

# FUTURE CHILD PERSONA PLAYBOOK



مؤسسة دبي للمستقبل  
DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION

unicef  | for every child



Artefact





# ABSTRACT

Building on the success of UNICEF's [Youth Foresight Playbook](#) in 2023, the Future Child Persona Playbook shares UNICEF's approach to helping organisations worldwide embed child rights into long-term strategy and decision-making through a practical, case study-based toolkit. Rather than seeing children as passive observers in policy and decision-making processes, this playbook positions them as central figures whose stories and perspectives shape the futures we invest in today.

The report [The State of the World's Children 2024: The Future of Childhood in a Changing World](#) explored three megatrends that will profoundly impact children's lives by 2050: demographic shifts, the climate and environmental crises, and frontier technologies. It also presented three future scenarios – possible outcomes, not predictions – for how children could experience the world of 2050. UNICEF Innocenti, Dubai Future Foundation, and Artefact Group collectively brought these scenarios to life.

Participatory workshops were conducted with children and young people to explore how they envision these trends unfolding in the future. The use of foresight encourages people to consider the consequences of their actions today, and to proactively work towards the well-being and rights of those not yet born. By using widely adopted foresight tools such as Causal Layered Analysis and crafting new ones like Superwheels and Future Child Backpacks, this project harnessed the power of human-centred design and experiential futures to craft a child- and youth-friendly methodology to make complex scenarios tangible. Centring workshop participants' lived experiences, the outcome was six future child personas – each representing a different region of the world.

This body of work took centre stage at the Museum of the Future at the 2024 Edition of the Dubai Future Forum on World Children's Day. The interactive exhibit allowed visitors to hear a message from each of these future children and leave a message for them in return.

This playbook is for anyone working on the child rights agenda and for the future of children more broadly – whether it be policymakers, funders, programme designers, child rights advocates, youth leaders, or educators. In an increasingly fractured world, this is a call to action: imagine, create, and champion future child personas that reflect the aspirations of your communities. By doing so, you join a global movement leveraging youth foresight to honour children's rights, amplify their visions, and co-create a world where every child can thrive. We can't wait to see how you make this methodology yours.



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# 1. LEARNING

## 1.1 Introduction

Despite tremendous investments in youth participation in the multilateral system, young people are still sidelined in global decision-making spaces. And at moments of institutional crisis or transformation, decision-makers often retreat inward, limiting participation rather than expanding it. But the future cannot be shaped solely by those at the top. These are precisely the moments when institutions must open their doors to the next generation.

In 2022, UNICEF established its youth foresight function through the first iteration of the UNICEF Youth Foresight Fellowship and the launch of the Youth Foresight Playbook. Since then, the organisation has successfully run second and third iterations of the fellowship across 29 countries and made substantive contributions to key global convenings such as the 2024 UN Summit of the Future and the Dubai Future Forum since its inception. Youth foresight – which happens at the intersection of strategic foresight, meaningful youth engagement, and emerging technologies – is opening up new ways for young people to contribute to long-term decision-making, bringing their insights, lived experiences, and bold ideas into emerging-issues analysis, strategy, and policy recommendations.

The future child persona methodology was crafted for the *State of the World's Children Report 2024: The Future of Childhood in a Changing World*, which presented an opportunity to push global thinking on two things: child rights and strategic foresight.

Too often, children's rights are reduced to checklists. While this can be a useful and important way to synthesise complex information, it risks taking away children's agency and personhood by using data points to define them – further alienating those already on the margins. This is the opposite of what children need and what the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) stands for. Child rights are fundamentally about dignity, agency, and participation. They compel one to see children as whole human beings in all their complexity, which requires a transition to new tools that centre empathy, imagination, and accountability.



“

It quickly became obvious that participants felt guilty as they confronted more negative future scenarios, repeatedly apologizing – as if not just to the personas but to young people in general – for the circumstances around them. They then vowed to ‘make things better’. Watching them take accountability for the future this child will face was deeply moving.”

*Mamadou Doucoure (2024 UNICEF Youth Foresight Fellow - Mali)*

*Rawan El-Bendary (2024 UNICEF Youth Fellow - Egypt)*

As for strategic foresight, when people think about the future, they often gravitate toward abstractions: utopias, dystopias, and extremes. But children and young people remind us that the future is not just a thought experiment; it is lived and felt. The goal here, then, was to create a methodology that honours their perspectives by anchoring foresight in tangible, everyday realities – family, friendship, learning, play, and survival.

The intention was to push these personas beyond binaries of good and bad, deliberately steering away from damage-centred language in order to reflect the complex granular reality of the human experience – where opportunities and challenges, pain and joy, coexist. This pedagogical shift challenges institutions to treat foresight findings not as speculations detached from lived realities but as a moral responsibility to collectively safeguard the rights and well-being of children and young people everywhere, who will inherit the very real consequences of the decisions made today.

The outcome, which is shared with you in this toolkit, is a methodology that leverages human-centred design, enabled by the Artefact Group. This toolkit outlines how young people – as active participants and leaders – can build out representations of future children that are tangible, enabling empathy in audiences while also giving workshop participants the space to draw from their own rich and diverse lived experiences. It is also accompanied by valuable insights into convening and amplifying from the Dubai Future Foundation, who led the on-site activation of the personas exhibit.

While UNICEF’s work has evolved from adapting foresight tools to creating their own, the ethos remains constant: children and young people must be seen as equal partners in shaping the futures that affect them most. And for this to work, meaningful youth engagement must be safe, inclusive, impactful, and sustained. The purpose here is ultimately about systems level change – building practical tools that open institutions to shared power, for youth foresight is not only about co-designing the future, but equally about reshaping power in the present.

## 1.2 Long-Term Thinking and the Child Rights Agenda

The meaningful participation of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives is firmly grounded in international law. Article 12 of the CRC obliges all States Parties to ensure that all children capable of forming their own views have the right to express those views freely, and that those views are given due weight in decision-making. This right to be heard is a foundational principle underpinning the entire Convention.

Beyond the CRC, a range of international frameworks – such as the World Programme of Action for Youth (1995), the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (2015), and most recently the Pact for the Future (2025) – while not legally binding, reinforce and promote the importance of investing in children and young people’s human, social, and cultural capital. Together, these frameworks recognise that children and youth are not merely passive recipients of policy but rights-holders and change agents in their own right.

Where the Pact for the Future marks a significant evolution is in its insistence that future generations of children, youth, and adults must also be considered in today’s decisions. It enshrines a global commitment to long-term, sustainable policies that safeguard their interests. Future generations do not get a vote. Save for a few exceptions, they are typically overlooked due to short-term political cycles and a lack of clear incentives for decision-makers. For the first time in history, the pact’s Declaration on Future Generations seeks to change this.

On its face, this could be read merely as a call for more urgent action on existential threats – from violent conflict and unregulated AI to the climate crisis. But as philosopher William MacAskill argues in his book *What We Owe the Future*, long-term thinking for future generations is also a profound moral shift: an invitation to widen the moral circle to include the vast majority of human beings who will ever live. MacAskill reminds us that the future is not empty. It could be vast – containing trillions of lives – and what we do now will significantly shape whether those lives are free, fair, and flourishing. To ignore them is not just shortsighted. It is a failure of justice.

