

# Scanning for a Brighter Future

Report from the 2012  
Searchlight Workshop





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The Institute for Alternative Futures  
with support from the Rockefeller Foundation

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# Foreword

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From anticipating the need for schools of public health to developing novel ways of making agriculture more productive, the Rockefeller Foundation has a long history of thinking ahead to find new ways of improving the future of poor and vulnerable populations globally.

As we approach our Centennial in 2013, the Foundation has developed a systematic approach to continuously identify innovations and detect signals that indicate how the world is changing. Known as the Searchlight function, an on-the-ground network of regionally-focused trend monitoring organizations from Africa, Asia, and the Americas conducts regular, ongoing scanning for novel ideas, research results, and “clues” about how to address some of the world’s most complex and pressing problems. Now in its fourth year, the Searchlight function is a unique, first-of-its-kind effort in the philanthropic and development sectors, taking an innovation pioneered by companies and governments and applying it to gain a better understanding of the challenges and potential solutions related to poverty and development.

This workshop report highlights the creative findings and ideas that emerged from the latest annual Searchlight gathering that brought together representatives from the participating organizations and a small group of foresight experts. The goal of this week-long workshop, held in the New York City area, was to identify novel ways of framing the critical problems facing poor and vulnerable populations in two particular subject matter domains, livelihoods and urbanization. As the report indicates, it was a lively, dynamic, and energetic conversation touching on a wide range of intersecting topics, from suggesting new ways for individuals, young and old, to get involved in improving their urban communities to considering how to improve the flow of capital from diaspora populations back to their home countries. Using visioning exercises, graphic facilitation techniques, and scenario-like storytelling, the meeting demonstrated how imaginative individuals from different backgrounds can come together to generate new insights that connect the dots and weave together a rich mosaic of themes and patterns.

We would like to thank Clem Bezold, Jonathan Peck, Eric Meade, and Mary Presswood at the Institute for Alternative Futures for their role in organizing the meeting, as well as Eileen Clegg for the real-time drawings and Mary-Lea Cox Awanohara for helping to assemble this report. We would also like to thank all of the Searchlight representatives and the invited advisors for their inspiring ideas, passionate imagination, and original points of view. As always, we look forward to the next gathering of the network in 2013 as the Foundation moves into its next century, and beyond.

*Claudia Juech and Evan Michelson*

**The Rockefeller Foundation**

# Introduction

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Four years ago, the Rockefeller Foundation established an innovative Searchlight function for informing its thinking on philanthropic activity in the developing world (See Box 1). Comprising 12 organizations in regions where the Foundation works—Africa, South America, South Asia and Southeast Asia—the Searchlight function is in essence a network of forward-looking organizations that provide information and “clues” as to trends that are likely to affect the lives of poor and vulnerable populations in the years to come.

Searchlight partners generate their intelligence via monthly trend monitoring newsletters and annual workshops. This workshop was the first meeting of Searchlight partners to be held in the United States, with previous workshops held in Bellagio, Italy (2010), and in Mumbai, India (2011). This report presents the highlights of the 2012 workshop, the third in the series, which took place in the New York City area from April 29 to May 4 and was organized by the Institute for Alternative Futures (IAF), based in Alexandria, Virginia. A total of 23 individuals representing the 12 Searchlight partner organizations were joined by five external advisors representing the futures studies, international development, and policy research communities. (See sidebars throughout the report for more information on external advisors and selected Searchlight participants.)

Considerable attention has been paid to so-called “mega-trends” that are shaping the future all over the world. At the Searchlight workshop, several of these major shifts were introduced by the external advisors who had been invited to participate. For example, James Dator, director of the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, noted four challenges facing the world. First, the world’s energy and oil resources have been severely depleted, bringing an end to the “age of cheap oil.” Second, climate change will continue to take a toll in terms of natural disasters as well as food insecurity, particularly in cities, where heat waves or flash floods, for example, could imperil daily life. Third, the world has yet to recover from the economic crisis that began in 2008, and unemployment has now reached 25 percent in some European countries. Fourth, governments around the world have proven unable to keep up with the pace of change, let alone to provide solutions to these problems. This situation has already led to political unrest, first in the Middle East and now in some Western countries as well. However, Jim ended this bleak overview with a note of optimism and encouragement, telling participants:

So: no cheap energy; no stable environment, food, and water; no sustainable economy; and no effective governance. What fantastic opportunities for creativity and innovation! You are so lucky to be entering into a world where almost nothing works and therefore everything is possible!

While participants were guided by these and other megatrends discussed over the course of the meeting, the bulk of their work for the Searchlight function involves looking at regional and country-specific trends and innovations that will impact the lives of poor and vulnerable populations. These trends and innovations may suggest emerging opportunities for the Foundation to advance its mission of promoting the well-being of humanity.



## Box 1. Background on the Rockefeller Searchlight Function

The Searchlight function is a first-of-its-kind trend monitoring effort in the philanthropic sector that gathers cutting-edge intelligence with a focus on on-the-ground problems and solutions. This intelligence is provided by a group of 12 forward-looking, regionally-focused horizon scanning and trend monitoring organizations that conduct regular, ongoing scanning for novel ideas, research results, and “clues” as to how the world is evolving, in particular with respect to the lives of poor and vulnerable populations.

First conceptualized in 2009, the Searchlight function was established to achieve the following goals:

- To illuminate important signals in the current contextual environment in which philanthropies and global development organizations operate;
- To showcase a diversity of opinions, methodological approaches, and points of view; and
- To identify potential solutions or intervention opportunities to critical problems.

Searchlight partners are asked to provide trend monitoring newsletters on an approximately monthly basis. The content of these newsletters reflects the partners’ points of view, areas of expertise, and knowledge of local conditions, and draws upon both secondary sourced quantitative data—e.g., demographics, market conditions, and political opinion – and qualitative findings from interviews and case studies. Over 300 Searchlight newsletters have been produced to date, with nearly 60 people having worked on newsletter production. In addition to the newsletters, Searchlight partners have also convened annually in different locations around the world.

The Rockefeller Foundation has used a variety of methods to synthesize and visualize the intelligence coming in from Searchlight partners in order to permit wider public dissemination. Four organizations were selected to carry out this work:

- The Institute for the Future (IFTF), based in Palo Alto, California, has broken down the information contained in the Searchlight newsletters into approximately 600 individual “signals,” which are contained in a “signals database.” IFTF also aggregated the signals to create a conceptual map entitled Catalysts for Change: Paths out of Poverty, which is available both in hard copy and in an interactive, online version (<http://www.searchlightcatalysts.org>) that features all 600 signals. IFTF also conducted the first public and interactive game allowing players from around the world to generate new ideas for improving the lives of poor and vulnerable populations.
- The Frederick S. Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future based at Boston University converted the qualitative information from the Searchlight newsletters into a quantitative data set, then extracted patterns from the trends at global and regional levels. The findings were presented in visual formats such as treemaps, sentiment histograms, differentiation and dashboard diagrams, and boxplots.
- The Manchester Institute of Innovation Research (MIOIR) at the University of Manchester reviewed the Searchlight newsletters using semantic text analysis and network mapping tools to identify trends, issues, and uncertainties, then created a series of network maps that identify connections between different actors and between different concepts.
- The Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning Program Office (RPO) located in the National Security Coordination Secretariat in the Prime Minister’s Office in Singapore, on a pro bono basis, applied two proprietary approaches to the Searchlight newsletters.

