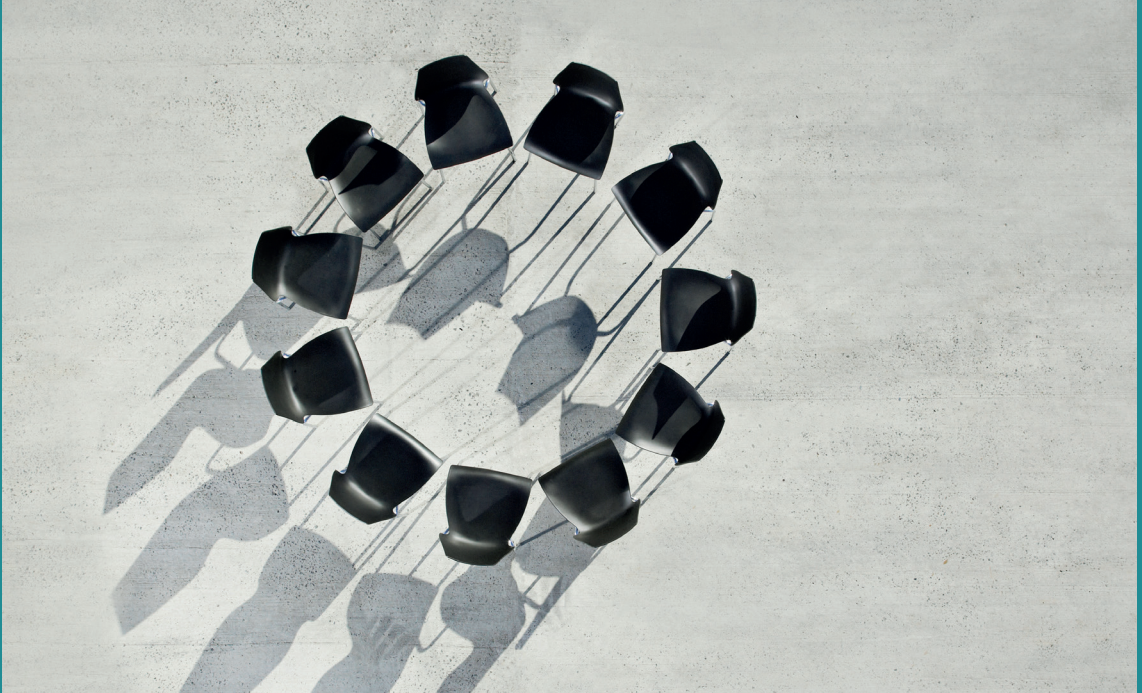


THE WORLD IN 2030

Broader Decision Making



Broader Decision Making

As the world faces complex future challenges, multi-party communities are themselves expanding and fragmenting. New approaches to broader decision-making gain traction.

Number of separatist movements in Europe (2020)

82

Number of full UN members (2050)

230

It is increasingly apparent that the big complex decisions for tomorrow are global, or at least multi-regional in nature. Climate change and pandemics are issues that are front of mind for many, but others of note include data ownership, food supply and the impact of AI. These are inherently cross-sector and multinational so, as well as requiring input from a diverse sector stakeholder set, they also demand wider geographic representation. But the current engagement models seem over-burdened and may not be able to accommodate the views of an increasing number of stakeholders. Some nations are fragmenting while others may become detached from the existing processes. At a time when global problems are crying out for international action the clear challenge is how to continue to ensure broader, collaborative, complex decision-making between a growing number of different parties around the world all with individual, sometimes diverging, agendas.

In the West and much of Asia, most people have grown up with globalisation. This has been broadly based on the idea that we all share some core experiences, values and interests and the best way to foster them is to ease the movement of ideas, goods, money and people across the planet. Huge benefits have been gained, cross-border trade, international travel, multi-culturalism, the development of multinational businesses have all contributed to a global rise in the standard of living for many. But globalisation has also opened the door to enormous problems – such as increasing inequality, climate change and, of course, the faster spread of infectious diseases. Such is their extent, many of these problems can only be addressed effectively through global action. But as countries fragment and some regional / sectorial

decision-making communities turn their focus inward, maintaining an effective environment for multi-party agreement will become more difficult. A clear challenge for the next decade is how to achieve broader collaboration at a time of increased fragmentation.

