

3 June 2026

Glocal Evaluation Week 2026

“Wow, it’s crazy out there!”

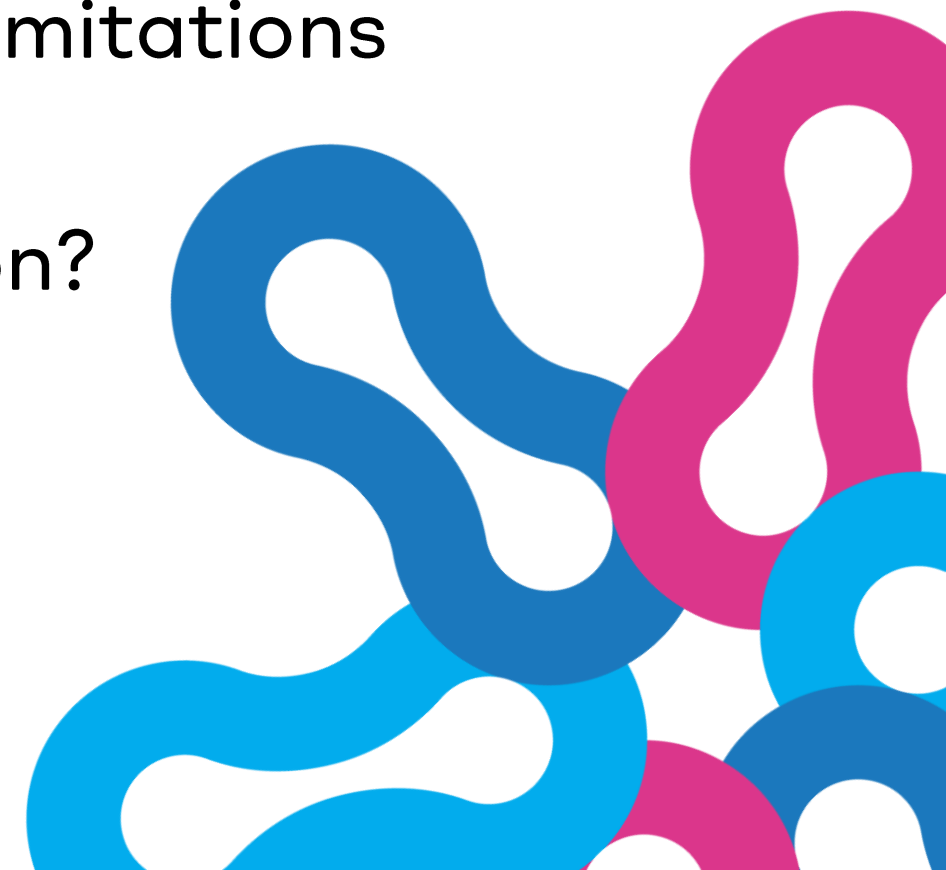
Introduction to Using Foresight in Evaluation

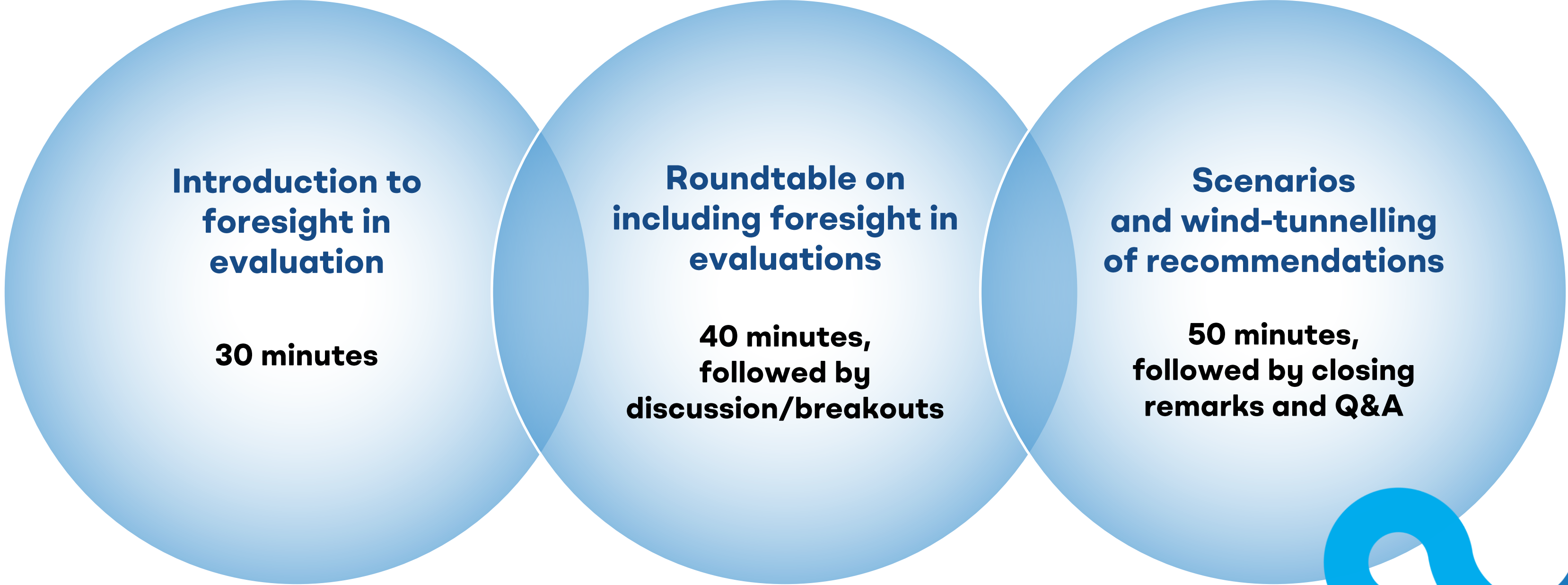
Learning objectives and agenda

“Foresight is the capacity to think systematically about the future to inform decision-making today” (Conway, 2015).

At the end of the session, participants will have a better understanding of:

- What is foresight? How to use foresight in evaluation? Why does it matter?
- What are some foresight tools and methods I can include in evaluation?
How do these work in practice?
- What are some of the practical considerations, challenges and limitations of including foresight in evaluation practice?
- Where can I find resources on combining foresight and evaluation?
- Who can I exchange with?





**Introduction to
foresight in
evaluation**

30 minutes

**Roundtable on
including foresight in
evaluations**

**40 minutes,
followed by
discussion/breakouts**

**Scenarios
and wind-tunnelling
of recommendations**

**50 minutes,
followed by closing
remarks and Q&A**

Part I:
Introduction to foresight in evaluation
– shifting mindsets for the future



"Wow, it's crazy out there."

Why foresight now belongs in evaluation

***In these times,
predictability is extinct
but the need for planning is not.***

Alex Steffen,
American futurist (adapted)



Why use foresight in evaluation?

- Evaluators are increasingly asked not only to look backwards, but **to look forward**
- Linear assumptions increasingly fail in **VUCA contexts** – now often described as **BANI** (brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible)
- Recommendations built on a single assumed future are fragile
- Other fields have already done this work – we can **borrow and adapt from their toolbox**

What foresight is (and is not)

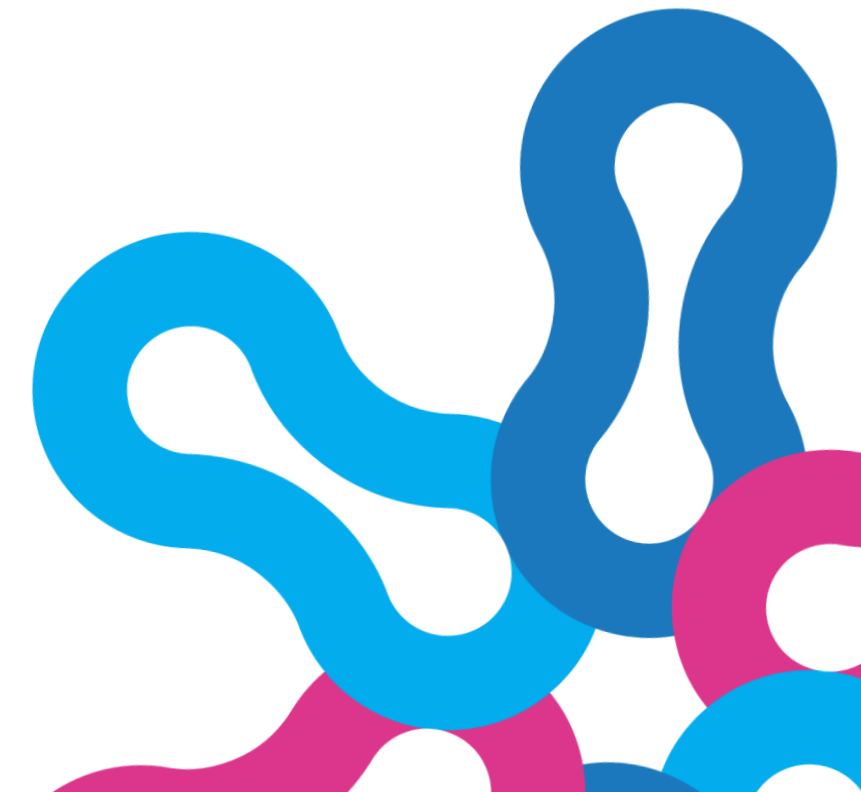
Foresight is

- A *structured* way to think about possible, plausible, and preferable futures
- A bridge between past evidence and future decision-making
- A complement to evaluation, not a replacement or competitor

Foresight is not

- Prediction
- Guesswork
- Forecasting only

Foresight helps evaluation engage with uncertainty — without pretending to predict the future.