– *Claudia Juech and Evan Michelson, The Rockefeller Foundation*

# Workshop Highlights

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Through a series of activities looking out ten years into the future, Searchlight participants explored many opportunities to build on existing conditions to improve the lives of the poor and vulnerable. These opportunities tended to concentrate in five areas:

- Jobs and Livelihoods:

While jobs are an important policy concern in most countries of the world, participants recognized that a decade from now a job in the conventional sense will be a minority experience. In some countries, it already is. Thus, participants focused their attention on opportunities to help poor and vulnerable populations create their own livelihoods.

- Urbanization:

The world is now witnessing an unprecedented demographic shift from rural areas to urban centers. In some cities, migrant populations have concentrated in slums, which can be vibrant in some respects but unhealthy and even dangerous in others. At the same time, many people are moving to secondary cities, which may offer more room for innovative solutions since much of the infrastructure has yet to be built. In both settings, participants saw opportunities to improve the conditions for the poor and vulnerable.

- Education:

Participants identified a need to shift from education and skills development to learning that occurs throughout the life course. With emerging technologies, the opportunity exists to create tailored learning trajectories that move every individual toward their highest potential. This learning includes but is not limited to skills that are required to ensure one's livelihood.

- Community Initiatives:

Recognizing that governance has failed in many parts of the developing world, participants saw communities as the locus of the innovations with the greatest promise for the future. To capture this promise, participants envisioned new governance structures where the community's interests are explicitly represented, new modes of engagement for diaspora populations, new platforms for mapping existing urban-rural relationships, and more.

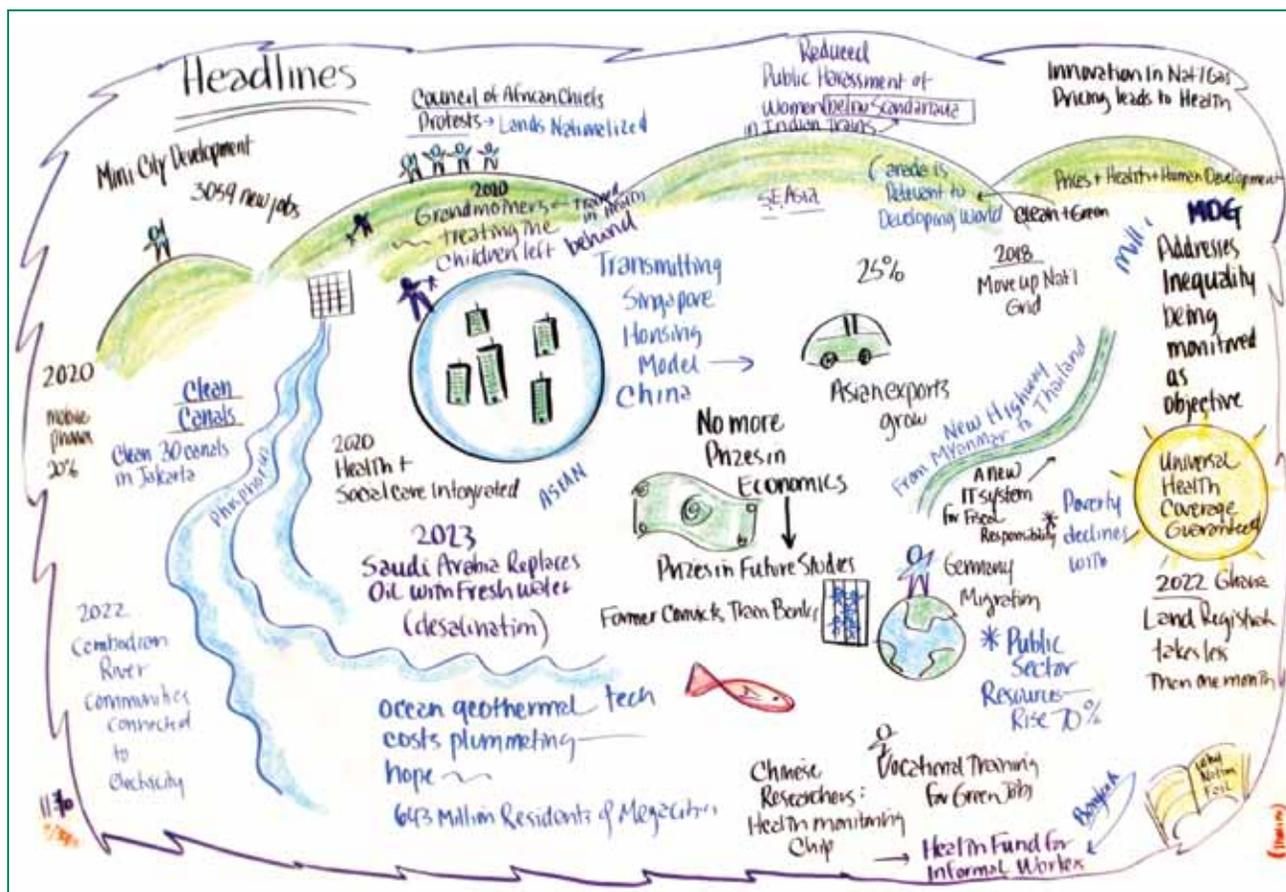
- Elders and Youth:

At both ends of the demographic spectrum, people face unique and pressing challenges. In some cases, the aging and retirement of a large cohort of workers threatens the solvency of social benefit systems. In others, a large cohort of young people could become a "demographic bomb." Participants saw opportunities to link these two groups for their mutual benefit.

## Jobs and Livelihoods

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Many among poor and vulnerable populations are unemployed, and many more are underemployed. Also, in developing countries, new technologies have reduced the supply of jobs. Many people in these countries work in jobs that are low-skilled and menial, offering little dignity or esteem. As one Searchlight participant put it, street sweepers,



This mural presents some of the future headlines that participants envisioned prior to the meeting.

domestic servants, and other low-skilled laborers in the developing world are often “poorly compensated and are also in abusive job situations, where, once they have burned out or died, they simply get replaced.”

In light of the diminishing supply of jobs, participants agreed that ten years from now a job in the conventional sense will be a minority experience. This implies a need for poor and vulnerable people to create their own livelihoods, as many already do today. They will likely do so through self-employment, part-time work, and informal transactions, and barter may play a greater role in economic life than it does today. This could be true despite growing collaboration among governments, multinational corporations, and poor communities to ensure that the corporations hire locally.

If this is true, then great insight can be found by looking at how informal economies function today. In many developing countries, the informal economy dwarfs the formal economy. For example, one participant noted that 95% of the economy in India is informal, meaning that taxes are not paid on transactions and that business practices do not comply with relevant laws, regulations, and labor codes.

There are several factors that tend to drive the formalization of these economic activities.

- Governments are eager to bring this form of economic activity under formal control, such as collecting taxes, enforcing regulations, and ensuring social protections.
- In recent years the opportunity to do business with multinational corporations (MNCs) has incentivized many in the informal economy—e.g., farmers—to move into the formal economy.

- Many of those working in the informal economy are now expressing a desire for the social protections available to workers in the formal economy. However, this factor may be mitigated by the public failure of governments to deliver on these social protections given their budgetary constraints.

Informal economies persist on a large scale and will likely continue to do so. Participants noted that the informal economy should be seen not as an aberration from what an economy should be, but rather as an existing opportunity for poor and vulnerable people to create their own livelihoods. But how could that opportunity be expanded?