The growth of multiple influential international bodies has long necessitated organisations and nations to participate in more collective decision-making. The UN, IMF, WTO at a global level and multiple regional bodies from the EC and ASEAN to the African Union and LAFTA have variously enabled different parties to come together to develop regulations and agree policy on key issues from, for example, the SGDs to trade tariffs and data sharing protocols. However, looking ahead some question the capacity of many of the organisations in place to be able to continue to operate within their current structures. If there are twice as many decision makers involved in the room, all of whom feel that they have an important voice, how can decision making evolve to accommodate them? Moreover, as many of the challenges that need to be addressed become increasingly complex, how can the wider community of stakeholders, with an associated broad spectrum of disparate interests, align on agreed future directions? Many believe that the old approaches may well be unfit for purpose. Negotiation, mediation and consensus building might work with fifty interested parties but less so with 250. New decision-making methods must be adopted.

[Peak] Globalisation?

In looking ahead sometimes it is useful to look back. Governments have worked together to solve common problems. Indeed, after the Second World War, the UN and other international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation, World Health Organisation and IMF were created to specifically provide solutions whenever governments face transnational challenges - international and civil wars, humanitarian emergencies, flows of refugees, sovereign debt crises, trade protectionism, and the development of poorer countries. In general, they operate consensually although their functioning, power, and effectiveness differs widely. But even after the immediate devastation of the war, when the determination not to repeat the mistakes of the past was top of mind, rallying collective action was always difficult. The problem is ongoing; rather than being able to deliver legitimate alternatives to unilateral state policies, global initiatives, however well meaning, often get stymied by compromise and end up achieving little of benefit. Think of the COP - the Conference of Parties for the UN Climate Change Conference. Despite meeting every year,

three decades of negotiation have produced just one major agreement to hold temperatures to a limit that is too high – an ambition which it is unlikely that any country will currently meet. That said, for all its flaws, the COP is the only forum on the ecological crisis in which the opinions and concerns of the poorest country carry equal weight to that of the biggest economies, such as the US and China. Agreement can only come by consensus so, although frustrating, this does at least give the decisions emanating from it global authority. Without such bodies, many believe the world would be at the mercy of individual governments and vested commercial interests, but in some eyes the ability of global organisations to take the big decisions is under growing pressure.

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More Voices

Coincident with a decline in the effectiveness of international institutions is the rise in support for more individual nation states. Indeed since 1990, 34 new countries have been created; some born out of the dissolution of the former USSR and Yugoslavia; others, such as Eritrea and East Timor, from anti-colonial and independence actions. In parallel with this separatist movements, from Catalonia to Kashmir, and Hong Kong to Scotland, have also made headlines around the world as they seek to establish new countries, reaffirm old ones, and so challenge the status quo. Indeed, in the next decade or so only three countries are expected to get bigger – Russia via progressive annexation of more of Ukraine; China which is building islands in the South China Seas and Ireland through a potential post-Brexit reunification. Elsewhere with many regions within existing countries vying for independence, there is likely to be a higher rate of new nation creation than ever before. This is occurring around the globe:

- Across Europe, for example, there are over 80 separatist movements – some looking at autonomous states, some as secessionist movement and other complete breakaways.
- In Africa nearly 50 secessionist groups are active across 31 countries. Some of the most likely to drive change include Biafra, Darfur, Kongo, Matabeleland, Zanzibar.
- Throughout South America there are presently 10 independence movements of which those in Argentina (Patagonia), Brazil (Sao Paulo), Colombia and Venezuela are the most prominent.
- While across Asia and the Middle East, there are over 100 active groups supporting new nations. Many of these can be found in China and India, and so have little chance of progress any time soon, but depending who you talk to, others are more confident. These include Bali in Indonesia, Kurdistan in Iraq, Sarawak in Malaysia, the Rohingya in Myanmar, Bangsamoro in the Philippines, the Tamils in Sri Lanka plus the splitting in two of Yemen and whatever is the next stage in the disintegration of Syria.

All in all, there is a possibility that there will be an additional 100 nations by the end of this century with perhaps 30 or so extra ones already in the mix by 2050. In Europe the EU may move over the next decade or so from accommodating 28 (27 post-Brexit) voices to expand to a broader church of around 40. In Asia, the ASEAN community could similarly grow from 10 towards 15 states while the UN and all its associated organisations may well grow from 195 countries and be approaching 230 full members, (but probably still not yet including Palestine). In Africa, the 55 member states in the African Union may grow to up to seventy.