The core mindset shift

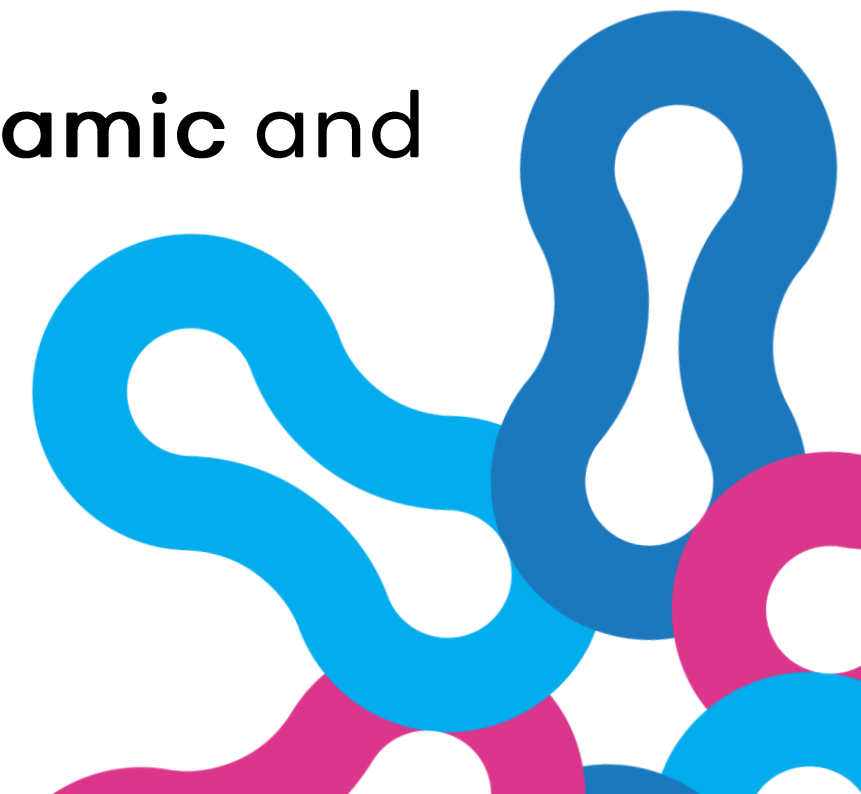
From certainty to preparedness

Traditional evaluation instinct

- Assume continuity
- Optimize for the “most likely” future
- Treat context as background

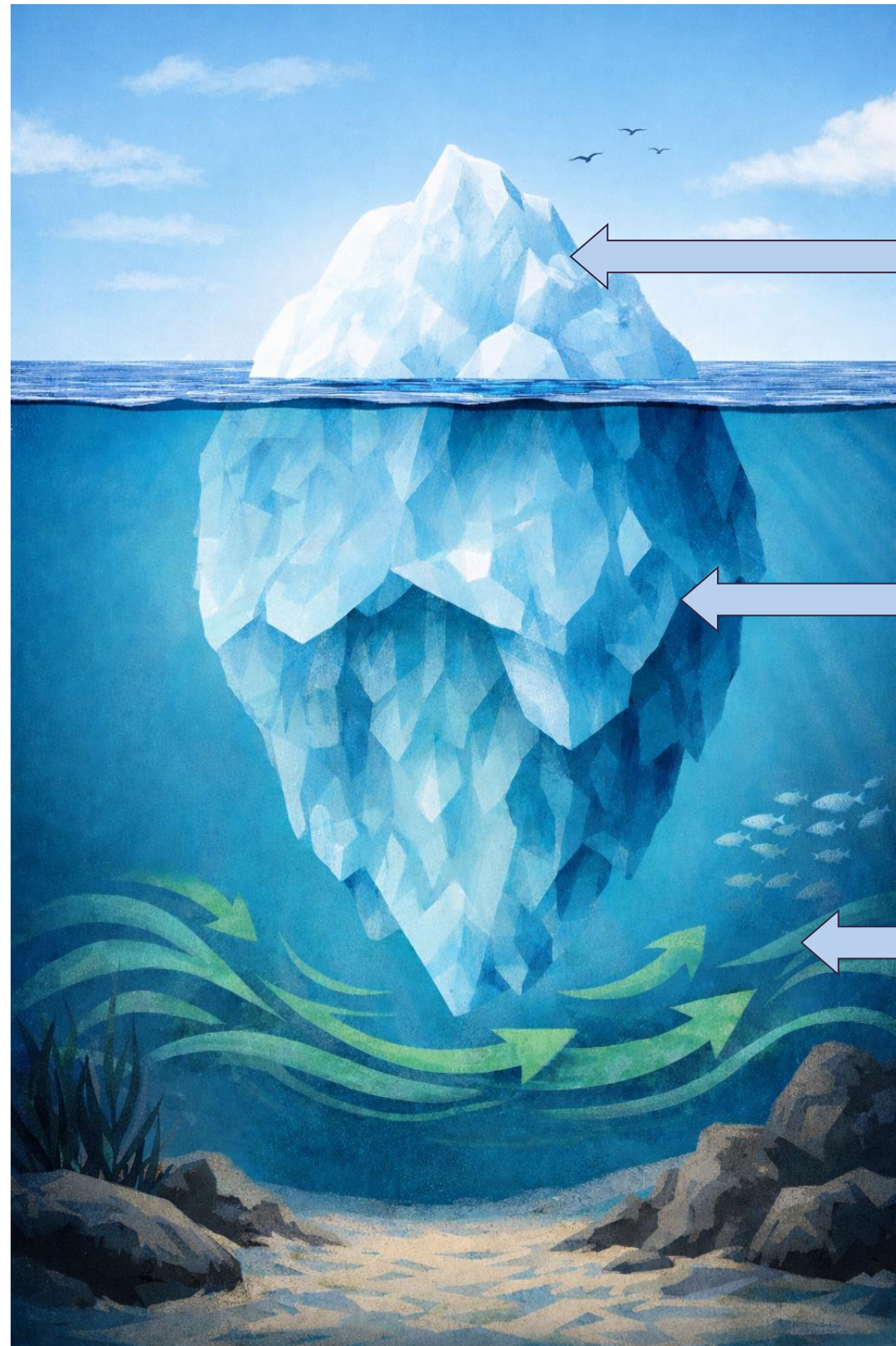
Foresight-informed evaluation

- Assume disruption
- Explore multiple plausible futures
- Treat context as dynamic and shaping outcomes



Foresight jargon: Signals, trends, drivers

Understanding change at different levels



Signals

Early signs of change

Often weak, partial, emerging (but visible)

Trends

Patterns of change over time

Directional, interpretable (below the surface)

Drivers

Structural forces shaping systems

Driving trends across sectors and time

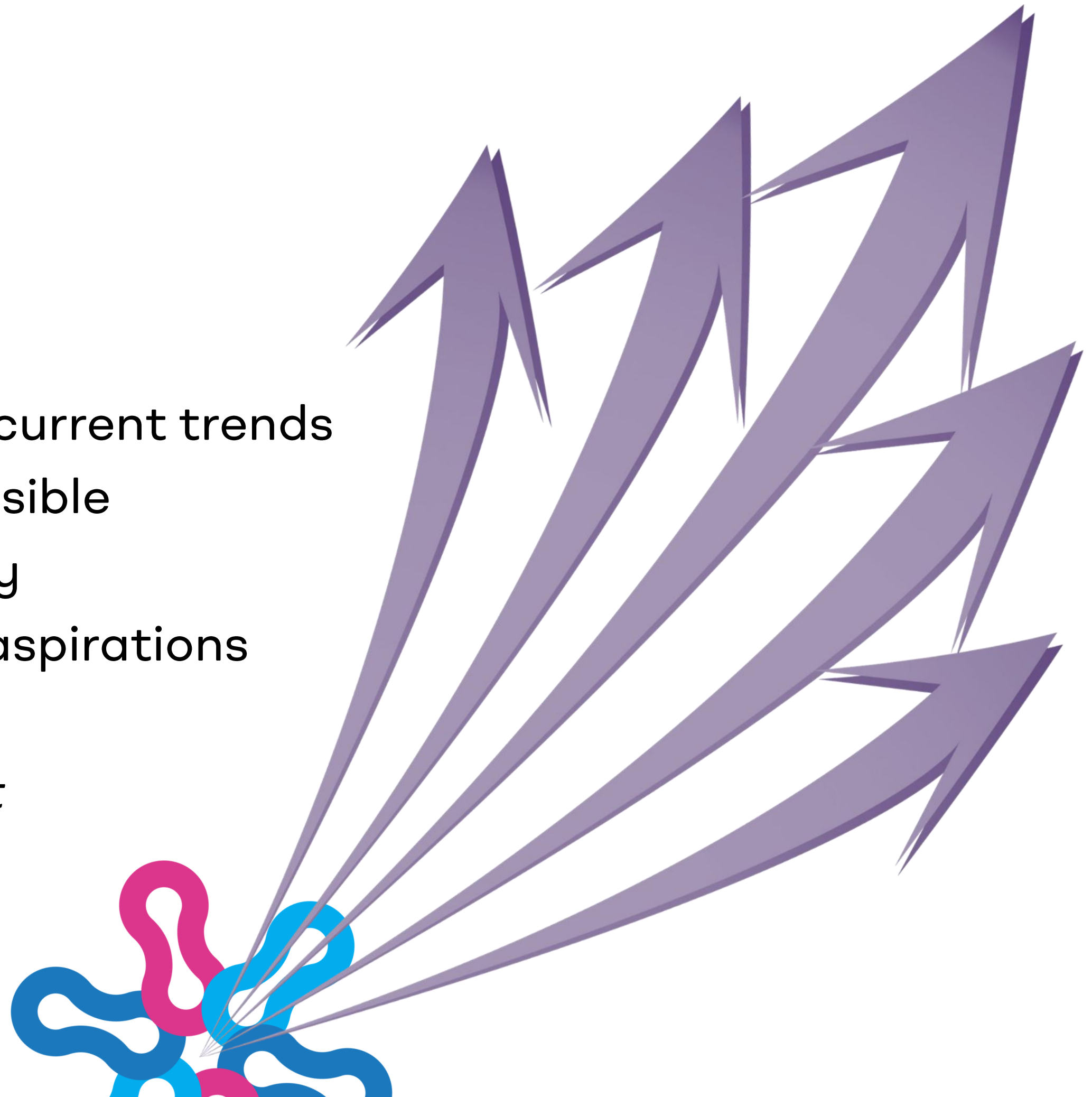
Larger movements, pushing the system (e.g., globalization, climate change, urbanization, AI)

