

The Strategic Foresight Book



Welcome

“ The future is not fixed. It is created by our ideas and our actions, our understanding of the past and our ambitions for tomorrow. It is not something we control but something we influence and respond to as the possibilities unfold. ”

Ben Holt, Global Lead for Strategic Foresight

THE IFRC SOLFERINO ACADEMY

Welcome to the Foresight Book

This book will not teach you how to predict the future, but it will prepare you for the possibilities. It will not give you definitive answers, but it will help you ask decisive questions. This book cannot tell you when to act or what to do but it can help sharpen your strategies as you anticipate obstacles and spot opportunities.

This book will help you engage with uncertainty, navigate complex challenges, and build more resilient organisations and communities. But it is a cookbook, not a rule book; adjust the ingredients to your tastes.

Strategic foresight itself is not new. It is a well-developed approach to explore and analyse emerging issues and possible futures, turning the insights into action today. It has been used for decades in other sectors to plan ahead, innovate and adjust to sudden shocks, but it is just beginning to gain real traction in the humanitarian world.

Humanitarian action will be vital to the future of humankind as we deal with complex crises in a rapidly changing world. Our sector is built on rapid response and the principles of dignity, kindness and practical action. But waiting for disaster to strike before we act is no longer enough and so futures and foresight are emerging as powerful tools.

Effective strategic foresight is an ongoing process. Developing the ability to monitor trends, understand how they interact and influence each other, and imagining how they might develop over time, is a powerful addition to our strategy design and decision making. Foresight should also be deeply participatory, drawing on our connections to communities all around the world to

ensure that the projects, plans and organisation we aspire to be reflects their hopes for the future.

This book takes what we've learnt and created in the IFRC Solferino Academy as we've used strategic foresight across the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) network over the years.

We have shared the tips, tricks and tactics we use to explore the future. We explain how to change the way we think about the possibilities, how to use creativity to enhance analysis, how to run effective workshops, and how to turn ideas in to action.

We truly hope it will be helpful as you develop your own approach to strategic foresight and help to re-imagine humanitarian action for the future.

Enjoy the journey,

Ben Holt, Global Lead for Strategic Foresight,
and the IFRC Solferino Academy team

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Definitions



Chapter I

Before we start – some definitions

Strategic foresight: An approach that enhances decision making by systematically examining emerging trends and drivers of change to consider a range of possible futures. Strategic foresight helps organisations navigate uncertainty by emphasising adaptability and action.

AKA: Exploring possible futures to make better decisions today

Megatrend: A global, long-term transformative force that profoundly shapes and impacts societies, economies, and industries across multiple areas of human life. Several trends, amplified and spread by drivers of change, make up a megatrend.

AKA: Big complicated changes that shape history

Drivers of change: The forces which shape and amplify trends so they have an impact. Drivers are dynamic and interconnected. They include things like shifts in attitudes and awareness, as well as economic and technological forces with influence how something spreads and grows.

AKA: How trends and new ways of thinking and doing things spread

Trend: A measurable change in a situation, sector or behaviour which is developing and becoming more common.

AKA: Something that is starting to change the world

Weak signals: Subtle and often early indicators of emerging trends or disruptions that have the potential to significantly impact the future but may not yet be widely recognized or understood.

AKA: Things that might turn into a trend

Permacrisis: A state of prolonged insecurity and instability caused by various interconnected crises. (Critics argue this is an unhelpful term which prevents people from imaging positive, meaningful change).

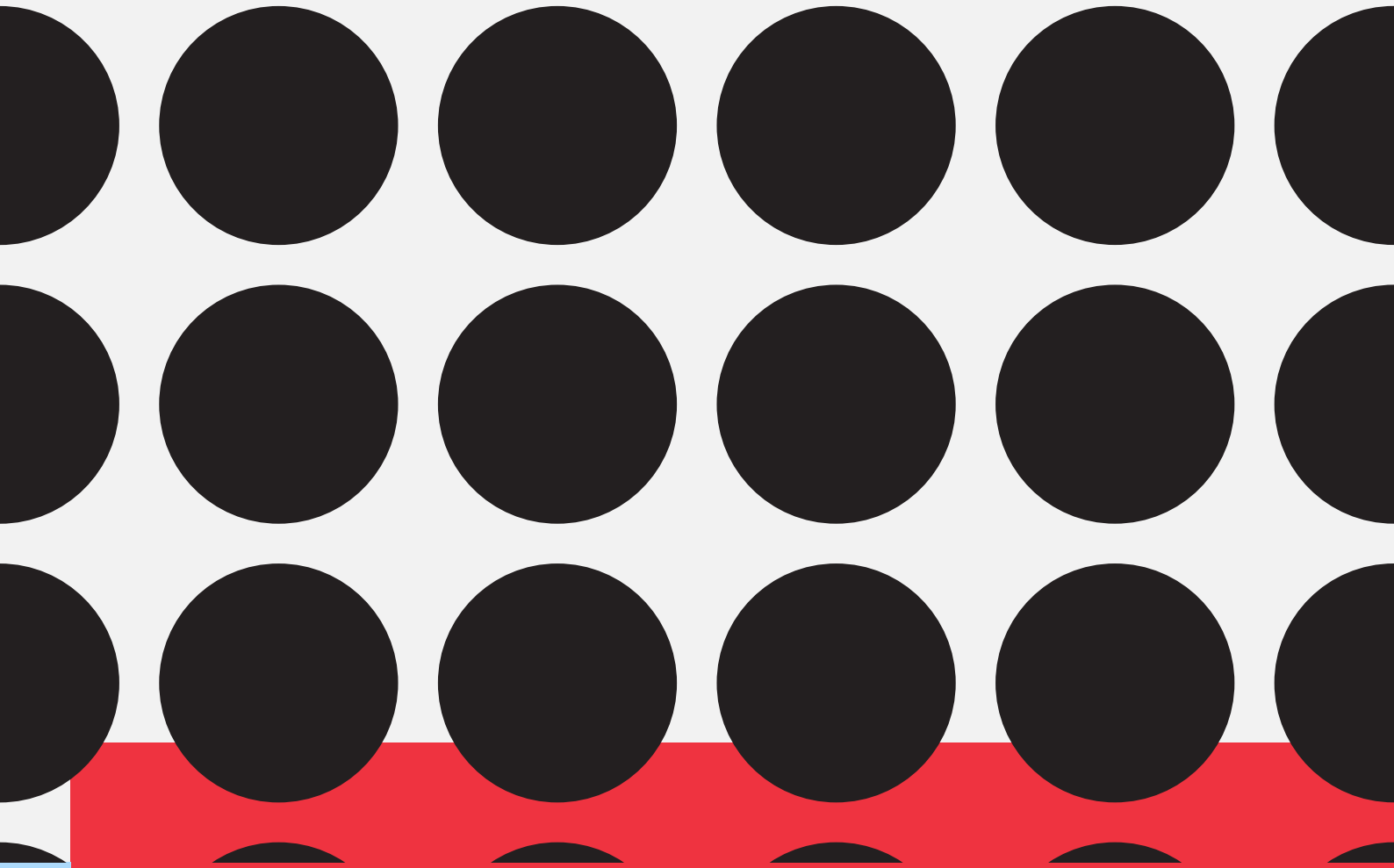
AKA: Everything going wrong at once with no end in sight

Community: A group of people who share common interests, values, or geographical location, which creates social connections and a sense of belonging.

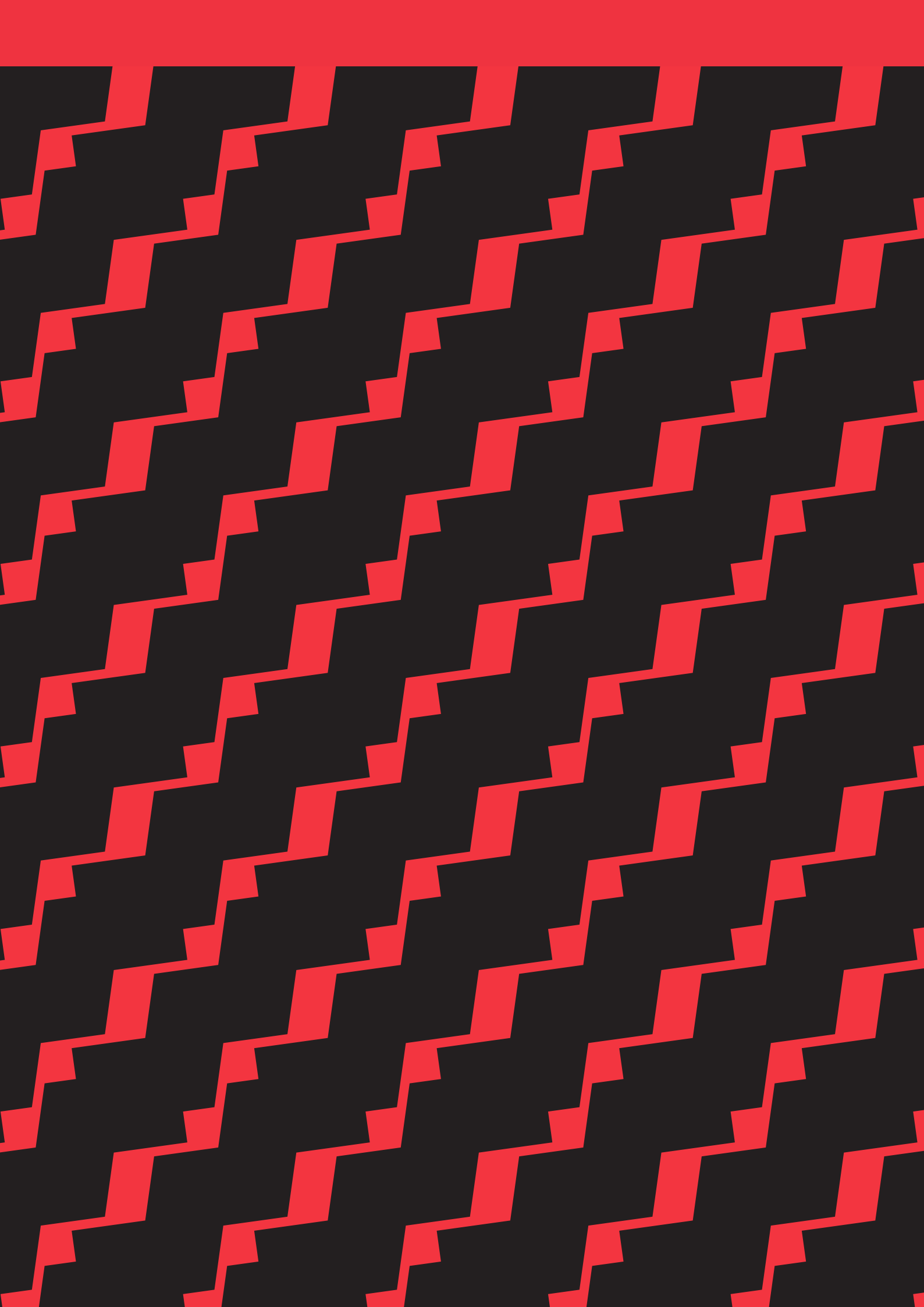
AKA: People who feel connected

Workshops: A collaborative and structured session where people come together to brainstorm, discuss, and generate ideas. Workshops usually involve guided activities, interactive exercises, and facilitated discussions to encourage creativity, problem-solving, and the development of actionable plans.

AKA: A space to have good ideas and decide what to do with them



Introduction



Chapter II

Introduction

The decisions we make today will impact the future. And that future will hold new challenges and unexpected opportunities. So how can we have a positive impact while preparing for potential problems?

We certainly cannot predict exactly what will happen, because the world will always throw up surprises and shocks. But we can explore the possibilities, consider the evidence and be better prepared for action.

Strategic foresight helps us engage with this complex and rapidly changing world. It is a practical approach which supports decision making and action today.

This kit will help you apply strategic foresight to your work, but it is a recipe book, not a rule book. We'll look at where you can use strategic foresight, how to make it work for you, and introduce you to some tools, tips and special ingredients that you can mix up to your own tastes.

“ Strategic foresight is the practice of envisioning and exploring potential futures, understanding emerging trends, and developing strategies to adapt and thrive in an ever-evolving world.” ”

Marina Gorbis

INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

Section A

Where can you use strategic foresight?

Our organisations talk about the future all the time – we wrap it up in strategy documents and budget projections, meeting invitations and vision statements. But we do not always think about how the world might change as we deliver our plans.

At other times, a sudden crisis shifts the world around us and the future we had imagined now looks uncertain. And then there are pressing decisions – we must choose where to invest our resources, scale our services, and connect to communities – that will shape the way we work tomorrow.

So many factors and forces can influence the future. Engaging with complex systems, and being able to examine connections between different issues, is critical in our dynamic, rapidly changing world.

Strategic foresight can help with all of this and more. It is a useful addition to our planning process and a good way to spot opportunities:

Part 1

Strategy development

A strategy is a plan with a long-term aim. Foresight allows us to look at different possible futures and think about how emerging trends might interact and impact the world we will be operating in.

By considering different scenarios, we can spot strategic opportunities and engage early with uncertainty that could affect our ambitions. It also helps us develop a much more nuanced and informed vision for a better future, and how we might get there.

Part 2

Navigating sudden shocks

When a crisis hits it can have consequences far beyond the people immediately affected. Wars, disease and disasters can ripple through our global systems.

Foresight helps us understand how the crisis may develop and impact other humanitarian issues. This can support both operational decision making and long-term planning at the same time.

Part 3

Stress testing decisions

Strategic foresight helps us make decisions today that will survive the challenges of tomorrow.

By looking at how the world may change as our projects grow and mature, we can sharpen our decision making. This helps us develop more resilient plans, actions, policies and strategies.

Part 4

Organisational resilience

In a rapidly changing world, our organisations need to be flexible, adaptable and able to cope with shocks.

We also need to engage with trends which shift the world slowly over time. By identifying these and exploring how they connect and influence each other, we can better understand how the environment we operate in, and the challenges we respond to, may develop. Understanding the potential impacts and implications for humanitarian action is a vital contribution to organisational resilience.

Foresight supports anticipation and timely action, helping to shift the way we scan for risk and organise our processes and governance.

Part 5

Innovation projects

We need new and useful ways to tackle tricky problems. By looking ahead, and exploring the complexity of potential changes, we can start to experiment with new tools and approaches we haven't yet considered. We can also spot emerging vulnerabilities and intervene early.

By helping us to see a wider range of potential scenarios and changes that may impact us, foresight reinforces the need for adaptive thinking and for continuously trying new approaches to address new threats and opportunities.

Part 6

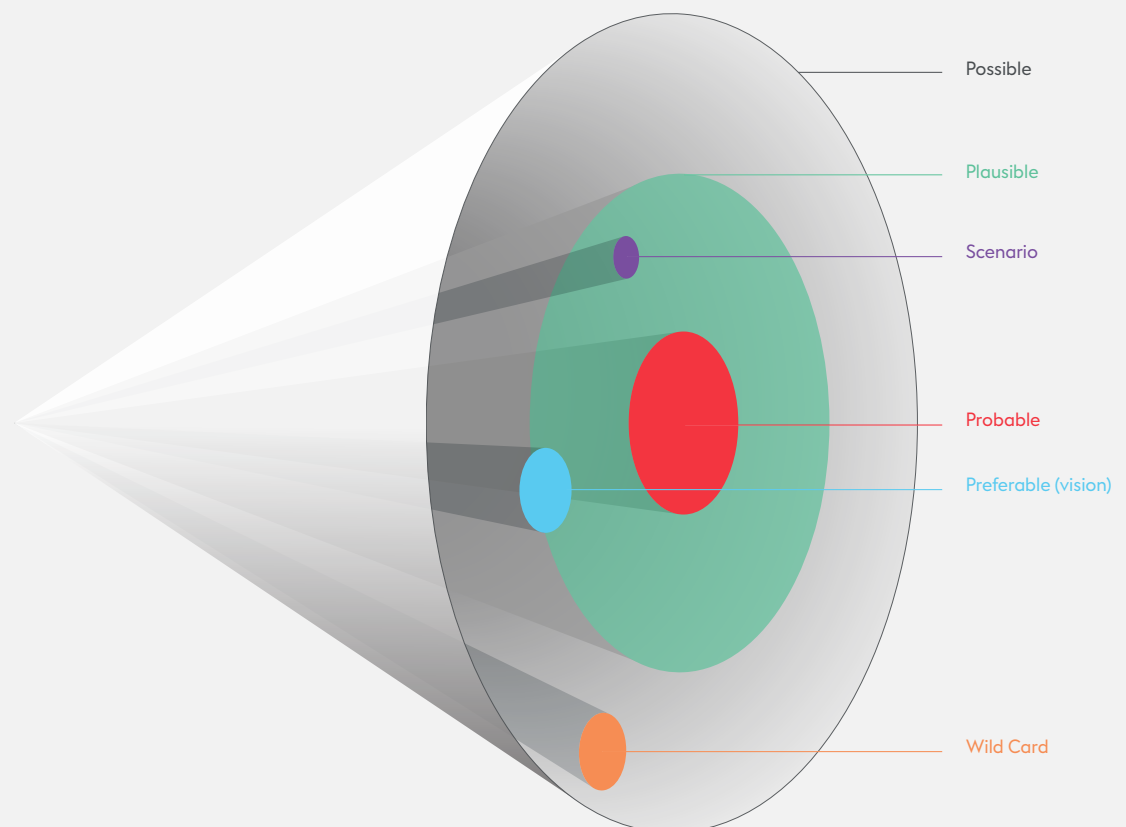
Participation

Everyone has hopes, fears and aspirations for the future. But the most vulnerable groups in society are rarely asked to help shape the future, even as they face the most severe consequences of crises and disasters.

Futures and foresight thinking is a powerful way to connect with people so we can collectively re-imagine what is possible and desirable. This supports future-focused actions that are developed and driven by communities.

Section B

How do you apply strategic foresight?



Today

TIME

Future cone

“ Futures are not singular events but a spectrum of possibilities that unfold based on the choices we make today, presenting both risks and opportunities. ”

Michio Kaku

THEORETICAL PHYSICIST AND FUTURIST

There are no hard-and-fast rules for using strategic foresight, just a set of useful ideas and approaches which you can use and adapt.

This cookbook will get you started and help you understand how we think about the future, how to spot emerging trends and weak signals, understand how they connect with and influence each other, how to create different scenarios, and then how to use these to make decisions.

You should build these tools into your existing decision making and strategy processes. They should complement and enhance what you already do, and lead to useful ideas which you can work on right now.

Strategic foresight is not a one-off activity or something you do annually; it is a way of planning and adapting by engaging with complexity and regularly surfacing new information and insights. The future is not static, it emerges and constantly changes, and your foresight practice will also develop and change over time

Section C

When is the future?

All the tools and ways of thinking described in this book help us explore possible futures.

But we often get asked “how far away is the future?” Are we talking about six months, next year, a decade from now or distant generations?

Again, there are no strict rules. You can pick any timeline that helps you. That said, different tools will work better for different time horizons. And if you work too close to today, you leave yourself less room to explore possibilities and consider how things might evolve over time.

By using a mixture of approaches across different timelines, we can combine data models with imagination, and rigorous analysis with creative problem-solving.

For example, you might get real value from extrapolating data trends over the coming months to see how many people may be impacted by, say, prices rises or seasonal floods. Layering these onto a systems map could help you spot new ways to intervene in these complex issues.

To consider how these crises might evolve over the next year, you could add broader trends analysis and examine how they interact with each other and existing vulnerabilities to spark new challenges. This could lead you to creating scenarios articulating how the world might change in five years or more, and what humanitarian services need to do to adapt.

Looking further out, speculative futures or large ‘What if...?’ questions can trigger imaginative new idea or identify new opportunities to explore now.

Equally, data models can be used to examine long-term trends, as they are in climate science, while scenarios can be used to examine narrower time horizons as a part of organisational resilience and contingency planning.

The methods can be used in many different combinations. But underpinning all of it is futures literacy – the skills you need to be a good future-thinker and to help others explore the possibilities and take action.

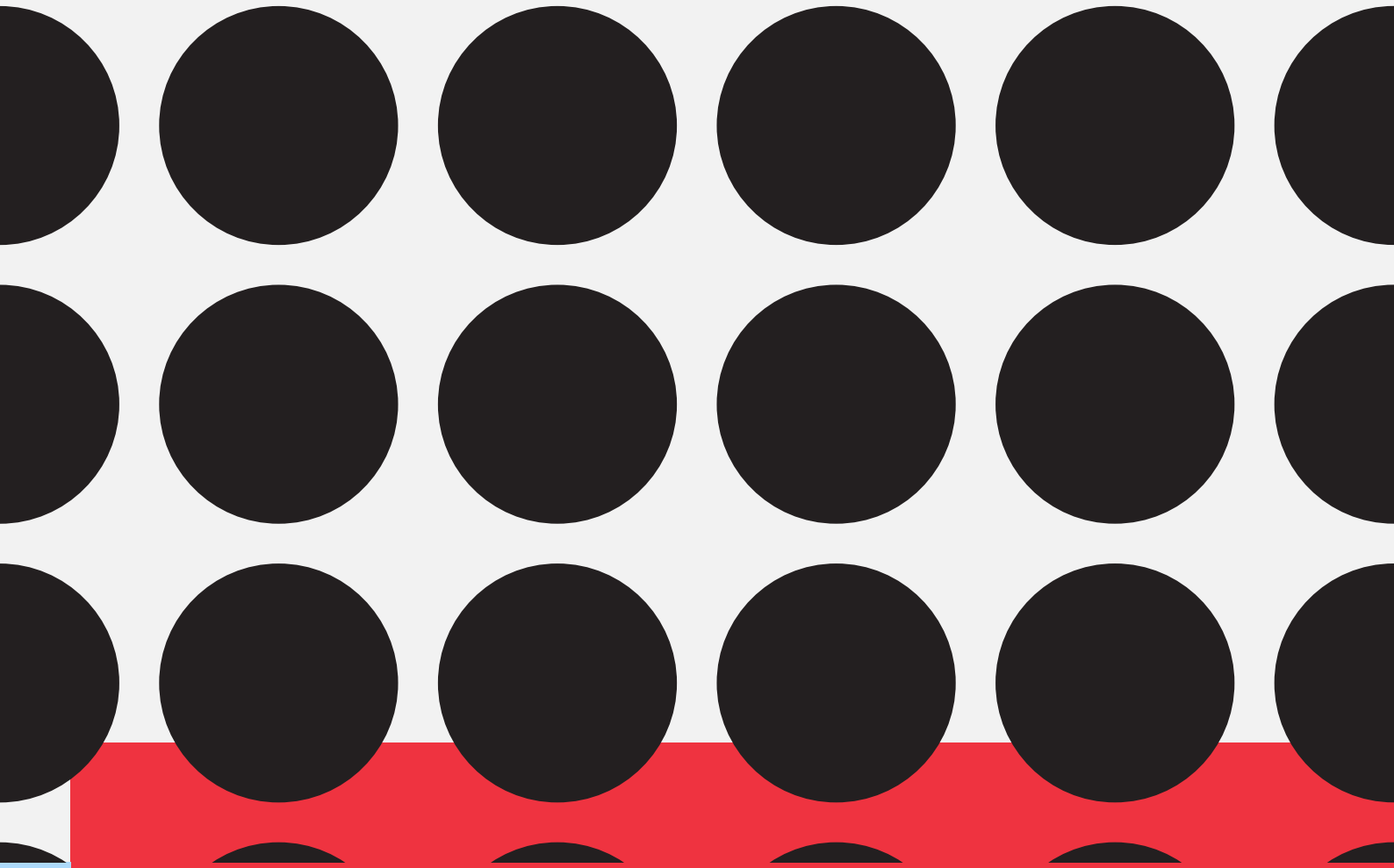
Critically, strategic foresight is about practical action and decision making today. By understanding how the world may change we can better navigate shocks, challenges and opportunities as the future unfolds.

Image 1

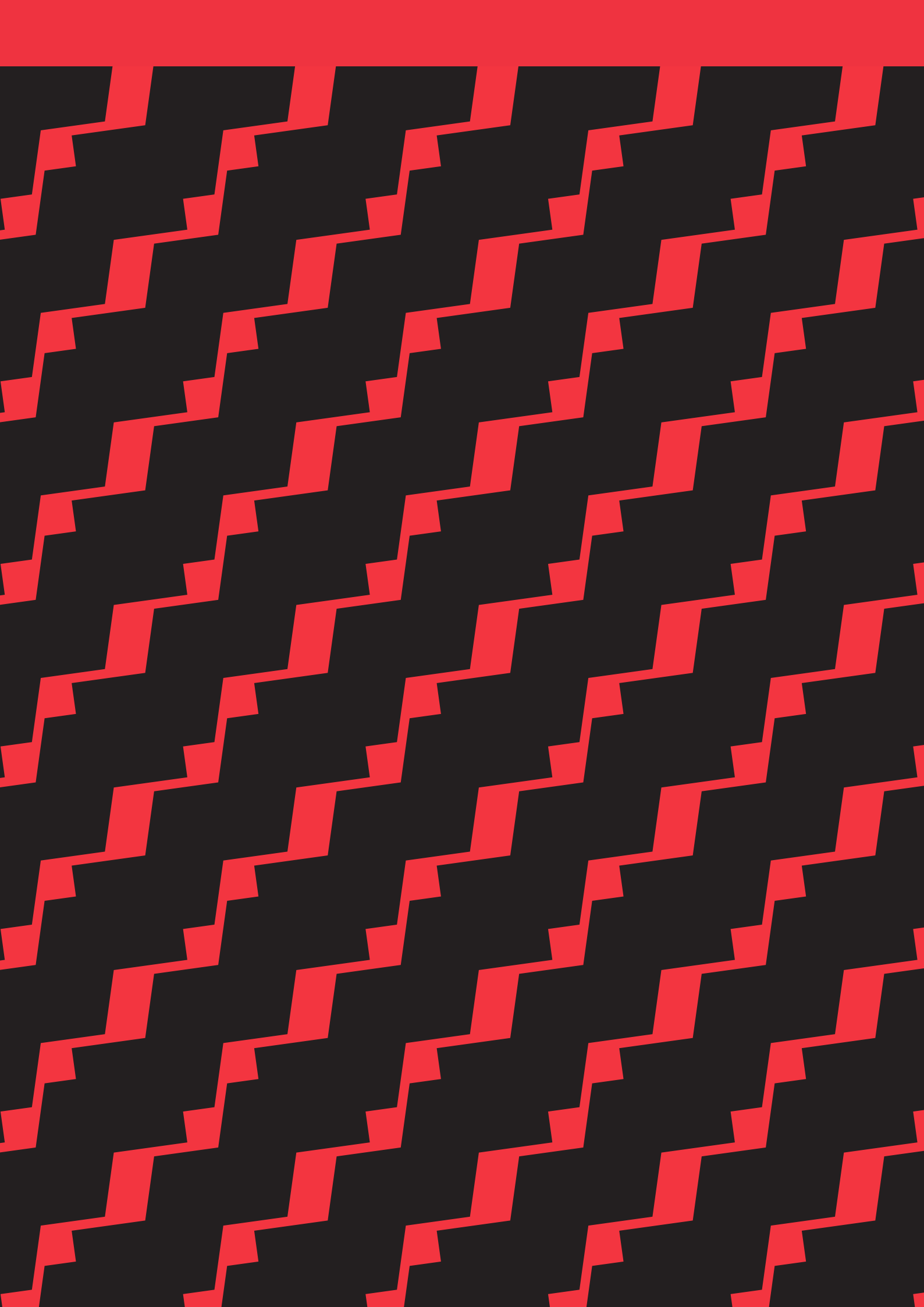
An illustration of one possible mix of foresight approaches over different timeframes

Futures literacy





Thinking about the future



Chapter III

Futures literacy: Thinking about the future

Humans have an amazing ability to time travel. We can picture ourselves in the future and tell stories about it. We can imagine how our lives may change and what could be different in the world around us.

We imagine the future when we make plans, start journeys, or mobilise people to tackle problems, invent technologies, build businesses or change society.

We can also travel backwards, learning from what we have done in the past and spotting trends that might stretch out into the future. Looking back, we can unpick the decisions and changes which shaped the way things work today.

This kind of thinking is critical for good strategic foresight work. And like any skill, we can get better at it through learning and practice. By thinking about how we think, and questioning how we question, we can get better at exploring the future and learning from the past.

These skills are called futures literacy. It is a new way of reading the world around us and exploring possible futures.

Section A

How is futures literacy useful?

When you do strategic foresight work you will run sessions to examine hard evidence and apply imagination. You want creative thinking that is rooted in the real world, with the aim of creating several possible futures.

Starting by sharpening people's future-thinking skills will lead to better outcomes. This is because we all have preconceptions about what will happen and often make big assumptions based on what we already know.

Section B

Biases and assumptions

While humans are great at imagining different possibilities, we are not always good at modelling accurate and useful futures.

We struggle with various psychological and social blockers. These interfere with our thinking and make it harder for us to fully explore the true possibilities of the future. So, understanding what these blockers are, and how to work around them, is critical to good strategic foresight work.

Part 1

Past experience

People tend to build their visions of the future from what they've already seen, done and experienced. We tend to recombine things we know, rather than looking for what's new.

This means we don't spot emerging trends, don't appreciate the impact of new technologies, or are just not aware of changes that could be incredibly significant.

For example, lots of people tried to invent a flying car by combining two things they already understood – cars and planes. Meanwhile, new materials and technology were emerging in disparate domains which ultimately made drones possible, which is a very different approach to flight that is reshaping entire industries.

Part 2

Shifting baseline syndrome

This is a huge one. It is seen as one of the key blockers for serious action on the climate and environment crises.

“ Strategic foresight is the ability to think systematically about the future, scanning the external environment for signals of change, and translating those insights into actionable strategies. ”

Riel Miller

FORMER HEAD OF FUTURES LITERACY AT UNESCO

Basically, our standards are continually lowered as people are born into a degraded world and just see that as 'normal'. They have no historical reference and are terrible at placing themselves in a long-term trend.

This means that a world with hugely depleted fish stocks, a massive decline in biodiversity, or regular catastrophic weather events, for example, is 'the norm', rather than a rapidly failing system which will get a lot worse unless we act urgently.

Part 3

Optimism bias

Optimism bias is very common and impacts our decision making, risk assessment and planning.

Individuals tend to believe that they are more likely to experience positive events, and less likely to experience negative ones, than other people. This means we underestimate the chances of something bad happening while overestimate the likelihood of good fortune.

For example, [Pew Research Center](#) discovered that 65 percent of workers predicted that automation would take over most work from humans within 50 years. But 80 percent of them felt their own job would still be fine.

Futures literacy helps us understand and overcome these biases, and discover new ways to think about the world.

Section C

Using futures literacy

We start by getting people to use their imagination and to feel an emotional connection to the future. This triggers a discussion about where those thoughts and feelings came from, followed by practical tips on how to push our thinking further so we are really exploring all the possibilities and not just the most obvious.

Here are some suggestions for activities to use in your workshops or on your own:


- 1 **Polak exercise** – This is a great way to connect people to their feelings by asking if they feel optimistic or pessimistic about the future, and whether they can or cannot make a difference. See [Warm-up activities on page 113](#) for more details.
- 2 **Three images** – Find three different pictures of the future. You might choose a still from a favourite sci-fi movie, an artist’s impression of an eco-city or a dystopian vision. The trick is to find three contrasting ideas about what the world might look like. Ask participants to spend one minute looking at each in turn. Then discuss how they made you feel, which one you’d like to live in or avoid, what details you noticed, and how they are connected to things you see happening in the world today. This starts to stretch our imaginations.
- 3 **10 years from now** – Picturing how we will live our daily lives in the future can be really powerful. Ask participants to imagine themselves in 10 years. Give them prompts to guide them through the day. What do they see as they walk through their community? What are the headlines in the news? What is top of their to-do list at work? Who are they working with? What do they do for fun in the evening? [\[TEMPLATE BELOW\]](#)
- 4 **The long view** – Ella Saltmarsh is an activist, creator and writer who founded [The Long Time Academy](#). She has created beautiful ways to connect people to a changing world. The [Human Layers activity](#) is an audio guide to walk through the generations. It is also available on [Spotify](#).
- 5 **Psychology of thinking** – Even though humans have great imaginations we are not always brilliant at understand the way the world changes. There are lots of [psychological reasons](#) for this, from bending information to fit what we already think, to failing to spot long-term patterns or only relying too much on past experience so we are surprised by new things. The [Factfulness quiz](#) is a fun way to test your assumptions.
- 6 **Discussion** – Having an open conversation about where our ideas of the future come from can be really useful. When they first start, people will often create futures that heavily feature the issues that are currently in the news, like AI and automation today. By talking about this and thinking about where we can find new information, spot weak signals and emerging trends, we can add a new dimension to our strategic foresight work.
- 7 **Re-framing questions** – Good questions are critical to strategic foresight work (we’ll look at this in more depth later [Crafting a question on page 33](#)). You need to make sure the questions you ask do not limit the


possibilities or send you off down one train of thought. For example, if you were exploring transport, asking “what is the future of cars” is less powerful than “what are possible futures of mobility”.

Spend some time crafting questions that open up space to explore.

These activities can really help us understand where our images of the future come from and create space for new ideas. They set solid foundations for good strategic foresight work.

You can read more about futures literacy on the [UNESCO website](#).

 Community – **What’s different?**

 Community – **What’s the same?**

 My latest project

 Urgent crisis!

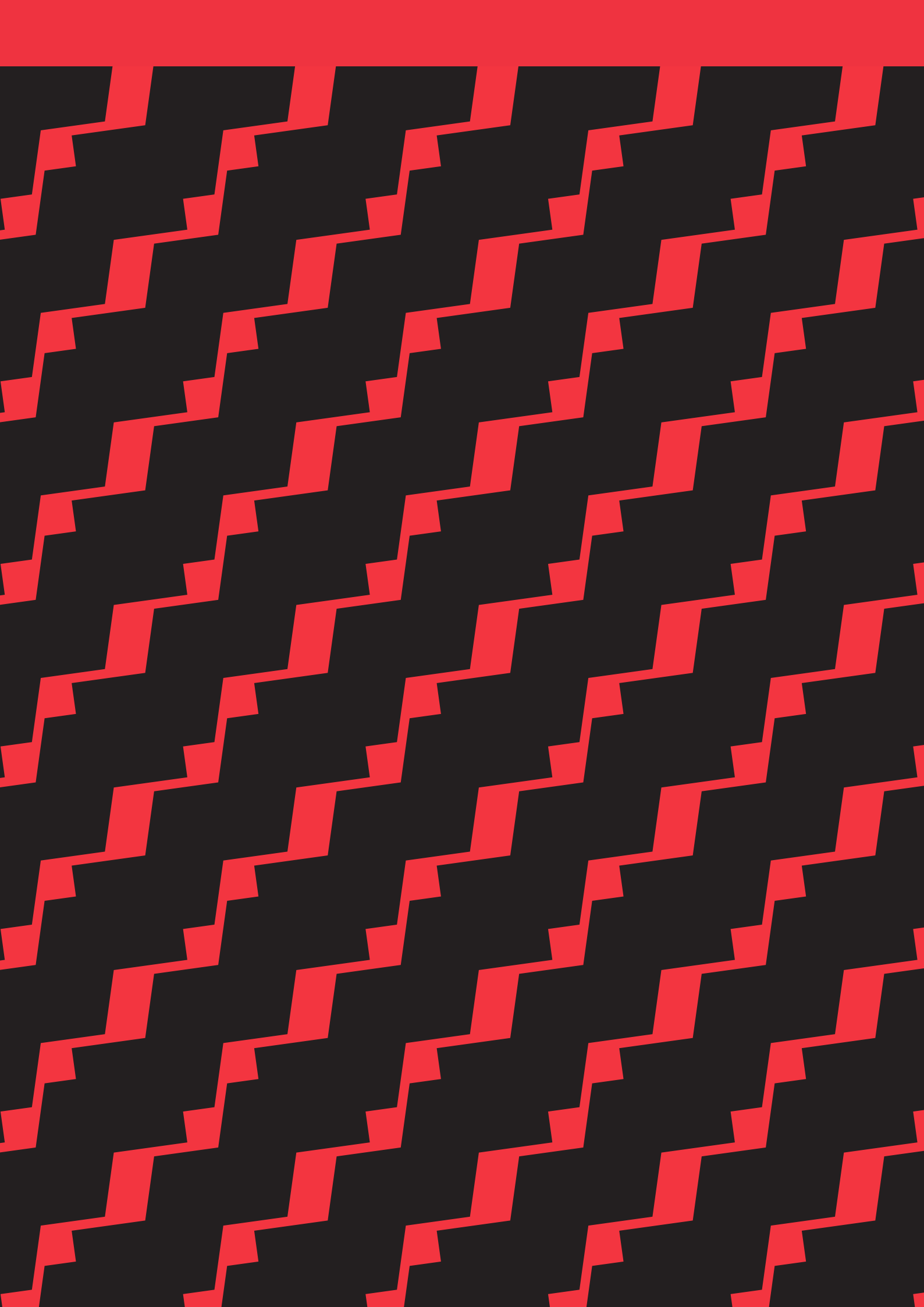
 News Headlines

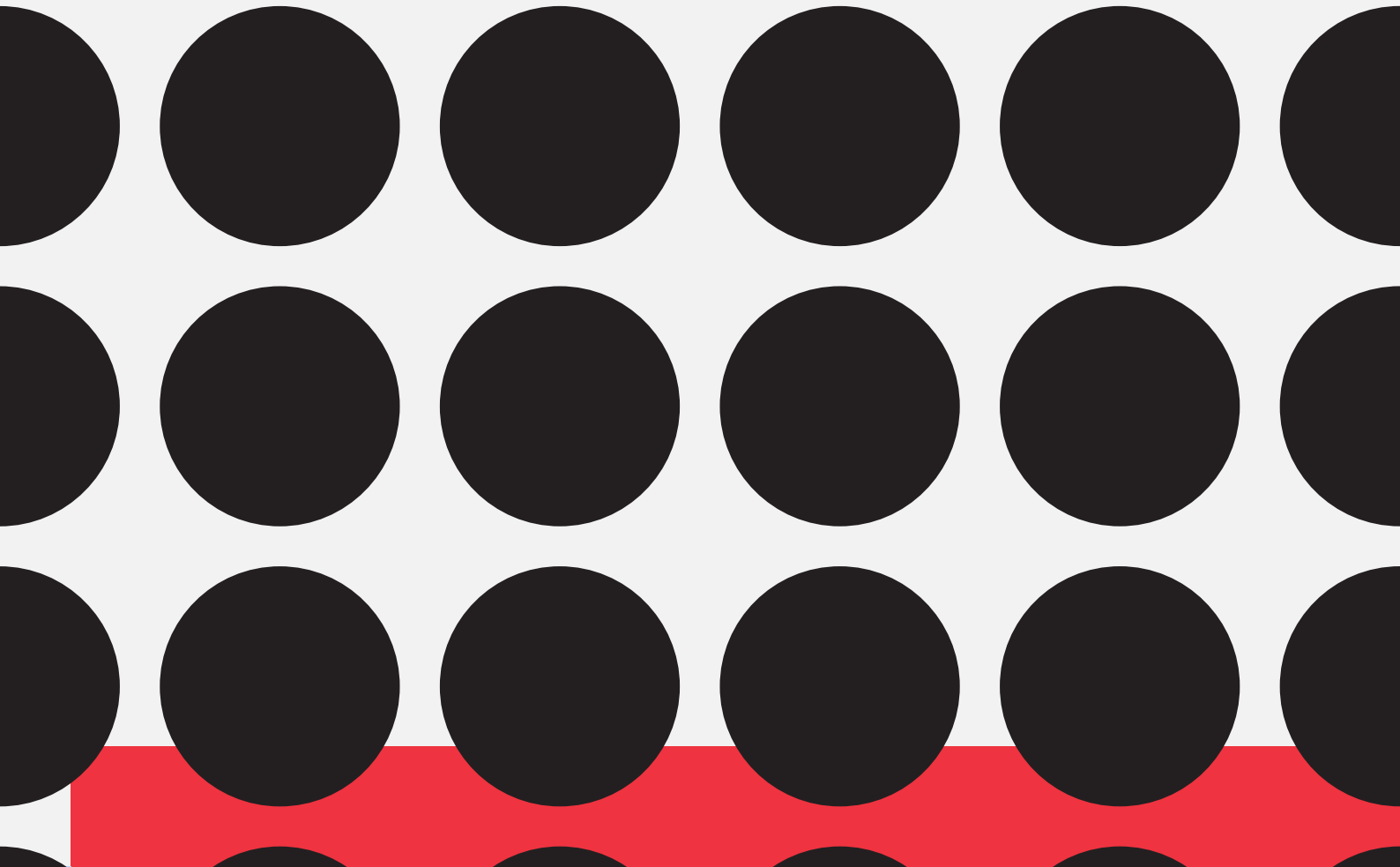
 Who is involved

 Latest Trends

“ Futures thinking holds the power to foster greater agency as soon as we realise that it is possible to play a role in shaping the future and getting one step closer to where one wants to be. ”

Irini Papadimitriou
FUTURE EVERYTHING





People, place and perspectives



Chapter IV

People, place and perspectives

People are at the heart of humanitarian action. Communities caught up in crises support each other, and humanitarians mobilise to help them survive, emerge healthy and thrive in the future. Millions of people all around the world volunteer their time and skills to respond, wherever and whenever they are needed most.

People should also be at the heart of strategic foresight. Historic trends and shifts in technology impact real lives and the futures we imagine will be home to billions of people. The visions we champion should be rooted in humanitarian principles, community connections and the dreams people have for the future.

Working with communities, and your colleagues in engagement teams, is vital.

Section A

Connecting with communities

The Red Cross Red Crescent movement's greatest strength is its reach and its diversity. We draw our power from communities in 191 countries, and across thousands of regions, cities, towns and villages.

We have also a powerful voice in the national and global community. We work with governments, policy makers, civil society organisations and a diverse range of partners to debate, design and deliver humanitarian services.

At times, our ideals may clash with groups whose actions or intentions are causing harm to others, as we champion humanitarian principles and protect human dignity.

All of these communities, and many more, shape our work and the world we live in. Done well, strategic foresight can create a powerful and productive space for collaboration, new solutions, and even fierce debate.

The key is diversity of perspectives and a recognition that individual communities are not homogeneous – there are power dynamics and competing viewpoints everywhere.

Part 1

Example: Destino Colombia

A strategic foresight and futures project was hailed as “one of the most significant events in the country’s search for peace,” by Nobel Prize Winner and former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

Destino Colombia brought together “an extraordinary cross-section of national leaders, including politicians, businesspeople, journalists, guerrillas, paramilitary members, academics, activists, peasants, military officers, trade unionists, and young people” and created future scenarios for peace, despite many of these groups being sworn enemies.

These narratives triggered powerful and productive conversations nationally about the country’s current reality and future evolution.

Read more: [Destino Colombia](#).

“ By embracing uncertainty and involving diverse stakeholders, we allow space for more inclusive and transformative futures to emerge. ”

Geci Karuri-Sebina

FUTURIST

“ There is no power for
change greater than a
community discovering
what it cares about. ”

Margaret J. Wheatley

WRITER

Section B

Power and perspective

As we use strategic foresight to navigate complex challenges in a changing world, we must connect with these communities to understand their hopes, fears and aspirations for the future.

