

# Through their eyes

A report of three Special Projects  
to explore the new future  
in the Western Pacific Region



World Health  
Organization  
Western Pacific Region





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## **Through their eyes: a report of three special projects to explore the new future in the Western Pacific Region**

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ISBN 978 92 9062 032 7

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**Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data.** 1. Diffusion of innovation. 2. Organizational innovation. 3. Regional health planning. I. World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific. (NLM Classification: WA541)

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# Contents

<b>iv</b>	<b>Foreword</b>
<b>v</b>	<b>List of contributors</b>
<b>vii</b>	<b>Executive summary</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Chapter 1. Imagining the futures: the SenseMaker Project</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Chapter 2. Shaping the futures: Crowdsourcing for Social Health Innovations</b>
<b>19</b>	<b>Chapter 3. The futures beyond words: WHO Futures Art Exhibition</b>
<b>29</b>	<b>Chapter 4. Conclusion – The futures belong to us</b>

# Foreword

For over two years, COVID-19 upended life as we knew it. The pandemic's devastating effects on health reinforced the idea that "business as usual" is no longer an option and that we must prepare for what may come next in our rapidly changing world.

To meet tomorrow's complex health challenges, the World Health Organization is committed to making the Western Pacific the healthiest and safest region by systematically looking to the future to better inform today's actions and decisions.

Through futures thinking, we support Member States to develop and implement national long-term change agendas for improving health and well-being for all, face future challenges and leverage opportunities.

As part of this process, we devised three Special Projects to capture the voices of people who are often underrepresented in decision-making – young people and artists.

Young people are among those most affected by the health decisions made today for tomorrow. Through our first Special Project,

we asked young futurists to envision the world in 2032. Their short narratives conveyed their hopes, fears, cares and frustrations.

As part of our second Special Project, young people in Malaysia and the Philippines imagined solutions to tackle today's health problems and make tomorrow better. Their solutions not only exposed current problems but also beamed ingenuity in showcasing how different means and skills could pave the way for better futures.

Artists have special ways of expressing feelings, ideas and visions through their artwork. They were also among those most affected by the pandemic. For these reasons, our third Special Project asked artists to imagine what the Western Pacific Region would look like in 2050. While some artists conveyed scathing messages about mental health, climate change and ubiquitous technology affecting every sphere of human life, others expressed hope in overcoming difficulties and solving complex problems to achieve a better future.

We hope this report amplifies these messages as the Region further considers the future of health, well-being and health systems.



**Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab**

Acting Regional Director  
for the Western Pacific  
World Health Organization

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# List of contributors

The Special Projects were organized by the Data, Strategy and Innovation group of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

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# Executive summary

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic caught the world unprepared, revealing society's vulnerabilities, systemic fragility and lack of resilience. In 2020, the Data, Strategy and Innovation (DSI) group at the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific adopted a Health Futures Strategic Dialogue (HFSD) approach to systematically assess life during the pandemic and anticipate how a world with COVID-19 might look in 2022. Building on tried-and-tested foresight methodologies, DSI convened five thematic think tanks, tapping experts across various fields. In addition, DSI implemented three Special Projects to help ensure the strategic conversation incorporated diverse perspectives, including those not often heard, thereby creating a more comprehensive description of the future of health in the Region.

The **SenseMaker Project**, the first Special Project, leveraged the voices of young futurists by asking them to imagine how the future of the world and the future of health might look in 2032, how those futures might emerge, and what could be done to create more positive futures. A total of 117 young people aged 18–30 years, with the majority coming from Asia, participated in the Project. The result is a collection of micro-narratives on the future as seen through their eyes. The SenseMaker Project highlighted the issues that young people deem critical, including technology, geopolitics, inequality and community/collective action. The young futurists acknowledged the limitless potential of technology to shape a better future, while also being acutely aware of the perils of technology-related issues surrounding data protection, surveillance, fake news and automation. The

impacts of geopolitics came up repeatedly. The participants expressed hope and positivity about their increasing awareness of climate change. At the same time, they voiced anxiety over the lack of social mobility, greater inequality (particularly given the impact of COVID-19) and a deficit of trust in leadership. For these young people, the path to a better future requires a rethink of the social contract and how society must strive to ensure equality and social justice.

