

EVIDENCE REPORT

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Foresight and International Development: Conference Report

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February 2016

The IDS programme on Strengthening Evidence-based Policy works across seven key themes. Each theme works with partner institutions to co-construct policy-relevant knowledge and engage in policy-influencing processes. This material has been developed under the Policy Anticipation, Response and Evaluation theme.

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FORESIGHT AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CONFERENCE REPORT

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1 Introduction

This report presents a summary of a one-day conference on 'Foresight and International Development' held at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) on 15 October 2015.

As part of the IDS Accountable Grant work on Foresight, the conference brought together 30 academics, practitioners and experts to explore:

- What is Foresight in the context of international development?
- What kind of Foresight is useful? For what purposes?
- Is it relevant to promote 'futures and Foresight' capabilities across international development research, policy and practitioner communities?

The conference focused particularly on small Foresight projects – 'Foresight on a shoestring' – as opposed to large-scale initiatives.

The conference programme can be found in Annex 1, and a list of participants in Annex 2. A list of related publications is featured in Annex 3.

2 Key discussion points

The conference presentations stimulated rich discussion. Some key points arising from the discussion include:

Foresight, an introduction

- Imagining the future is a basic human instinct; Foresight is a methodical, systematic and reflective way of thinking about future possibilities. Understanding future possibilities can help researchers and development practitioners to be prepared.
- Within international development, Foresight exercises are being utilised at many levels – national, regional and international, across wide thematic areas. Foresight is being introduced by a number of different actors such as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), governments, philanthropic organisations and academia. However, literature on Foresight is fragmented. This means that there is opportunity for deepening understanding of how Foresight can be used.
- Other tools that have been used to systematically understand the future include different kinds of modelling, which project historic data. These models may be useful over a short timeframe; however, in order to go beyond short timeframes other approaches are required.

Different schools of Foresight

- There is a great affinity between international development and Foresight. However, Foresight is not a single research methodology. Different schools of Foresight exist, each with its own approach.
- The French school: Marie de Lattre-Gasquet, representing CIRAD (French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development), discussed the values of the French school of Foresight, built on the work of Gaston Berger. She highlighted that there is a strong emphasis in this school on the importance of setting up an inclusive Foresight process. The three goals of Foresight for this school are ‘anticipation, appropriation and action’. This means that beyond the process of understanding the future, the school stresses the value of stakeholders appropriating the future throughout the Foresight process. It also emphasises that Foresight processes should be linked to social action. The approach stresses co-creation and collective ownership of the future thinking process.
- In the United Kingdom, Foresight is often focused on scenario-building to increase preparedness and to highlight what scenarios would be desirable to avoid.

Foresight for research

- Foresight can be a powerful research tool. However, several participants expressed unease with Foresight methodologies. This is because while research is expected to be authoritative, horizon scans and Foresight initiatives are characterised by uncertainty. This argues for utilising Foresight methodologies alongside other methodologies. It was also suggested that it is important to pick the right questions for Foresight studies, and that these should be as specific as possible.
- **A participatory tool:** Participants discussed the potential that Foresight methodologies hold as participatory research tools. It is important to recognise that who is in the room will influence the Foresight process. In most cases a combination of ‘experts’ and ‘non-experts’ is important. On the one hand, Foresight exercises benefit immensely from crowdsourcing the expertise of informed and knowledgeable

people. Tapping into the tacit knowledge of experts is a strength of Foresight methodologies. Meanwhile, it is important not to limit Foresight exercises to exercises between experts. In fact, often people who are too close to a certain policy problem or research field can find it difficult to step back sufficiently to engage in a Foresight exercise.

Foresight and civil society

- Most non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have little time, few resources and very few incentives to think beyond the next grant agreement. Civil society organisations think short term: narrow focus by donors on delivering results in a few years and the 'projectisation' of aid contributed towards this trend. This often prevents civil society organisations from doing the longer-term thinking required for tackling development problems.
- Kathy Peach, representing Bond (the network of United Kingdom-based NGOs working in international development), stressed that civil society organisations have developed cultures that are risk-averse. A survey on charity boards found that only 15 per cent of chief executives thought that their boards took risks, and just 16 per cent of chief executives felt that their boards looked at the external environment to take decisions.
- The process of diverting attention away from writing proposals and applications to investigate new ideas can represent a very large opportunity cost for organisations. Since charities are set up to meet people's needs right now, NGOs tend to be biased towards meeting current needs rather than needs of the future.

