# The World in 2025

## ……what it might look like

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**Introduction to "DCA international scenario 2025"**
**Rationale**

The world around us is changing rapidly: economically, politically, socially and culturally.  It is not easy to predict what the coming years will bring. A number of scenarios are possible that may lead to dramatic changes with radical and long-term implications for societies and citizens of our globe. On the development scene we are experiencing rapid and dramatic changes in state, society and development partners' attitudes, behaviors, policies and practices..

In such a dynamic and changing context DanChurchAid (DCA) has embarked on an inclusive scenario exercise with our partners and other stakeholders trying to look 10-15 years ahead, in order to be able to provide both reactive and proactive responses, based on informed analysis and vision. Proactively: by defining long-term responsive intervention goals. Reactively: by being better equipped to respond to global changes as they arise.

"DCA International Scenario 2025" is designed to provide analysis and input that can be used in the next generation of DCA 'Vision and Plan', regional strategies etc. From information derived from analyzing major shifts we have attempted to draw out some of the major challenges and opportunities most relevant to development actors such as DCA, partners, the ACT Alliance and a wider development and humanitarian community.

**The scenario process**
When the future appear to be completely unpredictable and uncertain, predictions and projections about the future may seem of little use. But when the degree of uncertainty is high, but not too high, scenario methods represent a good way to try to manage the uncertainties. Scenarios may be seen as images of possible and likely futures. It's most important quality is that it challenges reflection, by creating a space where future developments can be explored and tested: the space of potential and possibility. Within this space one can navigate and find the place, where one would desire to be positioned in the future – and try to influence developments in that direction.

When reading the scenario presented on the subsequent pages, it is therefore important to imagine for a moment that we are standing in the future – in 2025. At

the same time the reader must continue to him or herself one basic question: : "if this is indeed the future of 2025, what can be done by civl societyactors between now (2013) and 2025 in order toinfluence and prepare for the future ?"

In order to develop our scenario, we started by identifying and ranking some megatrends and critical factors. Subsequently, three draft scenarios for 2025 were then developed where these trends and factors were unfolded in different ways and degrees. The first was titled "Green and Clean – a new world". The second was called "A Multipolar World" and the third possible scenario was named "Eastern style capitalism". Based on these three draft scenarios for 2025, DCA consulted with its Partner Advisory Group and conducted a number of workshops in Copenhagen and regionally in Honduras, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, South Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia, Myanmar and South Asia. Conducted between December 2012 and June 2013, the workshops were held in order to include as many different experiences and points of views as possible before trying to capture the essence of all these discussions in one focus scenario.

The draft focus scenario was shared with 3 external consultants, Ms. Warigia Razia, Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Specialist (Kenya), Dr. Brian Pratt, Executive Director of INTRAC (UK), and Mr. Knud Vilby, journalist and specialist in development, poverty and environment (Denmark), who provided us with valuable comments, corrections and suggestions. Our thanks go to them and also to all those involved through DanChurchAid's Offices across the world providing a wide selection of reflections and perspectives from different parts the world.

The resulting consolidated scenario, presented below, is called "Multi-power rivalry in an interdependent World" and builds to a large extend on the scenario 2 (Multipolar World), but it includes elements from the other two draft scenarios. One observation from the consultation process so far: There was a significant discrepancy between what most expressed would be their preferred scenario ('Green and Clean') and the scenario considered most likely ('the Multipolar World'). While the preferred scenario may help to formulate visions and aspirations for agents of development, the most likely scenario is the reality within which we should be prepared to respond and interact. Therefor the Multi-power scenario is the one further developed over the subsequent pages.

**Assumptions**

As we asked ourselves what we actually already knew with a reasonable degree of certainty about the world in 2025, certain assumptions were made in advance of developing the scenarios.

The technological development in the history of mankind is rather well known 20-30 years ahead. The trends in the last 180 years have been that it takes 30 to 40 years for new breakthroughs in research to reach active use in society. The computer, for instance, was invented before World War 2 and so was laser light. Thus, the future of technology is relatively very well described over the span of the next 12-13 years making uncertainty low. The major uncertainties concern the actual use of old and new technology in different contexts.

Climate changes are expected and acknowledged for the next 12 years to come but the assumptions has to allow for substantial regional variation. Still, reports from the World Bank, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and others indicate that the global temperature is likely to increase with at least 4 degrees within the 21 century - more than previously expected. The expected effects will be dramatic with increase in droughts, sea-level rise, hurricanes, heat waves and other extreme weather events. These effects are likely to influence access to food and water, production, infrastructure, and livelihoods, which in turn will force millions of people to adapt – or move.  Such changes are likely to trigger violent conflict or civil unrest as citizens, businesses and nations increasingly will compete for limited resources, space and livelihood option.

**Unpredictable events of near apocalyptic dimensions** have been left out from the analysis. These may still be probable, but would have implications that will require a very substantial adjustment of th scenario, should they materialize. Amongst these are:
- Major epidemics causing greater loss of life's worldwide
- Major global/regional wars
- Acute shortage of food and water across the globe
- Major breakdowns in the overall political systems of the world
- An internal collapse in one or more of the major world powers or major regional powers
- Massive widespread natural disasters and very fast catastrophic (apocalyptic) changes in the climate on Earth

# Scenario: Multi-power rivalry in an interdependent World

## Global power balances

International cooperation and diplomacy experienced a historic low point when five member states left the United Nations (UN) General Assembly during the opening address of the UN Secretary General in 2025. All five member-representatives came from states often referred to as 'Lost Territories' in media reports. 'Lost Territories' has become the unfortunate short hand for some 20 areas or countries, which remain plagued by a mixture of internal conflicts, large displacement and refugee movements, 'war-lordism' or 'criminal gang rule' and with little or no overall legitimate and commonly accepted local or national leadership. These 'Lost Territories' appear to function almost in parallel with the rest of the world but have lost out completely in the otherwise fierce global competition for economic development and global or regional political influence.