**Crowdsourcing for Social Health Innovations**, the second Special Project, tapped into the vision and imagination of young people (aged 15–30) in Malaysia and the Philippines to identify challenges affecting the future of health in 2050 and design innovative solutions to build a better world. Through their submissions, the young participants reminded us that health is “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”, that we must keep this comprehensive definition of health in the discourse and as part of any solution to strengthen health systems, and that health and well-being are intricately linked. Education and learning were front and centre in the minds of young people, as reflected in the submitted project proposals. Students in Malaysia and the Philippines have had first-hand experience with prolonged school closures. Not surprisingly, many of them imagined a future with equal access to education, where learning is no longer a privilege but a right that can be accessed by every child, where the quality of learning is no longer determined primarily by parents' incomes, and where every child can receive the support they need to learn effectively. Young people's ideas on shaping

the future were also heavily influenced by their reliance on technology, which will likely grow over time. Technological innovations require ethical considerations, checks and balances, sound governance, regulatory frameworks, digital literacy and supporting infrastructure. Lastly, young people also place high importance on the issue of climate change. They no longer need convincing that climate change is a fundamental threat to our civilization. To build a better post-pandemic world, mitigating and adapting to climate change are critical.

The third Special Project, **WHO Futures Art Exhibition: Envisioning the Future of Health in 2050**, was designed as a platform for individuals and communities to express their experiences, hopes and fears through visual art. The Futures Art Exhibition showcased 63 submissions from 28 artists worldwide. Artists are witnesses to today's lived experiences. They help us make sense of collective traumas by archiving, expressing and interpreting the beauty and wreckage of cataclysmic events (sometimes simultaneously) in their works. At the same time, artists are essential architects of imagined

futures. Going beyond words, their works help us reimagine future possibilities, reminding us that the future is not predetermined.

The outputs from these three Special Projects all point to the following themes:

- ◆ Health is viewed as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”. Holistic health must be incorporated into the discourse and as part of any solutions to strengthen health systems.
- ◆ Concerns of social justice, inclusivity and equality are central in terms of the visions of the future and the paths to that future.
- ◆ Climate change is perceived as a challenge without precedent, with far-reaching consequences that need to be aptly managed.
- ◆ Technology is seen as a source of innovations and disruptions with spillover effects on essential issues such as privacy, automation and decentralization.

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# Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic caught the world flat-footed. Its scale, reach and speed exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and exposed the systemic fragility, lack of resilience and unpreparedness of many countries, even those with the most advanced health-care systems. No one was immune, and no country was spared. The pandemic not only threatened our health and well-being, but also upended our ways of living and working, exposing the fault-lines in our society while forcing us to question our deep-seated assumptions on a whole range of issues. How does one redefine the social contract between the government and its citizens (or between employers and employees)? How do we as a society deal with the looming threats of climate change while delivering economic growth? How do we as individuals walk the line between personal freedom and collective responsibility when our action/inaction can significantly affect the health and well-being of our neighbours? How do countries balance their commitment to their citizens while contributing to global public goods when life-saving vaccines and medicines are scarce? How do institutions build resilience and prepare for tomorrow in a world of radical uncertainty and ongoing discontinuities? Where does one go from here?

The Data, Strategy and Innovation (DSI) group of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific convened five thematic think tanks, tapping experts across a wide range of fields, to capture and imagine the possibilities of a future world where COVID-19 is part of our reality. The process identified 14 dimensions of change across five thematic areas that will shape the world, thereby enabling Member States to better understand the range

of possible futures and how to prepare for them. Those were:

1. **People and society:** Societies worldwide live under prolonged, sustained uncertainty due to the ongoing pandemic. People's distinct lived experiences with COVID-19 will define how they live and behave. The unequal impacts of the pandemic might deepen social divisions (and inequalities). Social contracts will need to be redefined and renegotiated. Governments need to balance meeting short-term (and urgent) needs and dealing with long-term challenges.
2. **Health:** The pandemic has strained the health-care workforce and systems and pushed them to the brink of collapse in some countries. Meanwhile, the resurgence of non-COVID-19 diseases will further complicate the picture. The definition, ownership and responsibility for health need a significant rethink. At the country and international levels, health leadership is facing intense scrutiny. New structures and mechanisms for global public health cooperation are long overdue.
3. **Technology:** The pandemic has unleashed a dizzying array of digital technologies and rapid innovations that touch every facet of life. The technology sector is also characterized by limited frameworks for governance, regulation and societal discourse, with most governments playing catch-up, which dramatically exacerbates risks and threats posed by unconstrained growth.

A critical insight from these experts, which is confirmed by the Special Projects, is that there is no single future for the Western Pacific Region.

In addition, DSI implemented three Special Projects – **SenseMaker, Crowdsourcing for Social Health Innovations**, and the **WHO Futures Art Exhibition** – to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the strategic conversation.

