POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR DEVELOPMENT NGOS

FIVE SCENARIOS UP TO 2030



Welcome to 2030.

These five scenarios were created in a learning process organized by Fingo and Demos Helsinki in the autumn of 2023. The scenarios are fictional examples of the futures of development organizations in 2030. They do not necessarily represent desired futures, nor do they reflect the aspirations of their creators regarding how the future should unfold. The scenarios are simply descriptions of how the world could possibly look like by the end of the decade, given that current trends develop in one direction or another. The scenario paths also reveal decisions made along the way. In addition to the scenarios, fictional personas provide their perspectives on the future. These scenario descriptions help us understand that there are always many possible futures. By imagining different future directions, we can better navigate the real uncertainties and surprises that inevitably lie ahead of us.

Our work began with a one-day training session organized by Demos Helsinki, after which scenarios were developed in small groups and workshops. Finally, experts from Fingo refined the texts based on the work of the groups. Creativity and a vivid imagination were required in writing to ensure that the scenarios were as diverse and tangible as possible. In addition to Fingo, 15 different organisations participated in the learning process. We thank all those who took part and hope that these scenarios bring inspiration and joy into strategic planning and boost futures literacy of many other likeminded organisations. Enjoy!

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Scenario 1: Climate change mitigation before babies





Climate change mitigation before babies

Finally! Climate warming has been halted at 1.5 degrees, and although the statistical data is very recent, this is celebrated ecstatically around the world. GHG emissions have been brought under control, especially with the use of new CO2 vacuums in the Arctic regions. There, fossilized carbon dioxide is buried deep into the northern bedrock. Alibaba is the corporation owning this groundbreaking tech, and has developed a data system for precise monitoring of carbon emissions and targeted CO2 absorption. While this innovation has been a relief for humanity amidst climate crisis, it is a challenge for personal privacy, as emissions monitoring requires real-time data. The future of our shared climate depends on Alibaba's patent, thus increasing the geopolitical and economic power of China to the extreme. Slowly, we have relinquished many of our rights and surrendered to a new kind of greentech dictatorship.

Despite fears, AI-based communication tools are advancing rapidly, and the world is once again in the midst of a new tech boom, solving the climate crisis. The focus on tackling climate change has made room for the escalation of other life-threatening issues.

With the massive growth of microplastics, nanotechnologies, and various chemicals, contamination of soil and water has crept into our awareness with a delay. The environmental chemical cocktail is a massive and intergenerational challenge. This crisis is fundamental and surprising as it particularly affects to human reproductive hormones. Suddenly we need enforced new global health policies and regulations on the use of chemicals. Reproductive health is the new darling on the global development agenda, attracting significant investments. The pharmaceutical industry thrives. Traditional medicine and natural supplies become popular and continue to exploit endangered species and boost poaching.

Reproductive health is a new unequal global structure. Who has the right to have offspring and live in a clean environment? Various opportunities for reproduction pose significant questions of social inequality. Especially in the Global North, new demographics challenge the foundations of a welfare society.

In 2024, Finland's global trade and development policy report directs a significant proportion of development cooperation funds through Finnpartnership. These investments will be targeted at projects and innovation development aimed at mitigating the climate crisis. Business Finland begins conceptualizing a new humanitarian expertise export package, which will be piloted in the Middle East. Development cooperation funding for NGOs becomes conditional: business models and private sector partnerships become mandatory. Development cooperation is an investment tool for boosting new green growth innovations and products, such as carbon capture devices and small nuclear power plants. In 2025, Alibaba launches its first commercial carbon dioxide absorbers in the Arctic. China, by the decision of the UN General Assembly, establishes special trade zones in the polar regions, citing urgency. In 2026, the Saharan reforestation project advances under the leadership of Finnish forestry companies. Finland seeks to profile itself as a significant forestry expert globally. Forestry export is a high priority for the government even if demand is low. In 2027, Alibaba establishes a new instant messaging app, and the user count immediately rises to 5 billion. The app requires real-time consumption monitoring, and its personalized emission trading mechanism can provide significant tax deduction to consumers. To put simply, it's a trade-off between emissions and privacy. China-based algorithms personalize selected information from a vast data pool, blurring our perception of informed decisions and choices. The tech infused world blends with reality, and it's hard to distinguish real human encounters from Al and chat bots. In 2028, state aid is abolished, and development cooperation projects transform into business-driven CSR projects. In 2029, for the first time, WHO reports on the effects of chemicalization of the world's freshwater sources on human reproductive hormones. In 2030, the first UN emergency meeting to address population decline is held in the same week as the release of the IPCC's new forecast report on the realization of the 1.5-degree target.