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Not only that, it is clear that the relative economic strength of the West is weakening, and this shift in the balance of power stand to have profound effects on the future governance of our global institutions with China and India likely to demand a leading position in the organisation of the international community. So, just considering nation states alone, there will be more voices, more votes and, in all likelihood a major change in the status quo of decision-making influence. This potentially means less authority in some bodies for some of the traditional leading nations.

International decision-making is not of course the sole domain of government. For years influential multinational corporations have been moving to the fore in terms of setting new agendas, many advocating self-regulation as an effective way of dealing with the speed of change which traditional policy making has been slow to address. This argument has been touted in particular by technology companies. But the fallout from the Facebook / Cambridge Analytica scandal of 2018 demonstrated that poachers sometimes find it hard to turn gamekeeper. There have however been learnings. Driven by increasing public interest in responsible business practices, corporate involvement looks set to shift further towards full-time, long-term relationships with a wider set of stakeholders and we can expect more companies to see the value of working alongside policy makers to co-develop working regulation. Add in a host of increasingly empowered NGOs, wealthy purpose-focused foundations plus more global networks and the number of voices to be heard over the next decade or so will expand enormously.

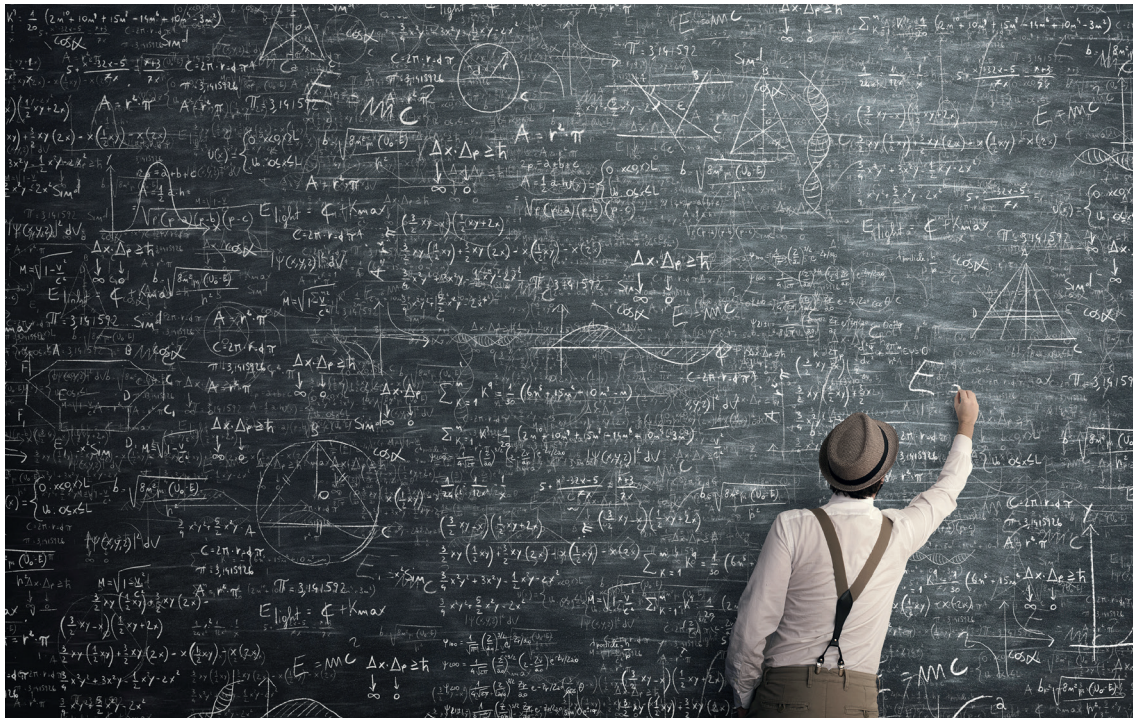
Looking ahead it is clear that more collective and transparent action will be required to manage policy. Truly independent institutions are, for example, clearly needed to regulate who has access to data, monitor the impact, and enforce compliance with regulation, technical standards and codes of conduct. Often funded unequally by different governments, multinationals or other institutions it has been easy for critics to argue that, in reality, most international bodies of any kind often act as a fig leaf of respectability for the specific benefit of the dominant party. Greater decision transparency could go some way to address this and also expose those institutions that have become inefficient or ineffective.