4. **Politics:** The shifting political alliances, which are being redrawn at the domestic, regional and global levels, are marked by the rise of extreme politics and growing tension among the superpowers, sowing mistrust, division and conflicts. The outcomes of this process, including unintended ones, might result in new patterns governing the movement of people, goods and information/data. Failures in containing COVID-19 might result in more fragile and failed states.
5. **Economy:** COVID-19 has challenged the fiscal and monetary capacity of even the most advanced economies. As the pandemic continues, many governments face increased funding shortfalls, rising debt and reduced revenues. Rising household poverty, deepening inequality, and in some cases, economic crisis/collapse may seem inevitable.

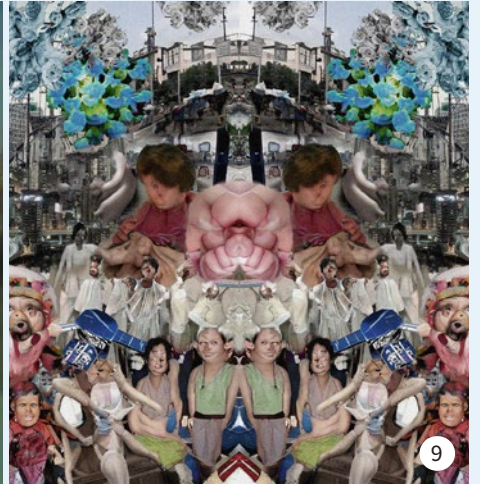
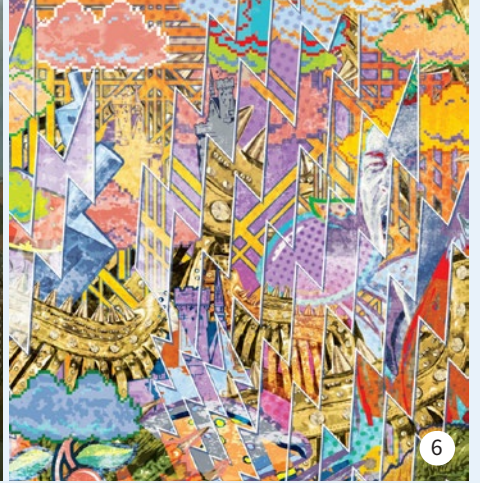
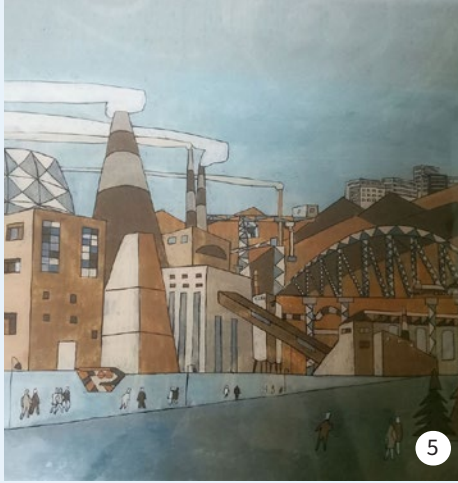
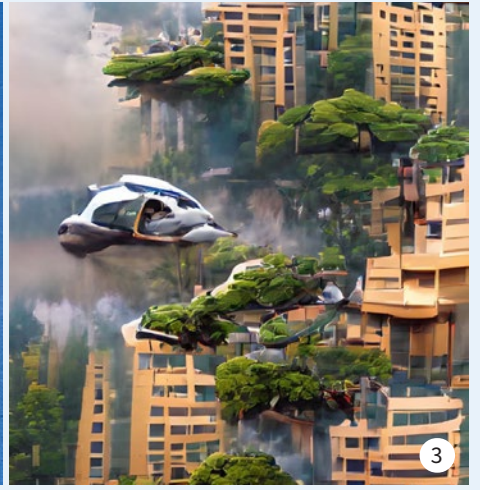
A critical insight from these experts, which is confirmed by the Special Projects, is that there is no single future for the Western Pacific Region.

In addition, DSI implemented three Special Projects – SenseMaker, Crowdsourcing for Social

Health Innovations, and the WHO Futures Art Exhibition – to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the strategic conversation.

This report is designed to connect the outputs and conclusions of the Special Projects, thereby providing a synthesis of perspectives and a comprehensive description of the future of health in the Region. The report is divided into three main chapters that analyse and extrapolate reflections and insights from the outputs of each Special Project. The first chapter examines the outputs of the SenseMaker Project, which asked young futurists to imagine the future of the world and the future of health based on the drivers of change identified by the think tanks. The second chapter focuses on the Crowdsourcing for Health Innovations Project, which was designed to harness the vision and imagination of young people in Malaysia and the Philippines to shape a better future. The third chapter delves into the WHO Futures Art Exhibition Project, which provided a platform for individuals and communities to imagine the future of health in 2050 through visual arts. The concluding chapter offers a synthesis of key messages from all Special Projects.





