Deepening Into Who We Are

Report on the AFRICAN FUTURES Regional Scenarios Workshop

Kinigi, Rwanda
March 2025

FUTURE ECOSYSTEMS FOR AFRICA

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EARTH COMMISSION

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Imagine:

1. *The year is 2125, and the sustainability transformation has been achieved. Human communities and the ecosystems they are part of are thriving across both land and water. Nature has recovered, and the resources people need are shared equitably between individuals and communities. From outside the window you're seated next to, you can hear something pleasant. What is it? Perhaps children playing, passing animals, or wind rustling through plants? What do you see when you look outside: terraced farms, windmills, mudbrick houses, a city of vines climbing up wooden apartment buildings? Where are the people, and what are they doing? Where are you, and what are you doing?*

2. *You have received a communication from the authorities responsible for time travel. We have always been time travelers: not only because we cannot resist moving forward into our future, but because we cannot resist imagining what we might meet there. We look forward to our leisure and our errands next Saturday, we construct expectations about when the train will arrive or how the stock market will perform, we fantasize about best- and worst-case scenarios for interviews or dates. Often, we wonder how things might be different; sometimes, we design plans that might bring us closer to finding out. Generally, these futures that we imagine are reflections of the present. To articulate an absence, you imagine a future where you have what you're missing; you can imagine losing something or someone to activate gratitude for what you do have. Your best-case scenarios can tell you what you want and help you find common ground with others. And to uncover the fundamental assumptions that bound your understanding of what is possible, likely, or preferable, you can imagine futures that depart radically from the present you know.*

3. *The time travel authorities are organizing a gathering in the year 2025, and they would like you to attend. How do you look back on that year, from the comfort of your hard-won future? What challenges face the people that live then, and what sort of events connect their present to yours? Most critically: will you risk the travel? It is not impossible that you will need to take the hard way back home to your current moment.*

FIRST WORDS

On 18 and 19 March 2025, twenty people gathered in Kinigi, Rwanda to envision new futures for Africa. They were scholars, artists, activists, innovators, and leaders from across the continent and its diaspora, and together they created a small environment in which radical imagination (and the courage it requires) came as easily as picking up a pencil, or opening one's mouth to speak. This document must begin by thanking everyone who trekked out to Kinigi, gave their all to the work, and created such a safe, warm, and exciting atmosphere. This includes Ibukun Adewumi, Lauren Beukes, Omar Degan, Gill Einhorn, Luwi Nguluka, Muthi Nhlema, Appolinaire Oussou Lio, Shaama Sandooyea, the co-authors of this report, and the others who did not wish to be named here.

As a PhD student on our international facilitation team, I have been tasked with presenting the proceedings and results of this visioning workshop, which means I must act as a griot: I must tell the story that weaves within and between the stories, and I must find the voice that can frame this small community's voices. Which is to say, reader, please attribute any missteps to me alone, and everything else to all of us together.

There are a huge number of organizations and individuals that made this work possible. We would like to thank Meriem Bennani, Dr. Joseph Muiruri Karanja, Dr. Pat Keys, Dr. Musonda Mumba, Dr. David Obura, Wole Talabi, and Dr. Chris Trisos for engaging deeply with the project, even though we're still gutted that you couldn't make it. Institutional support from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the Future Ecosystems for Africa project, the Global Change Institute, and the Earth Commission was essential for this project: thank you. Thank you to Dr. Luthando Dziba, Dr. Michel Masozera, and Ms. Angelique Kubwimana, our partners at the Wildlife Conservation Society, for all the work you did to make this possible, as well as your generous welcome when we visited your offices. Thank you to Kadiara King'ai and your team at the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, and to Pacific Kamugira and the team at Virunga Inn Resort and Spa for your tremendous patience during the organizing process and your warm welcome to Kinigi. Finally, we would like to thank FORMAS and Oppenheimer Generations Conservation and Research for supporting this work.

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INTRODUCTION

Making sense of the present

The year is 2025, and the future is uncertain. This year's challenges are numerous and interlocking. The climate crisis has arrived, causing worse and more frequent storms, heat waves, droughts, wildfires, cold snaps, and other severe climate events. Human pressure on terrestrial and marine ecosystems, distributed unequally across the globe, is causing accelerating species extinctions and losses of culturally and ecologically important landscapes. Socially, inequality is escalating both within and between nations, regional conflicts are emerging on multiple continents, and a focus on particular economic metrics among national and international decision-makers produces a powerful resistance to solutions that deprioritize economic growth. These problems interact with each other in unpredictable ways, creating a situation so complex that making sense of the present becomes a major challenge in itself. In sustainability science, we refer to these conditions (and the dynamics that produce them) as the Anthropocene, or the era in which human activity is the dominant force driving the climate, the shape of the land, and the well-being of ecosystems and people.

To help understand and navigate the Anthropocene's complexities, an international network of sustainability scientists at the Earth Commission designed a framework that divides human pressures on the earth system into 8 domains. For each domain, this Earth System Boundaries framework establishes a quantitative metric for anthropogenic "pressure" (e.g. CO2 emissions are the metric for the climate dimension) and sets boundaries for that metric. The floor, or the Access foundation, quantifies the minimum level of impact (on the Earth's systems) needed to meet human needs in an equitable way. The ceiling, or the upper boundary of resource use and pressure the planet can sustain, is comprised of two boundaries. The "Safe" boundary represents the level of pressure that risks eroding the stability of the earth system itself, while the (sometimes more constrained) "Just" boundary marks the level of pressure that risks severe harms to people (Gupta, Bai, et al., 2024). The access foundation requires fundamental system transformations in order to meet needs within the Safe space and is being quantified in the Earth Commission 2.0 to which this workshop contributes (Rammelt et al., 2023; Gupta, Bai, et al., 2024). At the global level, the Earth Commission has quantified pressure for 7 of the domains; we have currently breached the Just boundary for all of them (Rockström et al., 2023).