Before and during the opening ceremony at the new UN building in Singapore, the newly appointed Chinese Secretary General did her utmost to keep the five member representatives from leaving as she and her Secretariat had spent months preparing for a smooth opening ceremony in the UN's new Asian headquarters. The opening of the new 400 meter tall UN headquarters was also the - so far - most concrete expression of a UN with an ever stronger 'Eastern' oriented focus. As well as a global governance system which allows for a more seamless fusion of inter-state governance and large transnational private sector corporations such as Huawei from China and Park & Sons from Korea. Along with Siemens of Germany and Google in the US, the two latter companies are the prime sponsors of the new UN building.

A spokesperson for the 'Group of Five' stressed that they had no specific issues with the current Secretary General or with her speech, but that they shared a sense of duty to demonstrate their deep disappointment and frustration with: 'being left to perish in an abyss of anarchy propelled by ever worsening disasters, displacement, hunger, civil unrest and rampant crime. Neglected and forgotten as we are by the UN and the world at large, our people are left to a cruel fate dictated by criminals and local and regional power struggles'. Before retreating to a private meeting at Singapore's "The Real Astoria" hotel, the spokesperson declined to make any concrete suggestion as to how the UN or its member states could address their concerns.

Many media reports covering the Secretary General's speech referred to it as 'noticeable for what the Secretary General did not say - rather than what she actually

did say.' This was exemplified by the absence of any clear direction on a number of small and medium sized armed conflicts in the world. Some reporters going to the extreme point of counting the frequency of individual words used in the speech registered that the word 'security' was only mentioned once and the world 'sustainability' did not even appear.

In a rare joint press conference the Chinese and US ambassadors to the UN condemned the 'unconstructive and even childish demonstration by the five representatives who left the ceremony'. During a subsequent Q&A with the media, the two ambassadors readily admitted that there were serious humanitarian concerns in all of the five countries. But both ambassadors then went on to stress, that on the other hand, 'due to our direct initiatives – working hand in hand with the UN Security Council - none of these localized conflicts have been allowed to spread and thus do not constitute a threat to regional or international security and stability'.

Given the very limited international climate agreement signed in 2020, the failure of the UN Secretary General to even mention the stalled 'Explorative Consultations' (intended to deal with the numerous outstanding unresolved climate related issues) was condemned by leading civil society activists as a 'total surrender by the Secretary General and a collapse of global governance'. The 'Explorative Consultations' on reductions in CO2 emission and climate change mitigation – now into its fifth year - have made little headway suffering primarily from a neglect born out of the on-going neck-to-neck race between the world's leading powers for economic domination. This race is led by China and the US, with the latter increasingly challenged by a rising India and Brazil. Further down in the global economic hierarchy, the EU has lost ground to Mexico, Indonesia and a handful of other fast growing economies in the three continents of the global South. The World Bank and IMF have suffered from the increased economic competition, globally and regionally along with the creation of the BRIC bank has left the World Bank and IMF to play a limited role in half-hearted attempts to promote economic growth and governance in a handful of the world's poorest and strategically least important countries and regions ('lost territories)

'Lost territories' essentially is nothing new but over the last years there has been a growing realisation that also certain parts of a number of large cities basically exists with no official and legitimate governance. Rather, such areas are effectively ruled by criminal gangs (cartels) or in other cases more economically, politically and religiously motivated militias. Most of these areas run on a local sustenance economy, which in turn is fuelled by illegal and shadow economic activities (arms, drugs, extortion and

illegal taxation, money laundering, kidnapping, human trafficking and sexual exploitation with significant but deep-hidden links to the more regulated global markets and the 'established' world economy. We see such 'lost neighbourhoods' from Pakistan to the D.R. Congo, from Cité Soleil in Port au Prince over Nairobi and the favelas in Sao Paulo to the outskirts of Mexico City and – many would argue - inside or at the periphery of US or European cities such as Detroit, Moscow, Paris, Naples, Athens, Manchester, Belgrade and Bucharest. A growing number of the world's poorest and most destitute people today live in such 'lost hoods'.


**Security**
Security and related strategic national interests are a major concern in a world characterised by a growing number of internally competing economic players. In countries and regions of strategic importance to the most powerful nations (the 'Big Thirteen'), local conflicts are occasionally suppressed in 'quick fix' political – or if need be military -interventions aimed at restoring short-term calm rather than attempting to fulfil higher aspirations such as justice, democracy, development or sustainable peace.

A major change over the last ten years has been an increased focus on the continuous rivalry and – at the same time - an ever growing interdependency between the 'Big Thirteen' global powers, especially regarding security and economics. More and more often these countries act together in opportunistic formations of 3-4 countries or they may occasionally form an overall majority that will remain unchallenged by the rest of the world. Today, the following "countries" or state formations make up The Big Thirteen:, Brazil, China, the EU along with a separate seat for Germany, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa, Turkey, and USA. Nigeria and South Africa hold positions as so-called ''permanent observers' in the group. The G13 is a gradual evolution of the 'old' G8 group.