Futures are plural

One future is rarely enough

- **Probable** — continuation of current trends
- **Plausible** — disruption is possible
- **Possible** — wider uncertainty
- **Preferable** — values-based aspirations

⚠ Beware the *trap of the present*



Where foresight fits in evaluation

Strengthening the evaluation cycle

- Context analysis
→ *signals, trends, drivers*
- Theory of change
→ *test assumptions against futures*
- Evaluation questions
→ *future-relevant learning*
- Recommendations
→ *stress-tested for robustness*



Foresight is not one method

A simple orientation to the foresight toolbox



Understanding change

What's already shaping the present and near future?

- Signals & horizon scanning
- Trend analysis
- Forecasting
- Futures Triangle



Exploring futures

What different futures could plausibly emerge?

- Scenario planning
- Three Horizons
- Future narratives



Testing decisions

How robust are our strategies under uncertainty?

- Wind-tunnelling
- Stress-testing
- Assumption testing



Shaping action

How might we move toward desired futures?

- Backcasting
- Roadmapping
- Transition pathways



What this asks of us as evaluators

A foresight mindset!

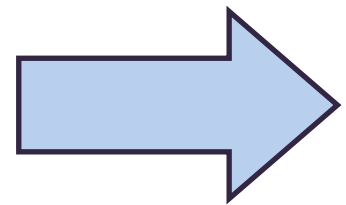
- Comfort with uncertainty
- Systems thinking
- Curiosity beyond silos
- Question business as usual
- Evaluation as a strategic conversation

This is not about having the answers. It's about being better prepared for what may lie ahead - and about making evaluation a more useful partner in navigating uncertainty.

Bridge to practice

From mindset to practice

*Every evaluation already sends signals about the future.
The question is whether we do so consciously.*



Next, you'll see:

- How foresight is already used in UN evaluations
- What this looks like under real constraints
- The added value foresight offers





Part II:

Roundtable on including foresight in evaluation

Roundtable on including foresight in evaluation



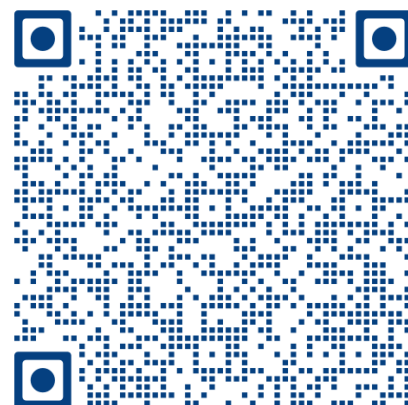
- Forecasting (UNICEF)
- Futures Triangle (OHCHR)
- Signal Scanning (UNDP)
- Three Horizons (UNITAR)
- Scenario Planning (UNIDO)

Forecasting (UNICEF)

How foresight informed the UNICEF Strategic Plan evaluation



Evaluation of the UNICEF
Strategic Plan, 2022-2025



Why forecasting mattered: Evaluation designed to inform the next Strategic Plan (2026-29), not only assess past performance

What was done: Forecasting grounded in observed trends to assess the plausibility of reaching 2025 targets

What this revealed

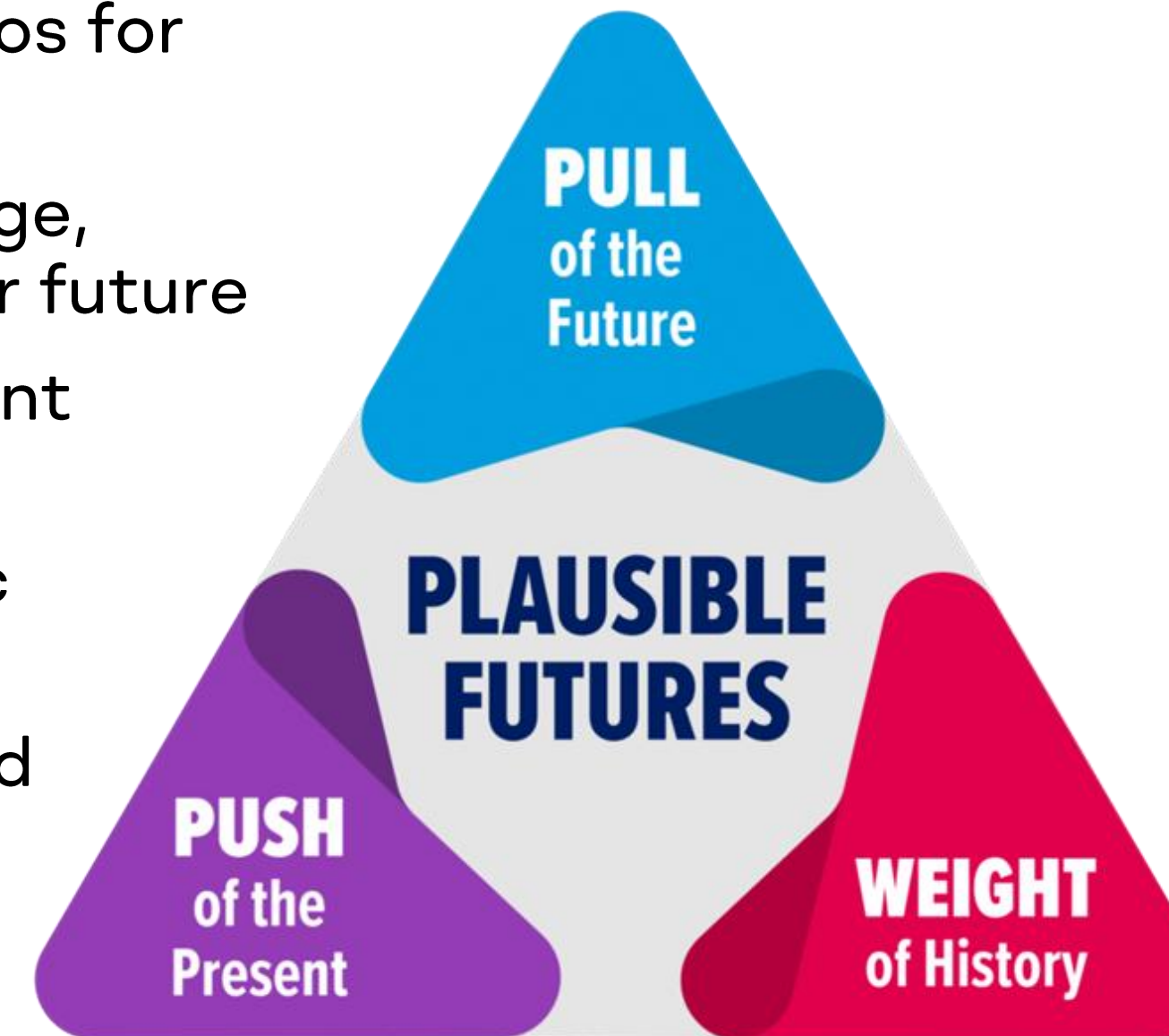
- While many output targets were set conservatively, some outcome targets were unlikely to be achieved
- Strong output delivery ≠ guaranteed systems change
- Early warning signals for the next Strategic Plan

How it was used

- Informed by more realistic ambitions and time horizons
- Supported prioritization and adaptive planning for 2026-2029

Futures Triangle for an OHCHR Country Office

- A Country Office asked to conduct an internal review to inform the formulation of the next country program: a “visioning” exercise
- Data collected for the review included the exploration of the context, relevant issues in the country program, and scenarios for the future
- A ‘futures triangle’ was used to identify factors driving change, from recent history to the current situation and into the near future
- Likely impact and degree of (un)certainty of the most relevant issues drawn from the ‘futures triangle’ were assessed
- Polarities were identified for settings with complex strategic uncertainties
- These strategic uncertainties – and their polarities – provided a structure to develop scenarios or a roadmap for planning



Signal Scanning (UNDP)

As part of the [Formative Evaluation of the UNDP Funding Windows](#), the UNDP IEO

- Tapped into collective intelligence to map signals, trends, and drivers of change
- Through an existing [UNDP Future Trends and Signals System](#) and two bespoke "Signals Studios" (see right)
(See also: [UN Global Pulse Horizon Scan Manual](#); [UN Global Horizon Scanning AI-Powered Tool](#) prototype)
- In order to support the evaluation's literature review (1st horizon) with weaker signals (2nd/3rd horizon)



June 03 | June 10, 2025

SIGNALS STUDIO

The Futures of Development Resources

The way we fund development is shifting. In collaboration with the Independent Evaluation Office, this studio explored how new players, co-creation models, and alternative finance mechanisms are reshaping the future of flexible funding by 2035.