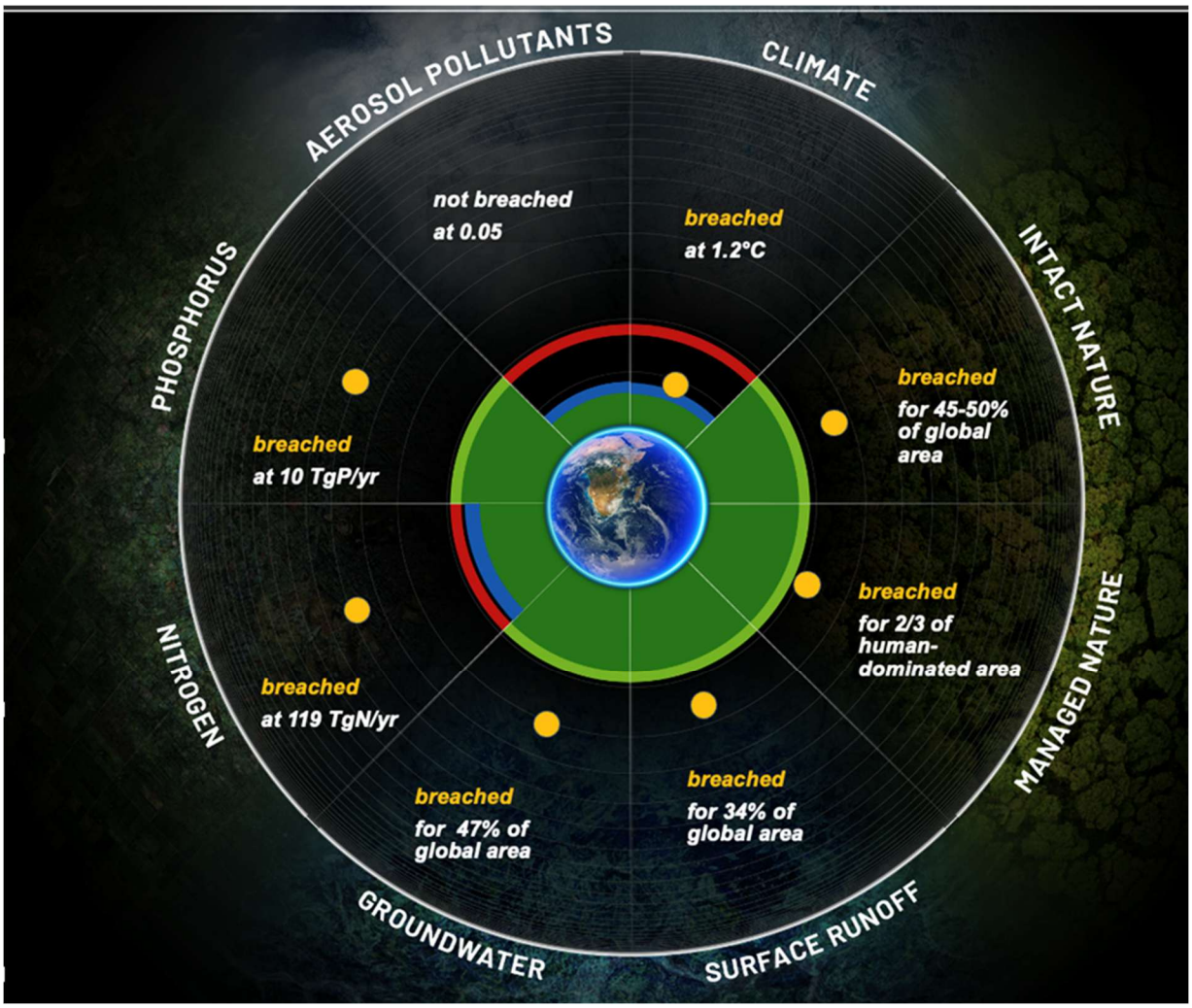


Figure 1: The Earth System Boundaries framework quantifies pressure on 8 earth system domains and marks 2 boundaries for that pressure. The Safe boundary marks the maximum pressure at which the earth system can remain stable, and the Just boundary marks the maximum pressure at which harm to people can be minimized. At the global level, the Just boundary has been exceeded in all 7 of the domains for which pressure has been quantified. Only in the Climate boundary has the Safe boundary not yet been breached. For aerosols, while globally the safe boundary has not been breached, regionally it has. Adapted from Figure 5 in (Gupta, Liverman, et al., 2024).

Let us imagine that there exists something we can call a global society, which we could say must learn to flourish within the bounds of the Earth Commission's safe and just operating space. This idea does not disregard the staggering diversity of communities, livelihoods, economic arrangements, relationships to nature, and ways of life that people move through across the world. Instead, the idea focuses our attention on the large-scale power dynamics, economic incentives, political assumptions, and dominant ideas that influence how people operate in their diverse contexts. The degree to which we have exceeded the earth system's limits indicates that creating a safe and just world will require transforming the way that global society relates itself to the planet (Gupta, Bai, et al., 2024). To transform society, it is necessary to imagine how we might want it to be different, so that we can steer toward those possibilities (Bai et al., 2016).