It is vital that we look beyond the obvious stakeholders and the loudest voices. We must actively seek out marginalised and vulnerable groups, we must listen to differing perspectives and remember that a positive future for one group may have a negative impact on others.

We must also seek to understand power dynamics within communities, creating safe space for alternative voices and new perspectives.

This is critical because far too often the most vulnerable groups in society are stripped of power, even as they face the most severe consequences of crises and disasters. They are not invited to shape policy or shift priorities, and they are rarely asked what they would like the future to look like.

Even when well-intentioned programmes and projects are launched, they can have unintended consequences on communities if people have not been involved in the design.

Connection to community is critical at all stages in the process. As you develop your focus question (page 15) and conduct your research (page 43), consult with people (page 25) and run workshops (page 99) with creative activities (page 67), engage with new perspectives, different voices and communities at all points in the complex system you hope to shift and change as you develop new possibilities for the future.

Section C

Play and place

People are playful and inventive, even in the face of huge challenges. Using games and creativity is a great way to connect people and generate insight into their hopes and fears for the future.

- Storytelling allows us to explore the past, present and future (page 125).
- Use drawing and collage to create visions of the future.

- Create illustrated maps of community resources and challenges.
- Do walking consultations to explore the community as you discuss the future.
- Set up pop-up games to draw people together. You can run a consultation by throwing balls into different bins to vote for competing project idea, for example.
- Create installation art and ask people to add their ideas. For example, you could write ideas on paper leaves and add them to a tree or build something that represents their ideas using only what is in the room.
- Use your imagination to engage people and create space for them to share their thoughts.
- There are more thoughts on creativity and futures on page X.

Section D

Other resources

[Inclusive Imaginaries: Catalysing Forward-looking Policy Making through Civic Imagination](#)

[The Diaspora Futures Collective](#)

[Play:Disrupt](#)



Crafting a question



Chapter V

Crafting a question

Strategic foresight lives or dies on the quality of the questions you ask. What makes a good question? One that leads to an insightful and useful answer. A really powerful question also fosters communication, deepens understanding and leads to meaningful change.

Your strategic foresight project needs a founding question or set of questions – the framing for all of the research and activities you do, and the focus for any actions you recommend. But you will also ask lots of other questions along the way as you dig into different pieces of the puzzle.

Section A

Asking questions

There are some general rules for all good questions:

- **Clarity:** Good questions are easy to understand. Avoid jargon and over-complex language.
- **Focus:** Be specific about what you want to understand. Don't be overly broad or muddle different issues together.
- **Openness:** Open-ended questions encourage thoughtful responses rather than yes/no answers.
- **Depth:** Dig deeper into topics to uncover more information and useful insights.
- **Neutrality:** Don't put your own assumptions and opinions in the question – let the answers share their own.
- **Context-aware:** Tailor your questions to the audience to get the best answers.

Section B

Your founding questions

The questions you ask will shape your work. Imagine you were working on transport. Asking ‘what is the future of the motor car?’ would generate very different answers to asking, ‘what are possible futures for personal mobility?’

A good strategic foresight question is focused, open and future-oriented but clear about the timeframe. There is no hard format for these types of questions but you could consider something like:

“ In the next [TIMEFRAME], how might [TOPIC/ISSUE] evolve and impact [RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS/ INDUSTRY/SOCIETY]? ”

followed by

“ What strategies can be developed to navigate and capitalize on these changes? ”

If you were working on a project to transform how the IFRC network uses strategic foresight, you might ask:

“ Over the next 7 years, how might strategic foresight practice evolve and impact the Red Cross Red Crescent network? What strategies might help the Red Cross Red Crescent leverage its global reach to identify and respond quickly to emerging humanitarian challenges? ”

Or you might be examining the impact of a key driver of change on a specific issue or group in one country. For example:

“ In the next 10 years, how might demographic changes impact food security in Malawi? What strategies can be developed to ensure a resilient and sustainable food system? ”

In our Ukraine work we asked:

“ In the next three years, how might the Ukraine crisis impact other humanitarian crises around the world, and what actions can we take to mitigate or prepare for these impacts? ”

These might still feel a bit too wordy and complicated. If you prefer, you can boil them down to “What are possible futures for...” or “What are possible impact of...:

- What are possible futures for strategic foresight in the IFRC network in the next 7 years?
- What are possible futures for food security in Malawi in the next 10 years?
- What are the possible impacts of the Ukraine conflict on other humanitarian crises over the next three years?

Once you have settled on your founding question(s), you can start examining evidence and exploring the possibilities. And there are some very useful questions which can help you with that too...

“ Foresight turns out to be
a critical adaptive strategy
for times of great stress. ”

Jamais Casco

FUTURIST AND AUTHOR

Section C

Digging deeper

Good questions will fuel your research and uncover startling new insights. We've shared a few ideas here to help you explore different domains:

1 Trend analysis:

- What emerging trends in **[INDUSTRY/FIELD]** are likely to have a significant impact over the next decade?
- How will technological advancements in **[SPECIFIC TECHNOLOGY]** shape the future landscape of **[ISSUE/SECTOR]**?
- What socioeconomic trends should we consider when planning for the future of **[ISSUE/AREA]**?
- How are trends interacting with each other and causing additional or new/accelerated impacts?

2 Disruption and innovation:

- What disruptive technologies or innovations are on the horizon, and how might they impact our sector?
- What emerging business models could reshape our industry, and how can we adapt to them?

3 Risk assessment:

- What are the potential risks and vulnerabilities we should be aware of when planning for the future of **[PROJECT/AREA]**?
- What external factors pose the greatest threats to our organization, and how can we build resilience against them?

4 Human behaviour:

- How are **[KEY GROUP'S]** preferences and behaviours likely to evolve, and how can we adapt our services accordingly?
- What demographic shifts will impact humanitarian issues, and how can we tailor our strategies to address these changes?

- What new markets or customer segments should we explore to diversify our revenue streams?

5 Regulatory and Policy Analysis:

- What regulatory changes or policy shifts are expected in our industry, and how can we adapt to them?
- How might changes in environmental regulations impact our services?
- What are the potential legal and ethical challenges we may face in the future, and how can we address them?

6 Global politics:

- What geopolitical trends and conflicts could affect our international operations and partnerships?
- How might shifts in global economic power influence our financial strategies?
- What are the implications of international political fragmentation on our global network?

7 Resource allocation:

- How should we prioritise our budget and resources to address future challenges and opportunities effectively?
- What investments in research and development are necessary to enhance our impact in the next decade?
- What trade-off should we consider when allocating resources between short-term goals and long-term vision?

8 Measurement and Evaluation:

- What key performance indicators (KPIs) should we use to track the progress of our strategic foresight initiatives?
- How can we regularly assess the effectiveness of our long-term planning and adjust our strategies accordingly?

- What mechanisms can we establish for ongoing feedback and learning from our foresight efforts?

Questions like these can help your strategic foresight work. They can push you to explore new information, generate scenarios and consider your options for action.

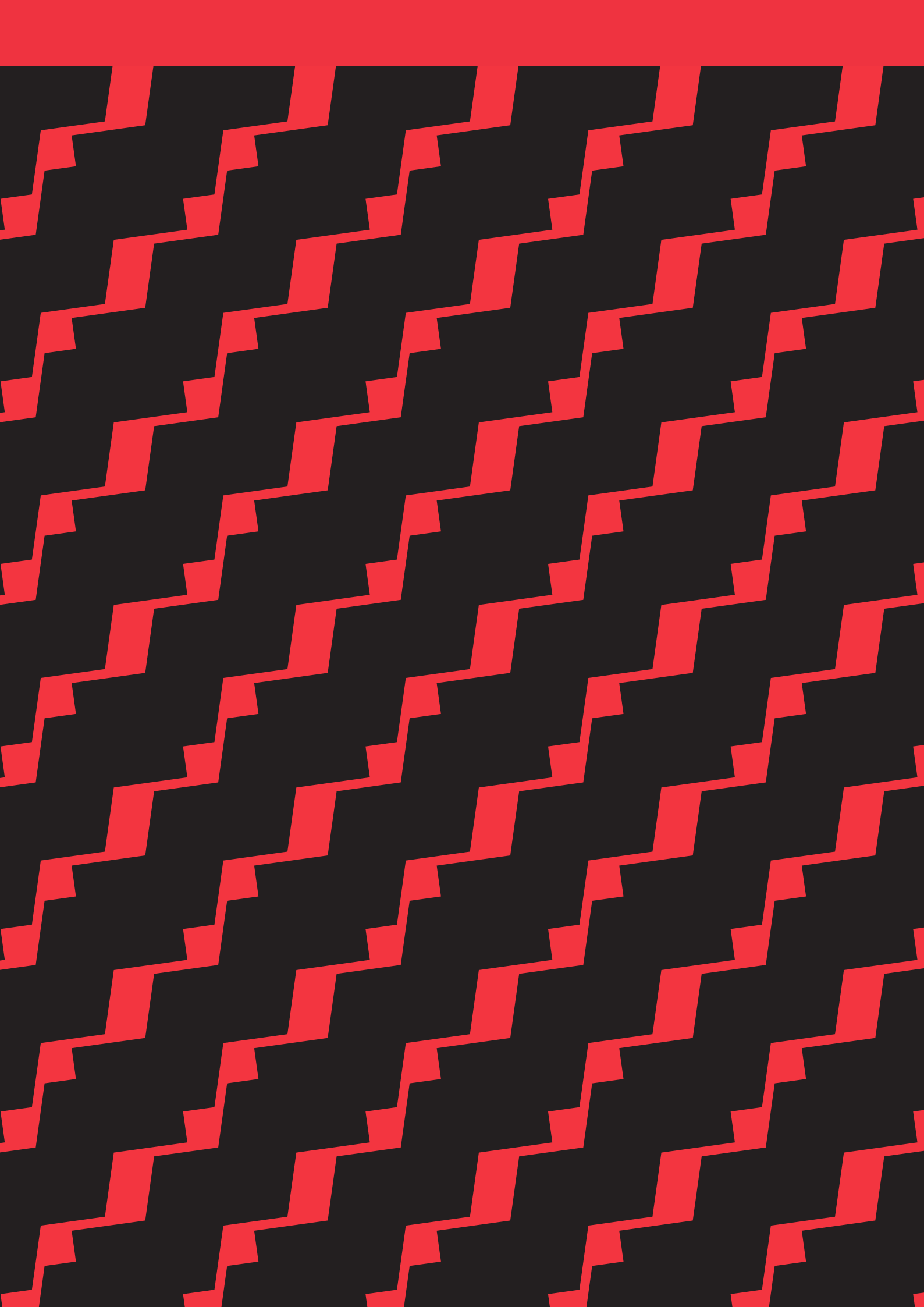
They can be used as part of a long-term foresight project to rethink an entire organisation, or used to support a farming community to think about the future threats and opportunities they may face to their livelihoods, or they can be fed into other initiatives looking for new solutions to complex problems and tricky issues.

Next, we will look at how to use research to begin to find answers...





How to research the future



Chapter VI

How to research the future

Let's be clear; we cannot predict the future and say exactly what will happen. But we can examine the possibilities using evidence, insight and imagination, and use this to sharpen our decision-making today.

Before we start, let's tackle the big question you will face: If you can't predict the future, then what is the point of strategic foresight?

Well, we know for certain that things will change and the challenges we face are immense. We know there will be humanitarian crises and scientific breakthroughs, shifts in politics and rapid climate change. How well we navigate these and adjust, how successfully we understand the forces that change history, and how skilfully we deal with uncertainty, will directly impact the people we support around the world.

Exploring potential futures allows us to ask powerful questions that can improve the resilience of our organisation and the flexibility of our plans. We can question the assumptions about the future which are shaping our current thinking and strategy.

If this happened, then what might follow...? How would our organisation cope – would we excel or struggle? How might we prepare now? How might we mitigate the risks early?

When done with rigour across multiple domains, these kind of questions can give us insights into the things we should be prioritising today, or the new capabilities, structures, and systems that we might need to develop now to deal with the uncertainty of these futures.

Foresight exercises undertaken during the IFRC [Strategy 2030](#) processes indicated that while we were likely to face significant growth in costs for humanitarian crises in the future, there were numerous indications that traditional sources of financing were going to be put under further strain in the sector.

Issues such as increasing sovereignty and nationalism and a decline in the perceived value of multilateralism, donor government prioritisation, widening disparities between rich and poor alongside 'diminishing middle classes' in donor countries, potential for recessions and economic downturns, fatigue with the sheer volume of crises and many more factors may mean the increase needed in humanitarian financing may not be available or able to match the increases in needs. This, many of the participants concluded, meant that we should be exploring new models of financing and rethinking how we currently finance the system.

These findings were one of the contributors then to developing more efforts and resourcing for exploring new models of financing in the IFRC network. It should be noted that under-financing has long been an issue in the sector but the realisation that current trends suggest it will get much worse, and that there are many more factors complicating this issue that we may not have previously considered, serves to become an additional pressure to prioritise the allocation of more resources toward finding new solutions.

“ The future is bound
to surprise us, but
we don't have to be
dumbfounded. ”

Kenneth Boulding

PEACE ACTIVIST

Section A

How do you research possible futures?

Strategic foresight uses information from a wide range of sources, seeking out diverse perspectives, competing ideas and unexpected evidence. Gathering these raw materials is key to good foresight work.

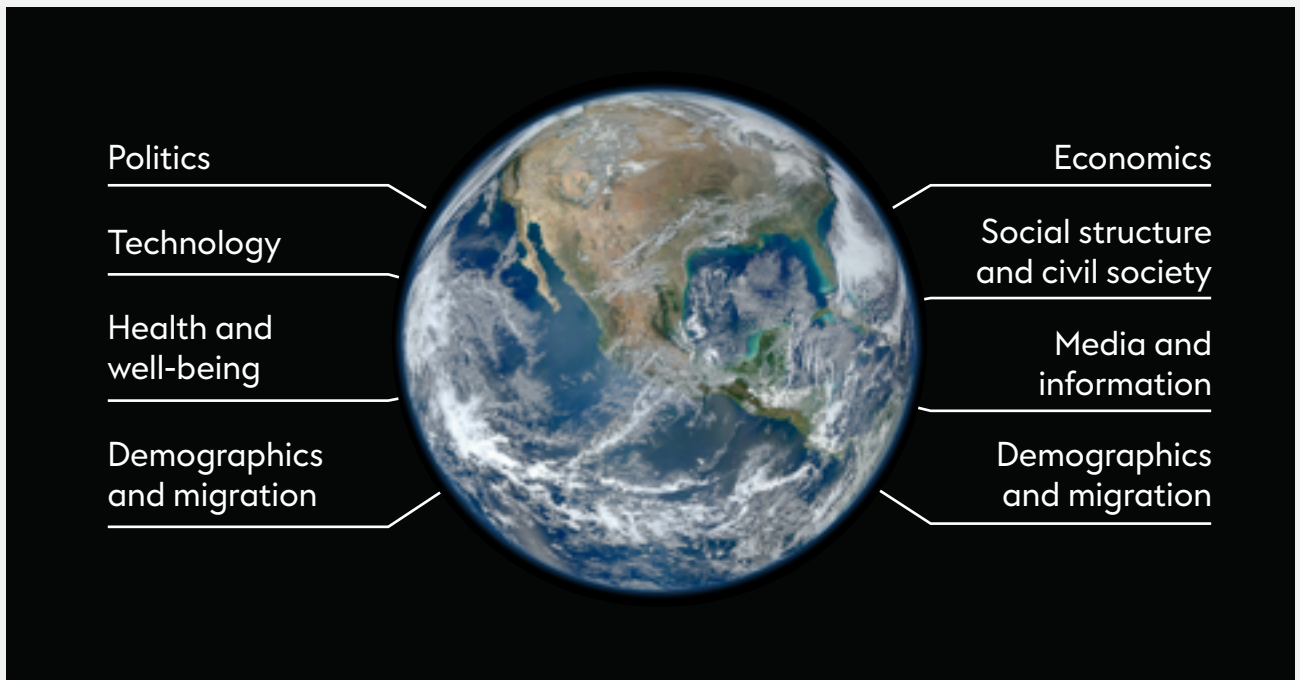
Research can be done in many ways. You may choose to do it yourself to help you understand the critical issues and emerging ideas. Or you may work with a group of people who bring different perspectives and specialisms to the project. You can even outsource some of the research to other teams or organisations.

A combination of people with specialist expertise and others with fresh eyes can work well. Lived experience dealing with the issues discussed in academia is also incredibly helpful. This mix of expertise and experience will help you spot new connections and draw out sophisticated insights.

Part 1

Start with some structure.

There are forces which will always shape history and impact the future, and these are a perfect anchor for your research. In Solferino, we start with these:



[Graphic/illustration needed]

- Politics
- Economics
- Environment and climate
- Technology
- Migration and demographics
- Social systems and civil society
- Health and well-being
- Media and information

There are other versions, and you can choose whichever one makes most sense to you. STEEP (society, technology, economics, environment, politics) is widely used. PESTLE (politics, economics, society, technology, legal, environmental) is also popular.

Don't be scared to adjust them, adding or subtracting issues that are relevant to your key question.

For example, when working on the Ukraine crisis we added 'agriculture and food production' because it was a critical area to understand given the region's importance to the world's food system.

Part 2

Do some desk research.

Start with your foresight questions ([page 43](#)) and begin to explore published reports, papers and websites of key organisations and thinkers. There will probably be some obvious starting points – UN agencies, think tanks, university departments – to draw you into the issues currently dominating the discussion.

The trick is to examine the data and analysis of the current trends, to understand what is influencing activities and policy discussions today, but also to keep an eye out for weak signals and emerging issues. These are the things that could grow, combine and develop into influential forces.

“ **Weak signals are like puzzle pieces scattered across different domains. It’s the art of connecting those pieces and forming a coherent picture that allows us to anticipate and prepare for future developments.** ”

Amy Webb

FUTURE TODAY INSTITUTE

As you work, look at the footnotes and references to dig deeper into the evidence. Seek out contrasting opinions and counterarguments. Move further away from the mainstream discussion and look for people and organisations championing new ideas or challenging the orthodox views.

Tip: Use a mind map to keep track of all this information and insight. Place your foresight question at the centre, surround it with the forces of change, and then add notes, quotes, links and light-bulb thoughts as you research. Link these ideas and seek connections across the domains.

Part 3

Seek out experts and super connectors.

Your research will raise as many questions as answers. You will also spot people with deep expertise in potential drivers of change who can help you dig deeper into these questions. These might be academics, activists, entrepreneurs, politicians or anyone championing change and pushing the limits of thinking.

Reach out. Ask for a call. Go prepared with your questions and ready to listen. Ask if you have fully understood the issue and unpick nuances that are not clear. Ask how they think these issues will change over time. Ask them to speculate on your foresight question, linking their expertise to your focus. Add the insights to your mind map.

And always ask them who else you should talk to and if they can introduce you – people pushing the limits of any domain will always know interesting people also trying to drive change, which is why we call them our super-connectors.

Part 4

Speak to communities.

We must talk to the communities we help about their hopes and fears for the future, about what they would like to see, and which trends they worry might escalate into major issues. This can uncover unexpected ideas and add human insight to desk research.

Communities should be also involved in defining the key questions and interrogating new ideas and potential futures as they emerge, wherever this is possible.

Our organisation is rooted in communities around the world so we can talk to people nearly anywhere. Use our network to connect with people who could be impacted by the issues you are investigating. Speak to colleagues in other National Societies (NS), contact the regional Hubs, or ask specialists teams if they can connect you to communities or gather insights for your project.

We've found some creative ways to connect with people and access their wisdom. Storytelling, creativity and imagination can be more powerful than surveys and questionnaires. Find out how we engage with communities [\(page 25\)](#).

“ The exploration of possible futures includes trying to look at the present in new and different ways, often breaking out of the straitjacket of conventional, orthodox, or traditional thinking and taking unusual, even unpopular perspectives... It involves, most of all, expanding human choice. ”

Wendell Bell

FUTURIST

Part 5

Apply imagination and insight.

Remember, we are not looking for a single future but exploring a range of possibilities.

As you gather ideas, start to connect them and group them. You may start to see recurring themes or contrasting opinions about how a trend will develop. Capture this in your research mind-map, adding new labels and layering in the thoughts and questions your research has triggered

You can also do this in small groups with key stakeholders and community members. Working together, you can discuss and debate connections and the implications of the ideas you have surfaced.

There is no 'correct' answer here, you need to trust yourself to make links and spot patterns.

As you work on it with your team you may have very different opinions about what the evidence is telling you, and this is a powerful asset. Capture all the different viewpoints as these are great raw materials for the next steps. This must be a living artefact, with new stuff added as your work continues.

By this point, you have layered lots of evidence, from hard data and trend projects to personal stories and quotes from disruptors.

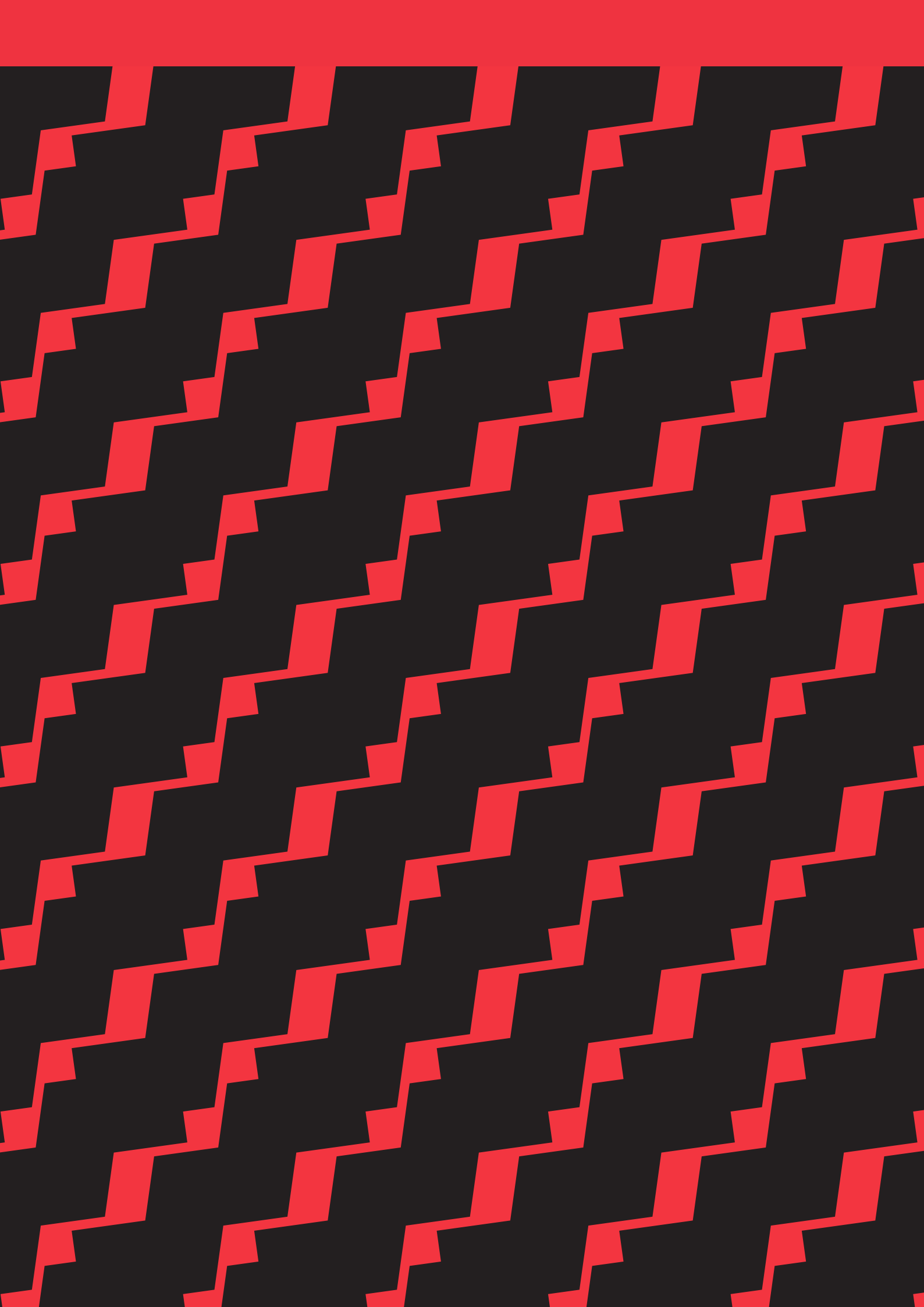
You will have 'ah-ha' moments of clarity, 'what if...?' moments of speculation and explorations where you ask 'If this happens, then what...?'. You will have moments of doubt and high emotion. This will all feed your foresight work.

Part 6

Use it.

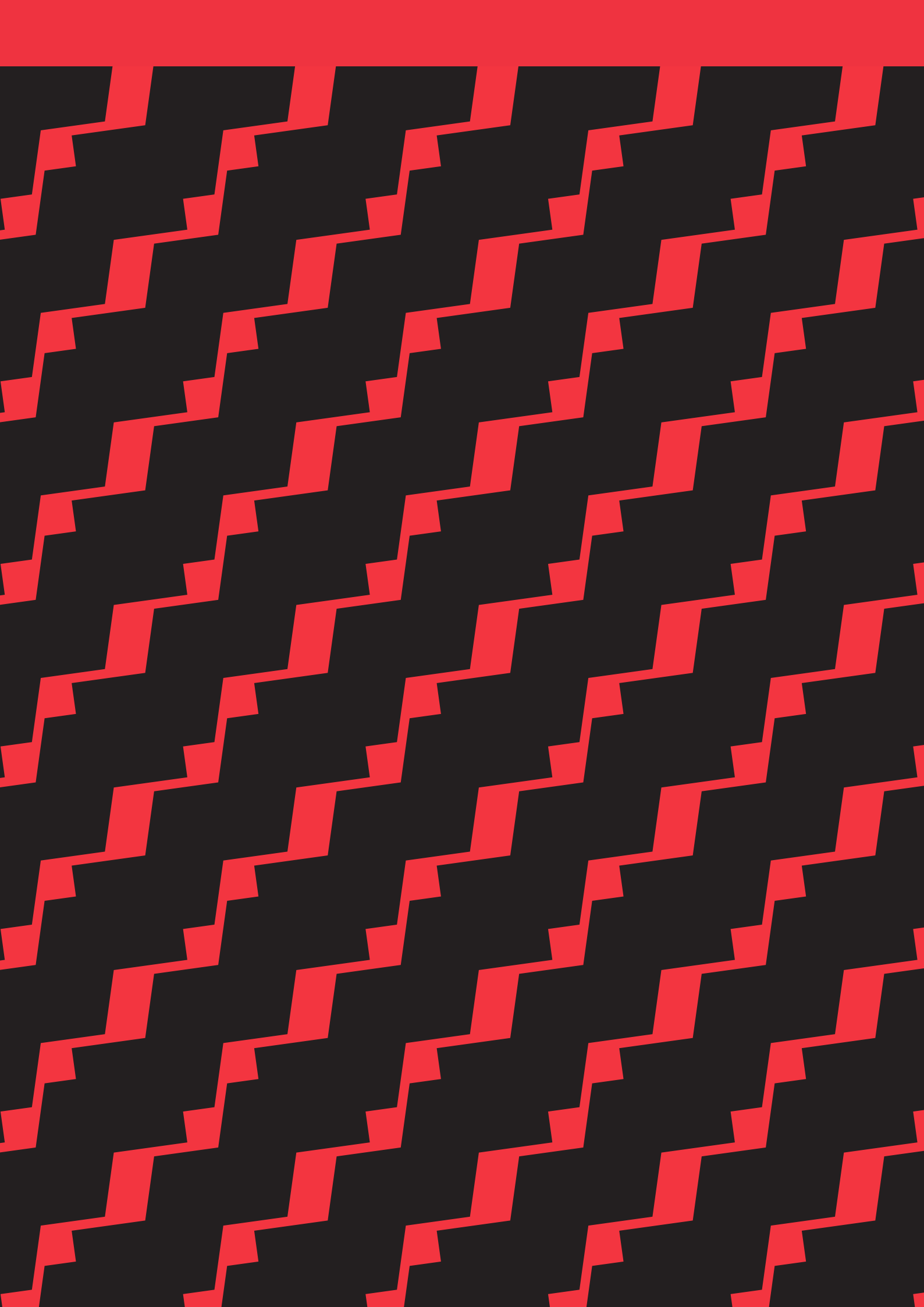
This research is fuel for the activities that follow. You can interrogate the information in lots of different ways, drawing our insights and building possible futures.

We recommend you start with the drivers of change activity in the [Save The Children toolkit](#), 2 × 2 grids ([page 181](#)), Roots and Routes ([page 197](#)) and then scenario building ([page 43](#)).





Action, anticipation and altering our thinking



Chapter VII

Action, anticipation and altering our thinking

Strategic foresight is a tool. It helps us craft new ideas, fix problems and build new visions and strategies for the future.

For organisations to use this tool successfully they must be willing to change. The problem is that change is hard and you will often face resistance. This is especially true when you are championing radical new ideas or conjuring up future visions that challenge current thinking. It can be easier for organisations to stick with what they know.

But the truth is that organisations change all the time. There are long-term plans and short-term demands, which require shifts in focus or reallocation of resources. People are hired, teams are merged, new technologies are introduced, and partnerships created.

Change is constant. Strategic foresight is a useful addition, opening up new ideas and strengthening our decision making. So how do we sell it to people and make it useful to our organisation?

This section offers some reflections and guidance from our own work to get you started. But changing systems and impacting organisational cultures is incredibly complex and difficult. We recommend you also dig into external research and expertise for support and inspiration as you design your approach.

Section A

Make the future useful

When we talk about the future it can be overwhelming. Some people get a sense of vertigo as the world they know drops away to be replaced with imagined futures.

Others get defensive, worrying that creating new visions will destroy the current organisation (which might mean they lose power or prestige) or carries criticism of the way they've been doing things. Some dismiss it as sci-fi or a fanciful indulgence, useless in the face of urgent crises in the real world.

But foresight is widely used by businesses, governments and the military. They are actively working towards a future that suits their objectives and scanning the horizon for opportunities. They also identify and mitigate potential disasters and crises to protect their interests and operations.

Examples:

- **US National Intelligence Council** – [Global Trends report](#)
Published every four years since 1987, this report “assesses the key trends and uncertainties that will shape the strategic environment for the United States during the next two decades”.
- **African Union** – [African Governance Futures 2063 Scenarios report](#)
This report “signals important ways Africa can harness incoming changes and direct the trajectory of national, regional and global governance, economic development, and environmentally sustainable practices” using strategic foresight methods.
- **Shell®** – [Shell Scenarios](#)
This strategic foresight work is driving change at one of the world's largest corporations: “The leadership teams in Shell have been using this work to help make decisions for more than 50 years”.

If our sector doesn't engage with strategic foresight and champion a future rooted in humanitarian principles and voluntary action, anticipating risks and acting early to shape the future, we are accepting a passive role, waiting for events to hit before we act. We also miss opportunities to be better partners to the people we want to support. Foresight can help us connect with communities to understand their hopes, fears and aspirations for the future. This will shape services that help people now and support positive futures.

“ Without a vision of
tomorrow, hope is
impossible. ”

Paulo Freire

PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Part 1

Break it down

Strategic foresight takes time and should be an ongoing process of exploring possible futures and adjusting your strategy. Along the way, you will run workshops.

Foresight workshops are energising. The room is often popping with ideas, and people are genuinely excited about the possibilities they have uncovered.

But then you need to make practical plans. How can you translate these futures into reality? What can you do today to take the first step? This is where people sometimes get stuck.

If a preferred future seems too ambitious, or challenging scenarios seem unavoidable, break down your plans:

- What things can we do immediately?
- Which actions will take time, budget and preparation to achieve?
- What will take structural changes and shifts in the way we think before we can achieve them?
- What might change before we achieve the long-term goal and how do we adjust our plans in response to new information?

Section B

What things can we do immediately?

Start by connecting strategic foresight to the way the organisation already functions.

Find out how decisions are made, what strategy documents are produced, how the Board keeps track of corporate risks, what resilience strategies are in place to help your organisation cope with a sudden emergency, how impact is measured and how are budgets signed off and tracked.

By understanding how information, decisions and money flow around your organisation, you can make strategic foresight useful. Design your outputs to help the current process, rather than to compete with it.

If you can suggest practical ideas which could be implemented now, you will build credibility for strategic foresight. It also removes some of the risk to the organisation as you are not asking for major upheavals.

There will also be action you can take to find out more about emerging trends or to connect with researchers, companies and communities dealing with the impacts and opportunities.

It is a really good idea to run some strategic foresight sessions early. Introducing people to new activities and helping them uncover interesting insights can help you find advocates and build momentum. It is also a great way to start building futures literacy (page 15).

It can help to invite people from outside the organisation who already use foresight in their decision making. Talking about how they deal with uncertainty and manage risk can be very powerful.

Section C

Time, budget and preparation

Some things need people and money to make them happen.

Investment is needed to introduce a new technology, or to scale an innovative service. People need to be mobilised to identify ways to cut costs or create better connections between departments.

As you uncover new opportunities through your foresight work, identify things which would be possible with preparation, budget and people.

It will take time to steer these proposals through your organisation. An inspiring vision backed by sound evidence will help, but there will be equally compelling reasons why investment is needed elsewhere.

You need to break down your vision into stages that build the evidence for the next step. This reduces the risk and builds confidence in the change.

Part 1

Building the case

For example, your foresight work might uncover a long-term vision about how emerging technology could change the way we work:

As automation and AI spread, you argue, people will be freed up from routine admin tasks and fed data insights and visualisations which humans could not generate. Refocusing people's time on collaboration, creativity, and problem solving – backed by AI insight and processing power – could radically change how our organisations operate.

But you cannot suddenly switch to fully automated systems and AI-assisted creative collaboration. You need to take it step by step.

You might first research the number of computer systems currently used, and the cost to the organisation of platforms and staff. Mapping areas of high demand will uncover processes which might benefit from automation. A small experiment can be run to understand if these benefits justify investment.

The human impact of automation and ethical questions posed by AI will be front-of-mind as your scenarios have considered how these issues might evolve over time. These can also be tested, and mitigation strategies built into the foundations of the project.

The American Red Cross took a similar approach in our of their [blood donation projects](#).

Once you have built some evidence, you can make an informed argument for or against further investment and changes to the tech estate or job roles.

Exploring this, building business cases for investment, and starting the cultural shifts needed for success, breaks the cycle of retooling what we already have rather than re-imagining what is possible.

“ Organisations tend to overestimate how much could change in the short-term and underestimate how much could change in the longer term ”

Sir Geoff Mulgan

Section D

Structural changes and shifts in thinking

There comes a point when every organisation has to make structural changes and introduce new ways of thinking. In humanitarian organisations, this can be driven by a new focus as different types of crises emerge and new vulnerabilities are exposed. It can be triggered by dramatic shifts in technology or a reckoning with historic power structures still deeply embedded in our sector, leading to movements such as decolonisation.

As strategic priorities and contexts shift, new skills, capabilities and resources are required. Strategic foresight can play a powerful role in understanding and navigating change. Backcasting ([page 225](#)) and wind tunnelling ([page 215](#)) can strengthen decisions and open new options.

Rooting transformation plans in well-researched futures, with a clear vision that accounts for changing trends, emerging technology and shifts in social behaviour (among other things) makes them more robust.

For example, how might our concept of crises and care change? As emerging trends mature and interact, we will face huge demands for humanitarian services. But some issues which currently trigger a response may become viewed as manageable in different ways, so we refocus. Or anticipatory action may shift our role in the cycle of crises, response and recovery.

Similarly, our concept of care may change. We currently structure the IFRC network around distinct services, with specialist teams mobilised to tend to specific needs. But if we reimagined our role as providing whole human care, with holistic support for mental, physical, financial and community health, this would demand shifts in our thinking and structures. Examining what might trigger fundamental change or demand radical new approaches is a very powerful way to start the conversation about what is possible and desirable.

Strategic foresight is helpful because as people participate in the process, they often internalise the insights and adopt futures thinking in their everyday work and decisions. This self-discovery and new connection with possible futures make impactful change more likely. To make this work, people need to be involved throughout, from developing the key questions ([page 33](#)) and exploring the evidence ([page 43](#)) to imagining and using scenarios ([page 167](#)).

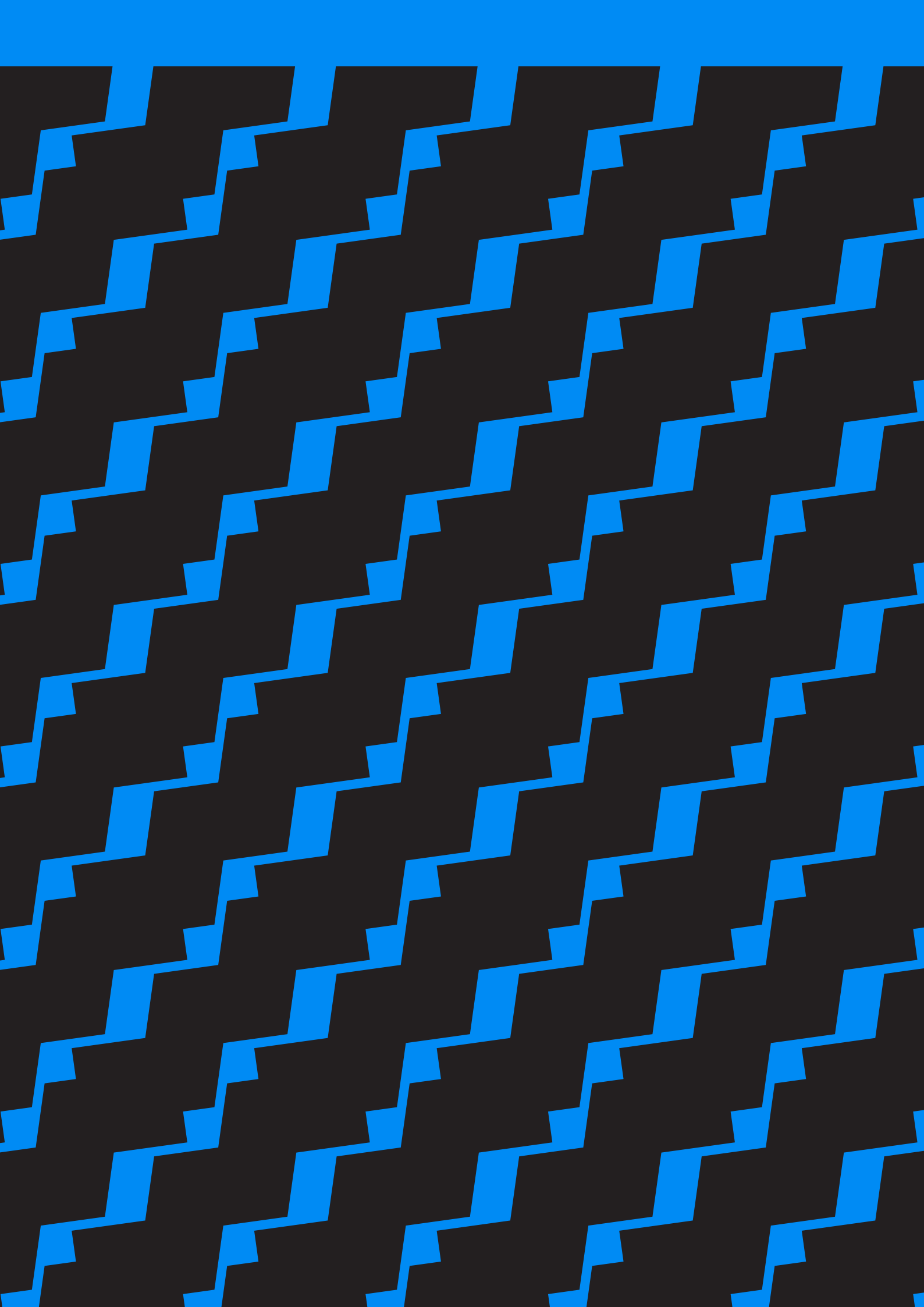
“ If the future is to remain open and free, we need people who can tolerate the unknown, who will not need the support of completely worked out systems or traditional blueprints from the past. ”

Margaret Mead
ANTHROPOLOGIST





Creativity in foresight – art and imagination



Chapter VIII

Creativity in foresight – art and imagination

Strategic foresight splices evidence and analysis with imagination and emotion. It is an extremely potent mix.

Data models and trend extrapolation helps us analyse the development of emerging issues. But it is imagination which conjures up connections and teases out insight, bringing possible futures to life. And it is emotion which triggers a response, as we feel the world shift around us.

As you develop your strategic foresight practice, make space for creativity and imagination. Look for ways to engage people, inspire surprise and provoke a reaction. Make your efforts impossible to ignore as they trigger new realisations and a determination to act.

Humans are not wired to respond to lists of figures and plotted paths on graphs alone. These feed our intellect as we interpret and evaluate the evidence. But we also need to feel the full force of the ideas in our bodies to really engage with the issues.

Our bodies respond to sight and sound, taste and touch. We live in all our senses, wired into the world through charging stimuli that trigger emotions and action. And we can use this in our work.

“ Seek wisdom, not
knowledge. Knowledge
is of the past, wisdom
is of the future. ”

PROVERB

Section A

Experiential futures

Scenarios don't have to exist only on the page. You can make possible futures physical, so that people can interact with them and understand them in a new way.

Part 1

Game on



The IFRC used experiential futures during the launch of Strategy 2030. To help people explore the power of taking action now to influence the future, we created an immersive humanitarian digital escape room game that transported delegates into different parts of the future where teams had to solve puzzles based on the five key challenges of Strategy 2030 and to successfully transform the organisation so that it thrived in 2030.

The game was set up in the conference centre where the General Assembly was being held. It was designed to make participants forget where they were; enveloping visuals, surround sound, floor-to-ceiling digital imaging, smoke machines and an addictive game element all contributed to an immersive experience.

It encouraged people to come together to ‘solve the room’ and build connections. It was also fun, so it stuck in the memory.

Part 2

Hands-on

At the Global Innovation Summit (GIS) in Nairobi, we created a Future Kiosk shop stocked with products from the future, in partnership with the Kenya Red Cross I.OME Innovation lab.

People could pick up boxes of **ReLeaf** – “genetically modified plants to grow your own medical supplies” – or examine **UnSeen**, “the biotech lenses protect your true identity while confirming your refugee-status or security clearance during retina and iris scans”, and many more.

These imagined goods were physical objects, designed, branded and marketed just like consumer products. They provoked intense discussion and debate of emerging trends.

Physical artefacts like this can be used in workshops. Give each group one item and ask them to imagine the world that generated such a product:

- What needs are being met?
- What new technologies or scientific discoveries have been developed?
- Who might be vulnerable in this world? What do humanitarian services look like?

Part 3

You're on

Creativity was the focus on the Futures We Imagine project. This programme was rooted in strategic foresight and human connection.

Young Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers from around the world explored the hopes, fears and aspirations of their community. These could be communities of place, identity, belief or shared interests.

They produced speculative fiction and pieces of art to communicate their visions for the future. You can find out more on this dedicated [website](#).





“ Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning. ”

Gloria Steinem

JOURNALIST AND ACTIVIST

Part 4

Guerilla futures



To help Leaders of the IFRC network of National Societies build connections with the future and provoke new thinking as they discussed plans at the General Assembly, we developed an experiential exhibition with guerilla elements.

Participants could use a device that enabled them to smell what the air in Mumbai would be like in 2030, given current pollution predictions, explore different scenarios with virtual reality, or experience future crises using augmented reality.

These artefacts gave people visceral connections with the future, engaging senses that helped intensify their analytical reflections of these issues.

A number of 'guerilla' items were also deployed. For example, realistic looking 100 dollar bills were placed near ATMs and in cafes. But once you picked it up, text on the flip side explained the need for new forms of financing in the humanitarian sector.

Fake business cards that contained realistic looking jobs of the future were handed out by youth delegates or left in meeting spaces. Jobs included Delegate to Silicon Valley and Artificial Intelligence Surge Team.

The idea with all of these artefacts was to lull the user into believing it was real for a moment before the surprise of realising it was a commentary on future trends.

Part 5

Art

Artists have always explored the future. Could cave paintings be plans for the next hunt and stories about how the tribe will succeed?

There are many contemporary artists exploring emerging trends. Their creations are a powerful commentary on the potential impact of new technologies and social shifts. They ask important questions about historic forces and the kind of world we want to live in.

In a piece called Stranger Visions the artist, [Heather Dewey-Hagborg](#) collected “hairs, chewed up gum, and cigarette butts from the streets, public bathrooms and waiting rooms of New York City. [ISHEI](#) extracted DNA from them and analysed it to generate 3d printed life size, full-colour portraits representing what those individuals might look like.”

She says, “the project was meant to call attention to the developing technology of forensic DNA phenotyping, the potential for a culture of biological surveillance, and the impulse towards genetic determinism.”

Artist and designer Ai Hasegawa looks at the relationship between technology and people through bio-art, speculative design and design fiction.

Her piece Pop Roach “explores a possible future where a small community of activists arise to design an ‘edible’ cockroach that can survive in harsh environments. These genetically modified roaches are designed to certainly pass their genes to the next generations, thus the awful black and brown roaches will be pushed to extinction by the newly designed, cute, colourful, tasty, and high nutritional ‘pop roach’”.

Her work asks how genetic engineering will shift our perception of food and eating habits, and how demographic changes could stress our food systems.

“ The future is not there waiting for us. We create it by the power of imagination. ”

Vilayat Inayat Khan

SUFI TEACHER

Part 6

Creativity in practice

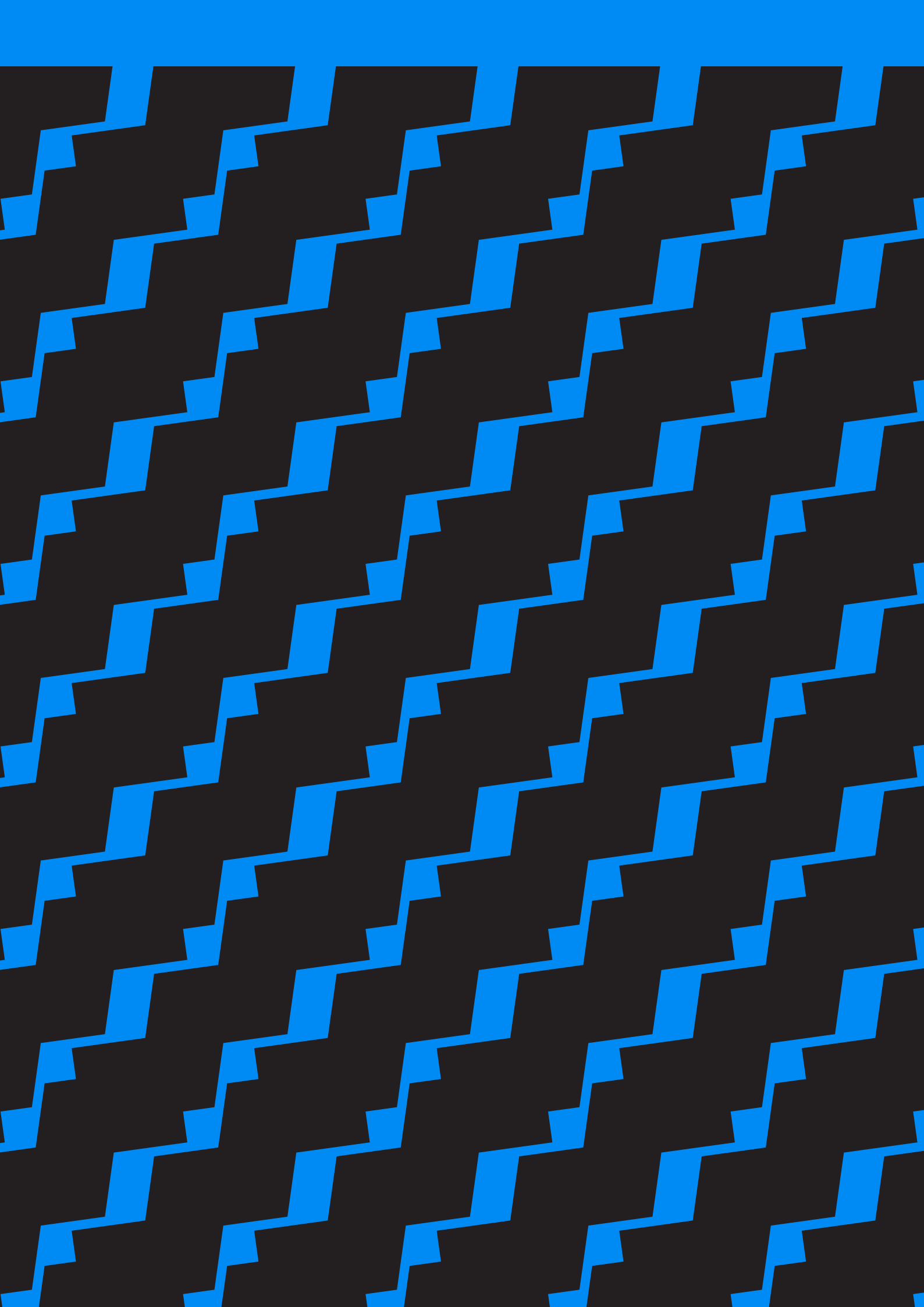
As you run strategic foresight projects, bring in art and speculative design.

Use artists work to prompt discussions and push your thinking on emerging trends. Share visions of possible futures and debate if this is a world you would want to live in, what humanitarian needs there could be, and how we might respond.

Create experiences people can touch and taste, hear and smell. Bring a little slice of the future back to today for people to experience.

Look beyond reports and slide shows to engage decision-makers and communities. Find creative ways to engage and energise the people you are working with, because this will spark deeper connections and more powerful ideas.

Let your imagination loose.



Generating new ideas: Foresight and innovation

Chapter IX

Generating new ideas: Foresight and innovation

There is a lovely interplay between strategic foresight and innovation practice. Foresight stretches our thinking into the future, allowing us to identify potential vulnerabilities or space for exciting new initiatives. In return, innovation approaches help us develop, refine and test these future-focused concepts today.

By taking action now, we can start to move towards our preferred future, influencing the changes that will shape the world while also improving the way we operate today. It is a potent combination.

To help you develop your own approach, this section shares some of the lessons we've learnt from linking strategic foresight to innovation.

As you explore these ideas, look for ways to connect your strategic foresight work to innovation, service design and transformation specialists in your organisation or wider network. These people have deep expertise which will enhance your foresight work, while helping them explore possible futures can trigger incredible initiatives.

Work together.

Section A

What is innovation?

Let's start by defining innovation; it is a word that is used a lot but can mean many different things. For us, innovation is new and useful solutions to real problems.

This doesn't mean everything is brand new to the world – adapting, modifying and using existing solutions in new ways can be extremely powerful. But innovation does demand creative thinking, deep understanding of the challenge rooted in evidence, and a willingness to explore and experiment.

Sound familiar? It is the same ethos we champion in strategic foresight.

The classic innovation process first generates insights into a problem, then focus these into a brief. It then repeats the cycle, generating ideas or potential solutions and then focusing on the most promising and impactful.

This is called the double diamond (even though you often do the cycle more than twice).

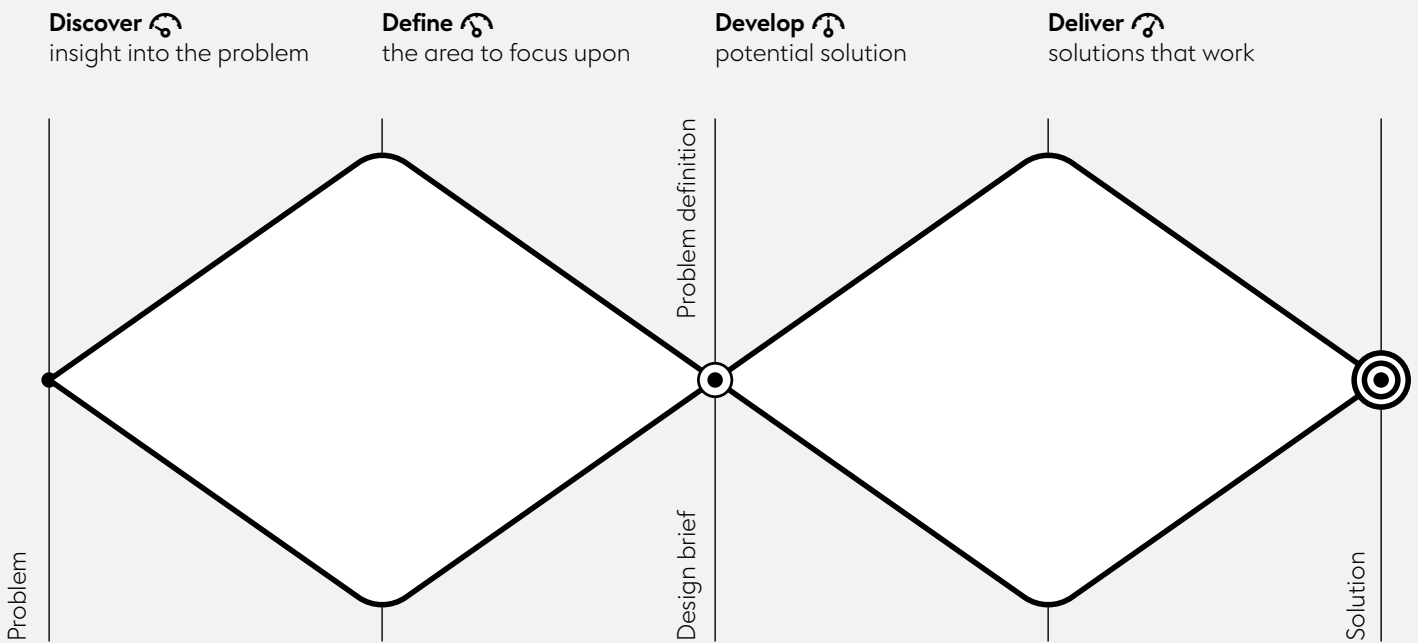


Figure 1: The Design Council's Double diamond model

So, alongside evidence and research (page 43), new ideas are a critical raw material for both strategic foresight and innovation.

When it comes to generating new ideas, you often hear people talk about 'starting with a blank sheet of paper' or launching into 'blue sky thinking', and there is a lot to be said for getting creative without immediate concern for how you might turn these thoughts into products and services that work in the real world.

But imagining ‘anything is possible’ can also be a false friend. You don’t start with a blank sheet – you start with a complex system (page 25), sometimes with many working solutions already in play, especially in humanitarian crises. There are significant constraints, and you have to be aware of them to overcome them (page 43).

This can paralyse organisations, which get caught between ambitious new ideas and messy reality. Innovative plans get scaled back to reduce the risk of exploring unproven ideas, or the effort is not focused on the most pressing problems for fear of ‘getting it wrong’.

Many organisations choose to play it safe, believing it’s safer to expand existing programmes, backed by historic data, than test new ones. Or they focus on designing a product to solve one problem, rather than trying to influence the system that creates the problem in the first place.

The problem is that the world is changing around us. The crises we respond to in future – and the approaches available for us to help people – will be very different to today, making some things harder but other things achievable that currently seem impossible. If we just rely on extending the lifespan of our traditional services and structures, we may not be able to meet these new challenges.

By adding strategic foresight to the mix, we can create new space for innovation to be bold.

Using scenarios (page 167) or considering the potential impact of new technologies, scientific breakthroughs and shifts in the social structure, can drive really creative problem solving and generate promising new concepts that we can work on today, but which will be also fit for the future.

Section B

In practice

There are many ways to use foresight to support innovation, and vice versa.

For example, you could spot emerging vulnerabilities or identify populations which might be at risk of future crises in your scenarios and then work with service design experts to modify your existing operations in anticipation.

Or you could identify a promising new social trend combined with an emerging technology which could potentially improve mental health support, and then partner with an innovation team to create and test a prototype.

Equally, an innovation team might feel that looking deeper into the future could help them be more creative as they develop new ideas. By examining the weak signals of change and building contacts in different sectors and at the cutting-edge of research, innovators can start to experiment early and find novel use for new tools and ideas.

Connecting early with start-ups and researchers identified in your foresight work could also provide benefits for all parties, as they get to understand how their ideas function during a crisis response setting and the Red Cross Red Crescent gets to experiment with new tools and ways of working.

If you are looking at the way your organisation functions, you could work with an existing transformation team and use foresight to explore the possible future operating environment, changes to the service mix, and how the world of work might evolve.

If there is no existing transformation team, you could convene a group of people with diverse perspectives and a desire to lead change, or who have been tasked with developing new ways of doing things.

By highlighting the range of possibilities and championing the need to be resilient and flexible, you could help shift the ambitions for the future of the organisation, working with these change-makers to embed new ways of working and anticipatory governance models now, with a clear vision of the critical uncertainties you are preparing the organisation for.

Part 1

Re-imagining services

This example illustrates another approach for connecting strategic foresight with innovation:

Imagine you are asked to help a National Society (NS) which runs services for people affected by flooding. This service has developed over time, with teams of volunteers set up in rural areas that have seen seasonal floods in the past, and

equipment ready to deploy that is well suited to the local terrain and temperature. They also have care packages and temporary accommodation set up.

The model works well and the NS are critical first responders when floods hit. They often make the headlines, which in turn attracts donors keen to support this vital work.

But recently, there have been unusual weather patterns and flash floods in urban centres during periods of extreme heat. The NS struggled to respond quickly and was unable to use much of its equipment as it was not suited to the city environment.

They decide to innovate to find new solutions and you convince them to include strategic foresight in the process. You break down the approach into three phases:

Part 2

Systems mapping:

Working with experts across the organisation, communities affected by floods, and specialists from other sectors, you map the factors that create the needs which humanitarian services respond to during flooding. This helps to visualise the 'mechanics' of the issue and the complexity of the problem space.

Systems maps (page 157) explore many different factors. This one, for example, could include government policy and investment decisions, agriculture practices which remove tree cover, community attitudes to risk, availability of flood insurance, and deployment of digital sensors to monitor river levels, alongside many other things.

Once the systems map has been refined and people are confident it captures all the key issues, the NS maps their current services onto it. This shows where they have strengths and where there might be space to explore new interventions.

Part 3

Futures scenarios

This phase examines what might change over time in critical areas and how that might affect flooding and the needs of people caught up in the crisis.

Through research ([page 43](#)) and trends analysis ([page 139](#)) you develop a set of scenarios which examine potential futures for flooding and flood response. You also identify some interesting organisations working on new solutions, cutting edge technology or different parts of the system you are trying to influence.

This all fuels the next phase.

Part 4

Innovation

Using design thinking and user-centred innovation approaches, you develop new and useful ideas for services which would thrive in each future scenario.

This stretches your thinking, encouraging systems-level innovation that takes advantage of emerging opportunities while preparing for new risks and different types of vulnerability.

The outcome is a portfolio of new ideas. The most promising can be refined into lean experiments to test key assumptions and build evidence of impact. Over time, these could reshape services or open new space for the NS to operate.

Section C

Find out more about innovation

- [Danish Red Cross Innovation Toolbox](#)
- [IDEO Design Kit](#)
- [Gamestorming](#)
- [ELHRA](#)
- [Design Kit](#)
- [Strategyzer](#)



Generating new momentum: Foresight and leadership



Chapter X

Generating new momentum: Foresight and leadership

Strategic foresight needs good leadership to lift it off the page and turn concepts into concrete action. Positive leadership animates ideas about the future and transforms them into decisions, impact and outcomes for the people we support and the organisations we run.

Leadership means many different things; effective approaches vary with place, time and the kind of choices being made. Power and final decision-making authority may be concentrated in senior roles, potentially allowing for swift action and clarity of vision. Or power may be distributed through the organisation to allow people closest to the problem to make decisions based on their expertise and experience.

In reality, a mixture of styles and different degrees of autonomy are needed as challenges and opportunities arise. Successful leaders know how to flex their approach, when to delegate, and how to make hard choices. They also know how to get the best out of the people they are leading to enhance the project, team or organisation they are responsible for.

It is also vital to recognise that leadership is found throughout our organisations and the communities we support. It is not a job title but the ability to inspire, guide, and influence others as you work together.

Strategic foresight is a critical tool for all leaders, especially in times of complex uncertainty and competing priorities.

To unlock the full potential of foresight requires the organisation to embed the practice in the way it makes decisions and takes action, creating anticipatory governance models. Leadership buy-in is critical. Foresight can then support and enhance work across all areas of the organisation, becoming a cross-cutting capability that benefits everyone.

Section A

Cascading crises

The Red Cross Red Crescent is a crisis response organisation; we are rightly proud of our ability to react fast and help people where and when they need us most. But it is critical that our governance systems are also equipped to anticipate and adapt to new challenges.

Today, the scope of these challenges is complicated by the relentless pace of change. We have arguably shifted from an era of episodic humanitarian crises – with localised conflict, sudden natural disaster or a disease outbreak followed by a period of relative calm – to a period of universal crisis, with no breathing space between emergencies.

Humanitarian organisations recognise that they are dealing with multifaceted, interlaced and cascading issues, with each influencing and complicating the rest. At the same time, new technologies, scientific breakthroughs, shifts in geopolitics and the urgency of climate change add more confusion to the competing priorities.

Faced by these challenges, our sector is racing to reorientate and reorganise. Existing structures, resource flows and decision-making approaches are being retooled. But this often proves to be a slow, hard and frustrating process.

Good leadership is needed at all levels to guide us through. While past experience and clear plans are useful, it is clear that traditional leadership models need to be modified to embrace uncertainty and allow our organisations to manage issues in a much more adaptable, agile way.

“ When winds of change
blow, some build walls and
others build windmills. ”

Proverb

Section B

Anticipatory governance

To fully unlock the power of strategic foresight to support this change, we need to embed it in the way our organisations are run and how we use ideas, money and resources.

These anticipatory governance models will improve the way we identify potential risks and uncertainties, assess them and adjust our activities.

Key features of anticipatory governance include:

1 Foresight and scenario planning

Systematically exploring potential futures and using scenarios in planning processes to better prepare for a variety of outcomes.

2 Risk management

Proactively engaging in risk and opportunities early, and then developing strategies to respond or mitigate the impacts. This improves organisational resilience in the face of sudden shocks. Future risks and emerging issues should be routinely discussed by leaders.

3 Collaboration and stakeholder management

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors, perspectives and specialisms in problem framing, trend analysis and decision making.

4 Adaptive capacity

Creating systems and processes which can change in the face of new circumstances. It means setting up ways to access and distribute resources outside of the historic planning cycles. Adaptive capacity also requires feedback loops and ongoing organisational learning, so we are constantly improving.

5 Technology integration

Enhancing decision making with technology. This includes data analytics, artificial intelligence, and tools to monitor trends, spot patterns and inform decisions.

6 Ethics

Striving to achieve outcomes which are just and sustainable and to reduce the potential for harm as we make plans and initiate new programmes.

7 Long-term perspectives

Anticipatory governance takes a long-term perspective, moving us beyond short-term planning and immediate priorities. The aim is to consider the enduring impact of your choices and to build resilient systems capable of withstanding future shocks.

8 Public engagement

Informing and engaging people so they can contribute valuable insights and support good governance. Engaging with the public on possible futures can also build momentum for change and generate critical support for new approaches which are rooted in community needs and aspirations.

Delivering these changes, and acting on the insights generated, will require visionary leadership willing to dismantle some of the ways we currently work while not losing focus on our core purpose.

Done well, this new governance approach will help us make the analysis of, and engagement with, emerging trends a standard part of the way we understand the world around us so that we are better able to serve the people we support when they need us most.

It will also allow us to apply foresight effectively during sudden shocks – like the Covid-19 pandemic or the conflict in Ukraine – to understand how they might develop and interact with existing humanitarian vulnerabilities.

Critically for leaders, it will allow us to stress test key decisions by considering how they might cope with possible future scenarios, leading to more robust plans and future-ready initiatives.

“ When I talk to managers,
I get the feeling that they
are important. When I talk
to leaders, I get the feeling
that I am important. ”

Alexander den Heijer

AUTHOR AND SPEAKER

Section C

Leadership qualities

Every leader has their own style. There are no hard and fast rules, but there is good practice and critical qualities which will help all leaders.

An IFRC Solferino Academy study sought to understand what kind of leadership will be necessary to successfully navigate the challenges our organisation faces. The research provides a glimpse into the perspectives of IFRC network leaders; over 30 executives from 30 countries participated in in-depth interviews.

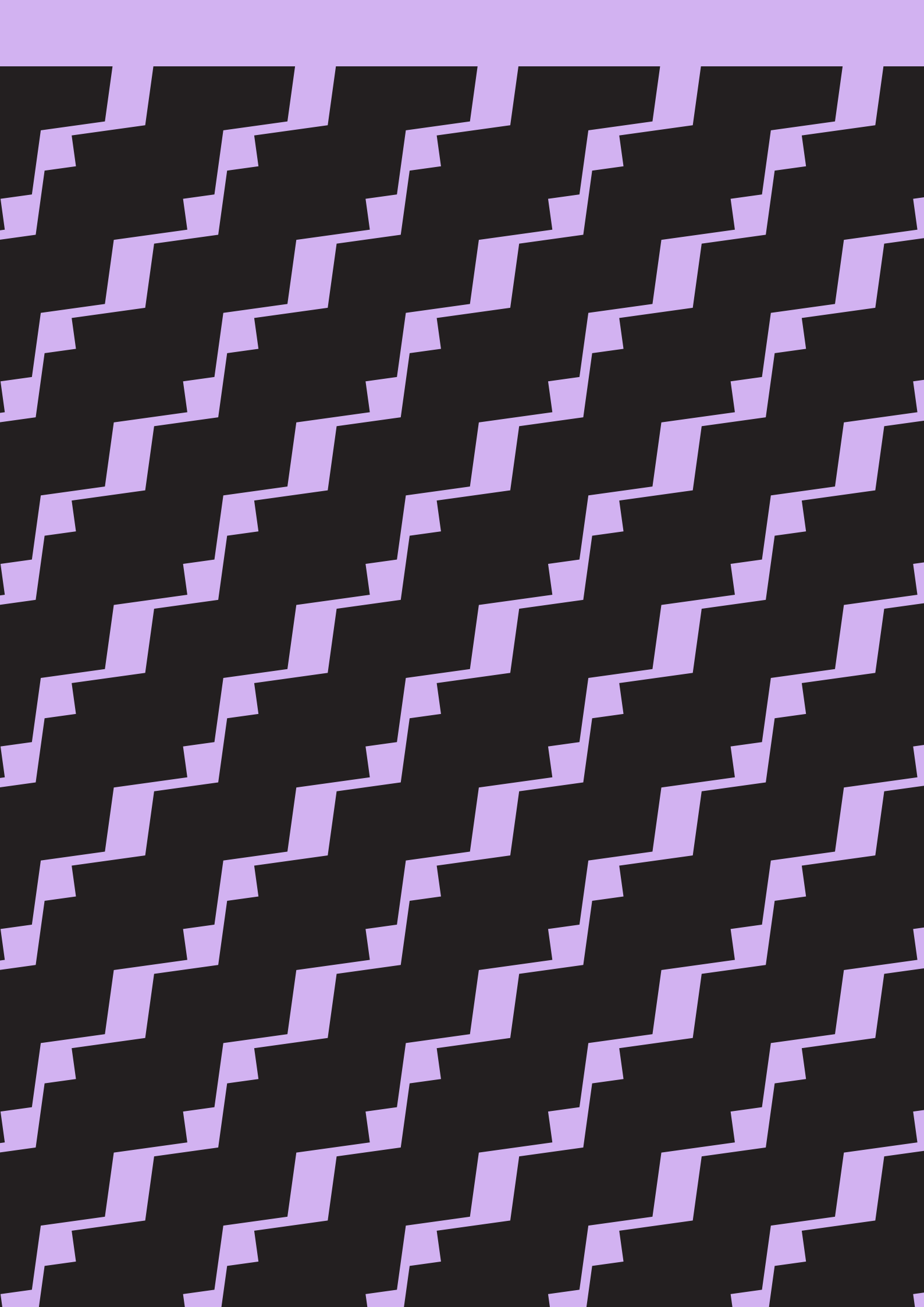
You can [read the full report here](#), which covers a wide range of ideas. But one critical theme that emerged from the interviews was “how to become more anticipatory, innovative and less risk averse in addressing growing humanitarian challenges” as leaders “emphasised the need to systematically analyse the changing environment and to establish mechanisms within our organisations to convert early signals of emerging disruptive trends into decisive action”. Strategic foresight is critical to this ambition.

A set of key leadership principles emerged from the research that could contribute to a new framework for a just, sustainable and future-ready IFRC:

- 1** Leadership that anticipates early signals of change and turns them into opportunities and actions.
- 2** Leadership that is collaborative and intentionally shares power, knowledge and information.
- 3** Leadership that fosters a culture of innovation.
- 4** Leadership that embraces uncertainty, challenges the status quo, and recognizes inaction as one of the most significant risks.
- 5** Leadership that invests time in nurturing others.
- 6** Leadership that includes marginalized and under-represented people in the decision-making and strategy processes.
- 7** Leadership that prioritizes mental health and well-being for others, and for themselves.
- 8** Leadership that engages in self-reflection and ongoing learning

Tip: Run a strategic foresight process to explore the futures of leadership in your organisation. Examine emerging trends ([page 139](#)), create scenarios ([page 167](#)) and consider how your leadership and governance models might need to change to take full advantage of new opportunities and mitigate new risks.

Designing workshops



Chapter XI

Designing workshops

You are asking powerful questions about the future. As you answer them, strategic foresight will help you gather evidence and insights, look for patterns and explore anomalies. You will uncover new questions and spin up scenarios that help you discover new opportunities for action.

Bringing people together in workshops is a critical part of this process. Strategic foresight workshops can be intense, exciting and challenging. People need to be creative and analytical, open to new ideas and willing to challenge each other, engaged with historic trends and connected to individual stories.

You will run different types of session at different points in your process. Foresight sessions can be rapid – an introduction to futures literacy ([page 15](#)) before setting a research challenge to complete in your own time ([page 43](#)), for example – or they can run over several days to dig deep into how emerging trends ([page 139](#)) might interact to shape the future.

This section of our Strategic Foresight Book sets the scene for good workshops and then shares details on lots of different activities. This is what we have learnt running strategic foresight workshops with people all around the world.

Take these ideas and mix them up, adapt them and splice them with your own facilitation style, creative tricks and ways of working.

Section A

General advice

Part 1

Be clear what you want to achieve

Workshops are a critical part of the strategic foresight process; they are how we make all these new ideas useful. But we've all been to workshops that fell flat and felt like a waste of time, so spend time crafting your agenda to make it engaging and impactful.

Start with your founding foresight questions ([page 99](#)) and ask how each workshop will contribute to process of exploring the answers.

Then specify each workshop's purpose before you design the agenda and the pre-work. Are you running an information session to explain strategic foresight? Or seeking new strategic priorities for a specific service? Are you aiming to identify new opportunities for innovation, explore trends or craft scenarios to kick-start the next phase of your foresight work?

Don't try and cram everything in to one session. You will overwhelm people with new concepts and not allow enough space for conversation and creative thinking about the future. Break it down into chunks, with each one leading logically to the next.

Part 2

Invites

When you plan your guest-list, be selective but aim for diversity of perspective, experience and expertise. If everyone in the room thinks the same way you won't uncover exciting new ideas.

There are no strict rules for numbers but if you go above 20 it can get harder to manage. And remember, a one-hour meeting with eight people is actually an entire working days' worth of time when you add it up.

Bringing in external collaborators can be really useful. People with expertise in a particular trend can add depth and detail to the discussions. Others with experience living, working or innovating in specific contexts can add nuance and rigour to the exploration of potential impacts of emerging issues.

Bringing in people with opposing views can also be very powerful, so long as you create a safe and welcoming space in which people can speak honestly and give feedback in good faith.

You must judge if bringing in new people and other organisations will make it harder to discuss sensitive issues or have honest and frank debates. [Chatham House rules](#) are your friend here.

Flex your guest list depending on the purpose of each session.

Part 3

Good communications

Send out clear communications in the run up to the session. Make sure everyone knows when it is happening, where they need to be, what they need to prepare and, most importantly, why you are running the workshop.

If there is pre-work, be clear on what is needed and how long it might take. For example, you might ask people to research a particular trend, bring an example of bleeding-edge innovation, or find companies working at the frontiers of what is currently possible. If you ask for this input, make sure you have a use for it during the workshop.

Keep everyone updated as the date approaches and answer any questions.

Part 4

Online, offline, hybrid and asynchronous

What's the best way to get everyone together? In-person workshops are often the most powerful way to collaborate on foresight projects, so long as you have plenty of space, good light, snacks and strong coffee. But with a little planning, hybrid and online workshops are great too.

We recommend having a dedicated online co-facilitator to manage breakout rooms, send link and fix any technical problems. If it's a hybrid session, they can ensure people who want to speak get a chance to come off mute.

Foresight sessions thrive on imagination and discussion, but it can be hard to replicate the natural flow of conversation online. In each activity, try giving

people a few minutes to think quietly, make notes and organise their thoughts before you start talking.

As you chat, the facilitator can give each person space to speak – it is not always easy to jump in and take the floor online. This also stops the more confident people or common ideas dominating the discussion, which is really helpful for futures work.

Asynchronous workshops are great too. Set up a briefing session to meet everyone, share the objectives and set a task with a deadline (1-4 weeks). We also set 'office hours' every week – a time when we'll be online to offer advice and support.

Everyone goes off to manage the work however they like before coming back together to share in the next session. Then you set another task and away you go.

This flow works well for strategic foresight as it gives people space to do their own research, ponder on the connections, and apply imagination, as long as they have time to work on the foresight task alongside their other jobs.

Part 5

Less is more

Don't try and do too much. You can't plan a workshop down to the minute – you will be behind schedule before you've even said hello.

Foresight sessions often start passionate debates about how changes might affect people and reshape the world, and that is a powerful part of the process.

So, pick your activities for maximum impact and give people plenty of time for breakout groups and discussion. If the workshop is engaging and the exercises are generating ideas, people need space to talk.

You can still set strict times for tasks – we use a big digital clock with an alarm – but let the discussion flow. Be realistic about breaks too – will people really be back in five minutes?

“ Disruption after disruption has forced organizations to shift their strategy, from avoiding change to embracing change”

Sohail Inayatullah

INSTITUTE OF FUTURES STUDIES

Part 6

Set the tone

We try and make our workshops fun as well as productive. We want people to be relaxed and creative as they deal with difficult issues and make hard choices.

Warm-up activities can set the tone (page 113). If you want people to sketch storyboards next, do a drawing warm-up. If you want them to generate ideas, do an invention game.

Another great trick is to ask if anyone in the room wants to run the warm-up. Not only does this give people a chance to shine, it will also teach you lots of new activities for future workshops!

At the beginning of every workshop, we also set some culture guides to encourage free thinking and genuine, constructive collaboration:

- Be creative – let your imagination free.
- Don't self-censor – share your thoughts and questions.
- Build on other people's ideas – use "Yes and..." instead of "No but...".
- Collaborate openly – be kind but challenge each other.

Put the agenda for the day up on the wall, along with the key question you are trying to answer with your foresight work.

Tip: Write each agenda item on a post it – including breaks and lunch – and run it like a backlog, re-prioritising a couple of times in the day.

Part 7

Step-by-step

As you plan your activities, think how one leads logically to the next.

You might start with some futures literacy (page 15) activities to help people understand how they see the future, then use the futures triangle (page 131) before moving onto 2 × 2 grids (page 181) and then scenario writing (page 167).

Part 8

Take a break

Breaks are just as important as action. People need time to process their thoughts, have a chat with the colleagues and refresh themselves.

Don't squeeze them too much – we recommend 15 minute minimum – and give people a five-minute warning before they end.

Part 9

Give up the floor

Even the most amazing and engaging presenter gets a little tiring if they are the only person who speaks all day. Build in plenty of space for discussion and let the participants lead.

It is a good idea to have some prompt question ready to encourage deeper conversations or to spark new ideas if the conversation dries up.

If you can, mix up the presenters – it helps them get a break as well as making it more interesting for the audience.

Part 10

Bring out the witnesses

Another great way to keep the energy up is to bring in experts from other organisation or people with powerful lived experience.

Hearing stories from new perspective can really power up the room. Add time for Q&A if you can.

Part 11

Be flexible

Even the best laid plans can go wrong. And sometime the activities that went down a storm in the last workshop falls flat this time.

So, don't be scared to change the plans; if it isn't working, move on and try something else.

Part 12

Breakout and work the room

Breakout groups are brilliant when the task is clear and people are open and engaged. They work especially well in foresight session as you want to spin up multiple possible futures.

Once the groups are hard at work, go round make sure everyone is happy, listen in to what they are saying and answer any questions they have.

“ Foresight turns out to be
a critical adaptive strategy
for times of great stress. ”

Jamais Casco

AUTHOR AND FUTURIST

Part 13

Clear outcomes and next steps

We've all been there; it's been a brilliant workshop generating loads of new ideas and getting excited about the possibilities... but then nothing happens.

Make sure you leave time to revisit the objectives of the session, to agree on next steps, and to allocate any actions.

Part 14

The emotional journey

Strategic foresight work is hard. We can be excited about the possibilities then overwhelmed by the challenges, we have moments of inspiration and times when we feel lost.

Some groups focus on dystopian futures, where everything is terrible, and need to be encouraged to think about hope, optimism and new possibilities. Others are convinced technology will save us or human kindness will triumph and refuse to consider the alternatives we might need to prepare for.

Good foresight explores all the possibilities, and this is not always easy.

Be honest about the emotional side. Keep your eye on the energy in the room, the body language and excitement. If people are starting to burn out, have a break. Do a one-word check in to see how everyone is feeling.

Open the floor for a chat about the emotional journey – and remind them that by the time they finish, they'll be full of enthusiasm for the possibilities of the future.

Part 15

Other ideas for your consideration

Chair for future generations

When we are applying foresight, we are thinking about the future and how we can be good ancestors for the people that come next, and people caught up in humanitarian crises.

It can be useful to leave an empty chair at the table to represent future generations.

During discussions and debates, address the chair and ask people in the room to imagine what future generations might have to say about their plans.

Mood and music

It can be very helpful to differentiate the space for strategic foresight sessions from business-as-usual meetings.

People need to think creativity and be open to new ideas, so music, decoration and lighting can play a powerful role. Images and artefacts from the future can also stimulate new ideas and shift people into a futures mindset (page 67).

Getting stuck

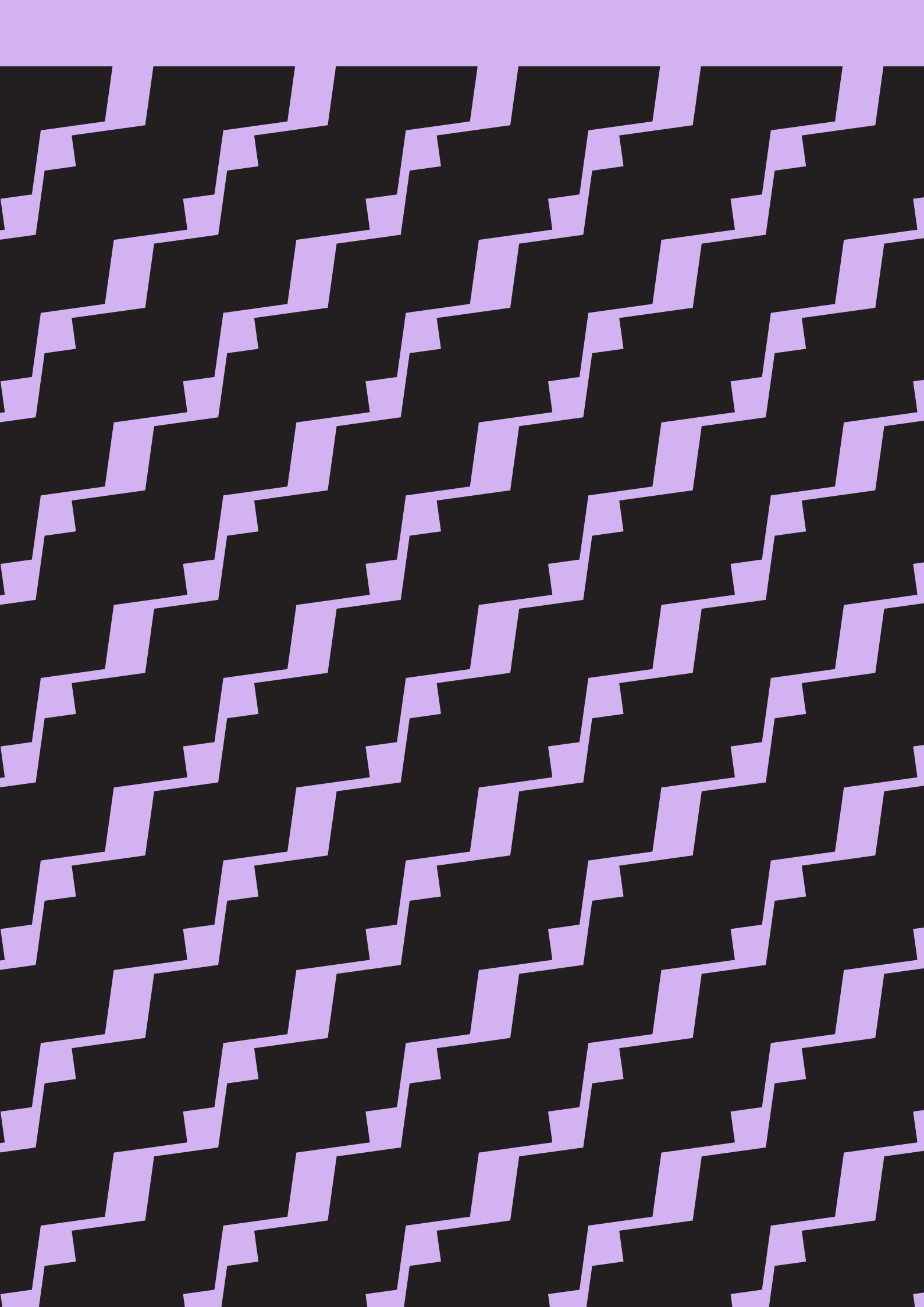
Sometimes people just don't grasp the purpose of an exercise or how it might contribute to real world action.

Be ready to explain the activities in different ways, using successful examples from other projects where possible. Equally, sometimes you need to move to something else, take a break or try a different approach.

Help and support

If you want any help designing workshops, refining agendas or learning how to use specific activities, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the [Solferino Academy Strategic Foresight](#) team.

We are always very happy to help.



Warm-up activities



Chapter XII

Warm-up activities

Love them or hate them, warm up activities are usually unavoidable in workshops. But they don't have to be embarrassing revelations about hidden skills or awkward attempts to find out your neighbour's favourite cheese. Good warm-up activities can be a really powerful way to connect people, set the tone for the session and to share a quick insight into strategic foresight.

Section A

Why do we do warm-ups?

You want your workshops to be creative and productive. It's really important for people to feel welcome and connected to the other participants so they are willing to share their ideas and work together.

This is particularly important in strategic foresight because not everyone feels immediately comfortable or confident talking about the future. And when people feel vulnerable, they are more likely to reject new concepts or dismiss novel ideas.

Strategic foresight workshops can also be very intense, with lots of new information and challenging activities, so you need a break to re-energise and wake up, especially after lunch.

Good warm-ups can also be a teaching opportunity and a chance for the facilitators to get a sense of the energy and opinions in the room, which helps them adjust their delivery.

Expert tip: In longer workshops, ask if anyone in the room would like to lead the warm-up. This not only takes pressure off the facilitators, it also lets people share their skills. And you will definitely pick up some new activities you can use in future sessions.

Section B

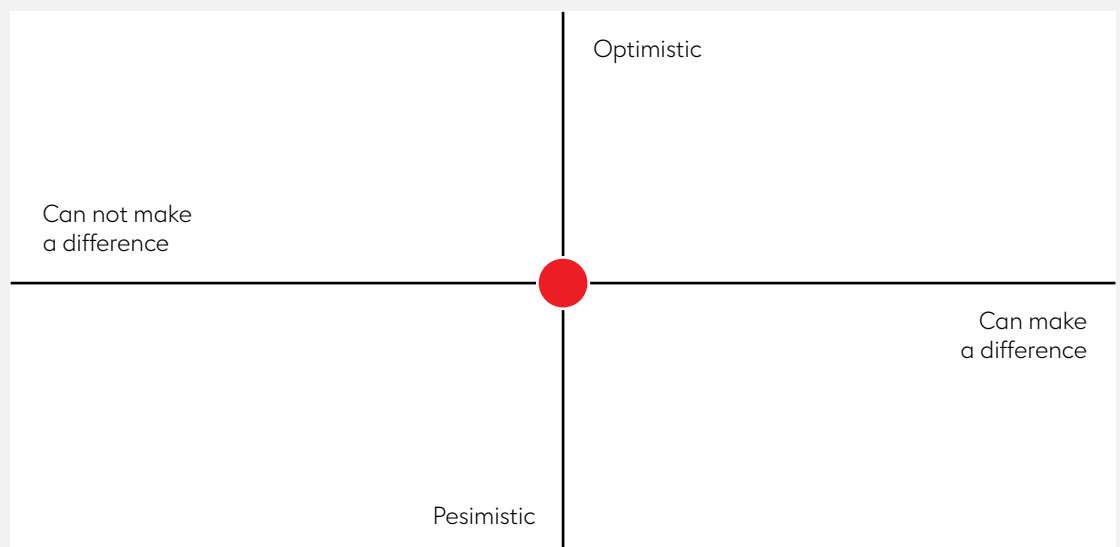
Warm-up ideas

Part 1

The Polak Game

This is a great way to start the day and make introductions. You can run it in several ways, but they all use the same structure:

- Ask people to relax and think about the future, connecting to the emotions it immediately triggers. Ask them to imagine the world in 10 years, 20 years... there is no right or wrong, just the feelings that emerge.
- Ask people to place themselves on this grid, moving up towards the top if they feel optimistic about the future, and down if they feel pessimistic. The further you go in any direction shows how strongly you feel about it.



