

# An Overview of the Futures Literacy Laboratory on

## The Futures of Collaboration, Partnership and Multilateralism 2050



Hosted by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), on 17 October 2022.



# How can we be better prepared for future events when we do not know what will happen?

How can we be trained to manage situations that can be so diverse? Should we make some assumptions with the risk that other options may arise? Or do we accept the uncertainty of the future and integrate this uncertainty into our thinking and planning? That is certainly less comfortable but probably more reassuring, because it should allow us to be more proactive when faced with an unknown situation.



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## Futures Literacy Terminology

### FUTURE

The future, by its very definition, does not exist in the present, and cannot be accessed as an object of inquiry. What is accessible in the present, however, is our anticipation of the future, and this is available as an object of cognition and investigation. Thus, the only form of the future available to us in the present is this envisaging of the 'later-than-now' through anticipatory processes described below. But we should remember that a person's anticipation of 'the future' depends upon their reasons for thinking about the future and the different ways people have of imagining the future.

### FUTURES

The diverse images, stories and descriptions of imagined futures. When the 'future' is referred to in its plural form as 'futures' in this document, it is to emphasise its plurality and the multitude of futures that humans are capable of imagining.

### ANTICIPATORY ASSUMPTIONS (AA)

Your entry points into the future. To project yourself into the future, you need to assume things about the present world known to you.

Anticipatory assumptions constitute the building blocks of human imagination. We imagine by building upon our existing frames of reference — in other words, our world views, knowledge, convictions, beliefs, hopes, fears and values.

'AAs are the fundamental descriptive and analytical building blocks for understanding Futures Literacy and "using-the-future". AAs are what enable people to describe imaginary futures. AAs define the frames and models that are used to invent the content of the fictions that are conscious human anticipation'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Miller, 2018: 24

# Introduction

On 17 October 2022, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) held a one-day, in-person, structured futures workshop, called a 'Futures Literacy Laboratory' (FLL), on 'The Futures of Collaboration, Partnership and Multilateralism'. At first glance, this may seem like a topic that an intergovernmental or international organisation need not concern itself with. Some of these types of organisations have been around for several decades or generations, and it seems likely that they will continue to exist and be supported.

However, there have been many indications that prompt us to raise questions on the continuity of intergovernmental or international organisations, from geopolitical shifts to disruptions to the key functions and services of such organisations.

For example, there is growing interest in additional countries joining the BRICS alliance (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), which already represents '43% of the world's population, 16% of the world's trade, and a larger share of the world's GDP than the G7' (Wilson Center, 2023). Since the early 2000s, other countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Argentina, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bahrain and Indonesia, have expressed great interest in joining this alliance. How might such geopolitical and geo-economic shifts influence the policy and operations of international and intergovernmental organisations?

More recently, the appointment of judges to the World Trade Organization's appeals body for dispute resolution in the global trade of goods and products has been blocked (Miranda and Miranda Sánchez, 2023). When key 'services' offered by an organisation established by the consensus of its membership are disrupted, the impact on the international order, both practical and symbolic, is significant.

Multilateralism – the alliance of multiple countries pursuing a common goal – is at the core of the creation and operations of international and intergovernmental organisations. When multilateralism is under strain, the organisations that multilateralism built are also strained. With a world constantly in flux, geopolitics, conflict and divisions, emerging ideologies, new technologies, social movements, and economic circumstances all have an impact not only on multilateralism, but also on the collaborations and partnerships that sustain and are sustained by it.

## **WOAH IN THE CONTEXT OF WAVERING MULTILATERALISM, COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS**

In its operations and communications, WOAH emphasises the importance of collaboration, partnership and multilateralism as the foundations for a healthier, more equitable world. However, will that always be the case? The Organisation was established in 1924 and has had a long history of multilateralism (starting with 28 Members and growing to 183 Members today), collaboration and partnerships. What should a nearly 100-year-old organisation like WOAH consider in the face of the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous nature of the future?

To tackle these questions, the organisers of the workshop took advantage of the presence of Regional and Subregional Representatives at WOAH Headquarters for their annual meeting, where both country representatives and staff were invited to participate in the FLL. In total, 17 WOAH staff (including two peer facilitators) took part. They included Regional and Subregional Representatives from the offices of Bangkok, Bamako, Brussels, Buenos Aires, Gaborone, Moscow, Panama City, Tokyo and Tunis.