 In UN jargon the G13 is known as 'The General Assembly's Informal Advisory Board for Regional Peace and Security' – GAIABPC, in many ways effectively constituting a new UN Security Council following decades of failed efforts to reform the membership and working style of the old Security Council.

Regional inter-state bodies, rather than the UN, are often used as proxies by the dominating global or regional economic powers in an ever-changing mosaic of opportunistic strategic alliances.

The military strength of the US is still the greatest in the world, though economic restrictions and strategic prioritization means that the US military is far less involved in direct combat missions than previously. Gradually China continues to increase its military capacity – not least its offensive and defensive military capacities in the area of information technology. At some point in the future the Chinese military strength is expected to match the American. The old Obama Doctrine of 2013, defining a more cautious US foreign policy and signalling a gradual retreat from the role of policing the entire world, has created space and opportunity for other members of the G13 to expand their spheres of influence.

As shale gas and unconventional oil have become major game changers the US is no longer dependent on Middle East oil and has instead become one of the world's major oil exporters. This development has gradually allowed the US to scale down its direct and indirect presence and influence in the Middle East while China and India have been scaling up as they continue to depend on traditional Middle Eastern and new African coal, gas and oil sources to fuel their economies.

Conflicts in areas, and in some cases entire countries, which are of little or no strategic interest for the 'Big Thirteen' are increasingly left to their own devices - as well as those of a number of private 'security and stabilization' companies, along with local and international humanitarian, developmental and faith based entities. Only if such conflicts challenge larger interests, e.g. if such 'lost territories' become havens for criminals or terrorists with a potential to threaten global security and economic interests, the major powers may (G13 - The Big Thirteen) intervene. When they do so, it is almost always through 'facipulating' regional bodies or individual countries within the region to act as their proxy by intervening with subsequent engagement and support of institutions such as the World Bank's 'Rapid Stabilization and Recovery Unit' – in media reports often nicknamed 'SEALS in a suit'.


**World economy**
The world economy continues to grow but significant growth is primarily taking place in Asia, parts of Latin America and in select countries in Africa and the Middle East. Europe and North America as a whole have experienced several years of slow growth or stagnation and particularly Europe has long struggled to stay at the 'top of the game'. In most parts of the world, the benefits of economic growth are touching an increasing number of people – yet at the same time, wealth is increasingly unevenly distributed within the population of many countries and regions. This trend continues

to deepen as deregulation and a highly competitive and globalised capitalism shifts capital, production and jobs around the globe in a continued chase after higher profit margins. Governments are increasingly working hand in hand with the private sector and they are less and less concerned with fair trade, democratic governance and addressing issues of inequality. As a result, frustration with lack of influence, poverty and inequality continues to surface in a number of countries or specific marginalised parts of countries or cities across the globe. So far though, such eruptions of social unrest and violence have been relatively localised and limited in time and geography and such eruptions are yet to spread more widely and take on more coordinated globalised forms.

Generally speaking, the East has had its problems as well. China had a few years with rather meagre growth rates after the Chinese housing bubble burst some eight years ago. This coincided with and was fuelled by a wave of social unrest resulting from a central decision to move (more or - more often - less - voluntary) almost a 250 million people from rural to urban areas over a short time span but faster than new job opportunities and urban planning and building could absorb.. India saw declining growth rates 10 years ago and it undertook a major reform of its public and much of the private sectors in order to the get the Indian economy up and running at full steam.

Global financial institutions such as The World Bank and IMF today play lesser roles regarding soft loans and limited financial help to developing countries. The Davos World Economic Forum, through its permanent secretariat, plays a significant role on leading and combining private and public efforts to save and restructure many of the worlds' fragile or threatened economies. Key to their action is the very direct role now played by a number of large transnational corporations working in cooperation with relevant governments and international institutions. Davos has met in Switzerland in February and its second annual meeting, in Sao Paolo, is coming up shortly. Brazil heads a permanent coordination committee composed of CEOs from the world's largest 25 transnational financial corporations and Ministers of Finance from the G13 countries. Working hand-in-hand with the Davos Permanent Secretariat this committee is able to take very quick and decisive action when faced with local, regional or global financial crises.

Economic rivalry continuous to be intense between most countries in the world, but at the same time the world has never been as interconnected and interdependent as today. This is true at the level of the major transnational corporations where economic

rivalry is filtered through and by an understanding of interdependency and cultural openness harboured in many individuals – high and low. Professionally, people work together across time zones, different languages and religious or other cultural differences, as this is a simple necessity – and a crucial competitive parameter - for any business with ambitions beyond its national confines. At a personal level, but only in the advanced and advancing economic countries, interconnectedness is being propelled by a host of different 'Beyond Facebook' social media channels and networks, which – although often regulated by national authorities – almost makes a truth of the catch phrase of the latest internet giant U-ME: 'Nobody is more than three clicks away'.

The impact of this increased 'interconnectedness' also has seriously negative effects. Not least in countries deeply divided along class, ethnic and religious cleavages, where new media 'hate speech' – in its most abusive forms referred to as a 'digital necklace' - to some extend co-exists with and intertwine with actual violence in the streets.

That is, of course, unless the person you're looking for lives in a 'lost territory' or the few other parts of the world more sparsely hooked into the global info stream. Several countries in the Middle East and Africa are experiencing a modest but steady urban and rural economic growth and are in varying degree part of both the increasing economic interdependency and the interconnectedness. But some 25 countries worldwide remain marginal to and largely detached from the global economy. Here the majority of people survive - or succumb - on a hand-to-mouth day-to-day basis. In a dozen of cases you can speak of entire 'lost countries' but in many others only specific areas and parts of bigger cities appear as 'lost territories'.

