

SPECIAL REPORT

# Youth Futures for Systemic Justice: Anticipation and Innovation Praxis in East and Southern Africa

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# Research Consortium Partners

## Lead: SAIIA Futures

The Futures Programme builds African foresight and innovation capacity to anticipate and prepare for major political, economic, social, security, technological and environmental disruptors facing the SADC region by discovering new possibilities for systemic innovation and anticipatory governance; and by assisting policymakers, the business community and civil society to deal with strategic risks and leverage emerging opportunities for meeting development goals.

## Co-lead: Centre for Sustainability Transitions

The Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST) at Stellenbosch University is an internationally recognised research and learning hub within the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. It focuses on the complex dynamics of sustainability transitions through education, research, and engagement.

## Co-lead: Bertha Centre

The Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the UCT Graduate School of Business is a globally ranked centre of excellence dedicated to advancing social innovation and entrepreneurship. Its mission is to build capacity and knowledge – with partners, practitioners and students – to advance the discourse and systemic impact of social innovation.



# Word list

<b>Action Research</b>	A dynamic, participatory process where those affected by a problem are central to understanding and transforming it.
<b>Agency</b>	The capacity for youth and communities to shape the systems they inhabit and act as active agents of change.
<b>Anticipation</b>	The development of skills and competencies to address future needs and navigate complex challenges.
<b>Anticipatory praxis heuristics</b>	Contextually appropriate, flexible and reflective guiding principles that can serve as relational and strategic change
<b>Change</b>	A shift in framing from passive recipients to active agents of development and transformation.
<b>Change Agency</b>	The role of youth as active agents driving systemic transformation.
<b>Complexity</b>	The interconnectedness of issues within socio-ecological and socio-technical systems, requiring understanding and navigation.
<b>Co-creation</b>	The collaborative process of developing initiatives and outcomes, involving shared design and input.
<b>Foresight</b>	The capability to explore potential futures and challenge dominant narratives, often using specific tools and methods for future
<b>Futures</b>	The exploration and shaping of potential future realities
<b>Participatory</b>	Involving active engagement and shared input from participants in processes and platforms.
<b>Participatory Futures</b>	Processes that actively involve participants in exploring and shaping potential future scenarios.
<b>Praxis</b>	Unveiling the intentionality behind actions encompassing our modes of becoming, deep-seated meanings, and underlying wisdoms.
<b>Social Justice</b>	Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.
<b>Systemic change</b>	A fundamental shift in deep-rooted systems (economic, ecological, social, and epistemic) towards desired futures.
<b>Systemic Justice</b>	The intentional transformation of the deep-rooted systems—economic, ecological, social, and epistemic—that shape beyond fairness in outcomes to interrogate and reimagine the structures, power dynamics, and cultural narratives that determine whose knowledge counts.
<b>Transformative change</b>	A fundamental process or action of shifting existing systems to create new realities. This refers to the act of bringing about deep
<b>Transformative Futures</b>	Desired future states that are fundamentally different, just, inclusive, and regenerative, often co-created through to the outcome or vision of these profound shifts.
<b>Youth</b>	Young people recognised as key architects of systemic transformation.
<b>Youth-centred</b>	Approaches and initiatives that prioritise the perspectives, needs, and active participation of young people.
<b>Youth Futures</b>	The exploration and shaping of potential future realities by and for youth.



# Youth Futures Project – Building on Phase 1

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# Phase 1: Youth and Social Justice Futures in East and Southern Africa

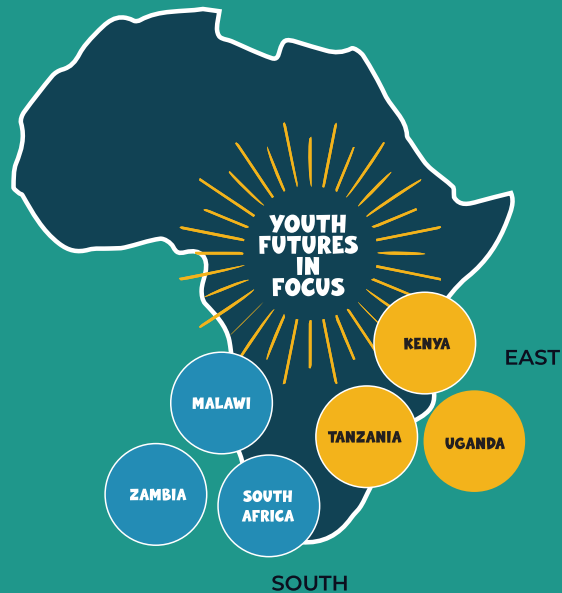
**Project Period:**  
August 2022 – October 2023

**Aim:** Explore youth needs and orientations toward the future to empower youth-led social justice in ESA.

**Problem:** Youth lack futures literacy and strategic foresight skills to drive proactive change and meaningful collaboration with decisionmakers in ESA.



# #1 PROJECT BACKGROUND



## #2 HOW WE APPROACHED IT

Future Literacy  
Labs

3 Horizons  
Framework

Desktop  
Research

Youth Advocacy  
Training

Strategy  
Development

Participatory Futures and Action Research  
SEPTEMBER 2022

National & Regional Policy Advocacy  
NOVEMBER 2023



# Project Findings

## YOUTH AS CHANGEMAKERS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

- dual emphasis on historical context and strategic conversations
- advocating for positive change in the present
- platform for youth researchers to confront complexity, fostering the emergence of action plans.
- prioritised internal change and sensemaking, steering learning journeys toward personal development rather than predefined skills

## FOR SOCIETAL JUSTICE

- navigating learning journeys in resource-limited environments
- created adaptive learning environments that thrive even in infrastructural gaps, searching for innovative alternatives to sustain the learning process.
- transformative power of imagination and futures skills in envisioning just societies

## YOUTH AS FUTURES LITERATE AND AWARE OF ANTICIPATORY ASSUMPTIONS

- creating inclusive spaces for learning, discovery, and reflection
- youth-centric transformative learning spaces
- new futures awareness, orientations, and imaginations

## YOUTH AS CO-CREATORS OF KNOWLEDGE AND POLICY

- collaboratively generating new insights and innovations
- empowering youth researchers in policy entrepreneurship and co-creation
- enhanced understanding, youth agency, and advocacy skills

# Youth needs identified during Phase 1





***“An opportunity to reflect on how I can be impactful and make significant change within the system from my domain” - co-researcher insight***

## **Youth Futures – Phase 2**

### **A focus on Systemic Justice**

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# Understanding Anticipation and Shaping the Future

- **Phase 2 builds on the insights from Phase 1**, particularly the need to expand the focus from **societal justice to systemic justice** - aiming to shape youth change agency through transformative spaces by employing **strategic foresight and participatory experiences of anticipation** that co-create transformative pasts, presents and futures.
- Anticipation is more than just guessing what might happen; it's about **actively working with future possibilities to guide present actions**. This means we're not simply predicting, but practically engaging with the present with what's to come. Crucially, the **future isn't fixed**; instead, timelines and possibilities co exist, and we can actively shape them.



# Systemic Justice

**Building just, inclusive futures require more than policy and social reform – it calls for systemic justice: A systemic reimagining of entire networks of human-nature relationships such as economies, institutions, knowledge and practice so that youth can not only survive but shape the world they want to inherit.**

**Systemic justice refers to intentional transformation of deep-rooted systems – that shape youth pasts, realities and futures. It extends beyond fairness in outcomes to interrogate and reimagine structures, power dynamics and cultural narratives that determine who benefits, who decides and whose knowledge counts.**

