FORESIGHT FRAMING – MAPPING THE R4D LANDSCAPE

Foresight framing is an essential activity in the preliminary phase of futures and foresight projects. It defines what the project is going to be about; including focal issues, geographical boundaries and stakeholders involved. It examines issues as understood and engaged with from 'inside' a system (and its immediate transactional environment) in the present and short-term future. In doing so it establishes some clarity and boundaries around a 'unit of analysis' for deployment of futures methodologies which have a focus on preparation for external disrupters and enablers and for the longer term. The understanding being that the foresight framing helps to make exploring ideas about futures – that do not exist – a structured and systematic exercise.

In this case the project is all about change and change processes associated with a preferred future for R4D. Therefore, the foresight framing was largely focussed on mapping perspectives and ideas concerning changes in response to challenges and opportunities for R4D, which are current or emergent.

There are many promising ideas and existing initiatives with transformative potential in the present, and it is vitally important to share learnings and build upon them, thinking about how they can be nurtured in ways that help to leverage widespread systemic change. Thus, the focal *issues* selected for the foresight framing were all concerned with what sort of change is taking place now (why, how, where and with whom) and perspectives of what sort of change still needs to happen in order to support transformational development pathways that will meet societal needs. This provides a suitably dynamic reference point for the futures methodologies, from which ideas about anticipating and responding to the longer-term future could evolve, and progressive action plans could be developed.

The underlying premise of the foresight framing exercise was that, whilst R4D has delivered development gains:

- it is associated with multiple areas of concern,
- has failed to reach its potential, and
- needs to transform to meet future societal needs.

There is a need to:

1. address persistent, deeply embedded assumptions, challenges, and inequalities,
2. be resilient to emergent challenges and responsive to opportunities in an increasingly VUCA world, and
3. recognise, nurture, and connect innovative activity for systemic change.

A transformative R4D system will make progress in and across all of these areas.

The foresight framing mapped four categories of 'issues' to help to focus attention on why, where, and how (potentially) transformative change in R4D is and can take place:

1. understandings of persistent R4D challenges/imperatives for change,
2. ways of thinking and doing that underpin transformative change processes,
3. emerging initiatives and trends, and
4. what are the attributes of a transformative R4D system that will nurture innovative activity and systemic change.

The intention was not to attempt to comprehensively cover all aspects of change in the R4D system, there will inevitably be gaps, but rather to provide a prompt for discussion, debate, and questioning.

Outputs from the Mapping Process

1. Perspectives on the needs and priorities for change in R4D systems.

Example of issues relating to persistent problems included the following:

- Exclusion in terms of problem framing, research process, mobilisation of knowledge, evaluation and accountability.
- Lack of delivery against global and national development targets.
- Lack of understanding of enabling conditions for transformative change – including capabilities.
- Anti-evidence/misinformation/disinformation.
- Fragmented and inequitable access to digital technologies.
- Inequitable funding flows/political economy of funding flows.
- Traditional modes of R4D research programming outmoded and constricting.

- Tensions across temporal, geographic and organisational scales.
- Research career incentives misaligned with transdisciplinary approaches and impact focus.

2. New ways of thinking and doing that may underpin transformative change.

- The need to challenge assumptions and established orthodoxy such as:
  - Move beyond ideas of catch-up convergence in the role of research for development.
  - Explore what counts as development research and for whom.
- Make visible and explore the politics of knowledge in the framing, producing, mobilising and quality assuring in R4D.
- Challenge inequalities and surface the power dynamics that shape knowledge production agendas.
- Recognise and engage with critical tensions in R4D, e.g. tensions across spatial, temporal and institutional scales and between excellence and impact agendas.
- Be creative.
- Be reflexive – feedback loops for learning in practice.
- Explore system dynamics, engaging with the need for radical and systemic change in policies, practice, mindsets and behaviour and the co-evolution of incremental and systemic change.

3. Examples of the many emerging promising initiatives and trends.

- Increase focus and appreciation of novel/diverse R4D partnerships and alliances – indigenous knowledge, grassroots innovation, knowledge brokering etc. and on equitable partnerships and process.
- Increased attention to contextually relevant initiatives.
- Support for science systems in and across African nations (e.g. SGCI, DELTAS programmes).
- Decolonising development movements and funder initiatives (e.g. IDRC Decolonising Knowledge Systems).

- Objectives and partnerships focussed on system wide change (e.g., education, infrastructure).
- Increased focus on research demand – building capacity to use research and evidence in policy (e.g. FCDO BCURE).
- Expanding metrics and tools for evaluation – relevance and legitimacy, rigour, process, and positioning for impact (e.g., IDRC RQ+).

Attributes of a transformative R4D system.

The foresight framing focussed on four core interrelated attributes:

1. Open (open science in terms of production and use)
2. Equitable
3. Capable
4. Connected (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Selected insights from the foresight framing/R4D landscape mapping exercise