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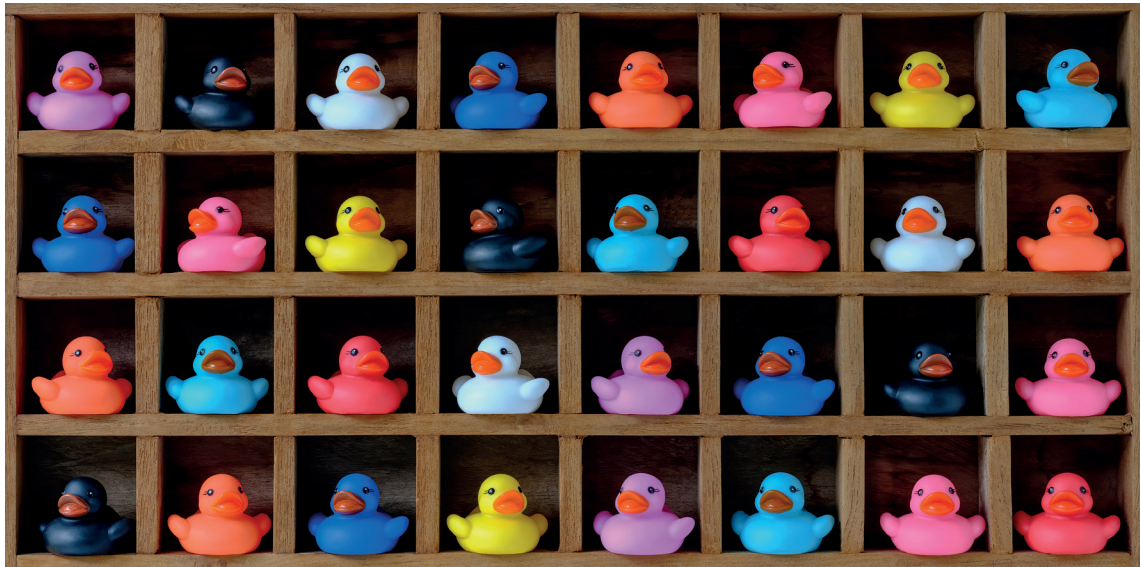
Complex Decisions

Five years-ago we highlighted the emerging need for deeper collaboration – particularly when tackling issues where multiple parties rather than just simple bilateral ventures are involved.¹ Our view was that partnerships will shift to become more dynamic, long-term, democratised, multi-party collaborations. Moreover, competitor alliances and wider public participation will drive regulators to create new legal frameworks for open, empathetic collaboration. Many of the topics of focus were those that have become familiar with such as obesity and urban air quality. These are simple issues in principle but highly complex ones to address. They require many different stakeholders to collaborate to drive change. Tackling air pollution effectively will, for instance, demand partnerships across transportation operators, energy providers, city

planners, public health organisations, governments, regulators, financiers and citizen groups – but all within one metropolis where the mayor's office can, for example, set the ambition for others to align around. Today many of city institutions benefit by working with and learning from equivalent organisations in other countries - as the sharing of information becomes easier it makes sense to share approaches to policy challenges. Indeed, many consider they are best addressed with a cross-border mindset and international regulatory cooperation.



Multiple Agendas



In addition to different decision makers driving the agenda, a core challenge is that the new voices will want to be heard and will expect their individual agendas to be on the table:

- Many of the 'new' countries, such as South Sudan, will be keen to exert opinion on a wider stage, while those that have lost regions such as Ukraine may be seeking to reinforce their traditional influence.
- Some governments will continue to advocate further globalisation of trade and connectivity while others will join those like Brazil and the US in taking a more nationalist or populist position.
- Many major cities such as London, New York, Paris and Tokyo may seek to further decouple themselves from their hinterlands and lead progress on issues that may well be out of sync with wider populations; and

- Some of the companies ranging from Amazon and BP to Tencent and Microsoft that are becoming ever more proactively engaged on a broader set of issues will be keen to support and be involved in wider dialogue.

Given all of this, it is evident to many that collaborative decision making is going to have to step up a notch.