RADICAL SIMPLIFICATION

- Growing demand for simplified funding mechanisms and reporting models
- Development banks seeking reduced overhead (GMS) to partner with multilateral agencies
- Push for purpose-led communication and transparency to attract trust-based capital

TECHNOLOGY & PLATFORM MODELS

- Crowdfunding, retail giving, and diaspora platforms gaining momentum
- Start-up logic and design-thinking shaping development funding mechanisms
- Proposals for AI-enabled, multi-stakeholder platforms to coordinate co-creation and visibility

DOMESTIC RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

- Countries increasingly pursuing domestic financing to reduce aid dependency
- Local governments experimenting with tax reform, incentives, and community buy-in
- Shift from international aid toward homegrown solutions and public finance innovation

TRUST, TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

- Erosion of trust in traditional institutions prompting calls for clearer storytelling and impact tracking
- Donors demanding granular visibility into how and where their money flows
- Civic demands for more accountable taxation and public finance in countries like Kenya and Sri Lanka

NEW PLAYERS & PARADIGMS

- Gulf and Asian countries entering the funding landscape with new priorities
- Asian and youth-driven philanthropy rising, influenced by proximity to social issues
- Family offices shifting to values-driven investment, bypassing traditional NGOs
- Entrepreneurs and social accelerators stepping into development problem-solving

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING WINDOWS

- Reframe donors as collaborators: Donors want strategic influence, not passive roles—this shifts how programs must be shaped.
- Invest in platform-building and participation: AI-enabled tools and participatory design may be essential for future collaboration.
- Expect decentralisation of funding: Governments, communities, and philanthropists will increasingly design and fund their own models.
- Rethink incentives and overhead: GMS rates and bureaucratic processes need to evolve to attract large-scale partnerships.
- Bridge cultural gaps in funding language: Development actors must adapt to business-oriented, purpose-driven framings.
- Build skills for agility and storytelling: Soft skills like trust-building, co-creation, systems thinking, and digital literacy are vital.

CO-CREATION & PARTNERSHIPS

- Donors increasingly want to shape strategies, not just provide funds
- Community-led infrastructure and energy efforts rising in Global South and Global North
- Citizen-designed solutions in Brazil and participatory governance models gaining traction
- New coordination models emerging beyond formal multilateral frameworks

Want to replicate this studio in your country or bureau?

Reach out to the Strategy & Futures Team to host your own Signals Studio.

Navigating the future of the IOMC Toolbox in times of uncertainties: Applying strategic foresight in a midterm evaluation

Purpose – Why ?

- Assess the current state of implementation as part of an independent midterm evaluation (Horizon 1)
- Share ideas for a desirable future for the remaining phase and beyond (Horizon 3)
- Identify recommendations for potential pathways forward to reach the desirable future (Horizon 2)



Framework – What ?

Three Horizons Foresight Tool

- **Horizon 1: Current system**
→ What is (not) working?
- **Horizon 2: Transition Zone**
→ What actions are needed to move towards tomorrow's vision?
- **Horizon 3: Desired future**
→ What would we like the project to look like by the end and beyond?

Process – How ?

Workshop

- Duration: 90 minutes
- Format: Online, teams
- Tools: Miro
- Participants: Project management group members from various UN and other IOs.
- Working mode: Plenary



Lessons Learned

- Preparing properly. It is useful to prepare in advance inputs under different scenarios without inducing responses. Anonymized insights from previous interviews were summarized and validated in plenary.
- Be prepared for disruptions. Foresight methodologies can open doors for discussions of different topics. It is important to find the balance between facilitating to finalize the exercise and facilitating to make the evaluation process useful in itself.
- Useful for evaluations with forward-looking purposes. Looking at the future can also help gaining a better understanding on how stakeholders understand the intervention's outcomes and impact(s).

Scenario Planning: UNIDO's Thought Leadership

- Different types of scenario planning
- Alternative futures:
 - Efficient implementer (incremental) - Emphasis on TC implementation
 - Integrated implementer/policy actor (integrative) - Better integration of core functions
 - Global policy leader with implementation credibility (transformational) - Transforming expertise and experimentation

	Scenario 1: Technical Cooperation Agency	Scenario 2: TC Agency with Enhanced Normative Function	Scenario 3: Global Thought Leader
Strategic Focus	Industrial project implementation	TC + stronger normative & policy linkages	Policy leadership grounded in implementation
Key Strengths	• Proven expertise • Strong funding appeal	• Synergies across core functions • Stronger impact	• Unique comparative advantage • Global policy leadership
Key Limitations	• Limited thought leadership • Underuses UN role	• Still not a top- tier thought leader	• Risk to contributor relationships
Organizational Shift Required	Minimal	Moderate	Transformational



Part III: Scenarios and wind-tunnelling



What are scenarios?

Scenarios are **stories about the future** designed to challenge our thinking and help us learn from the future in order to **take action in the present.**



Scenario archetypes

There are many scenario development methods, the most commonly used are **critical uncertainties (2x2), change progression and scenario archetypes**

CONTINUATION

The system moves forward along its current trajectory. This is the “official future” and usually considered most likely.

COLLAPSE

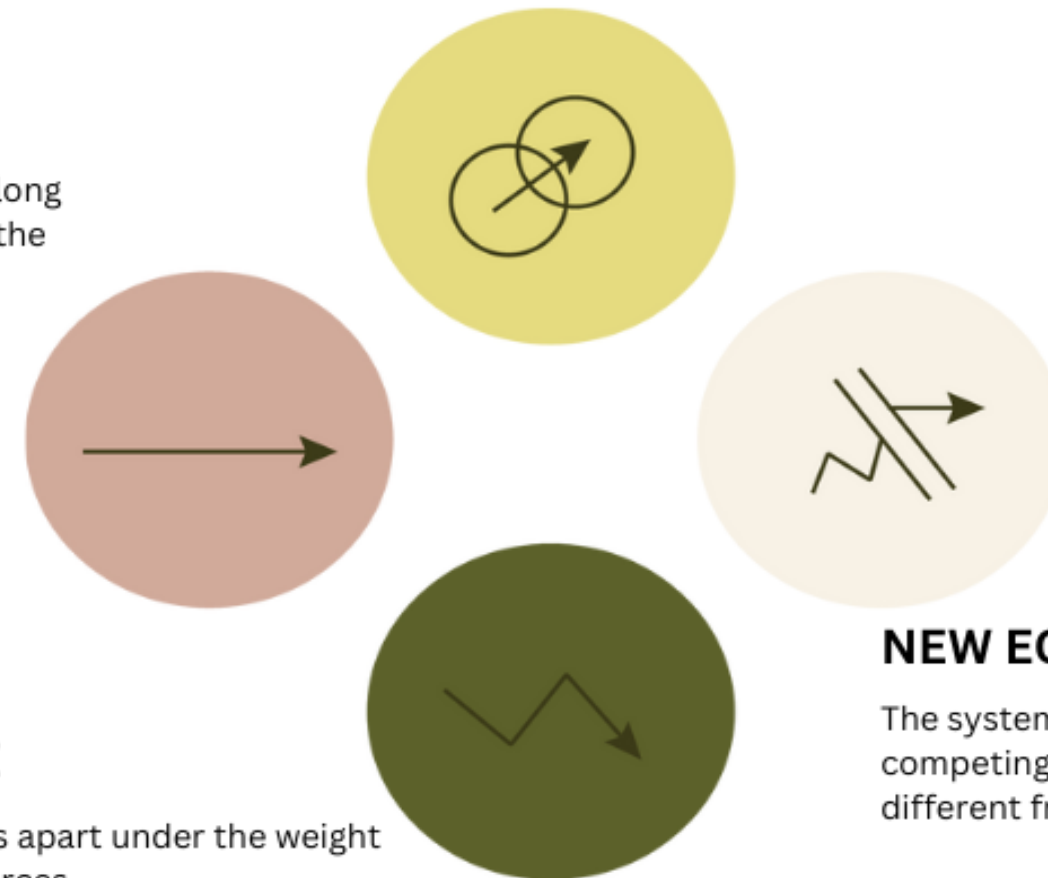
The system falls apart under the weight of “negative” forces.

TRANSFORMATION

The system is discarded in favor of a new one with a new set of rules.

