culture, providing them with a platform to connect and document their practices as case studies to inspire the field.

<b>USE CASE #6</b>	BECOMING MORE ANTICIPATORY AND AGILE
GOAL	To use foresight to understand the changing landscape as part of broader strategy development and establishing a longer-term vision. Becoming agile and more anticipatory are key objectives of our strategic plan and are embedded within our strategy.
KEY STEPS IN THE PROCESS	<p>The <a href="#">United Nations Development Programme's</a> (UNDP) first step was to collect signals of change through horizon scanning. Based on this, questions were then framed strategically and used to start conversations about change. The intent of these conversations was to understand the boundaries of change people can imagine, the world people want to leave behind and their lasting legacy, and the importance of creating impact. Part of establishing a longer-term vision requires revisiting our 'why,' and understanding how our work can contribute towards achieving this vision. To create a common strategy, the baseline assumptions need to be explicit from the start. At UNDP, we also found that collective bottom-up horizon scanning was helpful to open dialogue about the unexpected and the ways different futures could potentially materialize. We also established teams across different regions to develop mini-scenarios based on identified trends and disruptors. We created an opportunity for leadership to explore these mini-scenarios developed by UNDP staff on the ground. Overall, these visions were more dystopian and shocking than our leadership was able to relate to. It was a powerful learning experience because it revealed a significant difference in perspectives between top leadership at UNDP in New York, and those working on the ground.</p> <p>Areas that need improvement or transformation in the organization were stress-tested within the scenarios. This helps create a no-regrets policy type of approach and opens conversation about the critical actions we need to take, no matter what. It was an open interrogation around the future of development and our place within it. We wanted to create an experience and give staff and decision-makers a license to operate under a different context and environment. Foresight scenarios provided this opportunity and opened up a different way of learning. The ability to accept ambiguity and explore how things may unfold helps to elevate strategic conversations to a new level.</p>
SYSTEM SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS	Attention was given to ensure participatory engagement from staff, scientists and stakeholders. Foresight is a mindset shift for organizations that tend to focus on what 'should be done' and are accustomed to working through policy options to address this. This type of deliberate effort requires dedicating time and resources to make sure foresight is systematically understood across the organization and is part of the organization's cohesive logic. Having senior leadership understand and promote this way of thinking moving forward is essential.

<b>USE CASE #7</b>	STRATEGIC LEVEL CONVERSATIONS USING FORESIGHT SCENARIOS
GOAL	To facilitate high-level meetings that support strategic-level conversations and contemplation that builds consensus. To use hypothetical scenarios to allow participants to explore current geopolitical dynamics and longer-term economic and social projections.
KEY STEPS IN THE PROCESS	<p><a href="#">Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</a> (OECD) Member countries requested that strategic foresight informs the design and background materials for the 2023 Global Strategy Group (GSG) Annual Meeting, which brings together senior representatives from foreign affairs ministries and other relevant ministries on an annual basis to discuss important geopolitical and strategic issues. This confirmed demand from senior OECD audiences for big picture strategic reflection that actively engages senior level officials. The OECD Strategic Foresight Unit prepared and co-ordinated a background note for the meeting that included four scenarios and contributions from all relevant OECD Directorates as well as many external experts, aiming to stimulate reflection among the GSG meeting participants. These types of materials are very different from the type of information analysts typically work with to support evidence-based decision-making. Nevertheless, strategic thinking is valuable for positioning and developing a narrative around a fundamentally complex and uncertain environment. Geo-economic scenarios allowed the OECD to explore and challenge some significant underlying assumptions and expectations about the future of the global economic and geopolitical context. Especially in a consensus-based organization, senior-level and closed-door meetings without a set deliverable [i.e. only a confidential chair summary where comments are not attributable] are highly valuable. It was an informal setting, and OECD delegates were prepared prior to the exercise. The discussions touched on sensitive issues that are important to senior leadership decision-making. It was an opportunity to move towards improved strategy through conversation and contemplation of uncomfortable topics and help identify who needs to be part of these future closed-door strategic conversations and how these actors could be involved. These interactions created valuable discussion, reflection and shared language, which in and of themselves were considered valuable outputs from this foresight activity. This has also led to foresight being integrated into the subsequent edition of the 2024 OECD GSG Annual Meeting.</p>
SYSTEM SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS	Ministers and Deputy Ministers are in a position to make decisions about shifting systems that are complex and require an assessment of values and subjective judgment. Senior leaders often recognize the value of having this type of collective reflection. It requires working through big strategic issues and re-shaping narratives. Ultimately, this work provided value to senior leadership, helping to identify research they wanted to explore going forward, and it clarified their understanding of areas of uncertainty. Institutionalizing this process has been helpful in building an understanding of the foresight process and its value in influencing policy change.