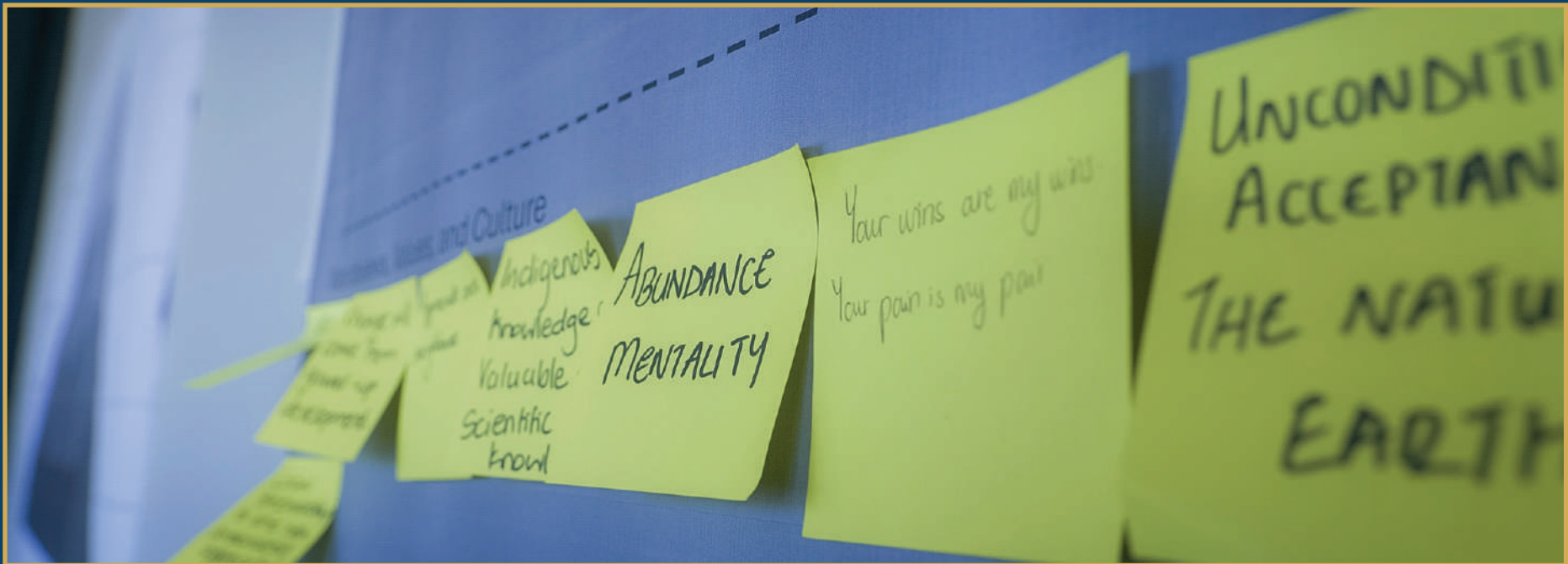
## **Systemic justice**

- envisions economic well-being not merely as access to jobs or income but also as participation in regenerative, locally rooted economies that sustain life and dignity;
- sees ecological resilience as inseparable from cultural memory and indigenous knowledge, calling for youth-centred stewardship and context-specific adaptation; and
- reclaims skills development as a lifelong, relational and anticipatory process that equips youth both to navigate complexity and to reconfigure it in ways that are just, inclusive and futures-oriented.

Systemic justice is about enabling youth and communities to shape the systems they inhabit, restoring agency and co-creating futures grounded in care, accountability, ecological and cultural integrity for intergenerational well-being.

# Rethinking Agency and the Power of Praxis

- Our understanding of **agency** also needs a rethink if we are to act on and contribute to systemic justice. It's not just about individual power; agency also **emerges from networks of relationships** and is constantly evolving, not fixed. Our actions often have unexpected ripple effects, highlighting the interconnectedness of our world.
- This leads us to **praxis**, which is more than just practice. Praxis is an **intentional reflective process revealing practical wisdom through meaningful action** that combines thinking with doing. It demands an awareness of our experiences, thought strategies, beliefs, values, and it's ultimately about shaping responsible futures.

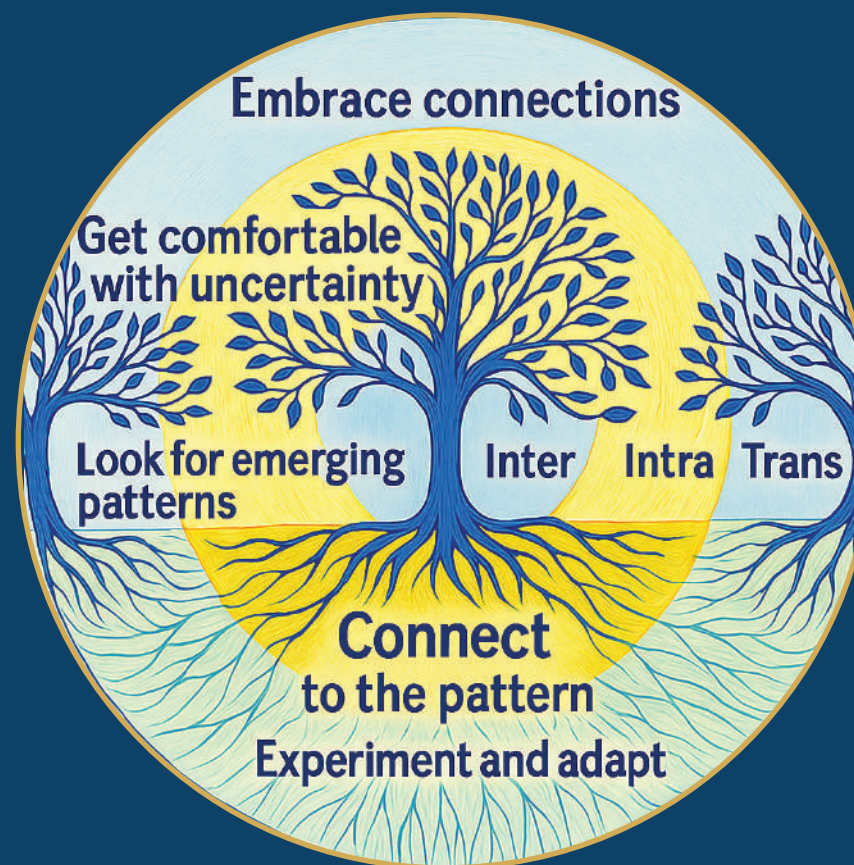


# Principles for Action to Guide Praxis

## Principles for Action

To effectively engage with anticipation and praxis, considering these five principles:

- **Embrace connections:** Experience how everything links together.
- **Get comfortable with uncertainty:** Resist the urge for quick answers and look for where actions don't align to intent.
- **Sense emerging patterns:** Adapt to the context and act according to subtle shifts and changes.
- **Connect to the pattern:** Connect your actions to deeper meaningful actions aligned with practical wisdom.
- **Experiment and adapt:** Explore new ideas, prototype new approaches, learn from the what's changing, and keep on adjusting.



# Our theoretical frame: Youth Anticipation and Shaping Behaviour Towards Systemic Justice

- **Anticipatory behaviour** has two key elements: a **forward-looking attitude** and **translating that foresight into action**. This can be a conscious action-orientated effort or an unconscious habit, but it's always more effective than just reacting to past events. It is leading from the emerging future in the present through working with “pockets of the future in the present” to shape youth futures for systemic justice.
- **The Seeds of Good Anthropocenes (SOGA)** approach embodies this by seeking out small, positive “seed” initiatives that have the potential in the present to grow and transform larger systems, but are often at the margin. Youth innovators are perfect examples of these “seeds,” demonstrating how local knowledge and community solutions can drive significant change.



*“The process instilled a sense of optimism, equipping respondents with a more strategic mindset for decision-making, better preparing them to make informed choices that foster meaningful change” - co-researcher insight*

## Key Driving Forces of Change Impacting Youth Futures

### Megatrends, Key Uncertainties

# Megatrends: Driving forces shaping the future

Large-scale social, economic, political, environmental or technological changes that are slow to form but which, once they have taken root, **exercise a profound and lasting influence** on many if not most human activities, processes and perceptions

- Geopolitical shifts and economic realignment
- Global population growth – youth population in Africa and ageing societies in other regions
- Urbanisation and migration
- Trust deficit and political disillusionment
- Climate and ecosystems breakdown
- Growing momentum of digitalisation, AI, big data and bioengineering
- Inequality and identity politics



# Key uncertainties and disrupters

## Come in a multitude of forms:

- global financial crashes
- pandemics
- wars
- sudden waves of immigration
- natural disasters to sudden
- shifts in population fertility

and more ...

How megatrends and disruptive trends interact will set the scene for the coming decades.

Governments, business, communities, researchers and citizens in general must reflect on what the interplay of such trends means in terms of opportunities to be seized and challenges to be met.