NEW EQUILIBRIUM

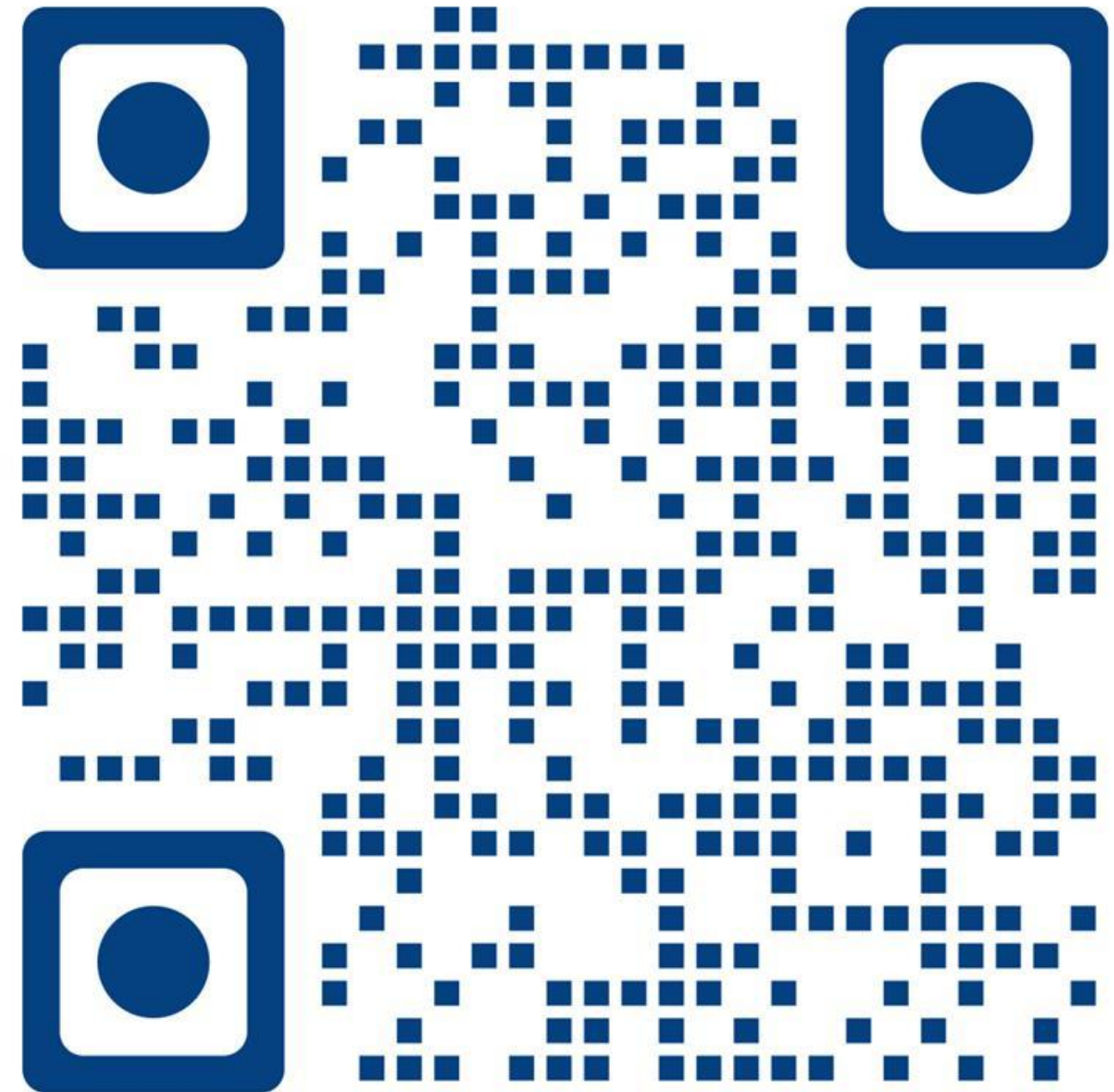
The system reaches a balance among competing forces that is significantly different from the current balance.



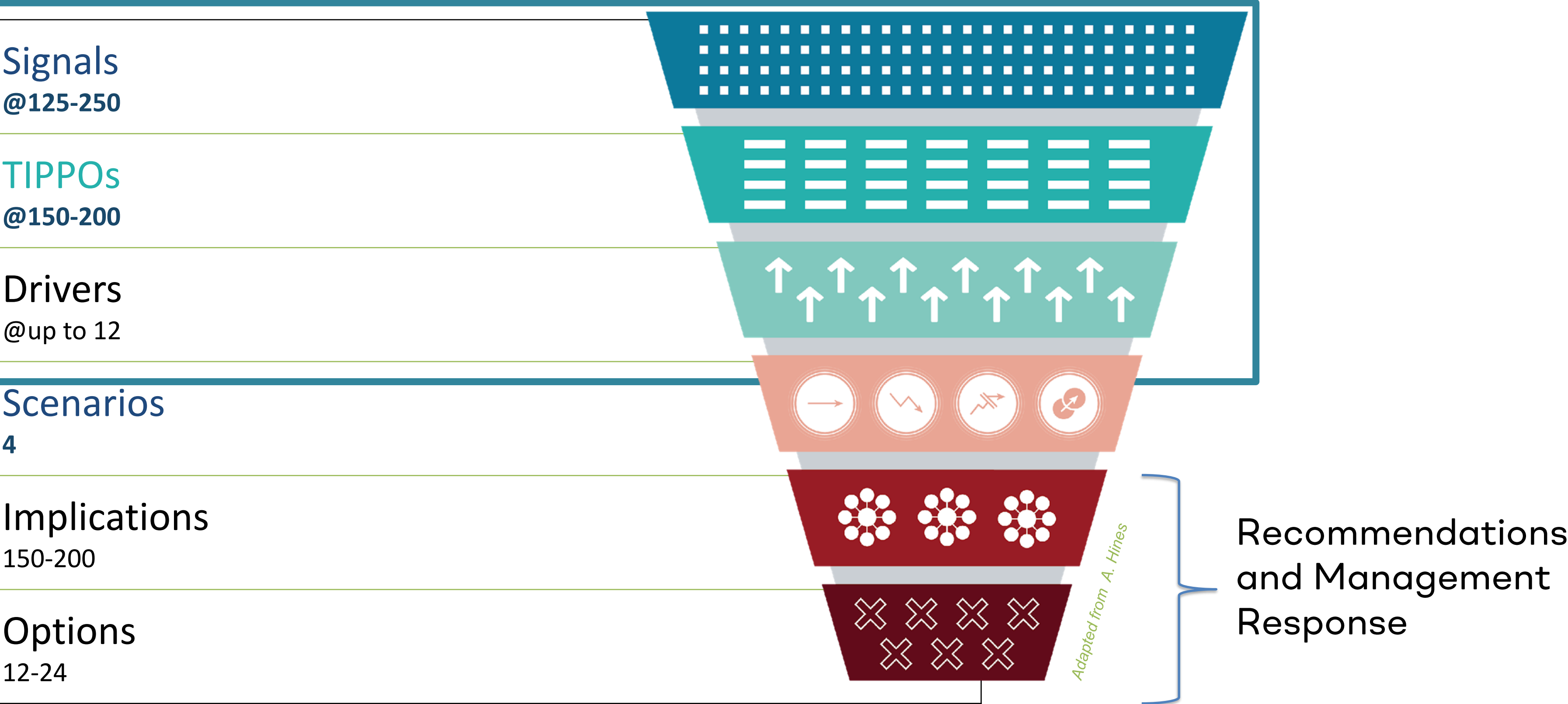
How do you arrive at scenarios?

Example from Formative Evaluation of UNDP
Funding Windows





The Foresight Funnel



Developing scenarios

Drivers

Geopolitical/Financial | Multilateral system regains trust. Regional blocs strengthen but coordinate. Alternative financial systems emerge.

Donor Behaviour | Donors evolve into co-creators and partners, emphasizing locally led development and shared values. Newer and diverse approaches on how to manage and assess impact amongst co-creating partners emerge.

UNDP Complexity | UNDP reforms internal governance; adaptive planning and shared accountability emerge.

Business Model | Revenue is diversified. As a result of diversification of business model, arises a need to juggle multiple operating frameworks in order to meet different value offerings, accompanied by a need to yet harmonize said operating frameworks where possible. Impact investing and blended finance gain traction

Digital/AI | AI and data tools help UNDP target and measure programs. Ethical AI frameworks are deemed paramount with regards to how AI is being utilized. However, there is yet to be a clearly defined global code of conduct.

Nascent scenario – New Equilibrium

Geopolitical/Financial Landscape: The multilateral system experiences a resurgence in trust, with regional blocs becoming more robust yet maintaining coordination with each other. This reflects a shift towards a more collaborative global order where regions work together to address common challenges. Additionally, alternative financial systems begin to take shape, offering new avenues for economic transactions and investments, which could potentially reshape global financial dynamics.

Donor Behavior: Donors are transitioning into more collaborative roles, focusing on partnerships that emphasize locally led initiatives and shared values. This evolution signifies a move away from traditional top-down aid models to a more inclusive co-creation of development solutions. Innovative approaches are being developed to manage and assess the impact of these partnerships, ensuring that local contexts and needs are prioritized.

UNDP Complexity and Reforms: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is undergoing internal governance reforms, leading to more adaptive planning and shared accountability mechanisms. These changes aim to enhance the organization's flexibility and responsiveness to complex global challenges, enabling it to better support sustainable development goals.

Business Model Diversification: The diversification of revenue streams necessitates the UNDP to navigate multiple operating frameworks to cater to varied value propositions. This requires a delicate balance between adapting to different frameworks and striving to harmonize them where feasible. The growing interest in impact investing and blended finance highlights a shift towards leveraging private capital for public good, opening new funding avenues for development projects.

