

Introducing *What Next*

The world at the beginning of the 21st century is deeply contradictory. There is among many an increasing disaffection with the state of humanity and a growing concern about the unprecedented damage being done to Planet Earth. At the same time, there are numerous examples, at different levels of society, of actions for positive change. In order to analyse the present situation and what we may be facing in the future, and to propose bold and innovative alternatives to the predominant development trajectory, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation has, over the past few years, devoted considerable attention and energy to the *What Next* project. This issue of *Development Dialogue* introduces the project as the first in a series of publications.



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Drawing on the Foundation's four decades of work in the field of development, the *What Next* project aims to contribute to the much-needed discussion about crucial issues in the next few decades. Under this initiative a diverse group of concerned people – civil society activists, academics, media representatives, national and international policymakers and civil servants – has come together to engage in intense debate and dialogue. *What Next* is a sequel, roughly 30 years later, to the Foundation's *What Now* project, which culminated in the 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report *What Now: Another Development* and the monograph *Another Development: Approaches and Strategies* (1976). The Report was launched as an independent contribution to the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Development and International Cooperation. With a print run of 100,000 copies in six languages, the Report came to play a significant role in the development debate during the following years.

What Now introduced the concept of 'Another Development', which advocated a different content and direction for development. It proposed a set of principles for alternatives to the established order and for the reformation of international relations and the United Nations system. Since the Report was published, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation has consistently explored and elaborated on alternative development perspectives in seminars and publications. The *What Now* Report was envisaged as a 'tribute to the man, who more than any other, gave the United Nations the authority which the world needs more than ever' – Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN Secretary-General 1953–1961 and one of the last century's most remarkable international leaders.

The year 2005 marked the centenary of the birth of Dag Hammarskjöld, during which much international attention was given to his life and work. New material about Hammarskjöld was presented and assessed adding to already existing knowledge. A more complete picture is beginning to emerge of a person with an exceptional background in the field of economics, international law and international negotiations, which he used to stretch the established limits for diplomatic action and create new ways and means of handling international crises. His famous speech in 1954 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York comes to mind: ‘In modern international politics – aiming toward that world of order which now more than ever seems to be the only alternative to disruption and disaster – we have to approach our task in the spirit which animates the modern artist. We have to tackle our problems without the armour of inherited convictions or set formulas, but only with our bare hands and all the honesty we can muster. And we have to do so with an unbreakable will to master the inert matter of patterns created by history and sociological conditions.’ It is our hope that the *What Next* project’s critical scrutiny of the predominant development path and the alternatives proposed bear the stamp of such a spirit.



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The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the What Next project

The Foundation that Dag Hammarskjöld gave name to was established in 1962. Hammarskjöld, who perished the previous year in a plane crash in Northern Zambia, died while negotiating peace in the troubled Congo. He was guided by the notion that small countries, especially those that had just emerged from wars of independence and decolonisation, should be able to assert their interests vis-à-vis the major powers and build their own future and destiny. As a way of commemorating Dag Hammarskjöld and his quest for a more just, humane and peaceful world, the Foundation has, since the time of *What Now*, explored workable development alternatives.

Believing in the power of ideas and in free and frank discussion among concerned individuals, the Foundation has, over the years, organised more than 200 seminars on a wide range of development issues. In areas spanning global health policy, indigenous publishing and cross-cultural communication as well as disarmament, UN reform, plant genetic resources and nanotechnology, the Foundation has sought to question established approaches where they have been deemed deficient and attempted to foster broad-based debates on new and viable perspectives. The results of these explorations of social, political, eco-

conomic and cultural development – particularly in the South but also globally – have been made available to the public in more than 150 publications, including the journal *Development Dialogue*.¹

Thirty years after *What Now* – in a world that has changed in many ways – there is a need to take stock of the past and look ahead. What has gone wrong with the world in the last 30 years? What has gone right? What global possibilities and challenges may we be facing during the next 30 years if the present trends persist? What are the roles of the state, of civil society and of other social forces in countering damaging trends and forging a more just and equitable world?

With a view to probing such questions, the Foundation has tapped the network it has built up over the years and brought together a diverse and dedicated group of people to exchange ideas and experiences. Meetings and seminars have been held in the midst of the bustling World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on the farm and training centre of the Indian scholar-activist Vandana Shiva in the foothills of the Himalayas, and at the Foundation's own, tranquil, wooden mansion, Geijersgården, in Uppsala, Sweden, to mention a few places.²

Throughout the process, there has been a significant presence of civil society actors. Already in the discussions following the launching of *What Now*, the 'Third System' – or 'the Citizen' – was strongly emphasised as one of the three prime movers of development, the other two being the Prince (the state) and the Merchant (business). Since then civil society has emerged as a more powerful force, not just within nation states but globally as well. The 1990s saw the rise of transnational, global justice and pro-democracy social movements that provided compelling critiques of the prevailing development model. The *What Next* project has aimed to include these views by involving representatives from a broad range of civil society groups. It has sought to build on the knowledge generated through existing initiatives and to stimulate cross-fertilisation and synergism among them. Among the Foundation's many different projects, *What Next* represents the most extensive exploration of the role of civil society actors.

