

UNICEF

Strategic Foresight Case Study

LBL Strategies



How UNICEF East Africa leveraged LBL Strategies' *Mastering Foresight: Scenario-Based Planning (SBP)* training to prepare for the future and operate in a world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA).



OVERVIEW

UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund is an agency of the United Nations responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide. They work in over 190 countries and territories to save children's lives, defend their rights, and help them fulfill their potential from early childhood through adolescence.

UNICEF South Sudan, in particular, is facing several challenges in accomplishing its mission because of climate change, a volatile economic situation, and geopolitical issues. This has created a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) situation for the foreseeable future and has resulted in a chronic protracted complex emergency. Due to the high level of uncertainty regarding the future trajectory of the conflict, UNICEF representatives in East Africa leveraged foresight training by LBL Strategies to learn how to write scenarios and incorporate results into their long-term planning. They wanted to learn a practical scenario approach to help them develop strategies and provide agile programming that addresses uncertainty and crisis.

APPROACH

LBL Strategies provided an intensive, hands-on training workshop to leverage foresight tools and techniques called *Mastering Foresight: Scenario-Based Planning* certification program tailored for the UNICEF team. This course provides certification in Strategic Foresight by George Washington (GW) University, Center for Excellence in Public Leadership. It is also endorsed by the Baldrige Foundation. It taught UNICEF participants how to scan the environment for signals and trends, identify key drivers of uncertainty, write scenarios, conduct workshops to yield innovative solutions, and leverage tools to analyze capabilities for investment, including "how-tos" for bridging the gap between foresight and strategy.

From Day One, a logical path for understanding the critical five phases unfolds, revealing a practical foresight process.

PHASES:

1. Focus on the Future
2. Develop Alternative Worlds
3. Facilitate a Scenario-Based Planning Workshop
4. Analyze Future Investments
5. Apply to Strategy Formulation



PHASE 1- Focus on the Future

UNICEF team members first studied how to scan the environment for signals and trends that may indicate how the future may unfold. Trend cards (see figure below) were introduced, and participants combined them to look for ways the convergence of these trends could impact future operations.

PHASE 1- Focus on the Future (continued)



A circular graphic with a green background. Inside the circle, a person's hands are holding a smartphone. Overlaid on the image are various white icons representing business and technology, such as a bar chart, a pie chart, a gear, a target, and a document. The words "GIG ECONOMY" are written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the circle.

GIG ECONOMY

The gig economy isn't going anywhere. Fortunly reported that in 2021, over 59 million Americans counted themselves as gig workers. This career style has grown in popularity due to the possibility of having increased flexibility over your schedule while making the same as you would permanently working for a larger entity. By working on short contracts or as freelancers, workers in the gig economy have more control over their days and careers.

PESTLE: ECONOMIC



An illustration showing two people working. On the left, a woman with long dark hair is sitting on a large orange beanbag chair, looking at her smartphone. A desk lamp is behind her, and a small potted plant sits on a table next to her. On the right, a man with red hair and glasses is sitting at a desk, working on a laptop. A clock on the wall shows approximately 10:10.

WHY IT MATTERS

Freelancers are posed to be the workforce majority by 2027. This career path offers increased autonomy, flexibility and additional income, so it's a no-brainer why it's on the rise.

New platforms and companies are now offering physicians the chance to join the gig economy. The growing digital health industry is allowing physicians to find more flexibility in a typically inflexible career.

Sources:
<https://medcitynews.com/2019/04/how-the-gig-economy-stands-to-change-healthcare/>
<https://www.wheel.com/blog/gig-economy-thriving-in-healthcare/>
<https://fortunly.com/statistics/gig-economy-statistics/#gref>
<https://assets.freelancersunion.org/media/documents/FreelancingInAmericaReport-2017.pdf>

PESTLE: ECONOMIC

PHASE 2- Develop Alternative Worlds

Participants then developed four world drivers and poles that would shape the future environment.

South Sudan UNICEF Program: 2030		
Driver 1:	Security	Description of the Future in 2030
Pole A: Stable		Static populations, adequate access to social services, uninterrupted livelihood activities, peaceful environment.
Pole B: Conflict		Constrained access to social services, increased humanitarian needs, displacement of populations, violence targeting humanitarian workers.
Driver 2:	Economy	Description of the Future in 2030
Pole A: Strong		Increased purchasing power, availability/ financial access to services, adequate resources to social services, improved productivity, high GDP
Pole B: Weak		Poor remuneration of public servants, unemployment, falling purchasing power,
Driver 3:	Infrastructure	Description of the Future in 2030
Pole A: Resilient		Climatic shock resilient agriculture, health facilities, schools, Water Sanitation and Hygiene facilities (WASH) and transport system.
Pole B: Weak		Compromised food production, inadequate access to basic social services, recurrent outbreak of disease, constrained transport system (mobility), WASH facilities.
Driver 4:	Governance	Description of the Future in 2030
Pole A: Strong		Equitable allocation of resources, transparent, inclusive and accountable systems.
Pole B: Poor		Widespread corruption, inequality, poverty and increased vulnerability, inflation

These four drivers with opposing poles combined to create 16 possible scenarios. Then, UNICEF team members selected four alternative worlds from those 16 possible combinations in order to deeply analyze how the potential trends and signals might affect the future of their programs. They brainstormed how the future may look given advances in all sectors across a PESTLE (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental + Industry) framework.