(1) *Community, Smart and Green*: Zhaohui Su; (2) *Famine and Poverty*: Abdoul-Ganiou Dermani; (3) *Harmony United*: Zhaohui Su; (4) *Hello Camera*: Zhaohui Su; (5) *industrialization*: Sergey Dobrynov; (6) *Overlook #9*: Michael Laughlin; (7) *Panda*: Gilles Cenazandotti; (8) *Sprawl*: Miguel Punzalan; (9) *The Sky Above the Port was the Colour of Television, Tuned to a Music Video*: Miguel Punzalan; (10) *These Days-extrusion*: Fan Zhang; (11) *Water Filters*: Danielle O'Malley; and (12) *Hopes and Dreams*: Tyrome Tover.

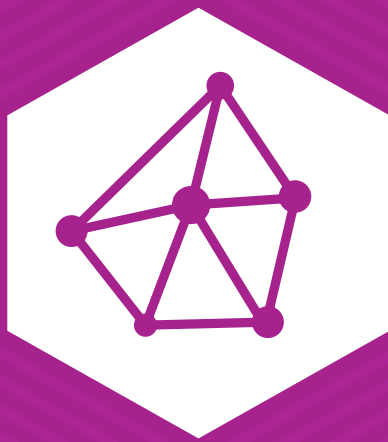


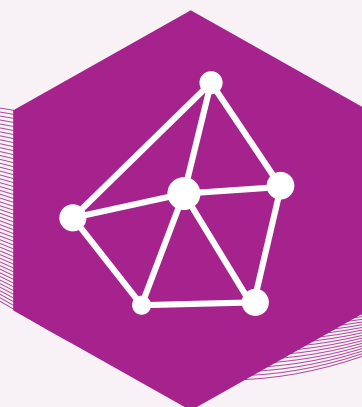


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Chapter 1.

# Imagining the futures: the SenseMaker Project





## Project overview

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The SenseMaker Project, conducted in December 2020, asked young futurists four open-ended questions on the future of the world, the future of health in 2032, how those futures might emerge, and how to create more positive futures, probing the long-term visions of young people to focus on exploring future visions.

Participants were 117 young futurists (aged 18–30) identified among a network of young foresight practitioners at the School of International Futures, which was contracted to support this Project.

## Project mechanics

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Using the SenseMaker® platform, the young futurists were invited to share their thoughts on the future of the world, the future of health, how the futures might emerge and how to create more positive futures. Utilizing the micro-journaling technique, participants could submit multiple, bite-sized observations throughout the day, responding to a standard set of questions or prompts from a mobile app. Unlike more traditional data collection methods, such as quantitative and qualitative research methods and surveys, micro-narratives reveal how social attitudes evolve, track the effectiveness of measures designed to improve a particular situation and allow storytellers to define where they stand on relevant issues. The three steps in this vital and innovative Project were: 1) collecting data; 2) exploring micro-narratives; and 3) identifying patterns and themes. This Project aimed to complement the expert perspectives of the thematic think tanks.

## Project results

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The SenseMaker Project resulted in a rich repository of micro-narratives that revealed emerging trends and themes as envisioned by young people from the Region and beyond. The demographics of the participants varied slightly depending on the question but remained relatively consistent.

The predominant themes revealed in the micro-narratives were technology, geopolitics, mental health, inequality, climate change and community/collective action.

The **SenseMaker Project** resulted in a rich repository of micro-narratives that revealed emerging trends and themes as envisioned by young people from the Region and beyond.



Opportunities for innovation



Geo-leadership



Mental health and well-being

◆ **Technology** dominates young people's imagined futures, most likely because digital technology has played a formative role throughout most of their lives. Technological innovations have helped level the playing field in many sectors, and their potential to shape a better future is almost limitless, given the right preconditions. In particular, the future presented opportunities for technological innovation to transform society in the health and non-health sectors, such as in education. The young futurists foresaw that to accelerate the workforce's ability to comply with Industry 4.0 requirements for technicians and coders, private education centres or so-called digital academies would spring up. Respondents also identified hybrid interaction transcending physical and virtual space as an important dimension of the future, with the potential to change service delivery and leading to the rise of digital citizenship. On the other hand, respondents expressed concerns over technology-related issues surrounding data protection, surveillance, fake news and automation. Young people are acutely aware of the potentials and pitfalls of our growing

reliance on digital tools, which explains their ambivalent view.

◆ The potential impacts of **geopolitics** on the future came up repeatedly. The young futurists were concerned about possible spillover if conflicts erupted between the United States of America and China. More than other generations, young people understand their interconnectedness – what started as a clash of protectionism between these countries in 2018 has affected the global supply chain, international trade and the world's economy. Moreover, the economic rivalry has bled into many other areas including politics, the military and cyberspace. On a more personal level, competition between these global superpowers might dictate what types of goods we can buy and sell abroad, how expensive these goods will be, how our personal data are shared and commoditized, and even what websites we can access.

