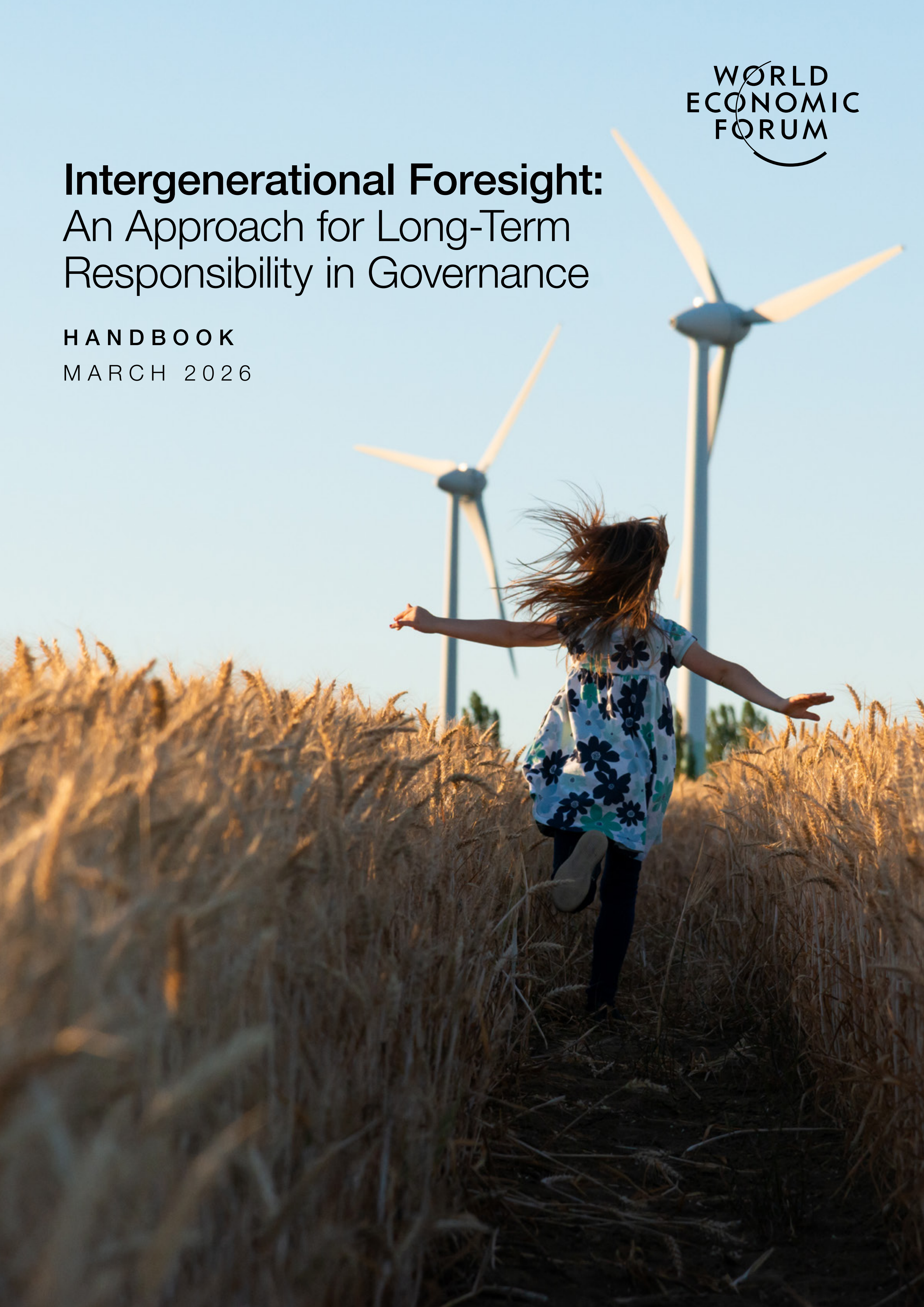
Intergenerational Foresight: An Approach for Long-Term Responsibility in Governance

HANDBOOK

MARCH 2026



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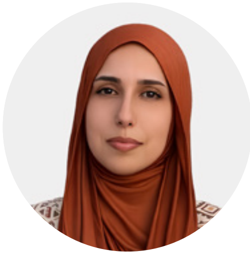

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Today's leaders are increasingly required to make decisions whose consequences will unfold far beyond electoral cycles, investment horizons and leadership tenures. Climate instability, demographic shifts, rapid technological change, and rising inequality are driving nonlinear and long-term transformations with impacts that are unevenly distributed between geographies and generations. Navigating these challenges demands more than short-term fixes; it requires leaders to steward uncertainty, complexity and accountability with a long-term perspective.

Strategic foresight has emerged as a critical response to this reality. Unlike forecasting, which extends existing trends forward, strategic foresight creates a structured space to explore multiple plausible future and shows how today's decisions expand or constrain the futures that remain possible. Strategic foresight has helped organizations anticipate change and build resilience, but today's persistent challenges reveal the limits of conventional approaches and make clear the need for foresight to evolve in both method and perspective. Foresight must evolve, broadening whose perspectives count and how futures are framed in decision-making.

The Future50 Initiative was created to meet this need. In partnership with the World Economic Forum's Global Foresight Network and Global Shapers Community, it explored how bringing generations together can strengthen foresight and lead to more legitimate, durable long-term decisions. Instead of relegating emerging leaders to the sidelines, Future50 gave them equal footing with seasoned experts to tackle real governance and organizational challenges around the world.

This handbook captures the insights that emerged from that work. It does not offer a definitive model, nor does it seek to replace established tools or methodologies. Instead, it contributes to the ongoing evolution of the field by articulating intergenerational foresight as an approach to long-term decision-making and governance, one that broadens who participates in shaping the future, rebalances power and perspective across generations, and strengthens the connection between authority and consequence. At the centre of this handbook are a set of regional provocations developed through the Future50 Initiative, illustrating how intergenerational foresight operates in practice, and how it can generate insights that conventional approaches may overlook.

This handbook is an invitation to leaders, institutions, and practitioners to reflect on how foresight is practiced today and consider how it can better serve both present and future generations. The choices we make now, and who is included in making them, will define the futures ahead.

Executive summary

The capacity to think and act for the long term has become a defining challenge for leadership in the twenty-first century. Organizations and governments are operating in an environment characterized by deep uncertainty, overlapping crises and accelerating change. Yet, many of the structures that shape decision-making remain anchored in short-term incentives and narrow time horizons. Under these conditions, even well-intentioned leaders struggle to reconcile immediate pressures with the long-term consequences of their choices.

Strategic foresight has become an essential capability in response to this tension. By enabling institutions to anticipate risk, explore alternative futures and prepare for disruption, foresight has strengthened decision-making across a wide range of contexts. However, its impact is increasingly constrained by the distribution of authority, expertise and legitimacy, as contemporary foresight remains concentrated within a narrow set of institutions, geographies and senior roles, often excluding those who will live longest with the consequences of today's decisions or who experience future risks first.

This handbook uses intergenerational foresight as an evolution of existing foresight and anticipatory governance practices. Intergenerational foresight is an approach to long-term decision-making that explicitly integrates intergenerational responsibility beyond temporal dimensions of governance. It brings multiple generations, regions and knowledge systems together in shared authority over how they envision, evaluate and govern the future. In doing so, it expands temporal horizons, broadens cognitive range and reconnects authority with long-term consequences, thereby strengthening both the quality and the legitimacy of long-term decisions.

By articulating principles, mindsets and conditions, intergenerational foresight can deliver more credible, resilient and legitimate long-term outcomes.

Intended as both a reference point and a catalyst, leaders and practitioners are encouraged to actively participate in intergenerational foresight as a living approach, one that evolves through hands-on involvement, continual reflection, and collaborative action, and that responds to a world in which the costs of delay, exclusion, and short-termism are increasingly difficult to reverse.

Introduction

Strategic foresight has become an established capability for navigating uncertainty. Tools such as scenario planning, horizon scanning and systems analysis have strengthened organizational preparedness across contexts ranging from technological disruption to climate risk and geopolitical instability.

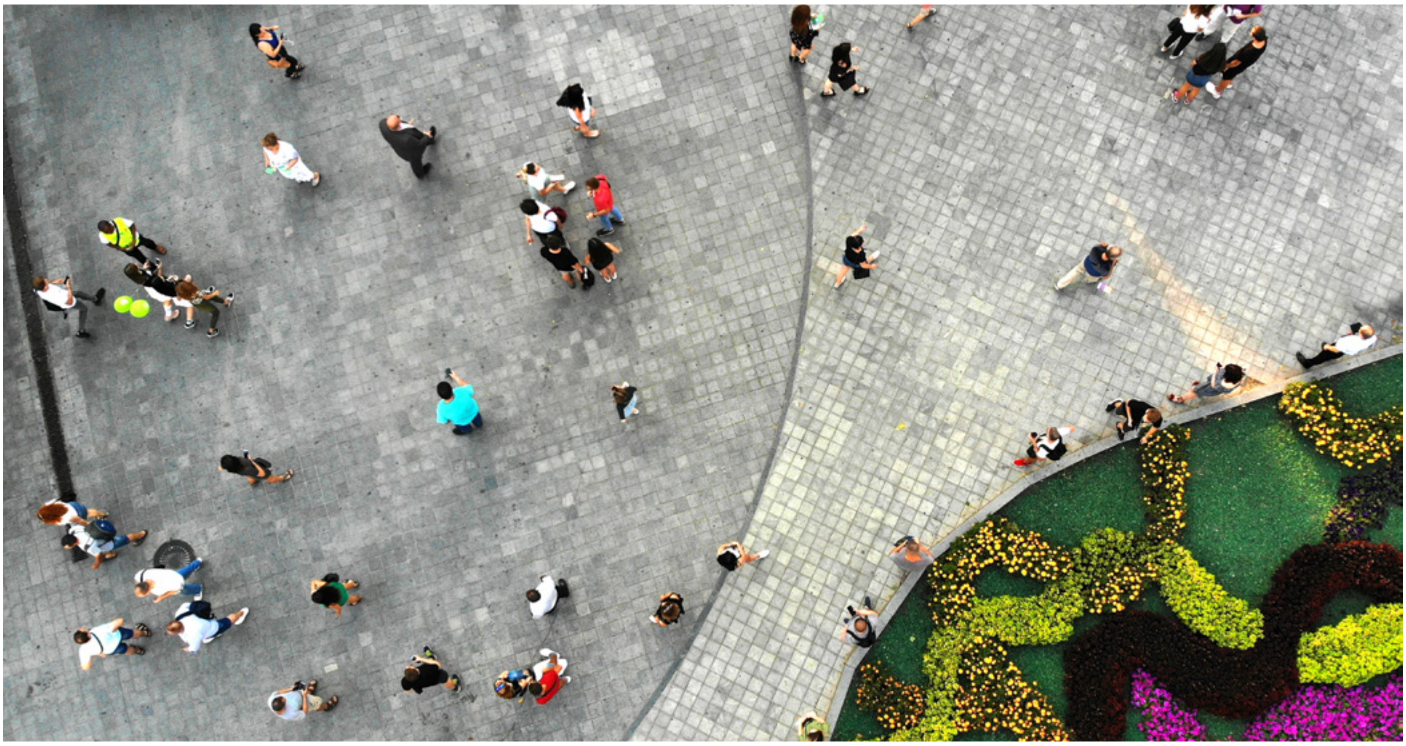
Yet the scale and persistence of today's challenges are testing the limits of existing foresight practice. Many of the most consequential decisions currently being made will shape social, economic and ecological conditions for decades, often in ways that are difficult to reverse. Infrastructure investments, climate and energy transitions, digital governance architectures and demographic policies generate long-term effects that extend well beyond the time horizons within which decisions are authorized and evaluated.

Under these conditions, a gap has emerged between the temporal reach of decisions and the structures that inform them. While foresight tools can model long-term impacts, the processes that shape how futures are imagined often remain constrained by short-term incentives, institutional silos and narrow assumptions about whose knowledge and perspectives are relevant. As a result, foresight risks becoming an analytical exercise detached from deeper questions of responsibility, legitimacy and consequence.

This challenge is not solely about technical capacity. It reflects a deeper issue regarding the distribution of authority over the future and the understanding of responsibility across time in decision-making systems. When decision-makers with little exposure to long-term consequences dominate futures thinking, they overlook important signals, underestimate risks and prematurely close off options.

Our work is grounded in a simple premise: the distribution of authority within decision-making processes directly shapes the futures we can imagine, assess and design. Decisions encode assumptions about whose interests matter, which risks are acceptable and which futures are considered plausible. Without meaningful engagement from future-oriented perspectives, including younger generations, communities with long-term risk exposure and knowledge systems grounded in stewardship and continuity, foresight loses both depth and legitimacy.

Intergenerational foresight addresses this challenge by extending foresight across time, geography and experience. This evolution is already taking shape, as global governance debates are institutionalizing, with actors exploring ways to give future generations a clearer standing in policy design, oversight and long-term accountability. Intergenerational foresight does not reject existing methodologies; it builds upon them, redirecting their application towards more inclusive, accountable and future-fit governance. By embedding multiple generations into shared decision-making authority and equipping them with the tools to succeed, intergenerational foresight helps institutions surface weak signals earlier, challenge entrenched assumptions and navigate uncertainty with greater credibility.



From specialist practice to institutional capability

Foresight has often been positioned as a specialist function, concentrated in dedicated units, expert communities, or advisory roles. While this helped establish analytical credibility and protect long-term thinking within systems otherwise driven by short-term incentives, it also narrowed the locus of authority over the future. Over time, assumptions about expertise and legitimacy shaped participation in foresight, determining whose perspectives held significance. Decision-makers often frame knowledge rooted in lived experience, local context, or long-term stewardship as contextual input rather than recognizing it as a form of strategic authority. As demographic change, climate risk and technological transformation accelerate, the limits of this arrangement are increasingly evident. Long-term challenges affect generations, regions and social positions unevenly and no single vantage point can fully grasp them. Under these conditions, the greatest gains emerge when foresight is treated not as specialist expertise but as an institutional capability: embedded in leadership expectations, decision routines and organizational culture and shared across roles and levels as part of everyday governance.

The Future50 initiative

The Future50 Initiative is a purposeful effort to reshape the practice of foresight and its inclusive participation. Created through a joint effort between the Global Foresight Network and the Global Shapers Community, it gathers fifty emerging leaders from various regions to collaborate with experienced foresight practitioners over several months.