The AFRICAN FUTURES Project

While there exist global future scenarios that imagine transformation toward sustainability, the breadth of what these scenarios can imagine is limited by the value systems that implicitly guide the projects and the teams creating them (Keys et al., 2024). To address this limitation, it is necessary to co-create scenarios that are rooted in diverse value systems and worldviews. The African continent is home to many such value systems and worldviews, which have historically been excluded from global discussions about the future of both the world and the African continent itself. This exclusion is especially problematic given the continent's growing demographic and economic power, as well as its position at the frontlines of climate change. With a wealth of ecological and cultural diversity, Africa is home to a valuable store of knowledge about both the Anthropocene's novel conditions and possible solutions (often unrecognized) to the crises facing the planet (L. Pereira, Lavery, et al., 2021).

The AFRICAN FUTURES project aims to create desirable future scenarios that foreground the diverse value systems that structure African communities' relationships to nature, in partnership with those communities. The project is committed to building future scenarios from an African perspective with a decolonial approach, acknowledging the historical and contemporary injustices that have shaped the continent's present, as well as the suppression of worldviews that might shape its future. To navigate the diversity of nature values that exist within and between the continent's communities, we use the Nature Futures Framework, a heuristic framework designed by the IPBES expert group on scenarios and models (L. M. Pereira et al., 2020). The NFF defines three "value perspectives," each representing a different way that people might value nature: nature can be intrinsically valuable (Nature for Nature), it can be valuable for what it provides to people (Nature for Society), or it can be relationally intertwined with the people that value it (Nature as Culture/One with Nature). These individual value perspectives can be understood as the extreme points of a triangle that contains the diversity of positions that an individual, a community, or an organization might hold at different times.

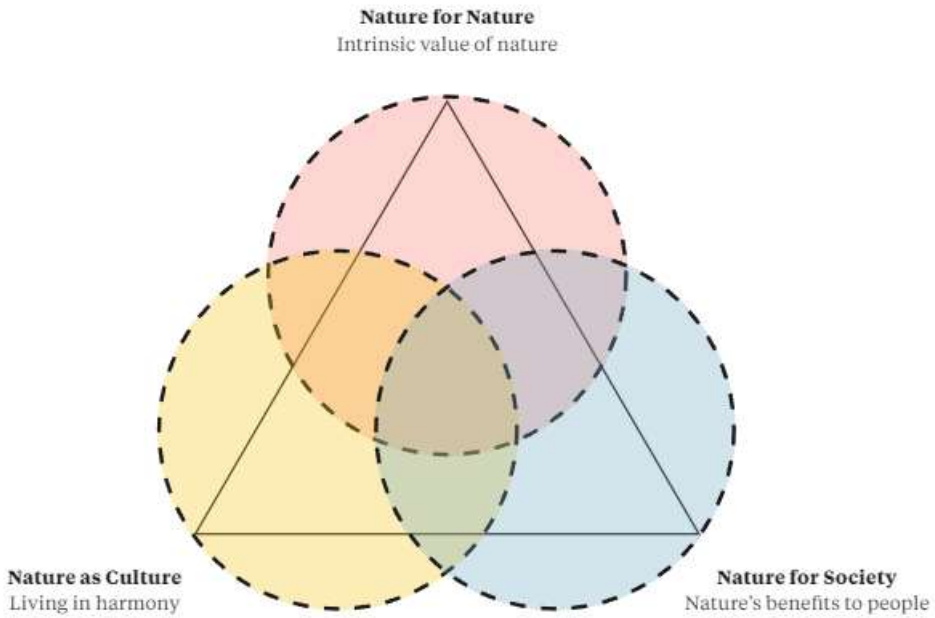


***Figure 2**: The Nature Futures Framework can be visualized as a triangle. The three "value perspectives," or ways that a vision can be "nature positive," sit at the corners. The corners represent extreme positions. Most stakeholders and scenarios will exist in the space between (modified from Pereira et al. 2020)*

AFRICAN FUTURES also aims to build an international network of leaders and changemakers that can navigate toward better futures for nature and people across the continent. We aim to contribute to the restoration of imaginative agency represented by the Afrofuturist and African-futurist movements. As Zimbabwean science-fiction writer Ivor W. Hartmann (2013) states in the introduction to the first major anthology of African sci-fi:

> *Sci-Fi is the only genre that enables African writers to envision a future from our African perspective... The value of this envisioning cannot be overstated nor negated. If you can't see and relay an understandable vision of the future, your future will be co-opted by someone else's vision, one that will not necessarily have your best interests at heart.*

The project also aims to support visions of global transformation that are rooted in diverse worldviews and value systems. AFRICAN FUTURES was designed to support the IPBES expert group on scenarios and models' call for "bottom-up scenarios" that build global- and regional-scale scenarios using insights gathered from local-scale scenarios. In the project's first stage, the team facilitated three local case studies, gathering traditional leaders and community members to imagine the future of a traditional community in Malawi, a cultural landscape in Zambia, and a biosphere reserve in Benin. This document reports on the project's second stage, in which we used methodological insights from the first stage to imagine desirable futures for the continent as a whole, as well as chronological action pathways that might connect those futures back to our present conditions. In the third stage, the team will composite the local- and continental-scale scenarios into mutli-scalar scenarios for the continent, offering methodological insights for the IPBES expert group.

OVERVIEW OF PROCEEDINGS

The regional scenarios workshop took place in Kinigi, Rwanda on 18 and 19 March at the Ellen DeGeneres campus of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund. Kinigi is a small village in the foothills of the Virunga mountains, just a few kilometers from Volcanoes National Park, which, in 1925, became Africa's first national park. It was a resonant location to imagine transformative nature futures for the continent, especially when the mist cleared in the late morning, bringing the park's tallest peaks into view. We were shaded by both the actual mountains and by a century of national parks, as well as a century of successful (if militarized) conservation.