**Demography**
There are 8.1 billion people in today's world. That is almost half a billion more than expected by the UN World Population Prospect from 2010. UN officials had particularly underestimated population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa and overestimated the toll of victims from HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Sub-Saharan population grew from 830 million in 2010 to 1.2 billion today and is expected to reach 2.1 billion in 2050. In Nigeria for example, the population has grown from 160 million in 2010 to 240 million today (2025) and is expected to reach 440 million by 2050 – and potentially a staggering 900 million before the turn of the next century.

As 400 million Africans are fifteen or younger, education, child nutrition, youth unemployment and eventually the ability of marrying and forming a family continue to be major social and development problems facing Sub-Saharan countries.

Generally, demography is a particular problem in the least developed parts of the world. In these parts of Asia, Latin America and in major parts of Sub-Saharan Africa population control is again becoming an important but contested challenge making it increasingly important to find more sustainable balances between population and available resources.

In the rest of the world, demographic developments have been more stable. China's population peaked a year ago. Indian population growth is faster, and India will surpass China as it expected to reach 1.5 billion inhabitants in 2029. The populations of Europe and Japan are shrinking, but with increased migration to northern Europa and particularly to Germany, populations are expected to begin growing again slowly in EU. The US seems headed towards a population of 400 million as it celebrated reaching 350 million inhabitants earlier in the year.


**Culture, ideology, values, and religion**
As economic rivalry takes priority, global, regional and even national governance are becoming weaker in some parts of the world. But the increased interdependency and connectedness is constantly creating new links and networks often replacing older inter-state 'governance' structures. The UN and other global bodies have gradually been reduced to mere 'talk-shops' where action only occurs if there happens to be a sufficient overlap of economic and security interests of the G13 powers and large corporations. Moral, cultural, religious or ideological values are still used - and misused – by governments and inter-state bodies at the rhetorical level (media and image management) but in reality such values matter little in the on-going global power struggles.

On the whole, values, other than a firm belief in continued economic growth as fundamental necessity for modern life, are not being genuinely promoted by the prevailing powers. On the contrary, it is basically left to value-based interest groups in civil society and to organized religion to uphold and promote positions and values such as protecting the future of our children and grandchildren, concepts about the duty to care for creation, opposition to non-renewable energy and unsustainable consumption, emphasis on a stable and predictable world, equality, justice or peace.

In an ever more confusing and competitive world, culture and religion have become more important to many individuals as they search for a unique identity, personal direction and some sort of 'moral compass' in confusing and fiercely competitive

societies. Some faiths – or rather certain sections within most faiths - adapt to present day needs, but others are insisting on looking to the past for guidance and direction - often resisting and demonizing change in traditions as morally corrupt and religiously unacceptable.

As long as they do not challenge fundamental power balances, space for value-based and religious organisations has grown, and in some instances dialogue and cooperation between different faiths and ideological groupings have transpired and step in where states and inter-state bodies fail. Particularly faith communities, based on their local community rootedness but also mastering of social media, possess an ability to maintain and even expand this 'operational space'. Faith communities often play a particularly crucial role as active agents advocating for structural change in countries where the space for civil society may otherwise be limited or under pressure. However, faith-based organisations can also be the source of conflict rather than promoters of tolerance and dialogue.

The increased popular role and importance of religion and ideology has also led to an increase in intolerance, fundamentalism and situations where religion, ideology and identity are used to set one population group apart - or up against - another group – often with horrific human suffering and loss of life involved. To some extend this may happen when governments and politicians prefer to encourage horizontal inequalities in order to exasperate conflict between people of different ethnic and/or faith background as a way to avoid unrest unsettling vertical hierarchies (class, corrupt governments and other elites).

**Information Technology**
Information technology continues to leap forward and technologies of all kinds drive economic growth. As global governance has weakened decentralized solutions to technological and organisational challenges are in general preferred to more centralized approaches. Customers increasingly prefer commercial IT platforms to more state controlled solutions with China as one of the few exceptions. But even the Chinese Government has to some extend had to bring down part of the digital wall, which was tightened after the big property market bubble burst in most of urban China some eight years ago.

Mobile communications, concentrating around the big five competing social networks, continue to grow in importance, including in rural areas previously perceived to be too poor. Africa, for instance, is the fastest-growing cell phone market in the world,

growing at an estimated rate of 20 percent per year since 2007. This has become a crucial and often defining feature of how civil society is organised and doing its business - locally and globally. Conversely, it has also enabled armed groups and rebels to 'overcome their collective action and coordination problems' translating to more organised violent conflict and terrorism, across geographically distant locations. It has also resulted in enhanced in-group cooperation and cohesion.

Commercial interests and powerful states invest heavily in monitoring, restricting and often manipulating these networks. At the same time, the sheer volume of communication on a multitude of platforms makes this a formidable challenge. For a wide range of civil society activists (as well as criminal and terrorist groupings) continuously adapting and tweaking technologies to outsmart the control and manipulation of commercial and state interests has become a fundamental survival strategy.

Some still use the old phrase 'cyber war' for this situation. But the younger the person, the more likely you are to basically see this as just a given part of modern society. It's like gaming, just more serious. The ability to swim, navigate, compete in the 'digital deep sea' and yet maintain a degree of privacy around 'your data' has long been one of the most sought after professional competences – as it is for anybody who wants to preserve a degree of privacy and independence at a personal level.