The objectives of this FLL were to:

- discover how foresight methodologies and Futures Literacy can be pertinent to the ways in which WOAAH responds to its Members in the face of dynamic and uncertain futures;
- apply scenarios and Futures Literacy to consider what the future may look like, contemplating what actions should be taken while challenging our deterministic and linear ways of thinking;
- be open to and inventive with uncertain futures.

Uncertainty is always present. The imperative for foresight and Futures Literacy is to draw attention to possibilities that are not often reflected upon and to question dominant narratives and assumptions about the present and images of the future. Futures Literacy Laboratories are meant to spark conversations about present and emerging issues and allow people to be more creative, open, experimental and innovative in imagining possible solutions and actions.

## Why use foresight and Futures Literacy approaches?

Foresight methodologies mainly centre on studying what is happening today to map out several alternative futures. These alternative futures can be useful in planning and testing strategies and development. The methods involve identifying emerging trends and issues (i.e. horizon or environmental scanning) and imagining how these elements may influence and shape future outcomes (e.g. through scenarios or points of impact). Foresight methods can also be used to dig into the root causes of current events to identify what needs to change (or what is not working), as well as what needs to be done to bring about other outcomes (e.g. through causal layered analysis, futures triangles, three horizons).

It seems straightforward to build a five-year strategy by simply exploring trends, issues and real and perceived disruptions through foresight methods. However, this assumes that the future exists in a stable and consistent form. It does not. The future is not predetermined and exists only 'in our anticipation of it'.<sup>2</sup>

The future can be described as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous.<sup>3</sup> It is tempting to use foresight methodologies to try to predict the future, or in a way that views the future as an extension of the present. Futures Literacy helps us to extricate ourselves from that slippery slope, and to shine a light on the potential pitfalls in employing foresight methods to reduce uncertainty – especially when addressing the complex challenges before us today. An FLL goes through the process of collectively imagining alternative visions of the future, only to then turn these visions completely upside down and push participants to go beyond 'using the future' solely for planning and strategising. Instead, Futures Literacy asks us to be open to surprises and to value uncertainty. Simply put, Futures Literacy helps us to 'do' foresight better.

## About Futures Literacy Laboratories

An FLL is a learning-by-doing, collective-intelligence, knowledge-creation process. It emphasises context-specific design and participatory processes. Participants are introduced to more diverse ways of thinking about the future and invited to leave the comfort of projected and probable ideas. By expanding their way of thinking to embrace

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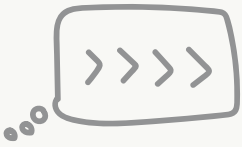
<sup>2</sup> Miller, 2018

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vuca-world.org/>

novelty, uncertainty and complexity, participants are empowered to be more innovative in rethinking and addressing the challenges of the present.

An FLL typically comprises four phases: Phase 1: Reveal; Phase 2: Reframe; Phase 3: New questions; and Phase 4: Next steps (see Figure 1, below).

### Phase 1 A & 1B PROBABLE AND PREFERABLE FUTURES



Comfortable

### Phase 2 REFRAME: UNFAMILIAR FUTURES



Uncomfortable

### Phase 3 NEW QUESTIONS



Did we learn anything new from Phases 1 and 2?

### Phase 4 NEXT STEPS



Use what you learned

**IMAGINE**  
Participants begin to realise they are continuously engaging in anticipatory thinking and creating images of the future

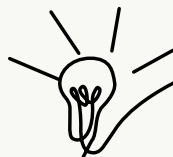
**REVEAL**  
Participants become explicitly conscious of how the future plays a central role in what they perceive and pay attention to in the present

**INVENT**  
Participants become aware of their own capacity to invent new underlying anticipatory assumptions (AA)

**ASK**  
Participants begin to reassess their perceptions of the present, depictions of the past and aspirations for the future. New questions surface

**DEVELOP INSIGHTS**  
Participants understand that imagining different futures changes what they could see and do in the present

**ACQUIRE & ACT**  
Participants begin to acquire the ability to become futures literate and consider potential learning actions for the future



# A Futures Literacy Laboratory with a twist

In the FLL held in person at the École des Ponts Business School in Paris on 17 October 2022, the 'Futures of Collaboration, Partnership and Multilateralism' were explored to challenge assumptions around the continuity of governance structures, collaborations and partnerships, and the role that WOAAH could play.

For this FLL, the designers decided to add scenarios (stories illustrating how the world may look in 2035, focused on the probable and possible) in between Phases 1 and 2. In the first FLL (which was held in November 2021), resistance to the 'reframe scenario' of 2050 in Phase 2 was observed. The shift from Phase 1 to Phase 2 was a monumental leap for some participants.