Its goal is not to develop a single model or set of recommendations. Instead, it aims to examine how intergenerational design can enhance foresight's ability to address long-term challenges by rebalancing perspective, power, and responsibility across different generations and timeframes.

Purpose and scope of this handbook

This handbook contributes to the ongoing development of foresight as a leadership and governance skill. It does not aim to establish a new orthodoxy or replace existing methods. Instead, it promotes intergenerational foresight as a means of redirecting and strengthening established practice amid increased uncertainty, risk, and accountability.

By combining conceptual framing, guiding principles, and practical insights, the following methodology shows how wider participation across time, geography, and experience can enhance decision quality and legitimacy. Key to this contribution are the provocations developed through regional collaboration. Each provocation demonstrates the application of intergenerational foresight within a specific context while addressing broader governance dynamics that go beyond any single region. These are not definitive solutions or prescriptions, but strategic prompts designed to identify blind spots, challenge inherited assumptions, and broaden leaders' strategic perspectives.

The handbook acts as a reference point rather than a fixed guide. It positions intergenerational foresight as an ongoing practice that must continually evolve as the futures we aim to govern become more complex, contested, and consequential. It encourages reflection on how organizations currently embed foresight and how they might develop it to better serve both current and future generations.

1 Defining intergenerational foresight

Foresight supports decision-making in conditions of uncertainty, where consequences unfold over long periods and are often difficult to reverse. Rather than predicting outcomes, it broadens the range of futures that decision-makers consider, enabling institutions to test assumptions, identify emerging risks, and examine how current choices influence longer-term trajectories.

Intergenerational foresight takes this further by explicitly integrating responsibility across time into how foresight is conducted and governed. It transforms how established tools like horizon scanning and scenario planning are used, who participates in them, and how authority is exercised within the process. Fundamentally, intergenerational foresight involves multiple generations and knowledge systems in shared foresight activities from the start, even before framing problems and narrowing options.

This approach recognizes that lived experiences, regional contexts and social and ecological positions influence how risks are perceived, strategic insights are generated and change is understood. Those who will live longest with today's decisions often have heightened awareness of path dependency and irreversible change. When decision-makers exclude these perspectives, short-term biases limit futures thinking even if it is nominally oriented toward the long term.

Adopting an intergenerational foresight approach has practical implications for governance. It expands participation by broadening definitions of expertise beyond seniority or proximity to power. It intentionally reconfigures authority within foresight processes, redistributing influence over how participants frame questions, explore futures, and understand trade-offs. The intergenerational foresight approach widens decision-makers' view of time by highlighting long-term consequences, intergenerational trade-offs, and future possibilities alongside immediate performance.

The value of intergenerational foresight lies in enhancing decision quality, institutional resilience, and legitimacy. By expanding perspectives and extending time horizons, it improves the detection of emerging risks, strengthens consideration of long-term trade-offs and reduces the risk of future liabilities going unseen. In contexts where public trust is declining, it also reinforces legitimacy by reconnecting authority with long-term consequences, demonstrating that futures thinking is rooted in both analysis and responsibility across time.

2 Core principles of intergenerational foresight

Temporal breadth

Intergenerational foresight broadens the time frames in which decisions are considered by explicitly emphasizing long-term and potentially irreversible outcomes. It prompts leaders to consider questions of path dependency, future flexibility, and cumulative risks, recognizing that choices made today influence future results and condition the range of options available to future generations.

Plurality of perspectives

Effective foresight depends on the diversity of perspectives that inform it. Intergenerational foresight treats generational, cultural and regional diversity as critical sources of strategic insight rather than supplementary inputs. Different generations experience risk, opportunity and change in distinct ways, shaped by their position within social, economic and technological systems. Integrating these perspectives exposes blind spots, surfaces alternative interpretations of emerging signals and alters both the range of plausible futures and the range of desirable futures.

Shared authority

Intergenerational foresight promotes shared authority within foresight processes. It does not displace expertise or leadership judgement. Rather, it distributes influence more deliberately, ensuring that those who will live with long-term consequences have meaningful input into how futures are imagined and assessed. This strengthens accountability by reconnecting foresight outputs to lived experience and long-term responsibility.

Systems awareness

Long-term challenges rarely arise from isolated causes. Intergenerational foresight, therefore, emphasizes systems awareness as a core principle, encouraging leaders to examine how decisions interact across domains and over time. This perspective helps anticipate unintended consequences while resisting the temptation to oversimplify complex trade-offs.

Legitimacy through inclusion

Intergenerational foresight clarifies which futures are considered and through which processes, thereby strengthening legitimacy. Inclusion is practised as an integral part of credible long-term decision-making, rather than as ethical signalling or reputational management. When foresight reflects the perspectives of those most exposed to long-term consequences, institutions are better able to justify difficult choices and sustain confidence over time.

2.1 Future50 as proof of concept

The Future50 Initiative offers a practical context for developing and testing intergenerational foresight. Three key design choices shaped this effort.

First, the initiative integrated intergenerational collaboration as a core feature rather than merely an outcome. Emerging leaders participated alongside experienced foresight practitioners in shared processes of inquiry, analysis, and reflection, allowing institutional memory and new perspectives to inform each other throughout the foresight process.

Second, authority within the initiative is deliberately distributed. Mentors and expert contributors acted as stewards of rigour, remaining open to challenge and learning from participants' lived experiences and regional insights. This reciprocal dynamic fostered experimentation and exchange, illustrating how foresight can move beyond hierarchical models of expertise without sacrificing quality.

Third, the initiative emphasizes regional grounding as a source of foresight intelligence. Participants engaged with real-world challenges rooted in their local contexts, demonstrating how futures thinking is influenced by place, history, and power, and how insights from specific regions can shed light on broader governance issues.

Importantly, Future50 does not generate recommendations or policy solutions. Instead, it offers a set of provocations that arise from applying intergenerational foresight.

3 From principles to practice: regional provocations

Cultivating intergenerational foresight is an ongoing practice that develops through engagement, reflection, and adaptation. The regional provocations that follow extend this work through regionally grounded application.

Rather than providing policy recommendations or implementation roadmaps, each provocation raises a deliberately constructed strategic question. These questions aim to uncover blind spots, challenge existing assumptions and expand collective imagination about long-term responsibility.

Across regions, the provocations demonstrate how intergenerational foresight is practiced under different demographic, institutional, and cultural conditions. They show how demographic structure, institutional maturity, cultural norms, and exposure to systemic risk influence long-term governance challenges and how shared foresight across generations and geographies can reshape what becomes visible, contestable, and actionable.

3.1 Provocations as strategic inquiry

Many enduring challenges remain because prevailing ways of framing problems limit which futures are considered valid. When foresight progresses too swiftly toward closure through targets, tools, or predefined best practices, it risks perpetuating current power structures and short-term mindsets rather than questioning them.

Provocations aim to disrupt this cycle. They help keep complexity visible at points where it might otherwise be oversimplified or prematurely settled. By revealing assumptions embedded in current governance models, provocations prompt us to question how success, risk, and legitimacy are defined over time. They also foster dialogue across generations and sectors, enabling perspectives often marginalized in formal decision-making to influence how challenges are understood.

Provocations are not meant as proposals to be adopted or solutions to be implemented. Instead, they serve as strategic tools that allow leaders and institutions to scrutinize their decision-making frameworks, reflect on how authority is exercised, and assess whether current approaches are sufficient to govern in the face of long-term uncertainty.

3.2 Shaping the contributions

Intergenerational foresight influenced the regional contributions in three key ways:

1 Problem framing

Questions were shaped by current limitations, anticipated long-term effects and intergenerational lived experience, thereby expanding the scope of what was regarded as relevant to the issue at hand.

2 Systems awareness

Participants examined reinforcing feedback loops, path dependencies and points of irreversibility that conventional planning processes often overlook, situating regional challenges within broader systemic dynamics.

3 Legitimacy and authority

The provocations reflect a redistribution of epistemic authority, integrating lived experience, local knowledge and institutional insight alongside formal analysis, rather than privileging any single source of expertise.

The result is a set of contributions that do not converge on a single narrative of the future. Their value lies in their diversity and tension, reflecting the reality that long-term governance challenges cannot be reduced to uniform solutions.

A

Europe and Eurasia

What if good governance were defined and measured by the temporal sovereignty it promotes and the collective agency it preserves across generations?

Across Europe and Eurasia, governance systems face a growing paradox. Institutions are increasingly active, intervening to secure economic stability, technological leadership, and geopolitical autonomy. Yet despite this intensity of action, many societies feel their future options are narrowing. Choices made today seem to lock in pathways that are difficult to reverse, while the capacity of future generations to shape their own trajectories quietly diminishes.

This tension is not primarily a failure of intent. Many policies use the language of sustainability, resilience, and strategic autonomy. The real challenge lies in how governance defines success.

Measuring effectiveness through immediate control, delivery, or optimization often sacrifices long-term agency without explicit recognition. The consequences emerge slowly, through constrained options, accumulated dependencies, and declining trust in institutions perceived as prioritizing the present over the future.

This perspective redefines good governance in terms of temporal sovereignty: the capacity of societies to preserve freedom of choice across generations. Its core is to ensure that today's decisions expand or narrow the range of feasible futures available tomorrow.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Pressure on legitimacy and long-term agency

Across Europe and Eurasia, multiple structural pressures converge. Demographic ageing is reshaping social contracts, with people over 65 projected to comprise roughly one quarter of the population by 2050. At the same time, democratic quality has declined across parts of the region, accompanied by falling public trust and growing perceptions that political systems struggle to represent long-term interests fairly.[1]

Social cohesion is further strained by rapid digital transformation.[2] Rising anxiety among young people, loneliness among older adults and problematic patterns of social media use weaken the relational foundations on which collective decision-making depends.[3] These dynamics do not directly cause governance failure, yet they erode the trust and legitimacy required to sustain long-horizon policymaking.

Public perceptions reflect this tension. Surveys consistently reveal that many citizens think governments are inadequately prepared to balance generational interests. Political systems are optimized for current demands, while the long-term consequences remain inadequately considered and addressed.[4] In this context, decisions taken today increasingly carry irreversible implications for future generations, even when framed as prudent or necessary responses to current pressures.

Europe and Eurasia's institutional complexity adds another layer. Multi-level governance across supranational, national and subnational levels enables coordination at scale, yet it can also diffuse responsibility for long-term outcomes. Decisions made within one jurisdiction may constrain options elsewhere or shift risks across borders, complicating accountability over time.

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

How future agency is quietly eroded

1 Electoral short-termism and agency erosion

Frequent electoral cycles and performance pressures often lead to decisions that deliver visible near-term gains. Long-term impacts are delayed, diminished, or externalized. Over time, these deferrals accumulate into structural constraints that limit future choices. As options narrow, governance becomes increasingly reactive, reinforcing short-term decision-making and further eroding temporal sovereignty.

2 Techno-optimism and pathway lock-in

Confidence that future technologies will resolve today's trade-offs can reduce urgency to safeguard optionality in the present. This optimism often justifies regulatory and investment decisions that harden specific pathways in digital infrastructure, energy systems and industrial policy. Once established, these pathways become difficult to reverse, even if underlying assumptions change. Long-term dependencies form, narrowing the opportunity space available to future decision-makers.

3 Present-focused sovereignty and exported risk

Efforts to secure strategic autonomy today can shift environmental and social risks to other regions with weaker safeguards. Policies designed to strengthen present sovereignty, such as green industrial strategies or critical minerals supply chains, may create external dependencies and legitimacy risks that undermine long-term agency. While appearing effective in the short term, these choices can reduce collective freedom of action over time.

Across these dynamics, a common pattern emerges. Decisions optimize for present performance while gradually reducing future optionality. The cumulative loss of reversibility, flexibility and strategic choice remains largely invisible in current governance frameworks until constraints become binding.

RATIONALE

Reclaiming temporal sovereignty

The above dynamics reveal a core governance challenge. Europe and Eurasia can manage immediate pressures but lack mechanisms to systematically safeguard long-term agency. Policies focused on current sovereignty, technological confidence, or short-term stability may seem reasonable in isolation, but collectively they limit the futures accessible to future generations.

This challenge redefines good governance as temporal sovereignty: the ability to influence long-term outcomes rather than being confined to reactive, short-term decisions. It considers whether decisions preserve the capacity of future citizens to adapt, choose, and course correct. Temporal sovereignty shifts leadership accountability. Effectiveness is assessed not only by immediate results, but also by whether choices allow for reversibility, flexibility and resilience over time.

To operationalize this reframing, the regional group proposes the **Future Optionality Index (FOI)**. The FOI functions as a decision-support mechanism that renders long-term agency visible in decision-making. It translates abstract commitments to intergenerational responsibility into concrete questions embedded in policy and investment decisions.

In a context of declining trust, demographic change and deep interdependence, this approach reconnects legitimacy with responsibility. Leadership credibility becomes linked to the preservation of choice, rather than to control alone.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

The pathways below are illustrative rather than prescriptive. They demonstrate how the provocation could be applied across governance contexts.

1. Redefine sovereignty through long-term choice preservation

Strategic assessments can shift from measuring present control to evaluating future agency. Infrastructure, industrial policy and security decisions are assessed based on whether they preserve or narrow the range of options available to future governments and citizens. This reframing aligns sovereignty with stewardship rather than accumulation.

2. Embed future optionality through an FOI

Decision-makers can apply the FOI as a structured decision test for major policies, investments and regulatory choices. They must assess whether an action:

- expands or narrows the opportunity space available to future generations
- increases dependency or preserves reversibility
- safeguards or erodes long-term assets, including ecosystems, human capabilities, institutional trust and digital autonomy

By making these trade-offs explicit, the FOI shifts debates from aspirational sustainability goals toward accountability for long-term agency.

3. Institutionalize long-term deliberation

Leaders can incorporate intergenerational and citizen deliberative processes into decisions that have long-term or irreversible effects. These forums complement representative institutions by surfacing long-horizon risks and value trade-offs before pathways are locked in. FOI assessments can be tabled alongside these deliberations, providing a shared evidentiary basis for public justification.