Censorship – or 'necessary regulation' as state and commercial interest would usually call it – has grown in ways, which few could foresee. Big tech companies, in tandem with states, are heavily engaged in more or less overt 'regulating' (censoring) of the services and platforms offered to their customers in for instance the US and in many eastern and southern countries. In parts of the 'Old Western Europe' regulation may appear less direct but in reality is accompanied by a heavy on-going monitoring of all digital communication.

In the last ten years the 'Loony Project' (originally started by Google some 10 years ago, but since 2017 co-owned with Brazilian, Chinese and Korean companies) has managed to set up helium-balloon Internet routers over most of the planet's remoter areas. Along with cables and antennas, digital services can be accessed in the most remote places on earth. This coupled with the growth in the production and marketing of cheap smart phones, mobile networks dropping connectivity costs, and development actors promulgating tech options, has served to make 85 percent of the world, even the poorer parts, connected. Equally important, mobile banking is now a

part of the everyday reality and possibility of millions of new users and customers across the world.

The 'Free the Net' movement is today one of the strongest civil movements with a near-global reach. They remain consistent in pushing for not just free access to the Internet, but also more active local community involvement in improving their neighbourhoods on a range of issues.

Emerging from the remnant of yesteryears' Wikileaks and Pirate Bay, and joining up with organisations in informal settlements in an increasing number of cities across the globe, 'Free the Net' continues to delicately balance between concrete action, hugely popular campaigns for local social-economic reform and - at times - a continued taste and talent for rather unorthodox and subversive use of information. From its HQ in the rather ungovernable parts of Caracas, 'Free the Net' can count on support and funding from both an astonishing number of benefitting individuals in informal settlements - and a surprising number of corporate supporters from across the world.

**Energy technology**
Energy continues to be a crucial factor for basic living conditions in both rural and urban environments. With no serious global commitment to more sustainable energy, it is left to all and none. Black, brown and green energy is used in a world where short and medium term economic interests dominate. Global $CO_2$ emissions continue to rise at rates climate activists and many scientists call 'alarming' and 'suicidal'. Shale-gas - along with nuclear and green energy - has resulted in North America and parts of Europe becoming increasingly independent of Middle East oil supply.

At the same time, small and relatively cheap and easy to maintain sun and wind based power units have led to nothing short of a revolution in many villages and other previously neglected rural and poor urban areas. Communities took advantage of this access to cheap, sustainable energy along with cheap mobile communications to gain significant independence from central and local authorities. They are increasingly organising themselves around services and issues usually provided (or at least expected to be provided) by national or local authorities, resulting in better access to education, health, information, livelihoods and participation in local, national and even global debates. Further, owing to this empowerment, communities are also holding national and local leaders to a higher standard of accountability and legitimacy, and getting involved in their governance. A lower threshold of tolerance for poor

governance accompanies this.

This development continues to increase the independence from government and local traditional power structures for rural farmers and small business owners in many parts of the World. Africa and remote parts of Latin America and Asia have experienced profound changes on this account. The new technologies have given access to power and water to so many farmers that an unprecedented agricultural boom is being witnessed in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa – particulalrly where water shortages have not (yet) put a brake on these improvements.

Women in general have also profited from these advances. The access to cheap, sustainable energy along with cheap mobile communication has contributed to greater access to information, and enhanced knowledge on agriculture, crop prices and markets for farmers, of whom women comprise the majority. This learning potential has improved farming techniques and productivity, as well as, child and adult education.

These leaps in technology have, however, been very moderate in the 'lost territories'. Where technology has been introduced it is often controlled by local warlords or criminal gangs. They basically try to restrict any use of new or old technology to what suits their own purposes. In many cases armed gangs either steal or 'tax' produce made with irrigation. Destroyed or broken solar panels and small wind turbines dot the landscape of their little 'fiefdoms' - leaving ordinary people with no taste of the progress happening in other parts of the world. To the extent that such local criminal groups do prioritize access to Internet and communication it is primarily used to improve the effectiveness of the oft-criminal activities underpinning their power.

**Climate Change and environmental issues**
With no backing for an effective global CO2 agreement, climate change is getting worse. Still, an abundance of new decentralised green energy along with new technology reducing CO2 emission from fuel-based energy has had some positive impact. That notwithstanding, there has been a worsening of CO2 induced climate change. From many parts of the world, a rise in average temperatures and increasingly frequent 'freak weather' (storms, floods, droughts, heat or cold waves) occurrences are reported and unpredictable weather has a significant 'loss and damage' impact on almost everyone's life. For farmers life will be more difficult and especially more unpredictable. In specific areas and at specific times, climate related

changes will impact local or even regional food production very negatively.

Importantly, new sources of locally produced green energy have contributed to a minimal reduction in the use of firewood. Energy-related deforestation has abated in many parts of the world. However, development-related deforestation has risen unchecked, particularly in the global South. Additionally, the fierce economic rivalry both globally and locally, has intensified the battle over natural resources and their exploitation. This, along with the marked effects of climate change is exhausting many environments – to the point of making more and more areas uninhabitable. In several 'lost territories' particularly severe and prolonged droughts and floods along with a complete lack of adaptation have accelerated this process faster and worse than in the rest of the world.

