

Futures Camp

Fingoo



Bringing futures thinking into global development

Futures Camp Fingo in short

Fingo joined the Futures Frequency partnership programme in autumn 2021. The programme, run by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, provided Fingo with funding for a project to focus on broadening the debate on futures. To this end, Fingo experimented a new way of facilitating futures discussions in a camp in August 2022. The core elements of Futures Camp Fingo were collective interaction and peaceful environment to expand imagination and challenge our thinking. There were 16 participants from Fingo Member Organisations, four from our Member Organisations' partner organisations from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Nepal and two from the Finnish-African cultural centre Villa Karo. Participants also had background in Somalia, Iran, Tonga, and Nigeria. The camp was facilitated by three Fingo employees. Lasting from Friday to Sunday, the camp took place at the Porkkala Camp Centre in Kirkkonummi.

The logo for Fingo, featuring the word "fingo" in a lowercase, rounded, sans-serif font. The letter "i" has a dot, and the "o" is a simple circle. The logo is positioned on the right side of the page, below the main text.

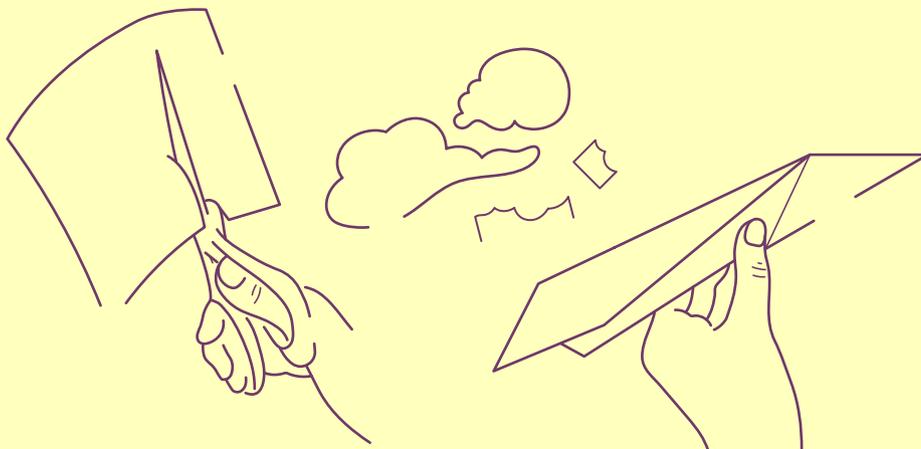
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Contents



Futures thinking in civil society organisations’ global development work	2
Futures Frequency	3
The Camp	6
Take-homes and discussions	8
Transformation in development cooperation	12

Imagine a balmy August evening and a campfire at a seaside location in Southern Finland. Imagine a group of people from around the world about to get to know each other. Imagine how they start sharing their dreams and hopes for fundamentally sustainable futures. What comes out of that? In the fall of 2022, a group of global development experts gathered to Porkkala for a weekend. This is what we learned.



IN A GLOBAL WORLD of interdependencies, the only way to solve our wicked problems is to create a genuine understanding between different realities. We must therefore pay close attention to the aspirations for futures by those voices that are most often ignored. Futures thinking is necessary for advancing the profound sustainability transformation of societies. Therefore Fingo has decided to focus on enhancing futures thinking and skills together with its member organisations. Futures Camp Fingo was a unique opportunity to do this in a new way.

The broader framework for Futures Camp Fingo was to question who decides our futures. This included creating new narratives concerning the futures of global development and development cooperation from the perspective of decolonisation, as well as actors' access to influence them. The camp challenged the traditional notion of foresight and the precautionary nature of futures thinking. **We cannot know the future, so it is important to employ a variety of ways of imagining it and to proactively influence the shaping of our preferred future. Embracing uncertainty is also part of our futures skills.**

Today's futures narratives still emerge from a narrow group of experts. There is an urgent need to introduce alternative futures that genuinely generate equality and systemic sustainability. It is time to challenge the economic growth narrative and the perhaps unfounded technological optimism as a solution to enable endless growth. Our imagination must expand across generations in order to eradicate inequalities and emphasise global justice¹. To be able to genuinely seek sustainable futures, we must broaden our view and look beyond our own perspective. We must also acknowledge the existing uneven power structures and place ourselves as part of the debate, as uncomfortable as it may be.