“

**Morality, in central part, is about putting ourselves in others’ shoes and treating their interests as we do our own.**

”

*William MacAskill, What We Owe the Future*

Yet anticipating the needs of future generations – and empathising with them – is an inherently difficult task. Unlike present-day stakeholders, they cannot speak for themselves. Their contexts, technologies, values, and lived realities may differ



dramatically from our own. We risk not only ignoring their needs but mis-imagining them, projecting today's assumptions onto tomorrow's complexities.

While futures will change, some human needs will remain consistent. Literature in developmental psychology and human flourishing – such as the work of Manfred Max-Neef<sup>1</sup> or Martha Nussbaum<sup>2</sup> – has shown that all people, across time and culture, share core needs: safety, identity, meaning, participation, and love. But how we meet these needs, and the relative importance we place on them, varies. A child's need for learning may be met in a classroom today but through virtual, community-based, or even AI-assisted systems tomorrow. The right is constant, but the method will vary.

This brings a critical challenge to the fore: ensuring that children's rights are consistently and credibly integrated into future planning and policymaking. Systems and institutions struggle to translate these rights into anticipatory policy frameworks. This is where futures thinking can be transformative. While foresight remains underutilised in many policymaking spaces, there is ample evidence that it can empower individuals and communities to engage with uncertainty inherent in the future – not as a source of fear, but as a field of possibility. For children and youth, especially those often marginalised in formal decision-making, futures thinking offers agency in an uncertain and rapidly changing world.

“

**Participants wondered why young people portrayed a negative view of the future, but I sensed they were responding to that negativity themselves. Beyond reading the descriptions and hearing the personas' voices, participants seemed to truly connect with them when asked to leave a message for a future that nobody seemed to want.**

”

*Abriel Perazzini (2024 UNICEF Youth Foresight Fellow - Argentina)*

## 1.3 Intersection of HCD and Foresight

While the key goal of employing strategic foresight was to inform strategic decision-making, helping UNICEF and its partners understand how current trends may affect child rights in 2050, there was an equally important ambition: to reimagine how to deepen understanding of the child rights agenda by building empathy for children – present and future.

To achieve this, traditional foresight methodologies such as Scenario Planning and Futures Wheels were adapted by integrating principles from human-centred design (HCD). The process included development of 'hero' characters – or personas – and used 'day-in-the-life' storytelling to illustrate how each future might be experienced by an individual child.

This hybrid approach allowed for translation of abstract, macro-level scenarios into vivid, human-scale narratives, bringing systemic change to life in a visceral, emotionally resonant way.

HCD brings several foundational principles to this work: a commitment to understanding the complex needs and contexts of people most affected by systems; a participatory ethos that involves users and stakeholders throughout the process; the intersection of systems thinking and the human experience; and a bias toward iteration and experimentation.

Personas can be developed in a variety of ways for different purposes. These include traditional personas based on user research that combine demographics with psychographics (motivations, goals, pain points); behavioural personas that focus on actions, mindsets, and usage patterns, often derived from field observation; and speculative personas – imaginary characters that represent people living in future worlds. Because the scenarios for this project focused on the year 2050, speculative personas were employed, co-created by children and young people themselves.

Key to the process was a participatory approach, engaging UNICEF’s global network comprising 149 countries to co-create future scenarios and day-in-the-life stories. This ensured that the outputs reflected real hopes, needs, and concerns of young people today. By grounding this work in diverse lived experiences, it moved beyond singular, homogenous visions of the future and rooted it in the intricate day-to-day realities of children. These contributions – rich with cultural insight and underrepresented perspectives – led to more imaginative, inclusive, and resilient futures.

By combining HCD with foresight, practitioners can design futures that are not only plausible and strategic but also equitable, empathetic, and actionable. This intersection allows one to reimagine systems in ways that centre human dignity – a consideration that is especially important when working with marginalised communities or planning for intergenerational impact when working with and for children and young people.



## 2. BUILDING

If you are looking to build your own future child personas, this section will outline how you can do so. It uses a series of five worksheet-based tools, and for each one we explain its purpose, describe how to use it in practice, and illustrate how it worked in our case.

Before you begin, it is important that you understand what your research question is, or even simply what themes and futures you are looking to explore. Our primary question was: What might childhood look like in 2050?

We suggest that you use the tools below in the order in which they have been laid out, especially if this is your first time working with foresight methodologies. But if you feel comfortable doing so, you can of course add, remove, or substitute methodologies as you see fit!

### 2.1 Building Scenarios

#### Background

The future is too uncertain and too complex to predict. Yet too often we treat it as if it were a straight line from the present – projecting today’s assumptions forward without questioning how trends may evolve, interact, or be disrupted. This is where scenario planning becomes invaluable.

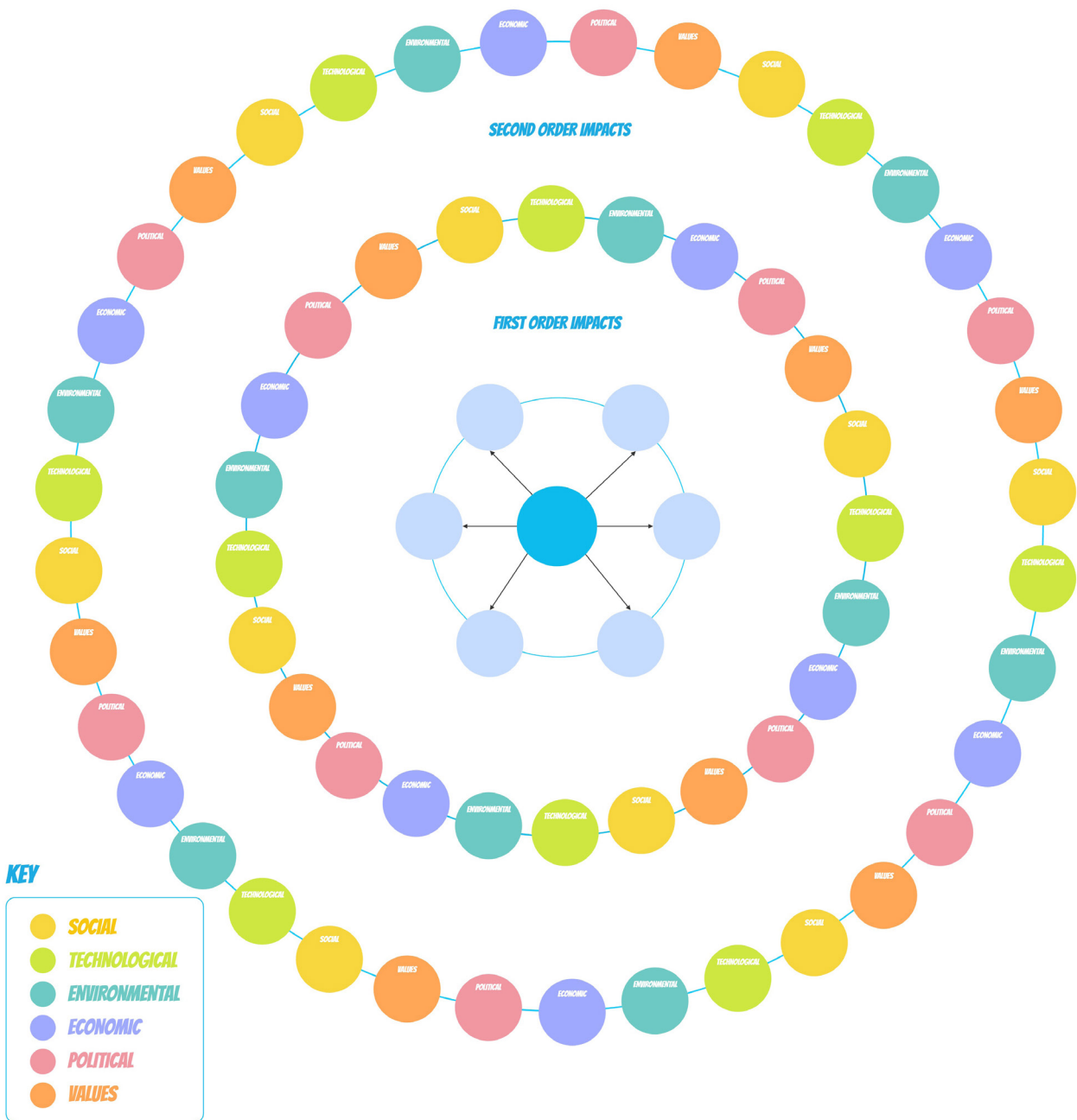
Scenario planning is a core methodology in foresight. It helps us create alternative futures – stories or snapshots of what the world might look like under different conditions. Rather than forecasting ‘the’ future, scenarios invite us to explore multiple futures: what’s possible, what’s probable, and what’s preferable. Scenarios can bring clarity to complexity, creating alternative futures and new opportunities to increase flexibility and adaptability.<sup>3</sup>