One opportunity is to strengthen new sectors that could provide livelihoods, such as:

- The “experience economy,” in which consumers pay not for material things but for new experiences such as travel and entertainment. Tourism has always been successful in Africa, with many coming from other parts of the world to go on safaris, for example. New experiences could be created for these visitors, such as working on a farm.
- The “creative industries,” which can often be sustained in the absence of an export market. African participants saw opportunities in this area as more Africans go online and acquire satellite TV service, which will stimulate the demand for African programming. As early examples, participants pointed to a booming South African animation industry, as well as to Nigeria’s budding filmmaking industry, referred to as “Nollywood,” which now stands alongside Hollywood and India’s Bollywood in terms of cinematic output. Fashion and graphic arts also represent new opportunities for many youth in developing countries. One African participant also pointed to a successful novel written in an African cybercafé that became an international bestseller. Such is the nature of a technologically networked world that a small amount of well-placed creativity can lead to astounding success.
- Specialized farming, which could grow due to changing dietary preferences and potential market changes. For example, organic foods have become more popular in developed countries, creating new opportunities for organic farmers in developing countries. Also, urban agriculture could be promoted through government incentives and through nutrition education programs to grow the market for healthy foods. Related industries include agroprocessing, which turns primary agricultural products into commodities for world markets, and “green” industries related to renewable energy and other sustainability technologies.
- God as a major employer. In many countries in Africa and elsewhere, new mega-churches are creating congregations of 40,000 people or more. These churches are funded by their own congregations and by donations from overseas. In other areas, it is Islamic organizations that are growing rapidly in number and influence. Participants recognized that these religious organizations can be a force for good or for ill. As a force for good, they provide opportunities for employment and voluntarism for thousands of people. They also provide a de facto infrastructure for community organization and for the delivery of a host of services, including education, health care, microcredit, microinsurance, and more.
- Care industries, which could grow due to the “outsourcing” of traditional family roles as family structures change, particularly due to the migration of many rural populations to urban environments less conducive to the fulfillment of familial obligations. Personal services could expand as well, as well as care for the elderly, which participants termed “daygecare”—that is, daycare for the aged. Health care and long-term care offer tremendous opportunities as well.
- Entrepreneurship that merges new technologies with traditional cultural practices. New services are already emerging to help people who have migrated from rural areas to the cities fulfill their familial duties back home. For example, in many cultures there are certain gifts—a goat, for example—that custom demands be given on occasions like births, weddings, funerals, etc. In Africa, some entrepreneurs are creating online services where a city-dweller can buy a goat online and have it delivered to relatives living in the countryside.

Another opportunity to expand opportunities for livelihoods is to leverage technology to empower individuals. Farmers in Africa, for example, are increasingly using mobile phones to check the prices their produce would sell for

Advisor  
**NANCY RAMSEY**



Nancy Ramsey is a futurist, author, entrepreneur, as well as a consultant with the Global Business Network. At the meeting, Nancy noted that one of the biggest changes in the 20th century was that women reconceptualized their role in society as different from, but not less

than, that of men. This creates a huge potential for future efforts since, as Nancy said, “We know that if you walk in somewhere and ask one woman one question, she will tie you into a network.” Interventions can use those networks as vehicles for facilitating change.

As a futurist, Nancy encouraged Searchlight participants to look for early indicators of future changes that are “hidden in plain sight,” but can only be seen if we go beyond the mental maps to which we have grown accustomed. She noted that “each of us has a mental map that comes from a lifetime of experience, but the door to that map only opens from the inside. So no matter what you tell someone, if their mental map is that it’s something else, then you won’t be heard. What you have to do is to help them open up that door from the inside. Then you can show them something new.”

in different markets, which helps them bargain with middlemen. Coffee growers in Vietnam have successfully delayed selling their crops based on forecasts of higher prices that they found on the Internet. Since there are now more mobile phones in the world even than there are toothbrushes, participants envisioned many new apps that would allow the poor and vulnerable to “hack” their way out of poverty.

In the formal economy, participants noted that industries like business process outsourcing (BPO) will continue to create employment opportunities, as it already has in India. African participants expressed optimism that the laying of fiber-optic cables from Europe down both coasts of Africa would open up new opportunities for African youth. The cables to East Africa were activated in 2009, and the cables to West Africa will likely be activated in 2012. Thus, BPO and other technology-related jobs could expand in Africa as well. Along similar lines, Peruvian participants noted that the software industry is already a major employer in their country.

Participants noted that talent mobility was a key component of any future livelihood system. This talent mobility can be provided in part through bilateral agreements such as the Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA), through which 500 Filipino nurses were recently deployed to Japan. However, talent mobility will also require the relaxation of labor laws dealing with residency, as well as the provision of social services (education, health care, etc.) that are targeted toward migrant communities. At the same time, attention must be paid

to the populations that are left behind when people—especially highly skilled people—migrate in large numbers.

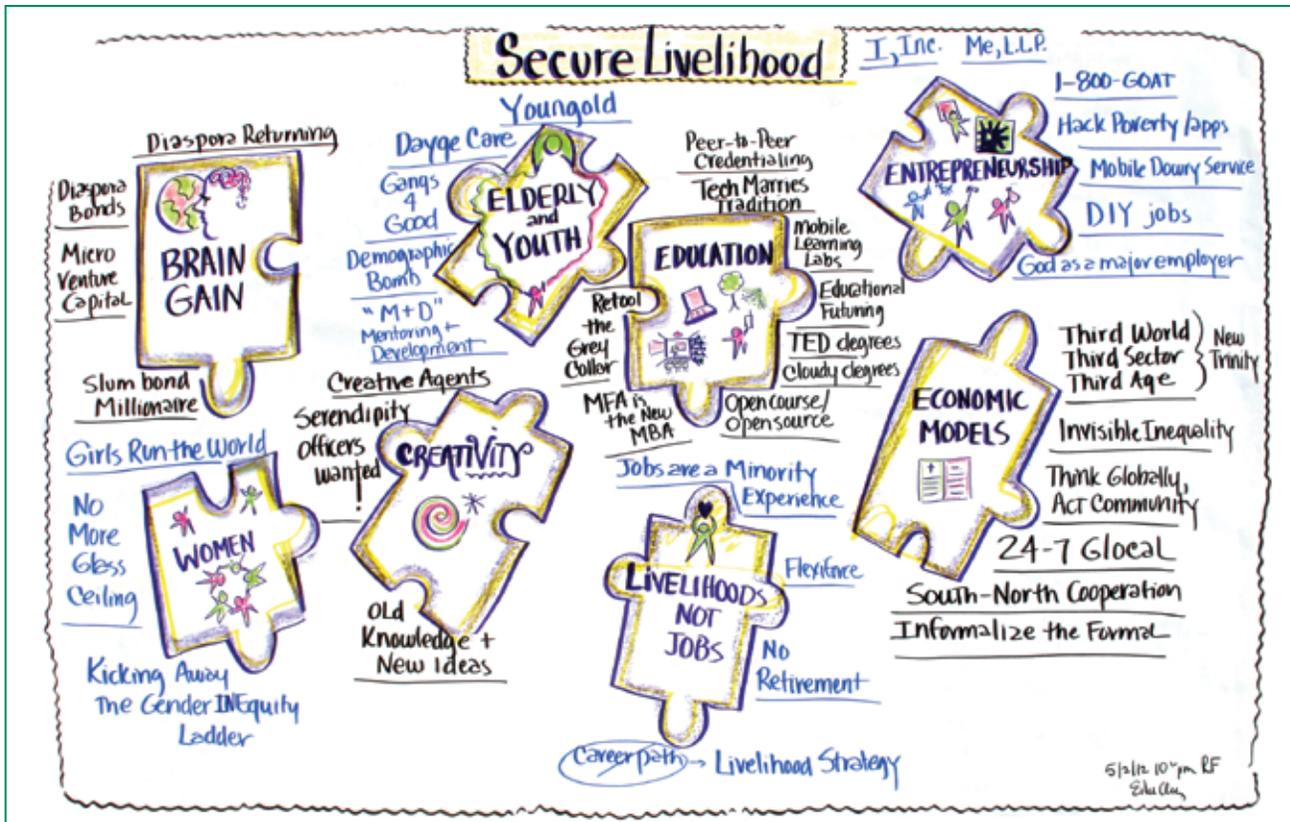
## Urbanization

In the 21st century, developing countries are facing a situation of rapid urbanization. As the World Bank notes, for the first time in history, more than half the world’s people live in cities, and over 90 percent of urban growth is occurring in the developing world, adding an estimated 70 million new residents to urban areas each year. In some regions, such as Latin America, birth rates among migrant communities now outpace net migration as a contributor to the population growth of mega-cities.