What does ecological reconstruction look like when seen from the suburbs of Lusaka, and what does the term even mean over there? What do people in cultures with a different perception of time think about the future? Why do we think the way we do, and which structures do those thought patterns reproduce? The Futures Frequency² method is an excellent tool for broadening of perspectives and examining these questions.

Futures thinking in civil society organisations' global development work

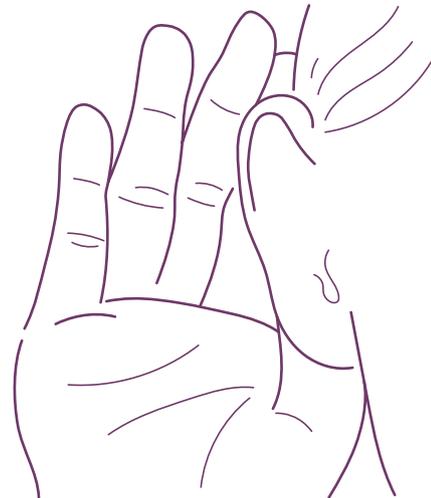
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS in both development cooperation and global citizenship education need to take part in national futures dialogues and make space for their partners' stories about preferred futures. This allows a switch from a reactive mode into more long-term thinking and more genuine relevance to needs and aspirations. This way Finnish futures debates can better consider global interdependencies and more diverse voices. Stories and aspirations must be created together, not assigned from above. **Are we really listening to each other?**

Futures thinking is a necessary organisational and personal skill that anyone can learn. To avoid a reactive approach, we must identify our own assumptions and thought patterns, challenge them, expand our capacity for imagining a spectrum of opportunities and, ultimately, take action for the realisation of our desired futures. **All of us can and should start using the future today.**

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*The future is not predictable.
The future is not predetermined.
Future outcomes can be influenced
by our choices in the present.*

Roy Amara 1981³

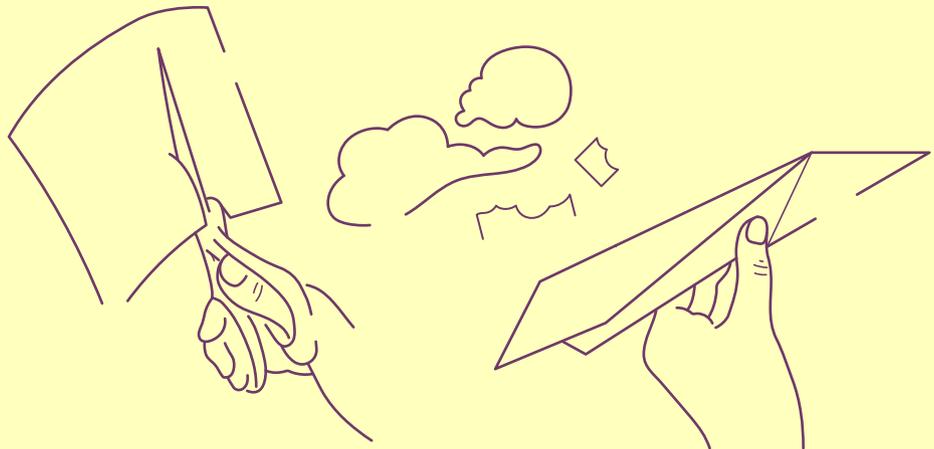


Futures Frequency

Developed by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, Futures Frequency is a method for imagining preferred futures and acting towards them. It provides a tool for challenging our assumptions about the future and stretching our imagining of possible futures. To conclude, the participants write down concrete measures and steps towards their preferred future. Futures Frequency is particularly suitable for groups with no previous foresight competence or experience, and the stories and examples can be tailored to each case. Before the camp, Fingo has also organised intensive three-hour online workshops. Futures Frequency is flexible to a variety of contexts.