The process begins with thinking expansively about what possibilities could exist in the future. In this stage you try to gather as much data as possible about potential impacts of the trends you are building upon. There are a number of tools that can be used for this – the one that we decided to use is an iteration of the popular Futures Wheel.

The second step in the process is filtering and dividing information between different scenarios – essentially building out different worlds from the possibilities that you explored. There are many tools that can help you do this; we chose to use the Causal Layered Analysis methodology.



# Worksheet 1: Broadening the Future



## Explainer

The 'superwheel' tool helps you to ensure your scenarios are holistic and to explore multiple dimensions of change when working with a dataset of emerging issues or trends. It integrates the Social, Technological, Environmental, Economic, Political, and Values (STEPPV) framework into the futures wheel and provides a starting point to help you make sense of the data that you are using.

# Worksheet 1: Broadening the Future

You can use it to map out future impacts of key trends, structuring your scanning and imagination across six key domains:

## **Social**

Family structures, cultural norms, migration, urbanisation

## **Technological**

AI tutors, bioenhancement, immersive media

## **Economic**

Youth unemployment, gig work, new welfare systems

## **Environmental**

Climate resilience, food security, eco-restoration

## **Political**

Governance models, youth participation, global conflict

## **Values**

Intergenerational ethics, identity, human rights norms

Scenarios that fail to explore these dimensions often miss key drivers of change. Using STEEPV ensures your scenarios are multidimensional and not overly focused on just one trend (such as technology or climate).

If you do not have a dataset of emerging issues or trends that you are working with, you can skip this step!

## Facilitation Guide

1

Place the emerging issue or trend that you are exploring in the blue circle in the centre of the superwheel. You can choose to make a different wheel for each data point OR you can have multiple circles in the centre of the superwheel.

2

Ask participants to write down immediate (first order) impacts of this trend in the first ring of multicoloured circles outside of the centre. These can be both positive and negative; the only thing to remember here is that these are immediate impacts of the identified data point. Remember to draw arrows connecting these circles to the central trend.

3

Then ask participants to move to the second ring of circles and map out second order impacts. As they outline these secondary impacts of the identified data point, they should build upon the first order impacts identified. Here, emphasise intersectional thinking, for example: a 'social' first order impact may give rise to a 'technological' second order impact. Here, too, remember to draw arrows connecting them to the first order impact that these are stemming from.

4

Finally, have a conversation to understand which impacts stand out most and why. This will help you prioritise what to include in your scenario in the next step of the process.

We built upon UNICEF's dataset for the *State of the World's Children 2024* report, which highlighted three transformative megatrends shaping children's lives by 2050: demographic transition, climate change, and frontier technologies.

## 1. Data point

## 2. First order impact

### 3. Second order impact

# Worksheet 2: Deepening the Future

## NAME OF SCENARIO

### SCENARIO FACT SHEET

#### A. BRAINSTORMING AND NOTES SPACE

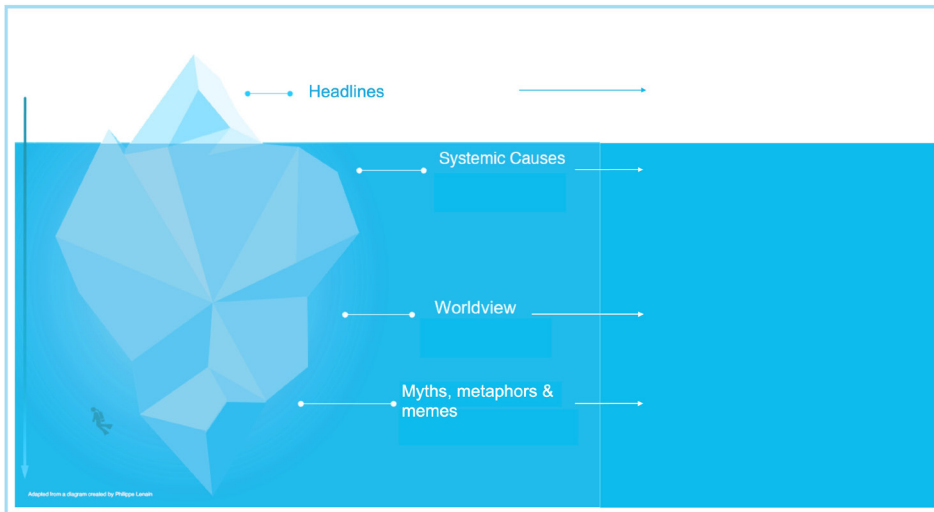
Use this space as your notebook/brain-dump! Take a few minutes to add your reflections, ideas, important points from the futures wheels and scenario discussion here. It can be messy, this is just for you!

##### i. Futures Wheel Content

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##### ii. What's missing, what else should be included?

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WHAT WILL MOST CHILDREN BE DOING IN SUCH A WORLD?



WHAT OLD PROBLEMS/OPPORTUNITIES THAT PEOPLE FACE NOW WILL BE GONE, REDUCED OR WORSENER?



WHAT NEW PROBLEMS/OPPORTUNITIES WILL PEOPLE FACE IN 2050 THAT ARE ABSENT OR UNIMPORTANT NOW?



## Explainer:

While STEEPV helps you think broadly, Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) can help think deeply. CLA encourages one to look beyond surface-level trends and explore the underlying structures, worldviews, and metaphors that shape them. If you haven't worked with CLA before, we would suggest practicing ahead of the workshop – it can seem complex, but once you've got a hang of it, it becomes quite intuitive!



## Worksheet 2: Deepening the Future

The four steps of the CLA framework can be understood in this way:

**Litany (the headlines):** What's happening on the surface? What are people saying?

**Systemic Causes:** What institutions, policies, or economic systems are producing these conditions?

**Worldview:** What cultural values, ideologies, or beliefs underpin these systems?

**Memes and Metaphors:** What deep stories do we tell about childhood, progress, or the future?

### Facilitation Guide

Decide how many scenarios you're building. There are many ways to go about this, but we have outlined two options below:

1

- a. Create four scenarios: Continued Growth, Collapse, Discipline, and Transformation. This set of scenarios can be slightly more complex – we suggest using it after reading 'Alternative Futures at the Manoa School',<sup>4</sup> or if you already have some foresight experience.
- b. Create three scenarios: Business as Usual, Best Case, and Worst Case. This pathway is more straightforward and accessible – if this is your first time using foresight, or if you would like to keep things simple for your group of participants, we suggest you start off with this set of scenarios.