4. Strengthen anticipatory capacity within the state

Governments can embed dedicated foresight units, futures commissions and long-term impact assessments within budgetary, regulatory and strategic processes. These mechanisms ensure decision-makers consider future consequences systematically rather than episodically and reinforce temporal sovereignty as a routine function of governance.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The tensions observed across Europe and Eurasia are increasingly visible worldwide. Efforts to secure autonomy in energy, technology, food systems and supply chains often deliver short-term security while creating long-term dependencies.[5] Similar dynamics appear across digital infrastructure, climate adaptation and social policy.

Temporal sovereignty offers a transferable lens for navigating these challenges. By judging governance on its ability to preserve future agency, institutions can better manage uncertainty, interdependence and long-term risk.[6] The Future Optionality Index provides a practical bridge between normative commitments to intergenerational fairness and day-to-day decision-making.

Europe and Eurasia's layered institutional architecture shows how institutions can operationalize such a temporal lens. The coexistence of supranational, national and subnational governance shows that institutions can embed longer-term perspectives without sacrificing democratic legitimacy. Wales's Future Generations framework illustrates how intergenerational responsibility can be institutionalized through clear duties and accountability mechanisms.[7]

More broadly, this challenge questions the idea that progress is defined by accumulation and control. Reframing leadership as stewardship provides a governance model better suited to addressing climate risks, technological acceleration, and geopolitical uncertainty. Incorporating temporal sovereignty into democratic innovations, such as citizens' assemblies, youth councils, and deliberative futures processes, enhances legitimacy by ensuring decision-makers consider long-term impacts alongside current needs.

In this view, legitimacy is earned not by the extent of control exercised by governance today, but by the extent of choice preserved for future generations.

B Middle East and North Africa

What if visibility in the innovation economy were earned through contributions to society rather than proximity to power, thereby strengthening the region's investability, stability, and global credibility?

Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), innovation and entrepreneurship have become central pillars of national development strategies. Startup formation is accelerating, youth-led ventures are proliferating and governments are investing heavily in innovation ecosystems as engines of growth and diversification. Yet beneath this momentum lies a persistent governance tension. Visibility, access to capital and institutional support remain unevenly distributed, concentrated within established networks rather than aligned with demonstrated contribution.

This misalignment carries long-term consequences. When visibility is inherited rather than earned, trust weakens, talent is underutilized and ecosystems struggle to scale inclusively. Over time, innovation systems risk becoming less adaptive, less investable and less credible, both domestically and globally. This provocation reframes visibility as a governance lever. It asks whether anchoring recognition in contribution could strengthen legitimacy, widen participation and improve long-term ecosystem performance.

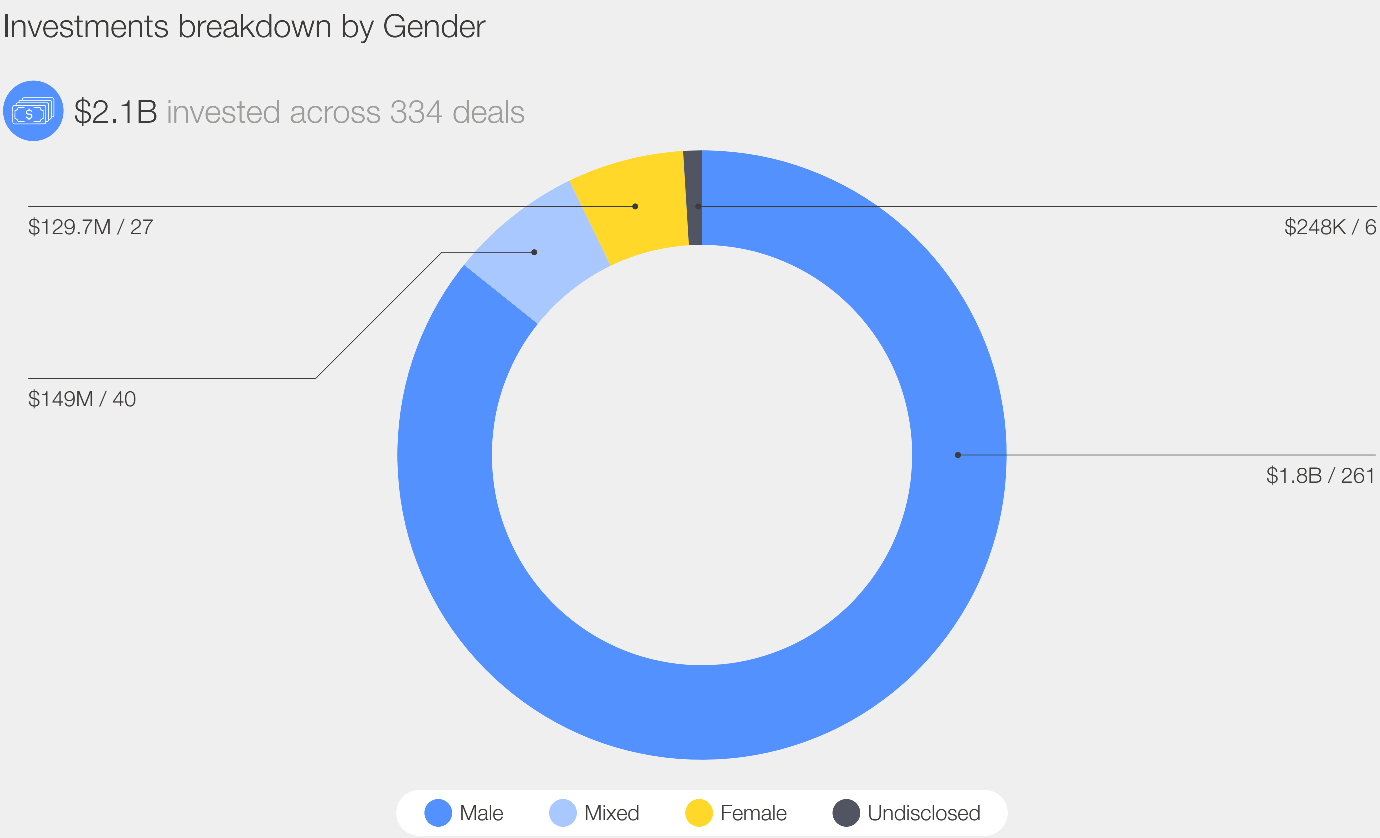
REGIONAL CONTEXT

Growth with persistent asymmetries

Entrepreneurship across the Middle East and North Africa has expanded rapidly over the past decade. Yet structural inequalities continue to shape which institutions are seen, funded and supported. Opportunities remain concentrated among a narrow set of actors and geographies, leaving significant pools of talent underrecognized and underfunded.

One clear signal is the gender financing gap (Figure 1).[8] Women-led small and medium-sized enterprises face one of the largest funding gaps globally, estimated at nearly $16 billion. In countries such as Iran, Oman and Saudi Arabia, women account for more than 50% of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates while receiving just 1.2% of regional venture capital.[9] This disconnect highlights a systemic failure to translate human capital into opportunity.

FIGURE 1 **MENA Investments in H1 2025 by Gender**



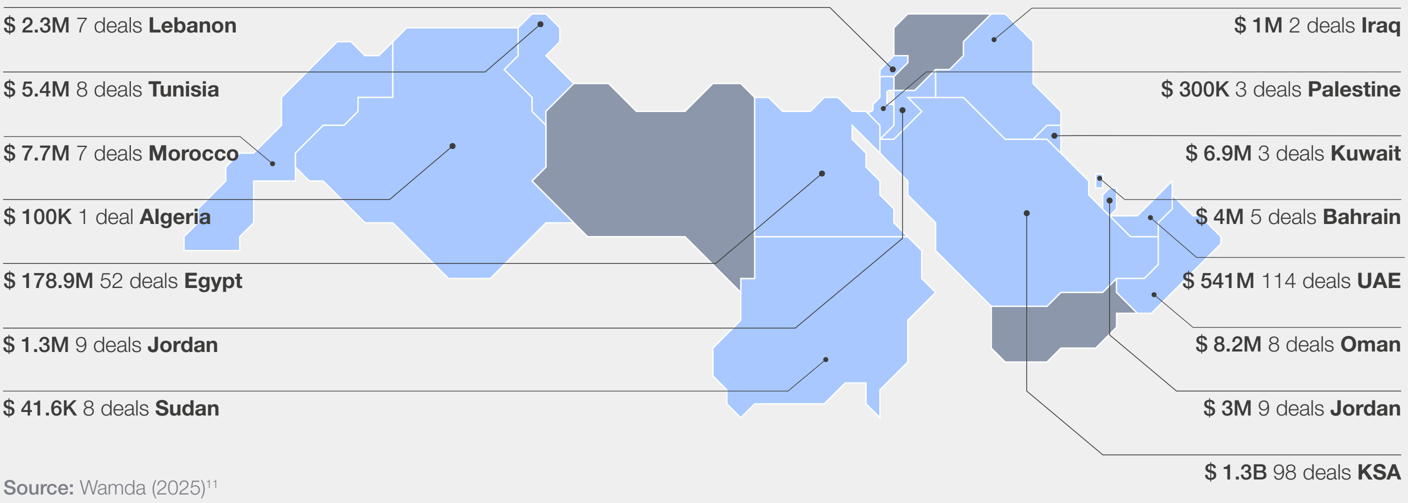
Source: *Wamda*

Geographic disparities further reinforce these patterns. In H1 2025, Saudi Arabia captured roughly 40% of all regional venture capital funding[10], approximately $750 million, while Egypt received about $25 million and Iraq received less than $100,000. Founders operating outside major hubs face reduced visibility, limited access to accelerators and procurement channels and fewer opportunities to build investor relationships. These dynamics constrain cross-border circulation of innovation and reinforce uneven ecosystem development.

FIGURE 2 | **Investments across MENA countries in H1 2025**

Investments breakdown by country

$2.1B invested across 334 deals



Source: Wamda (2025)[11]

Cultural and institutional dynamics shape these outcomes. Collectivist norms and informal mechanisms, such as wasta (informal networks of influence), play a central role in mediating access to opportunities. These practices draw on reciprocal social obligation and are often understood as support rather than exclusion.[12] Yet research shows that venture capital decisions rely heavily on social capital and familiarity, reinforcing prestige bias and narrowing definitions of merit. Proximity, rather than contribution, determines visibility.[13]

Youth aspirations reveal another tension. Nearly half of Arab youth say they plan to start their own business in the next five years, yet access to entrepreneurship support and skills-building remains uneven, with formal opportunities often concentrated in higher education institutions.[14] Scarcity of opportunity is therefore not inherent, but socially and structurally reproduced. Islamic principles of collective responsibility (amaanah) offer a pathway to reorient practice toward collective contribution and to widen access.

At the same time, countervailing signals are emerging. Digital commons, open-source infrastructures[15], collaborative innovation models[16] and experimental procurement policies are expanding across the region. Public-sector initiatives increasingly seek to reward local value creation, social contribution and ecosystem development[17]. Together, these signals suggest institutions are becoming more open to redefining how they confer legitimacy and visibility within innovation systems.

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

When growth reinforces inequality

Three reinforcing dynamics help explain why expanding entrepreneurial activity has not translated into broad-based legitimacy or durable growth.

1 Network concentration and opportunity closure

Investment and recognition decisions frequently rely on familiar networks, referrals and established relationships. Founders who are already visible receive repeated validation, funding and access. In contrast, others, including women, rural youth, refugees and lower-income entrepreneurs, remain excluded despite demonstrated capability as capital and attention continue to circulate within a narrow set of actors and geographies, entry points narrow further, reinforcing gender, geographic and class-based disparities. Over time, ecosystem diversity and adaptive capacity decline.

2	Prestige bias and perceived investability

Informal markers of credibility, including lineage, education and institutional affiliation, shape perceptions of investability. Founders with familiar profiles are treated as lower risk regardless of their underlying contributions or impact. Repeated selection of similar profiles reinforces investor preferences and undermines the legitimacy of demonstrated ecosystem value. Investability becomes a reflection of inheritance rather than performance.

3	Extractive recognition and weak capability diffusion

Success narratives within the ecosystem often elevate individual founders without mechanisms to reinvest visibility, knowledge, or resources back into the wider entrepreneurial base. While these stories signal progress, their benefits remain concentrated within existing networks. In the absence of structures that convert recognition into mentorship, shared learning, or ecosystem-wide capacity building, visibility becomes extractive rather than generative. An extractive model of visibility limits collective learning and weakens long-term resilience.

Together, these dynamics sustain a visibility economy in which legitimacy is disproportionately inherited rather than earned through contribution.

While high-profile successes continue to emerge, they do so at the cost of trust, inclusion and long-term system performance.

RATIONALE

Realigning visibility, legitimacy and contribution

The dynamics indicate a structural misalignment among visibility, legitimacy and contribution. Visibility determines who is seen. Legitimacy determines who is trusted. Contribution reflects demonstrated value to the wider ecosystem. In many Middle East and North African contexts, these elements remain weakly aligned.

This provocation targets misalignment by anchoring visibility in contribution. Rather than dismantling relational systems, it refines how recognition is earned within them. By linking visibility to measurable ecosystem value, such as mentorship, knowledge sharing, collaborative development and public-good outputs, recognition becomes a signal of trustworthiness rather than access.

This shift is practical. It does not require heavy regulation. It operates through incentive design, information flows and leadership norms. It aligns with regional values of collective responsibility and stewardship, including the principle of amaanah, which emphasizes an obligation to the wider community.

Anchoring visibility in contribution strengthens legitimacy, improves capital allocation and widens participation. Over time, it enhances ecosystem resilience and global credibility, making the region more investable and stable.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

These pathways are illustrative rather than prescriptive. They show how institutions can operationalize contribution-based visibility across policy, finance and ecosystem leadership.

1. Re-anchor rules of recognition around contribution

Public funding programmes, accelerators and investment processes can place greater weight on demonstrated ecosystem contribution alongside commercial potential. Criteria may include mentorship provided, collaborative projects undertaken, open problem-solving and local capacity building. This approach refines market judgement by improving signal quality and rewarding positive-sum behaviour.

2. Improve information flows through transparent contribution signals

Innovation ecosystems depend on trust, yet information about contributions is often opaque. Shared platforms, open reporting norms and contribution indices can surface currently invisible activity, including cross-regional collaboration and community problem-solving. When contribution becomes observable, visibility becomes less dependent on insider access.