- Next, ask them to move left or right, depending on whether they feel they can make a difference to future or not.
- In smaller groups, you can then go round and ask people to introduce themselves and share where they are on the grid and why. For larger groups you can use a show of hands for each quadrant.

- **Variations:**

Get up and move about: Line everyone up in the middle of the room and ask them to move around the space to show where they are on the grid.

As clusters form, give them a few minutes to talk about why they chose that spot. Then each cluster get a minute to convince the rest of the room why they are right. Whoever gets most people to move to their spot 'wins'.

Larger groups: If there are too many people to move about or do individual introductions, ask for a show of hands.

Move around the grid asking, "Who feels optimistic and like they can make a difference?" Then "Who feels pessimistic but that they can make a difference?"

You can even colour code the grid and have pieces of coloured paper on the tables. Ask people to introduce themselves to their neighbour or table and share their thoughts.

Online: Colour coding works well online too. People can share the colour in the chat or hold up something that colour to the camera. You could even use emojis.

Tip: Make this light-hearted and fun and let the conversation flow.

- **Learning point:** This exercise shows that everyone already thinks about the future and has strong feelings about it. It is a good starting point for a discussion on futures literacy or an introduction to strategic foresight.

It is also a good activity to revisit as you move through the strategic foresight process, as our connection to the future changes depending on our emotional state, energy or even the kind of day we are having.

In humanitarian and civil society organisations, we have noticed that most people are on the right-hand side – they feel that they can make a difference. We think this is because they work for organisations focused on social issues.

But not everyone feels like that – ask if they know how their service users feel about the future and how they might help people feel more optimistic, or support plans they have to make a difference.

This can trigger an interesting discussion about how to engage end-users and communities as you explore possible futures.

“ The rise and fall of images of the future preceded or accompanied the rise and fall of cultures. As long as the society’s image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive. This is, arguably, one of the most important tenets of Futures Studies. ”

Fred Polak

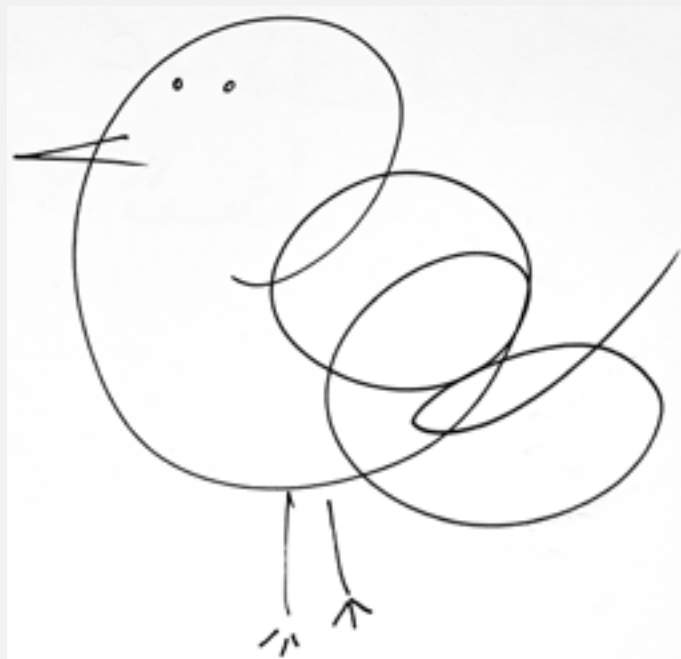
FUTURIST AND INVENTOR OF THE POLAK GAME

1 One boring fact

A classic warm up activity is to “share something interesting or unusual about yourself”. This can cause panic, so we flipped it. Asking participants to tell you something boring about themselves is a much more fun warm-up.

Start by sharing something boring about yourself: “I don’t like wearing socks, so I take them off as soon as I come in the house.” Or “I like to watch videos of people painting walls”. It should be something honest, ordinary and – at first glance – boring.

You’ll be surprised what people come up with and the laughter it triggers. **But there is a serious learning point:** A positive future is made up of ordinary, everyday moments; people living their lives with the safety and security to enjoy the ‘boring’ moments that come with routine, family life and freedom from fear (and the support to survive the challenges).



2 Squiggle birds

Good strategic foresight workshops are creative. But a lot of people will tell you they aren’t creative, especially when it comes to drawing.

This warm-up – which we picked up from the amazing [Game Storming site](#) – proves them wrong!

- Tell everyone to grab a piece of paper and pen and do some squiggles. The facilitator should do the same, on a white board or flip chart if there is one, or just on paper if not.
- Once the squiggles are done, reveal the challenge: Give them one minute to turn all the squiggles into birds by drawing beaks, legs and wings.
- If they are eager for more, ask them to doodle some more and turn the squiggles into anything they like – you'll be amazed what comes out.
- **Learning point:** Humans are amazingly creative. Even a quick sketch can carry a lot of meaning and be understood by others, so don't fret about your drawing skills when you do storyboards or sketch concepts.
- Also, we are really good at spotting patterns and finding meaning in a mess of information, which is really helpful in strategic foresight.

3 Reinvention

As a facilitator you want people to be really push their imagination and challenge themselves to come up with new ideas. Thoughts should be jumping around in their brain like popcorn in a pan.

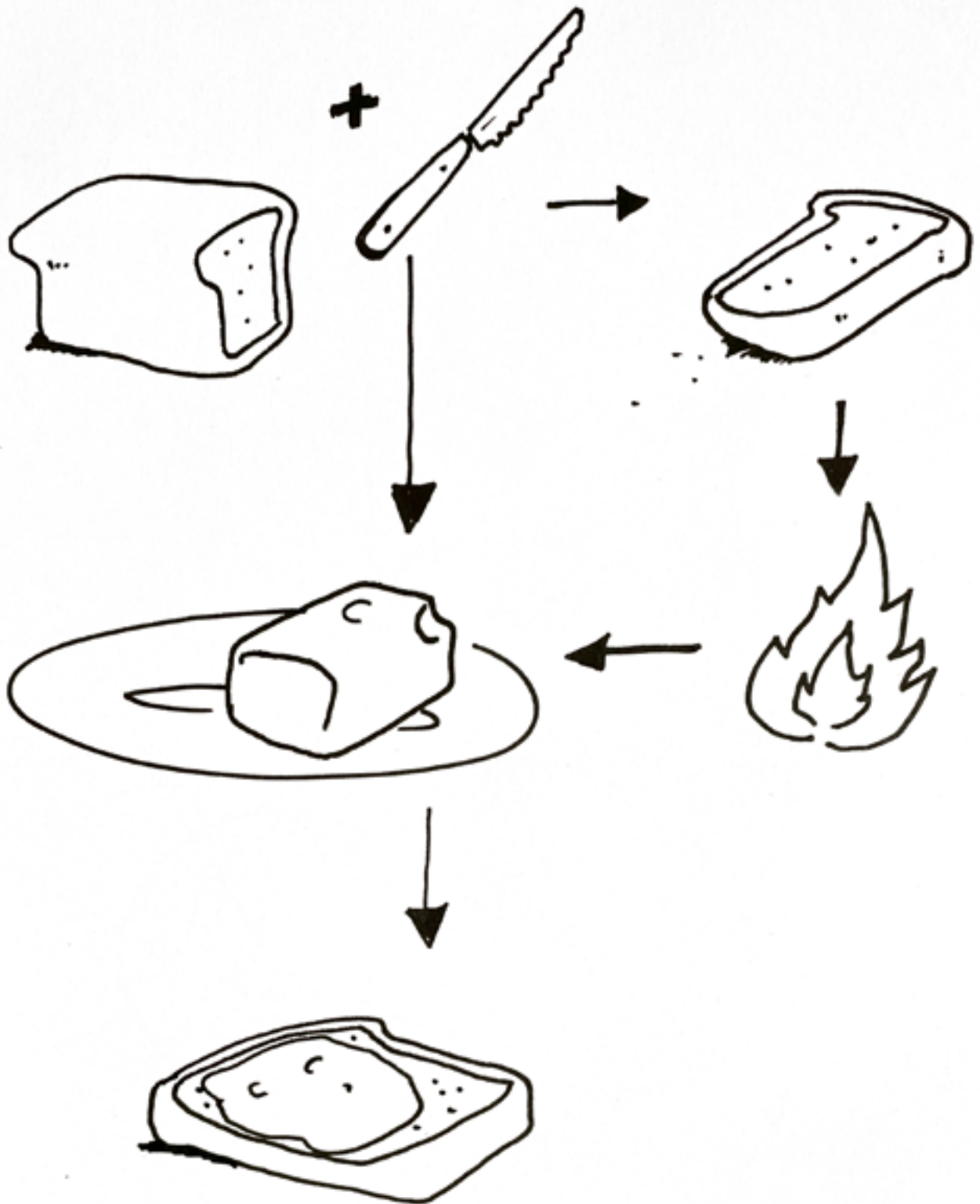
A simple warm up is the reinvention exercise, which works well as individuals or in teams:

- Pick an everyday object – a paper-clip, pen, hairbrush, spoon, cup, hat – and stick a picture on the screen or give every group or person one to play with.
- Give them three minutes to come up with as many different uses for the object as possible, with a prize for the person with the most ideas.
- For example, a paper clip could be a zipper replacement, an ear-piercing device, a phone stand, a lock pick, a ring, a fish-hook, a photo holder, a walking stick for a mouse...
- Ask people to share how many they came up with and their favourite idea.
- **Learning point:** Humans are incredibly inventive and can imagine all sorts of possibilities very quickly. We need to harness this for our foresight work. Learning to push yourself to come up with more ideas and to stretch your thinking is critical.

“ At its core, creative confidence is about believing in your ability to create change in the world around you. ”

Tom Kelley

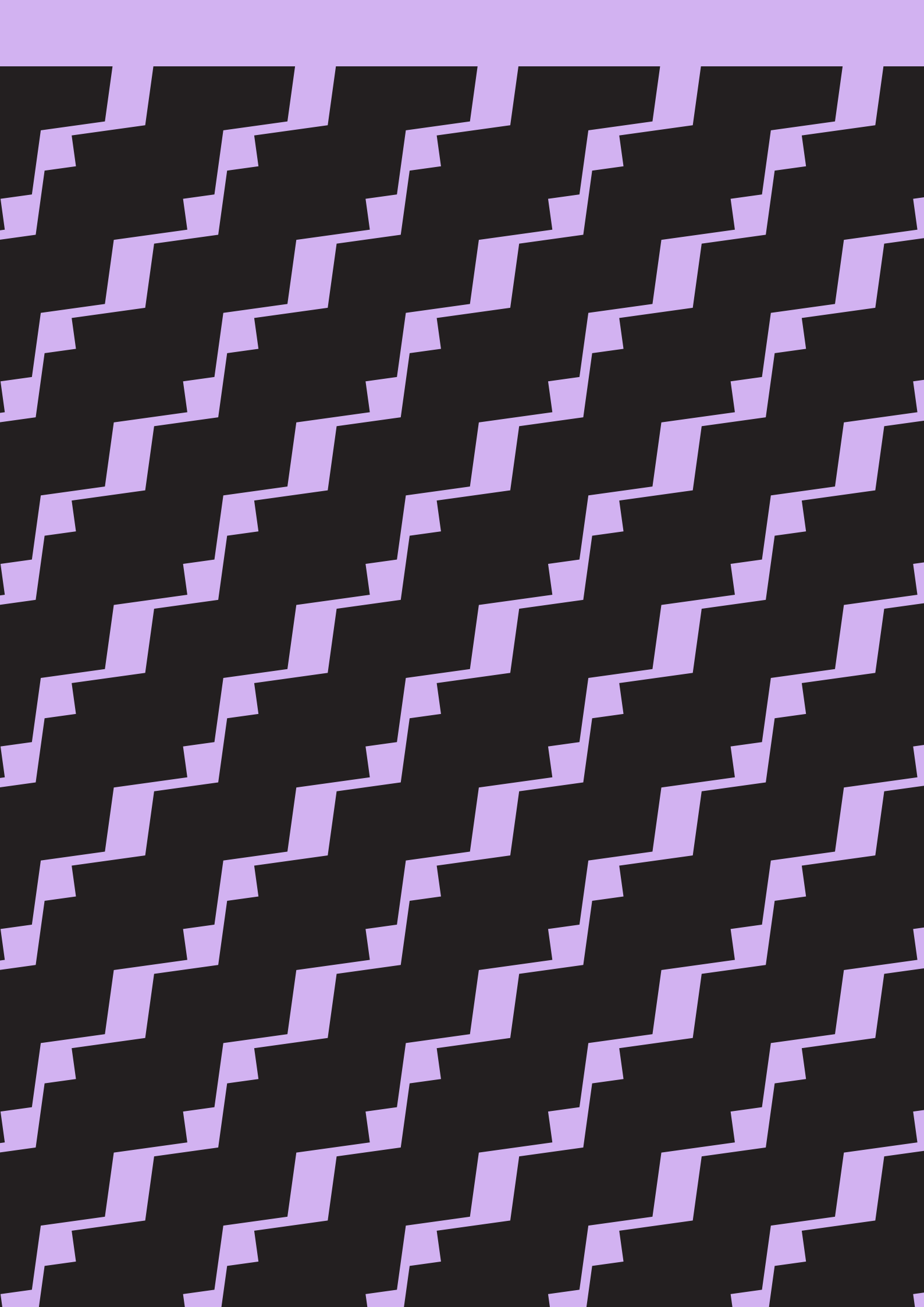
IDEO



4 Drawing toast

This is a great warm-up at any time, but it is particularly good when you are about to draft scenarios or start creating possible solutions.

- Check everyone knows what a piece of toast is and how to make it (not everyone eats it regularly so definitely check). If not, switch to coffee or something else common to all.
- Give everyone three minutes to draw the instructions for making toast. They can do it anyway they like but they have to be clear enough for someone who's never made a slice to complete the task.
- Time's up! Ask them to share with their neighbours, swapping drawings and seeing if the instructions make sense.
- Choose a few to share with the room. The trick is to get contrasting examples – someone might do a logical flow, someone else might do a single picture, another might start with planting the wheat seeds...
- **Learning point:** We all explain our ideas differently and focus on different parts of complex systems. We all need different kinds of inputs to make sense of things. Bear these different styles in mind as you collaborate and create new possible futures.



Community consultation: Storytelling session

“ To change the future, we need to change the story. Not just the story itself and who it is about, but also, who imagines the story and who gets to tell it. These new stories must have the power to break the spell of the old ones. ”

Pupul Bisht

DECOLONIZING FUTURES INITIATIVE

Chapter XIII

Community consultation: Storytelling session

When we consult with people about the future, we have to get creative, moving beyond surveys and clipboards, formal meetings and feedback forms. If the future is fuelled by imagination and participation, we need to find new ways to spark ideas and capture new possibilities.

This activity is a good addition to your strategic foresight research. It is a great way to engage with communities in collaboration with your colleagues in community engagement and service delivery teams.

It starts with stories. Everyone tells stories; it is how we connect and share information, make plans and mobilise for change. Stories are a powerful way to connect to possible futures:

Part 1

Set up and preparation

- 1 Once you have your founding foresight questions (page 33) and your initial trends research (page 139), you will start to spot things which

could have a big impact on the future. These priority areas and insights need to be explored, tested and expanded.

Agree on the issues you want to examine first.

- 2** Identify a community who could be impacted as the priority trends develop or speak to people already experiencing the changes.

For example, if climate change could impact agriculture and access to water in a currently secure region, you could speak to people in that area now.

Or if changes in migration profiles could have a dramatic national impact over time, look for somewhere where these changes are already happening to learn from people at the forefront of this emerging trend.

Or if it is about rethinking what new skills and capabilities may be needed in staff recruitment into the future of an NS, gather people from the organisation who may impact or be impacted by such changes.

- 3** Connect with the local Red Cross Red Crescent branch and community members to organise these sessions. We recommend suggesting key groups you would like to hear from and refining this by listening to people with deep local connections.

For example, this could be elderly people, youth, community leaders or traditionally excluded and marginalised groups, which will vary from place to place.

- 4** The conversations might be facilitated by community members, local Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers, or visitors for outside the organisation.

Whoever is hosting the conversation, on the day, make sure that everyone understands the project or work and its purpose. Emphasise that it is about exploring their thoughts on the changes they have experienced and the changes they would like to see in the future.

- 5** Break out into separate groups, one for each of the demographics. Doing this allows people to speak more freely, especially if there are local power dynamics and hierarchies, such as deference to elders or strict gender roles.

- 6 We recommend having more than one facilitator per group. One can ask questions while another takes notes and helps to ensure everyone has a chance to speak. Set an informal tone, so everyone is relaxed and the conversation can flow.
- 7 If you intend to record or publish any of the quotes, make sure you have consent.

Part 2

Running the session

- 1 The session will be based on stories. Move from the past, through the present and out into the future. Focus on the founding question of your strategic foresight project (for example futures of food security) but be open to changes of direction.

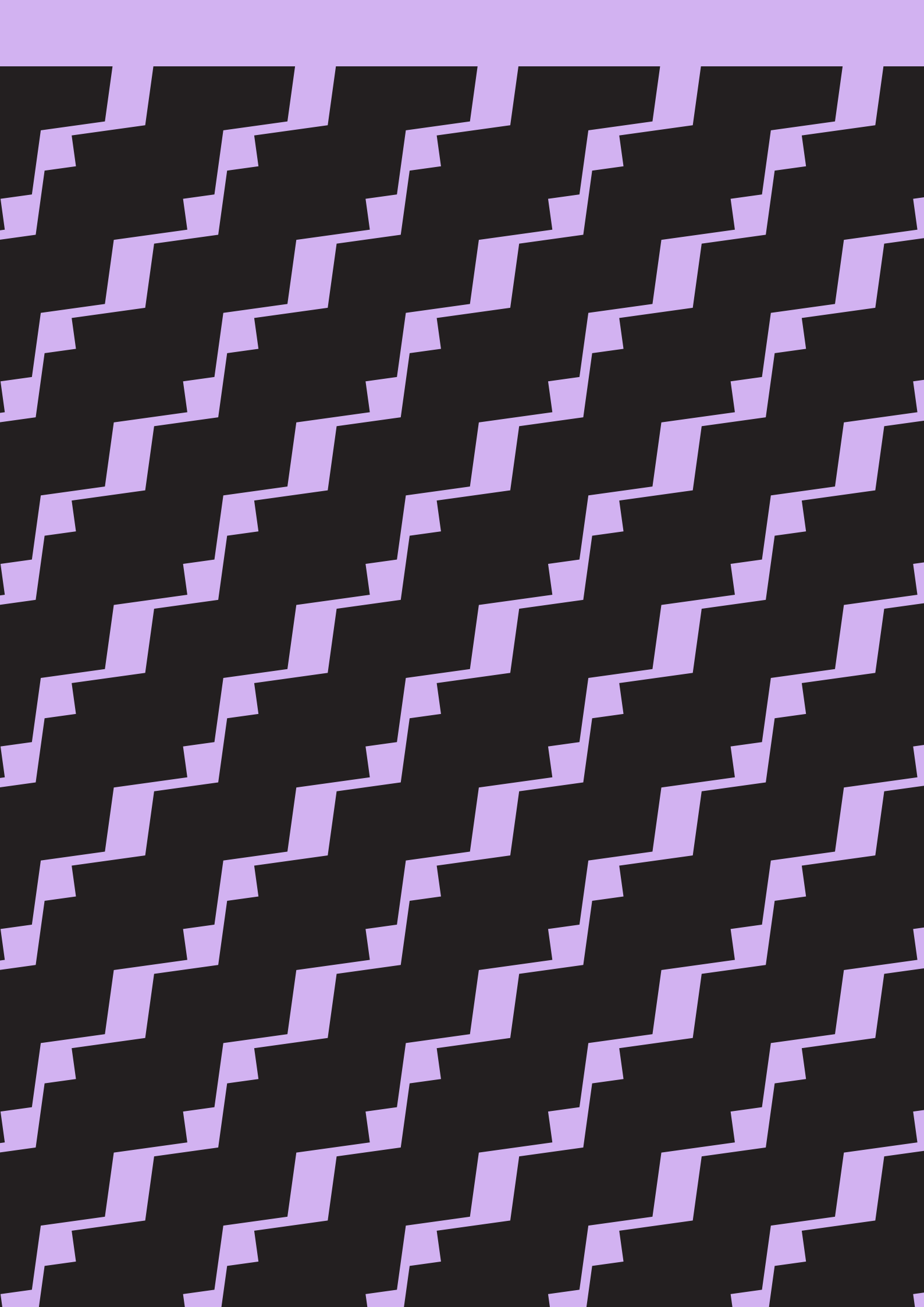
These questions are guides but you should allow the ideas to flow and adjust as you go, digging into issues and asking others for their opinions and ideas:

- a What do you remember from your childhoods which is different now **[IN FOCUS AREA]**?
- b What stories did your parents and grandparents tell you about their childhood, and what has changed?
- c When you were younger, what were your hopes for the future?
- d How do you see **[PRIORITY TREND]** impacting your community? Can you give me an example from your life?
- e How do you see **[PRIORITY TREND]** changing over time – what could it be like for your children? Tell me a story about their lives.
- f What do you hope will be different for your grandchildren and future generations in this community?
- g What do you worry might happen, and how might that be experienced by future generations?
- h What could make the future more secure for your community? What would life be like?
- i How might **[SERVICE]** change so that it is ready for the challenges of the future?

- 2** Allow the conversation to flow. Let people share their stories, build on each other's ideas and explore interesting topics as they arise.
- 3** After the breakout session, bring everyone back together and share some interesting ideas from each group (being careful not to share anything with may cause tension or conflict between the groups, although honest discussion and debate is encouraged).
- 4** Explain the next steps in your project. These insights and ideas will be added to the desk research and input from external experts. They will help us imagine and explore possible futures so that we can improve the way we work and the services we provide.
- 5** If you intend to continue this engagement over time, explain how people can stay involved.

After the workshop, analyse the insights and add them to your research and workshop plans. They can help develop personas (page 187), understand the system you are trying to influence (page 55), and drive ideation sessions (page 231), as well as many other things.

Futures Triangle



Chapter XIV

Futures Triangle

The challenges and opportunities we find in the future do not appear out of nowhere. They are driven by present trends and the decisions we make today, and they are rooted in the past and deeply influenced by history.

The Futures Triangle is a great tool to look at your challenge from these three perspectives – the past, present and future.

This activity can be a really good starting point for people who are new to futures and foresight, so it works very well in workshops.

Section A

How do you use the Futures Triangle?

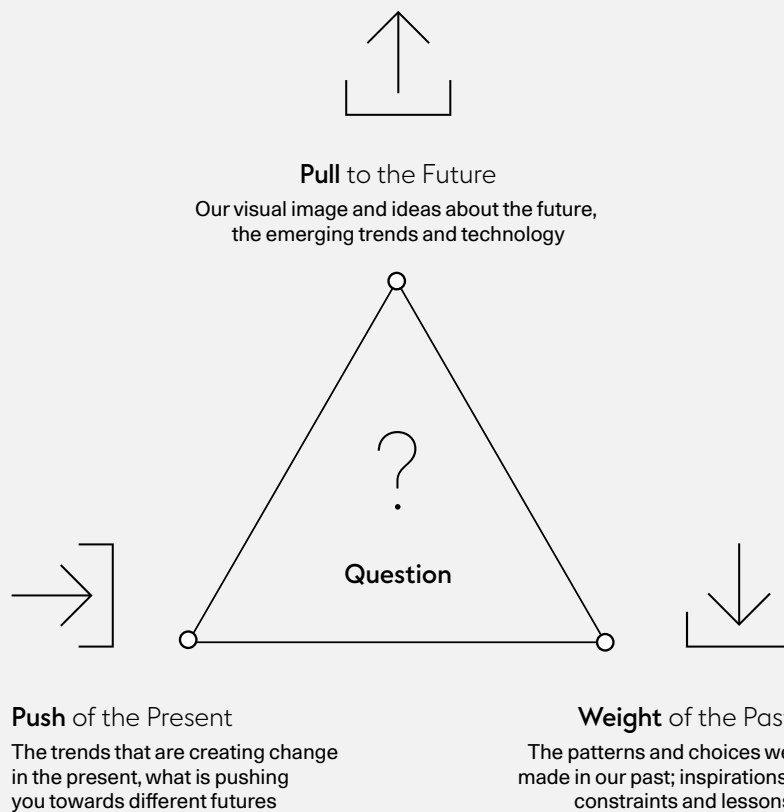
The Futures Triangle is essentially a trigger for an interesting discussion about your challenge. It works best in small breakout groups of up to five people.

Before you go into smaller groups, explain the question (page 33) which is the foundation of your strategic foresight project. Make sure everyone knows what this question is and has a chance to talk about it. (Write it on the wall or in a slide so everyone can see it as they work).

Introduce the Futures Triangle framework. It is a simple tool to help us look at our challenge from three different perspectives:

- **The push of the present** – This is a chance to talk about which trends are creating change in the present, what is pushing us towards different futures, what is happening today, and what can you influence?

- **The pull of the future** – This is where you consider the different possibilities, your visions of the future, the images and ideas that are already in your mind, the emerging trends and technologies you think will impact the world, the forces that may shape the future... and your hopes and fears.
- **The weight of the past** – Decisions made in the past shape today. Some things hold us back – whether that’s inequalities rooted in historic events or problems in our organisation caused by traditions, legacies, old ways of working, the culture or old notions about our purpose. Other things have taught us important lessons or laid the foundations for real progress.



Future Triangle

Now explain the task for the breakout groups and set a time limit. We recommend at least 20 minutes for the breakout task, and more if the conversation is flowing and people are engaged.

Each group must discuss the question from each perspective in turn – the past the present and the future. Make it clear each group will have a chance to feedback at the end so they should capture notes and be ready to share their thoughts.

These prompt questions are very useful, but stress that the groups can talk about anything they like as they explore each area:

Present

- 1 Which trends that are emerging today might be influential in the future?
- 2 What do we need to find out more about now to better understand possible futures?

Future

- 3 What is our current vision for the future?
- 4 What are our hopes and fears for the future?
- 5 What surprises might be in store for us?

Past

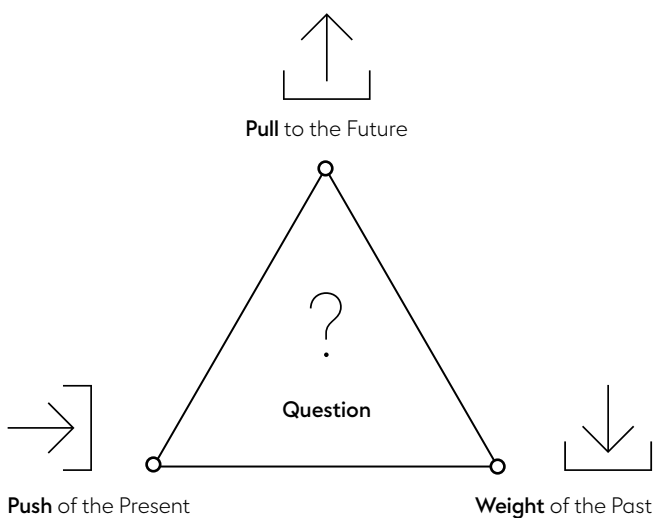
- 6 Which behaviour or systems from our past do we want to get rid of?
- 7 What have we learnt from our past successes or failures?

Tip: As they work, help them dig deeper by asking questions at each step of the way:

- But why might it be like that? What contributed to it?
- What else might be influencing that?
- What is another way that might turn out?
- What unintended consequences might there be when that happens?
- How might those things interact with each other?
- What other perspectives might people have on that idea?
- What changes might that cause in other areas (social systems, economic or technology, for example)?
- Have you got examples of that...?

As a facilitator, you should let the conversation flow but be ready to step in and help explore new ideas if needed. Listen first, as you move around the room, and gently prompt the groups to share more ideas.

It can be useful to put all this information on one slide so they can refer to it as they work:



1. Which trends that are emerging today might be influential in the future?
2. What do we need to find out more about now to better understand possible futures?
3. What is our current vision for the future?
4. What are our hopes and fear for the future?
5. Which behaviour or systems from our past do we want to get rid of?
6. What have we learnt from our past successes or failures?

Focus

Over the next 7 years, how might the Red Cross Red Crescent evolve into a future-ready, foresight-enabled network, leveraging its global reach to identify and respond to emerging humanitarian challenges?

After the breakout session finishes, bring everyone back together for a discussion. Capture any interesting ideas and useful insights. This is a good chance for people to share competing visions for the future and highlight different trends.

“ To think in terms of
the future, you must
have a past. ”

Bangambiki Habyarimana

COMMUNITY LEADER AND AUTHOR

Section B

What next?

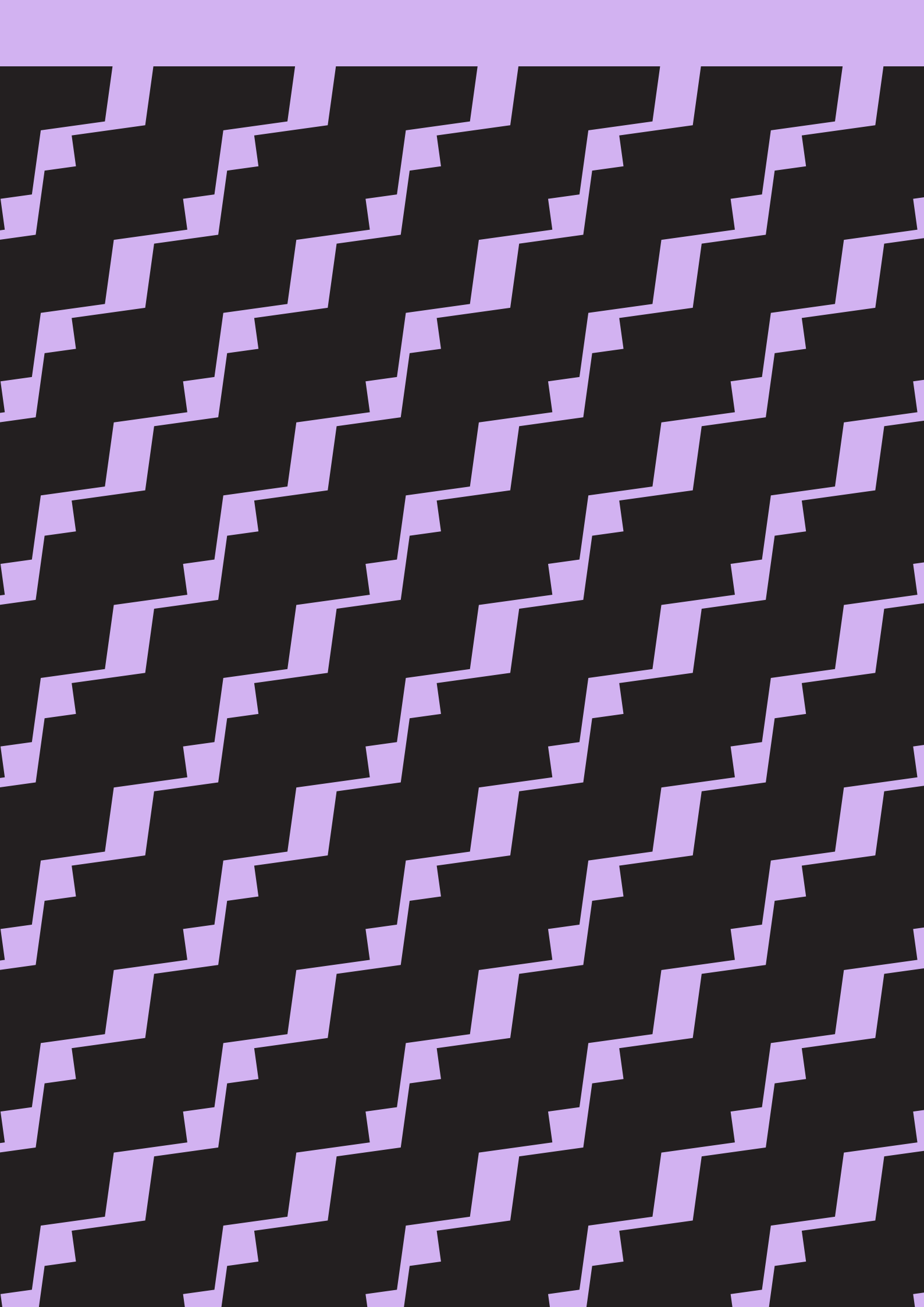
Often this activity leaves people with a lot of questions and a desire to find out more about the trends that are influencing the world. It can also lead to realisation about changes they'd like to see in the way their organisation works.

You can ask people to share a concrete action they will take (such as researching a trend, contacting an expert in a particular area, or setting up a meeting to discuss a change in a work process).

It also leads nicely on to other strategic foresight activities, such as systems mapping ([page 157](#)) and 2 × 2 grids ([page 181](#)).

Finally, this can be a really good activity to repeat if you are running a foresight project over several weeks or months. By revisiting the Futures Triangle, people can see how far their thinking has progressed and how their vision for the future has matured and grown.

Using trend cards



Chapter XV

Using trend cards

Trend cards stretch people's thinking and introduce new ideas about what the future could be. They come in many shapes and sizes – from flash cards to dense documents – but they all showcase emerging trends and provocative ideas about how they might impact the world.

The trends might already be affecting the world today, or the trend cards may draw together weak signals and propose a possible trajectory.

Trend cards are useful because they inject new ideas in your discussions. They help us move beyond the obvious trends that are already in the news or the political agenda. By considering how these trends might change the world, you can explore possible futures and look at your challenge from different perspectives.

Section A

Some definitions

First, let's revisit some key terms:

- **Megatrend:** A global, long-term transformative force that profoundly shapes and impacts societies, economies, and industries across multiple areas of human life. Several trends, amplified and spread by drivers of change, make up a megatrend.
- **Drivers of change:** The forces which shape and amplify trends so they have an impact. Drivers are dynamic and interconnected. They include things like shifts in attitudes and awareness, as well as economic and technological forces with influence how something spreads and grows.

- **Trend:** A measurable change in a situation, sector or behaviour which is developing and becoming more common.
- **Weak signals:** Subtle and often early indicators of emerging trends or disruptions that have the potential to significantly impact the future but may not yet be widely recognized or understood.

Section B

Where to find trend cards

You can create your own trend cards, which is very useful if you are examining a specific region, crisis or service area, for example. It is time consuming, but it can be very helpful to focus in on critical issues tailored to your challenge.

The Solferino Academy can help you create customised trend cards. We have produced several sets to support different strategic foresight projects, using our own researchers and an external network of thinkers and change makers.

You can also work with the different communities ([page 139](#)) and participants who are part of your strategic foresight process.

Running activities like the Futures Triangle ([page 131](#)) can surface interesting trends to explore further. Or a brainstorming session can generate a huge number of trends and signals which the group can then filter, connect and prioritise.

Another option is to provide example of megatrends and then ask people to research, brainstorm or run consultation sessions ([page 139](#)) to map trends and weak signals onto them. This can be done as group, as pre-work or asynchronously, so you build up a map of trends and evidence together while working separately but collating your ideas in a digital space, or even a wall in your office if you all work in the same location.

Lots of other organisations also produce high quality trend analysis, such as Sitra and the Future Today Institute's annual tech trends report. Dig deeper into specialist organisations to find resources to use in your own strategic foresight work.

“ Weak signals are like puzzle pieces scattered across different domains. It’s the art of connecting those pieces and forming a coherent picture that allows us to anticipate and prepare for future developments. ”

Amy Webb

CEO OF THE FUTURE TODAY INSTITUTE

Section C

How to use trend cards

You can use trend cards in lots of different ways to provoke discussion and trigger new ideas.

In the real world, trends interact and influence each other, creating unexpected new issues or overwhelming the systems we've put in place to deal with change and crisis.

So, while it is very useful to examine and understand trends in isolation, the real power is in considering how they overlap and clash, tangle and confuse each other, accelerate and intensify as they become more complex.

Applying your futures literacy (page 15) thinking and understanding how to draw insights for messy data and imagined possibilities is critical.

These activities can help you get started.

Part 1

Here, there everywhere

Participants choose a trend card (you can do this as individuals or small groups). Read the card and think about how it might impact the challenge which is the focus of your strategic foresight work.

Discuss:

- How might this trend develop during the time period your strategic foresight project is exploring?
- What existing humanitarian issues could it impact?
- How might this trend create new vulnerabilities?
- How might this trend create new opportunities?
- How might **[YOUR TEAM/COMMUNITY/THE IFRC NETWORK ETC.]** responds to new risks and opportunities?

Organise and prioritise your thoughts and then share:

- **HERE:** What are the key challenges and new demands you may face in your area of responsibility?
- **THERE:** What challenges do you think other parts of the **[TEAM/ ORGANISATION/REGION/COMMUNITY ETC.]** may face as a result of this trend?
- **EVERYWHERE:** What is an issue or opportunity everyone should be thinking about?

You can stop here or continue the activity by combining trends. You can do this by asking two groups to work together on the next task, or by asking each group or individual to choose a second trend (then a third, fourth and on as time allows).

After reading and discussing the new trend, ask:

How might the challenges, vulnerabilities and demands you have already identified impact this second trend?

How might this second issue influence the first trend you discussed?

Does the interaction of these two trends create new risks or opportunities?

Everyone then uses the 'Here, there, everywhere' format to feedback to the workshop.

Part 2

Strategic planning

Trend cards can be very useful in strategy and planning sessions. Each National Society (NS) has its own way of developing annual plans and longer-term vision for delivering Strategy 2030. You can introduce trend cards to this process to uncover new options for action.

The trick is to make the outcome of your trend card workshop connect smoothly with the existing planning process. The aim is to add useful new ideas and identify areas for further research. Speak to the people responsible for strategy development and align the outcomes of the workshop with their process.

Invite key stakeholders to the session. These should be people involved with developing the NS strategy and delivering its services.

Before the workshop, identify the organisation's current strategic priorities (with help from the strategy team, senior leaders or existing documentation). These priorities will shape the agenda as you will look at each one in turn.

Prepare for the session by printing each strategic priority on a separate piece of paper, as well as your trend cards. (You can share these digitally if everyone can access the documents during breakout group discussion).

In the workshop, get everyone warmed-up and explain the session, then split them into breakout groups. The first task is to focus on strategic priority one. Each group must identify and present:

Priority drivers: Which two to three trends could have the greatest impact on this strategic priority and why?

Digging deeper: What further research or analysis is needed to understand the impact of these trends on your local strategic priorities?

Service impact: How might you adapt your services or ways of working to respond to the trends? What new services might be needed?

Share back and then repeat this activity for each strategic priority. The outcome will be a set of critical questions for each strategic priority, and a list of potential ways to navigate the challenges and opportunities these trends present.

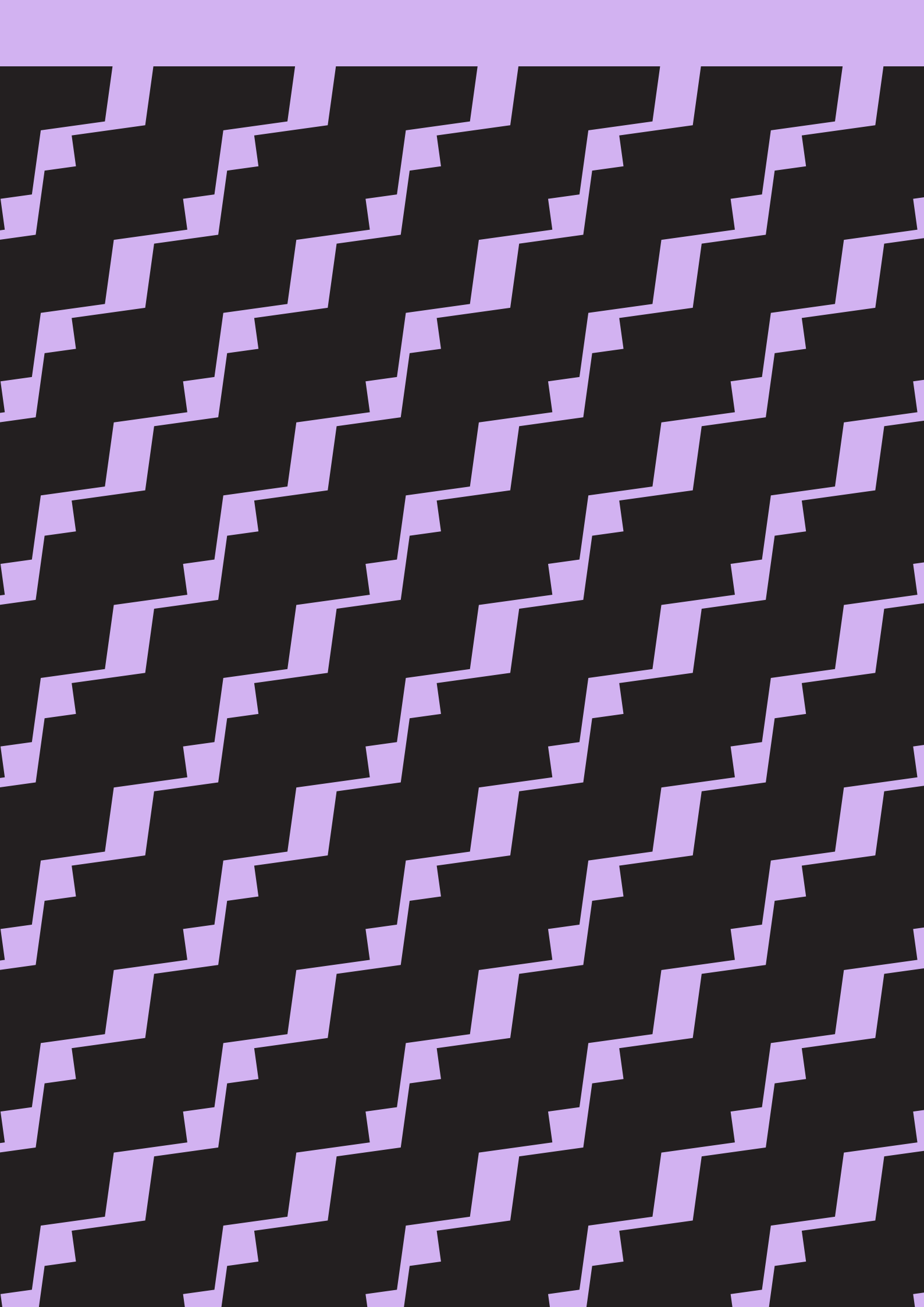
Part 3

Other activities

Trend cards are useful in several of the activities outlined in this book. Use them in 2 × 2 grids ([page 181](#)), Roots and Routes ([page 197](#)), and scenario development ([page 167](#)).

Sitra also offers lots of good ideas on how to use trend cards.

Icon cards



Chapter XVI

Icon cards

The future is not fixed but we can be certain that people will still face humanitarian crises, and the Red Cross Red Crescent network intends to be there to help. As we spin up possible futures through our strategic foresight research, we also have to consider our options for action.

Humanitarian organisations will need to adapt existing services and introduce new ones to meet emerging challenges. This means they will need new skills, cultures and capabilities. They will also have new tools at their disposal as technology and scientific research advances, and legacy systems are reinvented or retired.

Imagining the possibilities is a vital part of strategic foresight work. But starting with a blank page can be overwhelming. People sometimes struggle to push their thinking or share their ideas, or the most confident people dominate the discussion and stifle creative collaboration.

