

The UNDP Strategy, Policy and Partnerships (SPP) team in RBAP



CONCEPT NOTE

REIMAGINING DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

SCAFFOLDING PATHWAYS TO
THE FUTURES WE WANT

We recognise that our world is in a liminal space - that space between one form of existence and the next. We recognise that the development efforts that have gotten us to date, might not be adequate for our futures which are most certainly going to be far more complex and uncertain than before. Traditional notions of development are perhaps not evolving as quickly as we need it to evolve - to reflect the emergence of [large scale dynamic risks](#) that are inherently already cutting across all dimensions of sustainable development, and the conditions in which these changes are occurring. The very nature and scale of change and risk has changed so considerably that it surpasses our ability and our approaches to date to understand and manage it. A development ecosystem that is shifting in its very nature, means we need to understand how the different subsystems that exist within it are intertwined and tightly coupled.

How we understand human development, has to evolve with its landscape, and to take a forward-looking lens to see what is emerging and evolving within those sub-systems? Is it enough anymore to focus human development just on the immediate

needs right in front of us, or is it time to start to consider how these needs and shifts are impacting future generations and future issues of equity, justice, and wellbeing? If traditional notions of development are focused on 'quality of life', what are the emerging indicators of future elements of this that need nuancing? How do we understand these emerging indicators and take that into account in policy and programming ideation?

The UNDP RBAP Reimagining Development Initiative seeks to better understand and unpack what these nudges are pointing to in terms of an emerging development landscape in the Asia Pacific. The nudges noted below are not a finite list, but rather building on the signals we are sensing in the world and aiming to pull out the unfamiliar uncertainties within these.

This initiative seeks to position foresight as a global public good, a collective process of action, and reimagination to evolve the pathways and adaptive capacity to bring forward the futures we want to see come to reality in our region.

UNDP RBAP REIMAGINING DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

This initiative aligns with the UNDP 2020 HDR Report: 'Human Development and the Anthropocene' as a starting point to interrogate what other nudges, interlinked connections are also shifting how we understand both human and planetary development into the future, and how we might understand this from the perspectives of civil society, academics, scientists, economists, environmentalists, anthropologists, indigenous activists, technologists and development practitioners. It will answer the following question:

What might the new development paradigm for the Asia Pacific in the 21st century be?

This question does not focus on the approaches of development practice that are evolving quite quickly, but rather a rearticulation of its relationship to our collective humanity and the conditions that make us human in an uncertain future.

It will build off the recent UNDP/ISC work on 'Conversations on Rethinking Human Development', and the upcoming UNDP 'Tipping Points' publication but will push analysis to a futures lens, looking at the mid-term and long-term futures for analysis.

This initiative will position UNDP's efforts in rigorous strategic foresight as one mechanism that can amplify our policy, innovation and strategic intent.

DESIGN SUPERSTRUCTURE

This initiative will run for 12 months from January to December 2021 and will both have a broad global focus and then a narrowed lens to the Asia Pacific region.

The superstructure consists of three pillars. Individually each pillar fulfils a specific objectives but weaved together, aims to provide a substantive holistic narrative of what emerging development paradigms can be:

- **Written foresight briefs (5000-7000 words) by leading thought leaders, academics or practitioners. The foresight briefs are exploratory in nature, to grapple with the potential policy or programming implications of the topic.**
- **Deep in-country strategic futures practicum to understand the long-term trajectories of specific countries and their development landscape (to be trialed in 2-3 countries). The deep country futures work aims to test futures facing ideas and embed foresight practice in strategic and policy direction.**
- **Inclusive imaginaries to cultivate culturally driven, locally contextualised imaginations of the futures of Asia and the Pacific, to amplify ways in which more participatory visions might shape the way we live now and into the future**



PILLAR ONE: FORESIGHT BRIEFS

Foresight briefs will work to one of the ‘development nudges or signals of change’ noted below - as potential systemic nudges of what might be shifting the paradigm. They will blend futures analysis and grounded in evidentiary and data sources as well as analysis potential policy implications.

The themes below have been selected from a wide range of analysis on tipping points and selected to further interrogate its impact on development aid or a nudge that might shift development aid as a paradigm. It is not offered as a finite range of themes, but rather

seen as an evolving selection that might be added to and/or removed as the project learning increases. With this logic, the foresight briefs are positioned over the year to ensure that iterative learning is built across all themes, and connecting tissue is strengthened.

The foresight briefs are aimed at both internal UNDP and external audiences to influence forward looking development policy formulation.

NUDGE #1:

DEVELOPMENT AS LONG-TERMISM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Focus: Considering the long, interconnected risks and inequity our world is experiencing, should development amplify its focus on wellbeing of future generations? The focus on future generations is not necessarily new from a development policy perspective, but there has been a gap between the policy rhetoric and programmatic implications. How might we identify these pain points and how might we shift them forward?

