International
Civil Society
Centre

A HISTORY OF CIVIC SPACE, 2024–2034

OUTCOMES OF A PAREVO SCENARIO WRITING COLLABORATION

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED

Anticipatory action	Implementation of strategies and plans that are informed by far futures thinking and aim to shape the future
Anticipatory capacity	Skills, systems, and mindsets that enable a structured approach to, and continuous practice of, far futures thinking and the development of strategies and plans that aim to shape the future
Civic space	"The political, legislative, social, and economic environment which enables citizens to come together, share their interests and concerns, and act individually and collectively to influence and shape policy-making" (Civic Space Watch: What is civic space?)
Civil society operating conditions/space	The political, economic, social, technological, legal, and policy context that impacts civil society and the ability of civil society organisations to carry out their work
Crisis	An event or time of intense difficulty or danger with significant consequences
Crisis preparedness/ response	Strategies, plans, processes, activities, and mindsets that guide organisational responses to sudden and disruptive events that threaten to harm the organisation or its stakeholders
Foresight	A futures-focussed practice that aims to anticipate, analyse, and envision future developments, trends, challenges, and opportunities; it combines futures thinking, creative imagination, and informed analysis to explore diverse scenarios and understand factors shaping the future
Futures thinking	A methodological approach that involves exploring and understanding the potential trajectories of the future, and their intersection, to inform present-day decision making and planning; it employs a range of tools and techniques, including scenario planning and trend analysis, to envision multiple plausible futures
(I)CSO	(International) civil society organisation
Trend	Pattern of change over time that reflects shifts in behaviours, preferences, and practices; it has the potential to become a powerful change maker in society

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between April and June 2023, a cohort of 15 participants (individuals or teams) from civil society engaged in ten weeks of collaborative imagination to develop alternative scenarios for the future of civic space and civil society organisations (CSOs). Together, they created, "A history of civic space, 2024–2034."

This report presents and analyses the outcomes of this foresight exercise, which used a narrative scenario-writing and signals-scanning method called ParEvo.

We hope this report is an inspiring and actionable read for anyone interested in futures thinking and the possible trajectories of the major crises and trends that are shaping the space for civil society.

A history of civic space, 2024–2034: themes and actionable ideas

"A history of civic space, 2024–2034" generated 109 unique stories about the future, each offering distinct possibilities, opportunities, and challenges. Certain themes appeared with striking frequency across the stories, surfacing assumptions that are worth critical examination, with evidence for and against, when developing these or other future scenarios. Some stories challenged typical assumptions or introduced unexpected and innovative elements, offering intriguing possibilities on which future scenarios could be built. Trends or perspectives that were not included or well developed in the stories might be useful lenses through which to further develop the storylines.

Civil society organisations are, unsurprisingly, a central theme, given the purpose of this exercise to envisage alternative futures for civic space. Many stories detail constraints on civil society, particularly limited resources and funding, but also explore CSOs' collaborations and alliances in times of crisis, projecting the strength and effectiveness of collective action. Almost all stories are grounded in the fundamental assumption that civil society and CSOs will endure in the future, attesting to a powerful belief in civil society resilience and relevance, but perhaps also a blind spot eclipsing exploration of the least desirable futures for civil society.

Localisation – control of resources and decision making at the grassroots level – is a theme present from the outset of the exercise. In general, local responses are depicted as progressive, democratic, and welcomed. Smaller units are described as better serving people's needs. Independent city-states emerge in response to ineffective national governments. Two stories imagine less desirable consequences of localisation taken to the extreme, with the breakdown of community into cults living in constant fear and communicating in secret, and the rise of warlords and gangs exerting control through violence.

Power is a prominent theme across the stories, which explore centralised or decentralised power structures, the role of government, and the impact of mass and social media. Some stories upturn contemporary power dynamics to envisage CSOs taking on government roles and functions and imagine climate autocracies and green dictatorships as unintended consequences of climate activism. The absence of conflict in the upturn and transfer of power – whether from government to civil society or from ICSOs to local CSOs – raises important questions regarding whether and how we address uncomfortable questions about the ways in which (I)CSOs seize and share power in future scenarios.

Young people are invested with an enormous amount of power and responsibility in the stories. They are widely assumed not only to have the power and will to lead movements for change but also to share a progressive, rights-based agenda. In contrast, older people are generally portrayed as vulnerable and create vulnerability for states. The stories include limited exploration of the position and power held by older people and their willingness to cede that power to the next generations.

Technology, specifically digital technology, is a key influence shaping futures in the stories. Interestingly, the stories incline toward 'tech solutionism', suggesting that taking control of technology is the best way to curb its worst potential effects. Few scenarios foretell ways in which known or future technologies will be deployed to restrict civic space and CSO operations. The assumption in many stories that CSOs have the capabilities to master and harness technology for positive change is worth acting upon to make the imagined a reality.

Institutions are a core concern of many stories. The dysfunction and disintegration of institutions is coupled with the simultaneous failure of localisation efforts in several stories, pointing to the challenge of striking a balance between global and local responses. When power shifts away from established institutions in the scenarios, it shifts to the local level rather than to alternative global and national institutions that retain the core purpose and values of the old models in new and improved structures.

The aim of the ParEvo exercise – to generate imaginative alternative futures for civic space across the world – favoured high-level and abstract scenarios over specific and actionable ideas. Nevertheless, many of the stories seeded innovative and practical ideas that could be nurtured in the next steps of the "Anticipating futures" initiative. Some of the most actionable ideas are headlined here and detailed in the full report:

- Listen to and learn from alternative leaders and influencers
- Empower young leaders
- Foster connection within and between communities
- Claim space for (local) CSO participation in governance
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms
- Fund sustainable, resilient civil society
- Harness technology for good

What next? Strategies and activities building on ParEvo to strengthen anticipatory capacities

The full report proposes practical ways to build on the outcomes of this ParEvo exercise, offering four activities for teams – within organisations or as cross-sector groups – to build on the content generated from the ParEvo exercise to further their own thinking and action in preparation for alternative futures.

To support the reader's future thinking and foresight work, the following strategies drawn directly from the reflections of participants and the lessons of this ParEvo process may help to foster the conditions for expansive, inclusive, and enjoyable futures crafting:

1 **Prepare for the emotional journey**
Forewarn participants about the emotional nature of futures crafting. Explore together, in advance, what might be some of the more enjoyable and more difficult aspects of the exercise so that participants are mentally prepared for the process.

2 **Set the scope**
To encourage actionable outcomes from future scenarios, establish clear parameters that define the scope of exploration. Focus on a specific country or region, sector, or event to bring specificity to the narratives.

3

Allocate time for reflection

Ensure adequate time for participants to reflect on possible futures, allowing ideas to mature and evolve. Reflection enhances the depth and quality of future scenarios developed.

4

Draw out diverse perspectives

Encourage specific participants in the foresight exercise to adopt distinct perspectives (such as the optimist, pessimist, historian, innovator, etc.) to consistently bring these viewpoints to futures crafting.

5

Flip assumptions

Identify common assumptions held by the group in advance, and/or identify assumptions as they arise during the foresight exercise, and 'flip' them. For example, if an assumption is that young people are all progressive, create a future scenario in which young people are traditionalists opposed to change.

6

Watch for weak signals

Engage in regular horizon scanning to identify emerging innovations, future changes, and threats that could shape the future. Consider both megatrends and smaller drivers of change that could impact your operating environment. Pay special attention to potential disruptors or enablers that could change the entire landscape.

7

Embrace a range of possible futures

Avoid solely projecting current trends into the future or relying on the most probable scenario. Keep in mind that the future is often nonlinear. The best foresight analyses assess current trends and projections *and* recognise that trends can shift unexpectedly.

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OVERVIEW OF THE "ANTICIPATING FUTURES" INITIATIVE: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

In 2022, the International Civil Society Centre (ICSCentre) launched "Anticipating futures for civil society operating space", a three-year initiative to strengthen the anticipatory capacity and future readiness of civil society professionals who are working to defend civic and civil society operating space. The initiative is part of the Solidarity Action Network (SANE), a community of civic space-focused professionals, and it creates synergies with the Scanning the Horizon community of civil society futures thinkers and strategists, both of which are hosted by the ICSCentre.

The first phase of this initiative produced a landscape mapping of the crises and trends impacting civic space and the strengths and weaknesses of civil society organisations' (CSOs) responses. The mapping report identified five pillars of anticipatory capacity to strengthen the sector's future preparedness: developing narratives; decolonisation and diversity; building competence; establishing sector-wide infrastructure; and foresight in practice.