Timber rights, hydroelectric plants and the access to water play an important role in 2025. Some parts of Africa – but also Asia and Latin America – experience intense conflicts over land and land grabbing. As legal rights to the land are often hard to prove, poorer communities are rapidly losing the battle over land with the local elites, governments and local and international business. Land is leased or sold to foreign or local elite-run companies on an almost unimaginable scale. Too often, government officials and business tycoons immediately pocket money from these deals and these deals hardly make any contribution to the living conditions in the local areas. In 2021 such developments led a newly elected government in an East African country to nullify all such the leases and sales of land to foreigners as such deals had left 40% of the country's arable land essentially in the hands of foreigners. As a string of local and international court cases related to this event are still open, the world is yet to see if such sales and leases can actually be nullified – and if yes this might prompt a diminished foreign appetite for investing in Africa's agricultural sector.

**Food, water and other natural resources**
New, cheap and decentralised energy has promoted rural development in an unprecedented manner. It has also promoted farming productivity and local food production in many areas, through investments made by local and global development organisations and partners.

In spite of this, proper nutrition remains a challenge for all at a global level. In the 25 or so completely stagnant economies and in the so-called 'lost territories' such positive development is hampered by violent conflict, disasters and general insecurity

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and uncertainty. In these and some slightly better off countries, rampant land grabbing by the ruling elite allied with foreign corporations and states has resulted in cycles of hunger or famine-like crises in good farming areas where large commercial plantations produce and immediately export their production.

Decreasing access to land has very negative consequences for especially pastoralist communities – disliked as they often are by governments and neighbouring farming or urbanising communities. But also other rural communities struggle to hold on to land, which were traditionally theirs. Small and large scale and acquisitions take place in order to make way for large state sponsored – or at least sanctioned - projects such as industrial farming, planned and unplanned urban expansion, new industrial zones, major road systems, dams and airports.

Aggravating the situation is the fact that access to water is paramount to anyone wanting to cultivate the land or extract minerals and other resources. Water is increasingly a source of conflict as for instance parts of the Middle East and North Africa constantly balance on the brink of major crisis and outright war between several nations, and within nations between different ethnic and religious groups. Much is therefore being invested in developing large-scale desalination projects in parts of the region, making it possible to extract water for human consumption.

Pollution as a result of unsustainable extractive industries and lack of treatment of waste are leaving a dramatically increasing number of areas barren or so polluted that if production is continued, the produce is unsafe for human consumption.

Pollution and genetically engineered food have given rise to a host of chronic diseases. Elite all over the world are demanding for safe food, often grown under stringent conditions in controlled areas, at exorbitant prices that are beyond the reach of the middle to lower class and the poorest.


**Disasters and migration**
Complex emergencies and disasters are growing in number and scale triggered by local armed conflicts, and natural calamities such as earth shifts, cyclones, droughts and floods.. The so-called 'lost territories' experience the worst emergencies and here conflicts and natural disasters often collide to produce protracted (even seemingly endless) crises with massive human suffering and chronic lack of development and progress.

Intensified crises from these areas often produce high numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees. Increasingly, countries forced to accept refugees elaborate their own administrative interpretation of refugee law and international legal instruments, resulting in extreme restrictions and conditions for refugees. Assistance to people in need is dominated by a multitude of local, professional and voluntary entities along with a varying presence of international humanitarian actors and a growing number of private companies specialised in emergency assistance delivery (some – but not all of these – are in fact commercialized versions of major INGOs and UN agencies). In many crises these actors are working alongside or are being closely supervised and regulated by national armed forces and security organs or warlords and local militia.

In addition to internal migration caused by complex emergencies, climate change and disasters, is internal urban-rural migration in as an alternative to harsh conditions in urban peripheries. The world is also witnessing a sharp rise in international labor migration. Not least South-South migration within specific regions of the world (Central, South and South-East Asia) where the cost of mobility is lower, but also migration further away. For example, from Asia to the Gulf countries or to African growth economies; or from an African 'lost territory' to a better placed African country.

Lack of land caused by real and expected sea level rise has led to countries like Bangladesh attempting to purchase og lease, on near-permanent conditions, land in Africa thus ensuring one way to 'export' parts of a increasingly unsustainable population in a country with a 'shrinking' land area.

Small in numbers but still of note, is also the growing North-South migration in a bid to reclaim safe food and a kind of quality of life that has long been lost in the global North – a fact that has only gotten worse over the last decade.

The number of international labor migrants has almost doubled since 2012 to an astounding 400 million people today. The remittances sent back to developing countries (already 7-8 times the total global ODA back in 2010) has a huge impact on developing countries' economies and is at the individual and family level an important contributor to better education and health care coverage.

**Developing countries' self-help potential and the growth of a local middle class**

'Self-help potential' has increased in most developing countries including: increasing local food production; building infrastructure and markets for local production and products; and improving local service provision. In some of these countries, resources are more evenly distributed among the population. The self-help potential in cases of natural disasters and general development of rural and urban production of goods and services has improved markedly.

A new, small-scale private enterprise driven 'self-help/self-development' trend is a major force for change in many developing societies and countries. The easy access to sustainable and cheap energy, along with affordable mobile communication and banking is a major driver for this new 'micro-mega trend'. But people don't stop at only helping themselves. A growing number of middle class families try to support their own disaster-affected family and friends. Local farming and small industry is stimulated by decentralised power production. Pumps, small machinery and local autonomy help new production and create good local economies. Remittances from family members who 'made it' in the cities are a crucial driver for this local development. However, there are concerns that the longer people live in cities and overseas and join the growing middle class, they will lose culture and values, including forgetting their 'cousins' back home who need their financial support.

