Future Trends Series - GR:EEN Project

Title of the report

Scenarios for the Future of Technology and International Development

Area

Science and technology

Reporter

The Rockefeller Foundation and Global Business Network

Type of the Reporter

Private Organisation

Periodically updated?

No

First issued year

2010

Latest update

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Official website

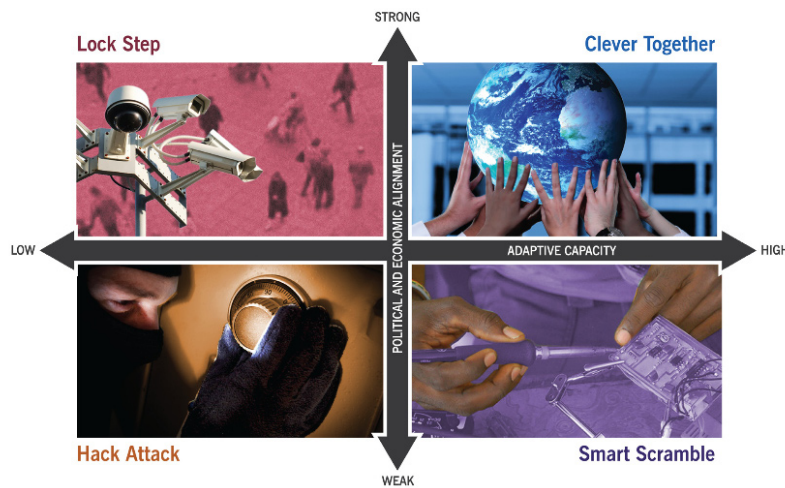http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/

Language available

English

Short summary

The focal question of this project is: "How might technology affect barriers to building resilience and equitable growth in the developing world over the next 15 to 20 years?" Two critical uncertainties have been selected: (i) political and economic alignment; (ii) adaptive capacity. Each of these uncertainties is expressed as an axis that represents a continuum of possibilities ranging between two endpoints. Strong and weak for political and economic alignment; low and high for adaptive capacity. When you cross these uncertainties, these axes create a matrix of four different futures (matrix below can be found on p. 16 of the report):

- "Lock step: a world of tighter top-down government control and more authoritarian leadership, with limited innovation and growing citizen pushback";

- "Clever together: a world in which highly coordinated and successful strategies emerge for addressing both urgent and entrenched worldwide issues";

- "Hack attack: an economically unstable and shock-prone world in which governments weaken, criminals thrive, and dangerous innovations emerge";

- "Smart Cramble: an economically depressed world in which individuals and communities develop localized, makeshift solutions to a growing set of problems".

Lock Step | Clever Together | Hack Attack | Smart Scramble

STRONG — POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ALIGNMENT — WEAK

LOW — ADAPTIVE CAPACITY — HIGH

Key trends

1. The **link between technology and governance** is critical to consider in better understanding how technology could be developed and deployed. In some futures, the primacy of the nation-state as a unit of analysis in development was questioned as both supra- or sub-national structures proved more salient to the achievement of development goals. In other futures, the nation-state's power strengthened and it became an even more powerful actor both to the benefit and to the detriment of the development process, depending on the quality of governance. Technologies will affect governance, and governance in turn will play a major role in determining what technologies are developed and who those technologies are intended, and able, to benefit.

2. **Development work will require different levels of intervention**, possibly simultaneously. In some scenarios, philanthropic organizations and other actors in development face a set of obstacles in working with large institutions, but may face a yet-unfolding set of opportunities to work with nontraditional partners — even individuals. The organization that is able to navigate between these levels and actors may be best positioned to drive success.

3. **The potential value of scenarios** as one critical element of strategy development. These narratives have served to kick-start the idea generation process, build the future-oriented mindset of participants, and provide a guide for ongoing trend monitoring and horizon scanning activities. They also offer a useful framework that can help in tracking and making sense of early indicators and milestones that might signal the way in which the world is actually transforming.

4. **New innovations and uses of technology will be an active and integral part of the international development story going forward.** The changing nature of technologies could shape the characteristics of development and the kinds of development aid that are in demand. In a future in which technologies are effectively adopted and adapted by poor people on a broad scale, expectations about the provision of services could fundamentally shift. Developing a deeper understanding of the ways in which technology can impact development will better prepare everyone for the future, and help all of us drive it in new and positive directions.

Suggestions

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Methodology

Research from secondary sources and in-depth interviews

Reference to other trends reports? If yes, which reports?

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