While most of the participants are linked to institutions, organisations or movements, they have participated in the process in their personal capacity. In the pursuit of common ground, participants have chal-

1 An overview of the Foundation's seminar projects and downloadable publications can be found at www.dhf.uu.se.

2 The list of participants in and contributors to the *What Next* project is found in Appendix 1.

lenged each other and exposed contradictions, disagreements and divergent points of view. The *What Next* project, therefore, has not aimed for a watered down consensus on each and every issue, or for any kind of monolithic blueprint, but rather to bring to the fore the many vibrant and crucial debates and the possible future directions that need to be considered.

What Next publications

The *What Next* discussions and deliberations are compiled in the following publications:

What Next Volumes I – III

Three collections of thematic papers. These contributions to the *What Next* project both serve as stand-alone pieces and provide material that feeds into the *What Next* Report (see below). The first of these volumes is presented in this edition of *Development Dialogue*. Summaries of the articles are found at the end of the volume.

The second volume will extend the analysis, begun in this volume, of global developments in the last 30 years and of current and future trends in such diverse areas as media and communications, multilateralism and international relations, religious, political and economic fundamentalisms, human rights and the politics of disability. A number of the articles take as their starting point local and indigenous perspectives.

The third volume will focus specifically on the field of economics. Contributions will include a questioning of the hegemony of neo-classical theory and neo-liberal policy-making, a reassessment of international and national social contracts in the light of globalisation, and an examination of the limitations of and alternatives to contemporary economics education. It will also explore new economic frameworks both at the local and international levels.

Special reports

In addition, there are two longer special reports in preparation. The first report focuses on carbon trading, which is currently pursued as the major approach to tackling climate change. It analyses the problems arising from the emerging global carbon market pertaining to the environment, social justice and human rights, and investigates new climate mitigation alternatives. The report, moreover, serves as a case study in which a number of the problems discussed within the *What Next* project come together, as well as a platform for the consolidation of a movement for climate justice.

The second special report examines modern society's deep-seated reliance on technology to tackle social problems. It explores how 'technology waves' have been created historically and whose interests they have served. The report also looks at government's and industry's strategies for technological convergence in the decades ahead and the implications of emergent technologies for the planet and its people.

The What Next Report



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The *What Next* Report summarises the major debates and critical issues raised in the *What Next* process. The Report approaches these issues in an unconventional manner: starting with a careful analysis of current political, corporate and technological trends, it expounds a plausible scenario of what the future may look like over the coming 30 years. Will the world find itself on an irreversible trajectory towards continued environmental destruction, massive inequity, and social unrest and insecurity? What will it take in the way of political will and popular power to prompt the policy shifts that can make another, more humane world possible? Without being naively utopic, what societal changes can we reasonably hope for?

Such a forward-looking exploration, the *What Next* group insists, is urgent. There are many difficulties ahead and it is critical to engage in longer-term reflection before making decisions or closing options. As this exploratory approach cannot presume to forecast future developments with any exactitude, the first part of the Report, 'What's Ahead?', is written as a fictional scenario. The group also found the fictional mode attractive for its capacity to convey facts and circumstances in ways that stir the imagination. This part is followed by an analytical section, which makes the connections between real world developments and the 2005–2035 scenario. The final part of the Report, 'What If?', outlines – also in the form of scenarios – more optimistic futures and ways in which these may be realised.

What's Ahead? A 'business as usual' scenario

In the first part of the Report, the 2005–2035 scenario, China shares superpower status with the USA and the EU, and has metamorphosed into a multi-party 'democracy'. In Beijing, an investigative journalist unravels the increasingly intricate connections between state and corporate agendas. The world is slipping only half-consciously into the cross-currents of changing climates, converging pandemics and new technologies, compounded by corporate corruption and civil myopia and mediocrity.

The scenario depicts a world where there is increasing reliance on technological quick fixes to solve pressing problems. Instead of attacking the root causes of these problems – multiple forms of injustice, unsustainable lifestyles and the blind faith in economic growth – powerful nations have, among other things, opted for uncertain ‘geo-engineering’ technologies to mitigate the effects of global warming. Governments and corporations work closely together to urge public acceptance of nano-technological strategies in the stratosphere and on the ocean’s surface that alter currents and climates. These schemes, however, often have unforeseen impacts on ecosystems and human health, and prove increasingly difficult to control.

The technologies also pose another threat to human security and to the very notion of democracy. The possibility of high-tech weaponry ending up in the hands of small groups has paved the way for an era of even tighter and more ubiquitous surveillance reinforced by increasingly powerful monitoring technologies. The general public is told that in order to defend democracy, restrictions on democracy and the scope for expressing dissent must be imposed. The future, as envisaged in the scenario, is therefore a world of greater insecurity and less individual freedom and privacy.