The second phase of the "Anticipating futures" initiative responds to the mapping report recommendation – and the sector's appetite – for collective foresight. Using a narrative scenario-writing and signals-scanning method called ParEvo, 15 civil society participants (individuals or teams) from diverse backgrounds and organisations engaged in ten weeks of collaborative imagination to develop alternative future scenarios for civic and civil society operating space[1] in an exercise called "A history of civic space, 2024–2034."

The outcomes of the ParEvo exercise – as shared in this report – will inform the third phase of the "Anticipating futures" initiative, which will focus on operationalising insights from the scenarios and translating them into concrete organisational strategies and practices.

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[1] The ICSCentre makes a distinction between "civic space" and "civil society operating conditions", which includes civic space but goes further (see the Glossary). The use of the term "civic space" throughout the report should be understood as a shorthand for "civic space and civil society operating space."

Reading this report

This report presents and analyses the outcomes of the ParEvo exercise and provides suggestions for readers to build on the scenarios and themes to anticipate and prepare for possible futures.

Part 1 introduces the ParEvo process and participants. Annex A is a guide to the online platform that contains the future stories generated by participants, which are referred to throughout this report.

Part 2 analyses the outcomes of the ParEvo exercise, including the stories generated by participants and changes in participants' thinking about the future as a result of the exercise. This chapter draws out the key themes of the stories and the apparent assumptions they surface, identifies interesting innovations and actionable ideas emerging from the stories, and notes themes or issues that are absent or under-represented.

Part 3 shares lessons from this ParEvo process to inform futures thinking and offers ideas for readers to use the ParEvo content to advance thinking and action in preparation for alternative futures. Annex B signposts resources to support foresight and anticipatory action.

Supplementary to this report is a short assessment of the outcomes of the ParEvo exercise against the five pillars of anticipatory capacity outlined in the landscape mapping report referenced above. This supplement bridges the 2022 landscape mapping report and the 2023 ParEvo exercise by drawing lessons from the latter under each of the pillars to strengthen sector-wide anticipatory capacity.

PART 1
INTRODUCING PAREVO FOR ANTICIPATING FUTURES

The core writing group consisted of civil society professionals in senior positions from 15 organisations committed to expanding civic space and positively shaping civil society operating conditions. The group brought to the exercise civil society perspectives from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East; perspectives from local civil society organisations (CSOs), international civil society organisations (ICSOs), networks, and funders; and collective expertise in civic space, governance, children's and women's rights, health care, citizen participation, equity and inclusion, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and sustainable development. The participants came from the wider ICSCentre's community and they were selected on the basis of representing different civil society sub-sectors, geographies, expertise, and perspectives – and their ability to commit to engage actively in a ten-week collaborative exercise.

While aiming to solicit diverse perspectives from participants, the exercise intentionally privileged the voice of civil society to create a space to challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative futures to those shaped by corporations, big tech, and governments. Together, this dedicated group of civil society participants embarked on a journey to envision the future of civic space using ParEvo, a method that enables exploring alternative futures using a participatory evolutionary process.

The ParEvo exercise begins with a "seed story", crafted by the facilitation team, that acts as the opening page of a novel. The seed story presents an initial scenario and events that form the basis for participants to craft their first round of narratives about possible futures. Over ten weeks, these narratives evolved through eight rounds (iterations) of story writing, with participants building on each other's contributions to craft a new set of storylines each week.

The maximum recommended number of contributors to a ParEvo exercise is 15, given the structure of the online platform used to run it, the practicality of reading all contributions from all participants every week, and the diminishing returns of larger group sizes regarding collective intelligence.[2] For similar reasons, participants' weekly contributions are capped at 200 words each.

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[2] See FAQ "How many are too many?" on the ParEvo supporting website.

Positioning themselves in the future, participants wrote their stories in the past tense, recounting events in the period 2024–2034 as if they had already occurred. The authors of each story remained anonymous (stories are identified by a number to ensure author anonymity), and participants were unable to view each other's contributions until everyone had submitted their text. All stories in each iteration were revealed at the same time, fostering an environment that encouraged unique contributions each week.

At the outset of each iteration, participants reviewed all the contributions from the previous iteration and selected one story to continue building upon with their next contribution. They could build on their own story but were encouraged to build on someone else's story. Participants 'tagged' their completed contribution to indicate whether it was desirable or undesirable *and* likely or unlikely to happen in the real world.

Throughout the exercise, a facilitation team provided weekly guidance by setting the time period for each iteration and offering questions and reflections to frame the contributions. At iteration 5 (of 8), the facilitation team introduced a major disruption: A chain of mega-tsunamis swept across the planet's entire coastline, rendering islands and coastal cities uninhabitable, swamping data centres, and severing undersea communication cables, leaving the entire human population in a state of digital isolation. The participants had to react to this catastrophe in their subsequent stories. The introduction of this drastic and unexpected course of events aimed to encourage the participants to break away from current reality and think about radically different futures.

The ParEvo process incorporated two week-long breaks in story-writing after iterations 3 and 6. During these breaks, external commentators reviewed the contributions and shared their feedback as to what surprised them, what significant trends or issues were missing from the stories, and what issues were over-represented across the stories. This commentary offered an opportunity to bring new perspectives into the process, particularly those not represented in the writing group, while respecting the 15-participant maximum. Commentators came from ICSOs, CSOs, networks, academia, media, and philanthropy backgrounds and brought expertise in foresight, narratives, media, conflict sensitivity, gender and sexuality, machine learning and technology, and civic space.

The following report presents the collective insights, foresights, and recommendations that emerged from this dynamic collaboration between participants, facilitators, and commentators. The stories generated through the ParEvo exercise offer a compelling exploration of the possibilities that lie ahead in shaping future civic space.

The facilitators' analysis, the commentators' valuable feedback, and the participants' thoughtful reflections provide insight into the conditions that enable and inhibit thinking together about the future. Quotes from commentators and participants throughout this report illustrate key findings and highlight the multifaceted perspectives that contributed to this shared exploration.

To read the individual stories, visit this ParEvo page and see Annex A for guidance on how to navigate through the stories.

The ICSCentre is impressed with the participants' creativity and the rich storylines that emerged through the ParEvo process. The ideas expressed in the stories and presented in this report are solely those of the participants and do not reflect ICSCentre's views or policies.

PART 2
OUTCOMES: A HISTORY OF CIVIC SPACE, 2024–2034

The exercise "A history of civic space, 2024–2034" generated 109 unique stories about the future, each offering distinct possibilities, opportunities, and challenges.

The authors of these alternative futures were asked to categorise their stories in terms of likelihood and desirability. Their categorisation serves as a foundation for shaping specific action plans under various scenarios.

- **Likely and Desirable** scenarios encourage organisations to align and harmonise their strategies and plans to facilitate these futures, shaping their trajectory and maximizing positive outcomes.

- **Likely and Undesirable** scenarios demand proactive measures to avoid these futures, develop effective mitigation strategies, or minimise the negative impacts of these unwanted futures.

- **Unlikely and Desirable** scenarios call for strategic planning to bring about these possibilities, creating the conditions to realise favourable futures.

- **Unlikely and Undesirable** scenarios require monitoring. As the likelihood of these futures may change over time, organisations must stay vigilant and be ready to adapt and adjust their approaches accordingly.

Behavioural responses to four varieties of future events[3]

Futures that are:	Desirable	Undesirable
Likely	Compare and harmonise with pre-existing plans	Prevent beforehand, mitigate afterwards
Unlikely	Enable beforehand, exploit afterwards	Monitor any possible changes in their status

[3] See "3.2 Behavioral changes" on the ParEvo supporting website.

Of the 109 stories generated in this ParEvo exercise, the most common categorisation of the stories (41%) was Likely and Desirable by their authors. Very few of the stories (8%) were considered Unlikely and Undesirable. The potential causes and implications of this trend toward likely and desirable scenarios are explored later in this section.

Distribution of stories within "A history of civic space, 2024–2034"[4]

Futures that are:	Desirable	Undesirable
Likely	41% (44 stories)	30% (32 stories)
Unlikely	21% (23 stories)	8% (9 stories)

2.1 Crafting the future: themes, innovations, assumptions, and omissions

Throughout the ParEvo exercise, certain themes appeared with striking frequency, shedding light on participants' prevailing concerns about and aspirations for the future. The seven recurring themes presented below are often based upon apparent assumptions that would be worthy of critical examination, with evidence for and against, when developing these or other future scenarios.