Futures Frequency consists of three elements:

- 1** Challenge
- 2** Imagine
- 3** Take action



1 Challenge



We all have some ideas about the future. These are typically either utopian or dystopian or emphasise the continuity of the present status quo. Flying cars and space tourism, ecovillages and return to self-sufficiency. These, however, are narratives that we have already heard before and that are not necessarily our own. Our ideas about the future are multilayered fabrics of learned norms and conceptions of the world. For example, narratives emphasising the status quo and continuity share an idea of growth, efficiency, and development. Thinking otherwise about a genuinely sustainable future requires that these narratives are challenged.

We are not as rational as we'd like to be. Our brain is above all tasked with keeping us alive. It is constantly scanning for threats and resisting change and risks.

This means our brain wants permanence and predictability; our factory default setting is to regard change as uncomfortable. We cannot change our brain but we can learn to notice emotions and behaviour so that we will not immediately give in to our fight-or-flight response when we face change we haven't expected. We can acknowledge that our thinking is embedded in societal hierarchies and identify the ideas we have created as a society; what kinds of beliefs, attitudes and unwritten rules are regarded as acceptable. All of these were devised by people and can be rewritten. We are currently – largely due to being forced by biodiversity loss and the climate crisis – in the middle of an enormous paradigm shift that calls into question our ingrained beliefs. Yet we may still not see a clearly signposted path to a new kind of future.

2 Imagine



Expanding our imagination is one of most fascinating things we can gain from futures thinking. To be able to seek change, we must first imagine it. From imagining we can move to words, and from words we can move to actions. Therefore, the way we do our imagining matters a lot. **Imagining different futures reminds us that there are countless alternatives ahead. We do not have to follow our current path.** We often talk about possible futures. Is there even such a thing as an impossible future? At least our ideas of what is possible

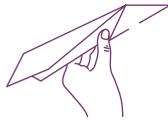
or impossible have expanded in recent years. Imagining allows us to grasp our preferred and desired futures – our visions of change.

Imagining futures is difficult because we do not always even know what we do not know yet. It might be ridiculous or uncomfortable to aim for something that doesn't have a name yet. Despite of that, we must just try to accept uncertainty and make an effort regardless of it. It is easier to detach from the present moment if we look far enough into the future,

for example into 2050. In Futures Camp Fingo, we used artistic thinking to facilitate imagining, but there are also other methods. Stepping into other people's or organisms' shoes may also help. What might the future look like through the eyes of other species? What will future generations think of our actions today?

3

Take action



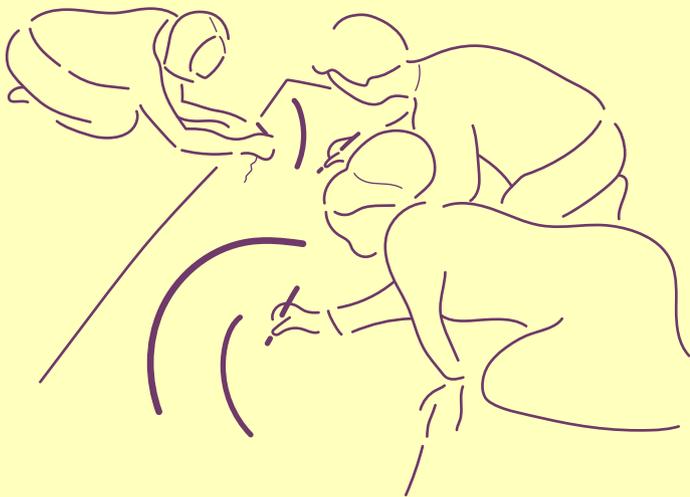
Without action, we only go halfway in challenging our own thoughts and imagining something new. This is why the final element of Futures Frequency focuses on taking action. Action takes shape at different levels: behavioural, structural and, ultimately, our ways of thinking or world views. For us to achieve effective and long-term change, we must tackle each of the three levels. A behavioural change, such as recycling, is not enough if we otherwise think that we as the human species are superior and that it is our down-right duty to exploit ecosystems and natural resources in a wasteful manner. World views often guide our behaviour unconsciously, but fortunately they can also be analysed and changed. Behaviour is the easiest level to start with, and structural analyses are already familiar practices in the field of global development.