At the same time, proponents of these new, converging technologies fervently advocate the seemingly limitless possibilities of ‘improving’ biological systems, the human body and nano-machinery. Increasing job competition and new environmental and health stresses lead to the further commodification of the human body as new drugs and therapies for ‘human performance enhancement’ are introduced on the mass market. As more and more people try to ‘enhance’ themselves, the ‘doping’ phenomenon prevalent in sports becomes commonplace, and enhancement products are available in food stores as well as pharmacies. ‘Designer babies’ become a reality, as couples increasingly use genetic screening to decide which babies should survive with what traits. The scenario depicts a humanity that is rapidly becoming ‘two-tiered’ – those who can afford and are willing to ‘enhance’ and those who cannot afford or do not want to. How will humanity respond? Who is ‘normal’ and able, and who is disabled in this new world?

Underlying these technological developments are increasing marketisation, commodification and militarism. Intense competition between existing and emerging powers for market positions, technological dominance, and critical natural resources cause growing geopolitical tensions and conflict. As the problems of over-consumption



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and environmental stress increasingly take their toll, the powerful attempt to preserve their privileges and wealth by building barricades around them and setting themselves apart from the rest of humanity. On the verge of collapse, the world re-learns the sad truth that new technologies can be commercial successes but scientific and human failures.

This scenario may seem bleak and pessimistic, but the *What Next* group argues that it is in fact quite logical and plausible in the light of current technological development and mainstream political approaches to tackling urgent global issues. The pervasive trends outlined are certainly met by acts of resistance in the scenario – however, they do not appear early enough and with sufficient strength to have a significant impact.

What If?

But what if these forces for change did have a significant impact? What if some of these pervasive trends were altered? Societies, and even deep-rooted values and worldviews, change over time. The numerous afflictions described in the scenario above create their own dialectic: in both rich and poor countries, there is growing resistance and a refusal to surrender to these developments. Many actors within civil society, governments and other institutions provide hopeful signs that point to another, more equitable and ecologically sound world. Local initiatives are increasingly being pursued and linked together, weaving a web of global grassroots resilience. What if the destructive trends are halted and more equitable choices take hold, the *What Next* group asked itself. What strategies are most effective to set in motion the processes of change?

The *What If?* part of the Report contains a number of scenarios which focus specifically on civil society action. One scenario looks at local rural resilience and the potential for a global grassroots movement to network into a major force for social change. Another scenario is premised on civil society's capacity to engage in more effective and long-term strategising and to take advantage of decisive moments for mass mobilisation. The scenario illustrates how the confluence of different movements could provide a momentum for social transformation that can hold both governments and corporations more accountable, and alter the current power balance. Yet another scenario starts at the United Nations and the possibility that politically astute, tightly-engaged social actors can utilise the 'soft underbelly' of intergovernmental relations and pivot off complex treaty negotiations to create a new political environment. Once again, the importance of networks

and, also, civil society's persistence and flexibility are emphasised. Here, the scenario argues that 'acting globally' informs and generates 'local' transformations. Each of these stories is independently plausible. Each starts from a different place and benefits from the web of interlocking relationships within civil society around the world.

These *What If?* scenarios are not prescriptive. Within the *What Next* group, there remain differences of opinion and different views on tactics and strategies for the way forward. Ultimately, the goal of the scenarios is to stimulate new ideas and constructive debate that may inspire new thinking and encourage effective organising. The *What Next* group is convinced that social and political movements in collaboration with other actors can turn the tide in favour of positive social change. This is not a pipe dream. A look at history reveals that almost all progressive, equity-enhancing developments, including the end of slavery, decolonisation, the advancement of civil rights, the recognition of women's rights and the victories involving environmental justice, have been, to a considerable extent, the result of popular mobilisation.

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This first *What Next* volume contains seven contributions brought together under the heading 'Setting the Context'. Taking stock of some of the major political, economic and environmental trends of the past decades, the volume provides a historical context and so builds an important basis for the forthcoming *What Next* publications. This his-



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torical survey also comprises reflections on the time in which *What Now* and ‘Another Development’ emerged, revisiting its principles and their relation to the mainstream approach to development today. Moreover, a number of the articles engage, at the conceptual level, in a critical examination of the key assumptions and underpinnings that characterise conventional approaches to politics and development.

In response to the shortcomings of the mainstream framework, the articles in this issue also put forward a set of alternative concepts, ideas and proposals for action. A common thread that runs through the volume is, again, the recognition of the increasingly important role of civil society – as a vital resource for engendering new ideas and solutions and as an agent for progressive change.

Just as the *What Now* team argued 30 years ago, the *What Next* group is convinced both that societies in the world must undergo far-reaching transformation to change the present structures and that this is possible.

It is hoped that the current and forthcoming *What Next* publications provide ideas and proposals that will stimulate ‘development dialogue’ and, in turn, help generate necessary action for change!

The Editors