We were 20 people, including 16 participants and 4 facilitators. In normal life, we were academics, business owners, artists, students, NGO directors, activists, communicators, traditional community leaders, and staff members of international organizations, representing more than a dozen countries.

Table 1: Demographic representation of the participants and facilitators

Sector	Gender	Country
Arts	Female	Nigeria, Canada
Arts, Civil Society	Male	Malawi
Private	Male	Italy, Somalia, US
Private	Male	Zimbabwe, South Africa
Private	Female	Kenya
Public	Male	Egypt, UK
Academia, Civil Society	Female	Mauritius
Civil Society	Female	Zambia
Arts	Female	South Africa, UK
Academia	Female	Kenya, Sweden
Private	Female	South Africa, Switzerland
Academia	Male	Nigeria, Canada
Public, Traditional governance	Male	Zambia
Public	Male	Nigeria, Kenya
Academia	Male	South Africa
Public, Traditional governance	Male	Benin
Academia (Facilitator)	Male	USA, Sweden
Academia (Facilitator)	Female	South Africa
Academia (Facilitator)	Female	South Africa
Academia (Facilitator)	Female	Mexico, Sweden

For the duration of the workshop, however, we were time travelers, representing 23 unique timelines, carrying wisdom from our individual futures to help the people of 2025. Let me explain:

- **Before the workshop** ("The Framing"): In the weeks before the workshop, each participant received an email asking them to imagine himself or herself as a time traveler from a future in which Africa's sustainability transformation has already been accomplished. They were also asked to identify the **seeds** (ideas, initiatives, or interventions in the present) that made their future possible.
- **Day 1** ("Visions"): After sorting into three groups, we used the **Manoa Mash-up** method to build coherent images of the future based on selected seeds (4 per group). The process involves thinking through the cascading implications of each seed for the future, and then tracing the ways the seeds might interact. Each group composed and performed short artistic performances to share their visions in plenary.
- **Day 2** ("Dynamic Pathways"): We used the **Branching Pathways** method pioneered in visioning projects conducted by the Earth Commission (as well as the AFRICAN FUTURES case study in Benin) to imagine how our visions might be achieved from the present realities of 2025. This led into a discussion about how we can carry insights from the workshop back into our normal work.

THE FRAMING

"Warmest greetings! We are thrilled to welcome you to the 2025 AFRICAN FUTURES Conference very soon. We are so excited to host a diverse and expert-driven group of representatives from more than a dozen timelines, and have prepared to receive your time machines on Monday 17 March. Please make sure to arrive in the Kigali of that date. Thank you: we know the journey from 2125 can be intense (especially for those of you who are time travelling for the first time)."

We on the facilitation team wanted to create a playful atmosphere for the workshop from the very beginning, so that all participants would give themselves permission to imagine the future as freely and radically as possible. We established a fictional framing for the workshop to facilitate that imaginative freedom. There were 3 fictional elements we wanted to establish:

1. **Each participant would be a time traveler from a desirable future.** Besides the fact that it is fun and exciting to imagine being a time traveler, this element served to unsettle everyone's connection to the present. It is easier to discard one's assumptions about the future when one is not focused on the limitations of the present.
2. **Each participant would come from a unique timeline.** By explicitly noting that every participant would imagine their own timeline, we hoped to get everyone excited to find out what the others had prepared.
3. **Each participant would represent one of seven "ministries."** Throughout our communications, the facilitators addressed everyone as the "minister" of a continental-scale organization. With the focus of the workshop's futures being as broad as "positive futures for people and nature," these ministries served to narrow each participant's focus to a particular area of concern. The ministries are introduced in Table 2.

Table 2: Introductions to each ministry and its mandate

Ministry	# of participants	Mandate
Culture	2	co-manages cultural landscapes, cultural practice, and cultural governance with the continent's diverse communities and peoples.
Economics	3	manages industry partnerships, resource governance, and all the ways that people organize their labor and resources at multiple scales.
Futures	2	manages innovation, political partnerships, institutional foresight, and everything required to navigate and build the continent's futures.
Nature	3	manages terrestrial ecosystem health, conservation, and people's interactions with their landscapes' plants and animals.
Ocean	2	manages fisheries, shipping traffic, responses to sea-level rise, and all other things that affect the health of people and nature in the oceans and the coasts.
Risk	1	manages risk assessment, resilience, peacebuilding, cooperation, and everything required to navigate a world full of both uncertainty and potential.
Storytelling	3	manages libraries, the arts, and the stories through which the present, past, and future are understood.

Each minister was asked to prepare three things before the workshop. First, they were asked for their proudest achievement in the past 5 years of their term. Second, they were asked for 3 examples of "big things that make [their] ministry's work possible" (e.g. technologies, practices, concepts, or political structures). Finally, they were asked to trace those "big things" back to their starting points (or seeds) in 2025. The facilitators selected elements from all 3 categories to feed into Day 1's visioning process; you can find them in Table 3.

Some participants found this framing to be rather odd, and maintaining the framing required clarification from the facilitators at key moments. However, once everyone understood the idea, many found it "freeing," giving them permission to "imagine whatever [they] wanted."

Table 3: Seeds used in the visioning process. While these were the only ideas that fed directly into the visions, they were certainly not the only interesting or important ideas that participants shared in their pre-workshop preparations.