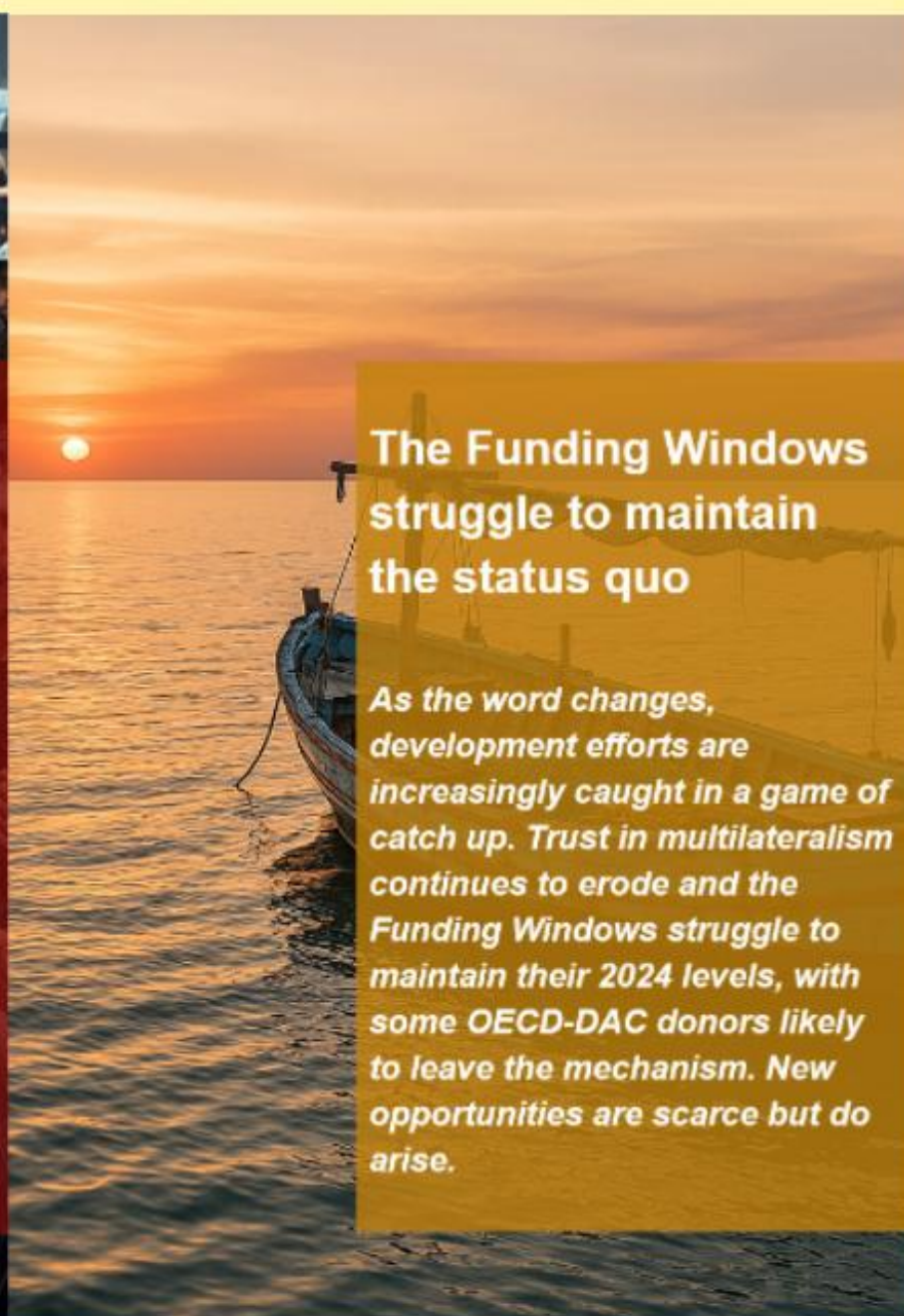
Digital/AI Integration: AI and data tools become integral to the UNDP's ability to target and measure the effectiveness of its programs. The emphasis on ethical AI frameworks underscores the importance of responsible AI usage, although there remains a gap in establishing a universally accepted global code of conduct. This presents an opportunity for the UNDP to take a leadership role in advocating for ethical standards in AI deployment, ensuring that technological advances align with human rights and developmental ethics.

Overview of pre-constructed scenarios

Collapse



Baseline



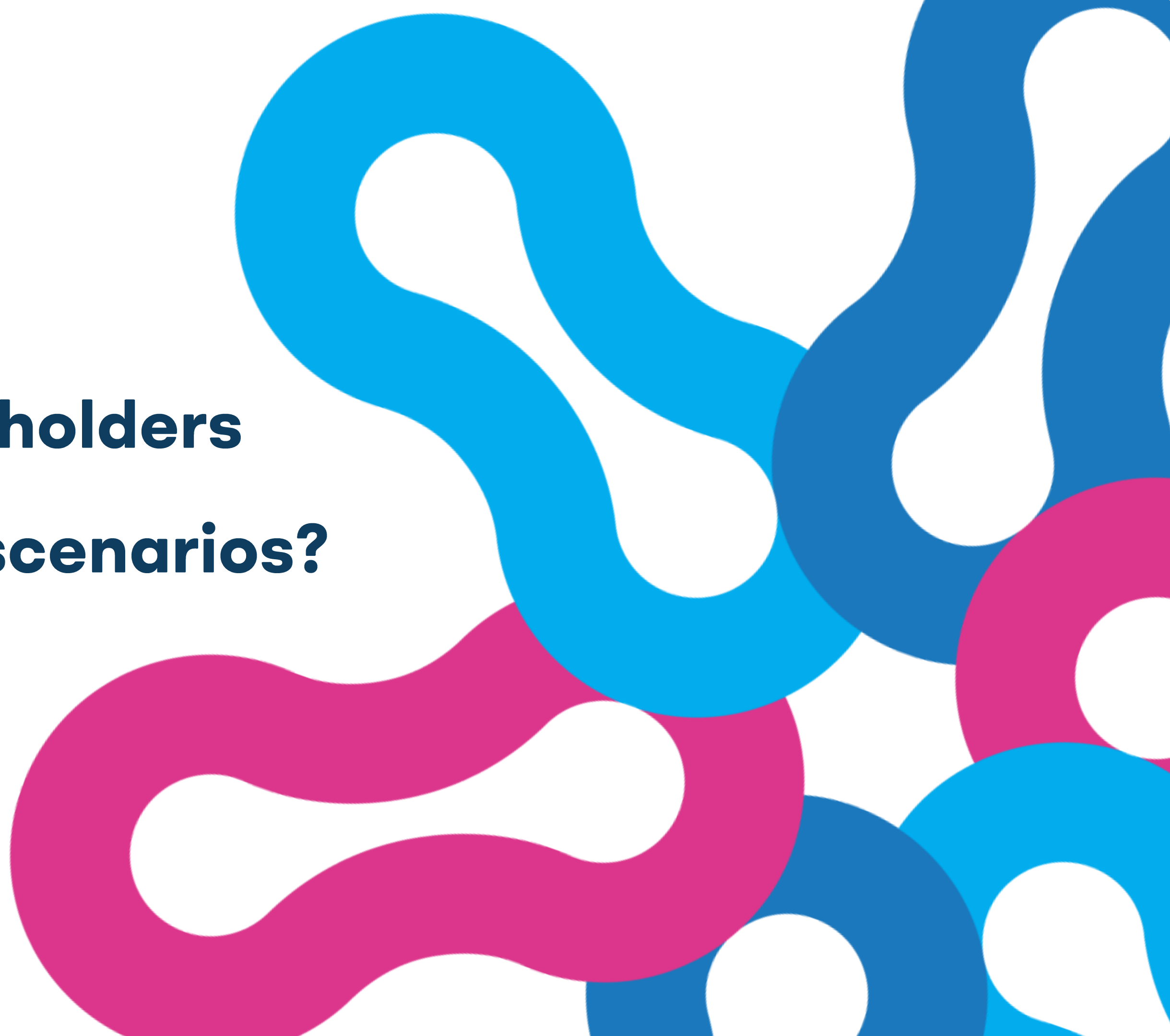
New Equilibrium



Transformation



**How to help stakeholders
"experience" the scenarios?**



Experiencing the Future

= An approach to scenarios that uses immersive, interactive, and sensory experiences to explore and communicate possible future scenarios.

This can be done through artifacts, games, simulations, physical environments, or performances.

By engaging more of our senses, it deepens the impact of the learning.

This approach can appeal to audiences who are not interested or willing to read reports.