Introducing other scenarios was a way of easing participants into immersing themselves into other future possibilities in order to consider what the role of WOAAH may become and how it would operate in any one of these futures. For reference, the 2035 scenarios and the reframed scenario of 2050 used in this FLL are given in the annex to this report.

In exploring future scenarios for collaboration, partnerships and multilateralism, the participants were asked to come up with a fictional individual who is living in the future and describe how they are interacting with WOAAH or how WOAAH is serving this individual. How are they partnering and collaborating?

As a thought experiment, try to imagine how an organisation, or an individual or group of individuals, might react and interact in any one of these scenarios.

The FLL took the form described below.

## Phase 1-4: The Futures of Collaboration, Partnership and Multilateralism

### Phase 1 - Reveal (2035 future)

Participants shared and discussed their images of probable (Phase 1A) and preferable (Phase 1B) futures of collaboration, partnership and multilateralism in 2035 and reflected on the assumptions that informed these futures.

For probable futures, the participants were asked what a 'realistic 2035' looks like, what people are doing, who the Organisation is serving, and what are the relationships like between governments, communities, organisations and other actors?

For preferable futures, the groups were asked to reflect on what 2035 would ideally look like, in a future where all the hopes and dreams for WOAAH and for the world are realised. Animal health and animal welfare, as well as global collaboration, partnership and multilateralism, are as good as they can be.

### Scenario explorations

Two scenarios were introduced to participants to help them explore what the world, and thus the operating environment, might look like for WOAAH in any one of these futures. These two scenarios were adapted from WOAAH's previous experience with scenario planning at EmLyon's Business School in a 'disrupted futures' course in 2020.

Scenarios published in *Global Scenarios 2035: Exploring Implications for the Futures of Global Collaboration and the OECD* (OECD, 2021) were also used in this exercise.

One scenario emphasised private-sector dominance in animal medicine, and the other focused on virtual animals and polarisation.

To interact with the scenarios, participants described a person who lives in these futures and what role WOAHA plays in their lives.

### **Phase 2 - Reframe (2050 future)**

Participants engaged with a future where the 'rules' of the world are completely different and unfamiliar in 2050. The purpose was to let go of familiar images of the future, to suspend the habit of imagining the future either as something that is likely or desirable.

In brief, the reframing represents a future where the governance structures and the multilateral, political and economic structures of 2022 no longer exist. In their place are fluid networks in which information and knowledge are exchanged. There is no apparent order and there are no boundaries.

This improbable future is hard to imagine. However, it is thought-provoking and challenges us to explore how WOAHA's work might change or transform in these circumstances. Participants are invited to imagine whom WOAHA is serving and how, and what these collaborations and partnerships may look like.

### **Phase 3 - New questions**

Returning to 2022, participants were asked to reflect on what they learned from the futures explored in Phases 1 and 2. Namely, did exploring different futures change the ways in which participants think about or wish to approach collaboration, partnerships and multilateralism in the present?

### **Phase 4 - Next steps**

Reflecting on the FLL process and the content of these conversations, still in the context of collaborations, partnerships and multilateralism, the participants were asked to consider what they had learned (knowledge gained about the topic in the face of uncertainty and unanticipated challenges), wish for (who are the collaborators and partners they need to know from the futures explored?) and act on (what should WOAHA start doing or stop doing?).

## **Insights and opportunities**

Throughout the phases of and additions to the FLL, participants identified and challenged various underlying assumptions.

In particular, the reframed scenario challenged how WOAHA currently operates, specifically its direct interaction with representatives of national governments, as well as consensus and the principle of 'one Member, one vote' for the adoption of animal health and welfare standards. In considering how WOAHA would operate in a future where the formal governance structures of today have transformed and taken on new forms,<sup>3</sup> the following insights emerged.

- Relying on our historical approaches to engage Members is insufficient – social, political, economic and technological landscapes are constantly evolving. For WOAHA to stay true to its core mission to improve animal health and welfare, the scope of standards needs to go beyond trade purposes. This is, in part, already taking place at WOAHA with the addition of standards on animal welfare and a wildlife health framework. Further, the scale for standards and standard-setting processes was also reconsidered, and new possibilities of adapting to local needs for animal health and welfare arose, as well as the potential for collaborating with local governments, entities and communities.