To help, we have created a deck of 52 Icon Cards. Each card has an image – from people to storm clouds, vehicles to crops. These icons are a powerful way to tell stories about future humanitarian services, and they encourage collaboration and are accessible to people worldwide.

They are also very flexible – you can make up your own games to help you generate ideas.

You can download the cards at [here](#).



“ The future belongs
to those who see
possibilities before they
become obvious. ”

John Sculley

FORMER APPLE CEO

Section A

How do you use the Icon Cards?

Use the Icon Cards to generate new ideas and tell stories about future Red Cross Red Crescent services and the world they operate in.

They work best in the ideation phase of your strategic foresight work, building on the trend analysis (page 139), scenarios (page 167), and examination of potential impacts (using the Futures Wheel on page 207). These possible futures are the world in which we will create new humanitarian services using the Icon cards.

In its simplest form, you choose the cards that represent key parts of the narrative or idea you want to explain – the cards become the people, equipment, places, events – and arrange them to tell the story. You can then walk people through the events by pointing to each card in turn.

But we find that these cards work really well as part of a rich storyboarding exercise. Rich storyboards combine drawing and physical objects with all the cards you choose to use to explain your ideas.

A rich storyboard allows you to guide someone through an imagined future. They help us discuss, explore and engage with complex explanations, new situations, service users' journeys, or the development of a situation over time, for example.

Rich storyboards and these icon cards are incredible flexible and really help stimulate discussion and ideas.

Section B

Rich storyboarding

Rich storyboarding brings the future to life and helps you develop a vision for change which is easy to communicate.

These storyboards are physical artefacts that you use to tell a story.

Part 1

The set up

This exercise works best in small breakout groups of up to five people. You will need space for each group to work together around a table. Each table needs a

set of Icon Cards, flip chart paper and pens. You can also add Lego if you have some handy, but this is optional.

This activity requires focus question (page 33) and a set of scenarios (page 167). You can produce these in several ways:

- The workshop organisers can research and write scenarios (page 167) ahead of the session. Make sure they are clearly written, explaining how this future is different from today and which trends have shaped it.
- Workshop participants can generate their own scenarios using the tools in this guidebook.
- Use pre-prepared scenarios from other organisations, such as Sitra, Arup or specialist foresight agencies.

Give each breakout group a scenario. It doesn't matter if two or more groups get the same scenario as they will come up with different ideas.

Remind them of the key question your workshop is focusing on. This could be possible futures for a specific service area or new ways to engage volunteers as demographics change, for example.

Part 2

The task

Each group will tell a story about the future and bring it to life using the materials on their tables. The aim is to help your audience understand the world you are exploring, and the humanitarian services you have designed for it.

They will also capture what they have learnt, key questions to research further, and actions to take today to prepare for their scenario.

- 1 Read the scenario** so that everyone in the group understands the future they are exploring. This can be done in silence, with everyone reading the scenario themselves, or someone in each group can read aloud. (10 minutes)

- 2 Discuss the scenario** by answering the following starter questions and then allowing the conversation to flow naturally (20 minutes):
- a** Who are the vulnerable people and what are their needs?
 - b** What new opportunities does this world offer for humanitarian action?
 - c** What new challenges...?
 - d** What services do you want to provide to tackle this issue?
 - e** How will you reach and help the people in greatest need?
- 3 Tell your story.** You can frame this in several ways, but we recommend that the facilitator chooses one approach and all groups work to the same brief (30 minutes):
- a Tell the story from the point-of-view of a service user:** Explain how they are impacted by the scenario, how they come into contact with the IFRC network, and what their user-journey is through our services.
 - b Tell the story from the point-of-view of a Red Cross Red Crescent team:** What services are they providing and how is it different from today? How do they reach the people they support? What technology and new approaches are they using?
 - c Day in the life:** Tell the story of a day in a community impacted by the scenario. What challenges do people face and how do they respond? What services are there to support them?

Ask everyone to get creative. Draw on the paper, use the icon cards to represent the different elements of the story – people, equipment, events, emotions, actions – and get creative with what you have to hand; turn a glass of water into a building, and packets of sugar into food sacks. Use whatever is available to tell your story – each group must prepare a three-minute story about their future scenario.

- 4 Share your story** with the room. Get everyone up on their feet and moving around the room, visiting each table in turn. Set a three-minute timer and let the group tell their tale. Then have another three minutes for questions and feedback. Keep going until all the groups have told their story.

- 5 Actions and next steps.** Return to the breakout groups as discuss:
- a** What new ideas are you most excited about? How can you develop them further?
 - b** Which questions or trends do you want to research further?
 - c** Are there any actions you should take today to prepare for the scenario or start to make changes in your team or National Society?
 - d** Who can we work with now to address any new risks or opportunities?

Depending on the time you have and the focus on the workshop, you can ask teams to briefly share a couple of points, or you could work together to group and prioritise all the potential next steps, so you finish with a list of practical actions.

Part 3

Variation – exploring trends

The icon cards can be used at other points in the strategic foresight process. They work really well when you are examining trends ([page 139](#)).

For this activity, you give each group a trend card, rather than a scenario, and ask them to imagine that they are a new team set up specifically to deal with this emerging issue.

Give them time to discuss the trend and how it might develop. Then ask them to brainstorm potential Red Cross Red Crescent responses and use the icon cards to tell a short story about that world and the work you do:

- Who are the vulnerable people and what are their needs?
- What new opportunities does this world offer for humanitarian action?
- What new challenges...?
- What services do you want to provide to tackle this issue?
- How will you reach and help the people in greatest need?

After every team has shared their vision for the future -using the icon cards and rich storyboard to bring it to life – you can combine the teams to see how the

trends might interact – how do demographic changes and climate change affect each other, for example.

They can then retell the story of their new services so that they are responding to this new set of challenges, and robust enough to deal with these intersecting issues.





Systems mapping for foresight

“ Human endeavours are systems... we tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system. And wonder why our deepest problems never get solved. ”

Peter Senge

MIT SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

Chapter XVII

Systems mapping for foresight

The world is a complicated place. So many forces interact with each other to shape human society that it's hard to untangle the root causes of the problems we face. It is also difficult to know where to intervene to have the greatest impact, and how to avoid unintended consequences when we act.

Systems mapping is a very useful tool when dealing with this complexity. It allows us to visualise the things which combine and interact to create the system, and to see the links between them and begin to understand how they interact with and impact each other.

In the same way that a map helps us understand the layout of a city or the terrain on a country walk, a systems map helps us navigate by giving us a useful overview of our challenge and links between the different areas.

Part 1

Challenging our assumptions

When we are faced with an urgent, complicated challenge, we often rush to a solution. We want to act fast, so we don't pause to examine the underlying causes of the problem.

This solution might be something we already know how to do, or it might be a knee-jerk response to the most obvious needs and the things we assume caused them. We may misdiagnose the problem altogether and deploy solutions that ignore complex realities or cause more harm.

By rushing to act without fully understand the system, we may also ignore existing solutions and resilient networks

already present in the community, undermining or destroying them as we charge in to help.

Systems mapping helps us dig below the surface. The process of creating a systems map encourages us to examine the problem from new angles, to connect with communities, to speak to experts from different domains, and to consider how different groups of people might be affected by any potential solutions.

Part 2

Mapping strengths and contributors

Once you have created a systems map, you can overlay your existing Red Cross Red Crescent services and resources. This shows us where we already have strengths and identifies new areas for us to explore.

You can also map other assets, such as government services, civil society organisations and community groups. Or you might identify organisations which are contributing to the challenge, such as highly polluting industries or tech companies spreading false information.

This exercise can highlight areas for new intervention and expose vulnerabilities in the system.

Part 3

Possible futures

Systems maps are also very useful for strategic foresight. Once we have an idea of the interacting forces, we can use foresight research to see how they might change over time.

Use the systems map to prioritise the key drivers of change. Use these as the focus for a round of foresight research, looking at how trends in these domains are developing and what new opportunities or shocks might be coming.

The connections between the different areas of the map help you link the trends and combine weak signals, which is fuel for future scenarios. Any scenarios you create will then be rooted in the mechanics of the system you are trying to influence.

“ Systems thinking requires a shift in mindset, away from linear to circular. The fundamental principle of this shift is that everything is interconnected. ”

Leyla Acaroglu

DESIGNER, SUSTAINABILITY INNOVATOR, AND EDUCATOR

Part 4

Innovation

Innovation means finding new and useful solutions to tricky problems. A better understanding of how a complex system works is a great starting point. It can spur creativity as you see the links between different domains and spot new opportunities to intervene.

When you add future scenarios rooted in the key drivers of change, you can push your innovation to another level. By stretching your thinking into the future, you will not only move early on emerging trends and technologies, but you will also be designing solutions to thrive in a changing world.

Section A

How to create and use systems maps

A systems map is a living document; you can keep adding depth, detail and connections.

Decide how you are going to visualise it as you work. You might choose a whiteboard in your office or a shared virtual space like Miro. PowerPoint can also be a useful tool as it has objects you can move around and link together with arrows and connectors.

Your systems map doesn't have to be perfect straight away. Start adding information, layering on more as your research continues and your understanding of the system deepens.

We use the following steps to create systems maps:

- 1 Define the challenge:** Once you start mapping a system you could go on for ever – so being clear on your focus is critical.

Use the founding question and key lines of inquiry for your strategic foresight project ([page 33](#)) to identify the key system you are trying to influence. Or create a clear [problem statement](#) that explains the challenge.

You can also frame the question to help you dig into root causes. For example, we asked “What determines people’s food security and access to livelihoods?”

- 2 Sketch the key elements:** Start with what you know, adding big obvious things like ‘economics’ or ‘government policy’. This gives you some anchors to hang detail off.

You can start with the key drivers of change ([page 55](#)).

- 3 Do some research:** Desk research is critical. Read reports, look for specialist organisations dealing with one sliver of the system, search for summaries of government legislation, and dig into the academic research. It helps to have several people working on this in parallel.

As you research, add new nodes to the map. These can be quotes, insights and links out to key information.

Also look for existing systems maps – someone may already have created something you can build on.

- 4 Look for links:** As you work, think about how the different components interact and influence each other.

Does environmental tax policy connect to levels of pesticides and link on to prevalence of pests in farm crops, which in turn affects household income and the affordability of school fees?

Do changes in one area feedback to another. Will shifts in one domain trigger new issues in another? Keep adding links and connections.

Dig deeper into this by reading [Leyla Acaroglu’s Tools for Systems Thinkers](#).

- 5 Outside input:** Go out and speak to people. Talk to people directly impacted by the issues you are investigating. And look for experts with deep experience in key areas.

You need to understand what is driving change in the system and how they connect.

- 6 Early feedback:** Create your first draft. This should be a version of the systems map that includes the critical elements.





There are no hard and fast rules on how much detail to include but a systems map should be clear without being over simplified. There is a sweet spot somewhere in the middle.

Send this first version out to trusted collaborators, ideally people with expertise and experience in the challenge you are focusing on.

Gather their feedback and iterate the map.

- 7 Fill in the blanks:** Your early feedback may flag underdeveloped areas, or places with too much detail. Sometimes you need to restructure to give more prominence to critical issues.

Create an updated version. This is the time to get some design help to make it look slick.

- 8 Another round:** If you like, you can go for another round of feedback and amends. Or you can use the updated version in a workshop, improving and enhancing the systems map as your project develops.

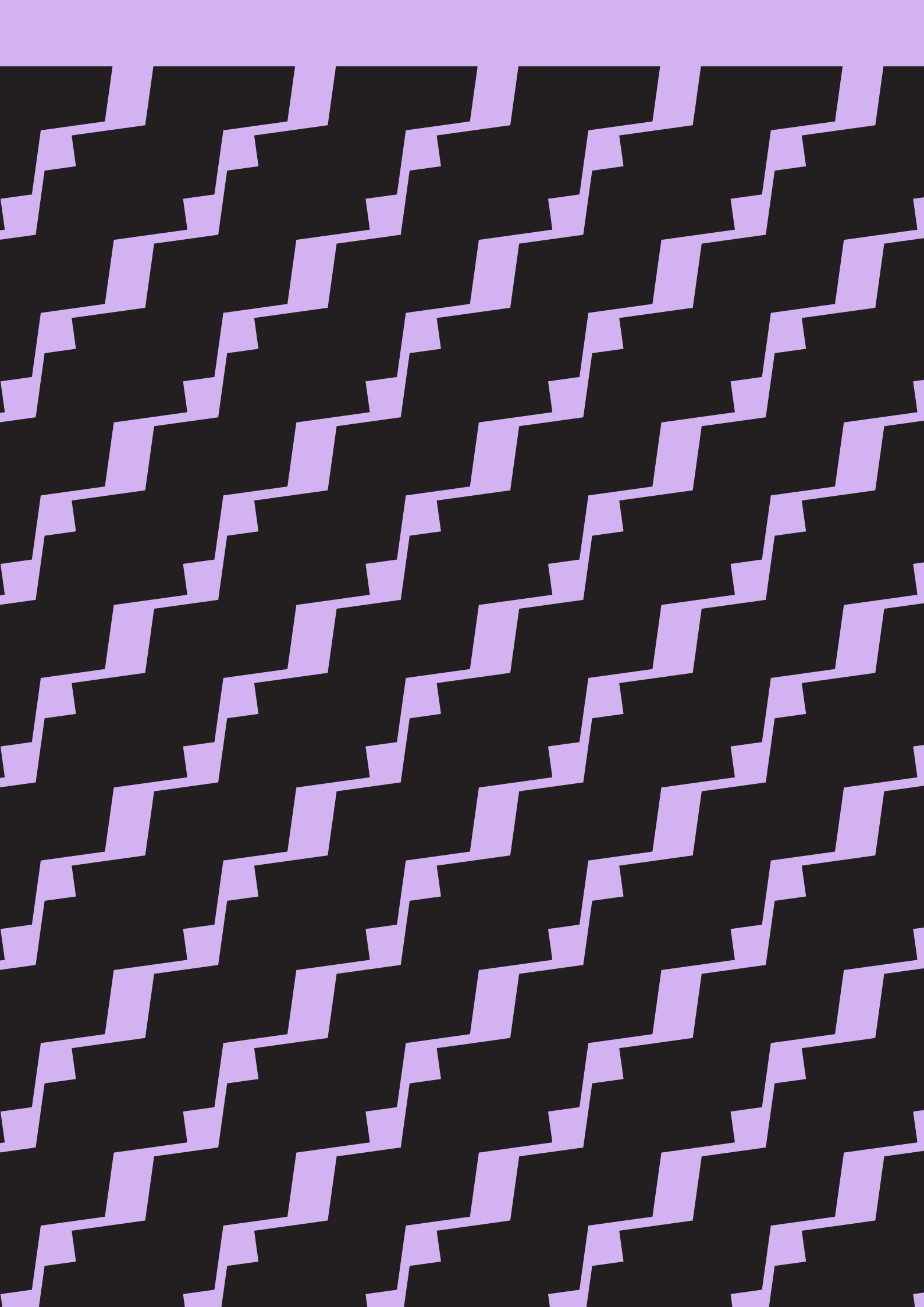
Remember, you are creating a useful tool, not a definitive document that everyone agrees is perfect. A good systems map is an artefact to be used in discussions and workshops and to build upon iteratively and to help launch new thinking.

Once you have your systems map ready, you can use it in many different ways. Try some of the activities we suggest earlier in this section – challenging your assumptions, mapping strengths and weaknesses, exploring possible futures, and driving innovation.

Find out more about systems mapping

- **IDEO** – [How to think in systems for greater impact](#)
- **FSG** – [Systems thinking toolkit](#)
- **WRI** – [Systems mapping – a vital ingredient](#)
- **MIRO** – [Systems mapping template](#)
- **OPSI** – [Systems Practice Workbook](#)

Writing scenarios



Chapter XVIII

Writing scenarios

A scenario is a description of a possible future. They are not predications but stories crafted from research into emerging trends, drivers of change and weak signals. A good scenario is more than just storytelling; it helps us navigate uncertainty, anticipate challenges, and uncover opportunities for action.

A collection of well-written scenarios is a powerful planning tool. By bringing different futures to life, scenarios help decision-makers test new ideas and consider how they might respond to emerging challenges, allowing us to select options that can withstand changing conditions.

Scenarios strengthen our ability to deal with uncertainty and encourage creative thinking when we face complex problems. They also act as an early warning system, allowing us to spot emerging risks before they become critical.

Critically, scenarios allow constructive debate about strategic priorities and differences of opinion on the best course of action. By generating different scenarios, competing visions can be scrutinised and plans can be prepared for different situations, which increases organisational resilience.

“ The purpose of scenario planning is not to predict the future but to prepare for it. ”

Eric Ries

ENTREPRENEUR

Section A

Preparing scenarios

Work is needed before you write your scenarios. After setting your question (page 33) and conducting research (page 43) to extract insights into possible futures (page 55), you can run a 2 × 2 session (page 181) to develop the bones of your scenario.

When different possible futures begin to materialise from your research, it is time to turn them into scenarios. There are no strict rules – you can adjust the style and structure to suit your needs – but these are guidelines which will help you write stronger scenarios:

- 1 Plausibility:** They must fall within the limits of what might conceivably happen.
Scenarios that rely on people suddenly gaining the ability to mind read, or the global economy deciding to abolish money overnight, might not be credible or useful.
- 2 Difference:** They should not be so close to one another that they simply become variations of a base case.
Consider how trends may interact to cause strikingly different outcomes, or how different speeds of technology change could impact social systems, for example.
- 3 Consistency:** The logic of each scenario must flow and not undermine the overall credibility of it. Consider how each driver of change has developed over time to create the situation detailed in your scenario, describing what has happened so your readers can follow the progress.
- 4 Utility:** A scenario should contribute specific insights into the future that will allow decision makers to answer the overall question that is being asked.
Your strategic foresight project has a founding question and a focus area. Your research will uncover potentially important trends which your scenarios make useful to decision makers.
- 5 Challenge:** The scenarios should challenge the organisation's conventional wisdom about the future. They should push us beyond the expected future into different possibilities rooted in sound evidence and world building.

“ The exploration of possible futures includes trying to look at the present in new and different ways, often breaking out of the straitjacket of conventional, orthodox, or traditional thinking and taking unusual, even unpopular perspectives... It involves, most of all, expanding human choice. ”

Wendell Bell

FUTURIST

Section B

Writing scenarios

Keep scenarios short and engaging. Remember, you are creating these stories to be used in strategic planning and problem-solving sessions, so they must be easy to understand even when they are full of challenging ideas.

All scenarios need a good narrative, explaining what this future is like and what has changed. Think about how the key trends interact to create new issues.

A simple approach is to use just three headings. Try and keep your scenario to one side of paper if possible:

- **Title**
A compelling and interesting name for this scenario.
- **This is a world in which...**
Describe what is happening in this possible future. What is life like for people and how is it impacting the community or region your foresight project is focused on? What new risks and opportunities are there? How have trends developed over time?
- **Key differences from today...**
Call out what has changed in this future. How have things developed? Are there newly vulnerable groups? Are some people in a better position? What is possible then that is not possible now?

As you craft the narrative, make sure you are using solid evidence and data to inspire imaginative and creative visions of the future. You can use the STEEP framework – social, technical, economic, ecological, and political factors – to create well rounded, comprehensive scenarios.

You can develop this to create your own scenario style. Here are some builds:

- Illustrate your scenario with graphics and visuals.
- Highlight the key trends or sudden shocks which have shaped the scenario, pulling out critical issues in each domain.
- Add personal stories. These should be quick sketches of daily life in the scenario.
- Imagine the news headlines or current political priorities.

- Add a visual timeline showing critical events between today and the scenario.
- Call out different responses to the issues raised in the scenario, explaining how different groups react to risks and opportunities. These could be presented as quotes from key stakeholders, for example.
- Add different perspectives on the changes detailed in the scenario – do some groups think these changes are positive while others are opposed, for example?

Section C

Impacts, implications and action

Good scenarios are plausible and useful. Think of them as a sandbox environment in which you can gather insight and develop new concepts for services, products, organisational change, and ways to respond to challenges.

‘Sandbox’ is term taken from software development meaning a safe environment in which to experiment and test new things before they go live. So, the intention is to find things which could work well in the ‘real world’ and make an impact on the problem you are trying to solve.

There are many ways to generate insight using scenarios. A useful scaffolding is impacts, implications, actions, with different activities at each step. The trick is to choose a mix of activities that works for your team and helps them generate a range of new options.

Part 1

Impacts

You can start by considering the potential impact the scenario might have on key stakeholders and the world they live in. The Futures Wheel ([page 207](#)) is a very useful, in-depth tool for this.

You can also explore the scenarios by discussing some key questions. For example, if your team is responsible for running humanitarian services, you could ask:

- How might this scenario affect people our humanitarian services are currently designed to help?
- How might this scenario impact other humanitarian issues?
- Which groups might be newly vulnerable or at greater risk in this scenario and why?
- How might this scenario affect our team and ways of working?
- How might this scenario impact other organisations, such as government, businesses and civil society groups?
- If this happens, what might happen next?

You can push this further by asking external experts and people with lived experience what they think the impacts of the scenario might be.

Example:

One scenario might include rising food prices, leading to the following possible impacts: *High food prices will negatively impact lower incomes households. These groups may cut other essential expenses such as schooling, energy, heating or medicines, or to engage in negative coping strategies. This could create a vicious cycle, entrenching food insecurity and poverty, with potentially irreversible effects.*

Part 2

Implications

The next step is to think about the implications for your organisation and the work it does.

A classic SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis is a really good starting point. This activity will help you identify and analyse internal

strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats to your project:

1 Internal: Strengths

What do we do well? What could we be best at? What advantages do we have? What unique resources and capabilities do we have?

2 Internal: Weaknesses

Where do we face challenges? What are we lacking? What criticism do we receive? What could be improved?

3 External: Opportunities

What could positively impact us? What could we use to improve what we do? Where could we now have an impact? What will help us have a bigger impact?

4 External: Threats

What is a risk or new challenge? What could negatively impact us and the people we support? What is cause for concern?

After you brainstorm answers, group and prioritise them to find the critical issues.

Next, turn these into 'What if...?' or 'How might we...?' questions. Spend time generating as many as you can, then group and prioritise. These are the questions your organisation needs to answer through its plans and actions.

Example: The impacts of rising food prices have many implications for humanitarian organisations, and pose some critical questions: What if a surge in negative coping mechanisms overwhelms our services? What if rising food prices triggers civil unrest in areas where we currently have no services? What if people stop volunteering to focus on earning money to pay rising prices? What if we start to provide 'whole human care' instead of multiple different services? How might we scale our cash assistance expertise? How might we help other organisations provide new services to keep children in school?

The Ukraine case study ([page 239](#)) explains how we used this approach to help with regional planning.

Part 3

Action

Do not confuse action with answers. You do not need to know exactly what to do and how to do it. Instead, you should focus on what you need to find out more about, how you might generate more evidence, and what you need to do next to develop solutions and options for action.

Tasking people with finding out more, building connections, and investigating further are useful actions.

You can also use your ideas from the SWOT exercise to make a plan. This time, use the TOWS matrix to figure out how to use your strengths and weaknesses to deal with the opportunities and threats:

	Strengths (internal)	Weaknesses (internal)
Opportunities (external)	How can we use our strengths to make the most of the opportunities?	How do we improve our weaknesses to make the most of the opportunities?
Threats (external)	How can we use our strengths to deal with the threats?	How do we improve our weaknesses to avoid threats?

Example:

Taking the questions triggered by the rising food prices scenario, some actions might include:

- Map local organisations providing drug, alcohol and other services for negative coping mechanisms.

- Connect our operations team with other parts of the global network with deep experience dealing with civil unrest.
- Consult with current volunteers to understand their reality and how we might help them deal with rising food prices.
- Set up a workshop with our existing operational services, external experts and service users, to explore the concept of 'whole human' care.
- Speak to fundraising and philanthropy teams to craft new ask for cash assistance and to explore alternative funding models.
- Look for existing meetings, forums or umbrella groups that can connect you to civil society organisations focused on schooling.

Part 4

What next?

Scenarios are a useful artefact. You can use them to develop new ideas and come up with solutions to the complex challenges we face.

Try using them as the starting point for a Futures Wheel exercise ([page 207](#)). You can also flip this and use the futures wheel to explore a range of possibilities which become the basis for scenarios.

Use the icon cards ([page 147](#)) to create a new humanitarian service designed to deal with the issues raised in the scenario, or to explore life in the scenario from the perspective of different future personas ([page 187](#)).

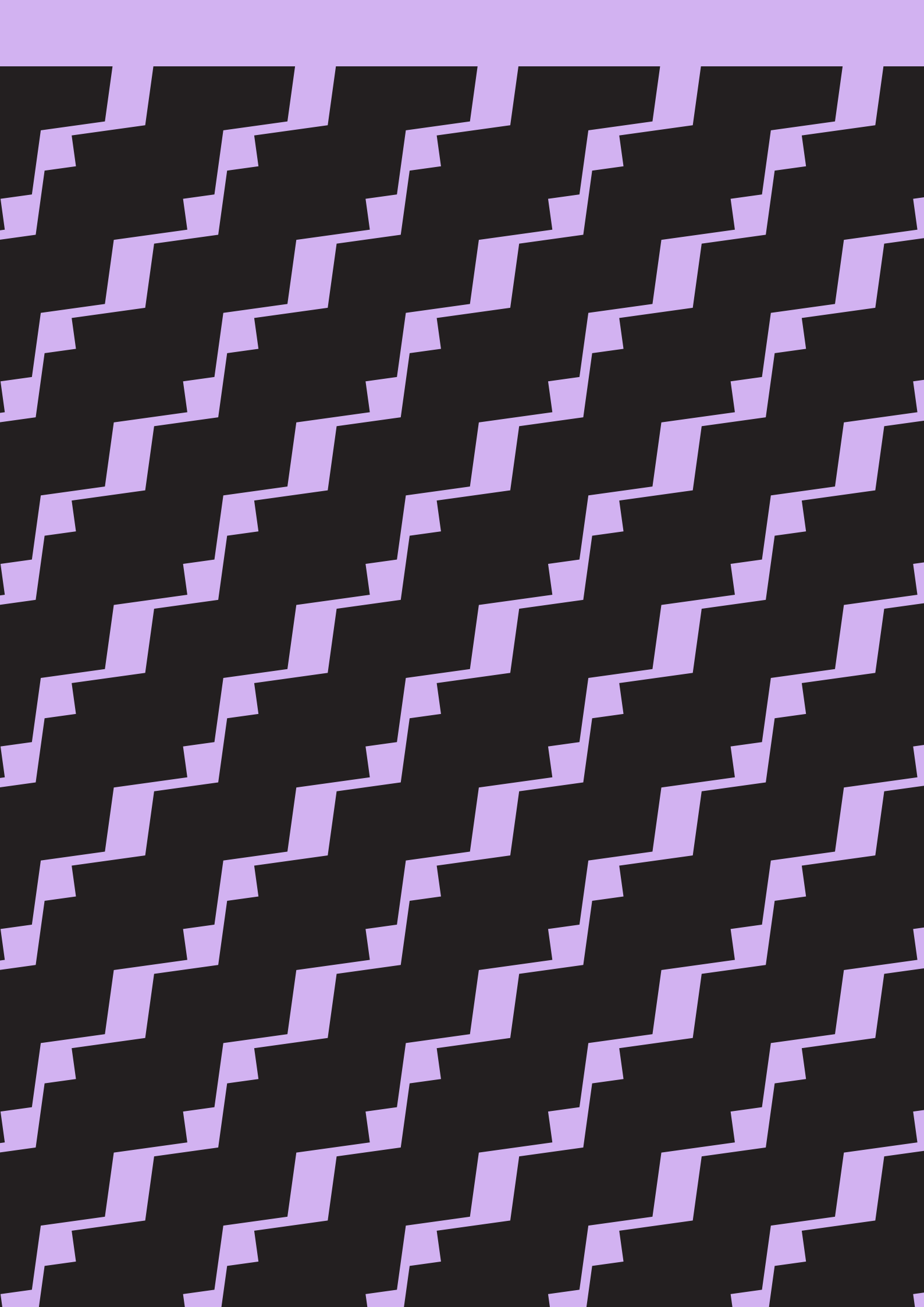
You can also use the Roots and Routes activity with a scenario as the trigger. This helps us understand what an impactful response to the challenges in the scenario might look like ([page 197](#)).

Once you have developed your strategy or policy options using scenarios, you can use wind tunnelling to see how they might cope in each possible future ([page 215](#)).

“ Futures thinking holds the power to foster greater agency as soon as we realise that it is possible to play a role in shaping the future and getting one step closer to where one wants to be. ”

Irini Papadimitriou

FUTURE EVERYTHING



2 × 2 scenario building

“ Scenarios are not about predicting the future but exploring multiple possible futures. ”

Adam Kahane

REOS PARTNERS

Chapter XIX

2 × 2 scenario building

A scenario is a story that uses trends and evidence to help us explore a possible future. It's not a prediction, but a way to make sense of what might happen based on different changes and choices.

Creating several scenarios is like imagining different outcomes of a game before you start playing, so you can plan your moves wisely. It helps us test our plans and look for new opportunities for action.

The process of writing scenarios also makes space for debate about the challenges the future might hold. It lets us share competing ideas in a constructive way as you are encouraged to spin up different possibilities.

Section A

Using 2 × 2 scenarios

The 2 × 2 scenario building exercise will help you create four contrasting scenarios using your trends research.

This activity looks at the future through the interplay of two key issues with uncertain outcomes. It allows us to consider how different outcomes may impact the world.

For example, if we were running a project to support resilience in coastal communities, two critical uncertainties might be the speed of environmental change and the strength of the government response.

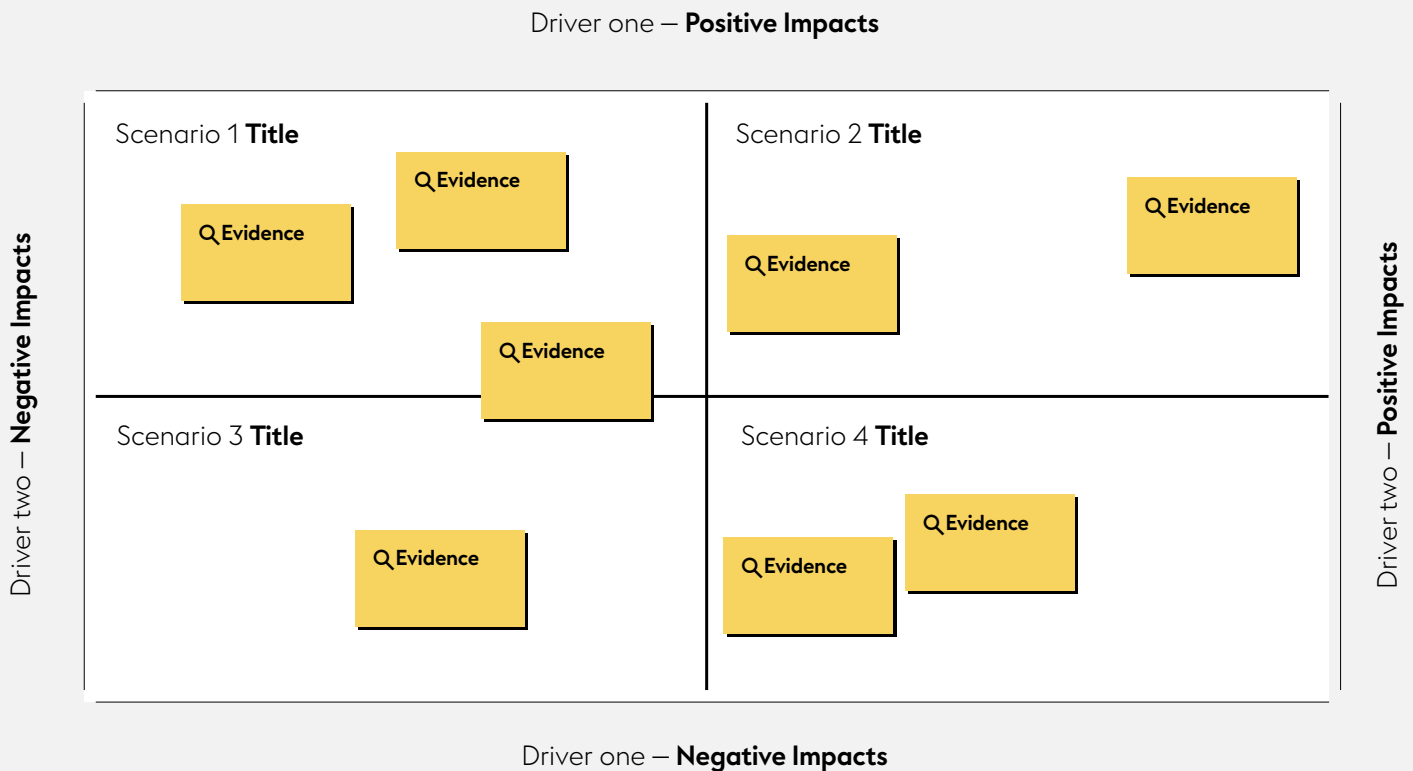
The 2 × 2 exercise would allow us to imagine four different futures:

- 1 Rapid environmental change and weak government action.

- 2 Rapid environmental change and strong government action.
- 3 Slow environmental change and weak government action.
- 4 Slow environmental change and strong government action.

Detail is then layered out, drawing on your trends research, insight from experts and insiders about the possible impacts on the communities we support, and workshop discussion about how these future scenarios might develop.

These details will give each scenario depth and bring them to life when you write them up (page 167).



Section B **How do you do it?**

This activity works well as part of a longer strategic foresight project, as you need to research the trends and drivers of change before you move on to creating scenarios.

We recommend working in groups of five to eight people for this exercise. For a step-by-step workshop guide, see the [Save the Children foresight toolkit](#).

- 1 Use the founding question(s) or lines of inquiry** for your strategic foresight project (page 181). This sets a clear and specific context for your scenarios.
- 2 Do your research:** Examine the drivers of change (page 43) and choose two high-impact, high-uncertainty issues from different domains which you think will shape the future of your challenge.

For example, in our Ukraine work, we used the escalation/reduction of violence, and the rapid/slow resolution of the conflict.
- 3 Decide on the time horizon for your scenarios:** This activity works well across different timelines; it can be useful to explore what might happen in coming months or right out to 20 years into the future or more. Look far enough out that there is some uncertainty about how the drivers will develop.
- 4 Set up your 2 × 2 axes:** Map one critical uncertainty on the vertical axis and one on the horizontal. Decide which aspect of the issue you are measuring. For example, it could be a spectrum of 'more/less', 'weak/strong', 'high impact/low impact', 'rapid/slow' or something else which fits the issues you are exploring.
- 5 Explore each quadrant** on your grid to add detail and develop four distinct futures. How might the key issues develop in each situation? How could they interact with other drivers of change? What might the impact be on people living in this world? How would this world be different to today? What insights can you add from your trends research?
- 6 Write up the scenarios:** The scenarios do not have to be long, but they should have enough detail and difference to be useful in your strategic planning and foresight activities. See page X for more details on how to write good scenarios.
- 7 Use your scenarios:** For each scenario, consider the following questions:
 - What are the implications of this scenario for our project's founding question?
 - Which groups might be more – or newly – vulnerable in this scenario?

- What opportunities does this scenario offer our National Society? What about other groups?
- What threats does this scenario pose for our National Society? What about other groups?
- How might this scenario challenge or change our strategic priorities?
- How might we respond to this scenario?

Section C

Limitations

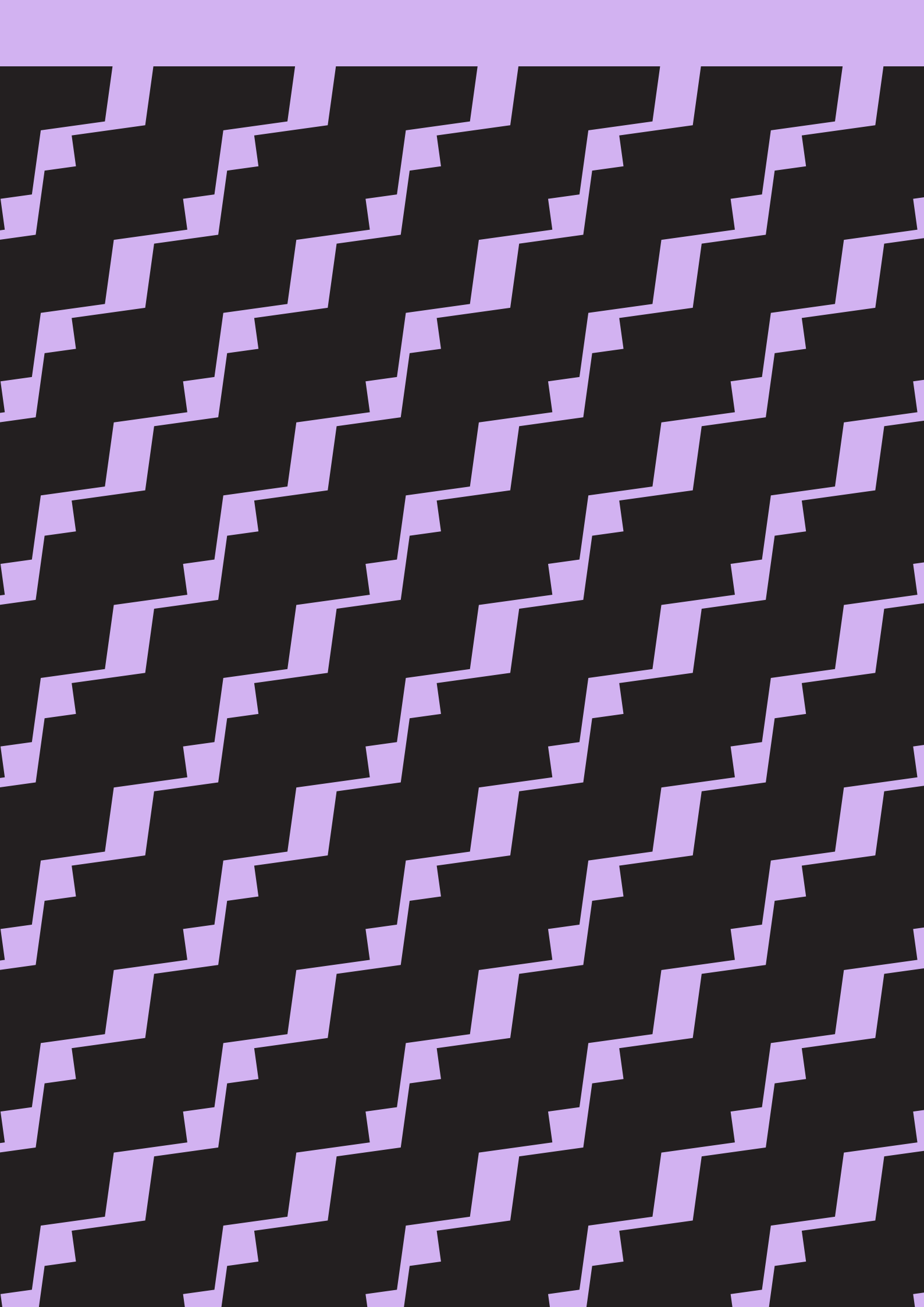
This activity is a great way to interrogate lots of information and to start to build four distinct scenarios. But it does have limitations.

Firstly, by concentrating on just two different drivers, we might miss the complex interaction of different issues. This can lead to simplistic scenarios if you don't work to craft detailed, nuanced futures ([page 167](#)).

Use the 2 × 2 as a starting point. Then use other tools, evidence and creativity to add detail and richness to make sure the scenarios are credible and useful.

The case studies ([page 239](#)) show how we have used this exercise as part of a strategic foresight process.

Future personas



Chapter XX

Future personas

When we imagine possible futures, we think in terms of trends and weak signals, historic drivers of change and social shifts. But who will be living there and how will they experience the future you are imagining?

Future personas can help. Personas are widely used in other domains to help designers understand the needs of their customers. They help us create products, services and resources like websites that are built for the end-users.

Personas are fictional but they are rooted in research. Each one represents a different key user group and brings it to life. They build empathy and understanding. They also stop designers assuming that what makes sense to them personally would also be useful to the end-user.

Good personas are based in observation and research. They are not 'made up' or guessed at. Each element of the persona is based on evidence and insight and then brought to life with a photo, quotes and emotions that capture the key characteristics of that user group.

Section A

Future personas

We can borrow these ideas from the design world and apply them to strategic foresight. Because not only will society and the environment change over time, so will people's attitudes, needs, hopes and frustrations.

By creating future personas, we can break away from our own current-day thinking about what will be useful, desirable and possible in the future. We can use these personas to design solutions for the people who may be using them, rather than for ourselves.

This can be a really powerful boost to creativity, empathy and innovation.

Section B

Evidence and empathy

Use personas as part of a wider strategic foresight process. Do your trend research ([page 187](#)) and build scenarios ([page 167](#)). Then pause and ask yourself, who will be living in this possible future?

You will have evidence of emerging trends and how they might develop over time. You will have researched weak signals and what new opportunities they might open up, or what vulnerabilities they may trigger.

It is important to listen to the people who may be directly impacted by the issues you are studying whenever you can, so they shape your foresight questions and help you understand emerging trends ([page 139](#)). For example, if you are looking at how environmental change could impact coastal cities, speak to people who live there now and those already impacted by the climate crises.

Now think on a human scale. Empathy mapping is a really powerful tool to start this process.

Work in small teams and choose one group of people who will be impacted by the future scenario you are examining. It could be people who benefit from developments or people who are negatively impacted. Over time you will develop a group of personas representing these groups and more.

“ After all, a person is herself, and others. Relationships chisel the final shape of one’s being. I am me, and you. ”

N.K. Jemisin

AUTHOR, THE FIFTH SEASON

Use this template to think about the life of the group you are focusing on:

Empathy Map Canvas

Designed for: Designed by: Date: Version:

1 WHO are we empathizing with?
 Who is the person we want to understand?
 What is the situation they are in?
 What is their role in the situation?

GOAL

2 What do they need to DO?
 What do they need to do differently?
 What job(s) do they want or need to get done?
 What decision(s) do they need to make?
 How will we know they were successful?

6 What do they HEAR?
 What are they hearing others say?
 What are they hearing from friends?
 What are they hearing from colleagues?
 What are they hearing second-hand?

7 What do they THINK and FEEL?

PAINS
 What are their fears, frustrations, and anxieties?

GAINS
 What are their wants, needs, hopes and dreams?

What other thoughts and feelings might motivate their behavior?

3 What do they SEE?
 What do they see in the marketplace?
 What do they see in their immediate environment?
 What do they see others saying and doing?
 What are they watching and reading?

5 What do they DO?
 What do they do today?
 What behavior have we observed?
 What can we imagine them doing?

4 What do they SAY?
 What have we heard them say?
 What can we imagine them saying?

Last updated on 16 July 2017. Download a copy of this canvas at <http://gamestorming.com/empathy-map/> © 2017 Dave Gray, xplane.com

Download [Empathy Map Canvas](#)

Share the empathy maps, explaining who you are focusing on and working through the ideas you have generated on the canvas.

Section C

Bringing personas to life

After brainstorming many potential users, work together to agree a list of key people to develop further. These will be the priority groups you think will need help and support in, or have influence or power over, the future you are exploring.