Zaid, 70, Lebanon



Zaid's life has been filled with numerous conflicts in the region. He is part of Lebanon's middle-class and used to work as a teacher. For years, Zaid's school partnered with an EU-funded teacher training program. After retiring, his daily life also involves various apps and platforms for quick communication, shopping, and entertainment. Alibaba's new artificial intelligence avatar enables a trip decades back when he was wild and free, experimenting with different personalities and self-expression. In a conservative society like Lebanon, it has been all fun and games for Zaid, although a bit daring.

"But what harm could come if the young Zaid-avatar celebrates and enjoys life? Does it really erode societal morals or threaten family honor? No one would know... right?"

Not all neighbors have the same digital skills or access to such technologies, and that is, of course, unfortunate. It is difficult to navigate between the reality and Al-infused dream world, fuelling mental health challenges, especially among the young and elderly. With climate crisis now under control, young people increasingly choose to stay in their hometowns and no longer aspire to move to Europe. In fact, Europe no longer appears to be the most attractive continent, on the contrart to the innovative and eager "south." There is energy and action there. Environmental crises, however, are not over. The amounts of Mediterranean microplastics and PFAS compounds are the highest in the world.

"My big dream of having grandchildren has not come true. It has been heart-wrenching to comfort both of my daughters after numerous miscarriages."





Back on the sustainability track

Winter in 2024 is unusually warm, and a momentary rise in the Earth's average temperature above 1.5 degrees Celsius startles decision-makers and citizens alike. The UN General Assembly and Summit for the Future becomes a pivotal moment for accelerating sustainable development goals, and the unexpectedly achieved additional investments of 500 billion, as defined by the SDG stimulus package, continue every year thereafter.

To steer towards the right path for SDGs, strong regulation affecting consumers and businesses is needed, including the complete phase out of fossil fuels. Investments are particularly necessary for the realization of a truly sustainable societal transformation. Social responsibility and the colonial dimensions of global resource flows are widely discussed. The neocolonial structures of global trade, aid and politics are unmasked. The voice of low-consumption countries is extremely powerful, especially on social media. The humanitarian disaster in Gaza made visible the structural global violence and the double standards of the West.

The era of right-wing populism is over, and people demand facts-based and consistent leadership in the face of shared problems. There is no time to waste. Low-consumption countries take sustainability leadership seriously. Our planet cannot be a playground where the most audacious own the most; we need inter-governmental actors. Post-growth and fair economic structures are discussed even in the most prestigious arenas. With strong global tax regulations, self-directed development is rapid and efficient, leading to the erosion of the EU's role in traditional development cooperation. Support becomes more diverse and peer-to-peer. Global inequality remains steep, but finally, the root causes are better understood.