However, investments in planning and infrastructure—such as in housing, water supply, sanitation, waste management, electricity, and roads—have not kept up with this huge demographic shift. Participants noted water supply, waste management, and transportation in particular as areas of concern. Furthermore, urban governance institutions are often rife with corruption, which further sabotages the successful accommodation of larger populations.

Many mega-cities in the developing world are located in places where they are exposed to earthquakes, landslides, floods, and other natural disasters. Participants noted that the poor tend to suffer the consequences of such disasters disproportionately as they tend to live in the most hazard-prone areas and in dwellings that are relatively unsafe. Moreover, many municipal governments do not possess disaster management structures that are adequate for saving lives when disaster strikes.

In this context, cities are having to accommodate large numbers of migrants from the countryside. Interestingly,

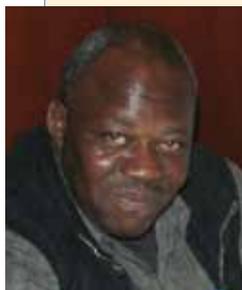


A variety of opportunities were envisioned for ensuring that people had secure livelihoods.



Meeting participants proposed new ways to transform the cities of the world.

## Searchlight Partner JIBRIN IBRAHIM



Jibrin Ibrahim is the Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), an independent not-for-profit research, advocacy, and training organization created to mobilize global opinion and resources for democratic development in West Africa. Jibrin has

been involved in Searchlight since its creation three years ago. Jibrin noted that “the excitement of Searchlight revolves around anticipating the future with a vision of moving away from negative outcomes,” and that Searchlight’s methodology can be fruitful if it is properly understood and if the ability to use it improves over time. Also, by drawing attention to where current trends are headed and how positive outcomes can be fostered, Searchlight has become an important advocacy tool in a country such as Nigeria, where, as Jibrin notes, “statistics are scarce and planning has disappeared from the national process.”

The meeting’s finding that given aging demographics in Europe, North America, and some parts of Asia, Africa will have a huge responsibility for solving future problems prompted Jibrin to reflect on what needed to happen to reap the “demographic dividend” that Africa could enjoy. While capturing this dividend will likely require improving governance in Africa, there is a potential for the young generation in Africa to rise to the challenges of the 21st century.

elements play a more predominant role in mainstream urban life than they would in older mega-cities where rural populations are more likely to be isolated in slums.

Participants identified many new opportunities to adapt urban environments to the conditions described above—or as one participant put it, to “retool the city for the age.” At the level of urban planning, participants saw several important opportunities, including:

- The creation of new institutions to deliver public services. Participants recognized that in many areas the established institutions are failing to meet this need, and that we may pass through a period when cities hit “rock bottom” in this respect. This would create an opportunity to leverage new technologies and new ways of thinking to create new institutions “from scratch,” since an entire cohort of people would not know how these services had been provided in the past.
- Increasing support for “satellite cities,” which include secondary cities as well as smaller metropolitan areas on the outskirts of mega-cities. Because of the cheaper land these areas offer, it is easier for new residents to find proper

several participants noted that the languages of the countries they represent have recently added new, pejorative terms to describe these rural migrants, indicating the scale of the migration and its cultural effect. As a result, the structure of cities is changing in several important respects:

- Slums have expanded considerably in cities across the developing world. In many cases, these slum areas exist side by side with posh retail or business districts. These slums tend to have their own organic social and economic relationships, often controlled by criminal elements like the gangs of “area boys” that control business, transportation, and other social functions in many African cities.
- Mega-cities are becoming “clusters” of smaller urban units, or cities within a city. This is driven by intra-city cultural differences that emerge when migrants from the same rural area settle in the same district. Participants referred to these areas as “rurban” – that is, they are physically urban but retain cultural elements more closely associated with the countryside. At the same time, however, affluent domestic populations as well as retirees and immigrants from developed countries like Japan and Dubai are building “gated communities” where they can access cheap labor but are protected from the security risks that exist elsewhere in the city.
- Mega-city growth has been accompanied, and in many countries surpassed, by the growth of secondary cities. Unlike the mega-cities that have been inundated by migrant populations, these secondary cities have had a chance to grow some of the necessary infrastructure as their populations have expanded. Also, because they are culturally more closely linked to the rural areas that surround them, they do not have some of the glaring inequities that are on display in a country’s first-tier cities. Thus, rural cultural

housing in which to live. These cities are now being built in Uganda, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the hope that they will divert migrating rural populations away from overcrowded mega-cities. Other examples include Eko Atlantic, a privately-led initiative to transform reclaimed land of an island near Lagos, Nigeria, into a financial hub for the whole of West Africa.

- Applying innovative technologies to solve the most pressing urban problems. Participants noted the following examples where this is already happening. In Mumbai, urban agriculture is on the rise as a means to provide urban dwellers with organic foods. In Singapore, reprocessed toilet water, called “jamban juice,” is being marketed as drinking water. (“Jamba” is a Malay word for toilet.) Participants remain on the lookout for other innovations that could be initiated elsewhere.
- Thinking about cities as living, breathing organisms in which residents live in and among a certain set of built environments and institutions. This way of thinking highlights the ways in which residents self-organize to improve their own lives.
- Improving disaster preparedness in cities. This would include both specific measures, like using real-time information when disaster strikes, and a larger reframing of disaster preparedness in terms of community resilience so that it can extend more broadly across many areas of activity. Participants suggested that governments could replace the Department of Disaster Planning with the Department of Resilience.

As with the informal economy, participants saw opportunities to improve people’s lives by leveraging the informal networks that already exist in and around cities. For example:

- Urban residents often have close social connections to their relatives and other residents in the rural areas from which they came. New technologies allow these relationships to be mapped, which creates new opportunities for spreading knowledge between the city and the countryside, and for strengthening interpersonal networks that are already providing the poor and vulnerable with greater resilience.
- Within cities, informal social networks are a source of community resilience. Thus, there are opportunities to have a large impact by strengthening capacity at key nodes of these networks. For example, participants envisioned a “Barefoot Grandmothers” program (based on the model of “Barefoot Doctors,” who provided basic health care to rural residents in China during the Mao Zedong era) that would provide additional skills to the older women in slum communities to make them an even greater resource to their neighbors on issues like child care and health.
- There is a lot of economic activity taking place in slums, but the people who live in slums have minimal access to finance. Since they do not own their homes or the land on which they sit, they cannot use real estate as collateral for a loan. And yet, these people may own many assets in terms of their material possessions. Thus, there is a significant opportunity in creating new methods for securitizing these possessions.

