

# Scanning the Horizon – Annual Meeting 2018

19 - 21 June 2018, LMS Conference Centre, Nairobi, Kenya

“Development, technology, politics: Future impacts on ICSOs”

29 June 2018

## Outcome

On 19-21 June 2018 the International Civil Society Centre brought together a group of 30 futurists and experts of strategic foresight. The meeting, which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, provided participants with the opportunity to compare their findings on new trends affecting the civil society sector and to learn from each other new approaches to scanning the horizon for emerging opportunities and threats.

On the first day, Jackie Cilliers and Zachary Donnerfeld from the [Institute for Security Studies \(ISS\)](#) in South Africa presented their model for scenario planning on “African Futures – Key Trends to 2035”. They explained how to use big data for modelling and forecasting and then tested the presented model by developing different scenarios for Africa’s future. There was wide agreement among participants that big data will play an important role in shaping our sector’s work and that this model would be a helpful tool when using big data to (re-) shape their programmes.

Day two of the meeting focused on three different areas of forecasting:

- New business models
- Digitalisation
- Populism and politics of demonization

The day started with Irungu Houghton from *Amnesty Kenya*, who provided an overview on key challenges facing civil society organisations. Two of the most critical points he mentioned were:

- The lack of diversity in international civil society organisations (ICSOs), where 64% of Board members and 63% of CEOs still are from the Global North, and
- The lack of connectedness between ICSOs and people-led movements on the ground.

The subsequent discussion focused on the question: Why is our sector changes so slowly, even though we mostly know what has to be changed? Lack of flexibility in organisational structures, inappropriate governance, and lack of personal courage were some of the answers mentioned.

Burkhard Gnärig from the Centre shared some conclusions from his work on new business models for Plan International in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is one of over 50 countries that have recently lost their “developing country” status and now need to finance their further development by relying mainly on their own resources. For ICSOs, this means that many of their funding sources dry up and they need to either find new money or close down their programmes and leave the country. If they decide to stay, ICSOs need to raise the bulk of their funds in-country. The main bottleneck for such strategic foresight at present is the lack of overall direction. Many ICSOs have not yet decided whether they will stay or leave these countries.



The final contribution on the topic “New Business Models” came from Kathy Peach from *BOND*. Kathy presented the fictional organisation [Mantis Systems](#) that uses big data and wide public engagement to address pressing development challenges. The example showed very well how big data can contribute to resolving some of our most challenging problems while at the same time creating new ones such as lack data protection and illegitimate interference at local and country levels.

Robin Miller and Michael Tsan from [Dalberg Advisers](#) presented an impressive overview under the topic of “Digitalisation and its Future Effects on CSOs”. They spoke about digital megatrends and how these are likely to change the world and with that, the work of ICSOs. In groups, participants looking at one trend each got to discuss how they think this might impact the work of their organisations.

The subsequent discussion on “Populism and Politics of Demonization” was informed by presentations from Mercy Corps’ Anna Young and Amnesty Kenya’s Irungu Houghton. Both shared situations of political persecution faced by themselves personally and by their organisations. The trend which has clearly emerged is that ICSOs are no longer “automatically” seen as neutral and well-intentioned actors. Even service-providing organisations that stay clear of contentious advocacy work can no longer be certain that their work will be tolerated, let alone supported. This situation will probably get worse before it will eventually improve again. Therefore, political developments have to be very much at the top of every organisation’s scanning agenda.

Day three looked at different scanning approaches as a basis for joint learning. Piero Fontalan from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) provided an overview on how scanning is being done in his organisation, and Jason Taylor from Plan International explained how he and his team implement strategic foresight. Participants in the subsequent discussion pointed out that they found the concrete examples of how scanning is done by others particularly helpful.

Finally, the meeting discussed how to further develop the Scanning the Horizon community as the start-up grant by the Rockefeller Foundation is phasing out and the group has to continue its work at a lower financial level. Participants agreed that a higher financial contribution from their end was unlikely and that the work had to be reorganised accordingly. The costs and benefits of the community’s Annual Meetings were discussed with a clear tendency to maintain the meetings as it would be difficult to keep the community together on a purely virtual basis. Also, the group felt that we should spend more time in learning from example by each-others and although difficult, keep up the conversation in between meetings. The Centre will develop and share a concrete outline for the post-grant phase in August.

During the afternoon, participants visited Nairobi’s tech community in the “Silicon Savannah”. We got introductions from the impressive organisations [BRCK](#) and [Ushahidi](#) as well as paid a visit to and were inspired by [iHub Nairobi](#). The first Scanning the Horizon meeting taking place outside Europe brought more diversity among the participants and presented new perspectives to strategists who need to scan the whole globe if they want to provide their organisations with timely and relevant insights.