For example, if your project was looking at potential futures of migration in a developing country in 10 years' time, this list might include:

- Workers made redundant by automation technology who are leaving to move to less advanced economies in search of work.
- Newly arrived climate migrants.
- Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers (who may be very different to today's).
- Consider groups who may not yet exist such as, Biologically enhanced elite – rich people who have modified their genes or have access to new technology that enhanced their health.
- Cyber criminals using deep-fake and AI tech to falsify asylum claims.

These are just examples. They should be generated by your foresight research and linked to evidence. Try and capture all key stakeholders.

Now it is time to bring each of these groups to life. There are many different persona templates, so you can develop your own approach. Useful information could include:

- A picture
- A back-story with a name, age, location, family connections etc.
- Values, interests, education
- Goals they hope to achieve
- Pains that make their life difficult
- Their emotional state
- Their economic circumstance
- Information relevant to your focus area. In the example of a migration project, this might include push and pull factors.

Here is a mocked-up example:

Somchai Saetang Koh Lanta, Thailand, 2035



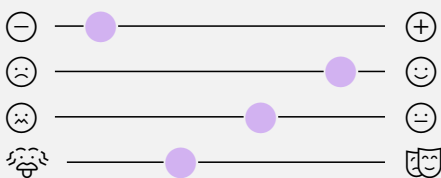
This is temporary, once I have saved enough I'll return to my family and set up a legitimate business

trafficked Somchai to the shanty to work it off.

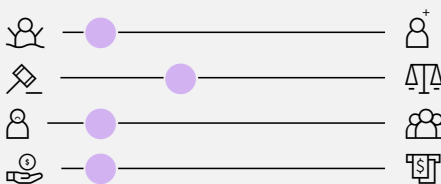
Biography and back-story

Name: Somchai Saetang
Age: 22
Nationality: Thai
Living: Koh Lanta shanty outside the gated foreign 'digital nomad' resort
Motivation: Earn money on black market without crossing international border
Family: Mother in Bangkok, one estranged child

Emotional State:



Economic State:



Push Factors

An increasingly sophisticated surveillance state & a newly digitised currency makes Bangkok a difficult place to operate outside the official economy. Healthcare costs have skyrocketed with the arrival of US providers, creating a grey economy for essential medicines, which his mother needs.



Pull Factors

Thailand created visas for 'digital nomads' from overseas. These gated communities grew fast, bring foreign currency. A shanty settlement has grown on Koh Lanta, providing black market goods to these nomads. A debt accrued in Bangkok must be paid off and criminals

Goals

- Save money
- Improve mental health
- Support parent
- Remain invisible to Thai State
- Pay off criminal debt

Pains

- State surveillance has shrunk grey and black economy
- Bribes must be paid to operate in Koh Lanta
- Technology access essential to use crypto for anonymous payments
- Mental health is fragile

Hopes for the future

Somchai intends to pay off his debt and earn enough to pay for his studies. He intends to establish a legitimate business. He has suffered from mental health issues and has benefited from NGO support, which one day he would like to repay by volunteering.

Section D

Using personas

Personas are very useful when you are designing and testing solutions or exploring the complexities of potential scenarios. By looking at the challenge from the perspective of an 'end user', you may identify new opportunities or more nuanced insight into the challenges. It will also help you focus on their needs, rather than your own.

Use them in brainstorming session to imagine what this person might need and how you might help. One approach is to generate as many questions as you can that this person might ask about their situation.

Then brainstorm as many answers to these questions as you can, considering how the Red Cross Red Crescent might provide or support solutions.

Part 1

User journeys

You can also use them to create user journeys and service maps. This details the different touch points this individual has with your service or product, helping you adjust the concept for maximum impact.

You can create user journeys by imaging how someone would first hear about a Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) service, for example. Then move through each interaction they have with the service, which might include how they share information, if they travel to receive support or have services come to them, what happens during their appointments and what they take away with them.

You can broaden this activity to look beyond the RCRC services. Think about what has happened in someone's life that means they need support from a humanitarian organisation. Where else have they tried to get help? What do they go on to do after the crisis support finishes?

After mapping these touch-points, you can look for ways to improve the service or add innovative elements to provide better support.

Part 2

Exploring scenarios

Personas can also be really useful in rich storyboards and desktop walkthroughs (page 187).

In this activity, someone plays the role of each persona, imagining what they would do and how they might interact with other personas. You can play these roles within the scenarios (page 167) you have written, or to add depth and detail to the user journeys.

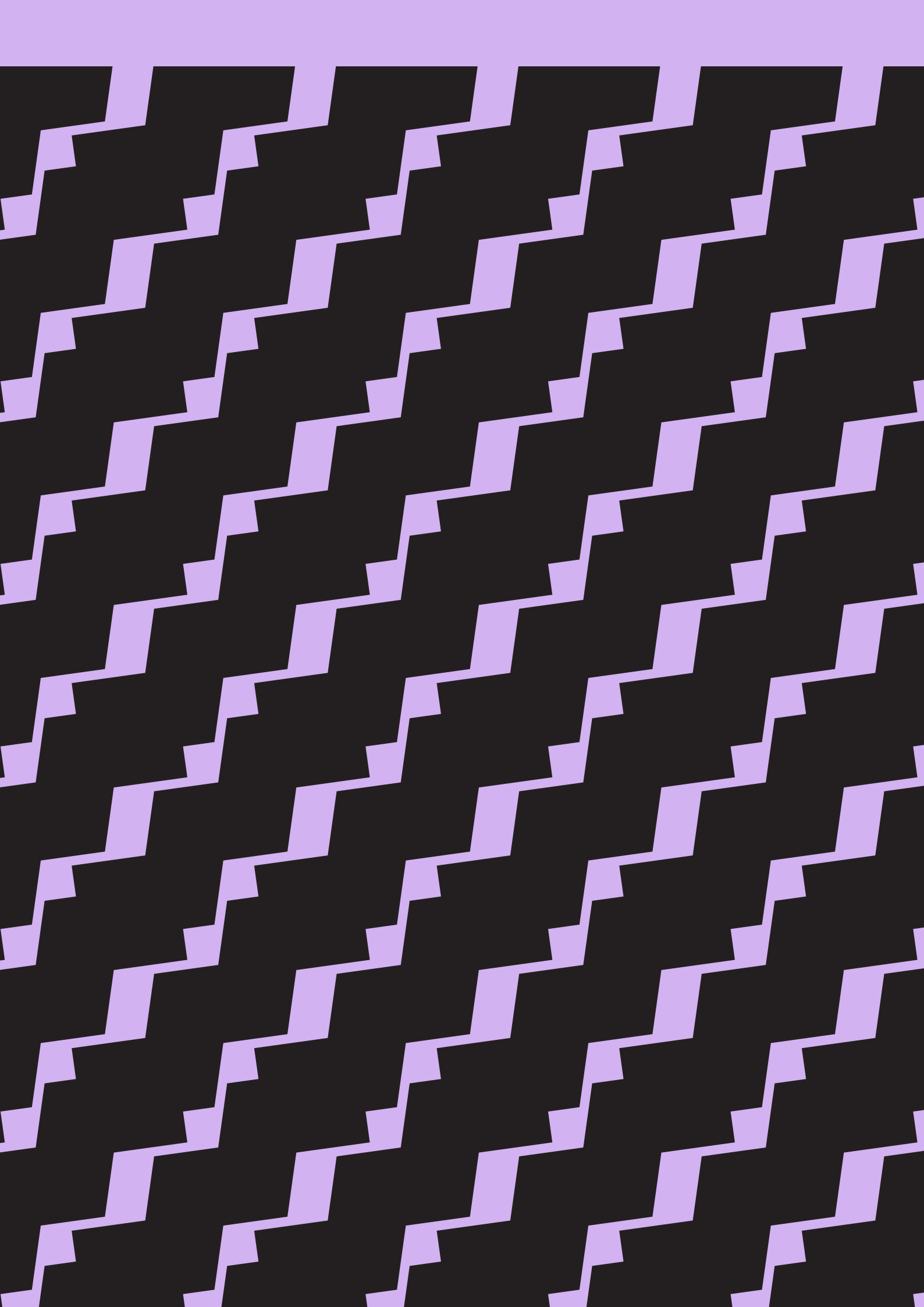
Different people will have very different experiences in your future scenarios – they do not impact everyone in the same way. By looking at it from the perspective of different personas, you will add nuance and detail, which can strengthen strategic planning and accelerates innovation.

The trick is to focus on the lived reality – what does it feel like to live there, how do new trends impact individuals, how does it feel if you cannot access opportunities or find the help you need?

These activities can be a trigger for further community engagement and co-creation today, to better understand people's hopes, fears and needs for the future.

Personas can also fuel creative foresight work (page 67), as you find new ways to bring these people's futures to life.

Roots and Routes



Chapter XXI

Roots and Routes

Strategic foresight combines evidence and analysis with creativity and vision. Done well, it helps us imagine a different world and make practical plans to help build it. Critically, this helps people feel like they can influence the future, rather than waiting passively to deal with whatever arrives.

Not everyone finds it easy to picture possible futures, or to believe that their actions could make a difference. So, helping people unlock the power of their imagination and see that the choices we make today will impact tomorrow is vital.

The Roots and Routes activity helps exercise your imagination and stretch your thinking. Participants place themselves in the future, thinking about what it could be like to live in a world impacted by emerging trends.

They create two different visions for the future – one in which we have handled the challenges well, and one in which the negative impacts dominate.

Section A

How does it help?

Roots and Routes helps us imagine a preferred future. This is a world in which people have the resources and support they need to survive and thrive.

Once we have generated ideas about what 'good' looks like, we can work backwards using activities such as Backcasting (page 225), to link this future to today's decisions. This allows us to mobilise people around a positive vision for the future which is rooted in evidence from your strategic foresight research (page 33).

At the same time, we articulate a negative future in which people's coping mechanisms and support systems fail. This sharpens our thinking by uncovering potential vulnerabilities and flaws in our current plans.

So, we root our thinking in foresight research and then map routes towards our preferred future.

Section B

How do you do it?

This session needs a bit of preparation. It works well as part of a longer strategic foresight process that draws on many different tools and activities as it runs. Roots and Routes can be useful during the development of a new strategy, organisational priorities, systems analysis, innovation initiative or project plans, for example.

It also works well as an asynchronous activity, where everyone is briefed and then given a deadline to come back with the outcomes from this task. This gives people time to research, debate and create richer visions of the future.

Before you try this exercise, we recommend that you:

- Agree your foundation question(s) and the focus of your foresight work (page 33). For example, you might be focused on food security in a specific community, the impact of demographic changes on volunteering, or how to change your crisis response set-up to deal with different types of emergencies.
- Agree the timeline you are working to – is it three years, five years or 10 years and beyond?
- Research emerging trends and key drivers of change (page 139).
- Run a trend-card activity (page 139) and/or use the futures triangle (page 131).
- If time allows, ask participants to come prepared with examples of companies, start-ups, or projects already working at the cutting edge of the trends you have identified. Alternatively, prepare some flash cards with real-world examples.

“ The future is uncertain...
but this uncertainty
is at the very heart of
human creativity. ”

Ilya Prigogine

NOBEL PRIZE WINNER

People will be full of ideas about the future after these activities. They will have imagined different possibilities and spotted new risks and opportunities.

Once everyone is warmed up (page 113) and ready to think creatively, explain the exercise and split people into breakout groups:

- 1 Pick three priority drivers** of change which you think will shape the future of your focus area.
- 2** Discuss how these drivers may **impact** the focus of your challenge:
 - a** What new vulnerabilities might there be?
 - b** Which groups might become more vulnerable?
 - c** What opportunities might these trends open up?
 - d** What new risks might these trends create?
- 3 Focus on a preferred future:**
 - a** Imagine you are someone living in the future you have just imagined. Describe this person – their name, age, location, personal priorities and key challenges. You can use Future Personas if you have already created some (page 187).
 - b** Discuss what the best possible support system might look like for this person to help them survive and thrive in the world you have imagined. Think about their family, community, Red Cross Red Crescent services, access to jobs, political context, and anything else you think needs to be addressed.
 - c** Share the examples of organisations working on the trends or use the flash cards prepared by the facilitators. Try and add depth to the world you are imagining – how are these new technologies and approaches being used to help the person at the core of your story?
 - d** Push your thinking beyond the first order consequences by asking “If this happens, what might happen next?”. For example, more reliable income could allow someone to set up a business and employ others, which in turn leads to other impacts.
 - e** Be ready to share your story about this future.

Example: A preferred future for small scale farmers in Zambia in 10 years

In a positive future for a farmer in Zambia, emerging technologies such as precision agriculture tools and climate-resilient crops have enabled her to adapt to environmental changes and increase her crop yields. Less local water is demanded by crops, allowing fish dams to be built and electricity to be reliably generated in flowing rivers.

A partnership between the Red Cross and a biotech start-up is providing farmers in Zambia with affordable access to personalized gut biome analysis and tailored probiotic treatments, which can improve their overall health and well-being. With access to this and other healthcare, she is able to receive specialized medical support and tailored diet plans to maintain good health, which means she misses fewer days of work.

Some of the crops she grows are sold back to the biome project for distribution to other communities, which provides steady income. She is able to employ two people, who can now put their own children in the local school.

4 Focus on a negative future:

- a** Repeat the exercise above but imagine the person at the core of the story has none of the support they need and the issues are affecting them negatively. How might this impact them?
- b** Revisit the trends and organisations and imagine how they might affect this person if the worst impacts were realised.
- c** Discuss how negative coping mechanisms might be used in this future.
- d** Consider how failures in the humanitarian system, community support and civil society might have contributed to this negative future.

- e Always push your thinking beyond the first order consequences by asking “If this happens, what might happen next?”. For example, if someone is unable to work, they might have to take their children out of school, which could lead to children taking dangerous jobs to help the family. Perhaps the family now needs to borrow money at high interest rates which triggers other unintended consequences.
- f Be ready to share your story about this future.

Example: A negative future for small scale farmers in Zambia in 10 years

In a negative future for a farmer in Zambia, the lack of access to emerging technologies such as precision agriculture tools and climate-resilient crops has made it difficult for her to adapt to environmental changes and increase her crop yields. Without these innovations, she struggles to produce enough food to feed her family and make ends meet. Local water is depleted, causing further health risks.

The absence of healthcare support for farmers has left her vulnerable to a range of health problems, including gut-related illnesses. The cost of healthcare is prohibitively high, and she cannot afford personalized gut biome analysis or tailored probiotic treatments. As a result, she and other farmers in her community suffer from poor health, which limits their productivity and their ability to earn a living.

The farmer is forced to take a child out of school to help earn money. The child is exposed to dangerous chemicals in small local factory and is bullied by other workers.

The absence of a partnership between NGOs, commercial companies, and local innovators means that farmers have limited access to markets and are unable to sell their crops for a fair price. This leads to a lack of income and food insecurity for farmers and their families.

- 5 **Share and discuss** the stories created by the breakout groups.
- 6 Return to the breakout groups and **work backwards** from the imagined future to today. Start with the preferred vision and ask:
 - a What would need to be in place for this future to operate? Imagine the Red Cross Red Crescent services, partnerships or new markets that would support the scenario you are describing.
 - b Step backwards. What would need to happen before this to put these systems in place and support their development?
 - c Step backwards. What activities would have laid the foundations for the stage you have just described?
 - d You can add as many steps as you like until you reach today. The ideas you arrive at today should be actions or investigations you can take immediately.
- 7 **Repeat this activity for the negative future.** This helps to flag potential risks or key decision point which could trigger negative consequences. Being aware of these possibilities can sharpen decision making today.

Example: Working backwards from a preferred future for Zambian farmers in 10 years...

- The ZRC has broadened its FSL programmes and renamed them 'Whole Human Services'. This combines mental, physical, community and environmental health to ensure we are caring for all aspects of a positive and healthy society.
- ZRC collaborates on a pioneering study into the impact of poor gut health on FSL and community health. It is able to help convene a group of biotech companies, drawing on its success with innovative approaches to FSL programming. Users report better mental health as their diet improves and they have less time off work sick.
- ZRC joins a partnership with a global network of Agri-tech start-ups, with seed funding available to test new

products in its programmes. This is attractive to innovators and funders as it gives them traction 'in the real world' while spreading new approaches. This cross-sector collaboration sparks new ideas...

Section C

Alternative uses

- 1** You can also use Roots and Routes once you have developed your initial scenarios (page 197).

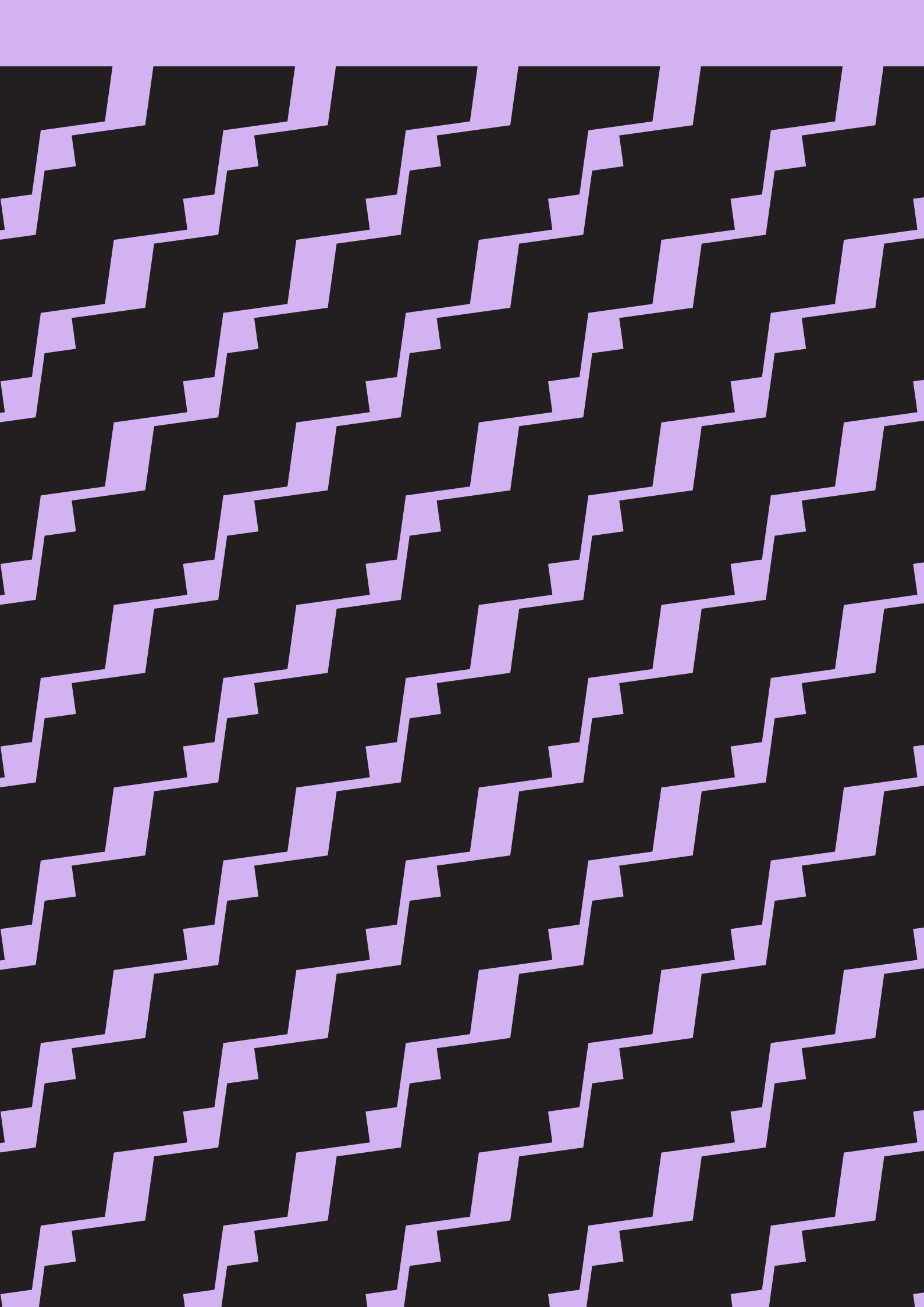
Use the scenarios in turn, imagining a preferred future and a negative future for someone living in that scenario. This helps to identify options for action and identify how the Red Cross Red Crescent might need to respond to trends and challenges.

Using Future Personas (page 187) can really help this activity, as you examine the issues from different perspectives.
- 2** Use Roots and Routes as part of scenario development.

Once you have researched and analysed trends, use this activity to imagine different possible manifestations of the issues. Consider how humans might manage the trends to have a positive impact on the world and compare it to how they might unleash the negative consequences.

These different interpretations of the data are seeds for alternative scenarios.

The Futures Wheel



Chapter XXII

The Futures Wheel

The Futures Wheel allows us to explore the impacts of a decision, trend(s), or future scenario. This helps us understand the potential consequences, particularly those that may not be immediately obvious, and how we might respond.

This is a simple technique to structure your brainstorming. The power lies in pushing beyond the obvious impacts and exploring the second and third order consequences, as one change triggers another. The ability to go beyond first order impacts is really important in foresight work.

As you uncover unexpected impacts, you can explore your options for action, plan your response, or alter your strategy to mitigate the risk.



Section A

How does it work?

You can start this activity with a scenario, a driver of change, a group of trends or a strategic decision you have to make. Place your key issue at the centre of the wheel.

We recommend using a large piece of paper or a whiteboard if you are working in-person. Online, you can use Miro or a similar collaboration platform, or ask people to note down their ideas and nominate someone to capture them and share back.

The key question is “If this happens, what might happen next?”. You ask this several times, digging down through first order, second order and third order impacts. Each step takes you further into the future.

Start with first order impacts.

Set a timer. Ask the group to work individually, writing down positive and negative impacts caused directly by the central issue. Once the timer is up, add these ideas to the futures wheel, grouping and discussing as you go.

Repeat the activity, asking the question “If this happens, what might happen next?” for each of the first order impacts.

Add these new ideas, linking them to the layer above. Group and label any common issues.

Go again, asking “If this happens, what might happen next?” about these second-order impacts. Generate as many ideas as you can before adding them to the wheel as third-order consequences.

Don't rush this exercise. Give yourself time to think, share and discuss your ideas at every stage. Done well this exercise can unlock many new elements in the issue being explored and help develop a rich and more nuanced understanding of the future.

To help the group dig deeper, it can be helpful to have a facilitator or team member helping to provoke new questions or challenge assumptions during the exercise.

Section B

Analysis and actions

The Futures Wheel helps you explore different possibilities. You may identify unexpected consequences, surprising risks or intriguing opportunities.

Discuss the ideas you have generated as a group. Rank them to identify the most pressing or promising.

You can then run several other activities, depending on what you placed at the centre of your futures wheel:

Part 1

A decision

Your organisation may have a critical decision to make. Should we invest in this service or that service, should we expand into a new area, or should we commit to a new partnership, for example.

The futures wheel can help you sharpen this decision by flagging unexpected impacts and providing more insight into the potential complexity of a scenario or trend(s).

You can repeat the activity for each option you are considering, walking them into the future by examining the knock-on consequences.

Then revisit the options you started with. Can you update, alter or combine them to maximise the benefits and avoid negative consequence? The final version of your plan will be improved by this debate.

Follow up with Wind Tunnelling ([page 215](#)) and Backcasting ([page 225](#)) to sharpen and stress test your plans.

Part 2

A trend or driver of change

The Futures Wheel will uncover many potential impacts. Prioritise them by asking:

- Which impacts create new vulnerabilities we must respond to?

- Key uncertainties: What do we need to find out more about to understand these impacts?
- Adapting: What can we do in the short term to address these impacts?
- Adapting: What can we do in the long term?

The different impacts you identify can also be fed into the 2 × 2 exercise (page 207) and scenario writing (page 167) for further exploration.

Tip: Instead of putting one trend or driver of change at the centre of the futures wheel, you can put two or three and then explore the first, second and third order impacts of what happens when those trends come together and impact each other. For example, urbanisation and pandemics.

This can help you explore complexity, converging trends and more specific inquiry into major trends concerning you.

Part 3

A scenario

If you place a scenario at the centre of your Futures Wheel, you will uncover a complex mix of potential impacts and consequences.

You can then use the outcomes of Futures Wheel to examine these impacts against different social groups or your team's key areas of responsibility. For example, what might the implications be for vulnerability, migration, young people, the elderly, social cohesion, urban or rural communities?

This reflection can help to make sense of impacts and their potential implications for humanitarian organisations, which in turn can trigger ideas for new strategic priorities, change or innovation.

Once you have identified the most pressing, use the Rich Storyboarding activity (page 147) to design a new service or operational response. By combining the outcomes of the Futures Wheel with Future Personas (page 187) as you create your storyboard, you can bring your ideas to life and explore them from different perspectives.

This helps you explore the issue and consider your options for action. It is also great fuel for innovation as you spot opportunities to intervene and provide new or enhanced services.

Section C

Futures Wheel example

This is not an exhaustive example but it shows the kind of things you might explore.

Central Event: 20 percent price inflation

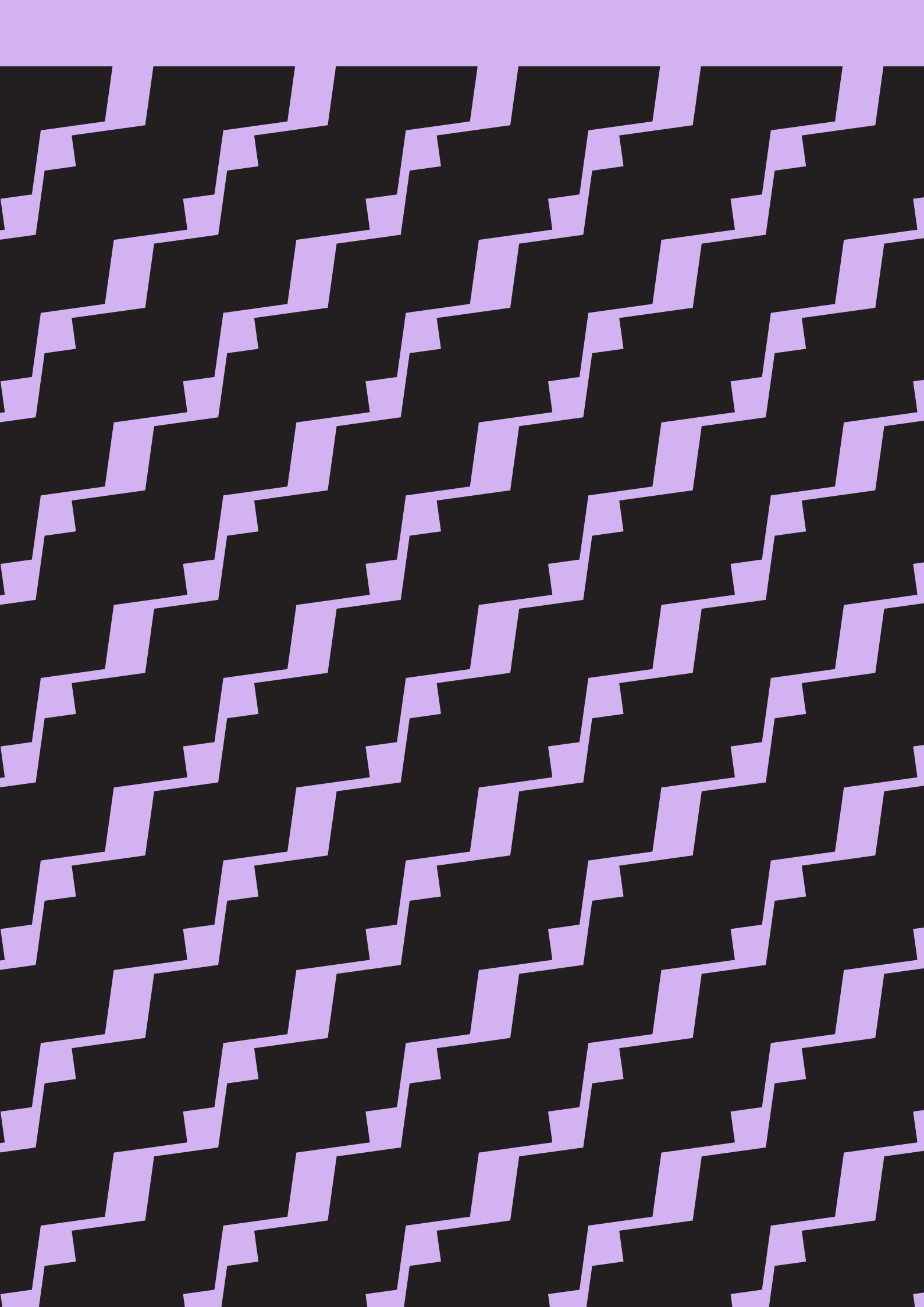
- First order consequences:
 - Staff demand higher wages
 - Rising costs of service delivery
 - Decreased donations as public seek to save money

- Second order consequences:
 - Loss of key employees
 - Increased workload for remaining staff
 - Staff members experiencing poverty themselves
 - Service cuts or restrictions
 - Scrapping planned investments
 - Creative attempts to find new sources of financing

- Third order consequences:
 - Increasing unmet needs in vulnerable populations
 - Rise in negative coping strategies
 - Decreased staff morale
 - Reduced capacity for growth

- New innovations potentially emerge to respond to increased challenges and crises (out of necessity)
- Need for strategic restructuring
- Possible opportunities:
 - Improve service coordination
 - Refocus on core capabilities
 - Innovative cost-saving measures
 - New partnerships with other organisations
- Possible negative outcomes:
 - Negative brand impact as needs go unmet
 - Competitors take market share
 - Service quality declines
 - Cannot secure long-term partnerships or contracts
- Adaptive Strategies:
 - Diversify income streams
 - Outsource back-office functions to cut overheads
 - Increase volunteer recruitment
 - Innovative collaborations with partners
- Key Uncertainties:
 - Duration of high inflation
 - Sudden onset humanitarian crises demanding response

Wind Tunnelling



Chapter XXIII

Wind Tunnelling

Wind Tunnelling is a strategic foresight exercise that helps us stress test our plans.

All of our humanitarian work is underpinned by plans, policies and strategies. These are our guides as we move into the future, setting out what we hope to achieve and how we will do it.

The services we run are the realisation of these documents – they are the way we influence the world and make an impact on the lives of people dealing with crises.

Lacing this together are the complex back-office support systems, decision-making mechanisms and infrastructure that allows our network to function. The bureaucracy that turns plans into action.

All organisations are constantly trying to improve the connections, so that inspiring plans can be turned into powerful action with as little waste and delay as possible. We all know it is not easy.

And there is another problem – the world is constantly changing. The future we imagine when we craft our policies, plans and strategies may be vastly different by the time it arrives. So, we use strategic foresight to help us anticipate and adapt.

Section A

How does wind tunnelling work?

Wind tunnelling helps us improve our plans by seeing how well they might cope with change, and if they need modifications to meet emerging challenges and opportunities.

You can use this approach to test your organisation's strategy or specific threads that run through it, like HR guidelines or digital transformation plans. It also works well for other areas, such as preparing policy positions, or sharpening your team's vision.

Use wind tunnelling as part of a wider strategic foresight process, combining it with other activities in this guide. For example, you may uncover new ideas that warrant further investigation and decide to do trends analysis ([page 139](#)), run a Futures Wheel ([page 207](#)) or create personas ([page 187](#)) and scenarios ([page 167](#)).

Equally, wind tunnelling can follow these activities, helping you refine your action plan and recommendations.

Part 1

Creating space for disagreement

Managing people, projects and organisations is not easy. People have diverse opinions, distinct expertise and different levels of power. This can mean that you never reach agreement on the best way forward, or that someone takes charge and decides what will happen regardless of what everyone else think.

Equally, if everyone agrees too easily and doesn't spend time examining the possibilities or challenging the assumptions they are making, the plans are likely to be underdeveloped and fragile – unable to cope with change.

These dynamics can cause friction and conflict, and they can lead to poor decision making.

Wind tunnelling, in combination with other foresight approaches, is a great way to create space for challenging conversations, differing opinions and competing ideas about the best way forward.

When you are no longer playing a zero-sum game, where someone has to be right and others have to be wrong, you are free to explore a wide range of possibilities and combine the best ideas you discover.

You can take proposals and walk them into different futures to see how they cope. And if someone wants to explore another scenario because they it feels plausible, there is space for it to exist in parallel without arguing over which is the 'right' answer.

This can massively improve team dynamics, as well as making your plans more robust and future ready.

Part 2

Using wind tunnelling

While wind tunnelling can be used in many different ways, we are going to share one approach which you can adapt and adjust for your own projects.

To prepare for the session you will need:

- **Future scenarios** – you can develop these yourself (page 167) or use existing ones.
- **Strategy or policy documents** – use your existing plans or the different options you are considering for implementation.
- **A diverse group of stakeholders** – invite people with different roles, responsibilities and expertise.

During the session:

- 1 Welcome** everyone, do introductions and a warm-up (page 113).
- 2 Introduce the policies** or strategies to be tested. Make sure everyone understands the purpose and intended impact of the plans. Give people time to read the documents and ask clarifying questions.
- 3 Explain the scenarios.** Make sure everyone understand that these are different possible futures, not predictions, and how they have been created. Give people time to read and understand the scenarios.

- 4 Split into breakout groups.** Each group starts with one policy option and all the scenarios. Their first task is to assess the policy against each scenario, asking:
- a** In this future, will the policy impact still be desirable and necessary?
 - b** In this future, do the policy outcomes need to be modified in any way?
 - c** How might we achieve the desired impact and outcomes in this scenario?
 - d** How might our strategy need to be modified to deal with this scenario?

Record your notes in the Wind Tunnel template – see examples at end.

- 5 Repeat the activity** with another policy or strategy option, continuing until each group have done as many as the available time allows.
- 6 Bring everyone back together.** By now you will have tested your policy or strategies against different future scenarios.

Go through each policy in turn, having a group discussion about the strengths, weaknesses and options for action to strengthen your plans:

- a** Which policies are the most robust?
 - b** Which policies will struggle in one or more scenario, and why?
 - c** How might you improve or combine the most promising scenarios to ensure they are fit for different possible futures?
 - d** What do you need to find out more about before you adjust your plans? For example, are there emerging trends you need to examine or specialist you need to speak to?
 - e** How might you track trends over time to help you adjust your policies and strategies as you deliver them?
- 7 Agree next steps and actions.** These could include:
- a** Further research into emerging trends.
 - b** Redrafting policy and strategy documents.

- c Recommending new strategic priorities or policy focus.
- d Present findings and recommendations to key decision makers.

Part 3

Wind tunnelling example

This is a simplified example to illustrate how wind tunnelling might help refine a key policy.

Policy: Local volunteers provide humanitarian services in their community.

Scenario: In this future, climate change becomes both a catalyst and battleground in conflicts, as nations vie for resources. These wars undergo a dramatic shift as autonomous weapons redefine conflict.

In one island country, hostile AI-driven drones, equipped with advanced threat analysis, and autonomous robots navigate climate-affected zones where traditional troops can no longer operate effectively. Damaged infrastructure means drinking water is no longer clean, with risk of cholera outbreaks.

This triggers an exodus of refugees, as those with options flee. The poorest and most vulnerable are left behind. The local Red Cross loses 80 percent of its staff and volunteers as people leave the country.

Wind tunnel exercise: Community-driven humanitarian response in autonomous conflict zones.

1 Will the policy impact still be desirable and necessary?

In this future, using local volunteers for humanitarian services remains highly desirable and necessary but it may not be able to meet demand. With a significant exodus, community-driven responses are crucial to address the immediate needs of the vulnerable population left behind.

2 Do the policy outcomes need to be modified in any way?

While local volunteers are essential, the policy should also consider integrating autonomous or remote-piloted technologies to enhance the efficiency and

reach of humanitarian services, especially in the absence of a large Red Cross presence.

Volunteers will also need protection under IHL from autonomous weapons, with threat analysis software able to distinguish aid workers from combatants.

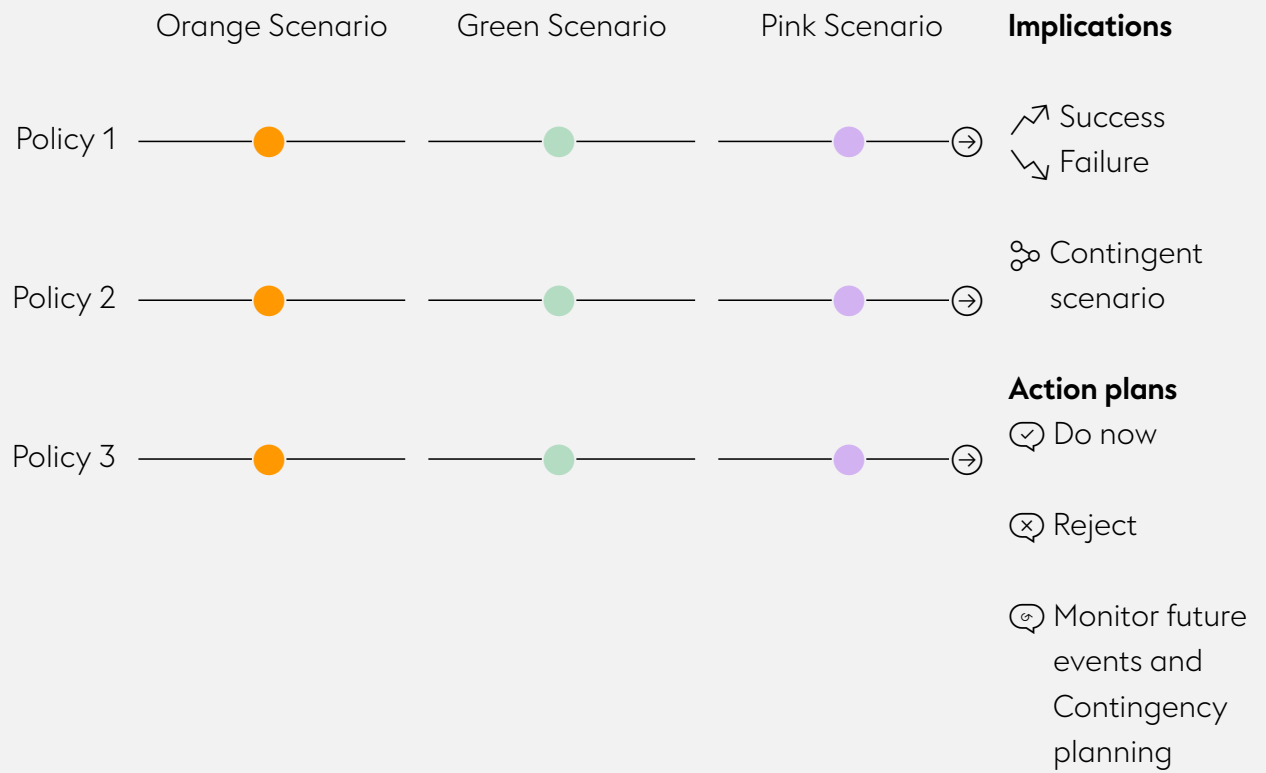
3 How might we achieve the desired impact and outcomes in this scenario?

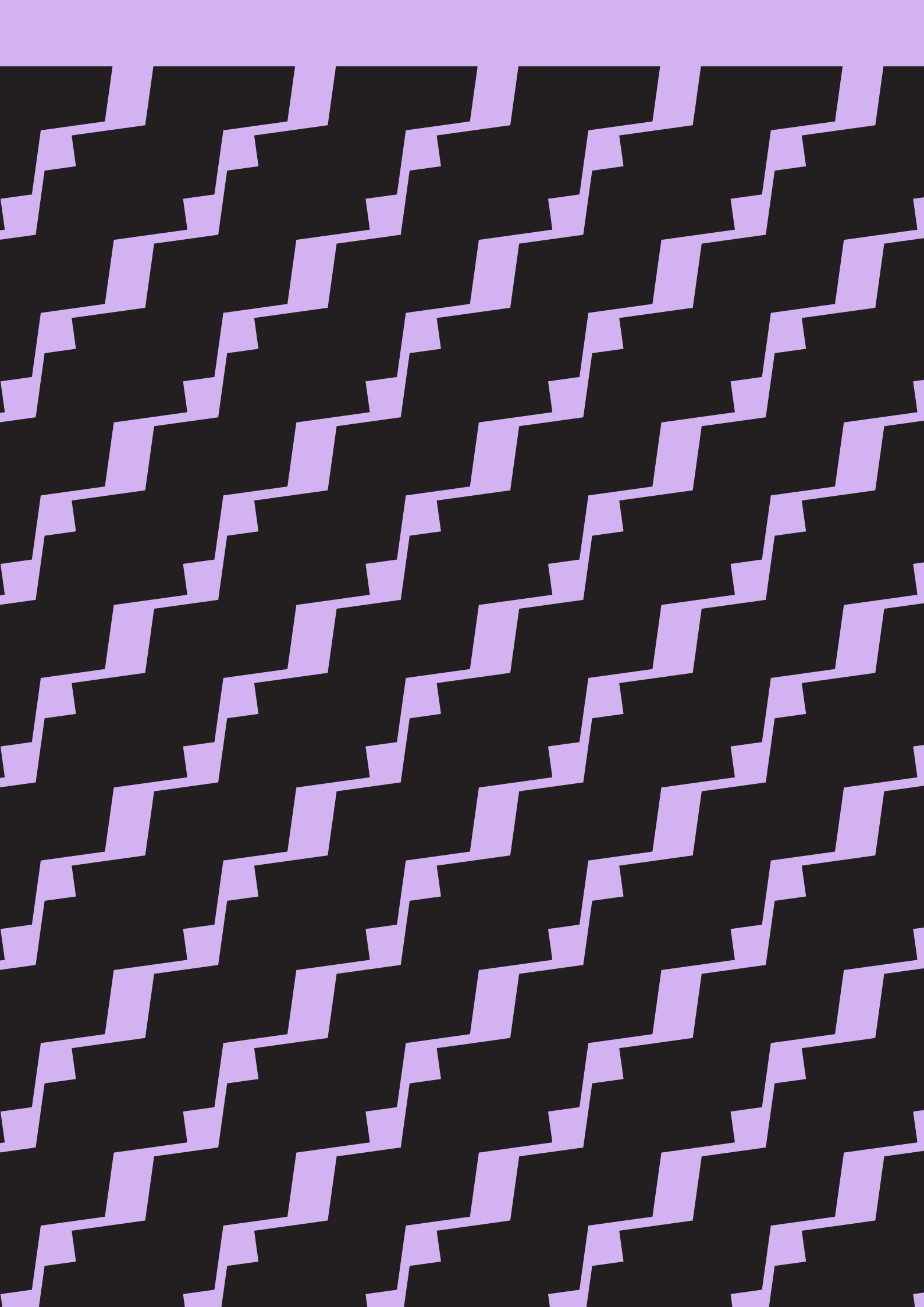
- **Empower local volunteers:** Strengthen training programs and support for local volunteers to enhance their capacity to provide essential services, while improving their material living conditions.
- **Integrate autonomous aid systems:** Explore partnerships with tech organisations to deploy autonomous aid delivery systems, ensuring more extensive coverage and timely responses in conflict-affected areas. This may allow new types of volunteering, such as remotely from other countries to monitor and guide tech systems.