# Issues Impacting Youth Futures

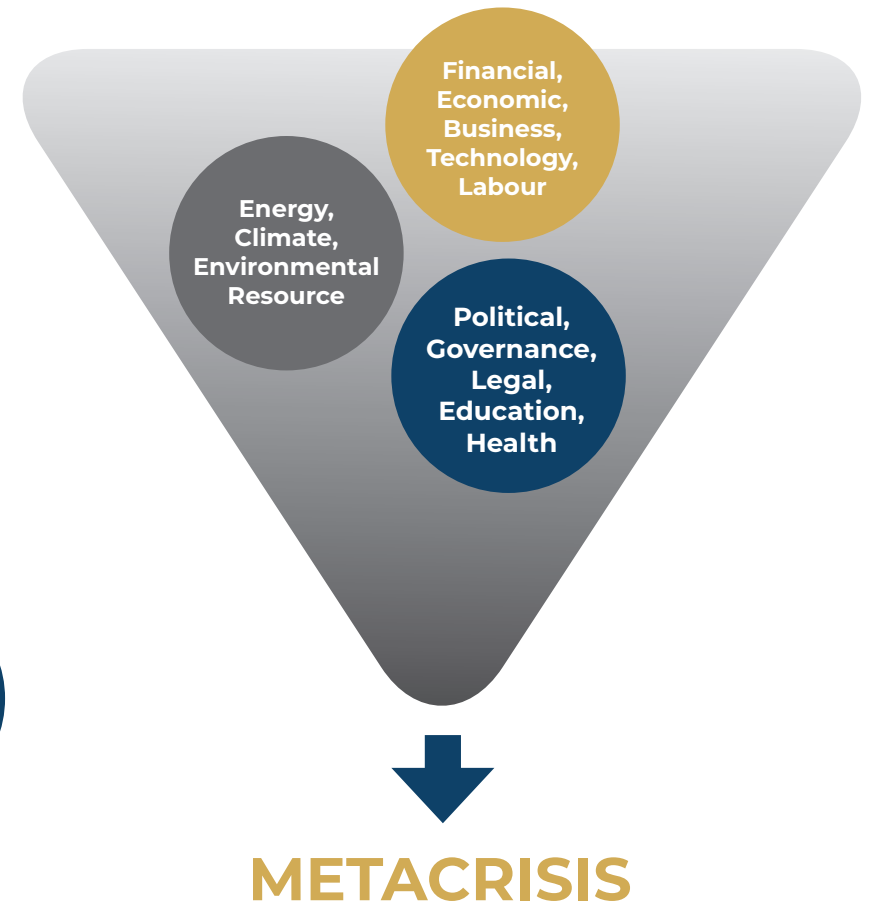
## Challenges and Opportunities

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# Youth are inheriting a future of compounding crises:

There is an urgent need to move beyond short-term solutions and toward youth-centred, future-oriented approaches that recognise young people not as a problem to be fixed, but as key architects of systemic transformation.

- climate disruption,
- economic inequality,
- political instability,
- historical injustices.



Deeper underlying problems of our interacting crises - worldviews, meaning, purpose, cultures, and consciousness that shape how we respond to these challenges.

**The need for transformation of systems**

# African Youth: The Demographic Rise

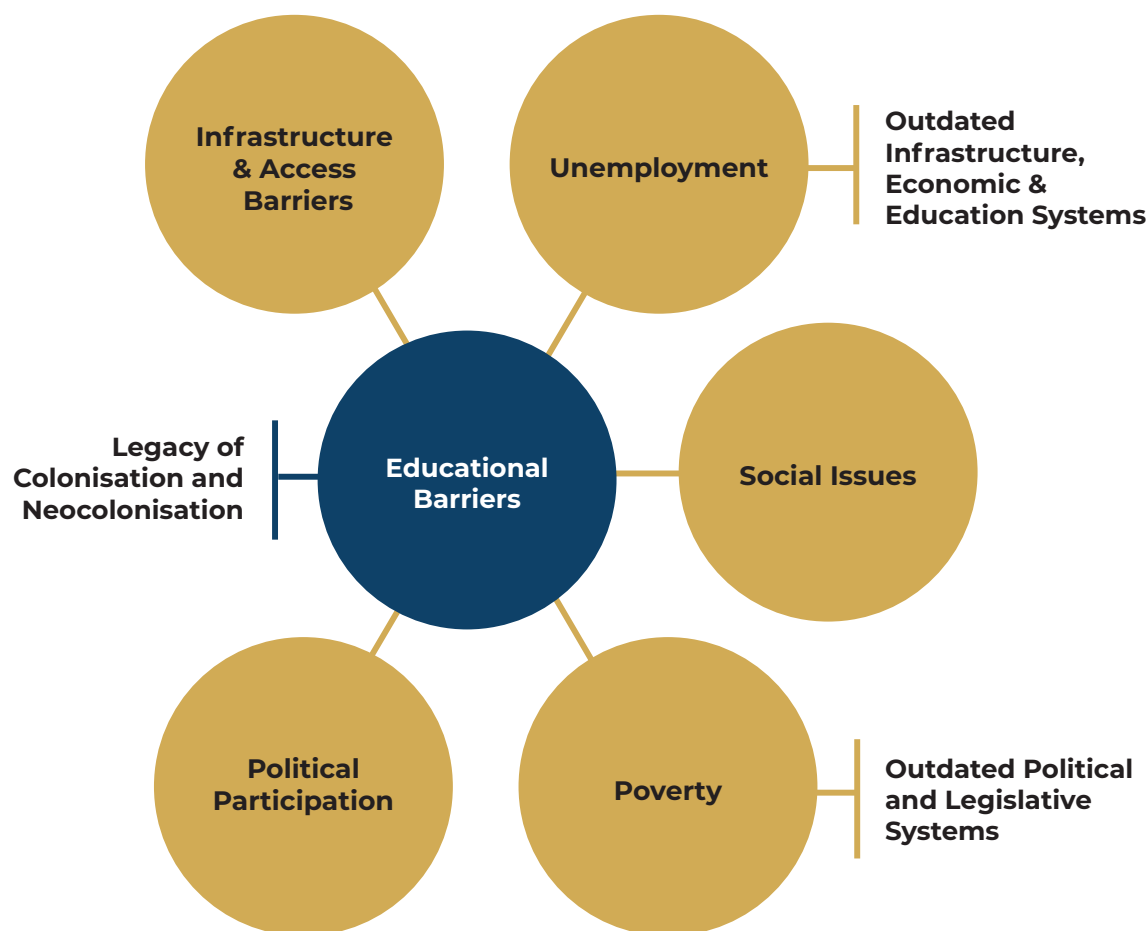
- Approximately **225 million young people** aged 15-24 in Africa
- Young Africans are expected to make up **42% of the world's youth by 2030**, and 75% of Africa's population will be under age 35
- Youth population could double to over **830 million by 2050**
- A larger proportion of the population will be **working-age population (ages 15-64)** and expected to rise significantly, potentially reaching 73% in countries like Kenya
- Young people in Africa's labour force to reach **375 million by 2030**. This growth means that by 2035, more young Africans will enter the workforce each year than in the rest of the world combined
- Currently **11 million African youth join the labour market each year**, and this number is expected to rise to 30 million annually by 2030

(UN DESA, African Union, UN Population Fund, World Bank, UNICEF, African Development Bank, World Economic Forum)



# Challenges Facing African Youth

- **72 million young people** classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), with two-thirds being young women. Represents over 25% of the youth population in Africa \*
- Barriers to transition from education to the workforce
- Lack the necessary skills and qualifications that employers demand
- Significant portion of Africa's youth lives in poverty, with the continent housing about 54% of the world's poor
- Trauma of livelihoods: exposed to violence, crime, and substance abuse, family structures are also fragile - single-parent households
- Barriers to political engagement, lack of representation, neglect of youth issues



\* (African Development Bank)