◆ The micro-narratives reflected on the pandemic's "invisible" impacts: **mental health** and **inequality**. The pandemic has



Growing inequality



Health sector workforce



Communities and collective action

forced people to deal with unprecedented health, economic and social crises that have negatively impacted mental health. COVID-19 has also exposed the existing fault-lines in our highly unequal societies. The pandemic and the subsequent responses have shed light on the outsized contribution of essential yet highly vulnerable groups of people (for example, health workers, front-line workers, gig workers and other essential workers). The cost of the pandemic is borne disproportionately by poor and vulnerable populations, further exacerbating pre-existing inequalities. In the minds of these young people, the path to a better future requires a rethink of the social contract and how society needs to do a better job in ensuring **equality and social justice**. Viewing health as an issue of social justice, respondents considered this moment as an opportunity to level the playing field around digital health and data policy, driving systems changes and empowering non-expert voices. A level playing field in terms of gender and feminism was also mentioned in positive entries, including around leadership.

- ◆ At the same time, the pandemic has nudged society to take action on **climate change**. The commitment to renewable energy in the post-pandemic recovery is a hopeful sign, as noted in one of the journal entries. Young people also expressed a sense of urgency when it comes to taking climate action. In their minds, dealing with climate change is an existential challenge of our time.
- ◆ Young people from different countries ascribe agency and power differently. Some believe that agency rests with institutions, while others think it resides with their **communities**. Differences in attribution might stem from the distinct experiences that young people had when living and interacting with their own sets of institutions and communities. Institutions represent a formalized, more rigid structure designed with specific purposes. Communities tend to evolve more organically and are thus more fluid and flexible in form and function. Institutions (for example, government, law enforcement and judiciary) typically exercise “hard” power with the threat of





Government restrictions/control



Hybrid interaction



Automation and AI on jobs

coercion and punishment. Communities (for example, media, academics/experts and religious leaders) rely more on the “soft” power of persuasion, influence, discourse and convening power. In a highly interconnected, digital and globalized world, young people recognize that soft power can be as influential as hard power. Anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists are an excellent case in point. By leveraging social media and other digital communication tools, anti-vaxxers have spread inaccurate information, at times significantly influencing the vaccine discourse, amplifying vaccine hesitancy and hampering vaccine roll-out.

The young futurists highlighted the issues that young people deem critical, including **social justice and equality**, in terms of the future they want to see and the path to that future. Our imagination of the future not only reflects issues that are important to us, but also reveals our deeper value systems and the emotions attached to those values. In the emerging futures, the participants expressed hope and positivity about their growing awareness of **climate change** and

the dominant role of **technology** in the future (although not always for the better). At the same time, there is anxiety because of the lack of social mobility, greater inequality (particularly given the impact of COVID-19) and a deficit of trust in leadership. These insights were partly captured in the think tanks’ dimensions of change, but at a more analytical (as opposed to emotional) level and to a different degree.

The think tanks provided an organizational perspective – those of institutions (for example, governments, affected communities and health workers), while the young futurists presented an individual perspective. They illuminated aspects that relate individuals to the system and are not captured by an organizational perspective. Each perspective provides unique insights. Therefore, it is important for decision- and policy-makers to be presented with multiple perspectives so that they can integrate various insights into their long-term decisions. The practice of considering multiple perspectives is crucial in creating flexibility of perspective – the ability to focus on the issues and questions that matter while being aware of and open to the unexpected.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schwartz P. The art of the long view: planning for the future in an uncertain world. New York: Currency; 2012 (Kindle Edition):61.



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Chapter 2.

# Shaping the futures: Crowdsourcing for Social Health Innovations





## Project overview

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Crowdsourcing for Social Health Innovations, the second Special Project, tapped into the vision and imagination of young people (aged 15–30) in Malaysia and the Philippines. Participants were asked to identify challenges and issues affecting the future of health in 2050 and to design innovative solutions to build a better world via an open call for “Imagine the World Anew: A Call for Youth Voices on COVID-19”.