3. Reframe leadership from prominence to stewardship

A contribution-based visibility model reframes leadership as stewardship of the ecosystem. Institutions recognize leaders who expand opportunities, strengthen networks and reinvest success in shared capabilities. When institutions reward stewardship, leaders invest in system health rather than individual prominence.

4. Enable participation through education and accessible pathways

Unequal access to entrepreneurial education reinforces visibility gaps. Expanding open education, community innovation spaces and accessible pilot and procurement pathways allows contributions to emerge beyond established hubs. Participation infrastructure supports self-organizing ecosystems without reliance on informal gatekeepers.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The dynamics observed in the Middle East and North Africa reflect a broader global pattern in which visibility, capital and opportunity concentrate around inherited access rather than demonstrated contribution. In 2024, Latin America and Africa together accounted for just 3% of global venture capital (VC) deals.[18] Women founders received 2% of global venture capital funding[19] and Black founders in the United States secured approximately 1% of total VC investment[20]. These disparities increasingly signal systemic underperformance rather than isolated equity concerns.

Research describes this pattern as a form of mirrortocracy, in which decision-makers repeatedly invest in profiles that resemble their own networks and reference points, with "merit" often inferred from proxies such as educational pedigree, social capital and cultural affinity rather than from demonstrated contributions.[21] In venture capital, informal referral systems reinforce this dynamic[22], making visibility self-reproducing and narrowing the pool of recognized innovators over time.

These dynamics have consequences beyond fairness. When legitimacy becomes detached from contribution, innovation systems misallocate capital, underutilize talent and weaken long-term credibility. The central concern shifts from exclusion alone to the losses that systems incur when contributions remain invisible.

The Middle East and North Africa provocation offers a transferable lens on governance. By reframing visibility as a public good earned through contribution, institutions can strengthen transparency, broaden participation and improve investability without heavy intervention. Whether embedded in funding criteria, procurement systems, education pathways, or civic infrastructure, the underlying principle remains the same: legitimacy strengthens when contributions are made visible.

For global leaders, the implication is strategic. In an era of declining trust and heightened scrutiny, demonstrating that opportunity is earned rather than inherited is becoming a determinant of resilience and credibility. A contribution-anchored visibility economy offers a practical mechanism for rebuilding trust, improving capital allocation and expanding leadership pipelines, thereby supporting more inclusive, durable and competitive innovation systems.

Ⓒ North America and the Caribbean

What if no public bailout in our region could proceed without a binding, enforceable commitment to structural change, co-created with the communities most affected?

Public bailouts are sometimes necessary. They can stabilize systems, protect livelihoods and prevent cascading harm. Yet across North America and the Caribbean, bailouts have also become one of the most consequential long-term decisions made under pressure. When decision-makers design rescue for speed alone, they can reinforce moral hazard, concentrate authority and lock in risks that future generations inherit.

This regional provocation reframes the bailout moment as a point of foresight leverage. It asks whether decision-makers can redesign the rules of rescue so that each major intervention reduces future vulnerability, strengthens legitimacy and expands the option space for those who will live longest with the consequences.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Rapid innovation and deepening vulnerability

Horizon scanning across the region suggests a paradoxical juncture. Technological acceleration and financial innovation are advancing rapidly, while systemic fragility is deepening beneath the surface. A dominant pattern of crisis-driven reactivity prioritizes short-term stabilization over long-term resilience. Emergency action restores systems to functionality without reducing underlying risk.

The buildout of artificial intelligence (AI) and data infrastructure illustrates this tension. In the United States, investment in data centres and information processing is supporting economic growth.[23] At the same time, this expansion depends on continuous and rising electricity demand that is already straining grids. Governments and utilities are facing pressure to act quickly and secure investment. In that context, agreements can be rushed and opaque, with limited community influence over siting, pricing and long-term liabilities.

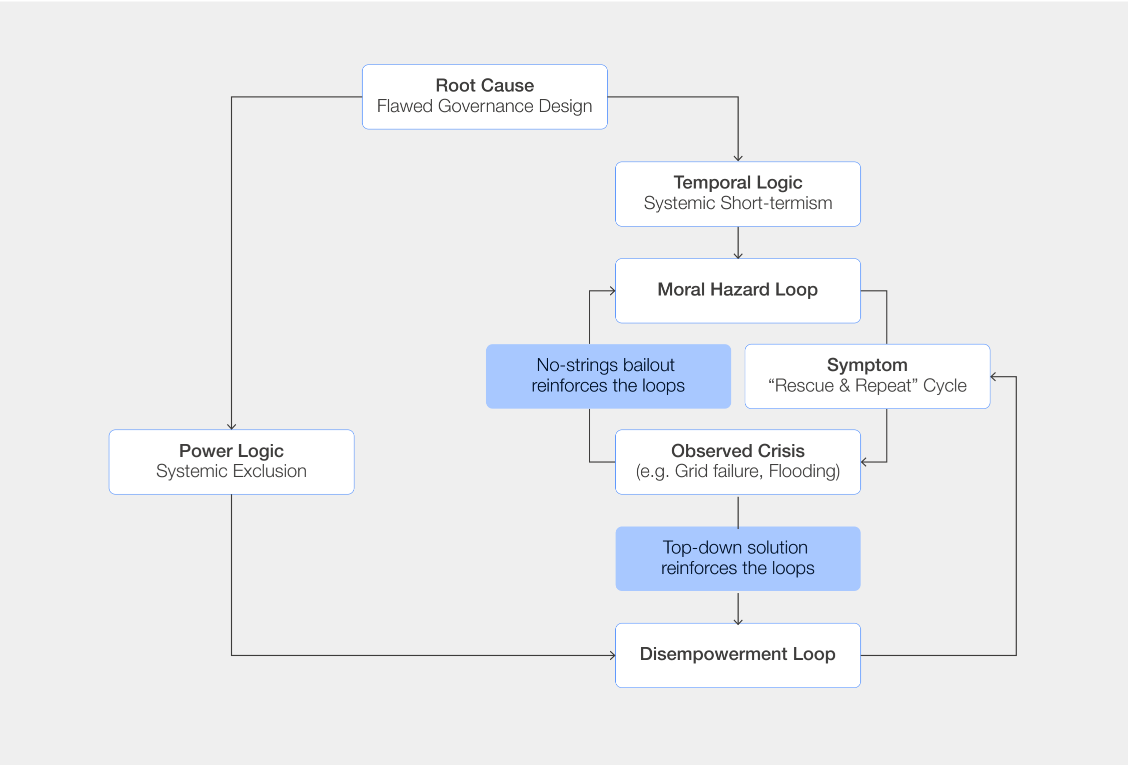
Across the Caribbean, limited electricity capacity creates high-stakes choices about whether limited power should prioritize essential services or foreign-owned digital infrastructure.[24] In Canada, provinces such as British Columbia have introduced restrictions on new data centre connections due to grid capacity concerns.[25] Decisions framed as technical grid fixes are also decisions about development pathways. These decisions shape which places carry the burdens of energy and land use, which communities build public capacity and how institutions distribute benefits and liabilities over time.

These dynamics can resemble a modern enclave economy. Foreign-owned infrastructure creates localized strain and long-term liabilities, while operational decisions, profits and technological benefits flow outward. Communities with limited influence, including younger generations who will face the long tail of risk and fiscal constraint, absorb the costs.

At the same time, countervailing signals are emerging. New governance forms are taking shape as trust in legacy approaches weakens. Grassroots coalitions, from Louisiana's environmental justice initiatives,[26] to Buffalo's binding Community Benefits Agreement,[27] are demonstrating how enforceable agreements can improve legitimacy and durability. The Caribbean Philanthropic Alliance[28] offers another signal through pan-regional, youth-driven climate resilience initiatives, including the Caribbean Climate Justice and Resilience Project. In Canada, 8 80 Cities[29] has influenced mobility, public space and resilience planning across municipalities, grounded in the principle that cities should work for an eight-year-old and an 80-year-old alike. These signals point to an emerging direction in which decision-makers treat inclusion, accountability and long-term outcomes as design requirements.

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Crisis response that reproduces fragility



Three reinforcing feedback loops help explain why crisis response across North America and the Caribbean often reproduces fragility and how changing the rules of rescue could unlock more durable resilience. Together, these loops shape whether public investment restores the status quo or rewrites the conditions that produced the crisis.

1. Moral hazard and the rescue-and-repeat cycle

When decision-makers deploy public rescue as an unconditional safety net, risk-taking becomes rational. Losses are socialized while gains remain private. Incentives to invest in prevention, maintenance and equitable adaptation weaken. As vulnerabilities accumulate, crises become more frequent and costly. Political pressure then increases for rapid, no-strings disbursement, reinforcing the same risk logic and shifting long-term costs forward.

2. Disempowerment, policy failure and legitimacy loss

When decision-makers manage crisis finance and recovery design through centralized, expert-driven processes, they often sideline the communities most affected. Local knowledge about lived risk, informal systems of care and place-based priorities are undervalued, leading to design interventions that underperform or create inequitable trade-offs. Trust declines when outcomes do not match needs. Participation costs rise, community authority weakens and future recovery efforts become even more top-down. Over time, this reduces the legitimacy needed to sustain long-horizon reforms.

3. Extractive recovery and enclave development

When large-scale recovery and infrastructure investment primarily benefit external contractors, financial intermediaries, or foreign-owned assets, value flows outward while localities absorb long-term liabilities. This imbalance between who benefits and who bears the costs is evident in enclave patterns, in which infrastructure strains public systems, including grids, housing and land. At the same time, profits and decision-making rights reside elsewhere. As communities experience recovery as extraction rather than renewal, social cohesion erodes and resistance grows. Transaction costs increase and governments default to closed, expedited deals that deepen extraction and weaken public capacity.

Together, these dynamics produce a rescue-and-repeat pattern. Each crisis triggers rapid funding that restores systems to pre-crisis vulnerability, weakens legitimacy and increases exposure to the next shock. This pattern is visible in rebuild-as-usual cycles across the region, including Puerto Rico's grid rebuild,[30] flood-rebuild-repeat dynamics in the United States,[31] repeated high-intensity storm reconstruction across the Caribbean,[32] and wildfire rebuilding cycles in Canada.[33] The contexts differ, yet a shared governing logic persists: restore quickly, externalize long-term risk and defer structural change.

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica

Hurricane Melissa's devastation in Jamaica highlights both the promise and the gap this provocation addresses. Following Prime Minister Andrew Holness's request for support, the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Caribbean Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group assembled up to $6.7 billion over three years for recovery and reconstruction. This intervention was accompanied by rapid-disbursing liquidity of around $662 million enabled by Jamaica's disaster-risk financing tools.[34]

At the same time, regional responders described a humanitarian emergency. Displacement, infrastructure damage, prolonged outages and urgent needs for shelter, food, water, medical supplies and trauma support required immediate action. Philanthropy mobilized to channel resources through trusted, community-rooted organizations across hard-hit areas and vulnerable groups.[35]

This case shows that large-scale public and multilateral finance can move quickly and at scale. It also shows that those on the frontlines most clearly define equitable recovery priorities. Jamaica's experience underscores the need to tie public rescue to binding, enforceable structural reforms co-created by decision-makers and affected communities. These reforms can include resilience standards for critical infrastructure, transparent targeting criteria, protections for displaced households and accountability mechanisms that track build-forward commitments over time.

Across the United States, Canada and the Caribbean, there is a shared governance dilemma. Institutions and governments often optimize crisis finance for speed and political relief. Legitimacy, learning and long-term risk reduction remain weak by design. The question is whether decision-makers can redesign the rules of rescue so that each bailout reduces future vulnerability rather than reproducing it.

RATIONALE

Bailouts as foresight leverage points

This provocation targets the system at its point of maximum leverage; the moment public money is requested. It turns a bailout from an open cheque into a negotiated reset of rules, ownership and accountability. Each request for major support would trigger a structured co-governance process that sets new baselines for risk-sharing, participation and resilience.

Bailouts shape long-term development pathways. These decisions determine whose risks institutions protect, whose harms they defer and which institutions gain the capacity to adapt over time. Decision-makers design a conditional bailout to interrupt the rescue-and-repeat cycle by rewiring incentives, strengthening community authority and embedding long-horizon resilience into the agreement governing recovery.

Interviews across the region described crises as X-rays of institutional design. They reveal damaged assets and the decision rules that determine whether public money yields renewal or repetition. Under current rules, funding often returns to the systems that failed. This provocation proposes a shift in decision architecture so that crisis response becomes a pathway to structural repair.

Three leverage shifts that make rescue renew

Requiring any bailout or major public rescue to include a binding, community-co-designed structural reform plan triggers three high-leverage shifts.

1. Rescue rule reset

Governments face intense pressure to act quickly during crises. That pressure is typically spent on short-term restoration. This intervention redirects it. Structural conditions tied to public money convert reflexive rescue into negotiated reform. Redirecting that pressure toward structural conditions tied to public money resets incentives that fuel moral hazard and helps ensure public funds do not underwrite high-risk choices.

2. Power rebalanced at the fiscal gate

Bailout approval marks one of the system's most consequential procedural points, yet insulated decision-makers often control it without bearing the long-term consequences. The provocation requires a representative community council to serve as a co-design partner with authority over the structural terms. Embedding a representative community council with authority over the structural terms shifts legitimacy from consultation to co-governance by embedding place-based intelligence and long-term interests into decisions. Evidence from enforceable community agreements suggests that formalized community power can improve durability and compliance.

3. Learning recovery engine

Crisis response often rebuilds without learning. Failures are repeated, documented and then ignored. Binding commitments tied to public funds can create structural lock-in for learning through enforceable milestones, transparent reporting and adaptive reforms. Creating structural lock-in for learning strengthens feedback loops that enable institutions to evolve and redirect extractive recovery dynamics toward long-term resilience.

Together, these shifts move the regional logic from rescue and repeat to rescue and renew. They redesign the decision architecture that determines whether crises entrench vulnerability or catalyse structural transformation.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

The conditional bailout is a provocation with a practical purpose. It aims to enable a recovery architecture in which public capital serves as a lever for renewal and communities become co-authors of the future. Two prototypes show how institutions can operationalize this approach across contexts.

Prototype 1: Conditional Resilience Fund

A Conditional Resilience Fund would be a permanent pool of public capital towards regeneration. It is designed to deliver speed through preparation and safeguards through non-bypassable gates. The fund could be activated in response to a declared crisis or a major public rescue request.