# It's Not Just about Jobs

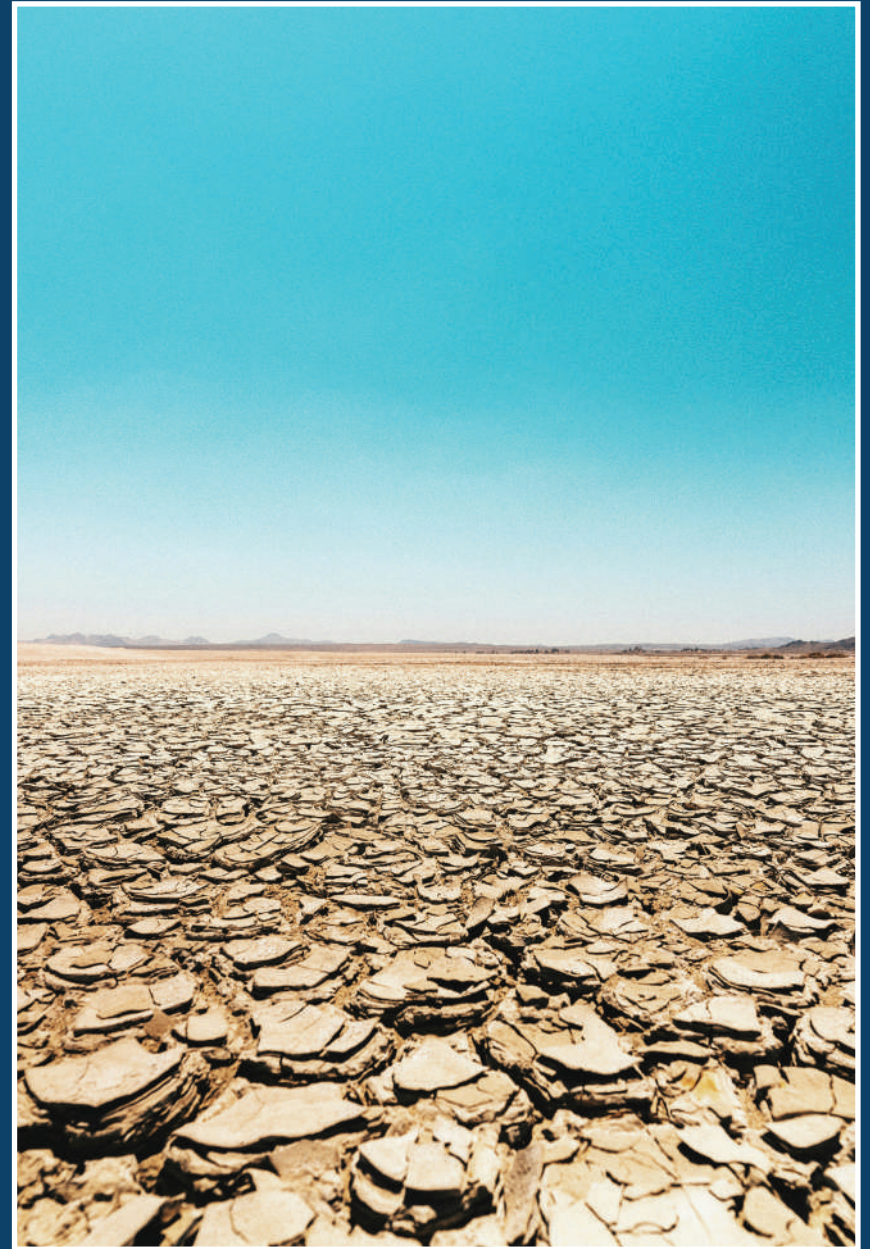
- having a job in the formal economy has long been seen as a fantasy by African Youth
- financial income comes primarily from informal work, the grey economy and precarious employment
- over 50% of the employment in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is already constituted in the informal economy
- jobs in themselves are not enough to provide economic security even in formal economy
- “What sort of education will enable young people to create long-term economic wellbeing for themselves, their families and their communities?” (Facer 2021:2)



# Addressing the issues impacting youth futures from Phase 1

## Emerging potential shifts

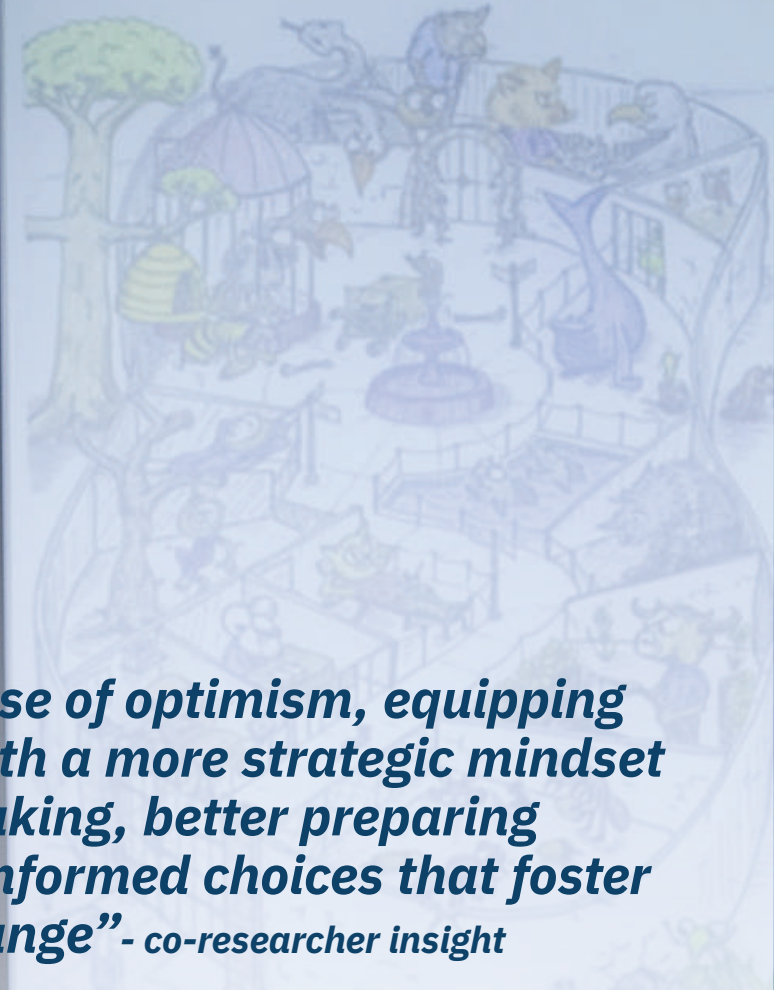
- Renewable energy adoption
- Shift to circular and wellbeing economies
- Mental health and wholesome living
- Urgent climate action to achieve sustainability goals
- Mindset shifts towards intergenerational fairness
- Technology and innovation



# Young people are often excluded from shaping the systems that determine their lives

- **Economic Barriers:** Although youth encounter high unemployment, informal work, and limited access to resources, funding for youth initiatives is often fragmented and competitive, reinforcing isolation rather than collaboration.
- **Political and Social Exclusion:** Youth are rarely seen as co-creators in policy and governance processes. Despite being consulted, their perspectives are often sidelined, and their knowledge undervalued. Youth are being included symbolically but excluded from real decision-making.
- **Education and Skills Gaps:** There is a mismatch between formal education and the skills needed for complex, rapidly changing futures. Identified skills gaps for youth include foresight, systems thinking, and emotional literacy, skills they often pursue independently without institutional support.





***“Instilled a sense of optimism, equipping respondents with a more strategic mindset for decision-making, better preparing them to make informed choices that foster meaningful change” - co-researcher insight***

# Shaping Youth Futures for Systemic Justice

## Research Project Overview

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# Research Aim & Objectives

## Aim:

explore youth innovator and changemaker agency to co-create systemic innovations and anticipatory practices in East and Southern Africa that foster economic well-being, ecological resilience, and systemic justice using strategic foresight and complexity-informed methods.

## Objective 1:

co-develop rich, bold and hopeful visions for transformative youth futures for systemic justice by adopting new practices of thinking, doing, and becoming.

## Objective 2:

explore how futures and complexity methods can help reframe strategies and roles in driving systemic innovations.

## Objective 3:

Co-develop contextually appropriate frames of mind and experiments that foster new ways of relating to economic well-being, socio-ecological resilience and systemic justice.

# Phase 2: Research Design

A hybrid, transdisciplinary qualitative research approach, combining participatory futures and action research. This design was chosen to actively involve participants in exploring and shaping youth futures, democratising long-term thinking, germinate change agency and co-create collective actions in the present.

## Phase 2 Research Design

The research followed a structured sequence of participatory engagements, building iteratively on previous stages to allow participants to refine, stress-test and develop emergent leverage points and strategic interventions.



Plan, Recruit  
Youth Innovators,  
Co-design  
Methods, Prepare  
Inception

## Seeds

Project Inception

2 Months

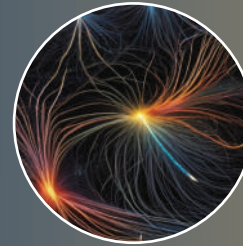


In-person  
Youth Visioning  
Summit

## Relate

Project Execution:  
Engaging

3 Months



In-person  
Anticipation  
Summit

## Curate

Project Execution:  
Engaging

4 Months



Virtual Youth Futures  
Labs & Evaluate and  
Share Heuristics,  
Experiments to  
Co-create Praxis  
Framework

## Germinate

Project Execution:  
Agenda Setting

4 Months



Finalise Website,  
Journey Guide and  
Change Agency  
Praxis

## Anticipate

Project Reporting  
& Launch Event

2 Months

← Youth Future Labs: Roles, Strategy, Advocacy, Reflection, Learning, Repository →

## Methods Applied

Seeds of Good  
Anthropocenes  
Systems Mapping

Futures Wheels  
Three Horizons  
Expeiential Scenarios

CLA, Multiple Timelines,  
Creature Features &  
Leverage Point Analysis

Relational Heuristics  
Experimentation  
Prototyping

Peer-learning  
Co-creation  
Evaluation

# Research approach and methods

- The research is deeply rooted in a participatory worldview, specifically a participatory futures approach and action research methods.
- It highlights collaborative relationships between researchers and participants, moving beyond a traditional subject-object dynamic to one of co-researchers and co-creators.
- The approach is inherently values-driven, aiming to enhance the well-being of individuals, communities and the broader ecological context.
- It embraces an iterative, cyclical process of inquiry, where tentative meanings and interpretations are continually reflected upon with participants, leading to reframed understandings and guiding further action.