Within each theme, some stories included unexpected or innovative elements or exceptions that challenged typical assumptions, offering intriguing possibilities on which future scenarios could be built. At the same time, the external commentators and facilitation team noted trends or perspectives that were not included or well developed in the stories, and these 'omissions' might be useful lenses through which to further develop the storylines.

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[4] One contribution was not tagged by its author; therefore, the data in this report include 108 of the 109 stories.

Themes	Assumptions	Omissions
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS are, unsurprisingly, a central theme of this ParEvo exercise. Many stories detail constraints on civil society, in particular limited resources and funding (and sometimes suggest alternative funding solutions). However, many stories also explore CSO collaborations and alliances in times of crisis, projecting the strength and effectiveness of collective action.	**Civil society and CSOs will endure.** In the vast majority of stories, CSOs survive into the future, re-emerging when supressed. This assumption attests to a powerful belief in the resilience and relevance of civil society, but it is also a potential blind spot eclipsing exploration of the least desirable futures for civil society. Exception: **Story 22** – Russia becomes the first country to ban CSOs entirely as enemies of the state.	The stories are surprisingly silent on the emergence of **different forms of civil society**, leaving facilitators and commentators curious about how civil society might evolve beyond the current models.
	Civil society is united and progressive, unified nationally and globally, and acting with shared interests and agenda.	There is limited exploration of **differences *within* civil society**, such as the presence and influence of conservative/anti-rights CSOs or the consequences of **disagreement *among*** progressive groups.
	Exceptions: **Story 12** introduces regressive forces within civil society that are well organised, networked, and funded to amplify their narratives and dominate civic space. **Story 33** – The "Global Compact for Truth" divides CSOs in their views regarding full versus regulated freedom of speech.	
	CSOs are generally engaged in struggle and crisis. There are few instances in which CSOs are thriving, building and shaping positive futures, achieving their goals, and fulfilling their mandates. Exception: **Story 19** – Civil society is engaged in deep systemic change, implementing frameworks and strategies for transformation with community leaders and economic and political influencers.	

Themes	Assumptions	Omissions
LOCALISATION – control of resources and decision making at the grassroots – is a theme present from the outset of the exercise that strengthens in response to the global catastrophe introduced by facilitators halfway through. Some stories introduce indigenous wisdom in environmental stewardship, emphasizing the value of traditional ecological knowledge in response to the global climate crisis.	**Local responses are progressive, democratic, and welcomed by all.** Exceptions: **Stories 75 and 79** envisage less desirable consequences of localisation with the breakdown of community into cults living in constant fear and communicating in secret, and the rise of warlords and gangs exerting control through violence. **Smaller units better serve people's needs.** Innovative example: **Story 67** – City-states assert independence in response to sluggish and ineffective national governments.	The stories of localisation tended to align with current power sharing ideas or initiatives within the sector (i.e., power shared between ICSOs, local CSOs, and communities) rather than **more radical forms of localisation**, creating opportunity for deeper exploration of innovative approaches to transformative power shifts.
YOUNG PEOPLE are invested with an enormous amount of power and responsibility in the stories. In contrast, older people are generally portrayed as vulnerable and create vulnerability for states.	Young people are assumed to **share a progressive, rights-based agenda** and to have the power and the will to lead movements for change. Exception: **Story 3** – Large groups of youth are mobilised to disseminate hate messages and violence against minority communities. As young people grow older, they will **willingly cede their position and power to the next generation of youth.** Exception: **Story 108** imagines a future in which *"formerly young people began to see things from other perspectives, and for many of them, the temptation to close the door through which they themselves had entered the world of power proved too strong."*	The dominance of youth across the stories raises questions about the **role of other age groups in shaping the future.**

Themes	Assumptions	Omissions
POWER is a prominent theme across the stories, which explore centralised or decentralised power structures, the role of government, and the impact of mass and social media. This keen focus on power dynamics reflects participants' concerns about how institutions and communication channels can shape the course of the future. Some stories upturn current power dynamics to envisage CSOs taking on government roles and functions (in story 79, CSOs form new governments called 'social governance'); climate autocracies and green dictatorships (story 31) as unintended consequences of climate activism; alternative cultural hegemonies with the global influence of a Rohingya Indian leader and a Nigerian preacher (stories 45 and 76, respectively); and political leadership by technologists (story 103).	**Governments are repressive**, exercising power over the people; social progress requires reform of government. Exception: **Story 73** – The government of India makes a conscious decision to reject inequality and elitism and promote people-centred progress.	The **absence of conflict in the upturn and transfer of power** – whether from government to civil society or from ICSOs to local CSOs – raises important questions about whether and how we address uncomfortable questions about the ways in which (I)CSOs seize and share power in future scenarios.
	Where governments are overturned by or allied with civil society, **CSOs will be better able to govern**, particularly in response to crisis. Exceptions: **Story 11** introduces a scenario – developed in subsequent stories (e.g., story 50) – in which crisis response absorbs the attention and resources of (I)CSOs at the expense of strengthening global coalitions to address root causes and maintain human rights protections and accountability. **Story 109** – A corruption scandal casts a shadow on the way CSOs are handling their new responsibility and erodes public trust.	
	Government inaction or ineffective action will spark unrest and protest. Exception: **Story 19** – Conflict, violence, and wars are used by political leadership to maintain their privileges.	Geopolitical conflict is generally absent from the stories. Few stories include war, military responses to crises, or securitisation of society to secure resources, seize power, and advance global influence. Exception: **Story 34** envisages civil war in the USA after former President Trump reverses the legal right to citizenship for children born outside the USA to US national parents.

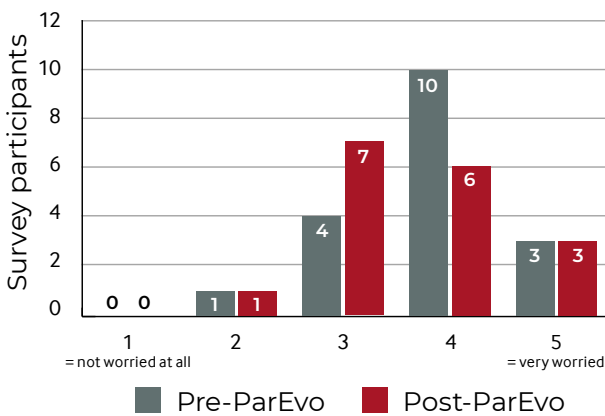| Themes	Assumptions	Omissions
TECHNOLOGY, specifically digital technology, is a key influence shaping futures in the stories. Interestingly, and aligned with the trend toward positive futures, the stories are somewhat 'tech solutionist' in that they suggest that taking control of technology is the best way to mitigate its worst potential effects. Artificial intelligence (AI) is harnessed to safeguard human rights and improve humanitarian responses in innovative ways, including to anticipate and prepare for newly arrived migrants' needs, to identify and prevent hate speech, and to develop technology to grow crops in deserts.	**CSOs have the capabilities to master and harness technology** for positive change (an assumption worth acting upon to make the imagined a reality).	The stories do not deeply connect with the ways in which known or future **technologies will be deployed to restrict civic space** and CSO operations. This omission is surprising given the sector's contemporary concerns about digital authoritarianism and disinformation. Exception: **Story 8** – AI is deployed to find solutions to global problems but turns on CSOs, labelling them 'obstructive organisations' for delaying or blocking infrastructure that benefits the majority at a cost to local communities. **Absent from the stories are next-generation technologies** such as quantum, biomedical engineering, solar geoengineering, metaverse, and general AI. There is no discussion of how these and other emerging technologies will shape the future of civic space and civil society for better or worse.