Governments, communities and institutions establish the enabling infrastructure in advance. They constitute representative community councils, agree on procedural rules and calibrate equity screens during stable periods.

When a crisis occurs, the system is activated rather than assembled. The model distinguishes between immediate humanitarian relief, which must flow without delay and larger-scale recovery and resilience capital, which would be governed by conditionality.

Funds would flow once a jurisdiction enters a co-governed agreement that identifies structural shifts required to reduce harm and increase resilience over a multi-decade horizon. Funds would be released in phases tied to structural milestones, so improvements in underlying conditions measure progress. This approach is comparable to milestone-based disbursement models used elsewhere,[36] while adding a missing element in many systems: formal community authority at the fiscal gate.

Prototype 2: Community-Led Bailout Protocol

A Community-Led Bailout Protocol would provide the procedural spine. It would standardize how stakeholders negotiate, record and uphold conditionality, so that recovery legitimacy does not depend on a particular administration. The protocol would set minimum conditions for shared power and transparency while allowing stakeholders to tailor outcomes to the context.

The protocol mandates a representative community council with defined seats for youth, elders, Indigenous partners and local civil society. The council would hold co-signatory authority over the structural reform plan and the power to amend its terms.

Selection rules are pre-negotiated and public. Many contexts may require a hybrid approach that combines representation from established organizations, neighbourhood associations and lottery-selected residents to balance organized voice with broad inclusion and mitigate elite capture. Dispute resolution is built into the process through pre-agreed neutral mechanisms that require a return to negotiation under revised parameters. Transparency is treated as a necessary asset. Terms, milestones and reporting are published on an open registry. Enforcement is pre-committed through clear triggers, so missed milestones prompt a rule-based response that is publicly legible.

Elements of this design are scattered across the region in fragments. Community benefits agreements can be legally binding. Disaster recovery regimes can require public action plans and participation. Impact and benefit agreements can formalize commitments with Indigenous communities. Parametric insurance mechanisms, such as the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, demonstrate what rule-based speed can look like at the regional scale. The prototypes integrate these elements at the fiscal gate where governments and institutions disburse public funds.

Conditionality as protection: avoiding punitive models

The central design risk is clear. Conditionality can reproduce inequity when it becomes punitive, extractive, or administratively exclusionary. This proposal distinguishes itself from austerity-driven conditionality.[37] In this model, conditionality is protection. It is designed to ensure that public money does not perpetuate harm and that recovery does not become another form of extraction.

Three safeguards are central.

Firstly, conditions are defined through equity-centred criteria tied to long-horizon outcomes, including measurable reductions in climate and infrastructure risk, demonstrated inclusion of community priorities and durable local capacity.

Secondly, roles are designed to ensure that responsibility is shared and accountability is traceable. Governments initiate the process and provide funding. Community councils co-design and co-sign milestones. Independent verification reduces chances of capture. Public reporting sustains accountability beyond the news cycle.[38]

Thirdly, equity screening is built into the gate. Health Equity Impact Assessment approaches help identify unintended impacts and mitigate harm before decisions lock in.[39] Decision-makers can apply these screens to energy and infrastructure decisions, including affordability and access measures such as household energy burden. When parties miss milestones, responses are structured around support and redesign rather than withdrawal or shifting harm to residents.

These prototypes make the Conditional Bailout governable by treating crisis capital as a generative resource, communities as enduring stewards and the future as a legitimate party to the agreement. In doing so, they shift recovery from a palliative response to a regenerative one, embedding learning as a permanent feature of recovery through regular review and transparent reporting that strengthen institutional memory over time.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The Conditional Bailout principle extends beyond North America and the Caribbean because the underlying governance failure is widely shared. Across regions, institutions routinely socialize risk, privatize rewards and exclude the intelligence of those most affected from decision-making. Similar dynamics are evident in European banking rescues that reinforced “too big to fail” institutions, sovereign debt negotiations that constrained policy autonomy in the Majority World and in post-disaster reconstruction processes that prioritized financial stabilization over community recovery.

This provocation reframes leadership responsibility as the stewardship of public capital to protect long-term resilience. It offers a practical interpretation of fiduciary duty that prioritizes the best interests of present and future generations. When applied in recovery contexts, it can shape funding for long-horizon resilience investments and democratic innovation. It can also support negotiation approaches that co-create conditions with communities and are oriented toward locally owned resilience, including climate-resilient food systems, water sovereignty and equitable energy access.

By embedding community authority and long-horizon needs into the architecture of recovery, the conditional bailout shifts crisis finance from a short-term stabilization tool into a lever for structural renewal. It turns moments of crisis into opportunities to reduce future vulnerability, strengthen legitimacy and expand the option space for those who will inherit the consequences.

D Latin America

What if rural governance reimagined legitimacy through intergenerational compacts co-created with the historically marginalized, in which prosperity is defined and measured by the health of ecosystems?

Across Latin America, rural territories sit at the centre of a growing governance paradox. They are foundational to the region's ecological integrity, food systems and cultural continuity, yet they remain structurally marginal in political and economic decision-making. For decades, development strategies have treated rural areas as sites of extraction or as spaces to modernize rather than as partners in shaping collective prosperity.

This extractive and top-down development approach has produced a legitimacy gap with intergenerational consequences. Decision-makers have prioritized short-term economic gains over ecosystem health and territorial continuity. The costs of this model are carried forward through degraded land, stressed water systems, weakened rural economies and persistent outmigration of younger generations. Governance systems struggle to sustain trust, while future options narrow.

This provocation reframes rural governance as a core site of intergenerational foresight. It asks whether decision-makers can redefine legitimacy and prosperity through binding intergenerational compacts that they co-create with historically marginalized communities and that make ecosystem health a central measure of success. In doing so, it positions rural Latin America not as a development problem to be managed, but as a critical arena for designing governance models capable of sustaining well-being, legitimacy and resilience across generations.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Extractive growth and rural marginalization

Extractive production models and the systematic marginalization of rural and Indigenous communities have shaped Latin America's development trajectory[40]. Colonial patterns that centred export-oriented hubs near natural resources established deep urban-rural asymmetries.[41] These patterns persist in the form of rural poverty, infrastructure deficits and continuous outmigration that depletes human capital as younger generations leave in search of education and employment.[42]

In the twenty-first century, the so-called "commodities consensus" reinforced these dynamics.[43] Governments across the political spectrum relied on raw-material-based growth strategies that privileged short-term fiscal revenues.[44] Rural territories absorbed the social and environmental costs of extraction, while their expectations for participation, stability and long-term well-being remained secondary.[45] Continued dependence on primary exports left governance vulnerable to international price cycles and external investment pressures, often at the expense of rural legitimacy.[46]

Limited regulation of extractive activities and uneven governance capacity in rural areas have compounded this trust deficit.[47] Historical underinvestment in education, infrastructure and basic services constrains local economic diversification.[48] Rural vocational training has expanded, yet evidence shows that training alone does not retain human capital without decent work, market access and territorial investment.[49] Gaps in transport, digital connectivity and finance further restrict rural capacity to generate livelihoods that are viable across generations.[50]

At the same time, countervailing signals are emerging. Environmental-economic accounting frameworks and natural capital initiatives are beginning to integrate ecosystem assets into fiscal and development planning.[51] Payments for ecosystem services in countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico have protected four million hectares of forest in two decades of implementation.[52] Water funds supported by development banks and local partners are advancing ecosystem-based adaptation in more than thirty watersheds.[53] These initiatives show that institutions can recognize ecosystems as productive assets that sustain livelihoods and strengthen national resilience.

Yet these advances remain fragmented. They often operate as programmes at the margins, rather than as foundations of rural governance and legitimacy. The central challenge is how to move from isolated instruments to a structural shift where prosperity is defined, measured and governed through ecosystem health and intergenerational responsibility.

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

When development undermines trust

Three reinforcing feedback loops may explain why extractive development patterns persist in Latin America and how shifts in measurement, representation and transparency could yield more durable, nature-positive outcomes. Together, these loops shape how legitimacy is earned or eroded over time.

1. GDP-first metrics and the extraction trap

When governments define economic success primarily through gross domestic product growth and short-term fiscal indicators, they repeatedly reward commodity expansion. Near-term revenues are prioritized, whereas rural well-being and ecosystem condition remain underrepresented in decision-making. Communities bear the costs of extraction in the form of degraded land, water stress and social disruption, without realizing stable, long-term benefits. Trust in institutions declines and political pressure mounts to further expand extraction in pursuit of growth. The declining trust and escalating extraction pressure reinforce dependency on extractive models even as their ecological and social foundations weaken.

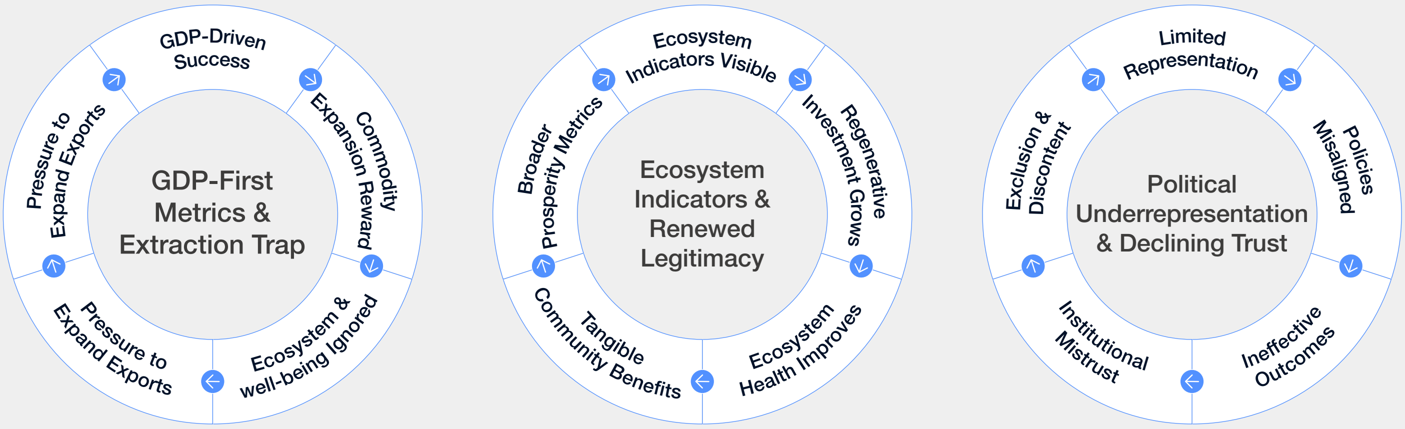
2. Ecosystem indicators, investability and renewed legitimacy

When ecosystem indicators such as water quality, soil health, forest cover and biodiversity become decision-relevant, definitions of prosperity broaden. Regenerative practices become visible, measurable and financeable. Investment flows can support payments for ecosystem services, watershed protection and ecosystem-based adaptation. As ecosystem conditions improve and benefits become tangible, trust in ecological governance strengthens. Growing confidence in ecological governance reinforces the use of ecosystem indicators and attracts further investment in regeneration, thereby creating a positive feedback loop among stewardship, legitimacy and long-term resilience.

3. Political underrepresentation and declining legitimacy

Historically marginalized groups, including Indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural communities, often lack meaningful representation in governance. Policies reflect incomplete territorial realities and overlook ancestral knowledge. Interventions underperform or generate inequitable trade-offs, deepening mistrust. Participation costs rise, representation weakens further and exclusion becomes self-reinforcing. This cycle of rising participation costs and weakening representation undermines both policy effectiveness and the legitimacy required to sustain long-horizon commitments.

Together, these dynamics reveal a core challenge. Rural legitimacy is often earned through short-term extraction rather than long-term stewardship. Governance systems reward immediate output while transferring ecological and social costs to future generations.



RATIONALE

Redefining prosperity through intergenerational compacts

Rural governance in Latin America is frequently approached through a deficit lens, focused on managing poverty or mitigating conflict. Prosperity is implicitly defined as convergence to urban-industrial models. This provocation invites a different starting point.

It asks what rural development would look like if prosperity were defined and measured by ecosystem health, social cohesion and cultural continuity. Intergenerational compacts provide a mechanism for this shift. These compacts serve as formal and lived agreements that guide how communities steward land, water and ecosystems so that they sustain opportunity across decades. They recognize that many rural and Indigenous communities already operate with long temporal horizons grounded in ancestral knowledge and responsibility to future generations.

The gap is not a lack of long-term thinking at the community level. It is the absence of governance frameworks that recognize, protect and scale that thinking within public institutions, markets and fiscal systems.

Redefining prosperity in this way produces concrete shifts. Policies align around continuity rather than extraction cycles; investment rewards regenerate rather than deplete. Legitimacy grows from decisions that remain credible to people and ecosystems in 2050 and 2075, rather than from short-term output alone.

Under this lens, rural Latin America becomes a laboratory for intergenerational foresight. It offers pathways to rebuild legitimacy by anchoring governance in stewardship, reciprocity and responsibility across time.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

The pathways below are illustrative rather than prescriptive and demonstrate how institutions can operationalize this provocation across different institutional contexts.

1. Constitutionalize ecological legitimacy with intergenerational governance

Constitutions or foundational laws can recognize ecosystems as rights-bearing entities and mandate ecosystem accounting as a basis for public decision-making. Permanent intergenerational bodies at national and subnational levels can co-set targets for soils, forests and watersheds, review progress against official ecosystem accounts and assess projects that risk breaching ecological thresholds.

Adapted to Latin American contexts, such arrangements would embed youth, elders and historically marginalized communities into long-horizon governance. Rural and Indigenous territories serve as anchors of ecological and social continuity, reducing dependence on short political cycles.

2. Build a regional natural capital finance architecture

A regional natural assets facility could aggregate and scale payments for ecosystem services and other nature-linked instruments, aligning them with national ecosystem accounts. Public development banks and central banks could adjust risk models and collateral frameworks to recognize verified improvements in ecosystem condition.

Public budgets, credit allocation and the cost of capital would then align with ecological performance rather than extraction. Rural communities would gain predictable long-term revenue streams, enabling investment in education, health and local economies while reinforcing stewardship as a core economic function.