In 2024, criticism against colonialism grows. Western democracy appears hypocritical and inefficient, rooting autocracies elsewhere. Meanwhile, nations affected by the climate crisis and heatwaves take the lead in renewable energy and regenerative agriculture. Solutions to the sustainability crisis are tech-focused and don't delve deeper into our consumption habits. In 2025, representatives from indigenous peoples' communities rise to global leadership positions, having significant push on biodiversity conservation goals. Corporations' and investors' strategies on nature evolve rapidly. The climate crisis is no longer discussed without considering biodiversity loss. COP30 witnesses unprecedented funding agreements for the Loss and Damage Fund. Investments significantly impact the progress of SDGs in countries ravaged by the climate crisis. In 2026, a global tax reform reduces the ability of multinational companies to engage in tax avoidance and dubious holding company arrangements. A growing share of tax assets goes to low and middle-income countries, significantly strengthening their economies. Despite corruption, this has a critical impact on strengthening the public sector and improving education, for example. In 2027, multilateral development banks go through a reform. As part of the anti-colonial and BLM movement, low-consumption countries refuse to pay back debts to major financial institutions, increasing pressure for debt cancellation. Investments in sustainability transition surge in the Sahara and Sahel regions. However, ensuring fair working conditions and eradicating human rights violations is not an easy task. In 2028, thanks to the African continental Free Trade Agreement and the economic impact of tax and debt reforms, Gen-Z experiences record-fast employment growth. Strong pan-African movement, combined with growing economic opportunities, lead to a reverse "brain drain." Lagos and Nairobi become global trendy metropolis. In 2029, the EU's mobility program Erasmus+ expands widely into Africa. Youth leadership is widespread and aims to address the root causes of inequality and the socio-environmental polycrisis. By 2030, the true costs of the green transition are high, and an average European can no longer afford a new electric car. The used vehicle market sees explosive growth.

Kaisa, 48, Finland

Kaisa's burning passion for saving the world has persisted throughout the years, even though her methods of action have changed. Kaisa lived in Senegal, Gambia, and Nigeria for a long time until she returned to Finland in 2026 when the last country office was closed. Kaisa's heart will always beat for NGO work, although she has now switched to the Department for Development Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In recent years, the department has been preparing the implementation of Finland's Decolonization of Aid -strategy.

Kaisa finds it exciting that terms and ways of working are evolving, but in practice, she often encounters challenges. At times, she longs for simpler times when the project management cycle was straightforward, and on monitoring trips, she could escape the gray winters of Finland. Institutional change and uncertainty have also led to a growing need for occupational health and career guidance services.

"Catalyzing partnerships and continuous evaluation of methods take a significant portion of working hours, and it sometimes feels like a burden to me. However, it feels like I need to stay committed to change. I don't want to fall behind, but I wonder if this new way is better... Work felt more meaningful when I could interact with people in the field. My daughter and I have occasionally argued because I don't quite understand this new discourse."

Kaisa feels a deep sense of nostalgia as her child is about to interrail to her student exchange in Addis Ababa.







States in the shadows

The geopolitical struggle and the power of international decision-making mechanisms, such as the UN, have dramatically plummeted. Chaos prompts companies to pursue investments in the Global South, creating a new kind of business-led development cooperation. Financing is guided by national fluctuating interests and demands raised on social media. The long-term perspective of development cooperation suffers due to a lack of understanding of its long-term impact. New trends and needs emerge rapidly and change all the time. Monitoring and evaluation standards loosen, making interventions more straightforward and flexible.

The civil society in Finland tries to strengthen its position by utilizing various digital platforms to organize thematically. NGO activists feel increasingly constrained without credible advocates, given the weak state support. Corporate collaboration is a common way to fund NGO work, but there is a strong internal tug of war within the sector. New forms of operation raise suspicions. Can you bite the hand that feeds you? Populist voices question the significance of CSO activists if their effectiveness cannot be demonstrated tangibly. Few people understand the work of NGOs, and hence, public support is weak. People are primarily interested in safeguarding the domestic welfare state, overcoming the debt gap, and resolving the health care crisis. The initiative for voluntary financing of development cooperation on tax returns progresses to legislative drafting. Spontaneous actions and direct activism strengthen as a protest against the official downsizing of the whole aid sector. Networked communities demand standards for corporate-based development cooperation and humanitarian aid, but their voice is weak.

Many Finnish publicly-listed companies have their own development cooperation departments, and there are also many private entities, such as gaming industry millionaires, as funders. Public figures increasingly support projects, as responsibility becomes a branding asset. There is global solidarity among civil societies, leading to a new determination to solve problems. This is demonstrated as crowdfunding campaigns on TikTok.