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New Decision Making

Some global institutions have already started to explore options around decision making. NATO for example has been re-examining its collaborative decision-making process for complex defence, security and stability challenges.² It has expanded from 12 members at its conception to 29 - soon to be 30 when North Macedonia joins. With more potential crises and conflicts to deal with, some possibly involving members' conflicting interests, there has been interest in more flexible collaborative decision making. This applies as much to allocating funding to align with predictive defence capability requirements as to the sharing of intelligence on cyberspace activities. Similar shifts are becoming evident in the WHO, UNESCO and UNDP keen to move on from simple 50% or 2/3 majority of members voting formulas, the widespread use of vetoes and lengthy committee-level pre-negotiations. With shifting influencers and more opinions to consider, the days when one of 200 nations can use a veto to block action may soon be at an end.

Elsewhere, as part of wider citizen engagement, some governments are experimenting with more devolved decision making. Referendums, while still popular in Switzerland, have not proved definitive elsewhere, in some cases quite the reverse. Governments are exploring new ideas about how best to gain wider endorsement for pivotal policy decisions which scale beyond a four- or five-year election cycle. As such in places like British Columbia, Ontario, Netherlands and Ireland, citizen assemblies are being pursued. Likewise, in Rio de Janeiro, Toronto, Denmark, Finland more open collaboration on governance is part of the mix. Within other communities more radical options are being trialled. As well as the re-emergence of game theory and AHP (analytic hierarchy process), more network-based approaches are being adopted. These are, for example, seeking to accommodate both a wider inconsistency in views across diverse communities as well as gauging the varied levels of agreement across members.³



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Leading in 2030

The world will continue to need multilateral institutions to be guardians of global public goods, addressing issues such as pandemic threats, climate change, and restrictions on international mobility. But public misunderstanding about globalisation the inability of political leaders to counter their fears risks undermining our ability to address some of these challenges. It is therefore up to the global institutions that form the backbone of our society to evolve and enable intelligent, multinational debate and action. One suggested approach could be for organisations to build deeper partnerships with local stakeholders and, rather than 'owning' initiatives, devolving control of development projects to national governments. Another is for institutional members to more accurately reflect the needs of the evolving global community and become more representative of the world as it is today.

Whatever system develops it is clear it can no longer be moulded by or for the Western powers alone. But those that want to be part of this more collaborative, multi-party, multi-agenda decision making will have to learn and adopt new styles of debate. Inclusion will be a priority and demonstrating leadership of a wider community of increasingly loud and individual voices will be a must. Ironically the immense challenge to protect global communities from the covid-19 virus, although on the surface forcing us apart, may well be the catalyst for just this sort of change.



References

- ¹ <https://www.futureagenda.org/foresights/deeper-collaboration/>
- ² <https://www.act.nato.int/articles/natos-assisted-decision-making>
- ² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1566253518302665?via%3Dihub>

The World in 2030

This is one of 50 global foresights from Future Agenda's World in 2030 Open Foresight programme, an initiative which gains and shares views on some of the major issues facing society over the next decade. It is based on multiple expert discussions across all continents and covers a wide range of topics. We do not presume to cover every change that will take place over the next decade however we hope to have identified the key areas of significance. Each foresight provides a comprehensive 10-year view drawn from in-depth expert discussions. All foresights are on <https://www.futureagenda.org/the-world-in-2030/>

Previous Global Programmes

The World in 2020 was published in 2010 and based on conversations from 50 workshops with experts from 1500 organisations undertaken in 25 countries as part of the first Future Agenda Open Foresight programme. This ground-breaking project has proven to be highly accurate in anticipating future change and the results have been used by multiple companies, universities, NGOs and governments globally. Rising obesity, access not ownership, self-driving cars, drone wars, low cost solar energy, more powerful cities and growing concerns over trust were just some of the 50 foresights generated. For more details: <https://www.futureagenda.org/the-world-in-2020/>

Five years on, the World in 2025 programme explored 25 topics in 120 workshops hosted by 50 different organisations across 45 locations globally. Engaging the views of over 5000 informed people, the resulting foresights have again proven to be very reliable. Declining air quality, the growing impact of Africa, the changing nature of privacy, the increasing value of data and the consequence of plastics in our oceans are some of the foresights that have already grown in prominence. For more details: <https://www.futureagenda.org/the-world-in-2025/>

About Future Agenda

Future Agenda is an open source think tank and advisory firm. It runs the world's leading Open Foresight programme, helping organisations to identify emerging opportunities, and make more informed decisions. Future Agenda also supports leading organisations on strategy, growth and innovation.

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