# Participatory Engagements

## 2 in-person Summits in Cape Town South Africa

### Visioning Summit (3 – 6 September 2024)

The aim of this summit was to empower youth and changemakers in Eastern and Southern Africa to envision bold futures. Through workshops and discussions, participants explored innovative responses to future challenges.

### Anticipation Summit (12 to 15 November 2024)

Participants collaborated to develop contextually appropriate strategic insights for transformative change agency. This summit focused on anticipation of systemic innovations, role identification, and building a robust approach to working with the future, navigating change, complexity and uncertainty for youth initiatives and changemakers in Eastern and Southern Africa.

### Youth Futures Labs (virtual ongoing throughout)



# Data Generation Procedures



## 2 Summits

- Summit workshop reports
- Post-summit surveys
- Role playing
- Reflective journals
- Informal feedback and discussions
- Digital records
- Desktop reviews
- Shared digital messaging groups



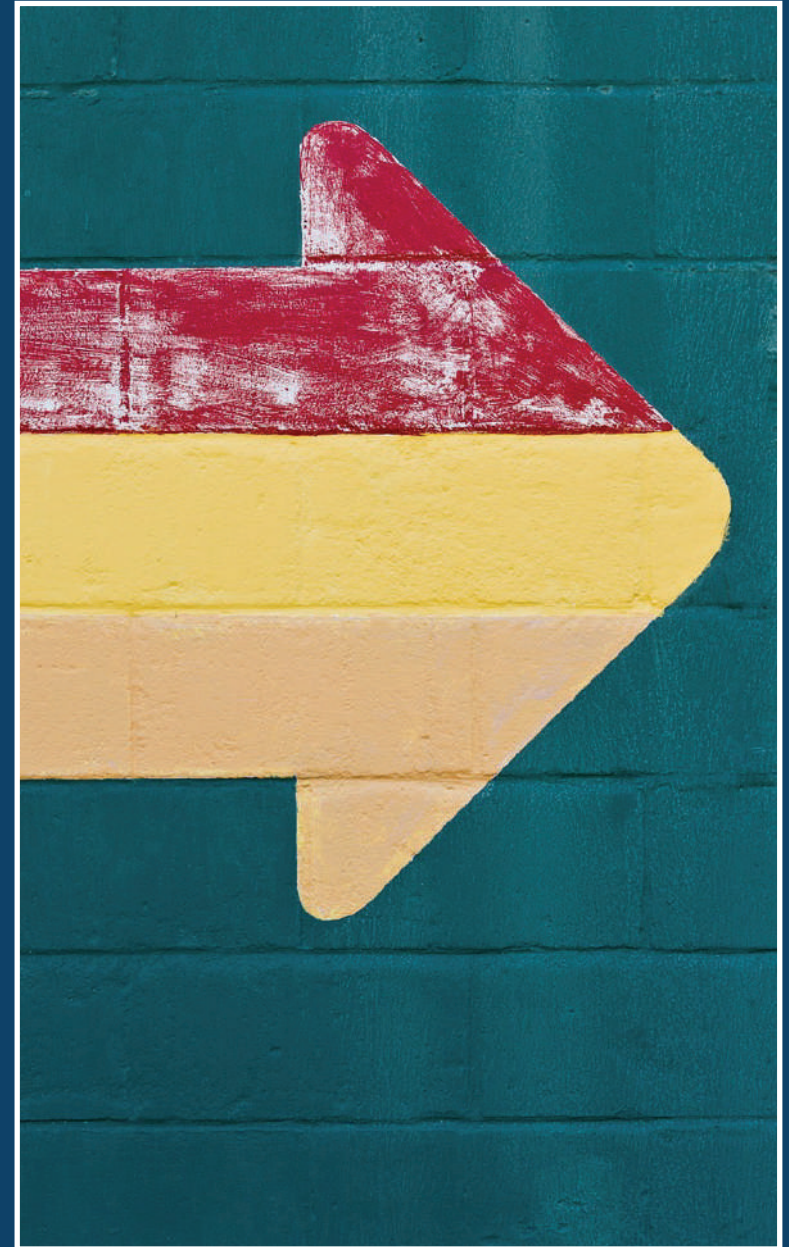
## Ethical Considerations

- Signed research agreement for all co-researchers
- Indemnity and informed consent form



## Researcher Self-Reflexivity

- Ongoing critical reflection on assumptions, biases and impact of actions
- Continually adjusting and refining the research
- Sharing diverse perspectives and cocreating knowledge in a collaborative research team



# Key Project Co-researchers

## 12 Seed initiatives

### Seeds are initiatives that:

Present new ways of thinking and doing  
Challenge the status quo  
Operate on a small scale  
Exist at the periphery  
Demonstrate vulnerability  
Transformative capacity  
Positive high impact potential

## From East and Southern Africa

### Working in these fields:

- Renewable energy, climate change, sustainability and circular economies
- Technology, economics, entrepreneurship, digital currencies and AI
- Health, mental health, gender mainstreaming
- Education, training, skills development, governance and democracy



## 16 Changemakers

A combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling methods was used for participant recruitment. An initial pool of potential participants was drawn from project partners' groups, professional networks, and existing repositories of youth innovators. Initial participants recommended additional candidates, enhancing diversity and ensuring a wide range of voices were included.

## From East and Southern Africa

### Working in:

- Academia/Science
- Arts
- Business
- NGOs
- Government Official/UN Bodies/Regional Bodies



# Youth seed initiatives



**Medikea**  
Dr Peter Lema



**Baobab Superfoods**  
Atula Owade



**ORIBI**  
T Anne Reddy



**WAGA Tanzania**  
Gibson Kawago/  
Olter Oscar



**Centre For Suicide  
Research And Intervention**  
Mary Gitau



**Youth4Can**  
Toini Thomas  
Dhiginina Amutenya



**Rural revive**  
Armanda Pieters



**Push local Ventures**  
Delicia Govender/  
Lauren Daniels



**Integrated Living**  
Wanjikū J. Kiarie



**Radio domus**  
Bonface Opany



**AFRISOS**  
Juvenal Deoscori  
Materu



**Qrate**  
Candice Chirwa

# Changemakers



**Arsene Ngombe**

Chief Enabler at RIAHSAH Co., advancing systems change through research, foresight, and strategic innovation.



**Tshego Walker**

Leads the South African Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, focused on systemic youth employment solutions.



**Raymond Ochieng F. KIM, HSC**

Kenyan Secretary for Youth Development, a veteran youth advocate influencing national and global policy through strategic partnerships and youth-led design.



**Noku Katom**

Founder of Inspiring People Network and Think Ahead Transformation Academy, empowering communities through platforms for learning, growth, and transformation



**Nancy Barisoa**

Andriamiarimbola Gender and climate justice advocate and founder of The Tanora Revolution Podcast, amplifying youth voices across Africa.



**Nneile Nkholise**

Award-winning mechanical engineer and founder of iMed Tech, revolutionising prosthetic design through innovation and additive manufacturing in South Africa.



**Katlego KG Letsoalo**

Mining sector thought leader and Council Member at SAIMM, recognised among the Mail & Guardian Top 200 for promoting youth voices in strategic mining governance.



**John Youhanes Magok**

Program Officer at the African Union, advancing sustainable mineral policy and founder of the Nile Youth Development Actions promoting regional socio-economic change.



**Tshegofatso Thulare**

Education and Project Development Specialist

# Changemakers



**Dr N. Jade Gibson**

Anthropologist, author and visual artist whose interdisciplinary work bridges art, science, and the humanities to explore cultural transformation.



**Thembi Joja**

Programme manager at Enke, equipping South African youth with entrepreneurial skills and networks through leadership and social action initiatives.



**Sidney Muhangi**

Postdoctoral researcher with the British Academy's 'Times of a Just Transition' project, supporting youth-led enterprise through United Social Ventures in Uganda and the YOMA platform across Africa



**Calvin Jodisi**

Founder of ASENTI AFRICA, transforming rural agripreneurship through physical hubs and incubation support to tackle food insecurity and promote innovation.



**Metsi Makhetha**

A seasoned UN leader with expertise across energy, gender, governance, and humanitarian response, gained through diverse senior roles in the UN system.



**Mapumba Cilombo**

A Cape Town-based musician and storyteller whose "Ndani" initiative uses performance and song as tools for healing, dialogue, and deep collective reflection.



**Mkhululi Nkosilamandla Ncube**

Programmes Officer at the African Minerals Development Centre, driving the implementation of the Africa Mining Vision and the African Union's mineral strategies.



**Nancy Makena Kimathi**

is a Master's student in Public Policy at Strathmore University. She has a keen interest in governance and policy-making.