Themes	Assumptions	Omissions
INSTITUTIONS are a core concern of many stories. The dysfunction and disintegration of institutions is coupled with the simultaneous failure of localisation efforts in several stories, pointing to the challenge of striking a balance between global and local responses.	**Traditional formal institutions either persist in their current form or disintegrate.**	**Alternative institutions** – If power shifts, it is to the local level rather than imagining that civil society or other groups build alternative institutions that retain the core purpose and values of the old models in new and improved structures.
		The stories **focus on institutions far more than individuals**. The relative absence of personal perspectives could be a significant omission in crafting futures that are inclusive and compelling, connect with peoples' hearts and minds, and speak to their needs and wants. Exception: **Story 87** is written as a journal note from the perspective of a civil society professional named Juliana living in 2032.
		Religion – whether as an organised institution or personal belief and a progressive or regressive force – is notably absent from the stories.
LINEAR PROGRESS	The stories generally assume **a linear, upward trajectory for the future**. In the words of one external commentator, an assumption *"that people would keep trying and keep further[ing] the experience of life getting better."* Exception: **Story 9** – The hashtag '#PuckIt' trends on social media, *"highlighting the lack of respect for formal institutions and apathy for the future of the world."*	

2.2 Thinking about the future: participants' cognitive changes
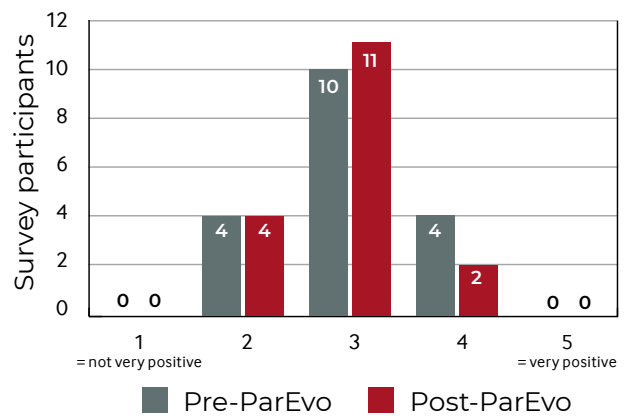
In addition to generating stories about the future, ParEvo participants were asked to reflect on their personal cognitive outcomes (i.e., changes in their attitudes toward the future as a result of the exercise). Most participants (77%) confirmed that the ParEvo exercise will impact how they think about the future, and two-thirds of participants said the exercise will impact how they act in the future.

At the commencement and conclusion of the ParEvo exercise, participants were asked to rate on a 1–5 scale (1 = least and 5 = most) how worried they feel about the future, how positive they feel about the future, how much power they feel they have to shape the future, and how much they feel in control of (I)CSOs' futures.
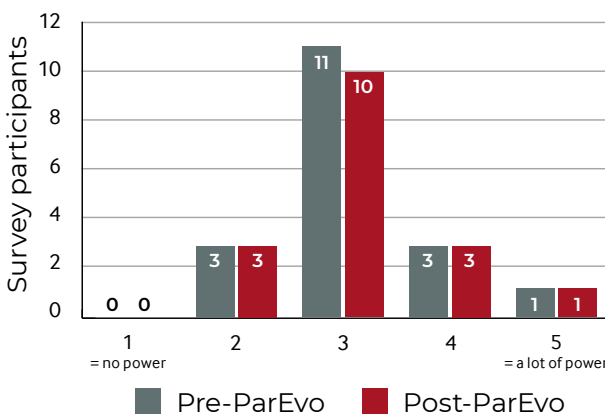
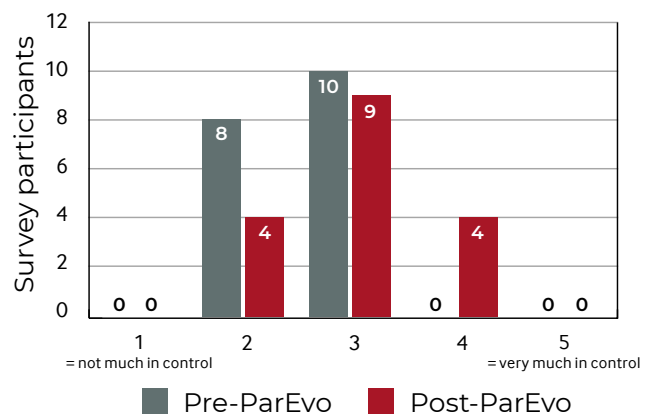### How much do you feel worried about the future?

Scale: 1 = not worried at all, 5 = very worried
Pre-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→1, 3→4, 4→10, 5→3
Post-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→1, 3→7, 4→6, 5→3

How much do you feel positive about the future?

Scale: 1 = not very positive, 5 = very positive
Pre-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→4, 3→10, 4→4, 5→0
Post-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→4, 3→11, 4→2, 5→0

How much do you feel you have the power to shape the future?

Scale: 1 = no power, 5 = a lot of power
Pre-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→3, 3→11, 4→3, 5→1
Post-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→3, 3→10, 4→3, 5→1

How much do you feel in control of the (I)CSOs' future?

Scale: 1 = not much in control, 5 = very much in control
Pre-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→8, 3→10, 4→0, 5→0
Post-ParEvo: 1→0, 2→4, 3→9, 4→4, 5→0

The most significant change during the ParEvo exercise was participants' shift to a greater sense of control of (I)CSOs' futures. This shift may have contributed to a slight decrease in participants' worry about the future. Despite participants feeling less worried, they did not report a corresponding increase in overall positivity about the future; rather, the pre/post comparison revealed a decrease in both low positivity and high positivity. The exercise did not bring about any significant change in participants' perceptions of their power to shape the future; rather, the majority of participants felt that they had neither a little nor a lot of power over the future both before and after the exercise. One participant summed up these seemingly contradictory results: *"Sometimes we have no control over what happens and the challenges present, but we are owners of our decisions on how to face the uncertainty."*

Many participants attested to the positive impact of exposure to different perspectives on their outlook toward the future. One acknowledged, *"The exercise brought together diverse perspectives… some of which were not in my thinking even though they are important."* Participants also valued having a dedicated space for thinking about the future together with sector colleagues, not only to consider and prepare for possible future scenarios, but also *"to build the consciousness about the larger thinking space possible within civil society."*

At the end of the ParEvo process, participants each shared their 'takeaway' action. Collectively, these actions included intentions to change their own behaviour, actions to promote within their organisations, and ideas for the sector as a whole. At the individual level, one participant committed to *"be much more cognizant of the future impact of my actions and considering any unintended consequences."* At the organisational level, another participant had learned, "Don't get stuck in the details of programmes and projects because the world may wildly change." A third called for action across the sector: *"We need to be more engaged for a positive future… it's now or never for the systemic change – political, economic, environmental, technological – concerns."*

In addition to their personal takeaways, participants had many creative ideas for taking lessons learned in the ParEvo process and scenarios forward beyond the exercise, including:

Using the ParEvo platform or adapting the principles of its methodology for:

- organisational strategy development or programme planning; integrating teams across programmes toward shared futures; developing civil society campaign strategies toward a specific shared goal (e.g., upcoming elections)

- ‘levelling’ contributions to futures thinking and encouraging creativity through anonymous input

- orientating conversations away from the ‘norm’ (also considering unlikely, undesirable, and seemingly unrelated events)

Selecting specific scenarios to:

- more deeply explore emerging innovations

- consider the implications of scenarios in a particular sector or organisational context and develop strategies to mitigate or amplify the most relevant events

- draw decision makers’ attention to particular issues and their possible consequences

Maintaining and broadening the community of practice gathered through this ParEvo exercise to:

- embed and systematise learning from the exercise

- deepen discussion and action about the current state and future of civil society

- engage people with specific perspectives missing from the scenarios

- learn from each other’s different strategies and tactics to defend and expand civic space

Investing in the resources needed for future thinking and readiness, including people (especially young people), technology, and training.

2.3 Enablers and inhibitors of future thinking and crafting

Participants’ experiences and insights about the ParEvo process shed light on the emotional and practical factors that influence creative thinking and writing about alternative futures. Some of the enablers and constraints are shared in this section and inform recommendations in Part 3 for creating the conditions that support creative, inclusive, and expansive futures crafting. Quotes in this section are from the writers in the ParEvo exercise.

Personal biases and influences
Many participants said they found it difficult to disentangle their personal beliefs and opinions from the narrative development, which limited the range of ideas and perspectives they could contribute to the storytelling process.