How often do we even ask these questions in decision making? It is **necessary to move forward and imagine alternatives, something totally different. Failing this, we may end up living someone else's future and that future may be very different from the world we hoped for.**

Ultimately, it is essential to speak in an active voice. To ensure commitment to the actions, all participants wrote letters to themselves on the final day which they received a few months later in mail. **What can I or my organisation do from today onwards to make our vision a reality? Where can we start? What exploitative structures can we focus on changing?** People involved in global development are good at spotting problems and shortcomings, but Futures Frequency forces us to address changes through solutions and opportunities.

The Camp

Once we arrived in Porkkala, we agreed on a few common rules. Every participant was there to contribute not only with their professional expertise, but with their whole life experience. We concentrated on actively listening to all kinds of voices while trying to identify the important messages behind each story. Each one of us was tasked with creating a safe space for others. States of not-knowing and confusion were welcomed. In addition to knowledge, bodily experiences and all kinds of feelings and emotions were considered as part of learning. Each participant was able to choose the depth to which they would take part in the exercises. Participants were also encouraged to practise tolerance of uncertainty and to allow insights and hunches to sink in later.



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All my life I've been living behind the curtains. But now I've stepped out.

One of the participants

Enriching methods

We had the opportunity to add depth into Futures Frequency with three additional enriching methods.

Members of Villa Karo encouraged us to explore **artistic thinking**. An experimental exercise employed audio drama sketches questioning our world views. The purpose of the introduction to artistic thinking and the exercise was to free our thinking into something wilder and unusual and to depart from the ordinary. After the audio drama, we looked at our own lives as a set in a theatre scene. What elements does it consist of? What should be taken out or increased? Essentially, what kind of life can flourish through me?

Active listening was encouraged right from the start of the camp. Towards the end, we discussed what prevents us from genuinely listening to and, consequently, understanding each other. After an introduction, we did a group exercise where each participant got to speak for five minutes uninterrupted. Each of the other group members was assigned a specific level to listen to and to report their observations. The levels were the head (thoughts, observations and facts), the heart (feelings and emotions) and the feet (what the speaker really wants, wishes and intends to do)⁴. Participants were tasked to share what they intend to do after the camp to promote their preferred future.

The **space for slow thinking** was a nook set up at the camp venue where participants could take a moment to rest, think and write down their thoughts, observations and hunches in the notebooks provided. Provoking questions included: What have we not thought of? What bodily sensations, reactions, feelings am I experiencing? What do I want to ask others? What ideas, thoughts or questions about futures are emerging? Participants were also encouraged to use the notebooks to write down any small hunches that were not yet complete thoughts or ideas but observations bubbling under; someone else might be able to take them further.

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What's foremost on my mind is 'a way of doing things differently'. Alternative dreams need a time and place where people can get together, genuinely share their thoughts and dreams and that way create shared visions and new ways of doing things. That's what we did this weekend and that was a powerful experience I want to continue in my life, activities and work.

A quote from the notebook

Take-homes and discussions

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What if we valued all life and every being?

“

What if wealth was replaced with sharing?

“

What if difference did not manifest as pain but if, instead, we invited it to emerge in each other?

Visions

A challenge often faced in futures thinking is that we are unable to detach ourselves enough from the present moment to think long term alternatives. The visions of the camp featured recurring themes such as **inclusion, equality, living within the boundaries of our planet, and cross-species and cross-generational empathy**. Therefore, it may feel at first that our imaginations are not stirring us up enough. How could we engage in a radically different imagining?

However, we realised at the camp that, if our visions were to become a reality, they would be very different from the present moment and therefore radical. What would it actually take to create a world like that? If visions feel too abstract or high-flown, we can try to focus them around a specific theme, for

example. In the end, the purpose of the camp was not necessarily to generate ground breaking new ideas. Instead, the aim was to germinate our hunches and potentially have them blossom into ideas in the longer run. Futures thinking is a slow learning process where quick wins are seldom seen. One of the participants pointed out that it is important to recognise the present moment and where you stand there before you can change the future.

We also reminded ourselves of the fact that shared visions are often consensus-seeking. Producing them is definitely not easy. Perhaps that is why it is often easier to stick to the old even though we know it is not working.

Visions for 2050

We will achieve collective solutions through compassion and collaboration that allows everyone to live a fulfilling life in harmony with our planet.