### Advisor T. IRENE SANDERS

Irene Sanders is the founder and Executive Director of the Washington Center for Complexity and Public Policy. Irene invited Searchlight participants to see themselves as “modern-day explorers,” venturing out into a future where no one has ever been. She brought to the Searchlight group her own explorations of chaos theory and complexity science, specifically in terms of their application to strategic planning. She noted that “most organizations and most individuals do really good planning without doing very good thinking about the future.” They tend to continue doing what they have done in the past; the logic seems to be, “If it’s working, then keep doing it, and if it isn’t working, then keep trying it.” These organizations can improve their strategic thinking by incorporating complexity science, which is built upon the work of many disciplines over the past few centuries, but only recently have we had the mathematics and the computational power to apply it to real-world problems.



Irene suggested that all of the systems being considered at the Searchlight meeting—the global economy, cities, and the natural environment—are complex adaptive systems that respond to changes in their larger environments and within themselves, often in unexpected ways. This is contrary to the planning model many policymakers use, which assumes that “if we just did this one thing,” everything else would fall into place in predictable ways.

## Searchlight Partner FERNANDO PRADA



Fernando Prada is Researcher and Coordinator of the Financing for Development Program at FORO Nacional/Internacional, which monitors trends in the international system for development financing, with a special emphasis on impact evaluation studies

and on issues of concern for middle-income economies. Fernando shared that his three-year involvement in the Searchlight project has improved his own capacity for identifying trends in development topics, and for deriving the trends' implications for his country and for public policy design. He notes that the Searchlight methodology is able to systematize different perspectives and events by finding patterns in large amounts of information. FORO is now training a group of young researchers in this methodology so that they can better assess the future implications of various public policy options. FORO is also researching how this methodology can be applied at the local level and at low cost, with a focus on improving management of development issues.

Fernando also described the value of the community created by the Searchlight project, noting that Searchlight partners are becoming advocates of futures methods in their own communities and countries. Searchlight's success shows that a community of people generating positive visions of the future and analyzing different strategic options on that basis can provide policymakers with a fresh and valuable perspective.

- There are also a lot of voters in the slums. In countries with compulsory voting, slum residents can become an important voting bloc, capturing the attention of political candidates and motivating important policy initiatives. Creating new mechanisms for slum-dwellers to be involved in the political process could promote government action to improve conditions in the slums.

## Education

Education is currently facing a host of challenges in both developing and developed countries. Governments often lack the financial resources or the political will to prepare their citizens for a changing job market and to meet the need for other life skills. This is a particular problem for poor or vulnerable populations who often lack access to the best schools and to the skills needed to find jobs in emerging technology-focused industries and sectors.

More generally, there is often a mismatch between job applicant qualifications and job requirements. In high-tech sectors, employers face shortages of applicants with a sufficient level of technical skill. These shortages are also pronounced at the level of middle management. Participants also noted hiring difficulties even in non-technical fields: for example, employers in India are having difficulty staffing a booming retail market because many young people lack the grooming habits and presentation style required for success in sales. Participants also pointed to the issue of "brain drain," in which highly educated citizens of developing countries are lost to developed countries through emigration, leaving unmet needs in health care and other professions.

Participants saw several opportunities to better prepare poor and vulnerable populations not only for the jobs that may exist a decade from now, but also for the challenge of creating their own livelihoods. Over the near term, they saw value in programs

that trained local populations with the skills they needed for the jobs that are likely to be available. In some cases, this training is provided by multinational corporations (MNCs) that are starting operations in a given geographic area. In other cases, it is provided by a public-private partnership, as in the case of the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) in India, which seeks to upgrade Indian workers' skills to meet the needs of the private sector and of the informal sector. Participants explored the notion that people would be paid to learn new skills, given the overall benefit to society in terms of increased productivity and reduced demand for social services.

Creating one's livelihood, however, requires a different set of skills. Obviously entrepreneurship skills are essential, but young people also need a new way of thinking about their careers. Rather than starting along a "career path,"

students must develop a “livelihood strategy,” which could include a variety of careers, vocations, and income sources over the course of one’s life.

Other skills will be required, but we may not yet know what they are. For example, one of the livelihood opportunities noted above was in the creative industries. To provide the necessary skills, a university in Arusha, Tanzania has created a cross-cutting curriculum in digital business and expressive arts. In addition, participants agreed that skills in mentoring, organizing, and leading would become more important in the future, and must be incorporated into education. Participants suggested that policymakers conduct ongoing futures work to identify the skills that will be required in the future.

The most exciting opportunities that participants saw in education dealt with disconnecting education and skills development from traditional degree programs and accreditation structures. This could occur if new methods emerge for checking a person’s proficiency in a certain skill area, much like Angie’s List and similar sites allow consumers to check the quality of certain service providers. Participants envisioned peer-to-peer credentialing based on ratings provided by members of the community.

The other key component of this system would be the widespread dissemination of knowledge through the Internet, both through formal courses provided by leading universities and through formats like TED.com talks that could ultimately be structured in a form that yields something similar to an academic degree. Participants recognized an opportunity to create an online platform for “open-source/open-course” learning for all. Furthermore, this availability of knowledge would facilitate the creation of tailored life-long learning trajectories that would move everyone along their own path. Participants noted that these shifts would require a change in intellectual property law, but they could anticipate this happening over the next decade.

As education improves in developing countries, “brain drain” will remain a significant issue as top professionals from these countries seek opportunities abroad. One participant noted that there are now more Peruvian scientists living and working abroad than there are in Peru. However, many from developing countries are now being educated in developed countries. Thus, participants envisioned a scheme to promote “brain gain” by developing “diaspora bonds” that encourage those living abroad to provide support for communities back in their home countries. These tools would complement the existing incentives that already encourage those who are educated abroad to return to their home country and use their expertise to improve the lives of the poor.

### Advisor JOAN PARKER

Joan Parker is President and CEO of Counterpart International, a US-based non-profit organization working with communities in over 20 countries worldwide. At the meeting, Joan highlighted some of the themes she found most intriguing: new forms of finance, such as “forest bonds”; youth-elderly partnerships rather than the youth vs. elderly dynamic that is so often discussed; the use of art and culture to create “dream societies” that provide a measure of social resilience in hard times; and the public-private-community partnership that could serve as a model of bottom-up governance.



Joan pushed the Searchlight participants to find the “tipping points” that could be huge game-changers, and that are where we have to put our resources going forward. She also emphasized finding the leverage points where—with vision—an intervention tested and proven at a local level can be taken to scale. She noted that policy is hugely important, but there are other forces that could be leveraged as well, including technology and new forms of finance. Joan also noted that “markets will prompt enormous movements from the local to the national level to transnational levels.” The question is, “how do we bring the things that we believe to be social goods into markets and value them?”

## Searchlight Partner KAI HONG PHUA



Kai Hong Phua is a professor of Health and Social Policy at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. He has been involved in the Searchlight project for three years and now leads the Searchlight health systems component in Asia. As a Searchlight

participant, Kai Hong has valued the virtual and face-to-face interactions with top think-tanks and futurists from around the world to forecast and propose innovative policy options to meet emerging challenges in development work. He noted that “there are many possible policy options and innovations from around the world that could be adopted and applied for development, but translation of ideas into policy and action has to be contextualized within the local systems and conditions.”

