



# How to use futures and foresight for humanitarian innovation?

Humanitarian Innovation Fund  
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# FUTURES THINKING & STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

**Futures Thinking** is the art of imagining alternative possible, probable and preferred futures. It helps us prepare for a wide range of changes and challenges ahead. Futures thinking is scenario-oriented.

**Strategic Foresight** is a subset of futures thinking that focuses on planning and decision-making. Foresight tools and methodologies help us to systematically assess uncertainty and adapt to change. Foresight is action-oriented.

# THE VALUE OF FORESIGHT IN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

- Strategy Development and Strategic Planning
- Enhanced Community Resilience
- Ethical considerations
- Collaboration & Coordination



# USING FORESIGHT FOR INNOVATION



- Identify future problems
- Identify future solutions
- Create future solutions

- A shared language & space to think
- Focussing on future human challenges
- Bold and believable

# A THREE-STEP FORESIGHT APPROACH



Step 1

## Explore

Gather data on the forces that might shape the course of the future.



Step 2

## Imagine

Envision possible futures with creativity and imagination.



Step 3

## Action

Take decisions and action to navigate through uncertainty and towards desired futures.

Exploring 'futures' requires setting a clear and meaningful timeframe (typically 5-10 years) and identifying a compelling angle that sparks curiosity while providing focus.

# FUTURES & FORESIGHT TOOL

## Explore

Gather data on the forces that might shape the course of the future.

## Imagine

Envision possible futures with creativity and imagination.

## Action

Take decisions and action to navigate through uncertainty and towards desired futures.

### Existing Tools

1. Horizon scanning
2. Driver mapping
3. Future Triangle
4. System mapping
5. SWOT analysis
6. Causal Layered Analysis
7. Inclusive Imaginaries
8. Futures Wheel
9. Trend/ Icon Cards
10. 2x2 Scenarios
11. Scenario Building
12. Future Personas
13. Roots to Routes
14. Three Horizons
15. Visioning
16. Ideation
17. Backcasting
18. Wind Tunnelling
19. Developing Roadmaps
20. Branch Analysis
21. Verge

# HUMAN CENTRED FORESIGHT

- **3 Scenarios:** The group will explore one of three scenarios:
  1. Withdrawal from international development.
  2. AI-driven emergency response.
  3. Mars colonisation and space migration.
- **Group Work:** Each group will work on one assigned scenario.
- Answer **two questions** for your scenario.
- **10 Minutes:** You have 10 minutes to discuss and capture your key insights.
- **Capture Insights:** Use the worksheet to capture your insights

## Questions

- What problems will this scenario create for the daily lives, safety, and dignity of **the communities we serve**?
- What problems will this scenario create for **humanitarian organisations** in delivering effective and ethical support?



# Scenario 1: Withdrawal from Intl. Development

**Year: 2028**

A wave of nationalist governments **cut international aid**, following the closure of **USAID**. The UK, Australia, and EU nations **drastically reduce humanitarian funding**, leaving millions vulnerable - but also driving innovation.