3. Secure tenure and polycentric basin governance

Community-led land registration reforms can secure collective tenure, guarantee free, prior and informed consent and record conservation obligations that transfer with land. Governments can fund basin councils and territorial assemblies with statutory authority over land use, public investment and concessions through fiscal transfers indexed to water regulation, soil health and habitat connectivity.

Open digital registries linking contracts, funding flows and verified ecosystem outcomes increase transparency and rebuild trust. Treating basins and territories as primary units of governance aligns climate adaptation, food systems and infrastructure planning with the lived experience of risk.

4. Create a universal stewardship dividend and a nature-positive real economy

Public transfers, utility tariffs, tourism levies and high-integrity biodiversity credits can finance long-term stewardship payments to rural households in priority biomes. These payments are linked to measurable ecosystem outcomes. Public procurement, agricultural extension, school meals and infrastructure investment can incorporate nature-positive criteria.

Over time, this reframes rural households as partners in managing climate and biodiversity risk. Coupled with education and civil-service reforms that integrate ancestral knowledge with earth systems science, this pathway supports a professional culture of anticipatory, place-based governance.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The legitimacy challenges facing rural Latin America reflect broader global fractures. Communities that manage land, water and biodiversity often experience decision-making as distant, extractive and short-term. Trust erodes where benefits are uneven and risks are imposed without consent.

This provocation offers a globally relevant response. By operationalizing intergenerational compacts, inclusive governance moves from consultation to shared authority. Historically marginalized rural communities are gaining recognized roles as stewards of natural assets critical to national and planetary resilience.

More broadly, it reframes rurality in terms of global leadership. Rural territories are not residual spaces awaiting modernization. They are central to climate security, food systems and ecological stability. Empowering rural communities to co-design long-horizon rules strengthens democratic legitimacy and expands future options.

By defining prosperity in terms of ecosystem health and embedding that definition in law, finance and territorial governance, Latin America can model a regenerative and intergenerationally fair form of development. It demonstrates how governments can rebuild legitimacy by aligning governance with the continuity of life and well-being across generations.

E

East Asia

What if East Asia's ageing population were viewed not as a burden to manage, but as a foundation for intergenerational capability and a source of resilience, continuity and performance?

East Asia stands at the forefront of demographic change. Ageing is advancing faster here than in almost any other region, intersecting with prolonged economic uncertainty, shifting labour markets and rising care demands. Institutions often frame these trends as fiscal and productivity challenges that must be contained. Yet this framing obscures a deeper governance question: how do societies value time, continuity and contribution across generations?

For decades, East Asia's development model has been defined by speed. Rapid growth has accelerated industrialization and swift technology adoption has delivered extraordinary gains. However, intergenerational planning and care systems have not evolved at the same pace.[54] Institutions optimized for acceleration now face a mismatch between short decision cycles and long demographic realities.

This provocation reframes ageing as a strategic governance asset rather than a constraint. It asks whether recognizing older adults as contributors to intergenerational capability could strengthen organizational performance, social cohesion and long-term resilience. In doing so, it positions ageing as a central concern of intergenerational foresight: a test of whether societies can govern time as a shared resource rather than optimize exclusively for speed.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Demography as design constraint and opportunity

Across East Asia, demographic change is reshaping economic and social systems. Japan has nearly one-third of its population aged 65 and over, combined with prolonged economic stagnation and widening intergenerational inequality. South Korea records the world's lowest fertility rate, alongside high youth competition, rising living costs and delayed family formation.[55] China faces rapid depopulation, a shrinking workforce, persistent rural-urban disparities and the challenge of supporting an ageing population without fully developed welfare systems.[56]

These trends expose a structural imbalance. While economies and technologies have advanced rapidly, systems of care, labour participation and intergenerational reciprocity have lagged. Social cohesion, historically grounded in intergenerational trust, has weakened under sustained emphasis on productivity and acceleration.[57]

Several assumptions reinforce this trajectory. Progress is often equated with speed, regardless of long-term consequences. Productivity dominates as the primary measure of value, shaping how societies assess individuals, firms and institutions. Ageing is framed largely through fiscal lenses, pensions, healthcare costs and dependency ratios, rather than as a source of experience, continuity and social capital.[58] Care for children and older adults remains heavily privatized within families, with limited systemic support.[59] Migration, although increasingly influential in labour markets and care systems, is often treated as peripheral to demographic strategy.[60]

Policy responses reflect these assumptions. Decision-makers often rely on short-term measures such as subsidies, tax incentives and housing support while deferring structural reform.[61] At the same time, the region retains significant assets for alternative approaches: cultural norms of intergenerational responsibility, advanced digital and robotics capabilities, traditions of collective action and a growing ecosystem of community-led experimentation in shared living, care and work.[62]

Together, these conditions create an opening to shift from acceleration to stewardship. Governing time as a shared social resource, rather than optimizing solely for speed, offers pathways to rebuild intergenerational continuity, redesign care systems and align institutions with extended temporal horizons.[63] As mobility increases within and beyond the region, ageing remains the primary structural condition, with migration acting as a reinforcing dynamic that reshapes how intergenerational systems adapt.[64]

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Ageing, capability and organizational resilience

The reinforcing dynamics below indicate where shifts in framing, incentives and design could enhance intergenerational resilience.

1 Short-term performance metrics and the capability erosion loop

When organizational success is defined primarily by speed, output and near-term efficiency, experience and continuity are undervalued. Older workers are treated as cost centres or exit risks, leading to early disengagement or exclusion. Institutional memory thins, learning slows and adaptive capacity declines. As resilience weakens, pressure mounts to further prioritize rapid execution, thereby reinforcing short-term optimization at the expense of long-term capability.

2 Care privatization, workforce strain and participation loss

As populations age, care responsibilities expand yet remain largely privatized within families. Mid-career employees face increasing caregiving burdens, which lead to burnout, reduced participation and higher turnover. Organizations respond with tactical fixes, such as automation or accelerated replacement, rather than redesigning roles to enhance flexibility and continuity. Care strain remains invisible in decision-making, reinforcing workforce fragility and knowledge loss.

3 Invisible contributions and misaligned incentives

Mentoring, advisory input, knowledge transfer and community leadership contribute significantly to organizational resilience but are poorly measured or unrewarded. Performance systems privilege individual output over relational and long-horizon value creation. As these contributions remain invisible, incentives discourage intergenerational collaboration, reducing opportunities for learning and continuity across age groups.

4	Technology substitution versus capability amplification

When decision-makers deploy technology primarily to substitute labour or accelerate throughput, they compress time horizons and fragment expertise. However, when aligned with intergenerational goals, digital tools can amplify human judgement by supporting knowledge transfer, flexible participation and long-horizon learning. The absence of intergenerational foresight in technological strategy determines whether digital investment accelerates capability loss or strengthens organizational resilience.

These dynamics reveal a central insight. How ageing is framed directly shapes talent strategy, trust and long-term performance. Organizations that fail to build intergenerational capability may optimize efficiency in the short term while eroding the foundations of resilience they will need in the long term.

RATIONALE

Ageing as a source of intergenerational capability

The system dynamics above point to a design failure rather than an inevitable demographic outcome. Ageing becomes a burden when institutions lack frameworks to recognize, value and integrate intergenerational contributions.

This provocation reframes ageing as a source of capability. It argues that resilience in an era of prolonged uncertainty depends on how effectively organizations and societies combine experience, care, innovation and continuity. Older adults contribute through mentoring, caregiving, institutional memory and community leadership. When these roles are formalized and supported, they strengthen decision quality, trust and long-horizon performance.

Reframing ageing alters strategic priorities. Leadership focus shifts from maximizing short-term output to building intergenerational capability. Operating models evolve to value flexible participation, advisory roles and community engagement. Decision intelligence is expanding to support knowledge transfer and long-term learning. Organizational design enables routine interaction across generations, allowing new forms of collaboration and problem-solving to emerge.

In this framing, technology is not a replacement for human judgement or care. It is an amplifier. When aligned with intergenerational goals, digital tools and automation extend capability, reduce coordination costs and support continuity rather than fragmentation.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

The pathways below illustrate how governments and organizations can operationalize this reframing.

1. Repositioning older adults as contributors to long-term value

Policy and organizational discourse often concentrate on the fiscal implications of ageing while underestimating the productive and social capital embedded in older populations. Creating structured cross-generational roles, including advisory councils, mentoring programmes and community governance bodies, allows this capability to inform strategy and strengthen continuity.

Formal recognition of these roles increases participation, preserves institutional memory and broadens the base of contributors to long-term decision-making.

2. Redesigning everyday environments to support intergenerational interaction

Urbanization and labour intensification have reduced shared spaces in which generations interact naturally, thereby increasing pressure on households. Multigenerational housing, time-banking, community-based care networks and technology-enabled independent living models can redistribute care more equitably while reinforcing social cohesion.

These approaches focus on rebalancing care responsibilities across institutions, communities and families, rather than automating care or shifting the burden to households.

3. Extending decision horizons through intergenerational foresight

East Asia's digital capabilities create opportunities to embed long-term learning and foresight into governance. AI-supported long-term impact assessments, participatory foresight platforms and community living labs allow leaders to test policies against demographic realities unfolding over decades.

By making long-horizon impacts visible, these mechanisms counter short-term bias created by electoral cycles, quarterly reporting and near-term performance metrics.

4. Integrating migration into intergenerational strategies

Migration reshapes labour markets, care systems and intergenerational relationships. When governed deliberately, it can reinforce intergenerational ecosystems by introducing skills, caregiving capacity and cultural practices. Migration as a demographic and labour force response to ageing requires inclusive governance that maintains trust and social cohesion while recognizing migration as part of long-term demographic adaptation.

Together, these pathways show how reframing ageing reshapes governance priorities: from productivity to well-being, from fragmented responsibility to shared stewardship and from reactive adjustment to anticipatory design.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

East Asia's experience offers practical lessons for leaders globally. Demographic change does not require sacrificing growth or dynamism. It requires redesigning how institutions recognize contributions, structure care and allocate responsibilities over time.

Examples across the region illustrate this shift. In Japan, Silver Human Resources Centres formalize retirees' expertise into mentoring and community services, supported by digital coordination.[65] In South Korea, emerging co-living models integrate shared spaces and technology to redistribute care. In China, the growth of the silver economy shows how older adults are shaping new markets and innovation.

These cases challenge the assumption that ageing is primarily a fiscal liability. They demonstrate how ageing can underpin new forms of economic and social value when institutions adapt.

When institutions recognize older adults as contributors and incorporate younger generations' perspectives into long-term decisions, they increase trust.[66] In this sense, intergenerational foresight functions as a governing mindset. It supports inclusive, anticipatory and durable responses to demographic and social change in an era of prolonged uncertainty.[67]

Ⓕ Sub-Saharan Africa

What if Sub-Saharan Africa rewrote the rules of resource governance by replacing elite-driven systems with a Dual Governance Model (DGM), a structure in which communities and the state share legally binding authority over licensing, monitoring, enforcement and benefit-sharing?

Sub-Saharan Africa sits at the centre of a global resource governance paradox.[68] The region holds an estimated 30% of the world's mineral reserves, yet this abundance has translated poorly into broad-based prosperity.[69] Although roughly 16% of the global population lives in the region, around 67% of people living in extreme poverty are found there.[70] This inequality is not a failure of endowment, but a failure of governance.

The roots of this disjuncture lie in extractive systems shaped by colonial rule and sustained through post-independence dependency structures.[71] Economies remain locked into raw material exports with limited value addition, constrained bargaining power and weak domestic control over production and pricing. Resource wealth that could fund long-term development instead circulates through narrow political and corporate channels, reinforcing inequality and institutional fragility.

Governance performance data reinforces this picture. The 2021 Resource Governance Index shows that many of the region's leading resource producers score in the "weak" to "poor" range, marked by opaque licensing processes, limited community participation and high vulnerability to political capture.[72] In practice, resource revenues frequently become tools of patronage rather than foundations for resilient development.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Legitimacy and participation in resource governance

As demands for inclusion grow, exclusion is becoming more sophisticated.[73] Nowhere is this more visible than in frontline and Indigenous communities whose lands underpin extraction.[74] The Niger Delta illustrates the stakes.[75] Decades of oil production have generated vast wealth for elites and multinational firms, while local communities bear severe environmental degradation and entrenched poverty.[76] This outcome reflects not an accidental failure of "trickle-down" development, but an actively maintained governance loop in which extraction finances the very systems that prevent redistribution and accountability.[77]

Demographic change is accelerating this legitimacy crisis.[78] More than 60% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa is under 25 and by 2050, the region is projected to account for approximately 25% of the world's population, compared with around 7% for Europe.[79] This youth cohort is increasingly politically conscious and less tolerant of inherited exclusion, particularly for Indigenous and frontline communities.[80] Across the region, youth-led movements demand more than improved benefit-sharing.[81] They call for meaningful stewardship over extraction decisions, including authority over terms, enforcement and long-term restoration.

In response, a more insidious pattern has emerged: the resource governance mirage.[82] The language of reform, participation and benefit-sharing is adopted, while real authority remains centralized through legal complexity, technocratic opacity and performative consultation.[83] Governments and institutions invite communities to participate without giving them the power to decide, monitor or enforce. Institutions increase transparency, yet they do not expand agency.

At the same time, countervailing signals point to alternative trajectories. Youth-led civic technology initiatives demand open contracting and legible governance.[84] Indigenous sovereignty movements increasingly link environmental justice to economic self-determination. Hybrid governance arrangements combining Indigenous authority with democratic accountability are emerging in pockets across the continent.[85] Together, these signals suggest that incremental reform is insufficient. Structural redesign of power is the decisive leverage point.

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Governance structures and power distribution

Four reinforcing dynamics can explain why extractive governance patterns persist across Sub-Saharan Africa, despite repeated reform efforts.

1 Elite capture and institutional erosion

Political and corporate elites dominate licensing, contracting and revenue allocation.[86] Resource rents fund patronage, weaken oversight bodies and reshape rules in favour of incumbents. As institutions lose independence and enforcement capacity, they become less able to resist capture.[87] Institutional weakness does not merely fail to prevent capture. It stabilizes it.

2 Export dependence and structural vulnerability

Reliance on raw material exports entrenches asymmetric bargaining power, as multinational firms control global value chains.[88] Limited domestic value addition and fiscal diversification narrow policy options, reinforcing dependence on extraction rents and discouraging alternative development pathways.