# What Did We Achieve?

## Research Findings: Youth as Anticipatory Changemakers

- 1. From Recipients to Architects of Change**  
Reframed youth as active agents of change (“seeds”) already endowed with the potential to shape systemic transformations.
- 2. From Linear Predictions, to Futures as Action-Orientated Anticipation Practice**  
Co-created real-world interventions using participatory futures and action research.
- 3. From Addressing Skills Needs to Competent Futures Literate Systems Thinkers**  
Built capabilities in strategic foresight and relational systems thinking to work with the past, present and future to help navigate uncertainty for systemic change.
- 4. From Reinforcing Technocratic Dominance, to Reclaiming Innovation for Systemic Justice**  
Critically reframed dominant narratives of ‘innovation’ by challenging narrow, technocratic views of innovation; advanced community-rooted justice-oriented innovations.
- 5. From Defaulting to Reactive Thinking to Cultivating Anticipatory Mental Shortcuts**  
Developed futures-oriented contextual frames of mind to act amid complexity and uncertainty.
- 6. From Fragmented Thinking to Relational Framing for Systemic Justice**  
Linked economic well-being and ecological resilience as interconnected justice priorities.
- 7. From Quick Fixes, to Anticipatory Systems Innovators**  
Fostered new ways of thinking, doing, and becoming to drive long-term transformation for systemic justice.



# Identifying Leverage Points for Systemic Justice

## Examples of leverage points identified:

- **Engage multiple perspectives early:** Including diverse stakeholders throughout to develop policies that reflect varied needs and remain adaptable to future changes, leading to more robust and inclusive solutions.
- **Change the narrative to change the system:** Reshaping underlying cultural narratives and assumptions, highlighting that altering the stories people tell can profoundly impact systemic change, particularly in areas like gender rights and health.
- **Start small but think big:** Making incremental progress while keeping a broad vision for change in mind, encouraging participants to take manageable steps towards larger goals without losing sight of overarching objectives.
- **Embrace iterative learning:** Viewing mistakes as opportunities for learning and adaptation, advocating for breaking down complex problems into smaller tasks and continuously refining solutions based on feedback. This fosters resilience and flexibility in navigating uncertainty.
- **Focus on relationships, not just components:** Instead of focusing solely on isolated elements like funding or infrastructure, focus as well on understanding how different parts of an ecosystem interact, fostering a systemic view of problems and solutions.
- **Known unknowns:** The importance of recognising gaps in understanding to encourage continuous learning and exploration, helping participants prepare for and address challenges as they arise.
- **Defining problems as systemic:** The need to identify the systemic causes of issues for effective intervention, supporting a deeper understanding of problems.

# Anticipatory praxis heuristics (Mental shortcuts)

**Defined as contextually appropriate, flexible and reflective guiding principles that can serve as relational and strategic compasses to help navigate systemic change**

- **Who is in, who is out:** The importance of understanding stakeholder inclusion and exclusion in decision-making processes to foster inclusivity and help reconcile differing perspectives within an ecosystem.
- **Finding new ways of being comfortable with the uncomfortable:** Embracing uncertainty and discomfort that comes with change.
- **What connects you?":** Highlighting the importance of interconnectedness for systemic change, including connectedness to history, place, context, and to each other.
- **Embracing change/emergence:** Allowing space to lean into uncertainty and adapting to evolving situations
- **Being in community:** Learning from each others' experiences (grounding). Find new ways of being comfortable with the uncomfortable: Embrace uncertainty and discomfort as spaces for growth and transformation.
- **Manage to have gratitude for multiple pasts, presents and futures:** Acknowledge and appreciate the complexity and richness of diverse timelines and experiences.
- **Reconnecting with your past to provide peace to your present:** Reflect on personal and collective histories to foster healing and grounding in the now.
- **Cultivate the belief that nothing is above me:** Nurture confidence and self-worth by rejecting imposed hierarchies and limitations.
- **See the positive in everything:** Train the mind to recognise possibility and value, even in challenging or adverse situations.
- **Question the unquestionable:** Challenge dominant narratives and inherited truths to open up new ways of thinking and being.
- **Develop the willingness to be told the truth:** Build the emotional resilience to receive honesty, even when it disrupts comfort or assumptions.

# Implementation of safe-to-fail experiments

## Examples of the experiments conducted:

**Testing a circular economy with electronic waste:** Employing university students to experiment with electronic waste to solve processing problems.

**Recruiting existing sorghum farmers in Rwanda:** Encouraging these farmers to produce other millet varieties.

**Supporting young people in recycling plastic as part of a circular economy:** Promoting agency among youth by accompanying them rather than imposing decisions and advocating for change through practice.

**Challenging gender and societal norms:** Collaborating with organisations to help unpack family issues that cause self-doubt in girls, aimed at challenging the norms that create these issues.

**Madagascar and Speed Dating Café:** An initiative testing interconnectedness, active listening and collaboration to avoid duplicating efforts and create synergy among youth change agents.

**Engaging youth in policymaking:** Involving youth in the policymaking process through high-level participatory workshops to ensure policies address youth concerns.

**Community dialogue for governance:** An approach creating inclusive spaces for intergenerational dialogue to generate insights on inclusive decision-making and test ideas for broader systemic change.

**Low-Code AI Bartering Dashboard:** A platform designed to facilitate resource-sharing and collaboration by enabling cohort members to vote on projects, manage timelines and track returns on investment.

**Co-Creation Lab:** Aimed at testing collaborative decision-making among multiple stakeholders to foster innovative solutions.

**Incentivising ideas experimentation:** Encouraging young people to experiment with their ideas without the constraints of traditional hierarchies to disrupt conventional thinking.



***“Prioritise collaboration across sectors, recognising that diverse perspectives foster innovative solutions” - co-researcher insight***

## **Key Thematic Areas of the Research**

### **Defining Clusters and Pathways toward Systemic Transformation**

# Sustainable development and inclusive cultural transformation

Interconnectedness and decolonial approaches are vital. The emotional connection to historical injustices, particularly colonialism's ongoing impacts, is a critical dimension for crafting genuinely inclusive and equitable futures. Relational approaches to systemic justice are needed, extending beyond isolated legal frameworks to reflect the interconnectedness of communities, ecosystems, and governance systems, aligning with Indigenous philosophies that view land, people, and governance as deeply interconnected.

## Shaping Youth Futures for Systemic Justice Calls for:

**Redefining Progress and Inclusive Futures** - Advocating for approaches rooted in African communities' genuine needs and aspirations; redefine success beyond traditional indicators like GDP; an emphasis on context-specific metrics such as Bhutan's Gross National Happiness, which prioritises well-being, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

**The Role of Imagination in Systemic Change** - Creative storytelling, speculative design, and artistic interventions to expand possibilities for justice; reimagining systems, such as education, economic models, and governance, to challenge entrenched paradigms.

**Narrative Sovereignty and Reimagining Agency** - Challenging dominant narratives with alternative narratives reflecting diverse histories, lived realities, and imagined futures; redefining progress through African cultural and ecological perspectives; indigenous knowledge and practices as central to shaping future innovation

# Education, Health and Wellbeing

Shifting to well-being is critical to overcome internalised limitations, such as low self-belief, which are significant obstacles to youth leadership. There is urgent need for confidence-building and empowerment. Emotional dimensions of systems change need to be acknowledged.

## Shaping Youth Futures for Systemic Justice Calls for:

**Systemic Reimagination of Learning and Agency** - A clear shift towards practical and actionable participation; the potential for even small changes to effect substantial transformation within communities; enriched understanding of systemic justice and sustainable systems; broadened perspectives on transformative change.

**Collaborative Action and Holistic Well-being** - Collaboration and diverse perspectives are key for lasting change, fostering a strong sense of shared community. Inclusivity is an imperative. "I learnt to recognise the strength in our diversity."

**Holistic Well-being in Activism and Leadership** - "Human being, not human doing" for sustainable work-life balance, recognising rest, reflection, and personal well-being as essential for effective agency. The issue of trauma-informed futures, highlighting the unethical and impractical nature of imagining the future while experiencing trauma.

# Economic Empowerment, Trade, Technological Advancement and Digital Inclusion

A critique of how exploitative dynamics perpetuate wealthier actors co-opting ideas and repackaging them for their own gain. Calling for a reassessment through lenses centered on African communities' genuine needs.

## Shaping Youth Futures For Systemic Justice Calls for:

**Alternative Economic and Legal Systems** - Urgent need to rethink systemic structures. A shift towards community-driven economic sovereignty. Social entrepreneurship and cooperative models, such as vegetable co-ops, identified as effective pathways to economic resilience and local ownership.