We will be citizens who have the power, motivation and means to act for fair and inclusive society and have adopted a sustainable lifestyle.

Safety and security of all people will be guaranteed by the communal mindset. Diversity will be respected. Every human being will have a sense of belonging. Indigenous and other forms of knowing will be listened to and valued. Fear, competition and “charity” will have been replaced by genuine solidarity, compassion and sharing.

The world has been decolonised.

We will be educators as part of a platform teaching all generations to respect themselves and all beings. Teaching the concepts of emotional, intelligent values, community-building skills and communication skills will ensure an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable society.

Spheres of transformation

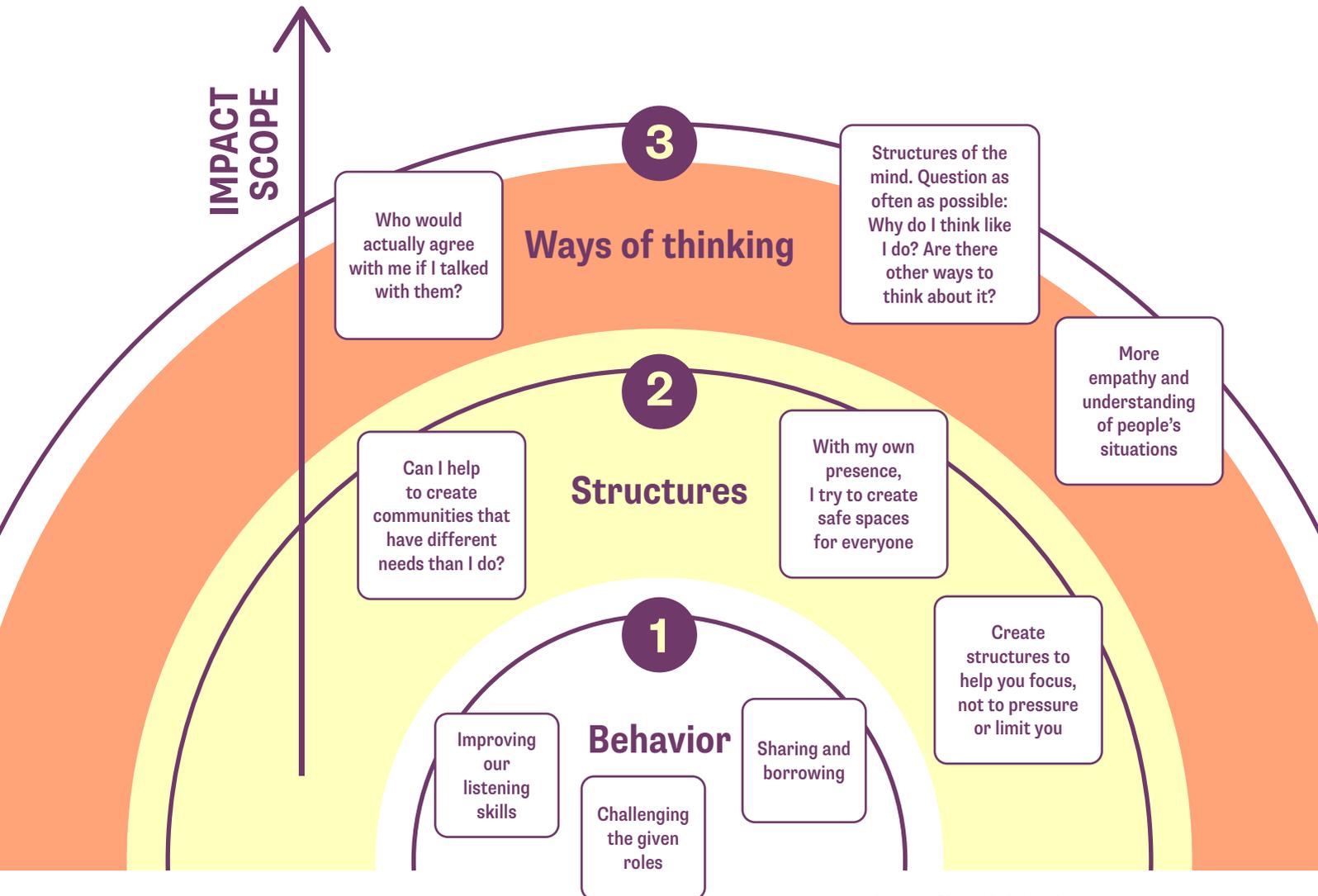


Image: Sitra. Original image adapted from Laininen 2018; O'Brien & Sygna 2013; Sharma 2007.