## Project mechanics: Philippines

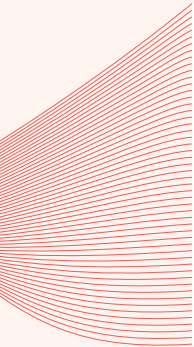
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In the Philippines, the Social Innovation in Health Initiative (SIHI) conducted the crowdsourcing activity in partnership with Social Entrepreneurship to Spur Health (SESH), Asian Medical Students Association (AMSA) Philippines and other youth organizations, and with support from the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

An open call was launched in October 2020, and submissions were accepted until December 2020. Participants were asked to identify challenges and issues affecting the future of health in 2050 and to design innovative solutions to build a better world in three categories: 1) youth voices to co-create the post-COVID-19 world (entries were texts, images, videos and music); 2) youth-led COVID-19-related innovations; and 3) youth-led social innovations during the pandemic.

Forty-three entries were received. The entries were evaluated by 27 judges (three judges per entry) – a collective of health professionals, academics, social innovation champions, youth leaders, and key partners in health and social innovations. The evaluation was based on the degree of innovativeness, feasibility, inclusiveness, effectiveness, and potential to inform policies and programmes.

Table 1 lists the 15 finalists with the highest mean scores in their respective categories. Finalists were invited to a one-day online civic hackathon via Zoom on 30 January 2021. They were coached on design thinking and counselled by volunteer mentors on how to improve their innovation entries and produce health communication campaigns. The online hackathon provided the participants with mentorship for research, ideation, and further development of their ideas and innovations.



The outputs of the **Crowdsourcing Project** revealed several key themes centred on health, education and learning, technology, and climate change.

## Project mechanics: Malaysia

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In Malaysia, Impact Hub KL organized the call for youth voices in partnership with SESH and SIHI, with support from DSI and the WHO Representative Office for Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Singapore. The crowdsourcing activity had three thematic tracks: 1) youth-led social innovation in health (with proposals, ideas, concepts and prototypes to address problems or challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic in a small- or large-scale community); 2) youth-focused messages (including text, images and videos) that can enhance resilience and mitigate the effects of COVID-19; and 3) futures thinking and strategic planning (i.e. future of health). The Project allowed Malaysian youth to generate and share ideas on how they imagine life in the year 2050, addressing key issues in a post-COVID-19 world, and creating social innovation projects and messages related to health and the future of health.

An open call was launched in March 2021, and submissions were accepted until May 2021. Forty-three youth-led project submissions covering the three thematic tracks were received. Table 2 lists the 14 finalists selected from judged submissions. Finalists were invited to attend a digital hackathon and national showcase, similar to the one in the Philippines, via Zoom in June 2021.

## Project results

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The participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic may have heavily influenced their vision of the future. Although many factors contribute to people's mental models, the pandemic arguably had a significant impact on the participants' conceptualization of the future, mainly since there has not been a substantial time lag between the pandemic and the Special Projects. The outputs of the Crowdsourcing Project revealed several key themes centred on health, education and learning, technology, and climate change.





This book is so Boring



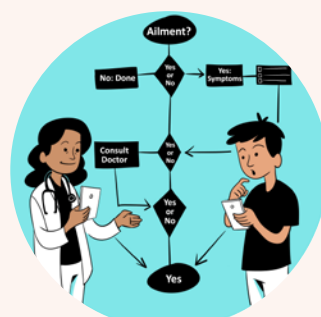
Project Tuklas



Nurture Stream



Katsa



Stat-Your Virtual Clinic

## Health

- ◆ Pandemic responses, such as lockdowns and social distancing, contributed significantly to another type of crisis: **mental health**. As echoed by the young people, health and well-being are intricately linked. One of the social innovation entries from the Philippines, a journal titled *This Book is so Boring*, aims to encourage adolescent readers to express their ideas and emotions. The predominant focus on mental health in their submissions is not accidental.
- ◆ When asked to think about the future of health and innovations to shape a better future, some participants reflected on sexual health. For example, the team that won the Crowdsourcing Project in Malaysia – Sexual Health YES! – developed an educational card game called *Grow Up* to help parents kick-start sexual health conversations with their children. The recurrence of these health-related themes may reflect young people's wish to access **holistic health**. Through their entries, many young people chose to transform their hardships into

innovative solutions. This also points to the need to provide ongoing opportunities for those who do not typically get a seat at the table to engage in these critical discourses, while ensuring that any solutions include the voices of those most affected. After all, building a more inclusive future of health in the Region requires ongoing engagement and discussion at multiple levels (among policy-makers, between policy-makers and their constituents, and among different communities).

## Education and learning

- ◆ Education and learning were also front and centre in the minds of young people. In the Philippines, Project Bookworm submitted an entry that proposed providing supplementary learning materials to students affected by the school closures in their communities.
- ◆ The participants imagined a future where there is **equal access** to education, where learning is no longer a privilege but a right that can be accessed by every child,



Argorzonnia



Project Rise



Sexual Health Yes



Brand New Malaysia



Komorebi

where the quality of learning is no longer determined primarily by parents' incomes, and where every child can receive the support they need to learn effectively.