In 2024, electoral interference through misinformation and deep fake technology leads to surprising and questionable results in several national elections. The U.S. presidential elections cause national turmoil for weeks. In 2025, Western states attempt to continue development cooperation in the old way, but they get stuck in dysfunctional processes, undermined by movements such as anti-gender. Identity politics formulate a battlefield, and sharp and direct messages make it at front page at the expense of facts. Personal experience and unrational fears overshadow researched information in many fields. In Finland, the debt crisis erodes the state budget, while the government stumbles in internal conflicts. Right-wing governments worldwide show little interest in regulating the growth of private money investments and interests, and cases of human trafficking go unaddressed. In 2026, new artificial intelligence-based social media platforms captivate and nearly the entire global population has access to them within certain limitations. The costs of participation and organization are low, people find allies and friends more easily, but data collection and surveillance increase. By 2027, the private sector explosively invests in green transition, and with the growth of renewable energy everywhere, the search for natural resources and waste disposal intensify inequality and the perception of injustice. Who ultimately benefits from development and who cleans up the mess? Escalating polycrisis threaten the profits of massive multinational corporations, but these disturbances are also seen as the breeding ground for new innovations. The universal belief in technological fixes remains strong. In 2028, companies fill the gap left by dwindling ODA funding by rushing into new markets. Humanitarian aid becomes commercialized and more efficient, emerging as a new Finnish export product. Companies are not bound by the same reporting obligations or impact assessments as the diminished public budget support. In 2029, there is a reluctance in recipient countries to involve international governmental actors in development cooperation or humanitarian aid. Borders are closed, especially in authoritarian states. Global peacekeeping operations are slowly dismantled. In 2030, the United Nations practically operates only in a few politically non-controversial places. Other global agreements and rules have completely lost their credibility. The UN Security Council is more of a formality, and General Assemblies resemble recruitment fairs for startups. Online and street protests and events occur almost weekly.

Ana, 22, Chile

"At the international activists against extractivism -meeting "Solar-platform", the following steps were agreed upon. We will continue to pressure companies to improve their responsibility reporting, but unfortunately, our political leverage is weak. Evidence will be gathered with the help of local actors to gain momentum for our efforts: eyewitness accounts will be collected to determine whether companies have acted in accordance with agreements and whether violations are occurring. Fortunately, we receive support from other citizen activists around the world, and we can share information, peer support, and ideas, for example, with activists in Sodankylä, Finland."

Ana is a young citizen activist in Chile. Although the transfer of power from northern actors directly to the Global South has been a result of years of work, she is both horrified by the end of long-term public partnerships and boom of erratic private projects. Of course, she is happy about direct action, cooperation between civil society orgs of different countries, and more agile ways of working. It's all a bit fuzzy still.

Latin America is middle-class but, for example, the effects of poor mining waste management are accumulating for an increasingly marginalized group in remote areas, whose voices are not being heard.

"We urgently need labor legislation that allows for organization and monitoring of workers' rights. Companies are taking huge risks at our expense."







Borders closed

In the West, right-wing populism has been on the rise for a long time. The role and credibility of these states and established institutions in world trade and politics are fluctuating, with the societal power shifting towards platform economies and technology companies. The direction of global development is largely determined by the biggest investment banks. State financing for development cooperation has decreased, and all forms of global solidarity increasingly rely on private funding. Diplomacy and peace mediation are based on commercial interests.

The 2020s have been filled with geopolitical conflicts, exposing neocolonial power structures. Low-consumption countries are creating new trade agreements and special economic zones autonomously. The EU is excluded from these agreements, and EU member states are forced to strengthen internal trade, self-sufficiency, and the innovate new business ecosystems. Immigration to Europe has dwindled, and the aging Northern population faces labor shortages. Should we have treated immigrants differently after all? There are increasingly more lab-grown artificial bananas on the store shelves. Avocado smoothies and backpacking trips feel like naive blasts from the past. The remnants of EU development cooperation are now barely attempts to have a share of growing markets.

