

Project Imagining Africa's Futures (IAF) :

Conceptual Framework of the Research Methodology

Through the collaborative and interdisciplinary Imagining Africa's Futures (IAF) project, UNESCO and the OCP Foundation are joining forces to change the way the future is conceived and used in Africa. IAF conducts scientific research into why and how people 'use-the-future' by undertaking prototype testing of Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLL) in Africa. Its aim: to prove that by changing the way we approach the future, we can better understand our present fears and hopes.

IAF is a rare and cutting-edge research project that is conducting the 'prototyping phase' of the 'innovation cycle' where the prototype being tested is a specific kind of FLL, the Futures Literacy Laboratory - Novelty. In order to provide a robust and universally applicable practical approach to building Futures Literacy UNESCO has joined with the OCP Foundation of Morocco and the University Mohammed VI Polytechnic to run a limited number of experiments across Africa that will demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of Futures Literacy Laboratories. Prototype testing public policy instruments is relatively rare and requires a high level of technical expertise, including an extended time period (in this case 3 years) and a significant budget (IAF is 3 million USD). Currently the project is in the pilot phase and will be running actual prototype tests in at least 5 sites in Africa in 2019.

What is Futures Literacy?

Futures Literacy is a capability. It is the skill that allows people to better understand the role that the future plays in what they see and do. People can become more skilled at 'using-the-future', more 'futures literate', because of two facts. One is that the future does not yet exist, it can only be imagined. Two is that humans have the ability to imagine. As a result, humans are able to learn to imagine the future for different reasons and in different ways. Thereby becoming more 'futures literate'.

Why Africa?

Because it is a plan for generating evidence that might help to both convince and enable Africans to diversify the why and how they use the future in and for the continent.

The different facets of the Imagining Africa's Futures (IAF) project consist of the different fields of competence of UNESCO as well as a range of engaged partners able to take on the practical challenges of jointly initiating, designing, implementing and assessing the Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLL) that are the capacity-building processes at the core of the project. Through these partnerships, Imagining Africa's Futures will explore innovative approaches to fostering lasting peace and sustainable development in Africa.

Jointly with local champions, UNESCO co-designs FLLs. These will ensure that the issues addressed at each Forum are both locally owned and understood in international contexts. FLLs are also intended to help African stakeholders take full advantage of international agendas such as the Agenda 2063 of the African Union or the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

FLLs can be engaged directly with national, sub-regional and continental level challenges, taking on such issues as climate change, evolving food systems, biodiversity, fragility and resilience, young people, gender equality, Science Technology and Innovation (STI), higher education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), the promotion of cultural heritage and cultural diversity, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, access to information, Internet and the mobile revolution in Africa, etc.

FLLs will be designed to invite, appreciate and advance the foresight capacities of a diverse range of local actors – from decision-makers in government and business to local community activists promoting youth and gender agendas. FLLs will generate new and innovative strategies, policies and networks to be put to use for Africa, by Africans.

What do FLL reveal?

Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLL) are currently in the prototyping phase of the innovation cycle. The aim of this phase is to test generalizable procedural goals, rules and methods that will in most situations ensure that FLL achieve the following objectives:

- revealing people's anticipatory assumptions,
- enhancing their capacity to use the future for different reasons and in different ways in different contexts (this is what it means to acquire the capability that is called Futures Literacy),
- enabling them to ask new questions,
- allowing for a better understanding of what is FL and how to design/conduct FLL, and
- reveal Novelty rather than Predictions: the shift Futures Literacy suggests is from Anticipation-for-Future to Anticipation-for-Emergence.

Contact

- Riel Miller, r.miller@unesco.org ([link sends e-mail](#))