Women play a pivotal role in the creation of this new self-help potential. Generally speaking, women tend to maximise resources no matter the amount, and their instincts to nurture ensure better education and opportunities for their children.

Still, the growth of a local middle class does not mean that poverty at a national and global level is gone. A large proportion of the growing middle class, especially the young, have become more apathetic and consumerist, perhaps encouraged by the media. They have no family or friends among the poor. All in all there are relatively speaking fewer poor people - but many of those who do not make it into the emerging middle classes are worse off, more helpless and marginalised than ever. Moderate improvements in rural areas have also created a bigger divide between the haves and the have-nots. Migration to bigger cities has not stopped – just declined a bit. In Africa the demographic changes and the fast growing populations create bigger numbers of poor people living in the cities increasing the number of informal settlements. For many – especially recent arrivals - city life is no a better life than

that of a poor citizen in the rural areas but plans, hopes and dreams of better opportunities still drive people towards towns and cities.

## Gender – a game changer

The growth of the middle class to a significant economic, and in some regions, political force, has some important gender characteristics. Some have even gone as far as to call these developments the third women's liberation wave in history.

As the middle class grew, girls accessed education in larger numbers and women sought greater economic autonomy from male relatives. This path to autonomy has been accelerated through education. However, for the poor it has mainly been through setting up of small to medium size businesses. The 'telephone ladies' of Bangladesh, the 'market mamas' of West Africa and women in the textile industry of Cambodia were among the first visible signs of the liberation process. In addition, women small-scale farmers have asserted their right to: equal access to and ownership of land, including inheritance rights; capacity building and training that is modelled to suit their multiple roles and responsibilities; women-sensitive access to credit and other agricultural inputs; and markets and competitive prices. This has catalysed an unprecedented agricultural boom, as women comprise an estimated 85 percent of farmers. Further, small-scale businesses and payment transfers today involve many women around the developing world, who work in a variety of sectors and small-scale business and manufacturing.

Women's most important priorities in development are on generating their own income and controlling said income. An increasing number of women worldwide are demanding recognition of their rights as human beings –over their bodies and their minds. This 'third wave' of women's liberation has touched Asia and Latin America in a big way, and is unfolding in parts of the Middle East and Africa.

Gender as a driver of change is specific to each cultural-religious region or area. Women in Africa have different cultural and historical reference points than women in the Arab world, Latin America or South/South-East Asia. Each region and country has seen its own pattern of gender change. In the Middle Eastern context things accelerated with the women of Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab uprising in 2011-12. In India around the same time, women and many younger men began to campaign publicly against the contempt for women being expressed in rape and wife killing. In Africa, concerted efforts against the rising sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict and non-conflict countries; and efforts to secure women's access to and

control of land and other productive resources in a move to improve food security catalysed it.

A lot of the efforts to create development and better living conditions for the poorest in the world still focus on women as an important driving force for improvement – both enhancing their self-help potential and helping with advocacy for gender rights. All these developments have triggered changing gender roles in the family, and to a gradually more equal partnership between man and wife.

Women's strategy for a better life often goes in other directions and finds other paths and means than that of men. And younger men often feel liberated, too, by the less traditional gender roles in modern families. Men's reputation for being willing to share the responsibility for bread winning and to behave responsibly to their families has grown because of this change in gender roles. This also means that families are able to save and pursue education, wealth and security, for both parents and children.

However, not all changes have been for the better. The proportion of single men in China and India has continued to grow as a result of the one child policy of China and the selection of sex during pregnancy in India. Criminal networks and some women looking for a 'quick' solution are exploiting this through forced or pre-arranged marriages between Chinese and Indian single men, and women from poorer countries in the neighbouring region. In its worst form, this has led to a very significant trafficking of women and girls – a mix of forced prostitution and forced 'bride export'. Further, a failure to locate women's empowerment within gender reconciliation; and the emasculation of men that has accompanied women's empowerment in some instances, has contributed to a rise in abusive marriages and families, separation, divorce and a crisis of masculinities.

**Poverty**
From 1990 to 2010 the number of poor people living under 1.25 US $ a day fell from 1.9 billion to 1.2 billion. Since then, the world has seen a further reduction in the number of poor but no accurate figures are available as of yet. A decade ago, a group of researchers foresaw that, bringing the last billion out of poverty would be more difficult than going from 2 to 1 billion. China was the major player in the first big wave of poverty eradication. But now, in the midst of the second wave, India and Africa are main areas of focus. India has to some degree achieved a similar development to China. But in Africa results are very diverse with, on the one hand, a  number of

countries doing well and creating a distinct role for themselves in the global economy, and then, on the other hand, a group of 'lost states and territories' experiencing declining living conditions for almost all - including the very poor. Somewhere in between, and scattered across the globe, are a good number of countries which have not descended into the chaos of the 'lost territories', yet they are largely bypassed by global developments and not well integrated into the larger world trade.

Ingrained social structures relating to caste and class – particularly in Asia – have kept many people in poverty in countries otherwise experiencing economic growth. While the vulnerable and voiceless seem to be getting more vulnerable and voiceless, more manifestations of their frustration and desperation are seen in terms of protests and direct, sometimes violent, uprisings.

**Education and Health**

The spread of affordable decentralised energy and communication has made school and Internet learning accessible and better, even in more remote areas. What experts call an 'Educational Leap' appears to be building up not only in Asia and Latin America but also in many parts of the Middle East and Africa.