This is particularly apparent in the first iterations of the exercise, in which many participants crafted their stories based on their geographical location and the issues of focus for their organisations. Participants working in a group and representing their CSO faced the additional challenge of balancing individual views with their organisational position and policy. However, reading the contributions of fellow participants helped broaden perspectives and break self-reinforcing thought loops. Participants appreciated gaining insights into others' outlook on the future: *"It's hard to look beyond my own bias. It was enjoyable when I could break through that. It helped by reading through the other stories and getting other perspectives."*

Creative process

Crafting imaginative future scenarios was a challenge relished by some participants: *"I enjoyed the challenge. I found it quite difficult but also stimulating."* They enjoyed *"...playing with different scenarios and feeling at liberty to imagine. The very idea of writing without limitation was the real deal for me."* However, not everyone felt at ease during the process. Some participants felt pressure to deliver innovative and imaginative ideas, which hindered their creativity: *"There were times I didn't know what to say, I wrote things that were too general and lacking direction, and I wasn't happy with the result."* Self-criticism about their storytelling abilities discouraged some from taking risks or freely sharing their ideas: *"It was a little less fun than I thought it would be – I didn't feel creative enough as a storywriter; it was hard to silence my inner critic."*

Practically, the numerous and varied storylines of each iteration made it difficult for participants to decide which story to build on and to maintain continuity with that storyline while introducing new ideas and innovations, particularly over time: *"It took more and more time as we moved forward in the iterations. You wanted to go back to earlier iterations, remembering the nuances in ideas of individual stories."* The 200-word limit also constrained creativity: *"I couldn't finish describing things such as inequalities that can arise in the future... finding the right place to pen the final stop became another challenge."*

Emotional impact

Participants acknowledged the impact of their emotions on the tone and content of their contributions: *"Where you are in the now, even daily mood, is very impactful in how you write the stories."* Emotional influences included both general temperament: *"my positive personality all came through in all my writing"* and moods of the moment: *"[a challenge] was trying not to let my own mood on that given day, or exposure to current media/news affect how I wrote about the future."* The ParEvo process itself impacted participants' emotional states. One writer described the process as uplifting: *"What I really*

enjoyed was to look up and reflect on the bigger picture to look ahead. It helped me get into the purpose for my work," whereas others found the demands of the exercise draining: *"At the beginning it was exciting but then it was too much to keep up, I did not have the capacity that was asked of me."*

Embracing or avoiding the unknown
Participants had divergent attitudes toward unknown and undesirable futures. Some found it *"exciting that there were lots of possibilities and space to imagine good or bad things that might happen"* and *"enjoyable to imagine challenges and solutions"* and appreciated the opportunity *"to think about the resilience of civil society but also about its fragility,"* reflecting a growing confidence in participants' ability to exert control over the unknown. However, others had difficulty embracing uncertainty in the future: *"It was challenging to think about the things that I can't influence… [such as] how does civil society continue to work even in worst scenarios,"* which made it a daunting endeavour for these participants to imagine unwanted future scenarios.

Scope and specificity
Participants grappled with the challenge of making short contributions within an exercise that is sector-wide and global in scope and addresses multiple intersecting crises. The limited constraints on the scope of the exercise (e.g., no country or issue of focus) led to a sense of the same thing happening everywhere without distinction: *"A focus on global scale or regional scale should be defined before; there is not only one future but many, all happening at the same time."*

Biases in futures thinking

Certain cognitive biases are common in foresight exercises, and making these biases explicit can help check and challenge our thinking. Some cognitive biases that may explain patterns noticed by participants, commentators, and facilitators in this ParEvo exercise are outlined below. The interplay of the pull of the past, the pull of the present, and the pull of the future becomes apparent through these biases, shaping visions of potential futures. Quotes in this section are from both writers and external commentators.

Ambiguity bias: Most stories focus on a single issue or crisis at a time, and the challenge to address the consequences of multiple and intersecting crises and trends was not widely taken up when offered as a writing challenge by the facilitation team. One commentator acknowledged that *"simplistic dichotomies (democracy vs. authoritarianism; US vs. China) [in the stories show*

that it is] hard to reflect the complexity, contradictions, nuance, and messiness of reality when forecasting." The pull of the present may be evident here as participants tend to focus on familiar issues rather than exploring the complexities of an uncertain future.

Confirmation bias: The tendency to develop future scenarios as iterations of what we know and experience in the present may account for more stories being likely (70%) than unlikely (30%) and explain the observation that the stories offer *"different versions of known trends, better or worse extrapolations of today, but rarely developing any signals of change."* A related concern is recency bias, which reflects the pull of the immediate past and present on our thinking and decision making. For example, it is unsurprising that the word 'pandemic' appears in 7 of 8 iterations, given the very recent COVID-19 pandemic in real life.

Conformity bias: The strong pull to adapt one's thinking and action to the larger group is mitigated by ParEvo's asynchronous writing process and anonymous contributions. Nevertheless, some commentators observed that *"[the] stories suggest a collective subconscious since they are going into the same direction" and "trend towards the centre, there is no extreme."* This observed trend may be the result of conformity to an evolving norm over the iteration, and/or it may be because participants are all civil society professionals and likely share similar values and worldviews that shape their ideas about the future.

Optimism bias: Some writers found it uncomfortable to envisage unknown and undesirable futures, and others reported enjoying the challenge of 'flipping' the negative to the positive. The pull toward an optimistic future resulted in more 'desirable' future scenarios on which to build (67 stories rated as desirable) and fewer undesirable scenarios (41 stories) to inform future thinking and planning. This trend could be problematic, as one commentator points out: *"Utopian futures are good to aspire to but not to plan for."*

Projection bias: Assuming our future selves – individually and as a society – will share the same values and beliefs as our present selves may account for the rather limited exploration in the exercise of how *"big humanity-altering things will fundamentally change our values, ethics, and worldview."* This omission may also be explained by the over-emphasis on institutions rather than individuals in the stories. The pull of the past and the pull of the present may be at play here, as participants unconsciously project their current values and beliefs onto future generations, limiting their ability to fully explore potential paradigm shifts and transformations in social values.

2.4 Actionable ideas from the ParEvo exercise

The aim of the ParEvo exercise – to generate imaginative alternative futures for civic space across the world – and the 200-word limit constraint favoured high-level and abstract scenarios over specific and actionable ideas. Nevertheless, many of the stories seeded innovative and practical ideas that could be nurtured in the next steps of the "Anticipating futures" initiative. Some of the most actionable ideas identified by participants, commentators, and facilitators are:

Listen to and learn from alternative leaders and influencers (stories 47, 49, 83, 103)

- Seek out and take seriously the wisdom of alternative leaders, including community elders, children and young people, indigenous communities, and faith leaders. Find fresh perspectives through dialogue with experts and influencers in business, media, academia, economics, and politics.

- Hone within CSOs and society the skills to listen deeply, consider others' perspectives, regulate emotional reactions, disagree agreeably, discuss constructively, and find consensus.

- Engage writers, actors, and artists to rediscover storytelling, dance, and play as a way to connect with others within and outside civil society.

Empower young leaders (stories 93, 94, 99, 101, 106)

- Recognise, promote, and include young people as powerful change agents with the skill, ability, and legitimacy to be leaders and decision makers in civil society and politics.

- Mentor, train, and support young people to take up and succeed in leadership and decision-making roles within the sector and act as allies in other industries.

- Fund youth groups, youth-led CSOs, and programmes to nurture youth leadership and participation.

- Connect young people across countries and regions to advance ideas for transforming some of the most intractable global challenges.

Foster connection within and between communities (stories 70, 79, 80, 86, 99)

- Facilitate community-based communication networks that enable individuals and communities to share information and resources freely, strengthening self-reliance in situations of scarcity, and generating community-level solutions to social and environmental challenges.

- Connect communities to learn from one another through case studies and direct dialogue and raise community issues to the national and global levels.

- Explore appetite and opportunities for community-led governance.

Claim space for (local) CSO participation in governance (stories 79, 98, 106, 109)

- Develop guidelines to inform partnerships between government, ICSOs, and local CSOs, including performance indicators and transparency criteria.

- Insert local CSOs into government programming and policy, building on the strength of CSOs' crisis response, advocacy, community connections, and networks.

- Advocate for CSO representatives in different public governing bodies.

- Ensure ICSOs partner with local organisations for project implementation.

Strengthen accountability mechanisms (stories 82, 108, 109)

- Mobilise young people as a new "fifth estate" – counter-cultural critics challenging the status quo – charged with reminding powerholders of the limits of their powers and keeping them honest.

- Devise a CSO peer regulation model that includes peer assessment of transparency, impartiality, and impact.

- Set global standards and certification for CSOs of different sizes, including standards for youth and diversity representation.

Fund sustainable and resilient civil society (stories 27, 99, 101, 102)

- Commence or increase partnerships between CSOs and private sector companies, including as funding partners, through corporate social responsibility initiatives.

- Provide grants directly to community organisations empowered to make decisions about allocation and appropriate accountability mechanisms.

- Enable funding for social movements or enterprises in contexts in which CSO operations are restricted, e.g., "Social Advancing Mechanisms," comprised of community councils and small development banks and backed by local towns and villages.