Kai Hong appreciated the platform provided by the Searchlight meeting for considering how innovations might play out in cultural, social, economic, and political systems at different stages of development. He also valued the opportunity to meet and interact with Rockefeller Foundation staff and others to explore the common issues they face. He noted that Searchlight offers a unique capacity to engage strategic thinkers and policymakers on important development trends and issues confronting different parts of the world, and to compare perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders and interest groups.

## Community Initiatives

In many developing countries, governments have lost the public trust through corruption, by cutting deals with corporations (e.g., in extractive industries) that hurt their populations, or by failing to keep up with escalating demands for urban housing, infrastructure, employment, and other issues. At the same time, many policymakers have seen promise in public-private partnerships (PPPs), but some participants were skeptical of these arrangements, noting that the profits are privatized but the risks are often socialized. In this context, many poor people take action at the grassroots level to improve their own lives.

To strengthen these grassroots efforts, participants identified a number of emerging opportunities. The first was to create a governance mechanism that would ensure that community interests were explicitly accounted for in decisions affecting poor and vulnerable populations. Participants discussed this mechanism as a “public-private-community partnership (PPCP),” a concept that in the view of the meeting participants has received too little attention. PPCPs would play a variety of roles in organizing community life, including part-ownership in key services, such as water delivery.

Financing of these efforts was also identified as a key opportunity area. For example, diaspora bonds could allow members of the diaspora to invest in community initiatives back home. In some cases, these could take the form of bonds that securitize the assets contained within slum areas. Also, new websites similar to Kickstarter could provide these initiatives with “micro venture capital” from many different sources.

Participants also noted the negative effect that overseas remittances often have on the dynamism of individuals and communities in the developing world, referred to as “remittance dependency.” There is an opportunity to counteract that effect by shifting overseas remittances—at least in part—from individual payments to community contributions. For example, foundations and money transfer companies could create a mechanism by which people sending remittances back home could opt to have a portion of their remittance set aside for community initiatives. In a sense, this mechanism would create a platform for “long-distance social entrepreneurship” and would engage diaspora communities more actively. The idea would likely also have appeal for those sending the remittances, who would like to feel that they are doing more than just enabling the dependency of their relatives back home.

Participants noted that the need for funding for these activities could be significantly reduced if existing community assets were used more efficiently. Participants envisioned public areas like parks and buildings being used throughout the day for youth development programs, elder programs, and other community functions. They pointed to early indicators that this is already taking place, for example in the case of t'ai chi exercises being organized in public parks. Mapping the assets that already exist within a community could provide a foundation for significantly expanding the range of activities and services available to residents.

## Elders and Youth

In many developing countries, a large cohort of young people is having difficulty finding satisfactory employment. These unemployed and disenfranchised youth could become a “demographic bomb”—that is, a source of social and political instability. Already they have formed into youth gangs that engage in criminal activity or assert control over entire neighborhoods, providing protection for local residents and businesses, but at a price.

While many youth have moved to cities in search of employment, others remain in rural areas, where they work small agricultural plots with low productivity. In many cases, these plots have been overtaken by “land grabbers” (foreign investors who have bought large-scale tracts of land for development), further reducing the opportunities available to young people.

At the other end of the demographic spectrum, older generations are finding that their skills are no longer marketable or that they are unable to retire given their financial resources and the state of the “safety net” available to them. This “graying” of the workforce has created new vulnerabilities, even in relatively affluent Singapore, where as one participant noted, the financing scheme for intermediate- and long-term care is inadequate to the need.

For youth, some of the most promising opportunities deal with organizing these young people to serve a useful function in society. Participants pointed to the efforts of Lagos (Nigeria) state governor Babatunde Fashola to set up vocational training centers for “area boys”—the street urchins and other youth who populate the local gangs. Once trained, these young people play an important role in cleaning up the community. Similarly, in Latin America disadvantaged youth have been recruited into “gangs for good,” which refers to sports teams, musical groups, and other activities that have a positive effect on their lives. Venezuela, for example, has created 30 professional orchestras in part by providing poor children with musical instruments and instruction in after-school centers in order to keep them away from drugs, alcohol, and violence.

More generally, youth could be recruited as staff or volunteers and provided training that is useful for their roles and for their future prospects—e.g., in disaster response. Similarly, one participant noted a program where young people were given mobile devices and sent out to collect data on local agricultural production, which is then sold to users. Youth are a great example of a resource that, if not used properly, could become a liability or a threat.

Participants identified many opportunities that would bring elders and youth together. For example, mentoring relationships could be set up in both directions: elders could transfer their acquired life skills to youth, while youth could help “gray-collar” workers learn the skills they need to survive in a technology-driven job market. Furthermore, these relationships would help pass on older traditions and lifestyles, which in many cases may offer innovative solutions to today’s problems.

## Searchlight Partner ANUMITA RAJ

Anumita Raj is the Joint Coordinator for the South Asia Security Unit and the Horizon Scanning Unit at the Strategic Foresight Group. She reports that her involvement in Searchlight, which dates back to 2010, allows her to “consider issues through a prism that is interesting and revitalizing.” She notes that the project’s intent has evolved from considering issues to examining solutions, which she finds uniquely exciting. What she has found most meaningful in Searchlight’s work is the ability to envision “lasting, impactful interventions” rather than simply “band-aid” solutions, which in her opinion account for most of the solutions now being implemented in the developing world.



Anumita expressed how much she has enjoyed the face-to-face Searchlight meetings, which have facilitated a full examination of issues from other parts of the world. She said that “the most exciting aspect for me was really thinking about the kind of solutions that seem to recur in various parts of the world, almost unplanned.” But what has most struck Anumita about the Searchlight project is that a group of committed and thoughtful professionals, with no political affiliations, belonging to various backgrounds, possessing different expertise, and invested in practical solutions to current and future problems, have been able to establish and maintain an expansive and free-wheeling discussion about exactly when, where, and how these solutions can be implemented. She hopes that some of this action may soon yield visible results in society.

**Advisor**  
**FRANCISCO SAGASTI**



Francisco Sagasti is Senior Associate at FORO Nacional/Internacional, an institution created to promote democratic governance and to foster dialogue and consensus on critical development issues. At the meeting, Francisco expressed his view that we are witnessing the end of an era. This era has seen the incredible success of a revolutionary intellectual

program created by Sir Francis Bacon in the early 17th century, which heralded the transition from medieval to modern times. Bacon's program is characterized by the use of the scientific method, often with public support, to generate knowledge for the service of human beings, moving along a trajectory of indefinite progress.

Francisco noted that 400 years later, Bacon's program has completely transformed human activities all over the world, but in doing so it has undermined its own premises. For example, some of today's questions cannot be answered by the scientific method, religious and other non-scientific ways of generating knowledge are seeing a resurgence, and the catastrophes of the 20th century have challenged the notion of indefinite progress. As a result, we need to "rethink the whole conception of what it is to generate and utilize knowledge, . . . and this is something that unfortunately requires a lot of hard thinking based on experience and practice." Francisco articulated a need not for more analysts who can break things into pieces, but for "synthesists" who can put things together in ways that make sense.

**Advisor**  
**JAMES DATOR**



Jim Dator is Director of the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies in the Department of Political Science at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Jim encouraged meeting participants to think in terms of the four major challenges now facing humanity. First, the "age of cheap energy" that supported the economic transformation from agricultural to industrial to information is now

coming to an end. Second are the ecological effects of that economic transformation, such as climate change, rising sea levels, and growing food insecurity. Third, the economic system that collapsed in 2007 has not yet recovered, and in Jim's view never will. Fourth, systems of governance are now "utterly obsolete," and there is a need to create new systems. Jim told participants, "You are so lucky to be entering into a world where almost nothing works and therefore everything is possible!"