Category	Ministry	Seed title	Description
Achievement	Ocean	Ocean eco-data grid	"A pan-Africa ocean ecological data grid that integrates real-time monitoring of ocean health with local user inputs, expanding on early 21st-century remote-sensing efforts."
Enabler	Economics	Economic self-sufficiency	"African recognition of the need for independence economically, with secondary and tertiary process capabilities through the continent."
Enabler	Economics	Afro-Optimism	"Can do attitude by a large majority of Africans."
Seed	Futures	Indigenous foresight	"Highlighting African foresight practices and methodologies in and out of Africa."
Enabler	Storytelling	Techno-communalism	"Shared ownership of cultural/artistic assets."
Seed	Risk	Biomimicry	"Biomimicry for design and innovation"; "bioutilisation in the context of using fungi to break down plastics."
Enabler / Seed	Economics / Ocean	Limits on personal "stuff"	"Restricting the amount of "stuff" per person" / "Environmentalists raising awareness at the societal level on the limits of resources and the impact of trespassing planetary boundaries"
Achievement	Futures	Resilient Africa Initiative	"The Resilient Africa Initiative (R.A.F.) ··· seeks to address Africa's most pressing challenges. This initiative is dedicated to transforming Africa's most fragile cities into resilient, sustainable, and interconnected urban environments" with "a framework that blends the wisdom of traditional African building practices with cutting-edge smart technologies, allowing cities to flourish while honoring the continent's rich cultural heritage.
Enabler	Nature	Local communities as custodians	Replacing militarized fortress conservation with "a model where local communities were custodians of their national parks, rivers, wildlife etc." so that "they directly benefited from the conservation of these resources."
Enabler	Storytelling	The Shared dreaming engine	This technology, developed by our ministry's scientists based on direct neural interfaces embedded in every willing user's mind, allows them (if they choose), to connect their thoughts with others in a secure immersive digital environment where these thoughts can be edited on-the-fly and experienced directly by all connected parties as though it were real. This enables people to imagine their futures together and see what those futures would look like immediately, constructing narratives and scenarios (both positive and negative) around this shared dream scenario from their own minds under the guidance of our professional storytellers, allowing them to experience and work through these scenarios from a place of mutual openness, safety and trust.

DAY 1: VISIONS

"The objective is to walk with you, it's not to get somewhere."

Introduction and team formation

After gathering in one of the Ellen DeGeneres campus' conference rooms, the ministers received a presentation from the facilitation team, who introduced themselves as the "Secretary of Timelines" (Laura Pereira), her undersecretary (Liam Carpenter-Urquhart), and two attached researchers (Alice Landin and Kim Zoeller). The presentation was structured as an introduction to the challenges of 2025. It also articulated the value of decolonial imagination, and called the participants to help "get 2025 out of its rut" with inspiring visions of radical futures.

After co-designing ground rules for the space, the undersecretary emerged to deliver bad news: none of the ministers would be able to return to their home timelines. The purpose of this twist was to reinforce the urgency of 2025's global conditions. There is a lot of freedom in imagining that the future has already been won (as participants did before the workshop), but there is also a risk of underappreciating the severity of the present's challenges and constraints. The facilitation team wanted participants to carry both freedom and urgency as they imagined new futures together.

The facilitators led the ministers in an NFF exercise. A large triangle was marked out on the courtyard, representing the NFF triangle. The ministers were asked to select a deeply-held memory of an experience with nature and position themselves on the triangle based on the values that memory evoked for them. The facilitators encouraged the ministers to cluster at the sides of the triangle: these clusters became our groups.

Table 4: Group distributions

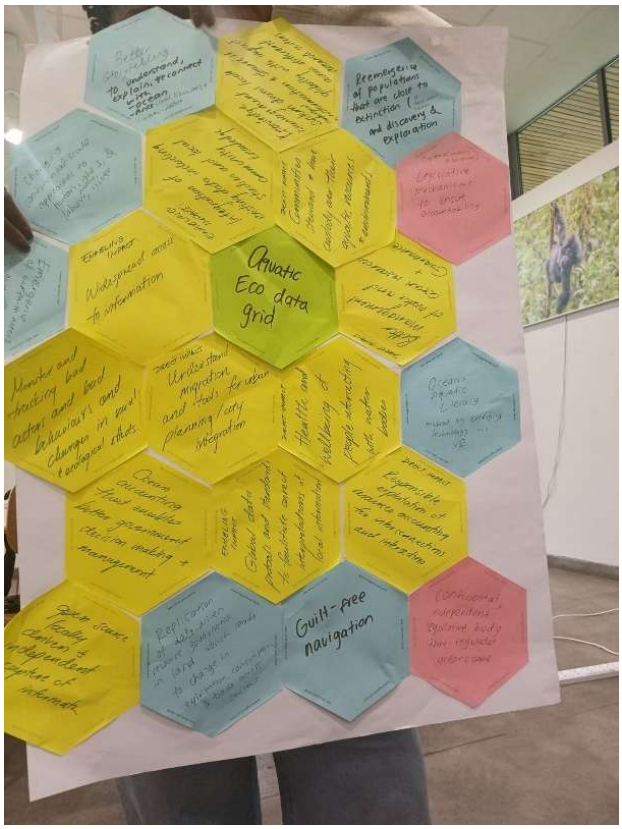
Group	Facilitator	Ministries Represented	Seeds
Sankofa (Nature for Nature / Nature for Society)	Alice Landin	Economics Futures Nature Ocean Storytelling	• Economic Self-Sufficiency • Resilient Africa Initiative • Ocean Eco Data Grid • Local Communities as custodians
The African Century (Nature for Society / Nature as Culture)	Liam Carpenter-Urquhart	Culture Economics Futures Nature Storytelling	• Techno-communalism • Afro-Optimism • Indigenous Foresight • The Shared Dreaming Engine
Adje's Journey (Nature for Nature / Nature as Culture)	Laura Pereira	Culture Economics Ocean Risk Storytelling	• No nation-states • Ubuntu Heritage Iniative • Limits on personal "stuff"