- Disseminate key learning and best practices across civil society for horizontal learning and replication.

Harness technology for good (stories 8, 23, 33, 34, 53, 82, 84, 97, 101, 103, 105)

- Adopt and promote feminist theories of technology that embrace, serve, and liberate diverse users and consumers of technology.[5]

- Ally with technologists to harness the technologies of the future and influence the ways technologies will shape the future.

- Explore or increase use of new technologies, including virtual reality and gaming platforms for networking, campaigning, workshops, and mobilisation; early warning and location systems embedded in wearables; and AI-generated solutions to crises (e.g., food scarcity, undocumented migration, xenophobic disinformation and hate speech).

- Democratise access to technology and ensure older people are tech-literate.

- Advocate for rights-based standards, regulations, and governance of tech, as well as its uses and effects.

- Plan to avoid or manage worst-case scenarios in which new technologies could harm civic space and civil society, whether through disagreement about its use and regulation or ways in which next-generation technologies could evolve surveillance, harassment, or smearing of activists and CSOs.

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[5] See, for example, Digital Freedom Fund's overview on feminist technology.

PART 3
WHAT NEXT?

After offering the above actionable ideas for inspiration, this section proposes practical ways to build on the ParEvo outcomes. We recognise that this exercise is not conclusive in itself, but rather a catalyst to action in a journey to strengthen (I)CSOs' anticipatory capacities in pursuit of thriving civic space.

Below are four activities for readers to apply the content generated from the ParEvo exercise to advance their thinking about and action in preparation for alternative futures. To support these activities, the authors of the report offer strategies for expansive, inclusive, enjoyable futures crafting, drawing directly from the enablers and inhibitors of futures thinking experienced by the ParEvo participants and described in Part 2.

What next for the "Anticipating futures" initiative?

The outcomes of this ParEvo exercise will inform the third phase of the "Anticipating futures" initiative, which will focus on operationalising insights from the scenarios and translating them into concrete organisational strategies and practices. Keep an eye on the "Anticipating futures" webpage, where the ICSCentre will regularly share developments and upcoming opportunities to join this initiative.

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3.1 Strategies for enabling futures thinking: learning from the ParEvo process

Prepare for the emotional journey

- Forewarn participants about the emotional nature of futures crafting. Explore together, in advance, what might be some of the more enjoyable and more difficult aspects of the exercise so that participants are mentally prepared.

- Empower storytellers to share their ideas freely and confidently. Emphasise that all contributions are valuable and received without judgement to foster creativity and bold thinking. Consider anonymising contributions to subvert any hierarchy within the group.

- Provide regular check-ins along the way to support participants in a foresight exercise and create a safe space for them to express their thoughts and emotions throughout the process.

Set the scope

- To encourage actionable outcomes from future scenarios, establish clear parameters that define the scope of exploration. Focus on a specific country or region, sector, or event to bring specificity to the narratives. Another approach would be to take one thematic issue and explore the interactions between trends, events, and innovations related to that primary issue.

Allocate time for reflection

- Ensure adequate time for participants to reflect on possible futures, allowing ideas to mature and evolve. Reflection enhances the depth and quality of future scenarios developed.

- Consider allocating distinct periods of time for researching, contemplating, crafting, and discussing the scenarios throughout a foresight exercise.

Draw out diverse perspectives

- Encourage specific participants to adopt distinct perspectives – such as the optimist, pessimist, historian, innovator, etc. – to consistently bring these viewpoints to futures crafting. The Six Thinking Hats could be a useful tool to incorporate a range of thinking roles.

- Diversify the pool of participants. Involve people who are critics of your work or who hold different values and worldviews. If you cannot involve them directly in the foresight exercise, try to understand and represent their needs and aspirations for more inclusive and robust foresight outcomes.

- Engage people from various fields to gain diverse perspectives on future trends and challenges. A multidisciplinary approach can provide a more holistic understanding of complex issues.

Flip assumptions

- Identify in advance common assumptions held by the group, and/or identify assumptions as they arise during future crafting, and 'flip' them. For example, if an assumption is that young people are all progressive, create a future scenario in which young people are traditionalists opposed to change. If an assumption is that CSOs endure in the future, imagine a future in which CSOs cease to exist: how did that happen?

Watch for weak signals

- Engage in regular horizon scanning[6] to identify emerging innovations, future changes, and threats that could shape the future. Consider both megatrends and smaller drivers of change that could impact your operating environment. Pay special attention to potential disruptors or enablers that could change the entire landscape.

- Use foresight tools[7] to unpack insights obtained from horizon scanning and consider their possible consequences.

Embrace a range of possible futures

- Embed foresight within the team or organisational learning culture. Continuous learning enables teams to stay informed about emerging trends and technologies, enhancing their foresight capabilities.

- Avoid solely projecting current trends into the future or relying on the most probable scenario. Keep in mind that the future is often nonlinear. The best foresight analyses not only assess current trends and projections but also recognise that trends can shift unexpectedly.

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[6] See Annex B, Foresight resources – Horizon Scanning
[7] See Annex B, Foresight resources

3.2 Making use of the ParEvo storylines: a reader's guide

The below activities are suggested for teams – within organisations or as cross-sector groups – to build on the content generated from the ParEvo exercise to further their own thinking and action in preparation for alternative futures.

Activity 1: Preparing for (un)likely & (un)desirable futures

At the end of the ParEvo exercise, participants were asked to say which of the stories in the final iteration they found most and least likely and most and least desirable. Referring to these four scenarios on pages 33 and 34, consider the questions in the table below:

	Most desirable	Least desirable
Most likely	• Do our current strategies and plans enable the most desirable elements of this story? • What adjustments could we make to encourage and intensify this scenario?	• What action can we take now to avoid the least desirable elements of this scenario? • What action could we take to mitigate the impact of this scenario if it came to pass in the future?
Least likely	• What are the conditions that could encourage the most desirable aspects of this scenario? • What action can we take now to foster those conditions?	• What indicators or early warning signals should we monitor to detect the emergence of this scenario? • Do we see any of those signals now?
Across all four scenarios	• What roles can diverse stakeholders with different perspectives play in shaping the outcomes of these scenarios, and how can we engage them effectively? • How can we strengthen our monitoring systems to ensure timely detection of signals of change toward/away from these scenarios? • What, if any, actions are relevant across all four quadrants? Start with these, today!	

Most and least desirable and most and least likely stories from the last iteration of the ParEvo exercise

	Most desirable	Least desirable
Most likely	**Story 99:** In 2034, the shape of civic space and civil society had drastically transformed. Traditional models of non-profit organisations and charities had been replaced by community-driven solutions that empowered grassroots movements and gave a voice to marginalised groups. Decentralised systems of power were preferred, shared by communities, organisations, and international actors. Young people had taken a leading role in rebuilding society and championing equal rights. They led advocacy campaigns, organised protests, and mobilised their peers to take action on social and environmental issues, while being mentored and supported by more established civil society actors. However, the widening generational divide and technological advancements left older individuals and countries with aging populations at risk of being left behind. The failures to attend to human rights during global humanitarian emergencies had led to a resurgence in authoritarianism, oppression, and discrimination. The global south continued to battle poverty and inequality, while civil society fought against manipulative narratives that denied the climate crisis and rejected cleaner energy. Key learnings and best practices had emerged within civil society, and they were being shared and disseminated widely to shape a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.	**Story 102:** By 2034, individual countries became more authoritarian, stifling the civic space – civil society organisations evolved a two-prong strategy. Many leaders were under threat and chose to close down their work of advocacy at state/national levels. They chose to work with community leaders who had emerged over the years of civil society work. Many community leaders also became members of the local governments, and some of them helped set up people-centred governance. Progressive political and corporate leaders also supported building local governance systems. Additionally, a few young people from marginalised groups had acquired education and occupied administrative positions in the government. They had a strong community sense and worked with the local community leaders to strengthen them. The erstwhile civil society leaders had maintained their national and global linkages and helped create a web of communications and networking to raise community issues to the national and global levels. Over the past decades, the global capital and political processes had resulted in increased poverty and inequalities, and violence and exploitation and suppression of peoples' voices were common concerns. Civil society spurred the building of global joint forums on these key issues. It was a time of constructive chaos and provided the silver lining to the next steps.