2

Once you know how many scenarios you're building, divide participants into groups accordingly. You can have one or more than one group per scenario – we would advise not to have more than six members per group to ensure that everyone gets a chance to contribute meaningfully. Each group should ideally have a facilitator to support them through the process – clarifying instructions and asking follow-up questions to deepen insights as necessary.

3

If you would like, you can set up participants for success by adding a few key data points to the 'Scenario Factsheet' space. This helps give them a few key points to build on as they develop their scenarios.

## Worksheet 2: Deepening the Future

4

Ask participants to add any relevant insights from the superwheels (if used) to the 'Brainstorming' space – this will help them gather all the information they need in one space rather than shuffling between two worksheets.

5

Now give them a moment to read through these insights and see if there is anything that is missing or could be elaborated further. They can then add any such points to the board.

6

For the CLA diagram, start by populating 'Headlines' and work your way down to 'Myths, Memes, Metaphors'. Encourage participants to share verbally as they write down their ideas. The prompts you can use for each stage are as follows:

- a. Headlines: How does this challenge/opportunity (select which term to use based on the scenario) show up in our day-to-day lives? What is the general translation of the challenge/opportunity?
- b. Systemic Causes: What are the big systems (eg, economic, political, ecological) that have created this challenge/opportunity?
- c. Worldview: What values and cultures are supporting this challenge/opportunity?
- d. Myths, Memes, Metaphors: What myths, memes and metaphors best capture this situation? (Note: in our experience, memes work well with young participants.)

7

Finally, facilitate a discussion about the scenario they have just populated, getting them to share how they feel about it and what stands out to them. You can then ask participants to either write down their answers to the following prompts or share them verbally as a co-facilitator notes down their thoughts:

- a. What will most children be doing in such a world?
- b. What old problems/opportunities that people face now will be gone, reduced, or worsened?
- c. What new problems/opportunities will people face in 2050 that are absent or unimportant now?

8

After the session with participants, see what came up in each scenario and take some time to convert these inputs into a narrative. This is helpful ahead of persona development, for participants to be able to envision these worlds better, but not necessary. Of course, if your process ends with scenario planning, you can skip this step!

## In Our Case

We went with the simpler option and built out three distinct scenarios:

### 1. 'United in Struggle'

In this scenario, children and young people have been radicalised by the failure to adapt economies, infrastructure, and support systems to climate change, shifting demographics, and disruptive technologies. Youth activism has surged as young people demand action against corruption, climate disasters, and inequality, while withdrawing into their communities for support and fostering resilience through local solidarity and grassroots initiatives.

### 2. 'Forced onto the Frontlines'

In this scenario, the world in 2050 is marked by a devastating rise in subnational conflicts globally where child soldiers on the front lines have become more commonplace. In conflict zones, population reduction can be swift, but there are now 1.1 billion children in settings where GDP per capita is less than USD 5,000 a year, eradicating much of our past child development gains. Economic growth lags behind and is prioritised over climate-induced disasters – solutions to which are only accessible to the elite. The child rights agenda has collapsed, just when we needed it the most.

### 3. 'Thriving in a Connected World'

In 2050, the world has embraced the belief that change is possible. This scenario depicts a future where global collaboration, technological advancements, respect for indigenous practices, and a commitment to social good and child rights have transformed societies. Due to steady, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth and empowerment programmes for women and girls, only 48 million children live in settings where GDP per capita is less than USD 5,000. Although climate disasters are more frequent, there is belief that climate change is manageable with current technologies and political will, and children and young people thrive in a world where they are seen as equals in addressing issues that concern them most.

## 2.2 Building Future Child Personas

### Background

Scenarios outline alternative future realities, what we might see as the backdrop – the scenario on a theatrical stage – to life. Alongside this, we wanted to illustrate more concretely what a child’s life might look like, not in the abstract but at a deeply granular level, to demonstrate the kind of accountability that is urgently needed today. In creating future child personas, our focus was not on an imagined ‘idea’ of a child but on specific lived realities of children in different contexts: a six-year-old living on the frontlines of rising sea levels, or a fourteen-year-old with a disability navigating life in a techno-utopia.

In our approach to developing child personas for 2050, we drew heavily on the concept of experiential futures, pioneered by futurist Stuart Candy. Instead of producing static reports, experiential futures encourages the creation of immersive artefacts – objects, media, and experiences – that make abstract scenarios tangible and emotionally resonant.<sup>5</sup>

To bring these personas to life, we began by conducting secondary research to understand the wide spectrum of children’s learning, play, and home-life needs. This process allowed us to establish a foundational understanding of the multifaceted nature of childhood and begin mapping the steps required to imagine a child’s life in future contexts. We then used this to create Future Child Factsheets (see worksheet 3) – ensuring diversity and inclusion that workshop participants could build upon.

Next, to draw rich and nuanced insights from workshop participants’ lived experiences in order for them to build these personas, we developed the Future Child Backpack (see worksheet 4) – an exercise designed to reveal what a child might need and prioritise in future scenarios. What would children heading to school, going to play, or, in some cases, fleeing their homes to escape conflict carry with them in their backpacks?

And last, to ensure that we are accurately representing children and young people’s imaginings of these future children, we crafted a worksheet for them to outline day-in-the-life narratives for each persona (see worksheet 5).



## Worksheet 3: Future Child Factsheets

| Name                                                                                                                                                                                             | Age    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Location:<br>Rural/Urban:<br>Gender:<br>No. of people in household:                                                                                                                              | Blurb: |
| <b>Family structure:</b><br><b>Support system:</b><br><b>Social circles or communities:</b><br><br><b>Family responsibilities:</b><br><b>Learning environment:</b><br><b>Personality traits:</b> |        |

### Explainer:

Drawing insights from your contextual understanding of children's needs and lives, as well as the focus of your research, start the persona development process by curating basic biographic outlines of future children – balancing both challenges and opportunities. To ensure representation, try to make more than one.

The goal here is not to present fully formed characters but rather to create a skeleton that children and young people themselves can build upon – providing participants with just enough information to make each child feel real, but not so much detail that it restricts their creativity or imposes a predetermined narrative.

# In Our Case

Given UNICEF's global presence, it was essential that the personas remained inclusive, so they could reflect how different scenarios might play out in diverse geographies and communities from all regions of the world. These initial sketches ranged from Sonia, a six-year-old girl from a coastal community in South Asia, to Luciana, a young person in Latin America living with a disability.

**Forced onto the Frontlines**

## Sonia

8 years old - South Asia - Coastal Community - 6 people in household



**CONDITIONS**  
Worse than anticipated

**LIVES**  
Sonia lives in a coastal community heavily impacted by climate change, where unpredictable weather and severe storms have taken a toll on her family and neighbours. She cherishes the familiar sounds of the sea.

**LEARNS**  
Sonia works at the fishery and attends a school there run by the women of her community in a seaside mosque. Her education focuses on survival skills and environmental studies, preparing her for the harsh realities of her environment. Limited resources and frequent health crises pose significant challenges to her learning.