## Technology

- ◆ Another prevalent theme was the role of **technology** in shaping the future. The various ideas on how to shape the future were heavily influenced by young people's reliance on technology, which will likely grow over time.
- ◆ One of the winners in Malaysia designed a mobile app – Brand New Malaysia – to help medium-sized retailers and micro-enterprises expand their businesses to online platforms.
- ◆ However, scaling up technological innovations requires ethical considerations, checks and balances, sound governance and regulatory frameworks, digital literacy and supporting infrastructure, among others. Many of these factors were perceived to be missing everywhere.

## Climate change

- ◆ Lastly, the young people placed high importance on the issue of **climate change**. Failure to manage the transition to a zero-carbon world will have disastrous effects on the younger generation. Young people no longer need convincing that climate change is a fundamental threat to civilization. To build a better post-pandemic world, it is critical to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- ◆ Their solutions to this threat were varied. AGROZONIA in Malaysia designed an online platform for customers to participate in a digitally implemented urban agriculture programme using hydroponic systems and to have their harvest safely delivered through the platform. VRTX in the Philippines proposed a reverse vending machine to recycle plastic bottles. KOMOREBI in Malaysia designed an automated system of deployable modular units that uses air space to serve as floating public streets and pocket spaces for families and individuals.

**Table 1.** Finalists and entries for the Crowdsourcing Project in the Philippines

Finalist	Description of entry
Project Planet	Technological advancements after the pandemic that focus on health, education, the economy and work
Waking up to a Beautiful Tomorrow	Designing positive impacts of the pandemic
Journey to a New World	Possible alternative arrangements in work, education and health
<i>Inilata ng Imahinasyon</i>	Technological advancements after the pandemic
Dearest Tonton	A message of hope and encouragement during the pandemic
Home 2050	Shows changes in ways of living after the pandemic
Moving Towards a Post-Pandemic World Advancing the SDG Agenda and Global Networks	Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda and global networks
In 30 years	Envisioned changes in ways of living after the pandemic
Check Me App	Virtual clinic through a mobile application
This Book is so Boring	A journal/book for adolescents to write down their ideas and emotions to promote mental health
Stat-Your Virtual Clinic	A mobile app for monitoring COVID-19 cases
ABSCISA	An Arduino-based smart contactless interface integrated with syndrome surveillance and alert system (ABSCISA) for fomite-mediated SARS-CoV-2 transmission mitigation
Nurture Stream	A virtual hub where individuals can celebrate togetherness for mental health and well-being
KATSA	Entrepreneurial solutions consulting to create sustainable programmes where women and young people in a community sponsored by a nongovernmental organization can overcome poverty
<i>Project Tuklas (Tele dermatology, Unang Kilatis sa Leprosy Ating Simulan)</i>	A youth-led initiative aiming to end leprosy by improving access to health care in endemic communities

**Table 2.** Finalists and entries for the Crowdsourcing Project in Malaysia

Finalist	Description of entry
Sexual Health Yes!	A fun and educational card game called GROW UP was designed to help parents kick-start sexual health conversations with their children. The game empowers parents with the knowledge to discuss the taboo subject of sex.
Student-Led Action Towards Evidence-Based Drug Politics (SLED)	Addresses the rising use of illicit drugs among youth in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. SLED aims to normalize and destigmatize drug education to improve the well-being of Malaysian youth. The SLED agenda is to extend allyship grounded in harm reduction and treatment approaches with youth using drugs.
Team UM	Designed for Malaysians of all ages, the mobile app monitors users' mental health. Additionally, the app connects users to a network of loved ones and licensed mental health professionals.
UNTUK Malaysia	A movement (#UntukMalaysia) focused on education regardless of ideology. It is an initiative by Pertubuhan Rejuvenasi Pendidikan. Its solution seeks to address post-pandemic illiteracy among children.
NENO Malaysia	A mobile health-care service and on-demand health-care platform tackling health-care accessibility for senior citizens and people with disabilities. NENO brings health-care services to the community via outreach initiatives and home visits.
Uncovify App	A social networking app designed to help people who are struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic and to help individuals be more aware of their whereabouts and surroundings during the pandemic for cluster-prone areas.
The Voices	A web-based app designed to monitor and track people who have been quarantined.
Peluang Kedua	Provides fresh Malaysian graduates with psychological assistance. After the user's well-being is assessed through questionnaires, they are linked to Psychology First Aid hotlines available in Malaysia.
Project:Rise	This song empowered Malaysia's young people to rise up and face common challenges such as bullying, sexual harassment and violence. The song was organized to give greater agency to marginalized groups.
Moonyy Storyy	A poem that addresses depression and loneliness among youth imparts a message of hope, togetherness and honesty. "I am no longer afraid to keep breathing." This poem is constructed story by story so that readers can link them together logically. Therefore, the readers can easily follow and imagine the scenes one by one and have a deep connection with their feelings.
COVID-19 & Youths	A poster that speaks directly to the youth of Malaysia, compelling them to fight COVID-19 by completing their education and achieving their dreams. The poster addresses the struggles of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.
AGROZONIA	A mobile platform that allows users to participate in a digitally implemented urban agriculture programme using hydroponic systems. Customers can choose vegetable plots, monitor their crops and order harvest delivery to their homes through the platform.
KOMOREBI	An automated system of deployable modular units that uses air space to serve as floating public streets and pocket spaces for families and individuals. The system is powered by renewable energy and driven by swarm intelligence. KOMOREBI stands for (KO)LLECTIVE - (MO)BILE - (RE)SPONSIVE - (BI)OMIMICRY.
Brand New Malaysia	A mobile app designed to help small- to medium-sized retailers and micro-enterprises expand their businesses to a host of online platforms. Eligible new merchants can receive a full subsidy for their online start-up costs, including product listings and delivery services. Additionally, mobile devices allow consumers to access the app's e-wallet for cashless transactions.