Questions on the role of Foresight in international development

- How can stakeholder participation be taken more seriously in Foresight work, including Southern voices?
- How might information and communications technologies be better harnessed for more participatory styles of policymaking?
- In times of austerity how do you make a case of relevance for Foresight in development?
- Some important questions about Foresight: Who commissions it? Who wants this done? Does it gain traction? Are we clear about what success in Foresight constitutes beyond just producing publications?
- How can academics work with donors and NGOs to create space to engage with Foresight and understand its implications?
- How might we use Foresight as part of broader processes of organisational and systems change?

Annex 1 Conference programme

‘Foresight and International Development’

Thursday 15 October 2015

With support from:



Department
for International
Development

Foresight and International Development

Thursday 15 October 2015

Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton

Convening Space, 0900–1730

You can tweet using the hashtag #foresight.

The Twitter handle of the Institute of Development Studies is @IDS_UK.

Context

As part of the Accountable Grant stream of work on Foresight, this daylong conference will bring together around 30 academics, practitioners and experts to explore:

- What is Foresight in the context of international development?
- What kind of Foresight is useful? For what purposes?
- Is it relevant to promote ‘futures and Foresight’ capabilities across international development research, policy and practitioner communities?

The conference will pay particular attention to the effectiveness of small Foresight projects – Foresight on a shoestring – as opposed to large-scale initiatives.

Programme

0900–0930

Registration and coffee

0930–1100

Welcome and introduction

Jim Sumberg, IDS, Fellow

1. Looking to the future

The future looms large in development. It is in goals, objectives, narratives and visions, and is central to the notion of preparedness. But there are many possible futures, and the relevance of policy-oriented development research depends on our ability to consider these possible futures systematically. The future may be an unknown country, but there are many different ways to preview the destination. Futures, Foresight, strategic planning, theory of change, long-term thinking, visioning and crystal ball gazing – this session will begin to make some sense of a complex field.

Alun Rhydderch, School of International Futures, Co-founder
Kate Bingley, Christian Aid, Head of Programme Performance and Learning

1100–1130

Coffee/tea

1130–1300

2. Foresight in policy-oriented development research (Part 1)

Researchers are generally comfortable examining the past and the present, but less so with the future, where epistemological questions – *How can we know?* – take on new and frightening dimensions. Yet, policy-oriented research is by its very nature future-oriented. What kinds of policy research questions are most amenable to Foresight approaches? What are the strengths and limitations of different Foresight methods and techniques, particularly in smaller-scale Foresight studies?

Chair: Chris Barnett, IDS/Itad, Director of Centre for Development Impact

Dominic Glover, IDS, Fellow

Marie de Lattre-Gasquet, CIRAD/CGIAR Consortium, Senior Foresight Scientist

1300–1400

Lunch (upper common room)

- 1400–1500** **3. Foresight in policy-oriented development research (Part 2)**
- Chair: Laura Rana**, Youth Business International, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor
Stephen Spratt, IDS, Fellow
Keetie Roelen, IDS, Fellow
- 1500–1600** **4. Putting Foresight to work for international development**
There is growing interest among development organisations in the use of Foresight approaches and methods. But in what situations and how can they be used most effectively? What are the commissioners, funders and potential uses of Foresight studies really looking for?
- Chair: Nick Nisbett**, IDS, Fellow
Kathy Peach, Bond, Head of Innovation & Foresight
Sarah Ireland, Oxfam, Head of Organisational Effectiveness
- 1600–1630** Coffee/tea
- 1630–1730** **5. Reflections and future directions**
A panel discussion to highlight and share insights from the day's programme, identify challenges and directions for future work, and bringing the discussion to a conclusion.
- Chair: Jim Sumberg**, IDS, Fellow
Alun Rhydderch, School of International Futures, Co-founder
Marie de Lattre-Gasquet, CIRAD/CGIAR Consortium, Senior Foresight Scientist
Kate Bingley, Christian Aid, Head of Programme Performance and Learning
- 1730** Close

Annex 2 List of conference participants

Name	Organisation
Keetie Roelen	IDS
Alun Rhydderch	School of International Futures
Marie de Lattre-Gasquet	CIRAD/CGIAR Consortium
Dominic Glover	IDS
Hayley MacGregor	IDS
Jon Brownlee	IDS
Richard Longhurst	IDS
Stephen Spratt	IDS
Chris Barnett	IDS/Itad – Director of Centre for Development Impact
Kathy Peach	Bond
Jim Sumberg	IDS
Gioel Gioacchino	PhD candidate, IDS
Sarah Mistry	Bond
Nick Nesbitt	IDS
Kate Bingley	Christian Aid
Jon Gregson	IDS
Henry Donati	Department for International Development
Mark Harvey	Department for International Development
Sarah Ireland	Oxfam
Jaideep Gupte	IDS
Laura Rana	Youth Business International
Syed Abbas	PhD candidate, IDS
Abdulkareem Lawal	Itad
Jon Cooper	Itad
Beris Gwynne	World Vision
Hannah James	IDS
Richard Jolly	IDS
Kevin Hernandez	Student, IDS
Robyn Eversole	Visiting Fellow, IDS
Ricardo Santos	PhD candidate, IDS