Storytelling helps us describe futures

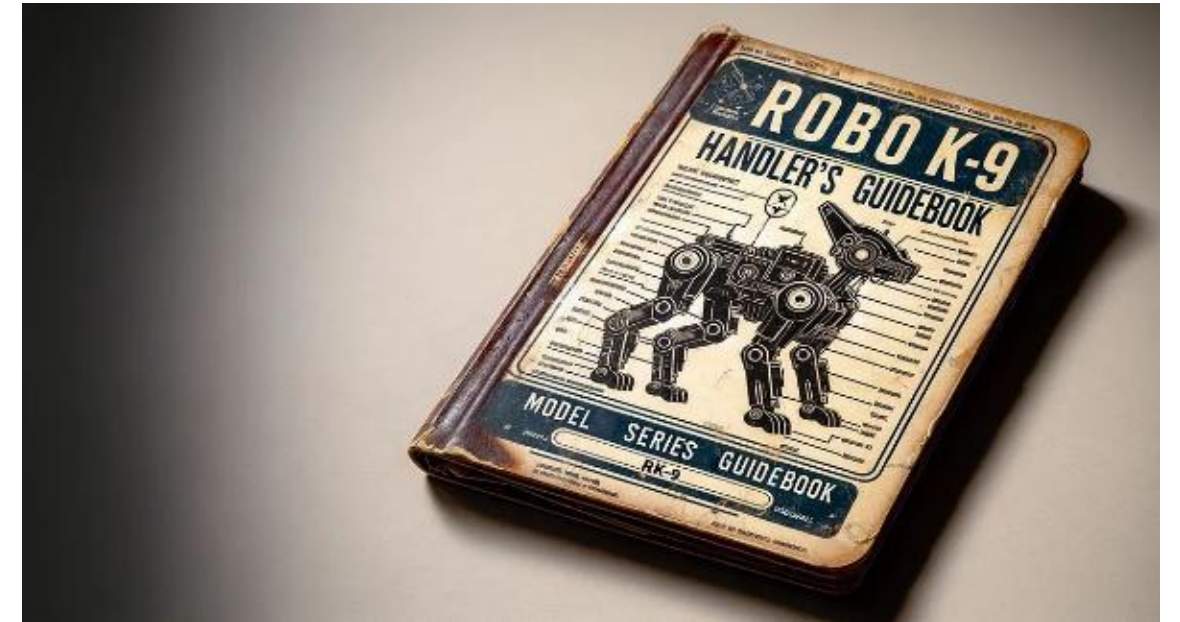
Speculative Design



Scenarios



Design Fiction



Science Fiction



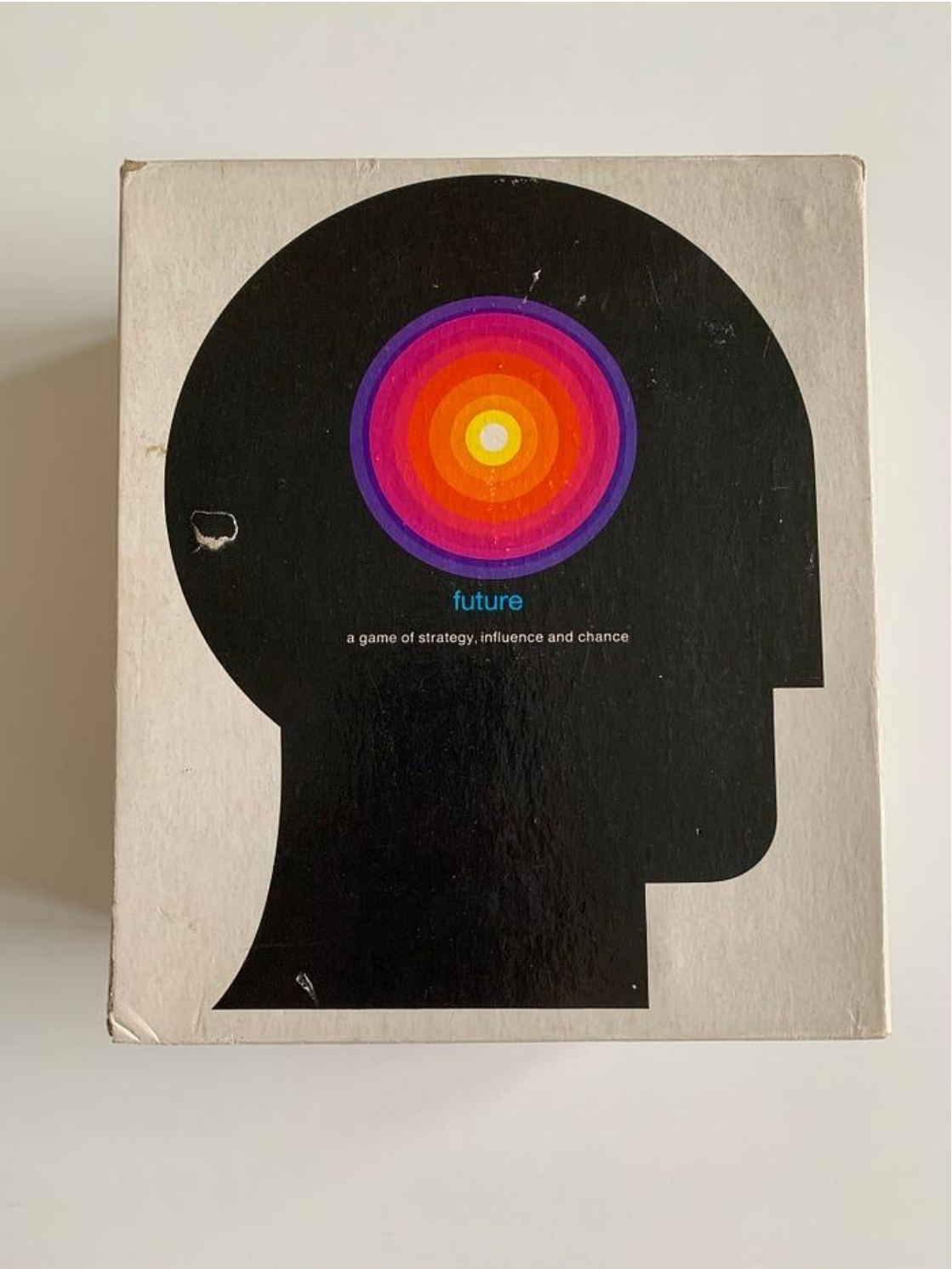
Strategy Memos/Plans



Imagination



Gamification: Scenario Exploration (1966)



Scenario exploration in the agrifood system



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

This **Futures Simulation game** is brought to you by
United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with the
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.



NUTRITION NEXUS

SHAPE TOMORROW'S AGRIFOOD SYSTEM



NUTRITION NEXUS: CORE ELEMENTS



PLAYERS

Each player draws a player card to find the role they represent in the agrifood system—government officials, agro-industrial corporations, research institutions, smallholder farmers' collectives, and consumer advocates.



OBJECTIVES

Players receive both a public objective, visible to all, and a hidden personal goal. These objectives guide players' strategies, blending collaboration with individual ambition to influence the game's outcome.



EVENT CARDS

Event cards introduce real-world inspired crises or opportunities, challenging players to resolve critical issues that affect the agrifood system. From regenerative agriculture to novel proteins, the event card requires collaborative resource contributions to capitalize on opportunities or mitigate negative impacts on the Crisis Meter.



WILD CARDS

Unpredictable twists, wild cards introduce sudden changes like resource shortages or new crises. These cards shift the balance of power and force players to adapt their strategies quickly.



RESOURCES

The game features four types of resources—Money, Research, Nutrients, and Public Support—essential for resolving events, forming alliances, and advancing personal objectives. Players must strategically allocate resources to influence the game.



THE BRIDGING HUB

The Bridging Hub serves as a platform for resource exchange, governed by bridging institutions. It facilitates collaboration by allowing players to trade resources at fixed exchange rates, supporting mutual goals.



CRISIS METER

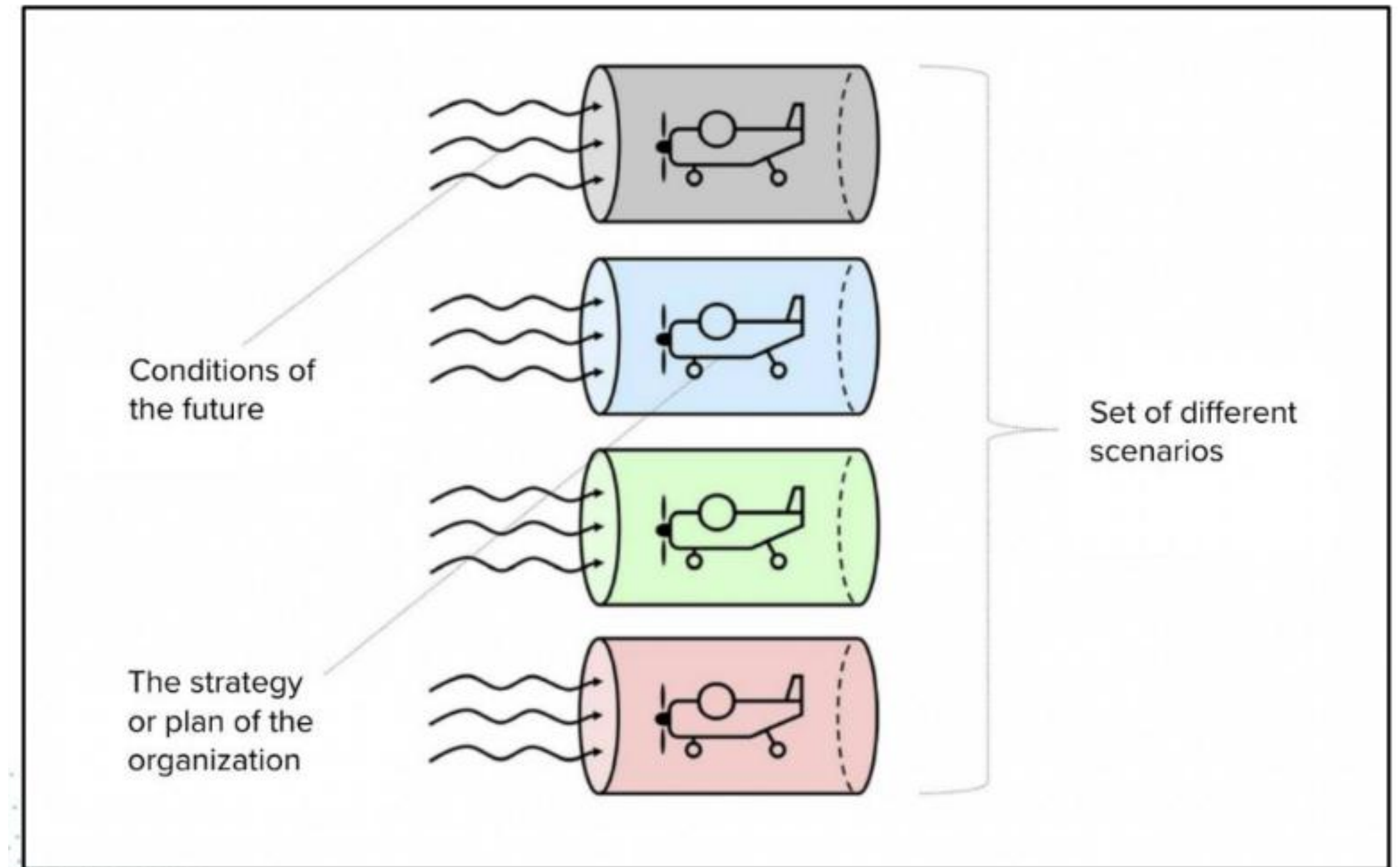
The Crisis Meter tracks the overall stability of the agrifood system, ranging from "Stable" to "Collapse." The meter moves based on how well players resolve events, influencing the game's duration and end.