One team’s example is depicted here- they called their scenario “Buried Hope”:

PESTLE+I UNICEF Trends/Signals

The world in 2030

	Political	Economic	Social	Technological	Legal	Environmental	Industry
World #3: BBBB “Buried Hope”	A few ruling ethnic communities	Deplorable living conditions	Low access to basic social services.	Little technological advancement –South Sudan behind rest of the world	Widespread violation of human rights	Flooding, overlapping with drought.	Access constraints for humanitarian action
BBBB Security Conflict: Constrained access to social services, increased humanitarian needs, displacement of populations, violence targeting humanitarian workers. Economy Weak: Poor remuneration of public servants, unemployment, falling purchasing power. Infrastructure Weak: Compromised food production, inadequate access to basic social services, recurrent outbreak of disease, constrained transport system (mobility), WASH facilities. Governance Poor: Widespread corruption, inequality, poverty and increased vulnerability, inflation	No elections	Increased poverty and inequality	Drastic increase in disparities	Massive brain drain affecting local production/innovation	Complete disregard for rule of law	Active fighting and conflict. Intercommunal conflicts	Looting of humanitarian resources/supplies
	War and conflict everywhere	Inflation	Increased displacement affecting social constructs	Limited capacity to exploit natural resources	Selective application of justice	Population live in camps	Redirecting of humanitarian funding
	Mushrooming of political interest groups	Chronic unemployment	Massive displacement of populations	Limited access to social media and information	Unfair prosecution/trials	Unmitigated climate change.	Increased needs for donor funding (high operation costs)
	Lack of accountability in the public sector	Volatile economy	Increased prevalence of wasting and mortality	Export of raw materials instead of finished products			Collapse of development programs
	Widespread Corruption						Brain Drain

Once world parameters were decided, and the future environment brainstormed, they created scenarios and vignettes to be used in the workshop. An example vignette is here:

The Buried Hope of South Sudan in 2030

Security

Economy

Infrastructure

Governance

Conflict

Weak

Weak

Poor

Security Conflict: Constrained access to social services, increased humanitarian needs, displacement of populations, violence targeting humanitarian workers.

Economy Weak: Poor remuneration of public servants, unemployment, falling purchasing power.

Infrastructure Weak: Compromised food production, inadequate access to basic social services, recurrent outbreak of disease, constrained transport system (mobility), WASH facilities.

Governance Poor: Widespread corruption, inequality, poverty and increased vulnerability, inflation



INFINIX AI CAMERA

- Volatile political situation
- Unstable economy
- Lack of funding for humanitarian response
- Access constraints for humanitarian action
- Unmitigated climate change
- Grave violation of human rights
- Persistent insecurity and conflicts
- Food insecurity, water shortages, malnutrition, and gender-based violence issues.
- Displacement of population
- Constricted media freedom; limited access to social media and information

PHASE 3- Facilitate a Scenario-Based Planning Workshop

Once scenarios and vignettes were created, a series of well-planned and sequential workshop exercises ensued. Participants learned how to moderate and run a scenario-based planning workshop utilizing LBL Strategies' provided templates that maximized and organized output in a logical manner.

PHASE 4- Analyze Future Investments

These carefully-designed training sessions provided a logical progression for participants to exercise their “future thinking” muscles in order to develop creative and innovative approaches to defining future capabilities and recommendations for UNICEF strategies - both at the corporate and regional levels.

An example of final recommendations from just one of the four teams follows:



PHASE 5- Apply to Strategy Formulation

At the conclusion of the course, UNICEF Team members translated prioritized investments and recommendations into strategic objectives that could serve as the basis for corporate or regional strategies.

RESULTS

The Mastering Foresight: Scenario-Based Planning certification program helped UNICEF team think strategically, screen for opportunities, and identify the capabilities and resources necessary for the coming changes. As a result of the training course, UNICEF team members learned how to:

- Design and run a foresight program
- Scan for signals and trends
- Identify future drivers of uncertainty
- Utilize a PESTLE framework
- Write scenarios and vignettes
- Lead a Scenario-Based Planning Workshop
- Prepare a communication plan to share recommendations with stakeholders
- Analyze foresight output
- Bridge the gap between foresight and strategy

TESTIMONIALS

Biram Ndiaye, *Chief Nutrition, UNICEF Somalia*.

Formulation and execution of a successful strategic plan for humanitarian response in fragile, conflict, and violence affected countries necessitates having leaders who can use adaptive programming approaches. This training has equipped me and my team members with tools and techniques to facilitate a participatory workshop in scenario-based planning. By integrating a scenario-based planning approach in the Drought Response Plan, UNICEF Somalia Nutrition Program was able to avoid therapeutic food supply pipeline break and contribute to prevent famine in Somalia in 2022. I believe that this training can provide skills and tools to staff members from United Nations Agencies and Civil Society Organizations working in emergency context to improve their performance in responding to constantly evolving humanitarian situations characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

ABOUT LBL Strategies

Our mission is to help organizations focus, make better decisions, and grow by leveraging foresight to think and act strategically.

Since 1985 we have provided strategy management education, training, and consulting services to public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Over time, we became the global leader in university-based and industry-based strategic management certification preparation. In fact, 97% of learners who complete our coursework and sit for industry certification, pass on their first attempt.

LBL Strategies is recognized by the International Association for Strategy Professionals (IASP) as a global leader in strategic management education, training, and certification courses. Our programs are offered in conjunction with George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership, IASP, and the Baldrige Foundation. We have a lengthy track-record of federal training and our instructors have more than 100 years of combined experience in the strategy management industry. Our consultancy practice has helped over hundreds of clients develop and manage their strategy.

For more information, contact <https://www.lblstrategies.com/>

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