What if programming and policy solutions had to consider two new types of obligations: obligations to not lock people into future inequity and obligations to future generations wellbeing?

NUDGE #2:

NEW FORMS OF RIGHTS

Focus: The complex changes in our world are calling for an expansion of traditional notions of rights. Increased focus on our planetary obligations, on digital futures, on greater equity and on future generations – how then must rights evolve for the challenges of our futures? What are new forms of rights that we must pay attention to and what policy implications does this lead to for the future of rights?

NUDGE #3:

NEW FORMS OF DIGITAL PUBLIC GOODS

Focus: What are digital public goods? Are they different from other types of public goods? How can they enable sustainable development? Who should provide them and how should they be governed? How do we ensure that digital public goods in these new frontiers do not exacerbate inequalities? How should these discussions be contextualized to different socio-economic and political contexts?

NUDGE #4:

INDIGENOUS FUTURES

Focus: How can future development paradigm learn and be informed by from indigenous concepts of sustainable development? How might indigenous futures inform and transform how sustainable development is considered, contrived and implemented? What are different measures of ‘sustainable development’ or ‘flourishing’ that we can utilize that respects indigenous futures and notions of flourishing?

NUDGE #5:

MOVING FROM RESILIENCE TO FLOURISHING

Focus: Traditional resilience programming has fostered a focus on ‘coping’ with shocks. The uncertainties of our futures however are now compelling us for futures where all people can thrive. What are the actual frames that will help us move forward from a resilience only frame to a more holistic flourishing framework? Is the concept of ‘vulnerability’ too narrow in its focus and rather do we need to take a broader lens to what might amplify all peoples’ ability to flourish?

NUDGE #6:

CLIMATE MIGRATED WORLD

Focus: The World Bank estimates that three regions (Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia) will generate 143 million more climate migrants by 2050. What might a climate migrated region mean for interconnected drivers of economic, governance, and social protection mechanisms that would need to be in place to support mass displacement of this scale? How might it invert or accelerate development trajectories both on the spaces left behind and the spaces that are newly inhabited? What might future implications then be on mental health and intergenerational grief of loss of home and identity?



PILLAR TWO:

COUNTRY PRACTICUM - DEEP STRATEGIC FUTURES

Critical in-country deep dive practical research in the Asia Pacific region to probe trends that are fundamentally driving long term change in the logics of the country and its development landscape. Identifying the strategic accelerants to bring about the type of futures envisioned by the country and mitigating against the strategic risks that might arise.

The structure of the deep dive practicum will be based around critical analysis and provocation to unearth unknowns and possibilities that might challenge our collective assumptions about development trajectories.



PILLAR THREE:

IMAGINARIES OF OUR FUTURES - WHOSE VISIONS OF THE FUTURE?

A culturally contextualised, participatory, inclusive futures approach to embolden imagination of constituents to articulate social values, institutions, laws, governance, and economic models that symbolize the way young people want for their future social whole and collective life. The hypothesis we hope to answer through this is what might flourishing

look like in our futures? And what are the beliefs, preferences, values, processes, systems, structures that can help bring that to bear?

This approach will work through the UNDP Accelerator Labs and Youth Co-Labs in the region to drive locally designed models and visions of development.

CONNECTING THE TISSUE FOR A FUTURES DOSSIER ON REIMAGINING DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA PACIFIC

The project aims to weave insights as they are generated across all the pillars to both iterate learning into each interconnected component and to drive wider engagement. A communications strategy that covers both analog and digital engagement will be designed - bringing in the authors to the SPP teams Strategic Policy Dialogue Series for 2020 as well as additional online 'fireside chats'.

The culmination of the initiative will involve a weaving together of all findings to articulate the evolved paradigm that it points to and will suggest key pathways to achieve the types of futures that we desire. Insights and findings will be synthesized and presented at the end of year Reimagining Development Conclave in December 2021.

FOCAL POINTS

The focal points for the Reimagining Development Initiative are the Strategy, Policy and Partnerships unit with UNDP RBAP.

Please contact Aarathi Krishnan for more information:

aarathi.krishnan@undp.org

FOOT NOTES

¹ <http://www.hdr.undp.org/>

² <https://council.science/publications/conversations-on-rethinking-human-development-2/>

³ These nudges are not finite and will be an iteratively reviewed through the year to ensure we are capturing the right topics and building off findings



REIMAGINING DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND STRATEGY IN ASIA-PACIFIC

The UNDP Strategy, Policy and Partnerships (SPP) team in RBAP conceptualizes the strategic direction of development pathways in the Asia-Pacific. They pursue this through rigorous, evidence-based policy and foresight analysis on frontier issues that reimagine development for sustainable futures across a diverse region. They offer advice on strategic policy and communications, helping build anticipatory institutional capabilities to navigate complexity and uncertainty. To amplify the voice and impact of UNDP, they forge partnerships with influential