**The Role of Technology and Digital Justice** - Digital tools as enablers of participation and global solidarity; concerns raised about digital surveillance, data colonialism, and algorithmic bias. Need for greater ownership and equitable distribution of technological benefits.

**Sustainable Infrastructure and Green Technology** - Greening infrastructure and technology through nature-based principles.

**Balancing Ecological Boundaries with Practical Necessity** - models for sustainable development rooted in cultural heritage and ecological wisdom.

**Interdisciplinarity and Cross-Sector Innovation** - Integrating diverse fields e.g. art, technology, ecology, is necessary for holistic solutions. Beyond interdisciplinarity to transdisciplinarity and embracing alternative ways of knowing. Reimagining what it means to be human in a complex world.

# Politics, Governance and Accountability

Traditional approaches to governance and policymaking and an overreliance on prediction and certainty in planning are inadequate for the great acceleration of change and scale of complexity in our post-normal times.

## Shaping Youth Futures For Systemic Justice Calls for:

### **Youth Organisational Capacity and Leadership Development**

- Peer mentorship models and workplace-based learning; practical management training; supporting youth-centred initiatives and ensuring meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes

### **Recognition of “Used Futures” and Potential for Radical Shifts**

shape new futures through fresh, relevant ways of thinking; challenging preconceived notions and fostering transformative thinking; “many systems still depend on ‘old ideas... which often fail to solve today’s problems.”

### **Alternative Governance and Policy Engagement**

- Advocacy for policy co-creation with marginalised communities; inclusive, community-driven policymaking; youth inclusion beyond tokenism



***“Equipped attendees with practical tools and systematic processes that encouraged critical thinking, stretching their capabilities beyond perceived limits and leaving a lasting impact on their leadership and policy efforts” - co-researcher insight***

## **Implications of the Research**

### **Co-Created Outcomes and Major Insight Moments**

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## Co-Created Outcomes:

- **Visioning & Transformative Innovations**
- **Complexity-Informed Anticipation Strategies**
- **Processual Modes of Becoming & Praxis Refinement**
- **Networked Ecology of Anticipatory Praxis**

- Emphasis on Positive Visioning to Navigate Complexity
- Leveraging Diverse Perspectives and Shifting Power in Youth Knowledge Creation
- Inspiring Collective Action and Relational Embeddedness
- Connecting to Systemic Justice and Influencing Strategy
- Providing Principles and Frameworks for Navigating and Integrating Key Components to Shape Systemic Change
- Fostering Self-Reflection and Relational Awareness Grounded in Care
- Challenging Assumptions and Shifting Perspectives to New Modes of Engaging
- Empowering Agency and Ownership Including Changing Narratives
- Finding New Ways of Being Comfortable with the Uncomfortable
- Structured Reflection and Inquiry to Question the Unquestionable
- Gratitude for Multiple Pasts, Presents and Futures
- Continuous Learning and Adaptation through Iterative Practice and Experimentation
- Supporting Resilience and Context-Specificity
- Co-creating Transformative Spaces and Prototyping New Forms of Becoming

# Major Insights – Visioning Summit

## Co-Created Preferred Futures:

- A Unified, Sovereign, and Relational Africa
- Redefined Economies Based on Well-being and Equity
- Inclusive Governance and Leadership Rooted in African Wisdom
- Revalued Knowledge Systems and Cultural Practices
- Technology Serving Humanity and the Planet
- Core Values of Compassion, Diversity, and Trust

### Key Divergences:

**The how and the scale of transformative innovations differed reflecting diverse contexts.**

## Co-Created Transformative Innovations:

- New social development criteria
- New metrics of economic wellbeing that are context specific
- Meritocracies that look at the individual as a whole
- Tax breaks for innovative/disruptive interventions
- Expansionary fiscal policy
- Build local capacities for the use of Africa's raw materials
- Develop a common African currency
- Create a United states of Africa

## Combined Reflections:

- Shift in Economic Value & Metrics
- Focus on Well-being and Care
- Reclaiming African Identity & Knowledge
- Collaboration and Unity
- Technology as an Enabler for Good
- Governance Transformation

# Major Insights – Anticipation Summit

## Combined Reframed Youth Futures:

- Wholistic Systemic Health is Holistic Systemic Wealth - Abundance Mentality
- Love is the New/Strongest Currency - “Your Wins Are My Wins. Your Pain is My Pain”
- Every Living Thing Has a Soul- Human Beings Are Not the Centre
- Indigenous Knowledge Viewed as Valuable as Scientific Knowledge

### Key Divergences:

**Specific priorities, intervention mechanisms and change entry points differed.**

## Convergences:

- African Agency and Sovereignty
- Systemic Transformation
- Importance of Values, Mindset, and Inner Work
- Relationality and Collaboration
- Critique of Dominant Paradigms
- Anticipation and Futures Thinking
- Youth as Drivers of Change
- Holistic Interconnectedness

## Combined Reflections:

- Affirmation of African Agency
- A Vision of a Just, Resilient, and Regenerative Africa, Steered by its Youth
- The Inherent Value of All Beings
- Prioritising Holistic Well-being, Compassion, Care, Unity, Self-belief, and Courage Over Productivity, Individualism, and Fear
- Technology and Digital Spaces Leveraged for Digital Justice and Equitable Distribution of Benefits
- Call to Action Grounded in the Belief that Transformation is Possible and Being Prototyped through Efforts of Youth Innovators and Changemakers Across the Continent

# Major Insights – Systems Change Leverage Points

**Key insights about the nature of systemic change and the potential for transformative futures in East and Southern Africa are:**

**Beyond the Obvious Symptoms** - Leverage points are often found deeper within the system, challenging underlying structures, worldviews, and myths. Participants learned to look beyond visible trends and identify the hidden drivers of problems.

**The Power of Mindset and Narrative** - Internalised beliefs (e.g., scarcity, individualism, undervaluing certain groups or knowledge systems) are powerful barriers to change. Reframing these narratives and cultivating new mindsets, such as collective well-being and an abundance mentality, are crucial leverage points.

**Relationality as a Core Lever** - Emphasis on collaboration, relationships, and engaging diverse groups (including marginalised communities and different generations) underscores the understanding that systems are fundamentally relational. Building trust, fostering empathy, and creating inclusive spaces are necessary preconditions and active leverage points for change.

**Youth as Agents of Transformation** - Positioning youth as active agents and co-creators of change. Integrating youth into governance, empowering them with skills (including foresight and personal development), and supporting youth-led initiatives is a vital lever for driving transformative futures.

**Holistic and Context-Specific Approaches** - Effective interventions must be holistic, addressing multiple aspects simultaneously, and contextually appropriate, drawing on local knowledge and realities, including indigenous practices.



*“shape their approach to daily tasks and future initiatives, focusing on building partnerships that enhance collective impact” - co-researcher insight*

# Ongoing Youth-Centered Learning & Adaptation

## Creating Enabling Environments

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# Visioning Labs & Participatory Foresight Methods

## To:

Reframe challenges; imagine alternatives; shape futures

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## Requires:

Using foresight methods as thinking habits; reassessing and evolving ideas based on new insights



# Peer-Led Learning Spaces

## To:

Support community embeddness  
and knowledge transfer

## Requires:

Youth-created networks and  
facilitated community learning e.g.  
podcasts, storytelling, collaborative  
teaching and inspirational activities