Building our futures

Our groups used the Manoa Mash-up method to create and distill complex, coherent, and desirable scenarios for the African continent's future. Extending the classic Manoa method **(Schultz, 2015)**, the Manoa Mash-up has been used to build novel futures from seed ideas in the contexts of southern Africa (Hamann et al., 2020), northern Europe (Raudsepp-Hearne et al., 2020), and global carbon capture (L. Pereira, Morrow, et al., 2021). For this project, our visioning proceeded in **3 steps**

1

We created **future wheels** to build out the implications of our seeds. To build a future wheel, you write your starting seed (change, intervention, or idea) in the middle of a surface, and surround it with up to 6 immediate effects that seed might have on the future. Then you add another layer by imagining what the second-degree effects (the implications of the immediate effects) might be, and continue to add layers until you're satisfied (3 is often enough). Each group performed this exercise for 2 or 3 seeds.



Left: Sankofa. Top Right: Adje's Journey. Bottom Right: The African Century

2

We used yarn to trace the **cross-impacts** between the future wheels. In our futures, the wheels do not operate independently: their effects may synergize or co-interfere. We pulled lengths of yarn between locations on the wheel to mark these interactions

Top Left: The African Century. Top Right: Sankofa. Bottom: Adje's Journey.

3

We distilled our futures into 10-minute **creative presentations** for the other groups. We shared these presentations around the campfire as night fell.

Sankofa performed a dialogue between 3 elders and their caretaker, as the elders remembered the changes they'd seen for the continent during their lives. In this future, Africa is now called "Sankofa," after a Twi word that translates as "to retrieve," as in "it is not forbidden to go back to retrieve what you have forgotten." The caretaker patiently reminds the elders about life on the Sankofan continent: its self-governing smart-city states (including 10 of the world's most livable cities), its resilient local food production systems, the robust grieving process that helped society weather the crises of the 21st century. Of all the continents, Sankofa was the one that weathered the climate crisis best, and now it allocates billions of Sankofa coins (the world's preeminent currency) toward education for both Sankofans and foreigners. The elders remember how remarkable it is that they are 160 years old, where Europeans are "lucky if they make it to 95 [···] They went through another industrial age, poor things ··· they didn't learn how to do it the local way."

The African Century performed a broadcast takeover. Every TV station is interrupted by a delegation from the future "to share good news [···] the African Century has *arrived*." The minister of economics describes how the continent has become an economic powerhouse thanks to strategic global positioning and the Shared Dreaming Engine, which acts as a platform for an extremely complex person-to-person barter economy within the continent. The Engine also enables people to commune directly with nature – an entity representing all of nature (translated by the broadcaster) expresses gratitude: "They are grateful for the communion they have with man, and ··· sorry, it's a joke, you wouldn't understand it." With its own rights and its own agency, Nature has a position on the continental security council. The minister of culture explains how cultural knowledge, cultural institutions, and cultural relationships with nature have enabled the continent's self-sufficiency. The minister of futures explains how narratives about Africa's future (and its plan for the next 300 years) are now more informed by indigenous perspectives than by the history of injustice or the power of others. As the signal breaks, the spokesperson ends with a charge. "This future is *possible*. It is hard, it is very difficult, but it is p-"

Adje's Journey performed in the mode of oral storytelling, recounting a young adult's search "for wisdom across a borderless world." The main character's name is "Adje," a multilingual pun bridging "Àjẹ́" (a Yoruba word roughly translating to "witchcraft") and "Adze" (a Fon word meaning "rat"). In an Africa with no nations, Adje can travel freely and learn from the people they encounter. They learn how to travel in the manner of their ancestors, by walking with the wind – they, like 80% of Africa's young people, are in touch with ancestral knowledge. In North

Africa's deserts, they learn how air travel technology uses thermal updrafts, modeled after "migratory birds that wait for the sun to rise." With major decreases in international exports due to the continent's local production and mindful consumption, the oceans they cross are clean and healthy. As they travel, Adje takes "what [they] need from the ocean, and no more." When they fall ill, they are "welcomed, taken care of, and loved" by a community that practices radical care. In exchange, and for the sake of balance and care, Adje shares what they have learned in their journey: "take as much as you are given, give as much as you take." Adje asks the Congo River for permission to ride its current. "Thank you river, for granting me that permission," Adje says. "You have the right to say yes or to say no for us to use you." At the end of the river, when Adje finds they "*miss* the people that they have left behind," they depend on the power of witchcraft to return home.

Adje's Journey performs around Virunga Inn's campfire

Campfire Reflections

After the presentations, we took time to reflect on what we'd noticed and felt throughout the day. Some of us highlighted synergies and overlaps between the visions. Every vision included some version of a borderless and/or nationless Africa, organized into city states, loosely-administered bioregions, or one continental government. Every vision also "hinged desperately on the type of technology that we were using:" *Sankofa* had its smart cities, *The African Century* deeply depended on its Dream Engine, and *Adje's Journey* treated witchcraft as technology. One of us articulated how these synergies clarify the value of exploring the future from different perspectives: "Even if we're not all on the same page, [···] we're definitely in the same book."