**PLAYS**  
Sonia finds joy in creative pursuits, making art inspired by the sea and playing games like Ludo with her cousins. She also cherishes the ritual of lighting an oil lamp in the evening, adding a sense of tradition and warmth to her home.

**VALUES**  
Sonia values community resilience, family bonds, and the beauty of her coastal home. Despite the hardships, she finds solace in the support of her family and the women who run her school, sharing resources and staying strong together.

**CHILD RIGHTS**  
The health crises and lack of reliable medical care emphasise the right to health care, while the scarcity of food and resources underscores the right to an adequate standard of living. The loss of her father to severe weather patterns illustrates the right to protection from the impacts of climate change.

**Forced onto the Frontlines**

## Ashley

16 years old - Europe and Central Asia Rural Community - 5 people in household



**CONDITIONS**  
Worse than anticipated

**LIVES**  
Ashley resides in a conflict-ridden area, where everyday survival is a challenge as most buildings have been destroyed. She lives with her family, holding onto traditions and moments of joy amidst the chaos. The extreme heat and droughts have devastated her farm, making resources scarce.

**LEARNS**  
Despite the destruction of their school, Ashley tries her best to be committed to her education, studying subjects like psychology, sociology, and music in a makeshift classroom. Limited technology and resources make learning difficult, but Ashley persists, driven by a desire to understand and improve their world.

**PLAYS**  
Amidst turbulent times, Ashley tries to make the most of the few moments of enjoyment that she gets. She listens to music on an old gramophone and tends to her farm animals, finding solace in these simple pleasures. Her bond with her dog and chickens provides much needed comfort and reduces her anxiety which can sometimes feel out of control.

**VALUES**  
Ashley values resilience, community, and the hope for a better future where young people will not be put in harm's way as child soldiers. She leans on her family and few remaining friends for emotional support, and tries to continue shared traditions as best as she can.

**CHILD RIGHTS**  
The conflict has disrupted Ashley's access to quality education, a fundamental right. The scarcity of resources and unsafe living conditions underscore the importance of the right to adequate living standards and health care. Ashley's situation also emphasises the right to protection from violence and exploitation, as many of her friends have been recruited to fight.

**United in Struggle**

## Luciana

8 years old - Latin America and the Caribbean - 4 people in household



**CONDITIONS**  
As anticipated

**LIVES**  
Luciana lives in a dense urban neighbourhood with her family. Her parents work multiple jobs, leaving early each day, while she and her brother manage their morning routine independently, highlighting their daily struggles.

**LEARNS**  
Luciana is homeschooled with traditional books and an AI tutor. She excels in maths but worries about potentially losing their computer due to economic hardship. Her education is supported by her brother and a family friend, ensuring she stays on track despite financial and health challenges.

**PLAYS**  
Luciana enjoys gardening and participating in youth-led environmental groups. Health issues like fatigue and dizziness sometimes limit her activities, but she remains active in her community.

**VALUES**  
Luciana values education, community involvement, and environmental stewardship. She cherishes the stories her father tells about their ancestors, which provide her with a sense of identity and purpose.

**CHILD RIGHTS**  
Luciana's experience underscores the importance of access to education and healthcare. Her reliance on an AI tutor highlights the need for innovative educational solutions. Addressing vaccine hesitancy, economic instability, and healthcare access is crucial for safeguarding her rights and future opportunities.

**Thriving in a Connected World**

## Kwame

8 years old - Central & Western Africa - Urban Dense Community - 6 people in household



**CONDITIONS**  
Better than anticipated

**LIVES**  
Kwame lives in a busy urban neighbourhood in Central and Western Africa with his parents and three siblings. His mornings start with tending community trees and enjoying fresh produce for breakfast. Despite the hustle and bustle, he feels a strong sense of community and support from his family and neighbours.

**LEARNS**  
Kwame attends a hybrid school that blends in-person and online learning. His favourite subject is writing, and he uses his tablet for online courses and virtual classrooms. He faces challenges like occasional power outages and limited internet connectivity, but he and his peers are resourceful, often downloading lessons in advance to ensure continuous learning.

**PLAYS**  
In the evenings, Kwame plays football with neighbourhood kids in green spaces, bringing energy and joy to his community. He also enjoys online games and self-development tutoring sessions, which help him build skills beyond the regular curriculum.

**VALUES**  
Kwame values education, community, and the balance of tradition and modernity. He is passionate about storytelling and dreams of contributing to both scientific advancements and cultural preservation. His family's traditions and his school's emphasis on social responsibility share his sense of identity and purpose.

**CHILD RIGHTS**  
Kwame's story underscores the importance of access to quality education and reliable technology. He faces challenges like power outages and limited internet, highlighting the need for better infrastructure. His engagement in health programs and community projects reflects the need for holistic development, ensuring his right to education, health, and a supportive environment is protected.

**Thriving in a Connected World**

## Thandi

16 years old - Eastern and Southern Africa Rural Community - 5 people in household



**CONDITIONS**  
Better than anticipated

**LIVES**  
Thandi lives in a rural community in Eastern and Southern Africa with her family. Despite limited resources, she feels strong love and support from her family and community. Her mornings start with fetching water from the community well and enjoying a hearty breakfast from their garden's fresh produce.

**LEARNS**  
Thandi attends a community school that integrates traditional knowledge with modern technology. She excels in civic education, STEM, and digital literacy, with a particular passion for responsible AI. Her tablet, provided through a government project, is essential for accessing AI tutors and educational resources.

**PLAYS**  
Thandi participates in traditional dance classes, celebrating her rich heritage. She enjoys stargazing, playing mancala with friends and siblings, and helping with family chores, including tending the garden and preparing dinner with fresh produce.

**VALUES**  
Thandi values education, cultural preservation, and community support. She is determined to integrate indigenous knowledge with technological advancements to benefit her community. Her mentor, Mrs. Mwenza, inspires her to stand firm in her beliefs and revitalize her studies with confidence.

**CHILD RIGHTS**  
Thandi's experience highlights the importance of access to quality education and the need for cultural preservation in the face of modernization. Addressing the challenges of integrating technology with local customs is crucial for safeguarding her cultural heritage and ensuring her community benefits from technological advancements. Her story underscores the importance of supporting initiatives that balance progress with tradition.

**Thriving in a Connected World**

## Mahmud

16 years old - Middle East & Northern Africa - Urban Dense Community - 3 people in household



**CONDITIONS**  
Better than anticipated

**LIVES**  
Mahmud lives in a small apartment in a dense urban community in the Middle East, sharing the space with two roommates. He moved to the city on a scholarship to attend a prestigious high school, seeking better education and future prospects. His daily life balances modern technology and traditional values.

**LEARNS**  
Mahmud attends a traditional school but excels in subjects involving AI development, healthcare, and social movements. He uses a trivia pursuit game to help him stay focused during the school day. His school emphasises critical thinking, empathy, and digital responsibility, which resonate deeply with his personal experiences and aspirations.

**PLAYS**  
Mahmud enjoys engaging in community service projects and working on his innovative asthma sensor, powered by solar energy. He finds relaxation in cooking traditional meals with his roommates, playing trivia games, and connecting with virtual communities focused on AI and green technology.