3 Demographic pressure and performative inclusion

Rising civic expectations, particularly among youth, are met with symbolic participation.[89] Consultations proceed without binding authority. Dashboards display data without decision rights. Community trusts distribute benefits without control. The gap between participation and power erodes trust and destabilizes local governance without altering authority structures.[90]

4 Complexity, opacity and the governance mirage (reinforcing)

Legal frameworks and monitoring systems are designed in highly technical forms that communities cannot realistically interpret or contest.[91] This gap produces transparency without agency. As collective capacity to challenge decisions declines, authority recentralizes even as institutions claim compliance with global governance norms.

Together, these dynamics explain why transparency and consultation alone fail: they increase visibility while leaving power structures intact.

RATIONALE

Aligning authority with accountability

Many extractive-sector reforms have focused on transparency and consultation, including environmental hearings, free, prior and informed consent processes, open-data portals and stakeholder frameworks.[92] While these tools increase visibility, visibility without authority can entrench dispossession by legitimizing outcomes that communities cannot meaningfully influence.[93]

The central governance challenge is no longer how to improve transparency, but how to redesign decision-making so that power cannot be easily centralized or captured.

The Dual Governance Model (DGM) responds by shifting from participation to shared sovereignty. It establishes a two-key system in which licensing, monitoring, enforcement, penalties and benefit-sharing cannot proceed unless both the state and a legally constituted community governance body approve them. Authority is embedded in law, not goodwill.

This distinction is critical. Co-ownership refers to shared legal authority, joint rights and obligations and enforceable decision-making power.[94] Co-management refers to shared operational execution and where co-management is not anchored in co-ownership, participation often collapses into symbolism.[95] By embedding operations within shared legal authority, the DGM makes accountability durable and contestable.

The provocation advances an architectural rather than aspirational shift. It seeks to collapse the governance mirage by making exclusion structurally difficult. When communities must co-author, co-sign and co-enforce, governance systems must become legible, auditable and resilient to technocratic capture.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

These pathways are illustrative rather than prescriptive. They demonstrate how institutions can implement the Dual Governance Model in practice across diverse political and legal contexts.

Embedding shared sovereignty at points of highest leverage

Licensing remains the primary gate through which power, value and long-term ecological outcomes are determined. Requiring joint state-community approval for licences would convert community consent from a procedural step into a condition of legal validity. Making community consent a condition of legal validity shifts governance upstream. It ensures that decision-makers and communities co-author extraction terms, safeguards and restoration plans rather than contest them after harm has occurred.

Reconstituting legitimacy through co-governed enforcement and benefit-sharing

Joint community-state bodies can serve as shared custodians of monitoring, sanctions, remediation and revenue allocation. When enforcement authority and benefit-sharing are co-governed, communities move from external watchdogs to institutional stewards with a direct stake in long-term outcomes; benefit-sharing shifts from compensation to co-ownership of rules and responsibilities.

Replacing technocratic complexity with legibility as a governance norm

Shared sovereignty creates a forcing function for simplification. When communities must co-sign and co-enforce decisions, contracts, monitoring systems and revenue disclosures must become legible and auditable. Capacity is built through exercising authority rather than through parallel training detached from power.

Aligning governance time horizons with intergenerational stewardship

Extraction decisions shape ecological and social systems for decades, while political cycles span only a few years. Embedding communities as long-term co-governors reorients decision-making toward durability, restoration and intergenerational benefit. This perspective strengthens resilience to political turnover and long-horizon risks such as climate volatility and demographic change.

Internal safeguards are essential. To mitigate local elite capture, the DGM embeds rotational leadership, transparent selection criteria, recall mechanisms, public disclosure of decisions and revenues and mandatory representation of women and youth within community governance bodies.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The dynamics described here are not unique to Sub-Saharan Africa. They reflect a global governance failure mode in which systems claim inclusion while designing out meaningful power. Across the Amazon basin, Indigenous communities face consultation regimes without authority.[96] In Indonesia's West Papua, formal autonomy arrangements coexist with centralized control over extraction.[97] Even strong legal frameworks, such as the Philippines' Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act, demonstrate how consent can remain procedural when communities lack binding decision rights.[98]

Comparable shared-authority models are already emerging elsewhere. Canada's Towards Sustainable Mining framework and Australia's co-management agreements with Aboriginal communities formalize joint authority over monitoring, standards and benefit-sharing.[99] These cases underscore a transferable principle: legitimacy strengthens when decision rights are embedded in law rather than mediated through goodwill.

By embedding communities as long-term co-governors, the Dual Governance Model addresses a deeper temporal mismatch between short political cycles, long extraction horizons and multi-generational ecological impacts.[100] In this sense, the provocation answers a global question with African clarity: what if inclusion were not a performance, but a power structure? The DGM offers one practical architecture for making that shift durable, auditable and resilient across generations.

G Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Oceania

What if the next era of credible leadership demanded not just more information but deeper wisdom, in which sacred knowledge and ancestral accountability became strategic assets for resilient governance and we reshaped concepts of credibility to include sacred ways of knowing, being and doing?

Across ASEAN and Oceania, governance is entering a new era of credibility. Leaders have more data, more dashboards and more analytical capacity than ever before. Yet trust is eroding, legitimacy is becoming harder to sustain and people increasingly question the ethics, coherence and long-term consequences of decisions made under pressure.[101]

This erosion of trust and legitimacy is a central intergenerational challenge. When governments treat credibility as a function of technical expertise and short-term performance, they tend to prioritize what they can measure quickly over what they must protect over the long term.

In the context of volatility, this creates a decision trap. Systems optimize for speed and control, while social cohesion, moral authority and long-horizon stewardship weaken. Future generations inherit the costs of that erosion in the form of fragile institutions, degraded ecosystems and diminished capacity to respond to shocks.

This provocation asks leaders to reconsider what credibility means. It argues that resilient governance requires epistemologies that strengthen discernment, relational accountability and responsibility across time. In this region, sacred, ancestral and faith-informed systems offer living governance resources that can help meet that need.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

The limits of technical authority

The region is experiencing a convergence of pressures that exposes the limits of credibility built solely on information.

First, trust in institutions has declined across many contexts, including advanced economies in the region. Public confidence in government, media, business and civil society has eroded, reducing leaders' room to manoeuvre during crises and amplifying contestation of policy decisions.[102]

Second, confidence in emerging technologies is uneven. Digital transformation is accelerating across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Oceania. Yet, public acceptance of algorithmic decision-making varies sharply, complicating governance of AI, surveillance and automated public services.[103] Where trust is low, technology adoption can deepen scepticism rather than restore legitimacy.

Third, climate impacts are escalating and often exceed current adaptive capacity.[104] Large-scale environmental shocks place acute pressure on governance systems, forcing rapid decisions under uncertainty while exposing longer-term vulnerabilities in planning, infrastructure and institutional coordination.[105] In these contexts, people assess credibility not only by whether institutions make efficient decisions but also by whether they perceive those decisions as fair, values-aligned and accountable to those affected.

Participants described a further compounding factor: a persistent form of scientific solutionism. Institutions are treating technical innovation and data-driven optimization as sufficient responses to deeply social, cultural and ethical challenges. Scientific tools remain essential for anticipatory governance and risk management. Yet technical competence alone does not generate social cohesion, moral constraint, or intergenerational coherence.[106] Overreliance on technical solutions can encourage reactive, risk-averse decision-making, thereby narrowing leaders' perceptions of what is possible and weakening the foundations of long-term stewardship.

Institutions create a credibility deficit that they cannot remedy with more information. What is needed instead are governance frameworks that embed ethical discernment, cultural coherence and intergenerational responsibility, as well as new epistemologies that provide the moral compass and long-term stewardship required for equitable intergenerational leadership.[107]

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Governance coherence under pressure

The regional group identified three reinforcing feedback loops that help explain why governance systems across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and Oceania struggle to sustain trust, coherence and long-term legitimacy under accelerating change. These dynamics are visible where rapid technological adoption, climate stress and cultural diversity intersect.

1. Crisis reactivity and ethical erosion

When leadership relies primarily on data-driven optimization and technical expertise, decision-making tends to narrow under pressure. In moments of crisis, speed, control and short-term risk mitigation dominate, while ethical reflection and relational accountability receive less attention. Decisions may appear efficient yet disconnected from community values and long-term consequences.

Over time, this produces ethical drift. Actions taken in an urgent context begin to conflict with public expectations of fairness, care and responsibility. Trust declines, reputational damage accumulates and leaders lose room to manoeuvre. Institutions double down on defensive and reactive approaches, reinforcing a cycle in which they meet each crisis with greater technical intensity and diminishing legitimacy.

2. Cultural misalignment and declining policy ownership

Governance across the region often relies on standardized frameworks designed for scalability and efficiency. When institutions apply these models without grounding them in local cultural, spiritual and relational contexts, they can achieve formal compliance while failing to resonate with lived realities.

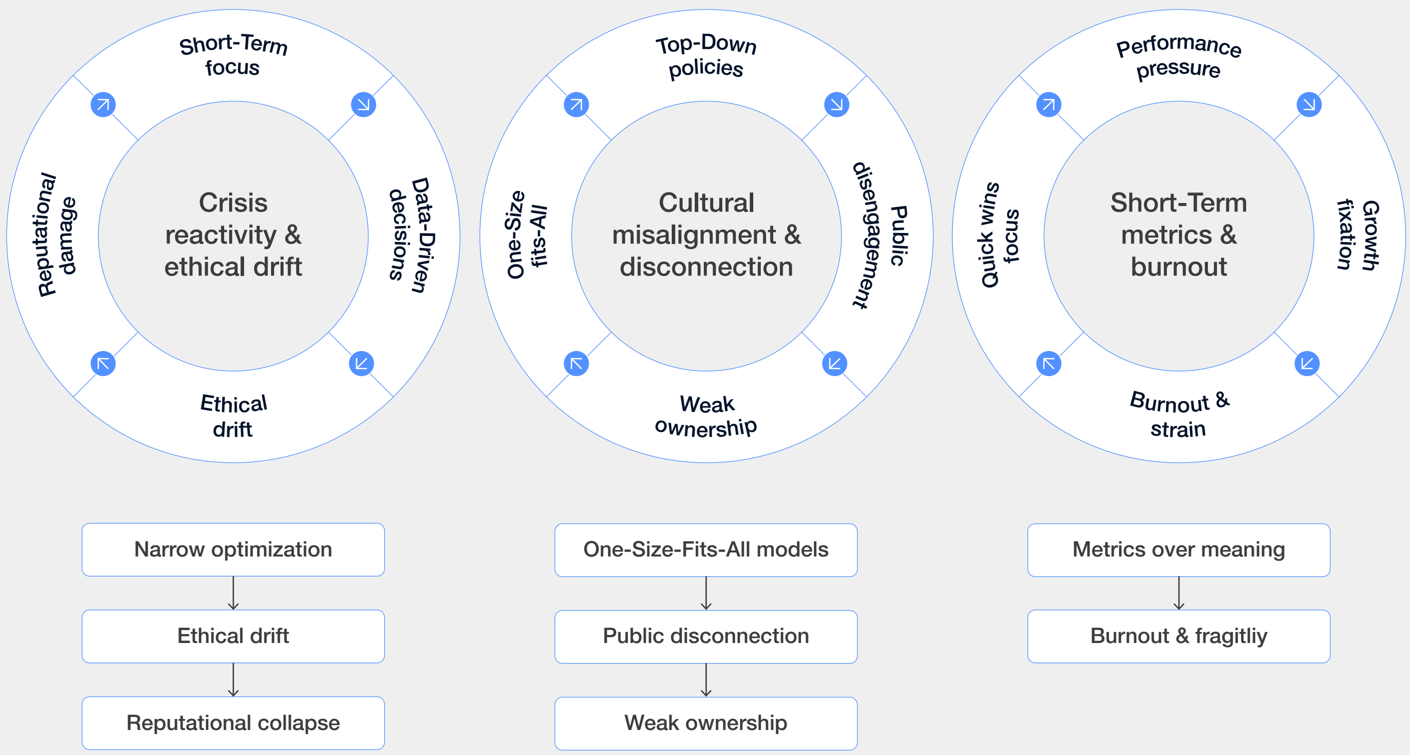
This misalignment reduces public connection to institutions. Communities experience policies as externally imposed rather than collectively owned, which weakens participation and long-term commitment. Implementation gaps widen and outcomes deteriorate, reinforcing perceptions that governance is distant, unresponsive, or illegitimate. In response, institutions may further centralize decision-making, deepening disconnection and accelerating the loss of legitimacy.

3. Short-term performance and systemic fragility

Institutions frequently evaluate leadership performance through narrow, short-term metrics focused on delivery, growth and efficiency. These indicators can support accountability, yet they can crowd out attention to meaning, well-being and long-term system health.

As leaders optimize performance against these metrics, organizational cultures become strained. Burnout rises, decision quality deteriorates and adaptive capacity weakens. Systems may appear productive in the short term, yet they become fragile under sustained pressure. Fragility increases vulnerability to shocks, leading to greater reliance on short-term fixes and reinforcing performance-driven exhaustion. Over time, institutions struggle to retain moral authority and internal resilience, both of which are prerequisites for credible leadership.

Together, these feedback loops reveal a structural challenge. Credibility is increasingly undermined not by a lack of information but by the absence of governance frameworks that integrate ethical discernment, cultural coherence and intergenerational responsibility into decision-making.



RATIONALE

Expanding the foundations of credible leadership

The dynamics above suggest that institutions can no longer secure credibility through data, performance metrics and technical expertise alone. In conditions of compounding crises, credible leadership requires a deeper basis for judgement. It requires shared moral reference points, relational accountability and an ability to hold direction without ethical collapse.

Across ASEAN and Oceania, Indigenous, ancestral and faith-informed governance systems have sustained communities for millennia by embedding accountability into relationships between people, place and time. These are not symbolic traditions. They operate as governance epistemologies that support legitimacy through continuity, care and responsibility to future generations. They offer decision logics that integrate ecological literacy, cyclical feedback and moral constraint in ways directly relevant to governance under uncertainty.

Regional practice indicates that these knowledge systems can inform institutional design at scale. The growth of the Islamic economy across parts of ASEAN demonstrates how moral principles can be translated into regulatory and market frameworks, thereby embedding ethical review, risk-sharing and longer-term accountability into financial and production systems. In Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, granting legal rights to rivers has led to governance approaches in which environmental, cultural and social values are accorded standing alongside economic interests, thereby strengthening legitimacy through relational accountability.