Another one of us carefully named a discomfort at the core of their experience during the first day. They felt the process was shaped by a belief system they did not share, even as the workshop aimed to center African culture. The way the process treated time was core to this: "there's time that's necessary to allow the collective to synchronize [···] we don't rush to the thing we're here to do." They felt like the process demanded the groups rush toward their ambitions and their final products: "I'm not seeing my African principles being brought into the work. I'm not seeing my identity being put onto the menu that we're eating." They were disappointed by the lack of space to center the joy of making community with the other humans in the room. They wondered if there is a danger of there being too strong a doctrine for futures work, or if it is subject to demands that makes it difficult to adjust to different cultural contexts. Several more of us echoed this feeling, pointing out how the atmosphere of 5-star hotels and high-end conference venues reminds them of uncomfortable gentrification dynamics in their homes, or naming how a full day of thinking at maximum speed without time to reflect ("go go go go go") left them feeling unprepared to "convey some of the richness" of their team's vision.

Another group of us chose to emphasize the value of the first day's goals and structure. One person acknowledged the immense amount of work it took to gather everyone in one place, while another of us pointed out how the rarity of these gatherings means that it's valuable to squeeze as much as possible out of the brief time we have together. Without focusing on producing a document at the end, we would leave room for others to narrate African ambitions, or to establish narratives about Africa's future without asking Africans about it. "How often does someone ask me what I think about the future of Africa?" another voice echoed. "I've never been in a process that was smooth," and this process was no closer to ideal than any other. However, now that we were here, what could we accomplish?

The final voice synthesized the dialectic: "Multiple truths can exist simultaneously. Every single thing here that was said was absolutely true [···] One of the magical things, for the lack of a better word, is that this group of people have been brought together for this experience, and that this group of people, individually and collectively, has the capacity to acknowledge those difficult emotions and the tensions where we are." We agreed that these 2 and a half days together should be understood as time to build a foundation for what we could do later, or to prepare seeds to sow at home. We also agreed that there is enormous room for improvement, and we, the facilitators, are grateful for the feedback we received: next time, we can design a better, kinder process. "It's a start."

DAY 2: DYNAMIC PATHWAYS

"One thing that we would like to emphasize is that a lot of it is already being done, it just needs to be scaled up. So none of these ideas are coming from nowhere ··· This is not a transformation of human nature, this is almost a deepening into what we already are. We are not becoming a new species, we are literally going back to who we actually are. Like waking up from a bad dream."

Re-introductions

During the first day, we met each other as time-traveling ministers and inter-timeline secretaries. To kick off the second day, we took time to introduce ourselves as people living in 2025. This was an extended and emotional session. Because everyone had already learned to be comfortable with each other, we could share the most interesting parts of our professional lives freely. We could also receive those professional details as useful context rather than as introductory labels to govern our interactions.

This session was also helpful as we moved into our discussion of the actions that might be required to create the futures we'd envisioned, both because our professional identities contextualized our expertise during those discussions and because they clarified how much agency the room held to make those actions possible.

Branching pathways

Our goal for the second day was to create chronological stories (or pathways) connecting the present to the futures we'd imagined. The goals for this exercise were twofold. By designing a chronological series of actions, we could highlight what actions and interventions might be possible and useful to encourage. By allowing our pathways to "branch" when there were multiple possible sequences of events we wanted to explore (or where we could not reach consensus on one option over others), we were also able to articulate the deeper structure of our visions. We could explore what events might be incompatible, what might happen when events countervailed our visions, and what enabling actions might be needed to keep things on course. Each group approached the pathways in a different way, but there were **two major steps** that all groups shared.

African Century

Adje's Journey

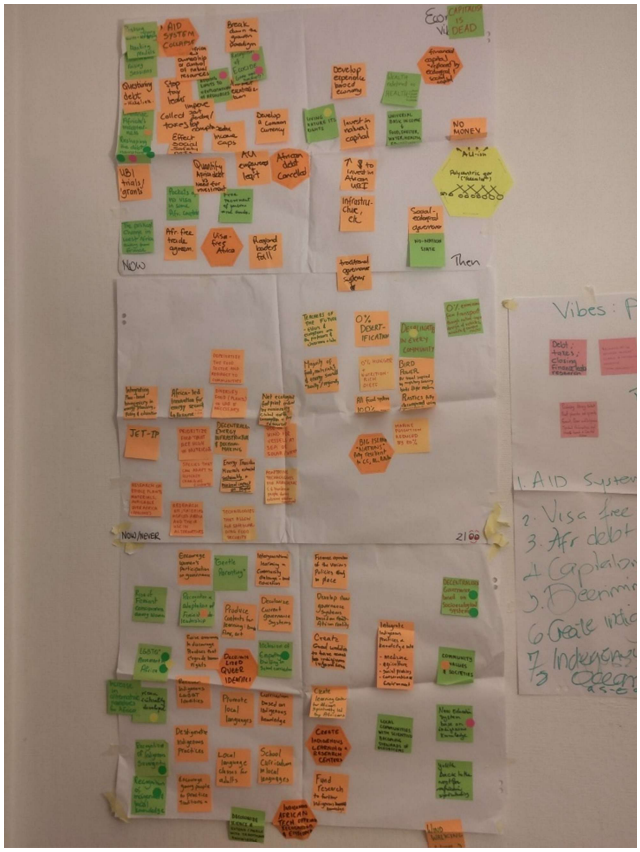
Sankofa

1

We used the **X-Curve** to articulate the conflict between the present's dominant structures and the ideas that would structure our futures. On the left is the present, and the future is on the right. You draw two lines, one starting high in the present and decreasing into the future, the other crossing it by increasing into the future. To start the decreasing line, you name the structures that enforce the present's conditions; as it decreases, you describe what must happen to diminish their control, and how they can empathetically be undone. The beginning of the increasing line is the place to name the seeds in the present that hold the potential to create your desired future; as it increases, you name what they'd look like as they grow to shape the world. *The African Century* spent most of their time for the day where the lines cross, discussing the conflicts that would be necessary to achieve their vision. *Adje's Journey* primarily used the X-curve to robustly describe the situation in the present before they moved on. *Sankofa* used stickers to vote on the events on the X-curve that were most important to focus on for the following stage.