**VALUES**  
Mahmud values education, social responsibility, and environmental sustainability. He is dedicated to improving healthcare accessibility and deeply respects his cultural heritage and religious practices. His close bond with his roommates and family traditions provide emotional support and a sense of belonging.

**CHILD RIGHTS**  
The challenges Mahmud identifies in access to quality education and healthcare highlight the necessity of ensuring these fundamental rights. The emphasis on critical thinking and empathy in his education reflects the importance of preparing children for future challenges. Moreover, his involvement in community service and technological innovation showcases the potential of young people when their rights to education, health, and safety are upheld.

# Worksheet 4: Future Child Backpack

## BACKPACK

\_\_\_\_\_ is leaving his/her/their home in the morning. Think about where he/she/they could be going, what does his/her/their day look like? Based on that and the information you have about him/her/their bag, what would he/she/they need to pack in his/her/their bag? Hint: we've added some categories to help you out!

### 1. A tech device

ADD IMAGE HERE

1. What is this item?
2. Why must they carry it, what will it help them with?
3. Who got this for them and how?
4. Does this item hold value? (monetary or sentimental)?
5. Do most children have this item in this world?

### 2. A food item

ADD IMAGE HERE

1. What is this item?
2. Why must they carry it, what will it help them with?
3. Who got this for them and how?
4. Does this item hold value? (monetary or sentimental)?
5. Do most children have this item in this world?



1. What is this item?
2. Why must they carry it, what will it help them with?
3. Who got this for them and how?
4. Does this item hold value? (monetary or sentimental)?
5. Do most children have this item in this world?

ADD IMAGE HERE

### 5. You choose!

### 3. An item that supports learning

ADD IMAGE HERE

1. What is this item?
2. Why must they carry it, what will it help them with?
3. Who got this for them and how?
4. Does this item hold value? (monetary or sentimental)?
5. Do most children have this item in this world?

### 4. You choose!

ADD IMAGE HERE

1. What is this item?
2. Why must they carry it, what will it help them with?
3. Who got this for them and how?
4. Does this item hold value? (monetary or sentimental)?
5. Do most children have this item in this world?

# Worksheet 4: Future Child Backpack

## Explainer

For each persona that you have laid the foundation for above, ask workshop participants to pack a bag for this future child as they leave their home in the morning. The idea here is to capture nuanced insights about the life that this child lives, while also making the future tangible through physical artefacts – drawing from the experiential futures framework.

## Facilitation Guide

1

Assign each group of participants a persona factsheet and give them some time to absorb it and have a conversation amongst themselves about this future child.

2

Then, introduce the backpack exercise to them – encourage them to be creative (feel free to jump in with provocations where you feel it would be beneficial to their process) and to draw or add images where they can! Ensure that participants are working together to identify items and not in isolation.

Each backpack must contain six items:

1. An item they use for learning
2. A food item
3. A sentimental object
4. A technological device
5. A recreational item
6. One blank slot for participants to fill with their own ideas

3

For each item they add to the backpack, they must also answer the following questions in as much detail as possible:

1. What is this item?
2. Why must they carry it, what will it help them with?
3. Who got this for them and how?
4. Does this item hold value (monetary or sentimental)?
5. Do most children have this item in this world?

## In Our Case

The choices participants made spoke volumes – whether learning devices that reflected future education systems, technological innovations (or their absence) that signalled inequality or access, or sentimental objects that revealed what children might value most deeply in uncertain times.

For example:

### **Ashley (Worse than Anticipated Scenario): Fireproof Clothing**

These clothes are designed to protect children from wildfires, shielding them from burns and flames during sudden wildfires which have become common as a result of climate change. They were purchased by parents for their children as a safety necessity. Due to shortages, they are very expensive, giving them high monetary value. While many families try to ensure their children have them, only those who can afford them are able to, making access unequal for what is an essential item.

### **Mahmud (Change is Possible Scenario): Trivia Pursuit Game**

This is a game that helps him stay focused and motivated while studying, especially before exams. As someone who is hyperactive and struggles to concentrate, he uses the cards to channel his energy productively and enhance his learning. He bought the game himself, and it holds strong educational value as well as a sense of personal achievement and control. Most children in this world don't have such a tool, making it a unique and empowering possession.

### **Sonia (Change is Possible Scenario): Music Therapy Device for Fish**

This unique device plays therapeutic music for fish, helping nurture aquatic life with the same care given to humans. It reflects a belief in empathy and well-being for all living beings. Her father invented it, making it both a personal and innovative creation. The device holds significant sentimental and ethical value, symbolizing compassion and holistic care. Only children who work with fish have such a device, making it rare and special.





# Worksheet 5: Day-in-the-Life Narratives

## *A DAY IN THEIR LIFE LOOKS LIKE...*

### **MORNING**

Think about how their morning - what are they eating, how are they getting ready?

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Who do they turn to for support and who takes care of them?

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How do they feel about the day ahead?

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### **DAYTIME**

What subjects/skills are they most interested in? How do they learn?

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How are they using technology in their day?

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What challenges do they face and how do they overcome them?

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### **EVENING**

What activities are happening in the evening?

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What do they do for fun?

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As they lay down to sleep, what hopes do they have for themselves and the world?

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# Worksheet 5: Day-in-the-Life Narratives

## Explainer:

To ensure the process remains true to children and young people's perspectives from start to finish, ask participants to translate their ideas into 'day-in-the-life' narratives for each child, broken into morning, afternoon, and evening. The open-ended prompts here invite them to describe daily routines, imagine the last thought a child might have before bed, or reflect on the community and relationships surrounding them.

## Facilitation Guide

1

To wrap up the persona development process, ask participants to now, in their groups, fill out this day-in-the-life worksheet for their future child personas. Explain that this is meant to be like a story of this child's day, so long-form writing is also welcome.

2

Participants work their way from morning to evening, answering the following prompts as they go:

i. Morning:

What are they eating? How are they getting ready?

Who do they turn to for support and who takes care of them?

How do they feel about the day ahead?

ii. Daytime:

What subjects/skills are they most interested in? How do they learn?

How are they using technology in their day?

What challenges do they face and how do they overcome them?

iii. Evening:

What activities are happening in the evening?

What do they do for fun?

As they lay down to sleep, what hopes do they have for themselves and the world?

As a facilitator, you can sporadically ask probing questions to help participants connect the dots between different activities.

## In Our Case

The outcome was six diverse stories of future children – spanning regions, demographics, and needs – each offering a window into very different futures. Together, they captured not only how children’s rights might be experienced in 2050 but also how children and young people today can be empowered to imagine and shape those possible futures.