Medical knowledge is – with great variation - more evenly distributed across the world but adequate services and more sophisticated treatments continue to be a privilege for upper and middle class families. The appreciation and utilisation of alternative therapies, many of which have their origin in the global South, continue to grow and often provide an attractive 'bridge' between the more 'natural science' based health care and a number of more spiritual or life style oriented approaches and perspectives on health. Improved local food production has in many areas led to a better nutrition and generally better living standards resulting in reduced morbidity and mortality. This primarily has benefitted the growing upper and middle classes, who on the other now are struggling with diseases such as diabetes and other life style related problems

For those who have little or no share in these improvements, NGOs, faith based and other civil society groups, private sector actors and government donors are engaged with trying to provide rudimentary health services for those in need. Many of the same actors continue to invest heavily in eliminating malaria and other diseases including new diseases responding to climate relates changes in the environment favouring for their spread.

**Civil Society**

Even at a time when 'hard power' appears to be dominated by a limited number of states, state bureaucracies and an increasing number of globalised private enterprises, civil society seems to be growing in both importance, sheer scale and - not least - interconnectedness locally as well as globally. Even if calling this a 'global democratization' would be naïve, in many countries and areas, power structures appear 'flatter' and more tuned to local needs and desires than ever before - due to better education, energy and communication. Shifts in gender roles and particularly the participation of women in this development continue to amaze social science researchers.

In many parts of the world such developments leave significant space for civil society involvement on a wide range of issues – particularly as long as such activities are not seen as a challenge existing power balances and structures. But in a significant number of other countries, authoritarian rule has narrowed the space for civil society at national and local levels considerably. Generally and globally civil society activity is closely monitored – and increasingly – moderated by governmental institutions and regulations and when push comes to shove, prioritising national security and economic interests over democratic and liberal principles (participation, transparency, freedom of speech etc.).

Power structures at local levels (rural villages or urban poor neighbourhoods) are often vibrant but also often in many ways dependent on good will and money from richer family members and high ranking officials and elites living in the more well off parts of urban centres. In parts of the developing world there are extreme cases, where rural areas remain in deep poverty and marginalisation while (often foreign) migrant workers exploit natural resources (oil and minerals) in their vicinity.

While the degree of control and regulations do vary greatly between countries, these developments have resulted in many independent groups of activists (whether focused on labour or land rights, environment, anti-corruption or human and political rights) adopting cutting edge 'hacker' approaches to their digital work style. Often, this is supplemented by old-fashioned 'word-of-mouth', analogue print and 'cell-like' organization and communications strategies. In many countries this has forced genuine independent civil society underground with a semi-legal and in some cases illegal status. Other NGOs have allowed themselves to be more or less co-opted by

governments - thus 'protecting' a limited public 'operational space' but at the price of genuine independence.

In the 'lost territories' and a number of 'grey zone' countries, civil society in many different old and new forms is active, yet struggle to get formal acceptance and real influence with shifting and often dictatorial power holders.

Faith based entities in many countries and in some 'lost territories' play a crucial role as bridge builders between different parts of the civil society. Faith based groups may also serve as a last resort 'save haven' for civil society activists as some of these groups have understood how to make the most of their locally rooted moral authority, their ability to advocate and communicate both locally and globally - and at the same time secure funds both locally and internationally.


**Foreign Aid and development Aid**
Foreign aid continues to undergo profound change. On one hand, traditional foreign aid and investments by private foundations have been instrumental in promoting the spread of decentralised sustainable energy, communications and not least sharing of knowledge and new ideas and values in developing countries.

On the other hand, as 'home grown' self-help continues to grow and take even more institutionalised forms and as the global power and economic balance is shifting more and more away from the traditional 'big donors', the importance of foreign aid is rapidly diminishing. In a good number of previously so called 'developing countries' – including several with impressive economic growth – regulation and monitoring of foreign aid activities are getting ever tougher. Policy and priority disagreements between old, traditional development donors and traditional 'receivers' are increasingly frequent - and increasingly polarised and entrenched. In a number of countries this has led to a situation where foreign aid groups either are not tolerated at all or only allowed to channel their assistance through a limited number of government approved local aid actors.

In disasters relief, international agencies continue to play a relatively bigger direct or indirect role. But also their actions are based more and more on models where 'outside expert help' and external funding is seen as a support and supplement to the self-help potential of the local government institutions and local civil society actors.

Changes in aid and particularly in fundraising for aid have been profound over the last 10-12 years. Dramatic reductions in governmental aid along with significant changes in preference and behavior of many private donors (individual or corporate) have opened up for a very wide range of new aid actors while many old INGOs and UN agencies have reduced or completely disappeared. Fundraising, advocacy and building of networks and cooperation between specific interest groups, 'community to community' cooperation and support is primarily mediated through the Internet and often have both local and global dimensions and subsections with decentralized 'self-governance'.

Some of the few 'old' INGOs, which so far have survived this transformation, now play a crucial role in establishing and guiding contact, communication and funding flows between specific 'interest groups' across countries, continents and cultures. Such assisted but self-governing 'global interest groups' varies hugely in size and themes and they are form around a huge number of issues and special interests such as gender activisms, diabetes mutual support and learning networks, human rights, climate activism, urban reconstruction/improvement or for instance virtual communities of dedicated coffee consumers and coffee farmers across the globe.

A renowned African blogger, social commentator and – not to forget - former UN Secretary General, in 2017 used a bit of a contradiction in terms to describe this phenomenon as a new 'responsible collective individualism' – and called it 'possibly mankind's only real hope for the future'.