4 How might our strategy need to be modified to deal with this scenario?

- **Include autonomous technologies:** Strategically integrate autonomous technologies into the policy, acknowledging the unique challenges posed by deploying new technology in conflict zones.
- **Re-imagine 'local' volunteers:** People based in other communities or countries could support aid delivery by piloting or supporting technology. This could include people displaced from the country, using their local knowledge.

Strategic foresight toolkit 2023: Practical exercises





Backcasting



Chapter XXIV

Backcasting

We need to connect our visions of the future back to today so that we can take action now.

Backcasting flips the normal planning process, so we start with a possible future and work backwards. This helps us understand how different scenarios might develop.

It also allows us to plot a path to our preferred future. By starting at the end, with a vision of the future in which we have navigated the challenges and delivered positive outcomes, we can identify the steps that might take us there.

Section A

How is Backcasting used?

There are two main ways to use Backcasting.

Option 1

The first works backwards from a scenario to examine how this future might evolve. This is useful because it allows us to think about how we might intervene at each step of the way to encourage or discourage the events that lead to this scenario.

This approach is quite complex. Our friends at Save the Children have produced an excellent step-by-step [workshop guide](#). In it, they outline key questions you will explore in their workshop:

- What technological changes are necessary for achieving the scenario?
- What cultural and behavioural changes are necessary?
- What structural, institutional, and regulatory changes are necessary?
- How have necessary changes been realized and what stakeholder (groups) are necessary?
- Is it possible to define milestones for the identified technological, cultural, and structural changes when looking back from the preferred future?

By repeating the exercise on the same scenario, you can develop multiple paths to the same possible outcomes. This can be extremely useful for strategy development and organisational resilience.

Option 2

Another option is to start with a preferred future. This is a vision for a world in which we have successfully navigated the challenges and used the opportunities the future holds.

Your preferred future might be a vision for a new kind of Red Cross Red Crescent National Society (NS), for example. Or it could be a humanitarian service designed to meet the demands of future crises. Perhaps it is a different community mobilisation model to strengthen local resilience.

The Roots and Routes exercise ([page 197](#)) can help you develop this preferred future.

Once you have a vision, you can use Backcasting to link it to today. You do this one step at a time, moving back from the future asking, “What had to happen before this to make it possible?”.

As you work, ask yourself:

- What decisions would need to be made to set up the next stage?
- What resources would be needed to move towards our preferred future?
- What partners would need to be involved?
- What trends might be influencing the context at this time and how do we manage them?
- What new opportunities are available at this stage that can help us move towards our preferred future?
- How would this stage in the journey be different to today?

Work backwards until you reach the present day. Now you have a set of steps linking now to your preferred future.

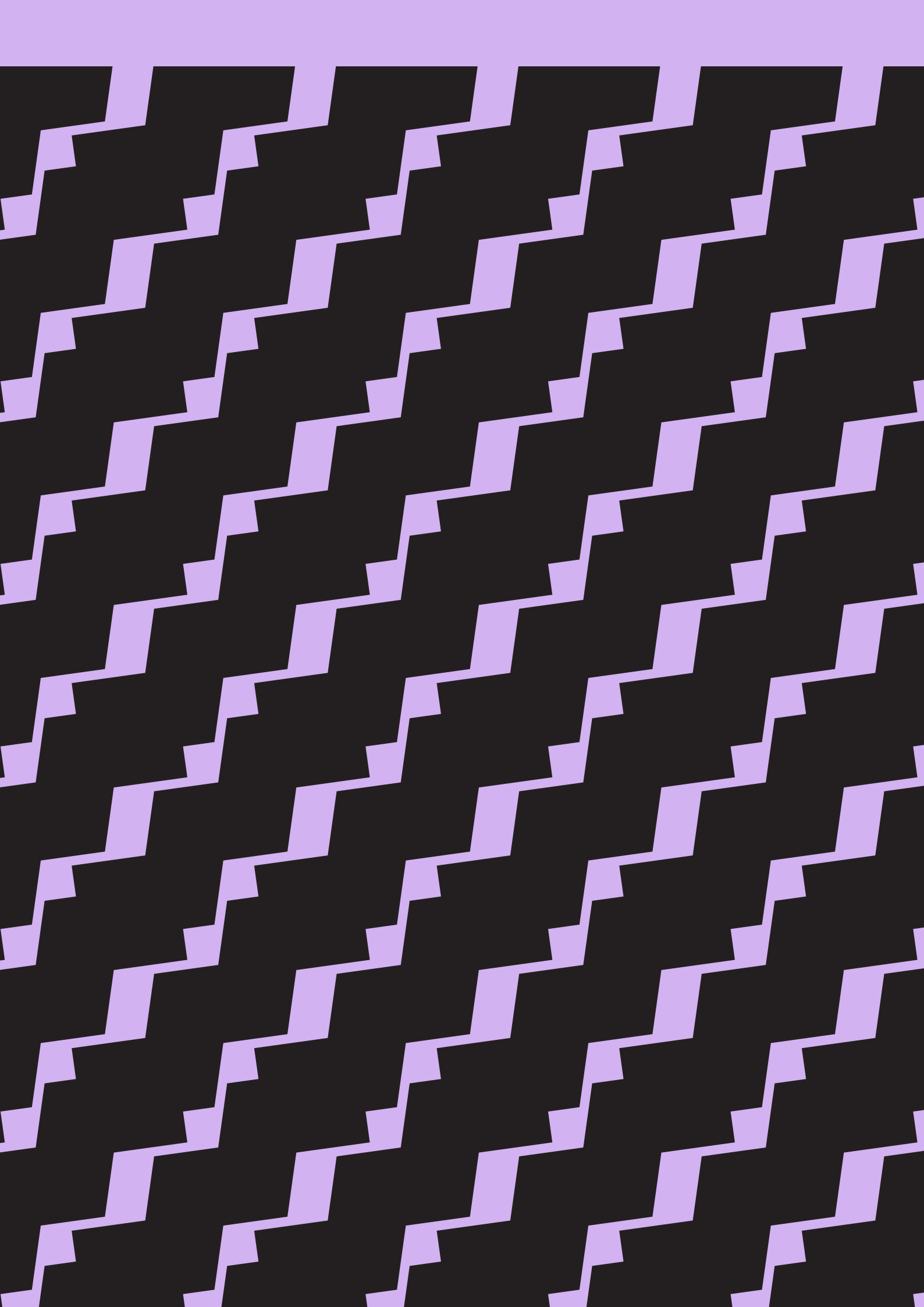
Replay the steps in the opposite direction, heading out from today towards the future. Do they still make sense? What is missing? How could you improve the chances of success?

Finally, decide on the actions you will take next. This could include:

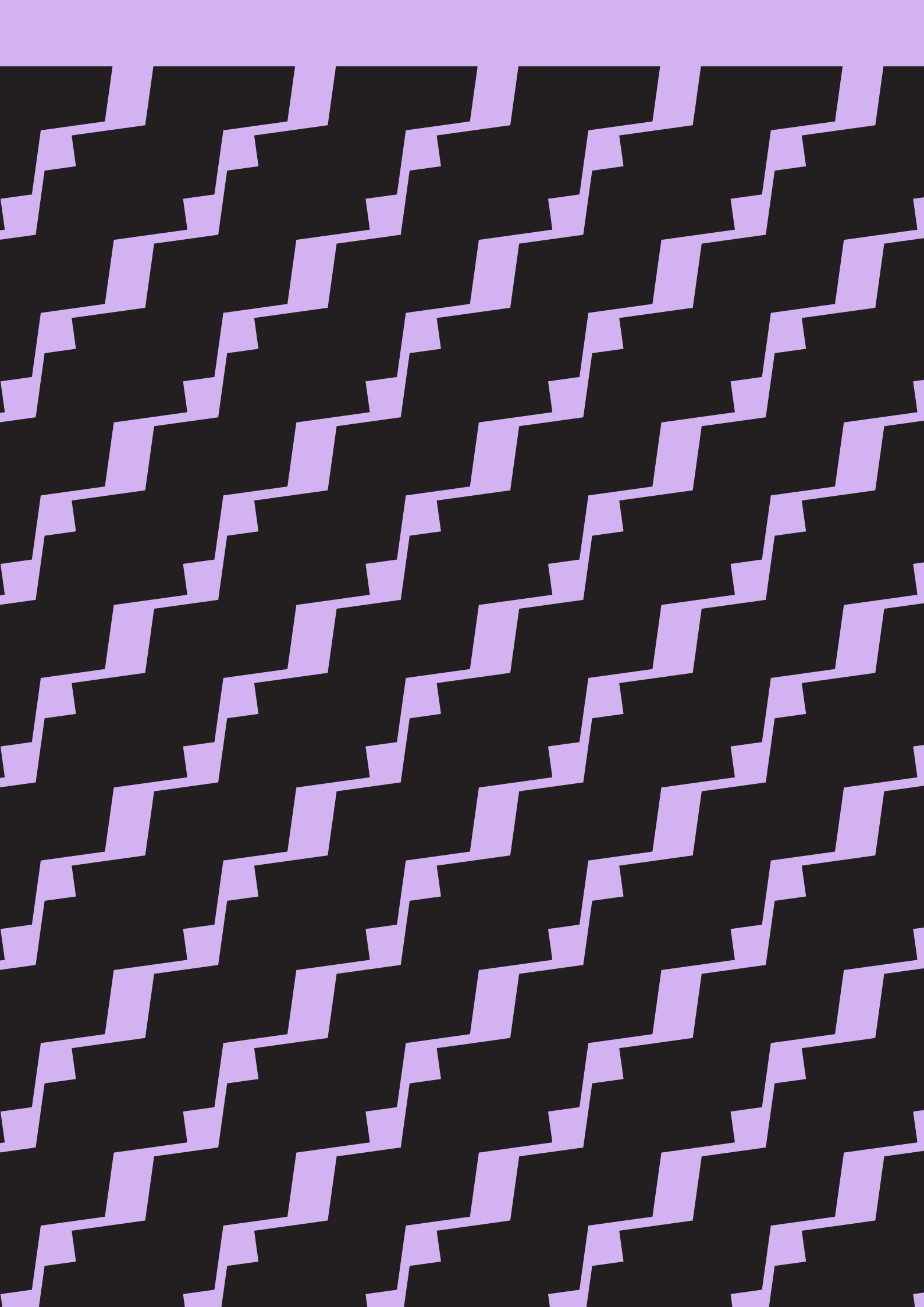
- Who can we speak to find out more about key trends or opportunities we have identified?
- Who could we pitch our new strategy ideas to?
- What experiments can we do that would allow us to test our assumptions and start building evidence for change?
- Which potential partners can we contact that could help us on this journey?
- How do we ensure that **[KEY GROUP]** is better represented in our decision making?

Remember, we are still dealing with an uncertain future. Our future vision, and the strategies we use to get there, need to be constantly updated and refreshed as conditions change and new information emerges.

Backcasting will not give you a detailed step-by-step plan ready to be executed, because it deals with one possible scenario. Instead, it gives you some broad strategic priorities and key considerations to work towards, even as the context and challenges shift and evolve over time.



Ideation: Constraints and their removal



Chapter XXV

Ideation: Constraints and their removal

The world is not a blank sheet of paper, so you need to understand what's already been written. Blue sky thinking quickly gets clouded when the real-world rolls in. And there is a lot of stuff inside the box that needs attention before we can come up with truly powerful new ideas by thinking outside the box.

This is a problem for innovation because new ideas that only work on fresh pages or in perfect weather won't survive in the real world. When we are trying to change things, we can't ignore reality with all its complications, compromises and constraints.

In fact, constraints can be a great inspiration for new ideas. It takes real creativity to find new and useful ways to solve tricky problems in all their gnarly detail.

Imagining how to make your concept work without a reliable internet connection or at half the cost, repairable with easily available parts during a natural disaster, or 70 percent lighter so it's cost-effective to ship, can fuel real ingenuity.

There is always a 'but', and here it is: The constraints we face today will change in the future. This means that we can dramatically limit our thinking by only considering what is possible today.

“ Creative thinking
inspires ideas. Ideas
inspire change. ”

Barbara Januskiewicz

ARTIST

Section A

Constraint removal

When designing new products or looking for ways to transform services, we can quickly run into a mental block. We tell ourselves it won't be possible because we'll never get the budget, the technology is too experimental, or the approach is untested. But that can all change.

Constraint removal can be a really useful activity. By taking away the issues which are limiting our thinking, we free our imagination and uncover new possibilities.

This can work really well as part of a strategic foresight project because you can point to evidence of change and to scenarios in which those constraints have been resolved. In that future, what new things might be possible?

Section B

How to do it

This is a creative activity to use in your solution development phase, when you are generating lots of new ideas before you focus on the most promising.

- 1 Warm everyone up** with a creative activity like Squiggle Birds ([page 113](#))
- 2 Explain the task:** This is a brainstorm session to generate as many ideas as possible. To free up our imaginations, we are going to remove some of the constraints that currently limit our options.

Work in groups of up to five people.

- 3 Set the focus:** This is the question everyone should be answering. How might we... questions work well. For example, "How might we respond to civil unrest driven by climate change?" or "How might we make mental well-being an operational priority?" or "How might we use existing local solutions at scale?"

What if...? questions are also good. "What if floods generate power instead of destroying houses?" Or "What if humanitarian services travelled with migrants instead of ending at the border?"

Another option is to ask What is stopping us...? For example, "What is stopping us retain Gen Z volunteers?"

- 4 Brainstorm constraints:** What are all the things that currently limit our options? This might be lack of budget, legal restrictions, expensive technology, no presence in the area, lack of time... List as many as possible.
- 5 Remove a constraint:** Each group chooses one constraint to remove and imagines a world without that limit. What now becomes possible? What could you do that you cannot do now?

Generate as many ideas as possible; go for quantity. Capture each idea on a post-it note.

Repeat with other constraints, as time allows.
- 6 Create a concept:** Share and group your ideas. Look at the solutions and options that emerge when constraints are removed.

Prepare to pitch a new concept that is possible when the constraint is removed.
- 7 Pitch session:** Each group shares their new concept. Add time for questions and discussion.
- 8 Pick the strongest:** New ideas will emerge which have potential in the real world. By stretching your imagination and removing barriers, you will uncover unexpected new ideas. Capture these and return to your focus question.
- 9 Back to reality:** How might you apply these new ideas to your challenge? Can you build them into your proposed solution? Are there things you could test now? Are there trends you need to research or experts you need to consult to understand how constraints will change?

This approach allows you to identify barriers between today and a possible future response to a key challenge. By considering what would be possible if this barrier was removed, we generate new ideas.

We can also investigate these barriers to see if any emerging trends will resolve them, and how they may change over time. This strengthens our plans as we are able to address concerns about the viability of our solution and move early on new opportunities.

Part 1

Example

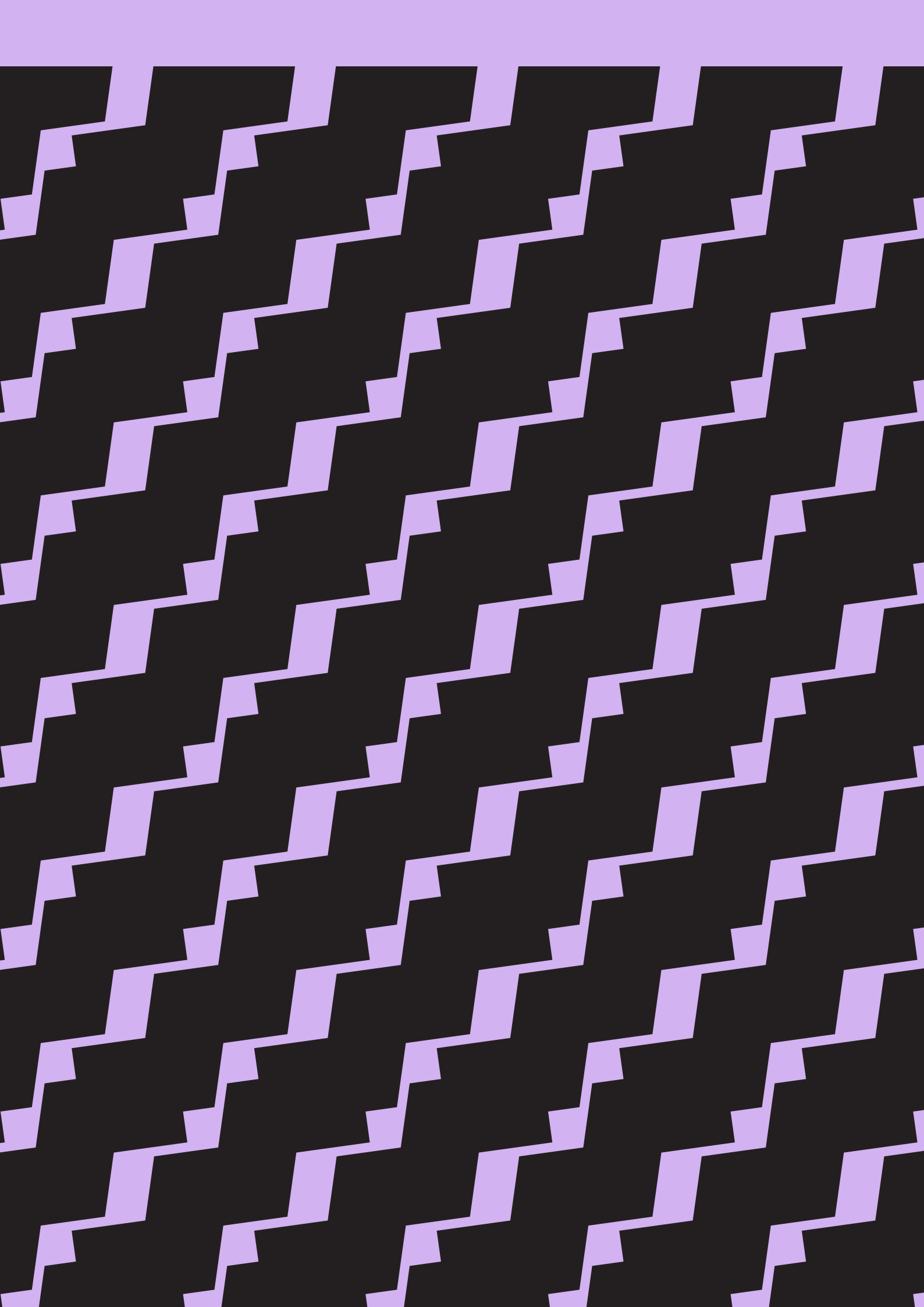
How might we retain more young volunteers?

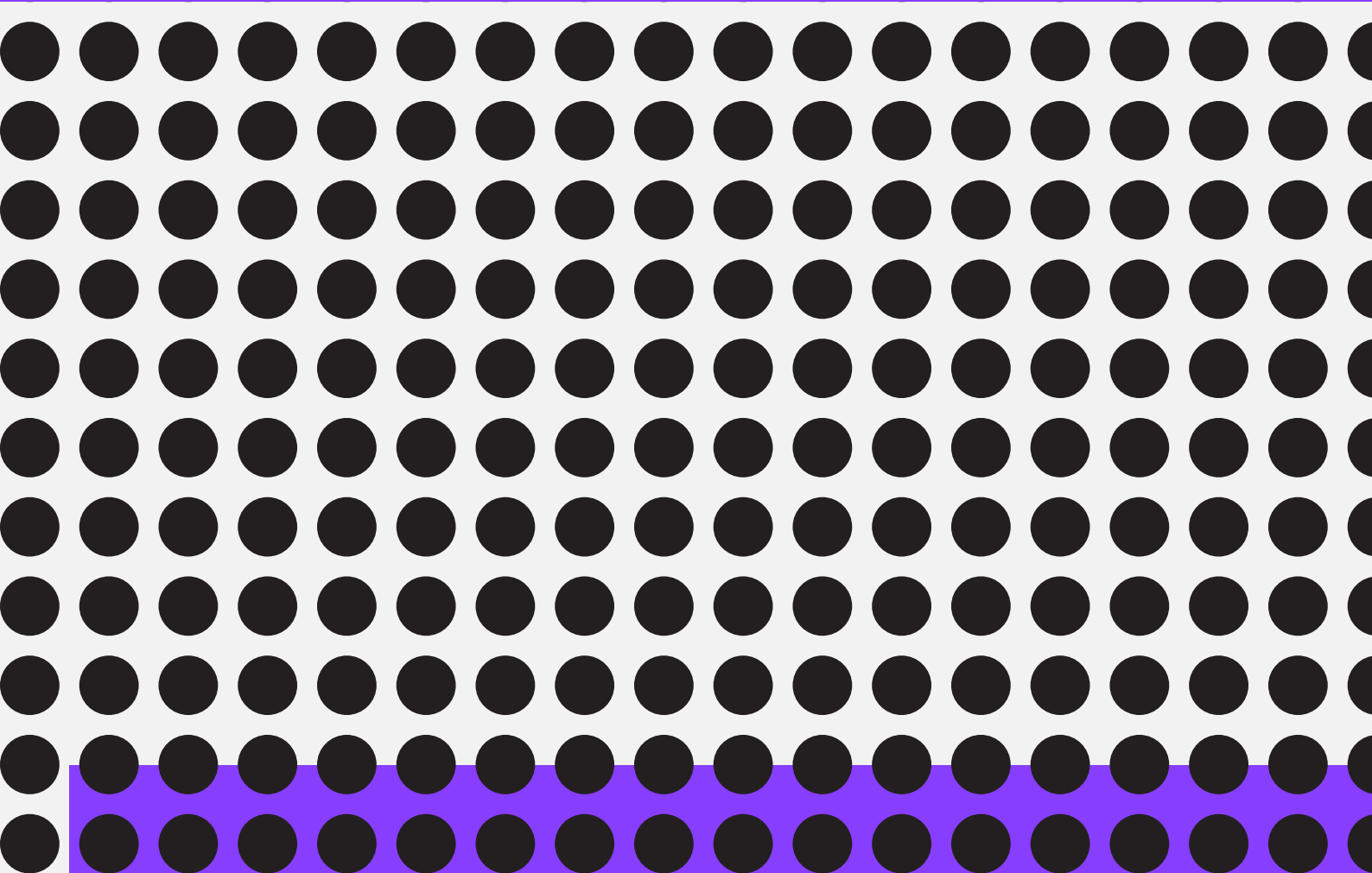
Constraint: Lack of time in busy lives. Inability to commit to regular schedules. Lack of transport. Lack of connection to humanitarian principles.

Without constraints: Young people can volunteer anywhere at any time of the day. The Red Cross Red Crescent comes to them, like a home delivery service bringing them the opportunity to volunteer. Micro-transactions allow them to contribute minutes of time whenever they are free.

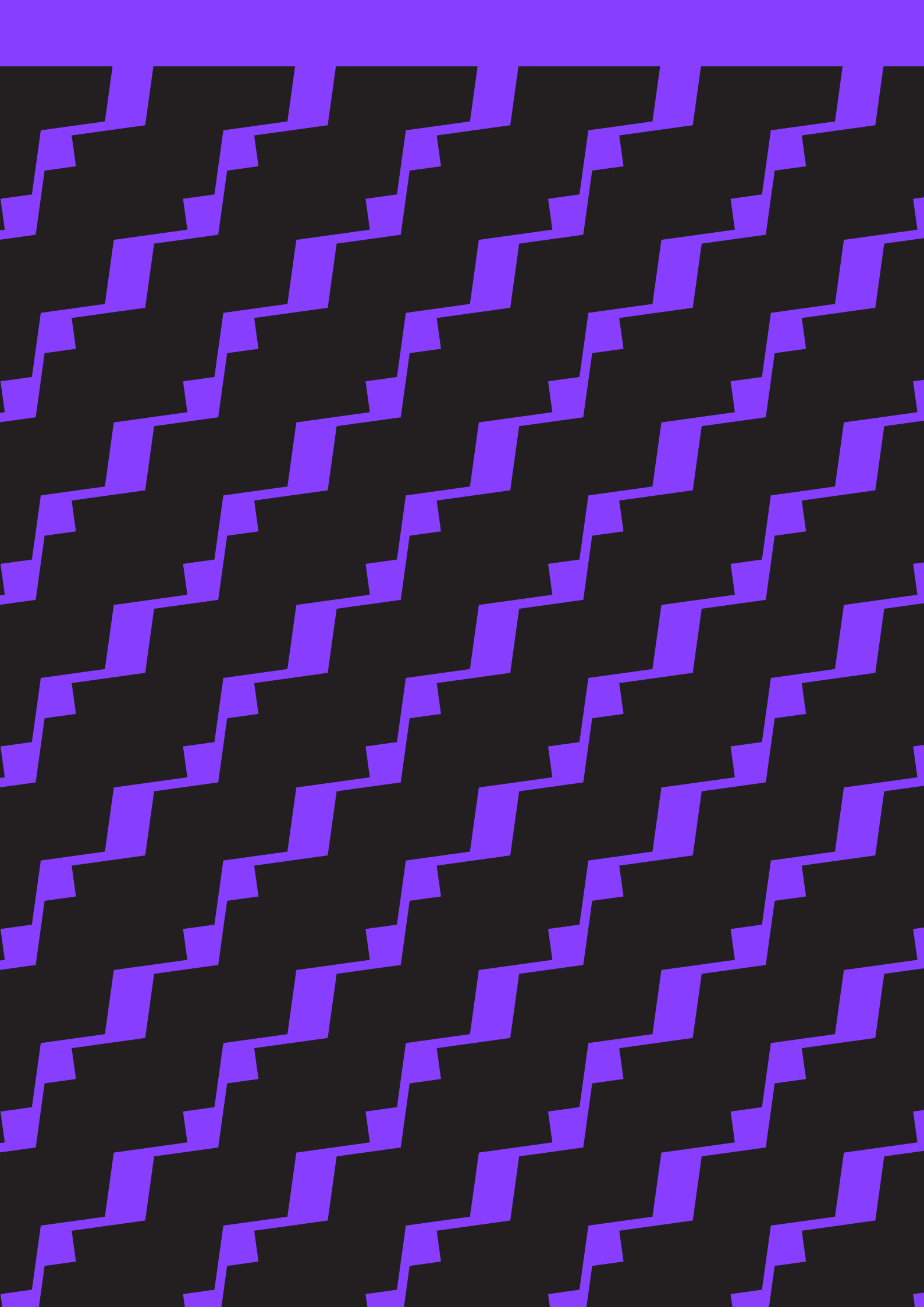
Concept: Driver-less vehicles with all the equipment and supplies needed to deliver a humanitarian service can be dialled up by a community member. They will be taken to the person or place in need of support. This vehicle optimises its route to maximise the number of people who can volunteer in a day. They can contribute to virtual communities, connecting people in crises with support globally, or physical issues in their local area.

Back to reality: Research the latest developments and projections for driver-less vehicles. Consider how drones might be used in this type of service. Conduct research with young people to understand their needs and priorities. Test this concept with a standard vehicle.





Case study: Ukraine Crisis



Chapter XXVI

Case study: Ukraine Crisis

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began on the 24 February 2022, triggered a colossal humanitarian crisis. Many millions of people have been impacted, and the cascading consequences of the war have been felt worldwide.

In the early days of the conflict, as the Red Cross Red Crescent movement mobilised to meet the challenge, the IFRC Solferino Academy was asked to coordinate a strategic foresight process to examine how the crisis might develop over time and interact with existing humanitarian issues in other parts of the world.

The intention was to supplement the urgent operational decision making with longer-term scenarios and some critical questions about the potential impact of the crisis on vulnerability and humanitarian space across the world.

Section A

Overview

This work was broken down into a series of deliverables, with each providing the foundations for subsequent stages.

The first element was a global scenario report. This was a rapid project, aiming to produce a detailed, insightful analysis of trends and coherent, useful scenarios in just four weeks, drawing on the reach and skills of the IFRC network and external contacts.

After publication, a session was held for senior managers to examine the scenarios and highlight key implications for humanitarian organisations.



Next, a one-day workshop for senior leaders in the Europe and Central Asia regional office examined key strategic priorities and created space to consider the network's options for action and areas for further investigation.

Strategic foresight was then embedded in the regional planning process, allowing individual countries to interrogate the scenarios, analyse new information on emerging trends, and adjust their local plans and priorities.

Section B

Approach and tools

The IFRC Solferino Academy led this work, in partnership with regional and local colleagues and collaborators around the world. The work was based on the following steps:

- 1 Set parameters:** The timeframe (three to five years), scope (global humanitarian impacts of the Ukraine crises) and key questions were established.
- 2 Rapid research:** The IFRC network was activated, with researchers briefed and asked to gather insight from both desk research and interviews with their contacts and colleagues. External experts with deep specialist knowledge or lived experience were also interviewed.
- 3 Sense making:** The research was mapped across nine key domains – politics, economy, public health, social structures and civil society, migration, environment, media and information, agriculture and food security, and technology – and interrogated for connections and critical impacts. Weak signals, emerging trends and the interplay between issues were examined.
- 4 Scenario build:** Three scenarios were developed in detail. These were written up and analysed to identify potential impacts on humanitarian issues and vulnerability. Key implications for the IFRC network were identified. Additionally recommendations were developed on the basis of all three scenarios, including with some potential options for action that could be considered by senior management.
- 5 Distribution:** The scenario report was distributed internally to contribute to the understanding of a rapidly changing, complex context and to support decision making and resource allocation.

- 6 Senior leadership workshop:** This session introduced futures literacy (page 15), examined the research and discussed possible post-conflict scenarios (page 239) and the role humanitarian organisations might play. This generated potential activities for the Red Cross Red Crescent to create or enhance in response to the Ukraine crises, and an analysis of what would be needed to successfully achieve this.
- 7 Regional planning: trends analysis:** In preparation for a wider planning process, the foresight team created a group of nine trend ‘dossiers’, digging deeper into emerging issues specifically within the focus area.
- 8 Regional planning: strategy workshop:** A three-day workshop to apply foresight to the regional strategic planning process allowed different Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies to consider possible futures, discuss how trends may manifest differently in different contexts, and generate new ideas for their strategic plan. This was run in collaboration with the regional PMER (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting) team.

Section C

Impact and next steps

This project made a positive contribute to a complex, challenging and fast changing crisis response.

Feedback indicated that it was useful to ‘look up’ from immediate needs and urgent decisions from time-to-time to consider the wider context and potential developments over a longer timeframe.

The implications that were surfaced – essentially big questions about how the scenarios might impact humanitarian needs and ability to operate – were found to be pertinent and thought provoking.

Considering different future scenarios while developing strategies was also well received. Some of the trends and drivers of change identified in the scenarios directly impacted strategic priorities and triggered further investigation.

This work built confidence in strategic foresight and led to multiple requests for support and training. It is hoped that it will lead to foresight becoming a standard element of complex crisis response in future.

Section D

Lessons learnt

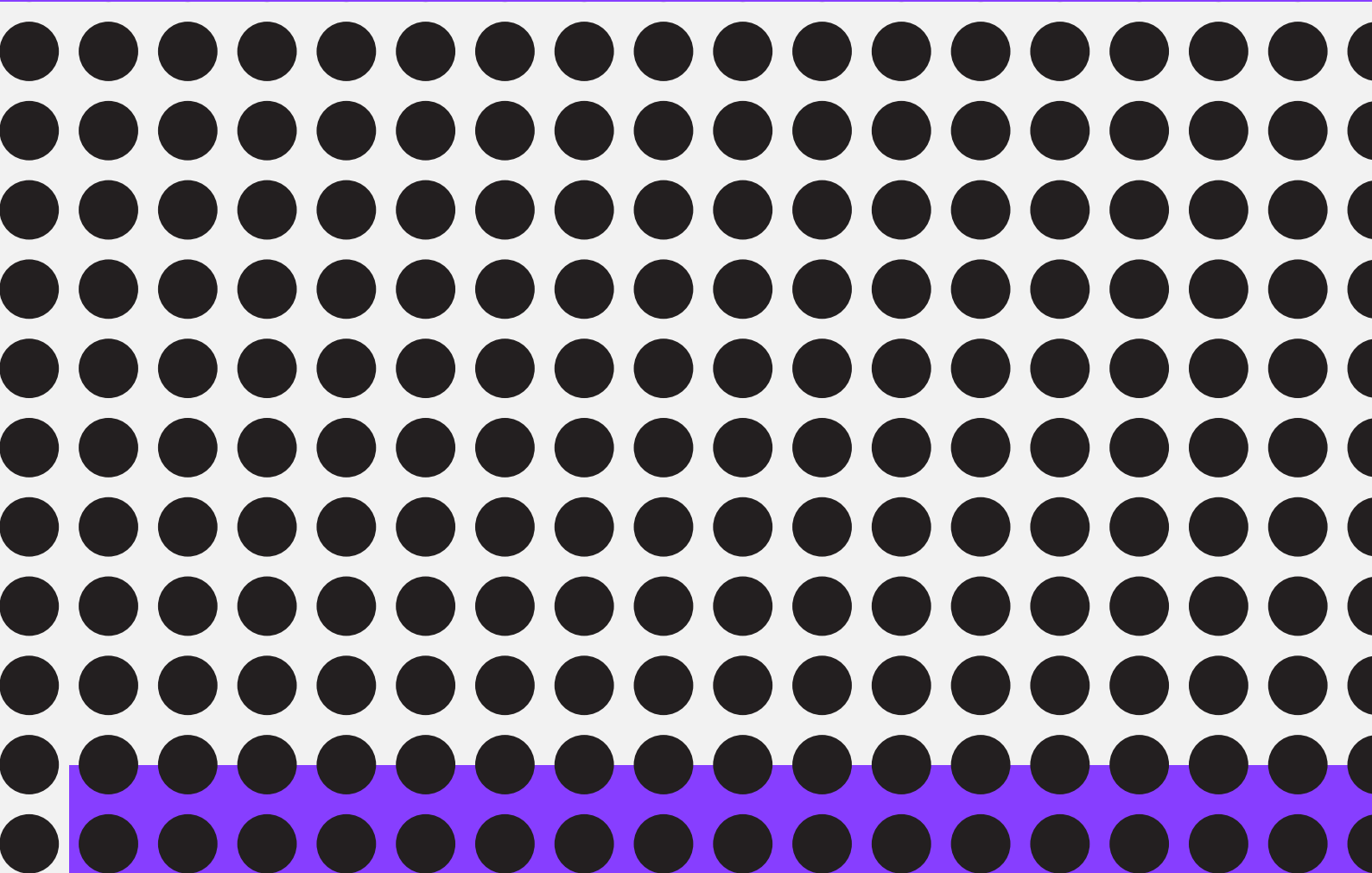
The key lesson was that it is possible – and beneficial – to conduct scenario based strategic foresight work during ‘live’ crises. The foresight work complemented operational decision making and planning, adding additional ideas and evidence alongside the existing approaches.

This work would not have been possible without the collective efforts of colleagues across the IFRC network. Being able to rapidly ‘activate’ such a rich network of contributors was critical.

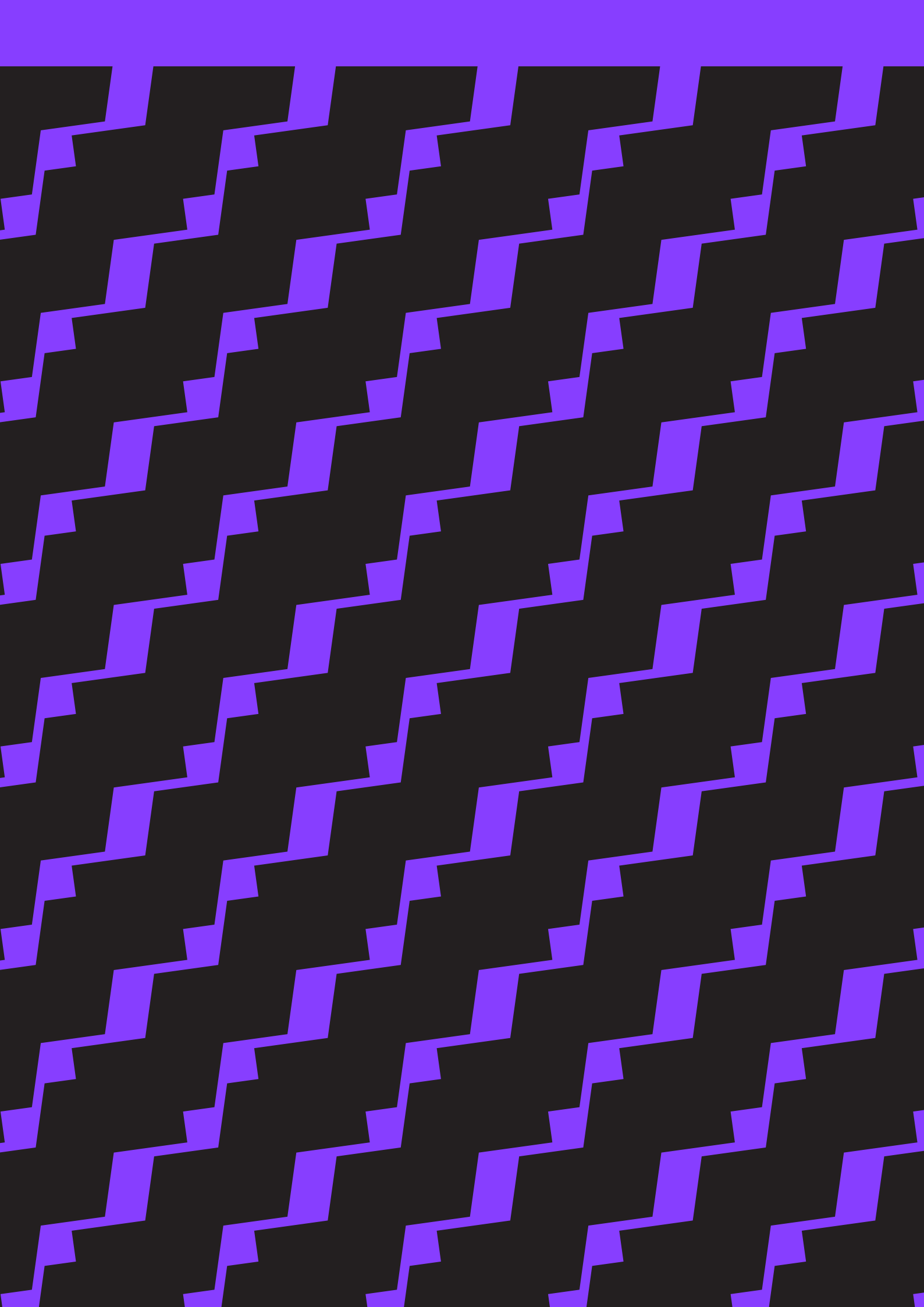
External network building also proved to be essential. It is vital to build connections with external experts, key organisations and communities at the heart of emerging issues so that you can rapidly get their support designing and researching foresight projects.

We also learnt the value of aligning strategic foresight work with the needs of the key audiences and their existing processes. For example, in the regional planning phase, we ensured that the outcome of foresight exercises mirrored the language and structure of the existing strategy processes so that they would be recognised as a valuable addition, rather than a competing process.





Case study: Food Security and Livelihoods



Chapter XXVII

Case study: Food Security and Livelihoods

Food security is a perennial humanitarian issue. People need reliable access to nutritious food to live healthy lives. A critical component to food security is a livelihood that generates the money to buy that food or provides the skills and resources to cultivate it or trade for it.

Humanitarian crises, extreme weather and many other issues can quickly disrupt food security and livelihoods (FSL), triggering cascading issues and threatening lives. So FSL programmes have been a critical part of Red Cross Red Crescent operations for decades.

This strategic foresight initiative was requested by the Zambian, Malawian and Kenyan Red Cross National Societies (NS). This group recognised that the future held new challenges and opportunities, which could fuel innovation in their FSL programmes.

The intention was to generate a portfolio of future-ready, systems level innovations that could be tested in the real world.

Section A

Overview

This programme ran over several months and was divided into three phases, which combined systems mapping, strategic foresight and design thinking:

- 1 Understand the system.
- 2 Explore possible futures.
- 3 Ideate and innovate.

At each stage, the three NS came together to collaborate and share insight, joined by external experts at key points. They then worked separately, focusing their research and imagination on their local context and strategic priorities.

The work culminated in a three-day workshop in each country. These sessions generated many new ideas, rooted in a deep understanding of the system we were trying to influence, and connected to possible futures and emerging risks and opportunities.

Section B

Approach and tools

Phase one examined the system which shapes food security and access to robust livelihoods. This 'systems mapping' exercise (page 157) helped us to understand the mechanics which drive the complex issues we are addressing.

The systems map was co-created with the NS and external partners, drawn from academia, corporates, start-ups and FSL experts.

Each NS then mapped their current programmes on the system. This allowed them to identify areas of strength and potential space for new or enhanced interventions.



In phase two, we explored possible futures for these priority areas. Desk research (page 43), expert interviews, scenario building (page 167) and the Roots and Routes exercise (page 197), allowed us to articulate a preferred future and identify risks.

By using Backcasting (page 225), we sketched potential pathways to this preferred future, linking our ideas back to today and considering what actions we might take now.

The final phase was designed to enrich our ideas and create innovative new concepts for FSL programmes.

We began by revisiting key communities, running story-based workshops (page 245) to understand their hopes, fears and aspirations for the future of food security in their local area. This generated powerful insights into critical issues, key constraints and the potential for new approaches.

This was followed by a stakeholder workshop. We were joined by a diverse group of innovators, entrepreneurs, academics, NGOs and government representatives, who worked together to interrogate the problem space and possible futures. This added depth and nuance to the innovation phase, bringing fresh perspective and new ideas.

Finally, the NS ran a design thinking workshop to generate new and useful ideas. We used icon cards (page 147), desk top walkthroughs (page 43) and classic innovation methods. The concepts which emerged were exciting, future-ready and able to influence the complex system we had mapped.

Section C

Impact and next steps

As well as generating new ideas, this project embedded systems mapping and strategic foresight skills in the participating NS. This kind of legacy is critical for exploratory projects like this.

The portfolio of ideas generated by each NS were ready to be taken forward as innovation projects. Support was offered to help turn the concepts into practical experiments as part of an iterative development process.

The success of the programme led to a proposal to expand the approach to other countries, with aspirations to secure funding to support the continued development of the innovation concepts over several years.

Section D

Lessons learnt

This project was an experimental approach. As well as combining systems thinking, foresight and innovation, we also tested asynchronous ways of working.