Annex 3 Documents

IDS publications

Bingley, K. (2014) *A Review of Strategic Foresight in International Development*, IDS Evidence Report 94, Brighton: IDS

Bingley, K. (2014) 'Using Foresight to Cope with Uncertainty', *IDS Policy Briefing 75*, Brighton: IDS

MacGregor, H.; Lally, S.; Bloom, G.; Davies, M.; Henson, S.; Mejía Acosta, A.; Roelen, K. and Ulrichs, M. (2014) *Non-Communicable Disease and Development: Future Pathways*, IDS Evidence Report 100, Brighton: IDS

Knezovich, J. and MacGregor, H. (2014) 'Responding to the Threat of Nutrition-related Non-Communicable Disease', *IDS Policy Briefing 65*, Brighton: IDS

Devereux, S.; Roelen, K. and Ulrichs, M. (2015) *Where Next for Social Protection?*, IDS Evidence Report 124, Brighton: IDS

Chaturvedi, A.K.; Vijayalakshmi, K. and Nijhawan, S. (2015) *Scenarios of Waste and Resource Management: For Cities in India and Elsewhere*, IDS Evidence Report 114, Brighton: IDS

Wilson, E. (2015) 'Managing the Emerging Waste Crisis in Developing Countries' Large Cities', *IDS Policy Briefing 86*, Brighton: IDS

Gregson, J.; Brownlee, J.M.; Playforth, R. and Bimbe, N. (2015) *The Future of Knowledge Sharing in a Digital Age: Exploring Impacts and Policy Implications for Development*, IDS Evidence Report 125, Brighton: IDS

Gregson, J.; Brownlee, J.M.; Playforth, R. and Bimbe, N. (2015) 'The Future of Knowledge Sharing in a Digital Age: Exploring Impacts and Policy Implications for Development', *IDS Policy Briefing 87*, Brighton: IDS

Glover, D. and Sexton, A. (2015) *Edible Insects and the Future of Food: A Foresight Scenario Exercise on Entomophagy and Global Food Security*, IDS Evidence Report 149, Brighton: IDS

Spratt, S. and Baker, J. (2015) *Big Data and International Development: Impacts, Scenarios and Policy Options*, IDS Evidence Report 163, Brighton: IDS

Spratt, S.; Dong, W.; Krishna, C.; Sagar, A. and Ye, Q. (2014) *What Drives Wind and Solar Energy Investment in India and China?*, IDS Evidence Report 87, Brighton: IDS

Krishna, C.; Sagar, A.D. and Spratt, S. (2015) *The Political Economy of Low-carbon Investments: Insights from the Wind and Solar Power Sectors in India*, IDS Evidence Report 104, Brighton: IDS

Spratt, S. (2014) 'Creating Alliances for Renewable Energy Investment: Lessons from China and India', *IDS Policy Briefing 67*, Brighton: IDS

Béné, C.; Cannon, T.; Gupte, J.; Mehta, L. and Tanner, T. (2014) *Exploring the Potential and Limits of the Resilience Agenda in Rapidly Urbanising Contexts*, IDS Evidence Report 63, Brighton: IDS

Béné, C.; Cannon, T.; Gupte, J.; Mehta, L. and Tanner, T. (2014) *'The Potential and Limits of the "Resilience Agenda" in Peri-urban Contexts'*, *IDS Policy Briefing* 63, Brighton: IDS

Other relevant documents

Bond (2015) *Tomorrow's World: How Might Megatrends in Development Affect the Future Roles of UK-based INGOs?*, London: Bond

Bond (2015) *Fast Forward, The Changing Role of UK-based INGOs*, London: Bond

Rhydderch, A. (2012) *Dimensions of Uncertainty*, UK Government Office for Science

Rhydderch, A. (2009) *Scenario Planning – Guidance Note*, UK Government Office for Science

UK Government Office for Science (2012) *Technology and Innovation Futures: UK Growth Opportunities for the 2020s*, London: UK Government Office for Science



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