Right-wing governments believe in market mechanisms as solutions to everything, and therefore regulation is virtually nonexistent. Companies' risk-taking has increased also because legislation is weak, and the ethical standards of digital trade are shaky. Trade union premises are quietly being restricted. On the other hand, the strengthening of companies' risk-taking capacity also fosters innovation. The rapid development of new tech supports the green transition and addresses challenges related to food security and self-sufficiency. Platform economy makes consumption more accessible than ever.

The significance of civil society is greatly emphasized in many places, and its demands are heard, loud and clear. NGOs, grassroots movements, and citizen activism seek to fill the gaps in the public sector as watchdogs of business.

In 2024, right-wing populism maintains strong support globally in many national elections, including the presidential elections in the US. In Finland, all forms of global solidarity support waver due to Russian harassment. In 2025, rightwing EU policies also mean tightened import tariffs. The funding for the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, Frontex, is tripled to prevent immigration. In 2026, the African Union and China enter into a unique free trade agreement. Asian and Latin American countries also forge their own bilateral agreements. The EU watches from the sidelines as its global power wanes, with no support even from the United States due to internal chaos. The wealthy and prosperous "West" is lost as we've known it. As industrial production cannot be outsourced anymore, labor shortages become a major issue in numerous sectors, including the already crisis-ridden public healthcare. EU countries start to compete not only for experts but also for low-income workforce. Care sector wage agreements must be rewritten as patient safety is constantly jeopardized due to understaffing. In 2027, Finland's eastern border fence is finally ready, all 1340 kms of it. By 2028, with external markets shrinking, EU countries have strengthened their internal trade. Spain, suffering from water scarcity, is becoming an innovation hub for artificial agriculture. Finland is rebranding itself as a producer of wood-based textile fibers and is soon to become the new heart of European textile industry. In 2029, EU Taxonomy regulation is rolled back in to accelerate innovation and economic growth after recession, especially as a boost to the agricultural sector. With increased risk-taking capacity of companies, various financing instruments are needed for potential bankruptcies. In 2030, as the Nordic welfare states crumble, the first Finnish asylum seekers arrive in Lagos by plane, but their applications are rejected. Major media outlets loudly report on white refugees.

Herman, 30, Mozambique



Herman is a young NGO leader from Maputo. His organization works for children's rights.

"Aid dependency has decreased. It's nice when the cooperation and relationships have improved, and I can flexibly choose the partners that match with our impact goals. The cultural differences are different with Brazilians and Chinese, of course. Maybe I should learn Mandarin next. My children just started in a daycare focused on language immersion."

Many capitals in Eastern Africa are growing rapidly, construction projects are everywhere. At the same time, regulation and security are overlooked, leading to accidents and misuse of contaminated land. The intensification of the climate crisis has made annual flash floods and Indian Ocean cyclones regular.

"We are part of the Globe Vision platform, where we can form new business partnerships and seek funding free of charge, as long as we commit to commercialize and scale up our projects. I no longer spend my work hours filling out reports that don't really align with our principles. Nowadays, work is more practical. The networks are extensive and multinational, often somewhat organic though. For example, last week, an Indian hacker group helped us in a DDoS attack. However, I know that human rights activists struggle with a few Chinese investors and their policies. Some of my former colleagues have returned to their home countries in Europe because obtaining visas has become so difficult. They call us weekly and say they miss it here."





Crises escalated

The extremely tense geopolitical situation leads to the questioning of international agreements and treaties, and the strengthening of regional alliances. The US is in a foreign policy crisis and has lost several old allies due to stances concerning the Middle East. NATO's role is shrinking, and regional military alliances are emerging. The green transition of industry and the electrification of energy production increase the demand for minerals, which are concentrated in the African continent. Africa's strengthened commercial and economic power means that it has leaped into the forefront of global trade. Populous countries like Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Egypt have gained significant global influence. Development is state-driven and often restricts civil rights for the sake of business development.

The era of a common and free internet is over. Artificial intelligence and algorithms guide our media behavior. Darknets are becoming increasingly popular, and informal markets are thriving. Due to the volatile global political situation, immigration and travels are also heavily restricted, visas are denied as anti-diplomatic measures, and international migration has stalled. Companies are closing their branch offices or moving to the dark web. The FIFA World Cup is canceled at the last minute due to an extremely tense security situation.