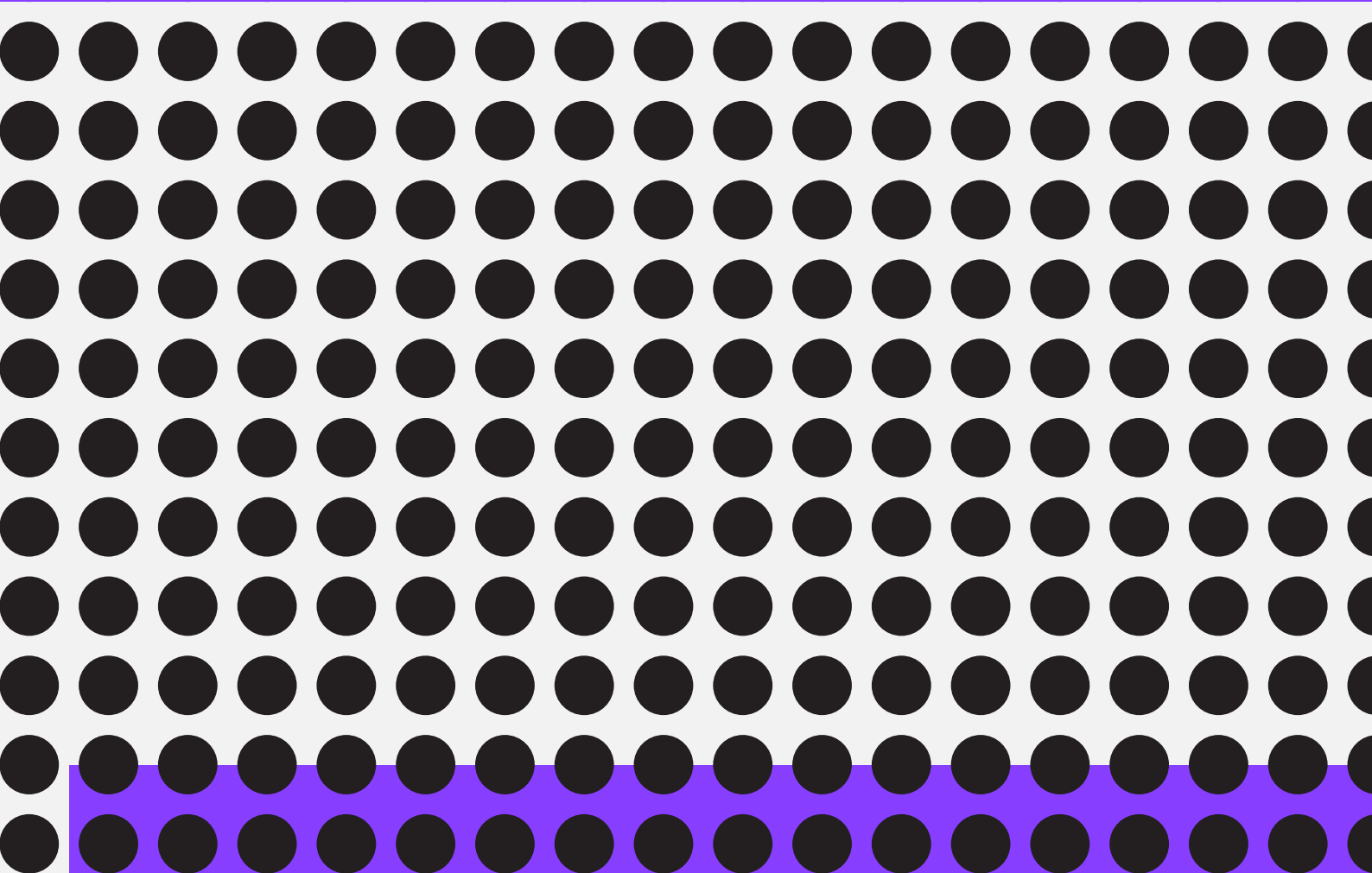
This meant that after coming together for an online briefing and sharing session, the separate NS managed each phase as they chose, drawing on support from the IFRC Solferino Academy as needed.

This autonomy worked well when there was a passionate focal point in the NS, able to maintain the momentum and motivation between sessions. Identifying these champions and offering more training before the programme kicked off could have helped in some contexts.

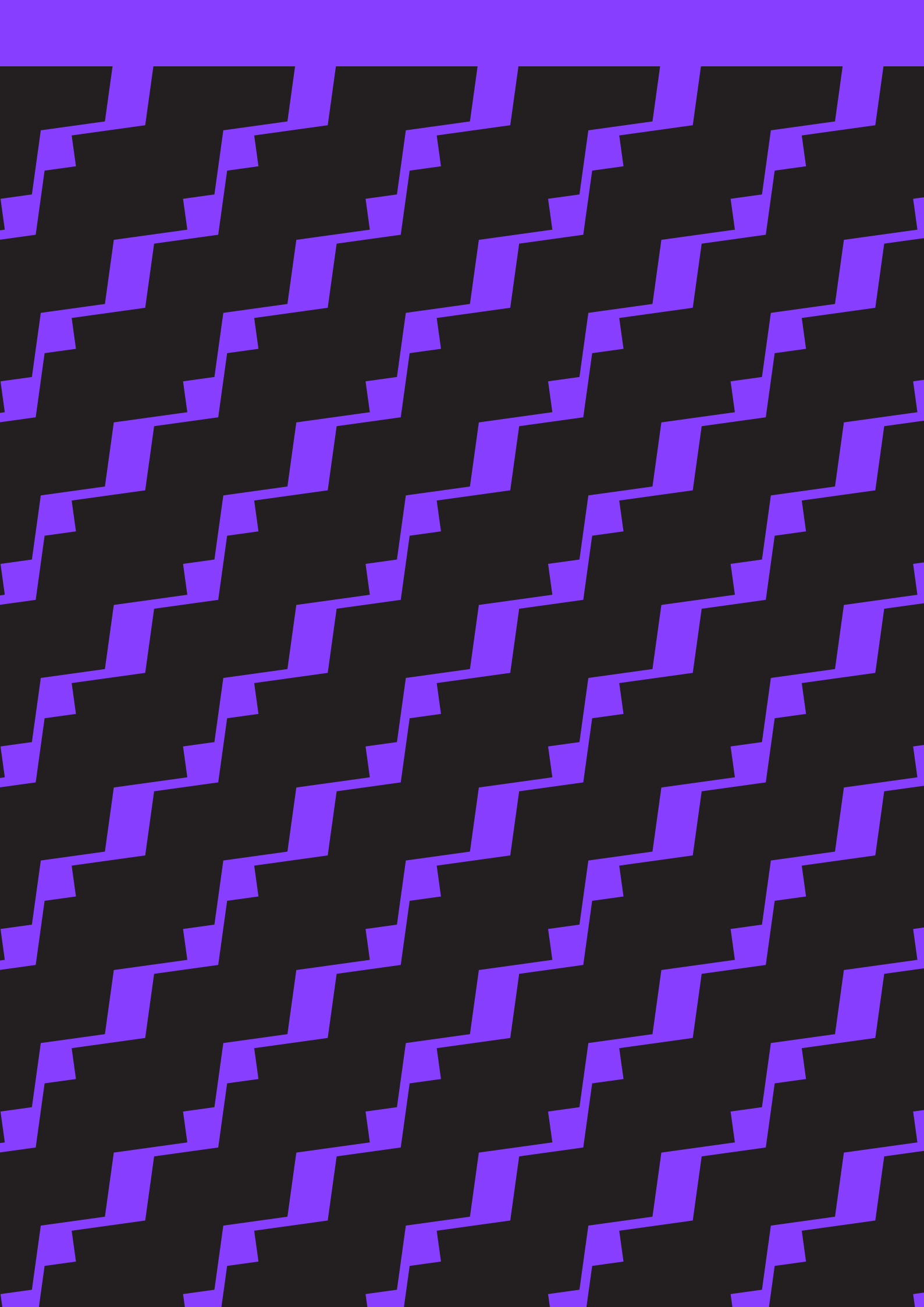
As the work ran over several months, there were disruptions caused by sudden onset crises, which demanded an operational response from the NS. This rightly required staff to focus on service delivery, which halted progress on this project. The asynchronous nature of the programme meant that this did not derail the project for all NS as each could proceed at a different pace.

Community connection was critical to this project. It would have been good to involve these groups at all stages in the project, adding their insight to the systems map and priority areas, for example. As it was, their views were represented by local Red Cross staff and volunteers or drawn from existing research.

External contacts were also key, allowing us to benefit from diverse perspectives. Maintaining these relationships and looking for opportunities to partner on the delivery of the innovation concepts would add strength to the outcomes. This is being explored at the time of writing.



Case study: The Futures We Imagine



Chapter XXVIII

Case study: The Futures We Imagine

Art is a powerful way to explore possible futures. By creating interesting, challenging and engaging pieces of work, we can bring emerging trends to life and provoke new realisations about the choices we make today and the influence we might have over the future. We can also provoke more visceral reactions to these concepts, lifting them off the pages of reports and formal presentations.

The Futures We Imagine was designed to engage young people in strategic foresight work and to challenge the IFRC network to look at critical humanitarian issues with new eyes.

The programme ran over several months, with participants given freedom to connect with their community and explore visions of the future. These communities were defined by the young people themselves – they could be communities of place, identity, shared history, culture or interests.

The aim was to present stories and artworks back to the IFRC network as a way to start conversations about our strategic priorities and vision for the future.

You can view the final pieces on [The Futures We Imagine website](#).

Section A

Overview

This was an experimental programme which combined strategic foresight training with creativity and art to explore possible futures for humanitarian action.

The Futures We Imagine was designed for Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers and staff aged 18-30. Twenty-five young people from around the world were tutored and mentored by the IFRC Solferino Academy to create visions, stories and art from the future of their communities.

Participants were trained in strategic foresight methods before conducting original anthropological research. They used the information and insights to imagine possible futures, which became the inspiration for a piece of speculative fiction.

The young creatives could then apply for funding to make a final piece of art 'brought back' from the futures they imagined in their stories.

These artefacts are designed to raise awareness of an opportunity, ambition, threat or risk from the future. They were later shared with the IFRC network, its leaders and decision-makers, challenging and inspiring our global humanitarian movement to change for the future.

Section B

Approach and tools

The Futures We Imagine provided training in strategic foresight and community consultation through practical experience. It was also intended to stretch people's thinking and encourage them to develop their creative practice.

The participants were selected through an application process in which they detailed the community they hoped to represent and the issues they wanted to explore. Special attention was given to young people with marginalised identities and from vulnerable communities.

Successful applicants were brought together for virtual training sessions. These avoided jargon and academic models in favour of imagination, creativity and exploration of possible futures while still teaching critical strategic foresight

approaches such as trends research (page 139) and scenario building (page 167).

An anthropologist introduced creative ways to consult with communities (page 25), to understand their hopes, fears and aspirations for the future. The participants then ran their own community engagement sessions.

This became the raw materials for a storytelling phase, and each person produced a piece of speculative fiction about the future of their community. Along the way, they were mentored and supported by the Solferino Academy team.

The final phase was to partner with an artist, designer or maker to create an artefact from the future. Cash grants were available to support this work, allowing the participants to realise their visions.

The final pieces were published online and can be used in various ways to inspire, challenge and encourage others to think about the future of the IFRC network in new ways.

Section C

Lessons learnt

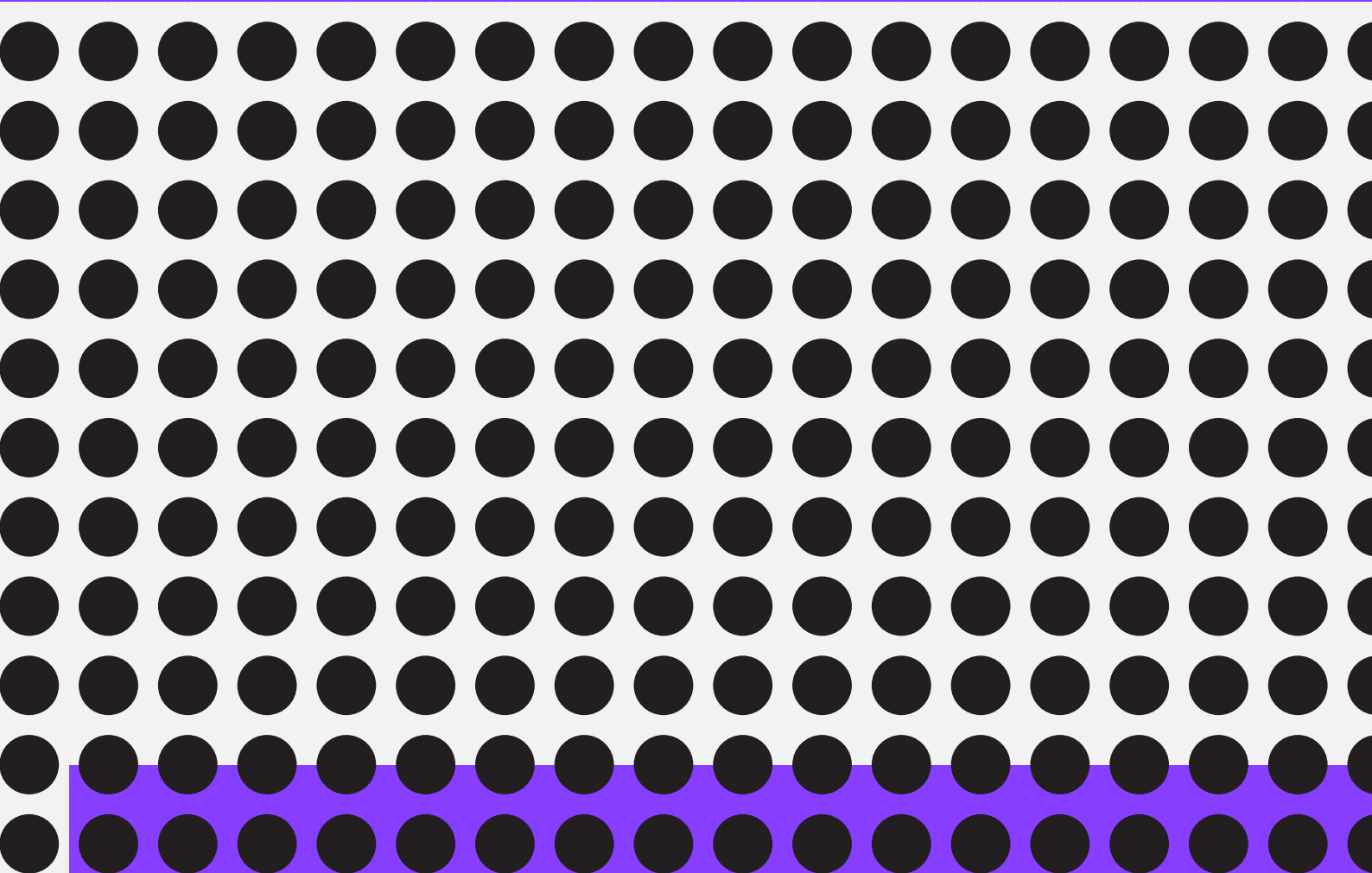
This was a bold and ambitious project. While art has been used in humanitarian contexts in many different ways, combining this creativity with strategic foresight and community consultation was a new departure for the IFRC Solferino Academy.

The young people were given support and mentors but were still responsible for a lot of logistics, such as setting up consultation sessions, for example. This proved to be quite challenging. It would be good to ensure the support of the National Society or local Red Cross Red Crescent branch to manage logistics and ensure access to key stakeholders.

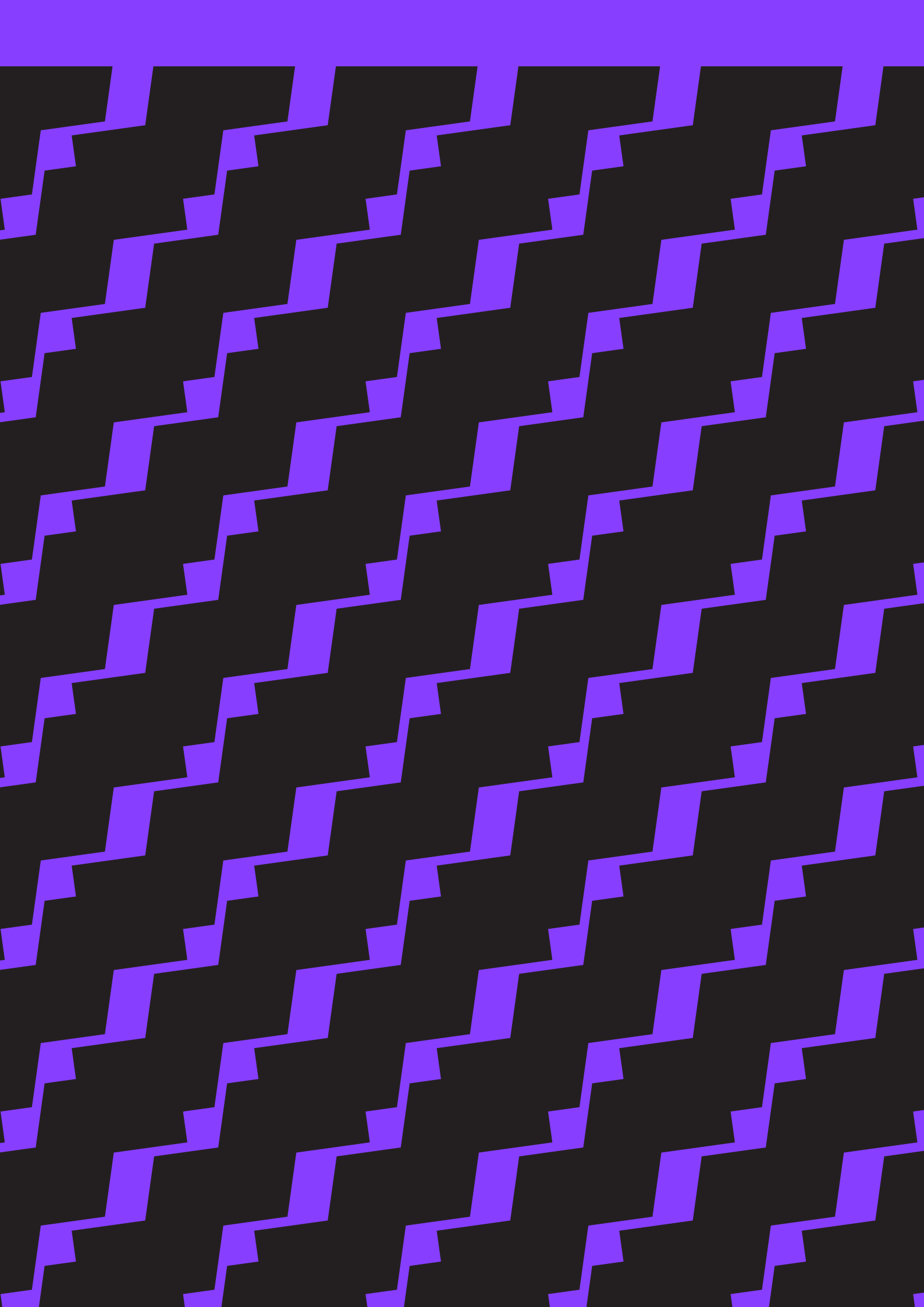
The creative process can also be quite an emotional one. Some people found the experience daunting at times or doubted their own ability to produce good work. Emotional support and constructive critique were critical. Creating more space for participants to share and support each other as they go on this shared journey could help.

Finding and engaging with the right artistic partners also takes time and can be a tricky process. Again, local expertise and support is really helpful to make this work.

We also learnt the power of art to engage and challenge. The project triggered many other creative ideas ([page 67](#)) and encouraged us to consider how we might use art more widely in our strategic foresight practice.



Case study: Strategic Foresight at the French Red Cross



Chapter XXIX

Case study: Strategic Foresight at the French Red Cross

By Sébastien Lagorce

Being at the forefront of humanitarian assistance, the French Red Cross (FRCS) and the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement need to project into the long term, identifying disruptive events or technologies, and understanding new citizen behaviours and practices.

Our organisation's agility – including our capacity to act during emergencies – depends on it. It shapes our ability to understand, recruit, and work with our volunteers and employees, and enables us to improve our actions towards the people we are working for. It makes us more resilient.

This led to the adoption of strategic foresight by the French Red Cross, which includes:

2019: Participation in international humanitarian prospective studies with the [IARAN network](#)

2020: Inclusion of a Strategic Foresight Committee in the association's statutes to guide the Board of Directors on long-term challenges.

2020: Comprehensive prospective analysis as part of the 2030 Strategy ([document in French](#))

2022: Analysis to anticipate the impact of the war in Ukraine on the activities of the French Red Cross over a 6 to 18 month period.

2022: Formation of a dedicated strategic foresight team.

The strategic foresight team aims to develop the use, culture, and influence of strategic foresight within the FRCS. They help the organisation understand and anticipate new needs, practices, or solutions, continuously feeding into the association's strategy.

The team has two major goals:

Provide FRCS leaders with analysis and insight into the possible futures to inform today's strategic decisions;

Raise awareness among volunteers, making the major challenges of tomorrow understandable and actionable for everyone.

Section A

Living in 2050 exhibition

A particularly effective educational method has been the immersive *Living in 2050* exhibition, which is now a part of our crisis mobilisation preparation days. Several hundred people have attended this exhibition, which continues to expand across France.

In this exhibition “where you are the hero,” a Red Cross volunteer is transported to 2050, embodying a French climate migrant in France. The experience aims to immerse them in a France grappling with various social and climatic challenges, forcing them to make choices and witness the consequences.

Beyond the immersive game, the exhibition is part of a broader reflection on “What would you do?” and “Are you ready”? By immersing participants in an uncertain world, it compels them to reconsider these questions from a new perspective, pushing them out of their comfort zones.

2050 - Dunkerque

Après une pandémie mondiale, la ville de Dunkerque est devenue une grande ville à forte densité de population. La ville est devenue une ville à forte densité de population. Les habitants de Dunkerque ont été affectés par la pandémie mondiale. Les habitants de Dunkerque ont été affectés par la pandémie mondiale. Les habitants de Dunkerque ont été affectés par la pandémie mondiale.

Énergie

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Santé

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Économie

Le système économique est basé sur des entreprises innovantes. Les entreprises innovantes sont utilisées pour créer des emplois. Les entreprises innovantes sont utilisées pour créer des emplois. Les entreprises innovantes sont utilisées pour créer des emplois.

2052 - Dunkerque

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Section B

What if the Unexpected Happened...?

Another educational tool is the card game *What if the Unexpected Happened...?*

This workshop is based on envisioning a disruptive situation at a given time horizon (2030, 2040, etc.). It proceeds as follows:

- Identifying causes leading to the event and the cause-and-effect relationships.
- Assessing the impact on the French population and the FRCS if the event occurs.
- Determining actions that the FRCS could undertake to mitigate the causes of these unexpected events and their negative impact on the populations.

The workshop can be conducted in two formats: a one-hour session for sensitisation to the unpredictable, and a three-hour session to develop a specific action plan.

We aim to distribute this card game to all our volunteers. By making the game as educational and enjoyable as possible, we hope it will serve as a basis for reflections, team meetings or social moments.

We are creating a professional card game with instructions, different levels of play, etc. Some themes we have tested include:

- What if, by winter 2026, France experienced hunger riots?
- What if, by 2030, France went through a six-month period without oil for the general public?
- What if, by 2030, France faced a complete shut-down of telecommunications and electronic equipment?



Section C

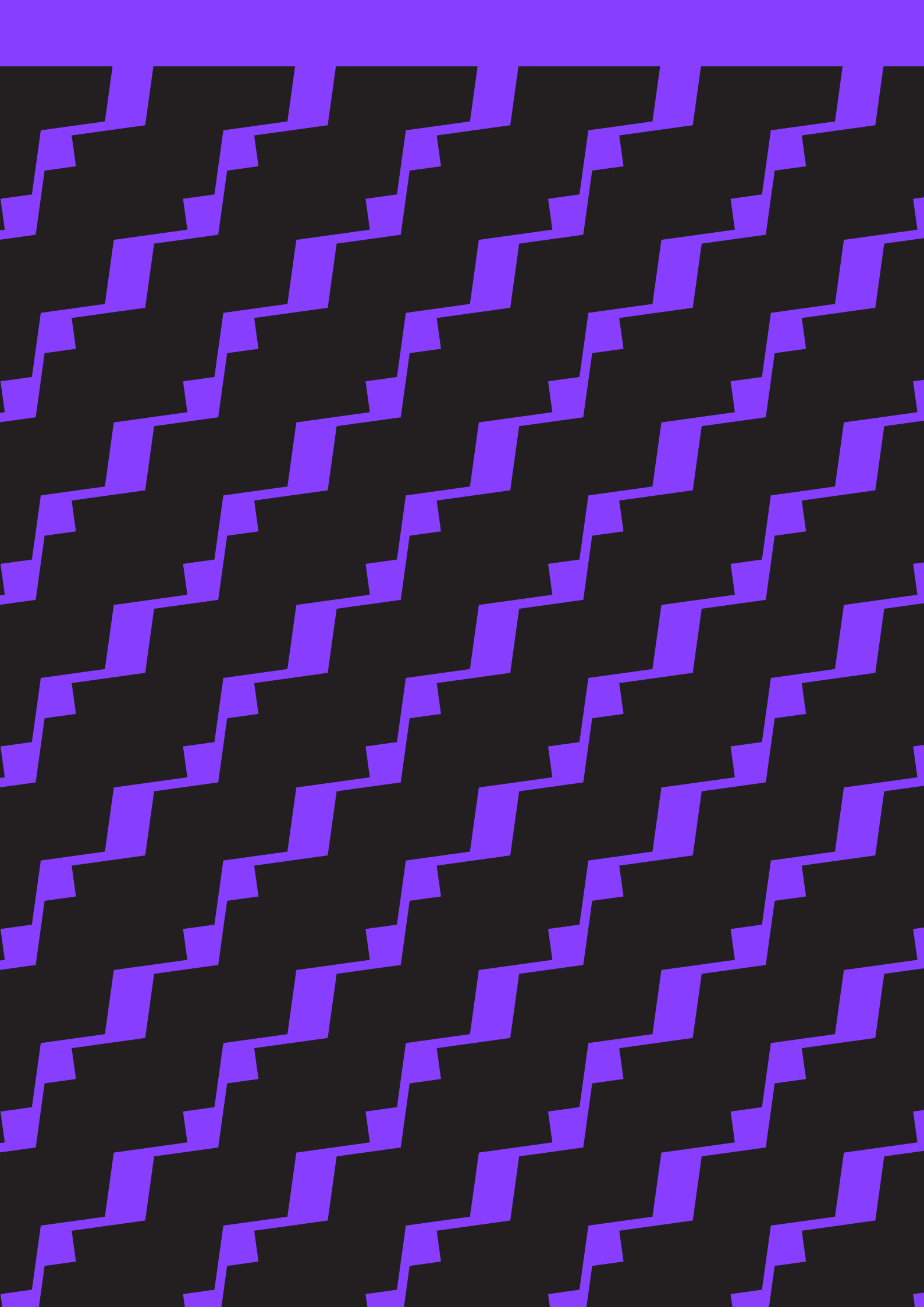
Lessons Learned

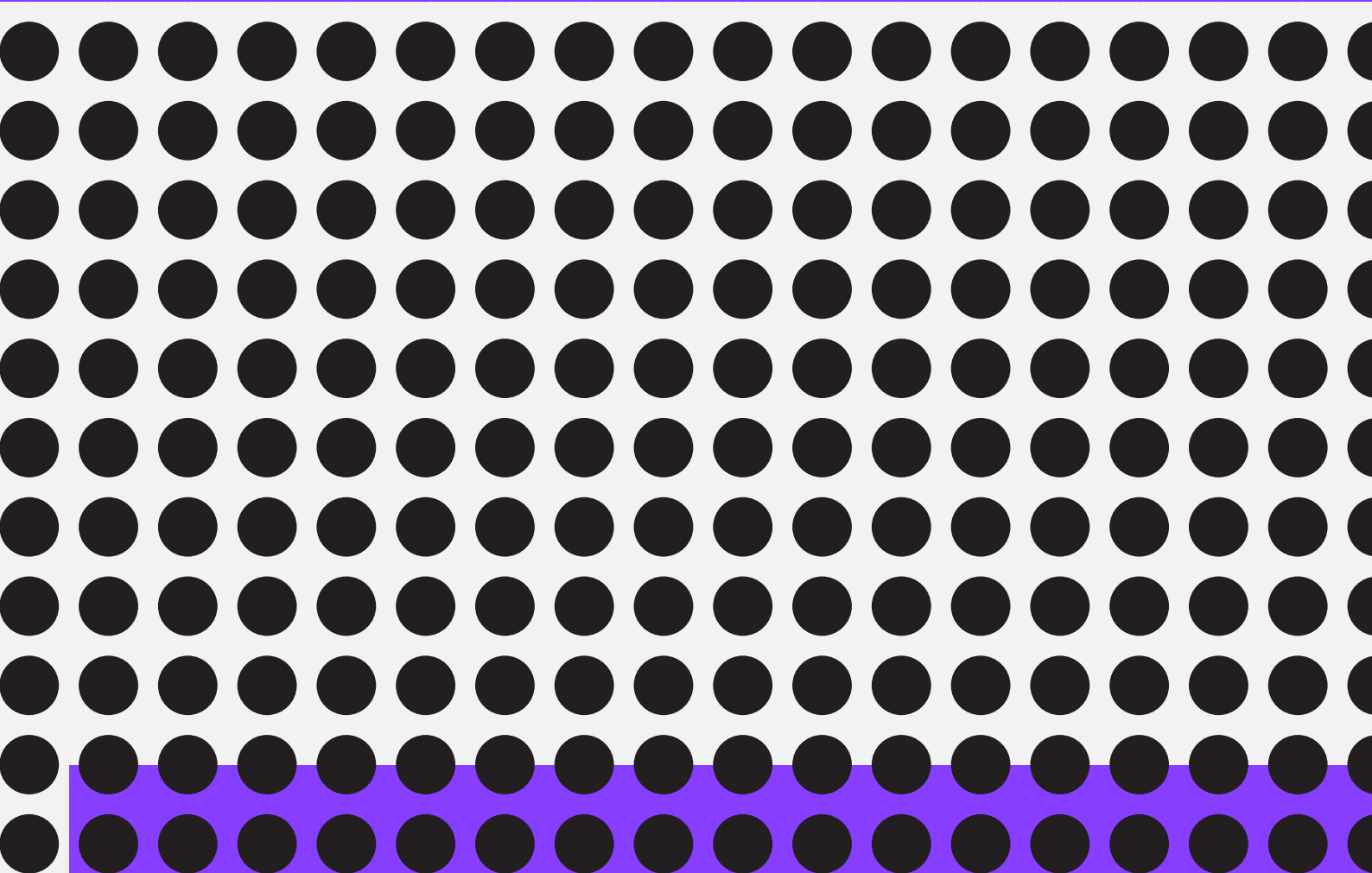
The lessons are both very simple and particularly effective.

Firstly, collective intelligence is a rare strength that must be constantly nurtured and yields unexpected results.

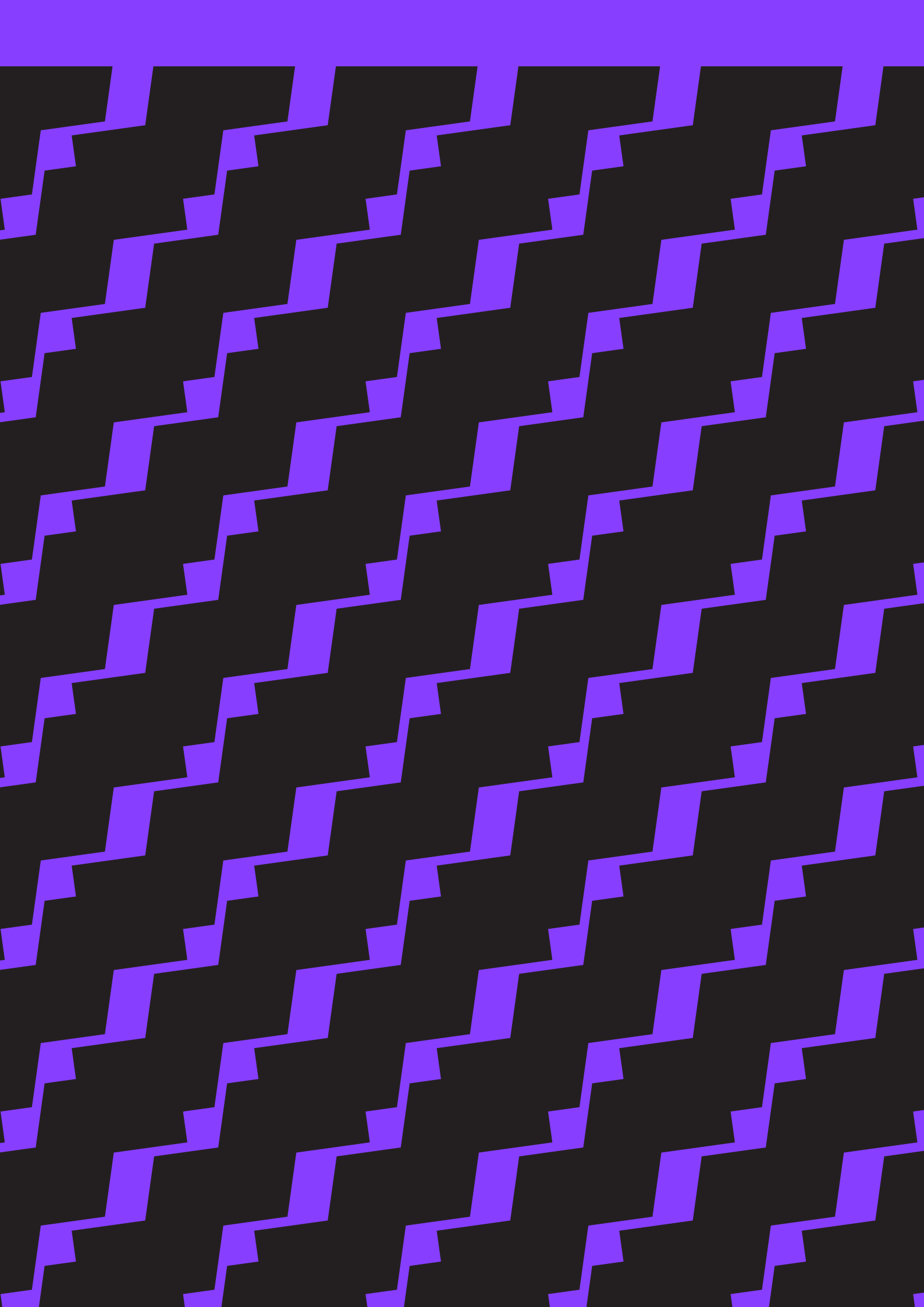
Secondly, preparing for the unknown and unpredictable does not mean being ready for everything... but it is critical in our ability to be prepared to respond when it arises. To be reactive, and not paralysed.

Finally, design is a key skill to integrate and develop in the foresight and innovation teams of National Societies. It allows for both a shift in perspective and the proper adaptation of initiatives to the needs of the people we support or our volunteers.





Case study: Radar on basic needs in the Netherlands



Chapter XXX

Case study: Radar on basic needs in the Netherlands

By Tecla Hoekstra and Marily Bronkhorst

There has been a strategic shift within the Netherlands Red Cross (NLRC) since 2021. Where the former strategy solely focused on emergencies, the current strategy entails helping people in need in both emergencies and in daily life.

In recent years the NLRC has witnessed an increase in poverty, homelessness, barriers to accessing medical care and psychosocial support in the Netherlands. Other organisations, such as the Food-bank and the Salvation Army, see an increasing number of people asking for support and they cannot meet all the needs.

Stepping in as NLRC seems logical, but there are limits to our capacity, finances and resources. To make choices, it is first necessary to gain insight and engage with emerging needs using strategic foresight methods.

The Radar Project was designed to help define and identify needs in the Netherlands, and then to monitor trends and anticipate changing demand.

Section A

Overview

The Radar Project is based on three key steps:

- **Definition** of basic needs, including minimum standards for the Netherlands.

- **Identification** and monitoring of basic needs in the Netherlands.
- **Reporting** on trends in basic needs, to support decision making by our management team.

Part 1

Definition of basic needs

The definition of 'basic need' is not straightforward. While there are established humanitarian frameworks like the Sphere Standards, these are mainly tailored for disasters, disaster-prone or low-income countries. This makes it difficult to apply within the Netherlands.

By making use of desk research, expert interviews and collaboration with academia, minimum standards of basic needs in the Netherlands have been developed for:

- Medical care
- Psychosocial support
- Shelter
- Food and water
- Personal hygiene
- Dignified safe space
- Information about loved ones

Part 2

Identification and monitoring of basic needs

The next focus was how the NLRC could identify people, or a population, at risk of not being able to meet their own minimum needs in the Netherlands.

After a couple of pilots and experiments with digital tools, the following three methods were found to be the most efficient and effective in the identification of needs:

1 Public data and research

There's a lot of public data and research available online. A lot of knowledge can be gained by systematically reading and analysing these reports and developing a knowledge base in which this data can be accessed.

A long list is reported to the management team every six months. When the decision is made to develop new forms of assistance, steps two and three take place.

2 Contact with stakeholders

A lot of useful information can be collected through close contact with local and national stakeholders who provide services or support to vulnerable groups.

The critical questions are: Are there persons who you cannot help at this moment and what is the reason you cannot help them?

Note: We are currently only contacting stakeholders about needs which the NLRC can help with, or where there is a desire to develop new forms of assistance. In this way we do not raise expectations. In the coming years, local NLRC branches will be further involved in this process.

3 Contact with people in need

This can be done, for example, through a focus group, interviews, needs assessments and through existing assistance from the Red Cross.

Again, we only contact people when we already help them or are in a process of developing new forms of assistance.

The identification of emerging needs can act as a starting point for the development of evidence-based interventions through which the NLRC can proactively address these issues.

That is why the outcomes of the Radar tool are regularly shared with the Management Team (MT) of the NLRC to support decision making.

Section B

Approach and tools

The Radar tool was developed by a multidisciplinary NLRC team. It supports the second step: the identification and monitoring of basic needs.

The idea was to make the tool as simple and as useful as possible. The outcome was an excel document with two tabs:

- **Long-term trends and context factors** in the Netherlands that could impact basic needs, either positively or negatively. This tab contains a very short summary of the trends, risks and opportunities, plus links to more in-depth reports.
- **Monitoring of needs in the Netherlands** linked to specific groups of people and supported by public data and research. This includes details of who is in need, what specific issues they are experiencing, and which services already exists. A traffic light system grades these issues to highlight changes.

The Radar tool is updated every three months. On a day-to-day basis a dedicated Microsoft Teams site functions as a knowledge bank, in which staff keeps track of the latest updates.

Every quarter, the Radar update is sense-checked with specialist colleagues and the outcomes are bundled for the MT of the domestic department of the NRLC. This includes advice on whether to start more in-depth research into the emerging needs as a starting point for new interventions.

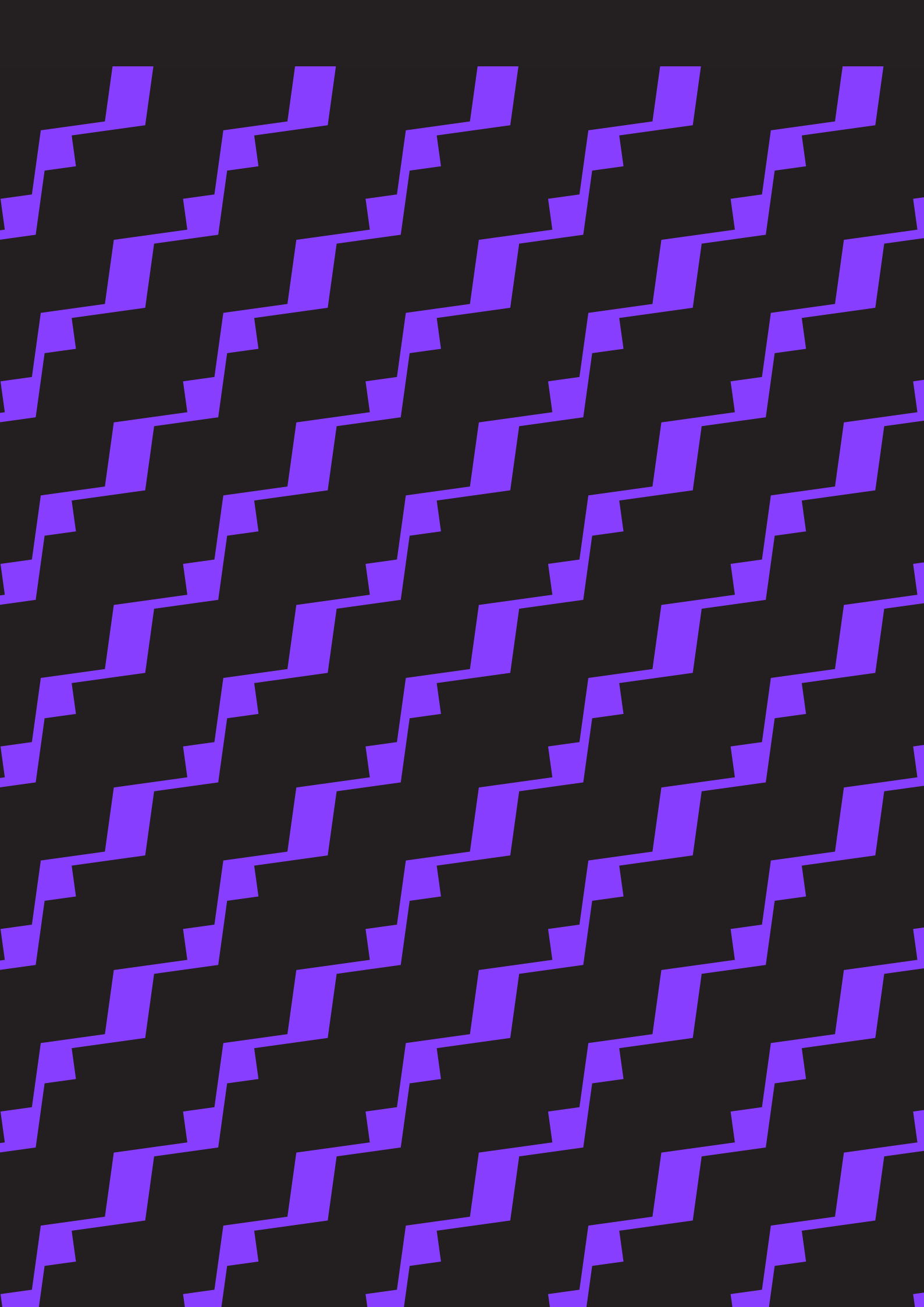
Twice a year the MT receive a trend report for the next six months. This includes scenarios for potential emergencies and overall trends in society that impact needs, such as an aging population, digitalisation, poverty, inflation, and the housing market.

Section C

Lessons learnt

So far, the NLRC learned a lot during the development of Radar:

- It is complicated to involve stakeholders and local Red Cross branches without creating high expectations. For example, when doing a deep dive on the topic of homelessness, at this stage solely for the purpose of the Radar, colleagues got excited about the insights and already wanted to start planning new services.
- During the development of Radar, we came to the realisation that a lot of people in the Netherlands lack one or more basic life necessities. And although there are a lot of local organisations active, the collective effort is not enough. The balance between choosing to help a group of people based on 'gut feeling' vs substantiated data is difficult.
- Last, although the development of Radar took a couple of years, keeping the data updated and relevant is not a lot of work. Defining a clear process and dividing the work between team members is key.



Contact

The IFRC Solferino Academy helps humanitarians find creative solutions to complex challenges.

We work across the IFRC network – collaborating with our leaders, volunteers and the communities they support – to help them design and test new ideas that work in the real world.

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“ In this age when surprise plays so important a part, is it not possible that wars may arise, from one quarter or another, in the most sudden and unexpected fashion? And do not these considerations alone constitute more than adequate reason to take precautions against surprise? ”

Henri Dunant

FOUNDER OF THE RED CROSS MOVEMENT – A MEMORY OF SOLFERINO, 1862