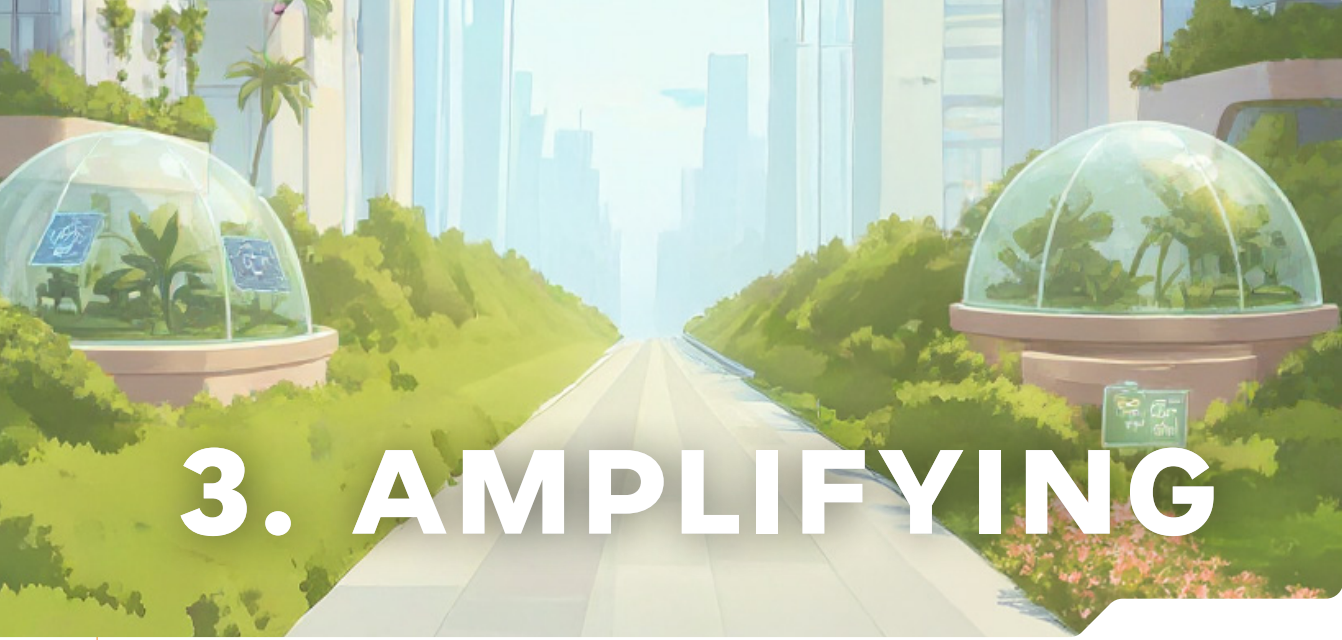
For example:

### **Thandi (Change is Possible Scenario):**

As the sun rises, Thandi starts her day with fresh fruits and vegetables from her family’s garden. She helps cook breakfast, catches up on the morning news, and gets ready for school feeling cheerful and hopeful. Supported by her parents, grandmother, and teachers, she feels determined to make the most of the day ahead.

During the day, Thandi’s lessons blend civic education, STEM, AI, and green skills. She learns through hands-on projects, mentorship, and volunteering. Using her tablet to take notes and access educational resources, she also helps mobilize community campaigns online. Despite challenges like limited books and funding, Thandi and her peers find creative ways to share materials and use local resources to keep learning.

As evening arrives, Thandi helps her family prepare dinner, assists her younger siblings with homework, and studies for school. Later, she relaxes by playing games, stargazing, gardening, or listening to stories from elders. Before she falls asleep, Thandi dreams of peace in her community, good health for her family, and a future where all children have equal opportunities to learn and succeed.



# 3. AMPLIFYING

Amplifying the Future Child Persona methodology involves elevating its reach and resonance across global foresight and policy spaces. This process focuses on expanding awareness and understanding of how children’s rights and long-term futures intersect. To scale this impact, we needed platforms that could bridge innovation, research, and influence.

The Dubai Future Foundation offered such a platform through the Dubai Future Forum - a global convening that brings together thinkers and practitioners shaping the future. Presenting the Future Child Personas in this space amplified the call for empathy and human-centered design into foresight practices and demonstrated the value of child and youth perspectives.

## 3.1 About the Dubai Future Forum

The Dubai Future Forum is the flagship gathering of the Dubai Future Foundation, the agency of the government of Dubai mandated to think “10 years ahead” for Dubai and to inspire the world. Dubbed as the world’s largest gathering of futurists, it attracts 2,500 individuals from 100 countries and has been held annually since 2022 at the Museum of the Future in Dubai. Since its inception, its goal has been to be a gathering that resonates with the urgency of today’s challenges and the promise of tomorrow. Its target, for both participants and speakers, is people involved in imagining and shaping the future, conceptually and materially. From discussions on the future of philanthropy to activations on the future of play to panels addressing longevity, AI for nature, and the power of traditions, it aims to spark conversations that inspire action.

## 3.2 Dubai Future Forum 2024: Outcomes and Convening

At the 2024 edition of the Dubai Future Forum, the launch of the *State of the World's Children* on 20 November – World Children's Day – marked a major milestone in embedding youth-centred foresight into policy conversations. This effort showcased how fictional yet deeply grounded personas can humanise data, give voice to young people's futures, and help decision-makers imagine policy through the lived realities of tomorrow's children.



### Luciana

From Latin America, grows up in a hyper-connected, climate-conscious city where AI tutors personalize her learning and indigenous knowledge is blended with advanced technology. Despite her rich academic life, she longs for deeper interpersonal connection in a world dominated by devices.

### Mahmud

A young innovator in the Middle East, balances tradition and modernity as he designs a solar-powered asthma sensor while juggling school, civic duties, and strong cultural values that shape his identity and goals.



### Sonia

Based in a seemingly resilient coastal community in South Asia, finds strength in tradition, art, and environmental stewardship. She leverages music therapy and AI tools to navigate grief and contribute to community solutions like beach clean-ups and climate preparedness.



## Thandi

Thandi is a bright and determined young girl who dreams of becoming a teacher. She is responsible for fetching water and helping her mother with household chores, but she always makes time for her studies. She is known in her village for her cheerful disposition and resilience.



## Kwame

Kwame is well known on his busy urban street. He is constantly getting his siblings and neighborhood friends together to play football and tag. His laughter can be heard from far away. Though Kwame can be silly and carefree, he takes looking after his siblings seriously as his parents are often busy operating the family business.

## Ashley

A spirited youngest child, Ashley enjoys being spoiled by the family. Despite being limited by a physical mobility issue, Ashley enjoys playing with friends in the fields and nurturing plants. The parents worry it might be difficult to adjust to life outside the village.



The Dubai Future Forum offered a unique and powerful platform for this work to be experienced – not just by those advocating for children’s rights but by technologists, futurists, private sector partners, and government officials shaping long-term strategies. More importantly, it validated the role of youth not only as ‘consumers’ of policy but also as co-authors of the future. The 2024 edition marked in fact the first time that the Children’s Floor in the Museum of the Future was activated as part of the Dubai Future Forum’s official agenda.

Participating in the Dubai Future Forum as part of the UNICEF Innocenti team with a clear mission made the experience empowering – shifting from merely attending to actively building and contributing meaningfully to the global futures community. Connecting with participants during our activation was mutually inspiring and has led to invitations to conduct workshops in their countries.