Integrating sacred credibility into leadership strengthens four governance capabilities in the face of uncertainty:

- **Strategic clarity amid overload**, by grounding decisions in shared moral and cultural reference points.
- **Legitimacy through alignment**, by connecting policy choices to community values and lived ethical frameworks.
- **Intergenerational coherence** by reducing the tendency to externalize costs onto future generations.
- **Resilience under pressure**, by enabling institutions to hold direction through crisis without ethical drift.

This provocation does not call for replacing science or data. It argues for complementing them with wisdom traditions that strengthen judgement, meaning and responsibility across time. In a region where climate disruption, technological acceleration and declining trust are converging, sacred credibility becomes a strategic asset for resilient governance.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

These pathways are illustrative rather than prescriptive and show how sacred credibility can be translated into practice across institutional contexts by reshaping governance rules, decision paradigms, information flows and system goals.

1. Embedding sacred credibility within institutional rules and roles

A first pathway moves sacred and ancestral knowledge from the margins of consultation into formal governance structures. This shift can take the form of mandated cultural standing in decision processes, co-governance arrangements and defined institutional roles for custodians of sacred and ecological knowledge.

The Whanganui River settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand illustrates this approach.[108] By recognizing the river as a legal person grounded in Māori cosmology, governance authority is shared between Indigenous representatives and state actors, aligning regulation with relational accountability. In Bali, the Tri Hita Karana philosophy informs land-use and conservation, embedding harmony among people, nature and the spiritual realm into regulatory decisions.[109]

In governance systems, the core shift is that credibility is assessed not solely on technical evidence. Communities also assess it by whether decision-makers honour obligations to place and community, including obligations to those who will live with long-term outcomes.

2. Redefining leadership credibility through moral depth and intergenerational equity

A second pathway operates at the level of governance paradigms. Many leadership models equate credibility with efficiency, growth and technical optimization. Sacred knowledge systems offer alternative logics centred on moral clarity, contextual judgement and intergenerational responsibility.

Islamic finance provides a regional example of how institutions can operationalize such principles at scale. Its growth across ASEAN countries demonstrates that regulators and market actors can embed moral constraints in regulatory and market frameworks through ethical review, risk-sharing and asset-backed approaches that discourage speculative volatility.[110] The relevance for intergenerational foresight is that credibility is tied to constraints that protect long-term stability and ethical integrity, rather than to short-term performance alone.

3. Reconfiguring information flows by weaving data with wisdom

A third pathway concerns how knowledge informs decisions. This approach integrates data and technology with relational, cultural and ecological intelligence so that technical tools strengthen discernment rather than displace judgment.

Models led by Māori practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrate how care for land and deep ecosystem understanding can guide decision-making that reflects interconnected systems.[111] When aligned with such knowledge systems, digital tools and AI can enhance transparency, support feedback loops and improve monitoring, while decisions remain grounded in cultural legitimacy and ethical accountability.

The practical goal is to treat technology as an input to wise governance, guided by frameworks that clarify what should be protected over time and what trade-offs are unacceptable.

4. Shifting system goals and metrics towards long-term stewardship

A fourth pathway focuses on what is measured and rewarded. When institutions narrow governance metrics to short-term delivery, they can drift away from well-being, cultural continuity and long-horizon resilience. Expanding system goals can embed stewardship into law, planning and investment decision-making.

The Yarra River Protection Act in Australia provides an example of a statute that sets out statutory objectives, including environmental health and Aboriginal cultural values alongside development goals.[112] Such approaches demonstrate how institutions can institutionalize long-term stewardship through clear duties, performance indicators and planning requirements. This approach aligns infrastructure, investment and intergenerational equity, thereby strengthening credibility through continuity and care.

Together, these pathways show how sacred credibility can operate as a practical governance resource. By influencing rules, paradigms, information flows and system goals, it offers institutions ways to rebuild trust, hold ethical direction under pressure and govern across generations in an era of accelerating uncertainty.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The challenges surfaced in ASEAN and Oceania reflect a wider global pattern. Institutions have unprecedented analytical capacity, yet trust, ethical coherence and long-term legitimacy continue to erode. In many contexts, the ability to act decisively is constrained less by insufficient data and more by a deficit of shared meaning, judgment and credible authority.

What ASEAN and Oceania contribute is the continued presence of living knowledge systems that treat credibility as something earned through stewardship, continuity and care for place. These perspectives offer globally relevant insight into how legitimacy can be rebuilt when technical expertise alone no longer commands confidence.

For leaders worldwide, the implication is to strengthen governance foundations. Sacred knowledge systems demonstrate how ethical orientation, contextual wisdom and long-term responsibility can coexist with formal institutions and improve decision-making under uncertainty. When paired with modern governance tools, they serve as filters for discernment, helping leaders navigate complexity without resorting to narrow optimization or reactive control.

Over the coming decades, climate volatility, technological acceleration and social fragmentation will place a growing strain on governance systems designed primarily for efficiency and growth. In this context, credibility will increasingly depend on whether institutions can demonstrate moral coherence, cultural awareness and accountability to future generations. Experience emerging from ASEAN and Oceania suggests that integrating relational and intergenerational intelligence is a strategic requirement for sustaining trust and resilience at scale.

South Asia

What if every initiative entering a community, from health and education to infrastructure and climate resilience, were required to embed a time-bound handover mandate, making community leadership a legal obligation rather than an aspiration?

South Asia sits at a crossroads of demographic strength and systemic fragility. Home to nearly 2 billion people, with more than 50% under the age of 30, the region faces overlapping pressures of inequality, sovereign debt, climate volatility and declining institutional trust.[113] Each monsoon, drought, or economic shock tests not only physical infrastructure but also the social contracts that bind communities to the state and to one another.[114]

Over decades, governments, donors, philanthropies and private investors have channelled substantial resources into education, health and climate adaptation. Yet despite billions in investment, gains frequently erode once project cycles conclude. Schools struggle after external funding ends, health systems lose trained staff and climate infrastructure deteriorates when maintenance responsibilities remain unclear. The issue is not the absence of investment, but the absence of inheritance.[115]

Across the region, initiatives are commonly implemented for communities rather than by them. When ownership ends at delivery, dependency deepens, local knowledge atrophies and trust in institutions weakens. During regional sprint interviews, teachers, youth volunteers and rural women voiced a consistent frustration: “They ask for our votes, not our voices.” This gap between participation and authority has become one of South Asia’s most persistent governance failures.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Continuity and authority in crisis governance

At the same time, countervailing signals point to alternative pathways. Bangladesh's Cyclone Preparedness Programme and India's Odisha Resilience Mission demonstrate that when institutions embed women and youth as managers of local systems, recovery accelerates and public confidence rises.[116] In Bhutan and Nepal, cooperatives are experimenting with community-run microgrids and schools that blend ancestral knowledge with digital tools. These models share a common feature: responsibility is transferred rather than deferred.[117]

The deeper tension lies in institutional incentives. Across South Asia, governance systems reward visibility over continuity. Decision-makers prioritize projects designed to deliver results within three to five-year funding cycles over those structured to last 30-50 years. Institutions treat sustainability as a downstream aspiration rather than a design constraint.[118]

This bias stands in contrast to the region's long-standing traditions of stewardship. Customary governance institutions such as panchayats, jirgas, shuras, cooperatives and faith-based councils have historically governed collective resources, mediated conflict and upheld moral accountability across generations. While imperfect and at times limited to who they include, these systems reflect a principle modern governance often overlooks: leadership is held in trust, not extracted for short-term gain.

As climate shocks intensify and external financing becomes more constrained, South Asia faces a choice. It can continue to manage crises through recurring interventions, or it can redesign governance to ensure that every initiative strengthens local authority and intergenerational continuity.[119]

SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Governance design and capacity transfer

The regional group identified three reinforcing feedback loops that explain why well-intentioned interventions frequently fail to produce lasting outcomes.

1 The perpetual intervention loop

External actors defer the transfer of authority by citing gaps in local capacity. This justifies continued control, postpones handover and prevents capacity from ever being fully built. Dependency becomes structural rather than temporary.

2 The power–performance loop

Those with control over funding and formal authority define success metrics. Locally defined priorities are marginalized, weakening legitimacy and reducing community commitment to outcomes once external oversight ends.

3 The trust deficit loop

Repeated exclusion from decision-making erodes confidence in local institutions. As trust declines, external actors perceive greater risk, reinforcing centralized control and further weakening local governance.

Together, these loops lock systems into a pattern where projects must be replaced rather than inherited. Assets, data and infrastructure are frequently transferred not to communities but to intermediaries or local elites better positioned to absorb resources than to steward them for collective benefit. The result is a quiet extraction of value that leaves communities structurally weaker once programmes conclude.

RATIONALE

Continuity as a design requirement

The time-bound handover mandate intervenes at a critical leverage point: the moment an initiative is designed, funded and approved. Rather than treating exit and sustainability as downstream concerns, the time-bound handover mandate makes transition planning a condition of entry.[120]

Under this model, decision-makers require that every initiative specify from the outset how stakeholders will transfer assets, data, operational knowledge and decision-making authority to recognized community institutions within an agreed timeframe. This process transforms development from an open-ended delivery model into a planned succession process.

The mandate also realigns incentives. External actors are rewarded for successful transition rather than prolonged presence. Communities are positioned as future governors rather than passive recipients. Public authorities gain clearer visibility into long-term responsibilities, while donors reduce the risk of repeatedly reinvesting in the same outcomes.

Transparency mechanisms, such as public handover registries and dashboards tracking transition milestones, convert each project into a learning asset. Over time, these records enable peer-to-peer replication across districts and countries, thereby shifting expectations about what constitutes responsible intervention.

The result is a governance architecture where trust, capital and authority reinforce one another rather than fragmenting at project close.

ILLUSTRATIVE PATHWAYS

In practice, the provocation is most effective when embedded within Philanthropy-Public-Community (PPC) partnerships. Philanthropic actors provide early-stage capital and technical support. Public institutions ensure regulatory continuity and accountability. Communities contribute contextual knowledge and long-term presence.

The handover mandate aligns these roles by requiring that transition costs, training, governance formation and data transfer are funded and executed deliberately rather than improvised at exit. Capacity building begins at project inception, not at its conclusion.

Safeguards are essential. Transitions are moments of contestation and without clear rules, informal power can override formal intent. Anchoring handovers within recognized and representative community bodies, such as panchayats, cooperatives and federations of self-help groups, while retaining state oversight, reduces elite capture and strengthens legitimacy. Gender-inclusive leadership requirements further protect gains, reflecting strong regional evidence that women-led institutions are more resilient to social and economic shocks.[121]

Over time, documented handovers and open reporting create a regional learning loop. Successful transitions become templates. Expectations shift. Planned exit becomes standard practice rather than an exception.

GLOBAL RELEVANCE

South Asia's challenge mirrors a global governance dilemma. Systems designed to serve communities too often reinforce dependency, extract value, or collapse once external actors withdraw. The time-bound handover mandate provides a transferable corrective measure.[122]

It reframes development ethics from delivery to succession, from presence to preparedness and from short-term outputs to inheritable systems. In a world facing compounding climate risks, demographic pressures and fiscal constraints, this model positions South Asia not only as a site of vulnerability but also as a laboratory for intergenerational governance.

By converting interventions into inheritances, the region offers global leaders a practical mechanism to rebuild legitimacy, strengthen local capacity and ensure that future generations inherit both assets and agency.

Conclusion

The regional provocations presented in this handbook converge on a shared insight: many of today's most persistent governance failures do not stem from a lack of analysis or technical capability. They arise from the distribution of authority, responsibility and legitimacy across time. Whether in resource governance, innovation ecosystems, demographic transition, crisis response, or institutional trust, short-term horizons and narrow participation repeatedly constrain the scope of foresight.

Intergenerational foresight reframes what credible long-term leadership requires. It treats the future as a shared responsibility to govern, rather than as an abstract horizon to observe. This shift has practical consequences. It positions foresight as an institutional capability rather than a specialist function, moves participation from consultation toward shared authority and anchors legitimacy in accountability to those who will live with today's decisions. The provocations surface recurring leverage points at which this reframing alters outcomes and shows how institutions exercise power, build trust and accumulate resilience over time through design choices such as handover rather than dependency, stewardship rather than extraction and long-term optionality rather than irreversible lock-in.

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that intergenerational foresight requires institutions to reshape the rules by which they make decisions today so that future generations inherit both assets and agency. It operates at the intersection of anticipation and governance, broadening the knowledge considered legitimate, the interests represented and the time horizons recognized within decision-making processes.

This approach carries clear implications across sectors. For governments, it emphasizes that they cannot defer long-term responsibility to future administrations or confine it to advisory processes; they must embed it in decision-making rules, institutional mandates and accountability mechanisms. For private-sector and civil-society actors, it highlights the limits of episodic foresight and the need to integrate long-term thinking into strategy, capability development and performance evaluation. For investors and philanthropies, it underscores the importance of aligning capital with governance arrangements that enable continuity, learning and shared ownership over time.

Intergenerational foresight does not displace existing foresight methodologies or governance frameworks. It builds upon them, redirecting their use toward deeper questions of legitimacy, power and long-term consequence. It recognizes that institutions cannot eliminate uncertainty and argues that they can design authority over uncertainty more deliberately. In doing so, it offers a way to navigate complexity without defaulting to short-term optimization or technocratic control.

The work ahead lies in integration. Institutions will determine the relevance of intergenerational foresight by the extent to which they embed it in everyday decisions, from investment approvals and infrastructure governance to innovation incentives and community participation. Integrating intergenerational foresight into routine governance requires experimentation, institutional learning and sustained collaboration across generations, regions and sectors.

This handbook represents one contribution to that effort. It reflects a growing recognition that long-term governance is a structural challenge that demands changes in how authority is exercised and distributed. As uncertainty deepens and irreversible decisions become more common, the ability to govern long-term consequences together will increasingly define institutional resilience and legitimacy. Intergenerational foresight offers one pathway for building that capacity and the invitation now is to carry it forward through practice.

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the colleagues, mentors, experts who believed in and supported the Future50 Initiative from its inception, and whose engagement strengthened its delivery and impact. The intergenerational foresight approach presented in this handbook emerged through the core design and practice of the initiative.

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