- In the reframed future, the growing role of the private sector was further examined. Typically, the Organisation has worked with national Veterinary Services and, over time, has supported Veterinary Services in private–public partnerships. Now, with Veterinary Services being supported by the private sector in direct training and diagnostics, the future of WOA’s relationships with national Veterinary Services may change, and the Organisation needs to work with the private sector to ensure that baseline standards and competencies for quality Veterinary Services evolve.
- Expanding and contracting networks are part of the process of evolving and changing socio-economic, political, environmental and technological factors. Other new and emergent stakeholders are farmers, food-producing networks and communities. These networks and stakeholders can be seen as generators of knowledge and should be a part of the solutions to complex issues, even if they are not scientific bodies or international organisations (especially in a reframed future where multilateralism does not exist). As problems are multidisciplinary, solutions seem to require a multidisciplinary approach – respect for differences and diversity in approaching issues is key. As a result, ‘consensus’ will look different, and will be reached differently in different areas across the world.
- Participants described the possible future of WOA as a steward, coordinator, verifier and archivist – all of which enable different kinds of collaboration with different levels of entities/authorities. Beyond human actors, technological advancements for artificial intelligence (AI) were seen as becoming more than just a tool. Laboratory participants expressed a mix of worry and optimism about this development, and raised questions about the use of AI and its impact on the Organisation’s work.
- Coming back to the present, participants shared the general sentiment that we are out of touch with our Members. The Organisation tends to keep falling back on what it thinks Members want without necessarily connecting with them. WOA must reflect on how it can work with existing stakeholders in the future, and what opportunities can be leveraged or created to engage more directly with Members. There was some reflection on the advantages that organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations enjoy by having offices within countries to engage with different actors in that particular country.

## Conclusions

*The purpose of looking to the future is to understand the possibilities ahead in order to make more informed decisions in the present. Good futures work reduces the risk of being surprised or blindsided.*

Andy Hines & Peter Bishop, *Thinking about the Future*, 2006, p. 29

No organisation can afford to operate with the mindset that the future is likely to continue based on what we know from the past. The ambiguity, complexity and pace of change in contemporary society do not allow organisations to rely solely on their historical experience and structures to guide them forwards. The value of exploring futures through foresight and Futures Literacy methodologies is that it enables us to consider alternative futures that go beyond what is probable, to meaningfully engage with preposterous ideas and to use these ideas to rethink our present actions.

The future exists in our anticipation of it; it is influenced and shaped by the decisions taken or not taken today. In this context, Futures Literacy is a skill that can be honed, which ‘allows people to better understand the role of the future in what they see and do. Being futures



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tianna Brand, Foresight Advisor at WOA, in collaboration with: Rahul Srivastava, WOA; Sally Yu-Yang Lin and Federico Filauri of the Social and Human Sciences Sector, Management of Social Transformations and Foresight Section at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and Joshua Polchar, Strategic Foresight Lead in the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These colleagues put extraordinary effort into designing and peer-facilitating the Futures Literacy Laboratory.

Thanks are also due to the École des Ponts Business School, Paris, for hosting the Futures Literacy Laboratory. The École des Ponts Business School holds the UNESCO Chair on Financial Anticipatory Systems Thinking (FAST). Not only did it open its doors to host this event, but the school also provided another experienced FLL facilitator for the laboratory's benefit. Special thanks go to two people at the school for their support: François Blanchet, for co-facilitating, and Agnès Peigne, for helping with logistics.

In preparing for this FLL, inspiration for additional scenarios was drawn from the OECD publication, *Global Scenarios 2035: Exploring Implications for the Futures of Global Collaboration and the OECD* (OECD, 2021), as well as from scenarios crafted specifically for WOA. The laboratory had the good fortune to have an OECD colleague who had been involved with the scenarios mentioned above to craft the outlines for this FLL, as well as being able to take advantage of his mastery at facilitating foresight workshops. Thank you, Joshua.

Gratitude is also extended to WOA Director General, Monique Éloit, and to our colleagues in the Organisation who took part in the laboratory for their willingness to try something out of the ordinary and 'step out of their comfort zones' to think differently about the futures that are emerging.

This FLL was supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

literate empowers the imagination, enhances our ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur' (UNESCO, 2023). By being futures literate, we can move from anticipating the future through goal-oriented planning to envisaging the future in a more open, less deterministic manner, which leaves open the question of what else may emerge. Futures Literacy can often be overlooked when using foresight methodologies, but it is an essential skill that allows us to fully appreciate the complexity of the world around us and the futures before us if we are willing to imagine them.

Nothing would be more surprising to an intergovernmental organisation than having multilateralism disappear or alter significantly from what it looks like today. There are warning signs and power shifts that affect international and intergovernmental organisations that have been built on multilateralism, collaboration and partnerships.