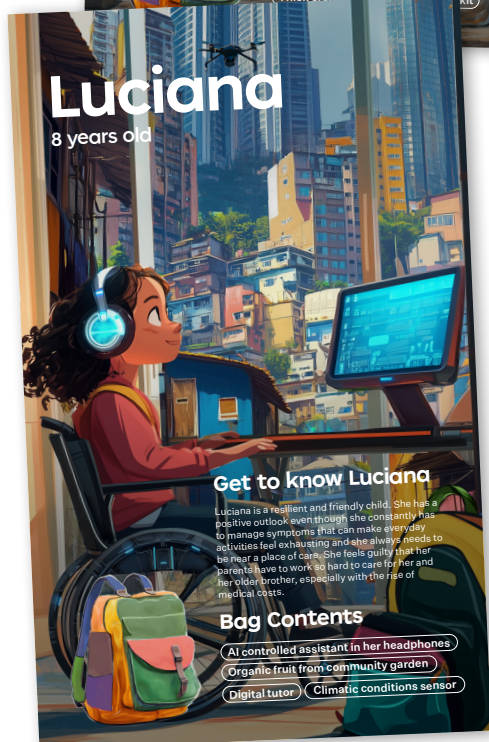
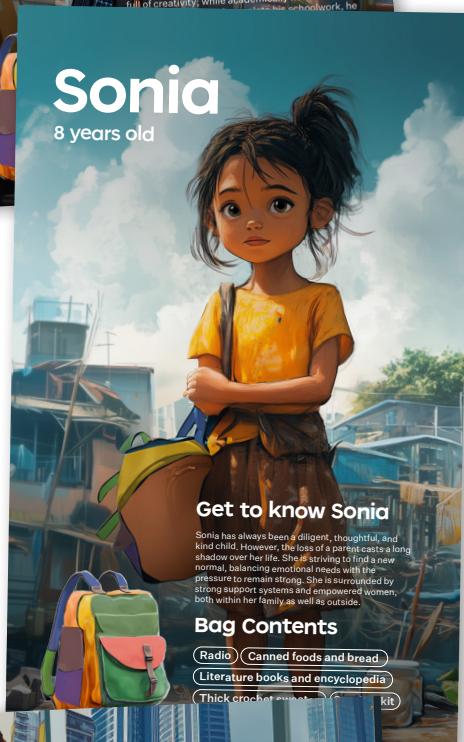
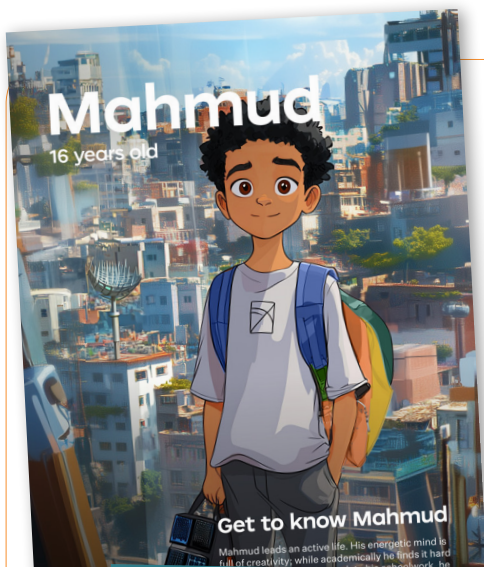
*Aisha Robei (2024 UNICEF Youth Foresight Fellow - Algeria)*

Sharing this work with the global foresight community has sparked meaningful conversations beyond the Dubai Future Forum – from questions around how to integrate these personas into anticipatory governance toolkits to the use of narrative foresight in youth empowerment programmes. And as we look ahead, the personas – and the children they represent – invite us to be positivists and reimagine futures thinking as a more caring, inclusive, and intergenerational practice. One where data is contextualised, technology is made ethical, and every child’s vision of the future matters.

## Messages to the Future<sup>6</sup>

The exhibit also included a telephone booth, where forum participants could hear a message from each of these future children and leave one in return. Their messages revealed how deeply the Future Child Personas exhibit resonated with its audience - evoking empathy, reflection, and a sense of moral responsibility.

Participants spoke directly to the personas as if they were real children, offering encouragement and promises of action. Many expressed hopes for a better world, pledging to build cleaner, fairer, and more caring futures. Others conveyed admiration for the children’s resilience and courage, apologizing for the shortcomings of the present and committing to “do better.”



### Balqees Fathi, UNICEF Gulf Ambassador:

*“Hi, Mahmoud, I’m so proud of you, our young entrepreneur. Good luck with your renewable energy business and I hope that you excel in it, and I’m sure you will. You’re just 16 years old and there’s a great future awaiting you. I love you and take care of yourself and your family.”*

### Participants (kept as anonymous)

*“Hi Sonia, I read about you. You are such an inspiration. I think you’re going through a lot, but you’re putting on a brave face and we all love you so much and I think the world that we are trying to change now is a world that you would want to enjoy and learn and be playful and at the same time give to people who are in need. I’m just hoping that the world that we create and that we leave behind is a world in which you can actually achieve all the dreams that you aspire for. Love you.”*

*“Hi Luciana, you’re doing amazing with what you have in front of you and it’s amazing to see your journey and making the most of what’s afforded to you. I truly hope that you continue with your resilience and your hard work, and I hope that we do right by you in the present. Thank you.”*

*“Hello, I want to tell you, don’t be afraid of the future and also be hopeful and do all that you can with the folks around you that you love, to talk to them about what your hopes and dreams are, and then encourage them to help you get the skills to get there and oh, what a beautiful exhibit. Thank you.”*

*“Hi, Mahmoud. I just wanted to say that your story is very inspiring. It definitely inspired me to look into how we can better leverage solar energy. And I just feel more connected to your work through your story. And best of luck.”*



*“Hi Sonia, I hope you’re doing good. I hope also that you will enjoy more the place where you live and that we will be able to leave you a better place to live in the next years. Wait one second. We will, we will make our utmost to leave you a better place than you found when you were born. So definitely we will. We will put our energies and our efforts to contribute to clean up this world and make sure that when you when you grow, you will find always more resources and a better and healthier place to live. Bye, Sonia.”*

*“Hi Ashley, I hope that you know that despite everything that is happening, your voice matters and you are such a powerful force of nature that it’s just inspiring to learn more about what you do and keep going on, moving forward and bringing positivity into your life. I know times are difficult, but when you have courage and resilience in yourself, you can do anything. It’s lovely to talk to you.”*

*“I’m sorry for everything that we’ve done. Please forgive us and I wish you all the best. Be better and do better than us.”*



# 4. CONCLUSION

These personas are not speculative abstractions; they are narrative tools rooted in foresight research and co-developed with youth. They reflect regional diversity, real inequalities, and emerging global trends – from neurotechnology and public-purpose AI to climate resilience and cultural preservation. When brought together, they form a nuanced, hopeful, and sometimes conflicting map of how children might live, learn, play, and lead in the world of 2050.

For policymakers, futures thinkers, and institutional leaders, these personas serve as ‘bridging tools’ – they bridge data and emotion, foresight and empathy. They surface blind spots in current systems: the emotional toll of technology-driven education, the invisibility of grief and compassion in design processes, and the trade-offs between social responsibility and public duty versus innovation and personal gain.

At the same time, they provoke new lines of inquiry for the future of childhood:

**How can public policy nurture emotionally resilient, socially connected children in a future surrounded by AI and immersive tech?**

**What investments are needed to sustain traditions while scaling innovation in rural communities?**

**And how do we ensure that young people’s agency is embedded not just in rhetoric but in the structures and systems that shape long-term planning and governance?**

Child rights are not optional principles but binding obligations. They represent the foundation for human dignity, equality, and justice – and must remain non-negotiable even in times of uncertainty or disruption. Together, we can leverage our situated knowledges of our communities to create future child personas that serve as catalysts for bringing empathy and imagination into decision-making processes that have become devoid of these attributes. Our organisations see these as seeds for discourse that move policymakers and decision-makers to engage with possible futures through the lives and perspectives of future children – ultimately driving change today, for better tomorrows.



## Acknowledgements

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## Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions of UNICEF or the Dubai or UAE Federal Governments.

## Endnotes

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