The global middle class has significantly strengthened, especially in Africa. The power balance between the global North and South has been shattered, but new regional identities have emerged. Labor is affordable and available everywhere, but workers' rights are protected only minimally. Cumulative and unpredictable ecological crises, such as forest fires and floods, cause constant uncertainty and the breakdown of social stability and institutional trust. The traditional ODA classification has been abandoned, and instead of fragile states, we talk about vulnerable groups.

Development cooperation organizations work with people in difficult situations regardless of country or region. The role of peace and reconciliation in development cooperation has become more prominent. The legacy of Martti Ahtisaari's peace work continues, and Finns are profiled as experts in peace keeping and diplomacy.

In 2024, the United States presidential election is won by a president who orchestrates conspiracies and greatly undermines national stability. Their decisions threaten to erode the authority and credibility of the UN and NATO. In 2025, due to shaky international agreements, international climate agreements cannot be continued, and COP meetings are in jeopardy. This leads to cumulative disregard, a new annual emissions record, the collapse of marine conservation agreements, and accelerated land use and deforestation worldwide. Despite this, the green transition continues especially in the technology sector, but the benefits of energy efficiency and electrification are offset by consumption growth and the environmental impacts of land use. Only the EU pushes for more ambitious climate targets, but policy measures are seen as obstacles to business competitiveness and therefore face widespread national opposition. In 2026, domestic turmoil and authoritarian leadership have led to national internet restrictions in countries such as China, Russia, Hungary, Thailand, and the United States. It seems that the internet is becoming fragmented. The biggest companies worldwide, such as Amazon and Apple, are creating their own internal networks. In 2027, with the rapid green transition and electrification of transportation, the mining sector and processing industries are heavily concentrated in the African continent, where extensive export agreements have been defined with the support of the African Union. Although this is great for national and regional income development, no one is addressing workers' rights or impacts to labour policies. In 2028, at least 800,000 people die from drought in Spain and Italy. ODA classifications are abandoned, as in the United States, 22% of the population is now below the national poverty line. Finland's new development policy program aims to respond to numerous environmental crises and conflicts by expanding the definition of bilateral development cooperation from state-centric to multi-stakeholder cooperation. Support is targeted especially at vulnerable groups of people. Peacebuilding is at the core of Finland's development policy. In 2029, 6% of Finland's official development cooperation funding is channeled through organizations to the United States. In 2030, an area the size of South Savo burns in July forest fires in Finland, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health launches a comprehensive evacuation program for those who have lost their homes.

Mike, 57, United States



Mike has had a long career with UN-OCHA. In recent years, the focus of his work has shifted to domestic issues.

"I never would have guessed that I ended up doing practical work in the most vulnerable areas of Minneapolis. In my day-to-day work, I encounter young people who are completely lost in life. For many, their studies were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic ten years ago. My previous assignment involved coordinating a large refugee influx due to the San Francisco wildfires and the associated opioid crisis. I believe I'll continue working for another 10 years."

Mike has studied for a combined degree in social work and paramedicine. Practical skills are needed on a weekly basis, and the situations are very diverse and hectic.

"We no longer have time to focus on long-term changes because new crises are emerging all the time, and our work needs to be constantly redirected. My career has been all about learning new stuff. The abolition of ODA criteria now seems really sensible in retrospect; the divide between rich and poor countries just didn't work anymore. The change in mindset was significant and took some time indeed... By going into the suburbs, we want to integrate the marginalized youth of the Minneapolis area back into society. The Community Welfare Institute at the University of Lagos in Nigeria is involved in our initiative. They have models that we are bringing into our context. We try not to care about our countries' bilateral relationships because this cooperation is very beneficial for us, and we learn a lot. We're also trying to find more ways and funding for our cooperation. Last year, we had visitors from Finland, it was a study trip and a ministerial delegation. The visa process took 6 months, but luckily everything went well in the end."

Thank you



Saana Ylikruuvi, Fingo ry