In the 'Take action' section we took the visions of the groups to the level of doing things. Each group evaluated the actions required both more broadly and personally. How can I influence, for example, structures that maintain inequalities? Can I change the language I use or make space for those whose voices are heard less often? The focus on actions also made it visible that there are differences between the participants' positions and access to influence. Some were inspired to claim more space for themselves going forward, while others took a more in-depth look at their own privileges.

Takeaways

At the end, we asked the participants to write down their takeaways from the camp. There was an emphasis on stronger confidence and courage as regards to being a force for change at a personal as well as collective level. **"I'm not alone with my dreams."** **"Together we can change the future but the change starts from within myself."** In addition, the participants' futures thinking had broadened during the weekend. **"I feel challenged to think more broadly about the future and that anything is possible."**

To conclude, the participants wrote letters to themselves, reflecting on their experiences and writing down actions and pledges for themselves. The letters were posted back to them two months after the camp. In three months from the camp, there will be a follow-on meeting to go through the steps the participants have taken after the camp.

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Together we can change the future but the change starts from within myself.

One of the participants

The camp's working methods were also brought up in responses. **"Modality of the workshop (method), engagement, space for everyone, artistic thinking and questioning about futures."** **"Creating space & time for sharing, play, joy."** One of the participants also took home a very concrete outcome: **"I got a plan."**

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I got a plan.

One of the participants

Transformation in development cooperation

The field of development cooperation is undergoing a massive transformation. There is a seismic shift in who has the power and where and whether development cooperation should take place. This is understandable knowing that our entire world order is undergoing a dramatic change. The current way of doing things cannot continue. We have reached the boundaries of our planet. Our way of thinking, experiencing and doing things must change.

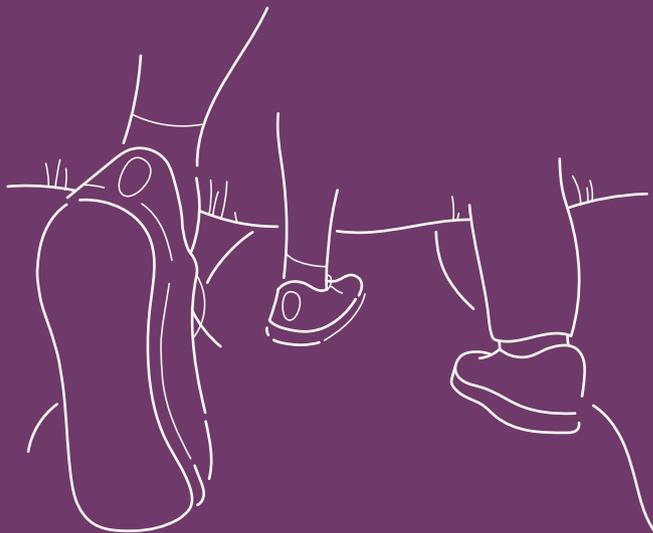
What are the next steps in global development and in bringing about the necessary, systemic change? What is the target level required when the deadline set for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development expires? What kind of world do we want to create through development cooperation - and overall? These are some of the issues that we discussed at Futures Camp Fingo.

Endnotes

- 1 Galviz, C. & E. Spiers (eds) (2022) *Routledge Handbook of Social Futures*. Routledge. 360p.
- 2 Sitra.fi: Futures Frequency [sitra.fi/en/projects/futures-frequency].
- 3 Amara, R. (1981), 'The Futures Field: Searching for Definitions and Boundaries', *The Futurist*, 15(1):25-29.
- 4 The Barefoot Collective (2009). *The Barefoot Guide to Working with Organisations and Social Change*. p. 29-32.

**The camp was only one step on
this path that we will be walking
together from now onwards too.**

**Join us and be a force for
change towards genuinely
sustainable futures for all.**



fingo