2

We proceeded to create our **branching pathways**. *The African Century* did not construct a full pathway, instead listing their major branch points sequentially, so naming the major questions that must be answered to reach their vision. *Sankofa* robustly ordered events leading toward their vision, as well as points of contention where things might go off course and long-term capacity building actions that would need to co-occur with their pathway. *Adje's Journey* covered a large surface with simultaneous actions, rising from the present (at the bottom) to the achievement of their vision (at the top).



Adje's Journey

Sankofa

Across groups, we emphasized the importance of building economic power for the continent at the global scale, even when the goal was to build anti-capitalist (or even money-free) economies within the continent. The tension between building economies of care at small scales while building the strength to defend those economies at larger scales was a major question. We also asked what might be necessary for the continent to achieve reparations or debt forgiveness from global financial powers.

Another common element was the presence of cross-scale cultural and/or legal institutions. Every vision emphasized the importance of local governance and local culture, and so our pathways asked what sort of political infrastructure might enable local institutions to inform continental-scale governance. Major questions included how those institutions might navigate language, and how they might govern (and be governed) in the absence of national governments and borders.

Technology remained an important synergy as well, along with the infrastructure to govern and maintain it. We asked how energy and communications infrastructure might be built under African ownership. This raised questions about how we might resist the dynamics of private infrastructure ownership that have eroded democracy among the present's major powers, and how such infrastructure might be built without neocolonial interference.

Final Reflections

We ended the workshop with both individual and communal reflection. As the afternoon approached its end, we each spent 30 minutes alone to consider what insights from the workshop process we might apply to our normal work. Then we gathered to share our insights and document our final impressions.

We left feeling "cautiously optimistic" about the continent's future. We were "hopeful," "inspired," and "bullish;" we also felt "concerned" and (occasionally) "bleak." For the most part, it was the hurdles in the present that tempered our optimism: "self-interest" held by those in power, consistent underestimation of "how bad climate hazards will become," the overwhelming complexity of the world's "track record." In short, we were concerned by how global society "[seems] to be stuck in the habit of doing the wrong thing." Nevertheless, we largely felt ready to contribute to the "serious paradigm shift" required to realize our hopeful futures by "[telling] alternate stories of Africa's future," by bringing our perspectives and abilities to the table, and (more than anything else) by continuing to do the work we have already committed ourselves to. Although the present contains "huge hurdles," we hoped that 2025's turbulence and upheaval might "galvanize [the world] to truly commit ourselves to positive change." Furthermore, while we critiqued this process' 100-year time horizon for its tendency to overlook the present's barriers to change, that long view enabled us to notice how "small shifts in decisions today will have amplified consequences in the long term."

This workshop was a first encounter with futures thinking for a few of us, offering a broader understanding of how and why to think about the future. Some others found technical or methodological takeaways for their own futures practice. Two stand-out techniques were the Nature Futures Framework and the use of the pathways exercise to uncover our visions' pain points. Some of us hoped to repeat this workshop's visioning process at the community or national level, or to apply the Nature Futures Framework in more specific contexts, such as ocean states or heritage conservation.

We overwhelmingly agreed that the workshop's highlight was the opportunity to create a network with each other. Some of us noted that our pathways were not able to reach the depth and specificity we hoped for, and that we'd witnessed "familiar biases and blindspots present elsewhere manifest" in this process. Other feedback mirrored the previous night's campfire reflections: it would have been best to dedicate more time to reflect, to rest, and to engage deeply with each other. However, we also agreed that the end of the workshop would not be the end of our network.

CONCLUSION

"··· this is the seeds, and each of us will sow those seeds and reap the rewards in our own contexts [···] we are that we are a magic elixir that's been fit into a container. There is no container that will fit this elixir, but it's a start."

It is worth noting that it was challenging to leave each other, not only because that difficulty indicates that we all enjoyed the workshop, but because it indicates that a community cohered in the brief time we spent together. Not all of us left feeling more optimistic about the future, but we all left with new ideas about how we could approach our individual work. During this workshop, we gained a deeper understanding about the future's possibilities, our agency within those possibilities, the value of our perspectives, and the enormous diversity our perspectives sit within.

Now that we have distilled new narratives about the continent's role in its own future, we look forward to analyzing these visions and dynamic pathways for the academic literature. Dominant narratives about Africa have marginalized African values and African agency. We hope that our perspectives will counteract this dominance. Although we are far from the first to imagine plural, decolonial futures that center the continent's cultural diversity, we contend that the world cannot have too many stories written from Africa. And besides: no one else can make quite what we have made.

We also look forward to continuing to work together and learn from each other. Some of us have begun to work toward a formal articulation (from a policy perspective) of action steps inspired by the process. We on the facilitation team will take the group's feedback into account as we design future processes. Finally, the African Futures project team has taken steps to establish a Community of Practice, officially designating this workshop (and the previous African Futures workshops) as only the beginning of what the community will accomplish.

Remember.

1. *The year is 2025, and the world is crowded with challenges. You have imagined a world that is kind and beautiful, but we have not made it yet: the road toward that future will be hard, exhausting, and unkind.*

2. *We have been blessed to dream together, and too are we blessed to work together. I called that unkind road "the hard way back home," but the dream is not home: our home is with each other.*

3. *The purpose of dreaming is not to escape. It is to remember how to wake up.*

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