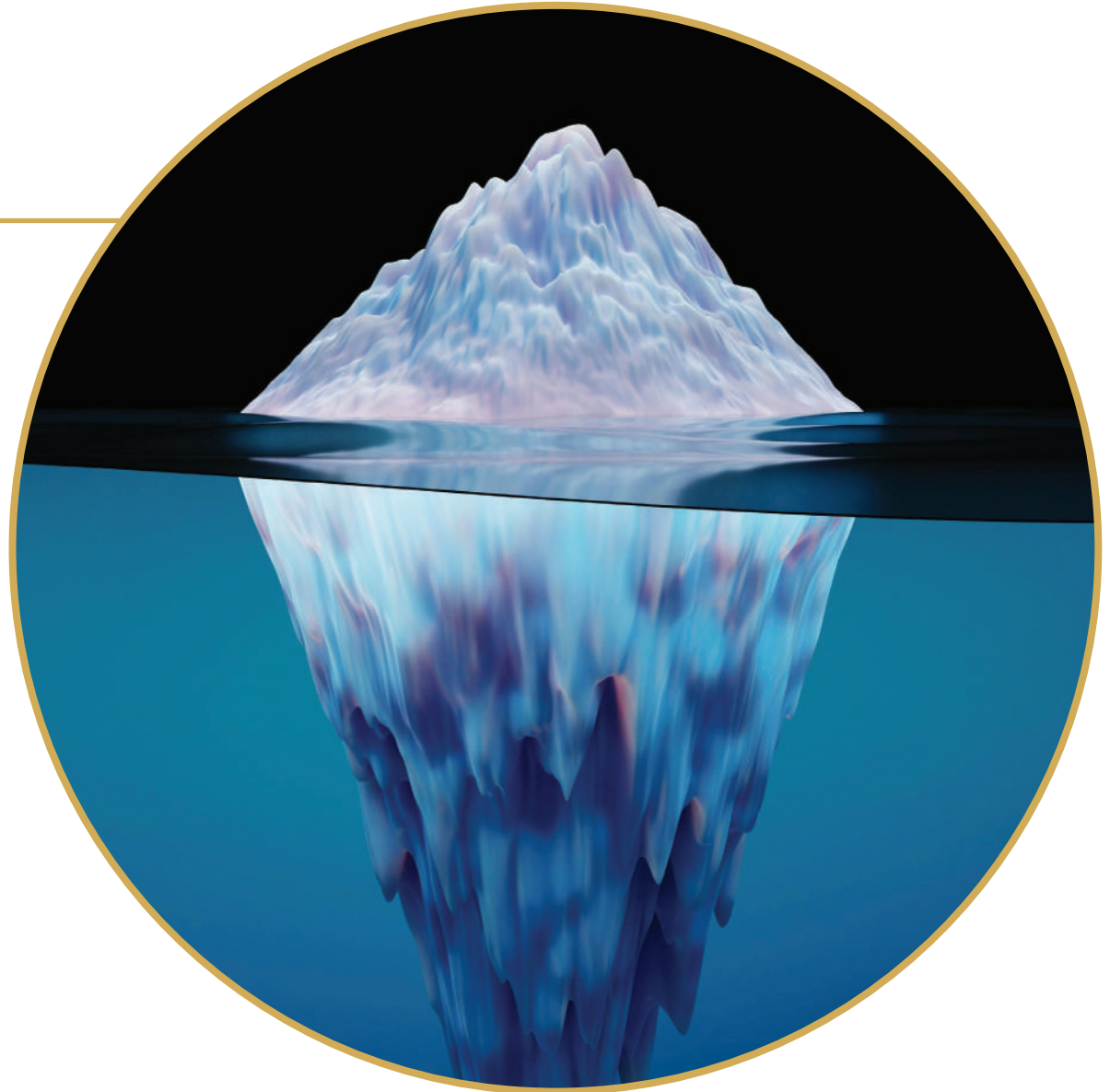
# Integrated Reflection Practices

## To:

Anchor self-awareness and values-based development

## Requires:

Integrating relational and reflective practice such as journalling, pulse-checks, group check-ins.



# Narrative and Identity Reframing

**To:**

Reclaim African narratives

**Requires:**

Decolonial dialogue challenging inherited roles and identities; youth reauthoring their identities as change agents through futures literacy, centering lived experiences.



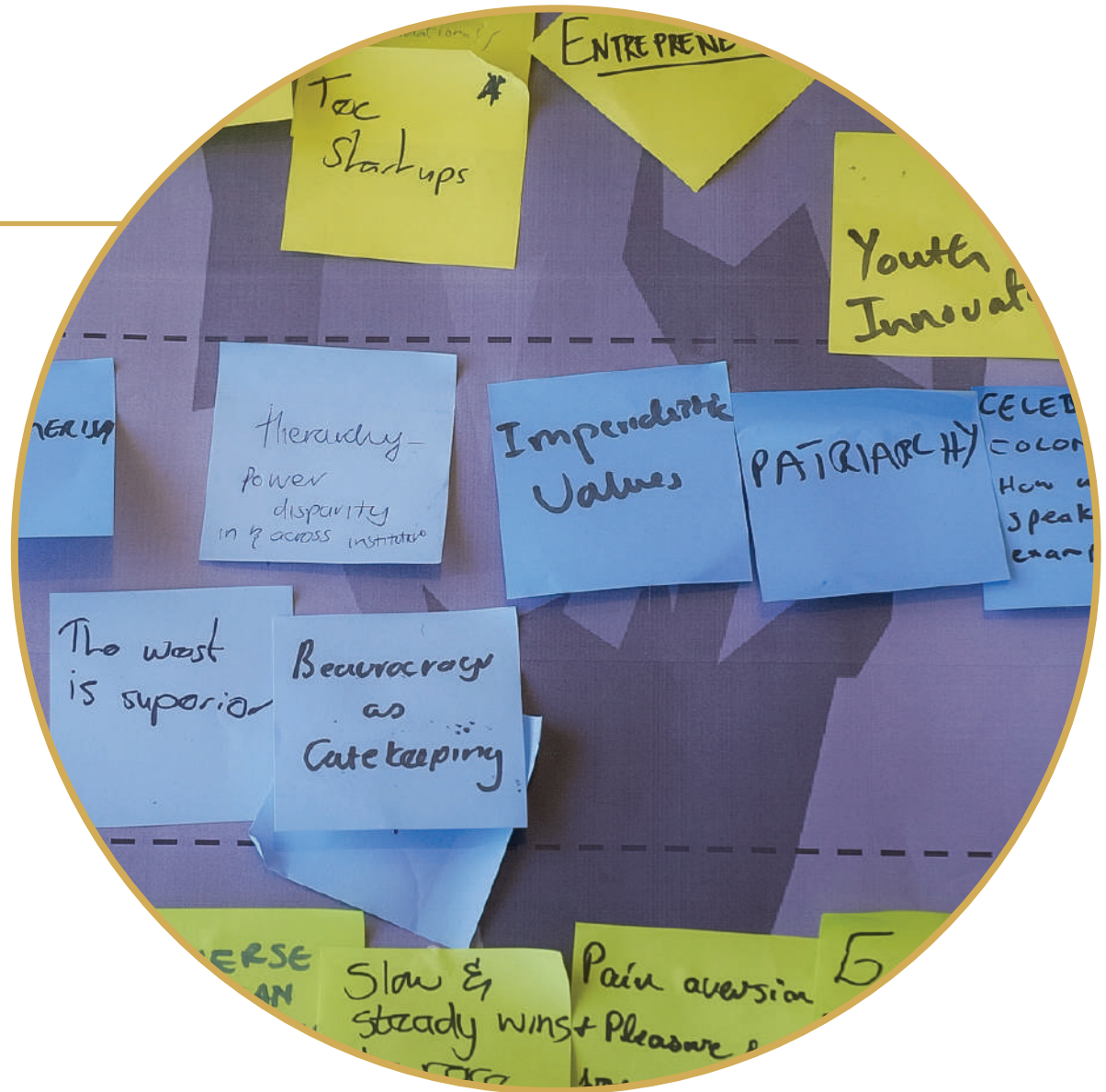
# Experimental and Iterative Prototyping

**To:**

Dynamically respond to complexity

**Requires:**

Building iteratively in small cycles and making revisions based on feedback, resource constraints, and contextual insight.



To:

## Requires:

55



***“We are not just imagining futures—we are already becoming them” - co-researcher insight***

## **Where Do We Go From Here?**

### **Recommendations**

# Recommendations: Where do we go from here?

## FOR FUNDERS:

- Fund for process, not just product
- Invest in ecosystem enablers and systems weavers, not just individual leaders
- Support tools for narrative and futures literacy

## FOR POLICY-MAKERS AND GOVERNANCE ACTORS:

- Institutionalise youth co-governance
- Reform education systems to embed futures & systems thinking
- Reframe metrics of youth engagement and success

## FOR CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS

- Act as stewards, not owners of change
- Amplify and archive youth knowledge
- Create adaptive infrastructure for ongoing learning

# Lessons and Take-Aways

- Co-ownership is essential for commitment and relevance
- Iteration and reflexivity drive adaptation
- Relational trust and safe spaces enable critical engagement
- Practical application and experimentation foster learning
- Foresight tools connect personal experiences to systemic issues
- Cultural expression and storytelling are core methods, not add-ons
- Community and peer learning build durable networks
- Participation requires power, not just inclusion
- Process integrity matters more than project speed
- Success is measured in depth, not just reach
- Facilitators and researchers must become co-learners
- Understanding methodology is key to constructive engagement
- Embrace emergence

## **The Role of researchers in creating an enabling environment:**

1. From directing outcomes to holding space
2. From implementers to co-learners
3. From measuring impact as “change delivered to” communities, toward impact as “change cultivated with and through” communities

## Conclusion

This project has demonstrated that when youth are trusted as co-creators, equipped with futures and relational systems thinking methods, and supported through participatory, reflexive processes, they are capable of leading transformative change.

**“Youth are endowed with the change agency to actively co-create systemic justice when operating as equals and given the opportunity to work with the future in participatory transformative spaces!”**





# Thank you!

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