**How can scenarios help
with my evaluation?**



Wind tunnelling of recommendations

= stress-test your recommendations and/or proposed management response actions using scenarios



Future-Proofing Recommendations by Wind Tunnelling

1



In a nutshell

Windtunnelling involves testing ideas (recommendations) against multiple plausible futures (scenarios) to evaluate their appropriateness.

2



Clarify

Before diving into the scenarios, the recommendations' objectives and desired outcomes were clarified.

3



Immerse in scenarios

Multiple plausible scenarios of the future were elaborated based on drivers (discussed in June).

Your role isn't to challenge the scenario but to step into it and imagine it.

4



Test

Discuss the appropriateness of recommendations in each scenario.

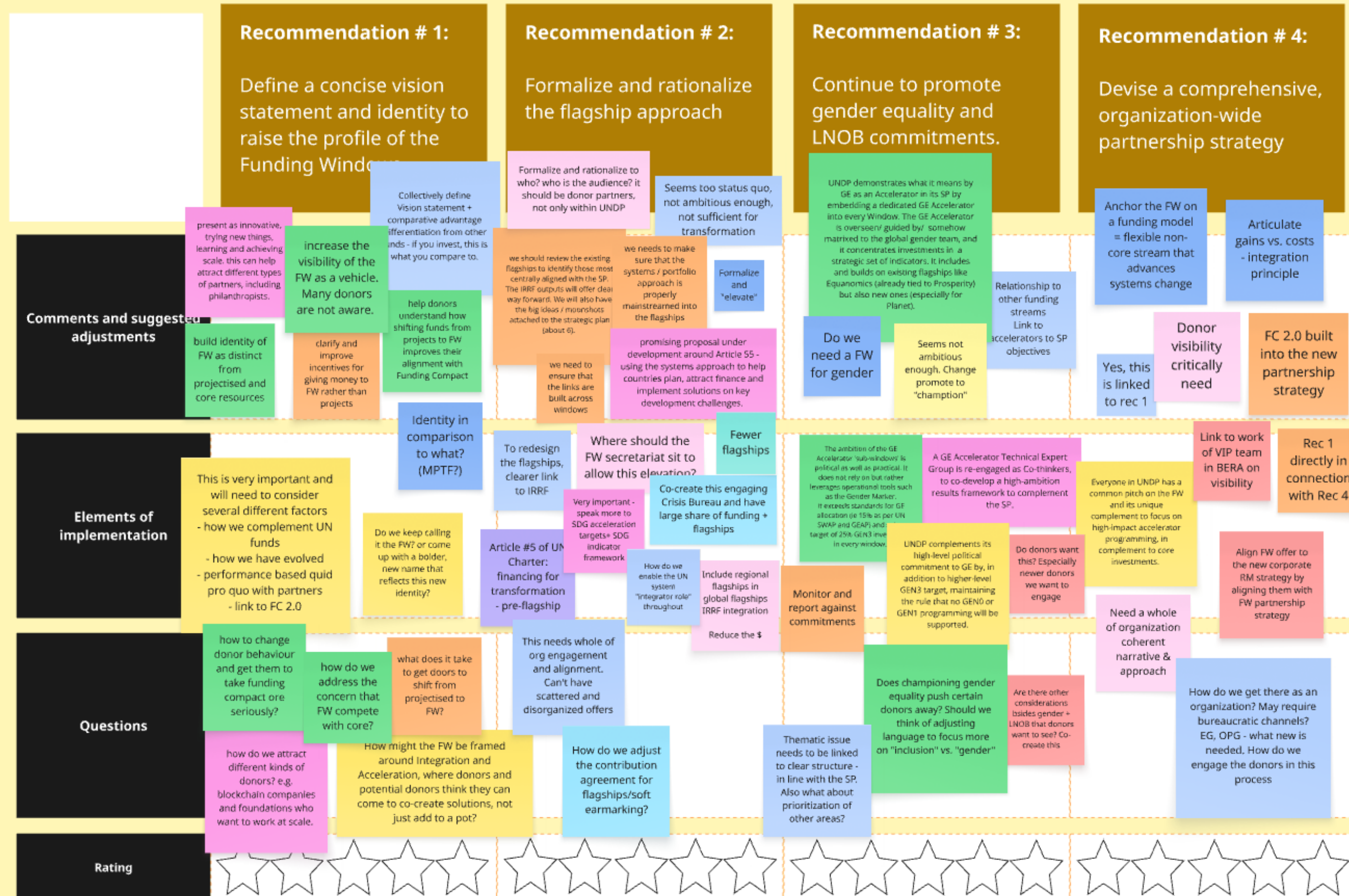
5



Expected outcome

An informed understanding of whether recommendations are resilient, adaptable, and robust across a range of future contexts.

Exercise - Group 4 (Transformation Wind Tunelling Board)



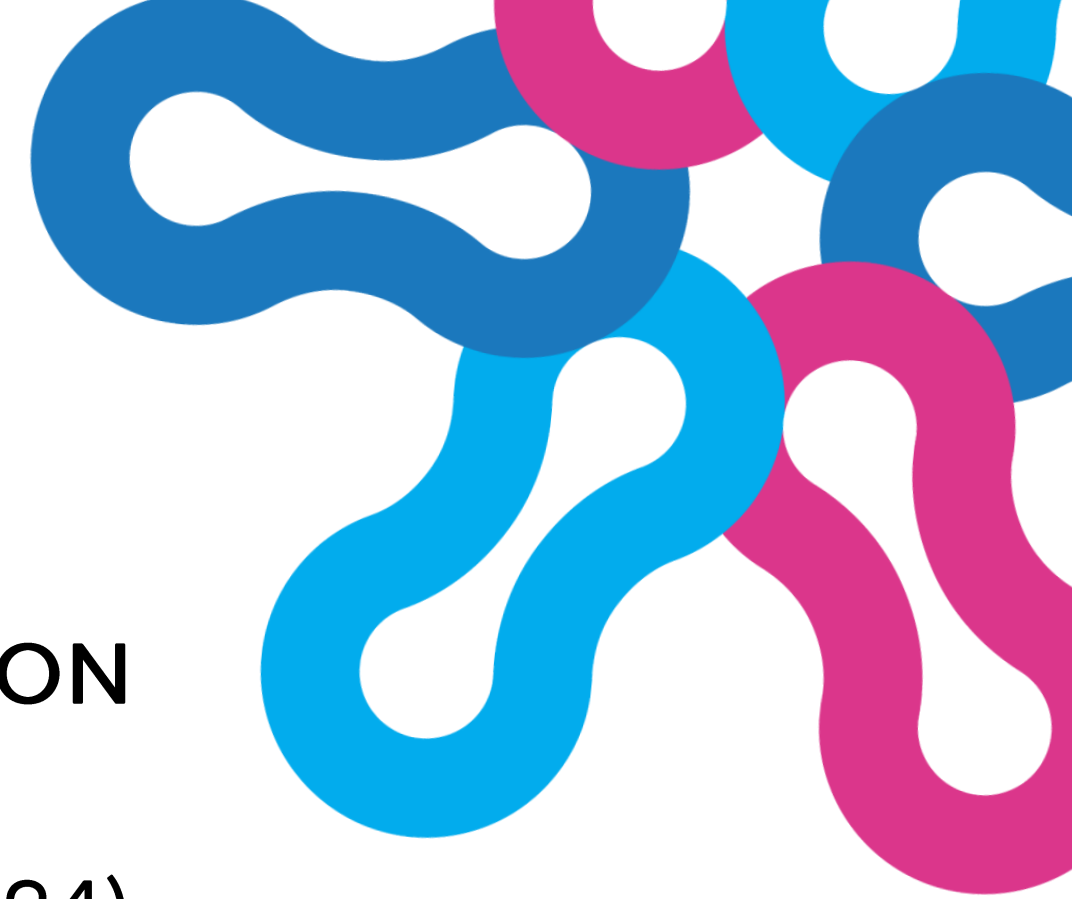
Resources

FORESIGHT

- [UN 2.0 Foresight](#)
- [UN Futures Lab](#) (Website)
- [UN Strategic Foresight Guide](#) (2023)
- [The Futures Toolkit for Policy-Makers and Analysts](#) (UK Government, 2024)
- [Centre for Strategic Futures](#) (Singapore Government Agency)
[Driving Forces Cards](#)

FORESIGHT EVALUATION

- [Foresight Evaluation](#) (Better Evaluation, 2024)
- [Special Issue: Bridging Foresight and Evaluation](#) (New Directions for Evaluation, 2024)
- [Foresight evaluation approaches](#) (UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, Methodology Center)





global
evaluation
initiative

Thank you!

This session was prepared by the
UNEG Interest Group on Foresight.



*"You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn to surf."*

John Kabat-Zinn