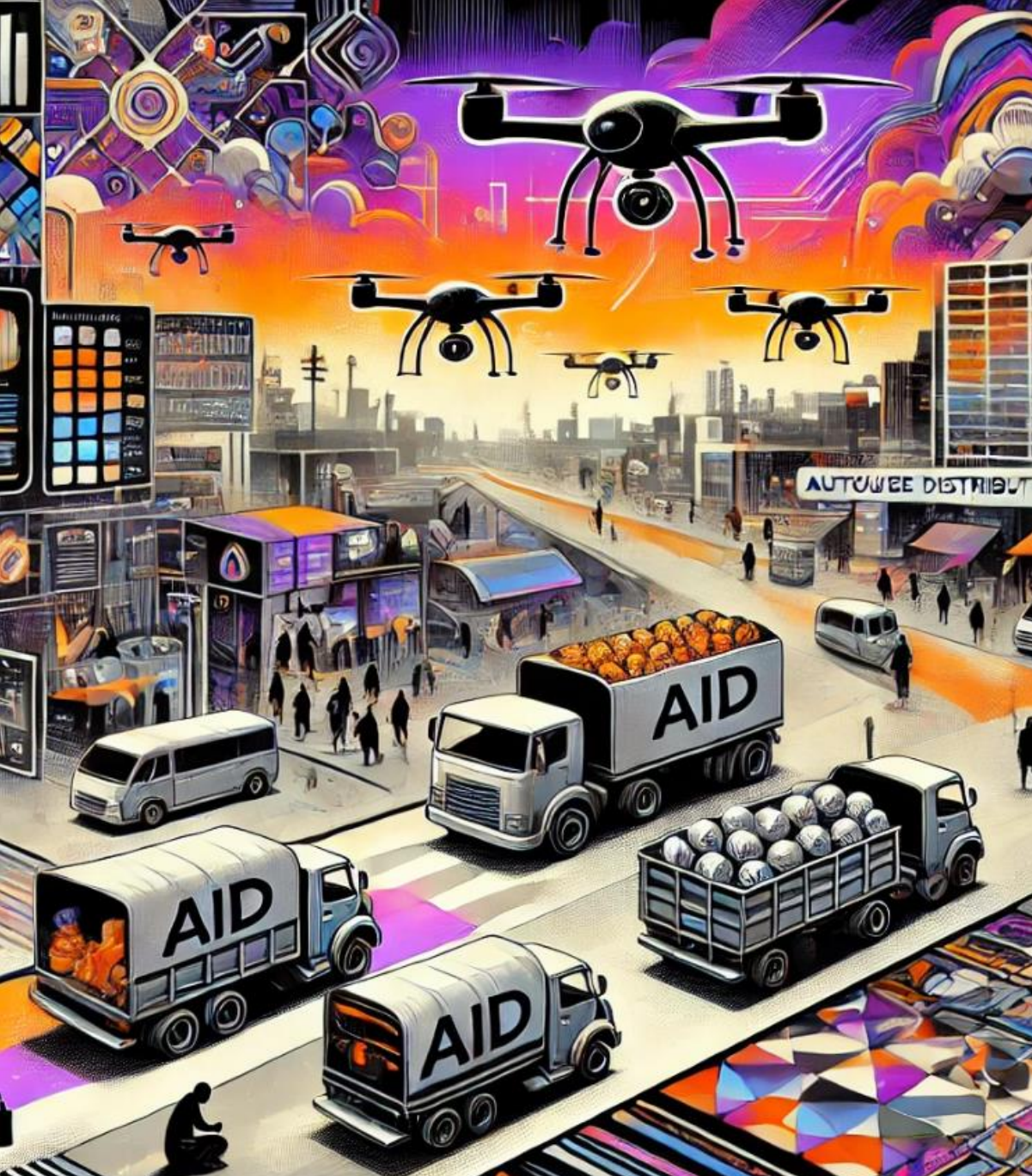
## Challenges

- **Local governments** struggle to maintain essential services as aid funding disappears.
- **NGOs face a funding crisis**, forcing program closures and reduced support.
- **Corporations and private donors** step in, but profit-driven motives raise ethical concerns.

## Opportunities

- **Local solutions emerge** as communities take greater ownership of development efforts.
- **New funding models** (social enterprises, impact investing) grow to fill the gap.
- **Technology-driven innovation** enables more efficient humanitarian responses.





# Scenario 2: AI-Driven Emergency Response

**Year: 2032**

AI-powered **crisis response hubs** manage humanitarian aid, autonomous vehicles manage the delivery of goods and food. Governments and donors celebrate the shift to **faster, automated solutions**, but ethical questions remain.

## Challenges

- **AI predicts refugee flows**, but communities feel like statistics, not people.
- **Aid workers lose jobs** as AI automates coordination and decision-making.
- **Local engagement declines**, as algorithms, not communities, dictate who gets help.

## Opportunities

- **Faster emergency response** reduces delays in aid reaching disaster zones.
- **Data-driven decision-making** improves efficiency and resource allocation.
- **Humanitarian workers shift roles** from logistics to advocacy and strategy.

*The visuals are created with the AI tool Dalle-E*



# Scenario 3: Colonising Mars

**Year: 2040**

The first **self-sustaining Mars colonies** are thriving. Governments and billionaires **shift resources to space**, while Earth's crises continue—but new opportunities arise.

## Challenges

- **Funding for humanitarian aid declines** as investment in Mars expands.
- **Wealthy individuals and nations migrate**, creating a divide between those who "escape" and those left behind.
- **Climate disasters intensify**, worsening poverty and instability on Earth as resources are focussed on Mars.

## Opportunities

- **Space-driven innovations** (sustainable energy, food production) could benefit Earth.
- **New alliances** between Earth-based and space-based communities may emerge.
- **A renewed focus on planetary responsibility** could drive global cooperation.