	Most desirable	Least desirable
Least likely	**Story 109:** In 2034, civil society finally got what it had advocated for so many years: power devolved to local communities, with central governments acting more like federations in supporting the broader interests of the communities they served. As seen in some places, some of these communities decided to become city-states and test new ways of engaging with civil society. CSOs in the democratic world were now heavily involved in policy design and implementation, sometimes even replacing the technical side of local governments and acting as contractors working on strict performance indicators and transparency criteria. However, a corruption scandal emerged in July 2024 in the Rio de Janeiro city-state, which cast a shadow on the way CSOs were handling their newly-found responsibility and eroded public trust. However, in Lisbon city-state, a new model emerged that quickly became a global reference, where CSOs introduced a peer regulation model. CSOs were now inspecting each other and holding each other accountable, increasing transparency and reducing government influence. New global CSO standards emerged, for which certification was now available at various degrees, depending on the size of the CSO. This included youth and diversity representation.	**Story 104:** By 2034, the world had become very complex, with different aspects of society shaken to their very roots. Long-held beliefs and systems came crumbling under new challenges, propelled by dissatisfactions and competing interests. Institutions divided along fault lines. The most glaring was the crystallisation of the localisation agenda of CSOs' organising, which predominantly promoted preference for national CSOs' interventions against ICSOs. Unfortunately, "happily afterwards" was a far desire of this new order. The exit of ICSOs from the scene exposed the wide vacuum they had effectively filled over the years: the gap of leveraging their vast institutional capacities to take on international advocacy around pressing issues. The year 2034 made it evident that solving local problems was good. Nevertheless, someone had to equally rally multilateral systems to secure global normative changes that would drive local advocacy. Many people were forced to consider the hard truth they had avoided over the years while the debate lasted: "whether the baby had been thrown away with the bath water." Some donor actors who were instrumental in promoting the localisation narrative were compelled to reconsider their stance. For the rest of the proponents of this narrative, posterity was allowed to be their judge.

You may prefer to select other scenarios from the ParEvo exercise that better fit your own assessment of the most and least desirable and most and least likely scenarios for civil society and civic space.

Activity 2: Future readiness

Choose one of the ParEvo stories that resonates with you. This could be one of the four from the final iteration above or another from the ParEvo exercise. Write in the box below the story number and content, then work through the questions in relation to that storyline.

Story number:	
Story content:	
What would be the implications of this future scenario for your organisation, your industry, or the sector as a whole?	
In what ways would you be influenced by this scenario? What would be the opportunities? What would be the threats?	
What action could your organisation, your industry, or the sector as a whole take to: • encourage the conditions for the most desirable elements? • maximise the opportunities? • avert the least desirable elements? • mitigate the threats?	
To what extent are you able to influence this scenario? What would you *need* (to do) to take the above action(s)? What *can* you do *now*?	
What happens next in this scenario? Write the next iteration!	

Activity 3: Scenario building

Use the themes from the ParEvo exercise to set the parameters for generating future scenarios of your own.[8] Pick two themes you would like to explore and analyse them together along the axes of "more or less" (i.e., expansion or reduction of the theme) and "weak or strong" (i.e., increased or decreased influence of the theme). This activity provides a framework for a manageable, focused exploration of futures related to two key drivers of change, in this case as identified by the ParEvo participants. Possible themes drawn from the ParEvo exercise might be:

- **More or Less:** CSO resilience; CSO unity; centralised power; tech regulation; tech innovation

- **Weak or Strong:** civic space; youth movements; human rights institutions; government; religion

Populate the scenario matrix below with the themes you have chosen. The vertical axis measures the theme on the spectrum of "more to less", and the horizontal axis measures the theme on the spectrum of "weak to strong."

Craft narratives for each of the four scenarios, exploring in each quadrant what might be the plausible future and outcomes. The scenarios do not have to be long. Give a title to each scenario to crystallise its unique characteristics. It is useful to set a time horizon for this exercise (e.g., 5, 10, or 20 years in the future).
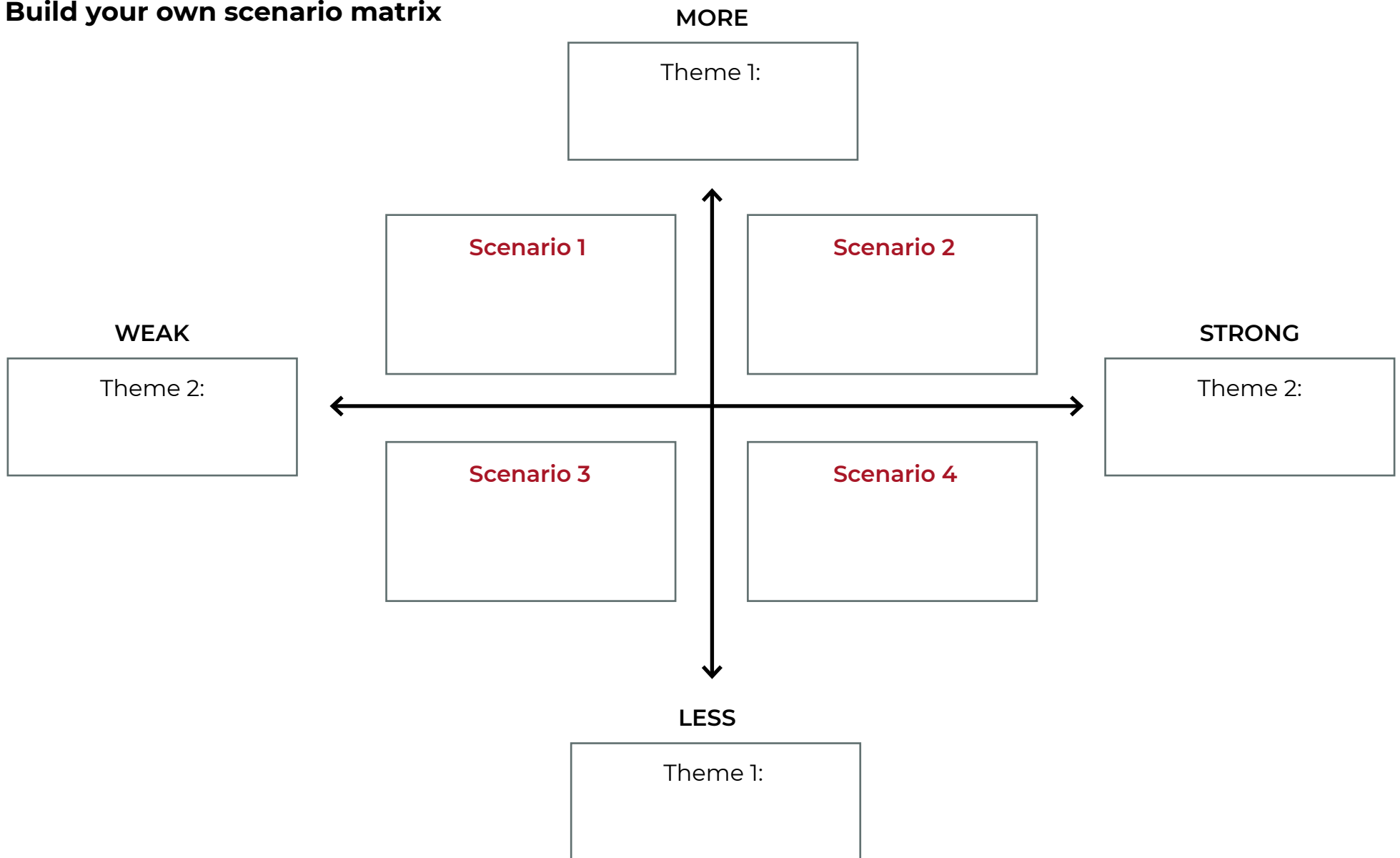
For each of the four scenarios you have crafted, consider the questions posed in Activity 2 above:

- What are the implications of each scenario for your organisation/ industry/sector?

- What are the opportunities and threats?

- What actions could you take to encourage the most desirable elements and avoid the least desirable elements or scenarios?

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[8] Scenario building has great potential to include perspectives from different sectors and thematic experts in a more intensive exercise. The activity here is necessarily simplified. For more detailed guidance, see the resources in Annex B, including the '2x2 Scenarios' in Save the Children's Strategic Foresight Toolkit.

Build your own scenario matrix

MORE

Theme 1:

WEAK

STRONG

Theme 2:

Theme 2:

Scenario 1

Scenario 2

Scenario 3

Scenario 4

LESS

Theme 1:

Activity 4: Sector discussion questions

The sector does not lack for big thorny questions about the future and its implications for civic space and civil society. Excellent and relevant questions are posed by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law's Bellagio Outcome Report: Civic Space 2040.