Furthermore, he suggested that we are probably in the process—if not already then certainly within the next decade—of a transition "from an industrial and information society to a 'dream society' focused on identity, icons, and aesthetic experience." As an example, Jim noted that South Korea has already made the development and export of its popular culture a major focus of its economic policy. Jim saw further evidence of this trend in Searchlight participants' focus on developments in the creative arts among developing country populations.

**Searchlight Partner**  
**SHEILA OCHUGBOJU**



Sheila Ochugboju is the Chief Communications Officer at the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET), an economic policy institute supporting the long-term "growth with transformation" of African economies. She has been involved in the Searchlight project since 2010. Sheila finds it exciting to use the "Searchlight lens" to explore ideas and to report on areas of dynamism on the ground in West Africa. She notes that while it is a bit counterintuitive to process information received today by imagining what it will look like in the future, it is a very powerful filter, and after two years of experience with Searchlight, the evidence shows that this approach is effective in monitoring trends more accurately.

Throughout her involvement in Searchlight, Sheila has been fascinated by "how simple and yet how complex it can be to project your own thinking forward from the nucleus of an idea or an activity on the ground." You have to combine "a macroscopic and a microscopic view to paint complex scenarios about what might emerge in the near future." She added that, "Once you begin to do this in a systematic way, you start to find it quite natural and everything you examine afterwards instantly shines a light further off, which also shifts your perception about almost everything you see happening today."

## Box 2. Cross-Cutting Themes

Two cross-cutting themes emerged in many of the discussions throughout the workshop: gender and ecosystems. Considering both will be critical to advancing productive livelihoods and creating sustainable cities for poor and vulnerable populations globally.

### Gender

Women face a unique set of challenges in the developing world. They often live under significant social and economic constraints, and may lack a voice in their homes and communities. Since women tend to live longer than men, there are many older women who have become much more vulnerable after their husbands die.

However, women have several advantages that are worth considering. They often manage the household finances, sometimes under the firm control of their husbands but sometimes not. In rural India, the proportion of village council members that are women is on the rise, giving young women role models to emulate. Women have also benefited significantly from girls' education initiatives, microcredit programs, and business process outsourcing.

In India and Thailand, in particular, women are reaching high-level positions in business and society. Workshop participants felt a tension between the rapidly improving prospects for these urban women and the more challenging circumstances faced by rural women.

### Ecosystems

Many of the challenges of the coming decades will emerge from the natural environment. Natural disasters will continue to create disproportionate stresses for poor and vulnerable populations. Climate change, with the associated risks of disease outbreaks and unpredictable weather events, will likely create tipping points that force changes in the architecture of political, economic, and social systems.

Invited advisor Jim Dator suggested that we stand at the dawn of a new geological era—the Anthropocene era—in which human activities are playing a major role in shaping the natural environment. This era requires a new way of looking at the environmental consequences of human activities.

As humans more intentionally shape ecosystems, they will be able to draw from both traditional and modern value sets and approaches. For example, modern approaches like vertical gardening and urban agriculture, “forest bonds” to support environmental protection, and the reengineering of cities all offer the promise of more sustainable human systems in the years to come. At the same time, traditional approaches can provide support to the poor and vulnerable communities where they are still broadly applied, as well as to more affluent communities where they could be introduced.

# Conclusion

## The Benefits Of Horizon Scanning

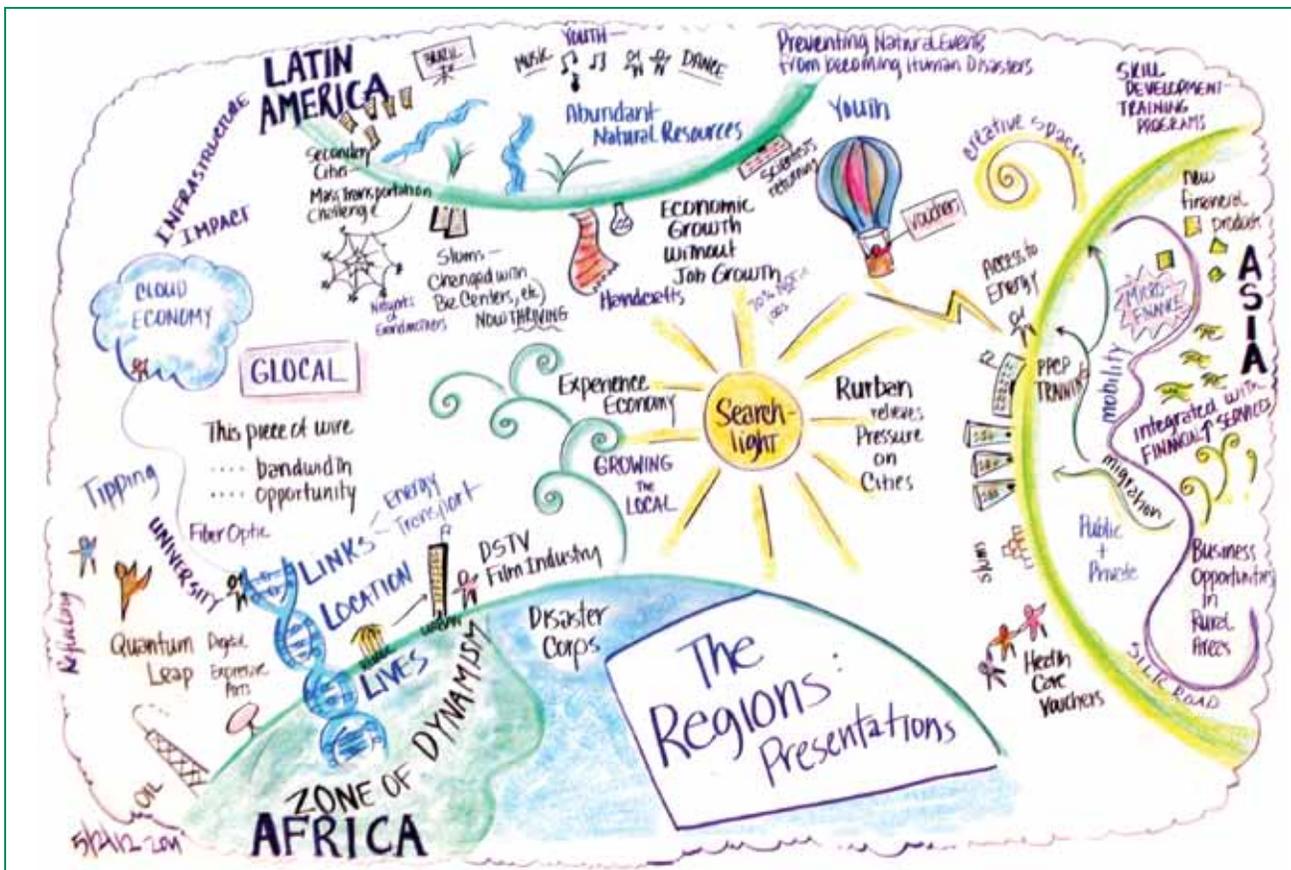
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As noted above, the Searchlight function is a first-of-its-kind effort to inform philanthropic decision-making with forward-looking, on-the-ground observation and analysis. The benefits of this approach to horizon scanning are discussed below.