For example, multiple countries could decide to withdraw from current multilateral structures to pursue their own structures, aligned with their specific needs and values. Before dismissing this as improbable, please suspend all disbelief (a skill that is honed through the use of foresight and Futures Literacy), and look into the eye of the storm today to ask, 'What if...?'

Allow yourself to be transported into that alternative reality, and consider:

- What are the steps we need to take to continue to engage with countries, partners and collaborators?
- What does the Organisation need to do to adapt and transform itself? What should it start or stop doing?

# Annex 1

## THE SCENARIOS

The following two scenarios were inspired by OECD Global Scenarios 2035 and those developed for WOAHA by EmLyon Business School students in the 'disrupted futures' course. The scenarios were introduced just after Phase 1 of the Futures Literacy Laboratory process to move from the probable and desired futures of that phase in 2035 to the reframed 2050 scenario in Phase 2.

### The elephant in the room

The year is 2035, and humanity is at a precipice. Society is characterised by powerful private actors who rushed into the vacuum created after public opinion turned on governments and international organisations in the wake of numerous crises.

The private sector has gained significant influence given the unprecedented speed of technological and medical innovation. In fact, this sector is the leading voice for nearly all sectors including the animal health sector, in most parts of the world. These advancements in animal health and medicine are not without consequence, as the companies are criticised for prioritising profit over animal welfare and impacts on human health.

In addition to market dominance, the private sector re-invests at will into private philanthropic foundations which advocate for their version of public goods. As populism becomes part of the fabric of society, these foundations have greater hold over public opinion and influence public funding and research agendas. Resource allocation is set less by government and more by private actors. WOAHA is struggling to justify its existence despite knowing that it has an important role to play behind the headlines

### The unicorn takeover

Welcome to 2035, the world has become a volatile mix of luxurious 'paradise-living' complexes alongside city slums, all plugged into the metaverse at varying degrees of accessibility. Indeed, most of human interaction takes place on an interconnected virtual platform, for business and leisure.

Virtual animals, both real and mythical, are coded into the metaverse at the whims of human engineering, creating a wave of digital biodiversity. People care more about their cyber animals than animals in real life. In addition, the physical spaces needed for human habitation are expanding and sprawling into spaces previously reserved for nature; nearly all land, and even some of the oceans, are under the influence of humans, with the cooling of computing systems invading the deep sea.

These physical landscapes are scarred by light and noise pollution that damages ecosystems and alters the habits of many species. Biodiversity over all is decreasing due to the altered habitats and plagues of invasive species. The distinction between wildlife and domesticated animals is blurring and their habitats are overlapping more and more. Epidemics of diseases such as rabies, Ebola, and COVID are appearing in humans and animals in parts of the world where there have been no cases before. The ideas of 'wilderness' and 'wildlife' barely exist any more; nature has been backed into a corner.

The relationship between States, users (as customers and creators), multinational platform companies and animals is more complex than ever, with new social dilemmas emerging around the ethics of human-animal interaction in the virtual world.

## Welcome to 2050!

The world is in **constant flux**, with people, networks, and the world all melted to a state of **continuous fluidity**. Political and economic structures of the past no longer exist. Instead, multiple dynamic communities which are all different from one another have become the way life is organised. Decision-making takes place in **fluid and open manners**; these dynamic communities are **small and localised** and yet are able to connect with other dynamic communities when and if required.

Within this context, new networks are **created spontaneously** from interactions with other communities. It is easy and quick to enter or exit these networks, which themselves **continuously emerge and disappear**, as do collaborations and partnerships. The localised nature of these communities gives rise to more diverse methods of creation, and almost anything can be and is made by anyone (including 'animal health products' e.g. vaccines, antibiotics and other veterinary medicines, diagnostics and their reagents).

Fluidity also characterises information and knowledge. There is no apparent order, there are **no boundaries** in the way knowledge and structures are organised. New **rhizomatic knowledge models** have replaced hierarchical ones: there is no one scientific authority setting scientific truths and standards, but rather a **plethora of different actors, researchers and collaborators** all contribute to the advancement of research regardless of formal recognition, titles or status.

**Access to information is extensive and collaborative**, scientific research is prevalent. Likewise, knowledge and understanding of animal health and welfare has become **diversified**. This also means that local communities and small producers may set their own standards for animal health and livestock yields, with varied outcomes.

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Required citation: World Organisation for Animal Health (2024). *The Futures of Collaboration, Partnership and Multilateralism 2050*. 11 pp. <https://doi.org/10.20506/woah.3461>  
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