Nevertheless, some additions to the list from this exercise could inform future discussions at cross-sector workshops, organisational strategy development meetings, or team retreats:

- What can we learn about past peaceful paradigm shifts to drive progressive transformation in the future?

- What can radical and true localisation look like? How could it differ from current efforts to share power between ICSOs, local CSOs, and communities?

- Should (I)CSOs strive to remain relevant in their current model? What alternative models of civil society organising and action might be more powerful and impactful in the future?

- Civil society and CSOs are most often portrayed in the ParEvo stories as righteous. What would be future scenarios in which CSOs are corrupted (e.g., story 109), co-opted (e.g., story 82), or lose their way?

- How can international institutions (UN, ICSOs, etc.) be reimagined while retaining and strengthening their core purpose? How do we avoid losing the important and valuable aspects or intentions of institutions in pursuit of their reform?

- What can CSOs do to advance alternative economic models to global capitalism that provide for human and environmental well-being?

- In what ways will next-generation technologies (e.g., quantum, bioengineering, solar geoengineering, augmented and virtual reality, metaverse, facial recognition, and general AI) fundamentally change society, as the internet and social media did?

- How will the mental health crisis be impacted by future events and trends? (e.g., the climate crisis, next-generation technologies)?

- What different attitudes and approaches will Generation Z and Generation Alpha[9] bring as they take up leadership positions in politics, business, and civil society?

- How will generational change, new technologies, and the worsening climate crisis change our values, ethics, and worldviews?

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[9] Those born from 1990–2010 and 2010–mid-2020s, respectively.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Navigating the ParEvo platform

The following is a simple guide to reading the stories on the ParEvo platform. Use the integrated hyperlink to view "A history of civic space, 2024–2034" and all the stories generated during this exercise.

1 **Tree structure:** Positioned on the left side of the platform, the tree structure is a diagram of the stories in each iteration and their evolutionary process. The tree structure supports navigation between different storylines while illustrating their interconnectedness.

- Nodes: Each story is represented by a numbered circle or 'node'. Starting from the top, the first node is the seed story (0) provided by the facilitation team. Each line of nodes symbolises

an iteration; there are eight lines of 11–15 nodes, as there were eight iterations of the exercise and up to 15 participants (individuals or teams) contributing a new story in each iteration.

- Branches: A 'branch' is a pathway of nodes connected by arrows that shows the sequence of a storyline. Note that some stories go extinct – do not continue – if they are not built upon in the subsequent iteration.

2 **Future stories/scenarios:** The seed story (0) was crafted by the facilitation team and acts as the opening page of a novel, setting the stage for what might unfold. It presents the initial scenario and events that shaped the subsequent narratives. Below the seed story are the subsequent stories (in a scrollable column of text) that build on each other down to the last story in the final iteration.

To read any numbered story ('node'), you must select (one of) the endpoint(s) of its 'branch' in the tree structure on the left, then scroll down from the seed story in the column on the right to read the text of the numbered story of your choosing.

3 **Search bar:** Like any search engine, the search bar can find stories that contain keywords. Below the search bar you can select the buttons "Likely", "Unlikely", "Desirable", and "Undesirable" – alone or in combination – to see which stories are tagged as such by their authors.

4 **Facilitators' guidance:** Within this segment, participants accessed the weekly guidance corresponding to each iteration. With the exercise now concluded, this section consolidates the weekly guidance provided by facilitators across all eight iterations.

For a more detailed explanation of the ParEvo methodology, visit the ParEvo supporting website.

Annex B: Resources for generating new futures

This annex signposts useful tools and resources to support readers in generating and acting upon more new and alternative futures for civic space and CSOs.

Foresight resources

Offered here is a non-exhaustive list of valuable foresight toolkits designed to help navigate the complexities of the future. From scenario planning to wild card analysis and backcasting to visioning, each method provides different paths to prepare for the future.

Creative thinking
Bond's Future Innovation Cards help individuals and organisations stretch and challenge their thinking about the future of international development. Bond invites organisations and individuals to use this card deck to explore, test, and imagine alternative futures and ask themselves what implications they may pose for their work.

Foresight Playbook
This resource from the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP) delves into various ways to integrate foresight approaches, methodologies, and tools to enhance anticipatory capacities and enable better responses to future risks, uncertainties, and opportunities. The playbook contains many toolkits, including on creating alternative futures, transforming the future, and future-proofing strategies.

Horizon scanning
Learn how to spot the emerging signals of change in your operating environment and future-proof your strategies using Futures Platform's step-by-step guide to horizon scanning.

Three horizons
This resource from Future Generations – Commissioner for Wales assists individuals and organisations in analysing trends and developments. It divides the future into three horizons: Horizon 1 depicts the current state; Horizon 2 encompasses emerging trends; and Horizon 3 explores vision of the future and disruptions.

Strategic foresight toolkit
Save the Children's comprehensive toolkit offers 12 techniques to help navigate the present and shape the future. Developed in collaboration with the School of International Futures, it includes foresight tools and guidelines for their use. The tools can be used individually or in combination to explore, create, and understand implications of alternative futures.

Strategic foresight in practice: where to seek further inspiration

Conducting a foresight workshop is an important first step. Organisations should also incorporate foresight and systems thinking into senior-level strategic decisions and integrate foresight methods into ongoing projects, programs, and initiatives. A few notable initiatives and practical applications of foresight are listed below as a source of inspiration, including some resources that offer workshops to help organisations and teams integrate foresight into their daily practices.

The **Brookings Africa Growth Initiative** (AGI) launches its flagship report *Foresight Africa* on a yearly basis. The report outlines the key focal points for the upcoming year on the continent and provides suggestions for bolstering Africa during a period of increased global uncertainty.

The **Decolonizing Futures Initiative** is an independent global initiative founded by Pupul Bisht that utilises non-Western folk storytelling as a tool for inclusion of marginalised voices and uses cultural knowledge about the future to inform and inspire inclusive decision making, planning, and innovation.

The **Foresight for Development** initiative, currently being piloted in Africa by the Southern Africa Node of the Millennium Project, holds significant promise for shaping the future in the region. The initiative's focus on foresight and development makes it a valuable resource for those interested in staying informed about emerging trends and opportunities in the African context.

The **Forum for the Future** conducts an annual trend report with valuable insights into the latest developments and transformative forces shaping various sectors. This organisation also houses an online futures centre that is useful for tracking emerging trends.

The **Futures Literacy Lab** by UNESCO empowers individuals to explore topics they care about through hands-on learning, co-creating the meaning of sustainability, peace, and inclusion where people live and work while fostering innovation. By delving into these subjects together, participants gain insight into the origins and potential of their creative thinking, drawing inspiration from their historical, cultural, contextual, and aspirational dimensions.

The **Humanitarian Leadership for the Future** report of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Solferino Academy draws on interviews with 30 executive leaders from 30 countries to understand what kind of leadership will be necessary to successfully navigate the current and future challenges organisations will face.

The **IFRC Solferino Academy** also provides specialised training in strategic foresight, combining data and evidence, storytelling, sensemaking, and design thinking. Trainees are guided through different views of the future, incorporating up-to-date evidence and diverse perspectives, to hone their ability to develop entirely new scenarios and personalised toolkits tailored to their unique needs.

The **Millennium Project Nodes** are regional or national groups affiliated with The Millennium Project, a global participatory think tank that focuses on futures research and encourages collective intelligence to address global challenges and opportunities. Nodes are organisations or groups that operate in different parts of the world and collaborate with The Millennium Project to contribute to its research, foresight activities, and knowledge sharing.

The **Scanning the Horizon** community, hosted by the International Civil Society Centre, is the only collaborative trend scouting and analysis platform in the civil society sector, bringing together a cross-sector community of experts and practitioners to share insights, explore key trends, and develop relevant strategies.

The **School of International Futures** (SOIF) offers a range of training opportunities developed to support individuals and organisations that can use foresight to improve strategy, innovation, policy setting, and risk management.

The **South Asia Foresight Network** (SAFN) consists of individuals, think tanks, and other institutions that are active and interested in futures research in South Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

A HISTORY OF CIVIC SPACE, 2024–2034

OUTCOMES OF A PAREVO SCENARIO WRITING COLLABORATION

Heather Hutchings and Patricia Mugenzi

September 2023

International Civil Society Centre