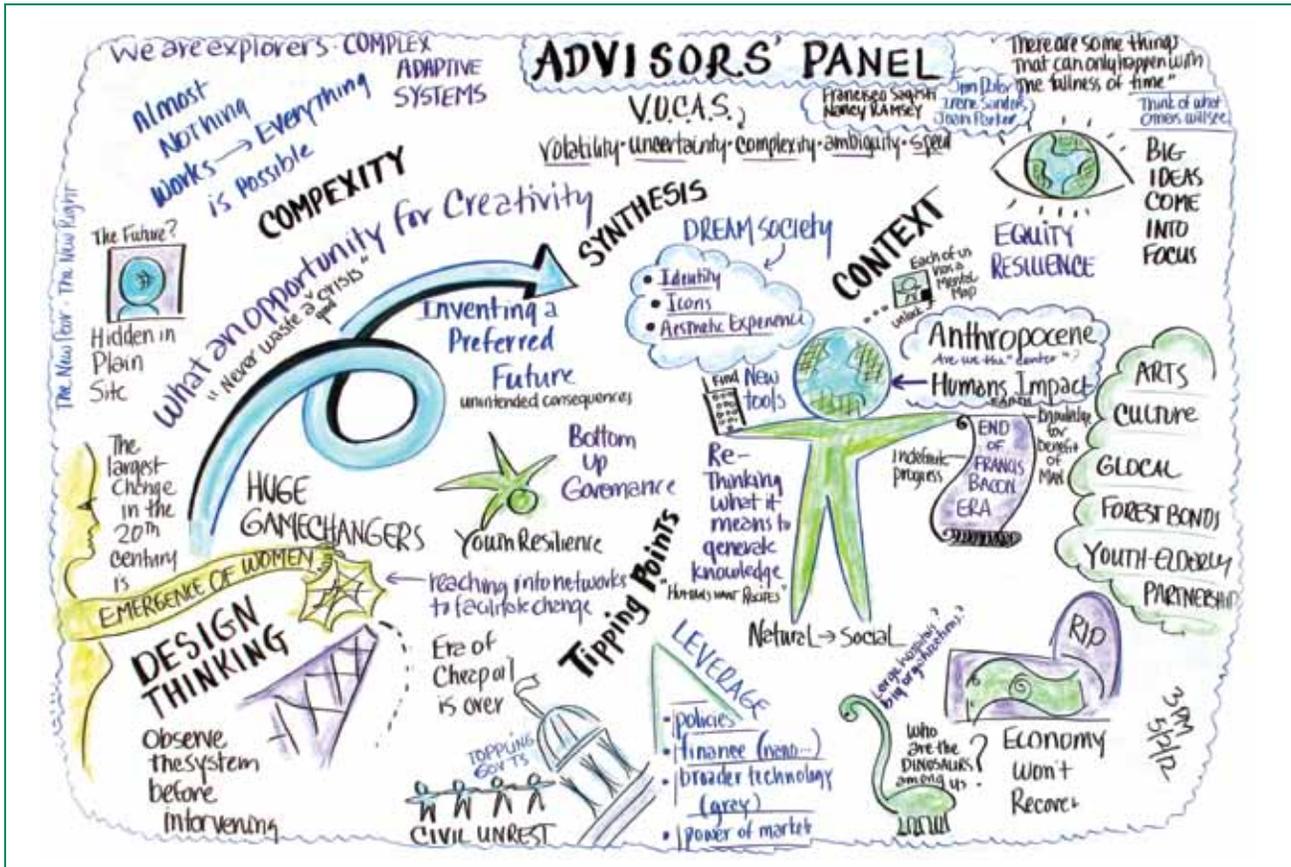
- **Enhanced awareness of the leading edge of change:** The Searchlight function has provided the Rockefeller Foundation, and the broader philanthropic and development community, access to sources of information with which they otherwise would not have engaged. In some cases, this is because the information is highly local in nature. In other cases, it is because the information is qualitatively different from the analysis that is typically used in philanthropic decision-making. As Francisco Sagasti said during the advisor panel, “We don’t need more analysts; we need more synthesists.” Searchlight partners provide their highest value in their capacity as synthesists, recognizing patterns, spotting trends, and highlighting early-stage innovations. Thus, to fully leverage this capacity, philanthropic decision-makers may need to open themselves to a new style of learning that is closer to the forefront of change, but may lack some of the pedigree that comes from publication, for example, in peer-reviewed journals.
- **Greater awareness of local conditions:** Many of the opportunities highlighted in this report reflect informal solutions that have emerged at the local level. Searchlight partners are in a unique position to identify these informal solutions so that they can be supported, enhanced, and expanded. Rather than focusing on problems described by aggregate statistics, they focus on the conditions in which actual people live. They recognize that these conditions have evolved for a certain set of reasons. As one participant put it, “The question is, can they evolve to something better?” In particular, the Searchlight partners have enhanced the Rockefeller Foundation’s appreciation for commonalities and differences that exist across the contexts in which they work.
- **Diverse opinions, methodologies, and perspectives:** Participants at the meeting represented countries from across Africa, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and South America. They also represented a range of organizations, including academic institutions, policy think-tanks, futures research organizations, and market research firms. This diverse composition of the Searchlight function was intentional, and has brought into the discussion a broader range of methodologies and perspectives than would otherwise have been possible. At the same time, Searchlight meetings have yielded mutual learning among the partner organizations. For example, after seeing an “undercity” of slums nestled beneath an “overcity” of shopping malls and five-star hotels in Mumbai, one African participant at the 2011 meeting was struck by the very different forms that poverty can take from country to country.
- **An emerging global conversation about pro-poor foresight:** All of the Searchlight partners have distributed their newsletters through their own local, national, and regional networks. Some have used speaker series, workshops, websites, blogs, opinion pieces, and other formats to further disseminate the findings from their Searchlight work. Searchlight content has been re-posted on well-known development websites, such as Next Billion. The Searchlight function has been an important component in an emerging global conversation that also includes a trend-focused website, <http://www.FutureChallenges.org>, which is partnership of the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation

■ **Innovative ideas to inform strategic decision-making:** At the Rockefeller Foundation, trends identified by Searchlight partners have been incorporated into the planning process and specific innovations have been considered as candidates for early-stage funding. Many of the ideas published in the Searchlight newsletters are extracted and stored in an internal idea management database, and these ideas have become important building blocks that enhance strategic thinking and decision-making.

In conclusion, the 2012 Searchlight meeting brought together more than 25 people with unique perspectives and a sincere interest in promoting the well-being of humanity. In the course of their discussions, participants came together around the idea that the problems addressed by the world’s leading philanthropies may in fact require the enhancement and expansion of solutions that poor and vulnerable communities across the developing world have already initiated. The Searchlight function is one example showing how leading philanthropies, development practitioners, and even those in the private and public sectors can effectively access the on-the-ground knowledge required to ramp up these novel solutions to complex challenges. Through their newsletters, meetings, and other activities, the Searchlight partners have expanded the range of information available to these communities and have illuminated the rich, local contexts in which they live and work. The Searchlight approach offers high value to any organization that believes in the promise of innovation and anticipating the future to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable populations.



Searchlight participants explored both the similarities and differences across regions.



The invited advisors shared a wide range of perspectives and ideas with participants during a panel discussion.

# Appendix: List of Participants

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## Searchlight Partners

**Gonzalo Alcalde**

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**Mario Bazan**

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Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies

**Joan Parker**

Counterpart International

**Nancy Ramsey**

Independent futurist

**Francisco Sagasti**

FORO Nacional/Internacional (Peru)

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