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## Chapter 3.

# The futures beyond words: WHO Futures Art Exhibition





## Project overview

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The third Special Project, WHO Futures Art Exhibition: Envisioning the Future of Health in 2050, was designed as a platform for individuals and communities to express their experiences, hopes and fears and bring these to the attention of health decision-makers.

The Futures Art Exhibition utilized the power of visual arts to envision the future of health in 2050, complementing the other Special Projects to create a more comprehensive description of the future of health in the Region. Artists have a unique capacity to interpret reality, make sense of collective experience and reimagine the future. Their works serve as a rich and complex repository of yesterday's memories, today's experiences, and tomorrow's hopes and fears.

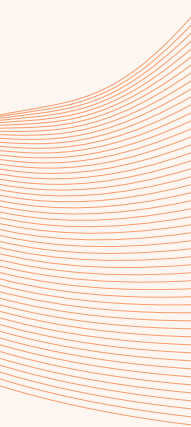
## Project mechanics

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A call for submissions was opened on 13 September 2021 and closed on 31 January 2022. Seventy-nine submissions were received in five categories: 1) People & Society; 2) Economy; 3) Environment; 4) Technology; and 5) an open category. After the initial screening based on the rules of entry, 63 art pieces were invited to be displayed at a 2D gallery in February 2022.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://whofuturesartexhibition.artcall.org/pages/web-gallery>.



The **Futures Art Exhibition** utilized the power of visual arts to envision the future of health in 2050, complementing the other Special Projects to create a more comprehensive description of the future of health in the Region.

A panel of four WHO staff and four external experts judged the 63 pieces against pre-agreed criteria: visual impact, the strength of the vision conveyed through the picture, the strength of the vision conveyed through the statement, and relevance to the original concept within the category. From 7 February to 6 March 2022, the public was invited to choose up to three pieces that best represented the futures of the Western Pacific. Through this process, 22 art pieces were selected and invited to be displayed at a 3D exhibition.<sup>3</sup> The WHO Acting Regional Director for the Western Pacific presented Certificates of Special Mention to the 22 selected art pieces (see Table 3).

## Project results

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Art reflects an artist's profoundly personal portrayal of reality and, therefore, might evoke varied reactions from different audiences. An interpretation of the submitted artworks, which will be carried out to some extent in this chapter, is highly subjective. The exercise aims to catalyse discussion and inspire conversation on critical issues that affect the future of health in 2050. It is not meant as an assessment of the artists' work or their merit.

Several critical messages predominated the Futures Art Exhibition.

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://whofuturesartexhibition.artcall.org/pages/3d-gallery>.

## People and society

Artists are witnesses of today's lived experiences. They help us make sense of collective traumas by archiving, expressing, and interpreting the beauty and wreckage of cataclysmic events (sometimes simultaneously) in their works. The exhausted, disconnected countenances in Hyun Joo Song's *COVID19 Visages of Other* visually highlight the "hidden pandemic" of **mental health**. Severed human connections, unprocessed grief and loneliness are taking a severe toll on our well-being. Tyrome Tover illustrates the pernicious *Stigma* attached to certain diseases and health issues, including mental health, HIV and COVID-19.

At the same time, artists are also essential architects of imagined futures. Going beyond words, their works help us as a society to reimagine future possibilities, reminding us that the future is not predetermined, and that the decisions and actions made today will shape how the future eventually unfolds.

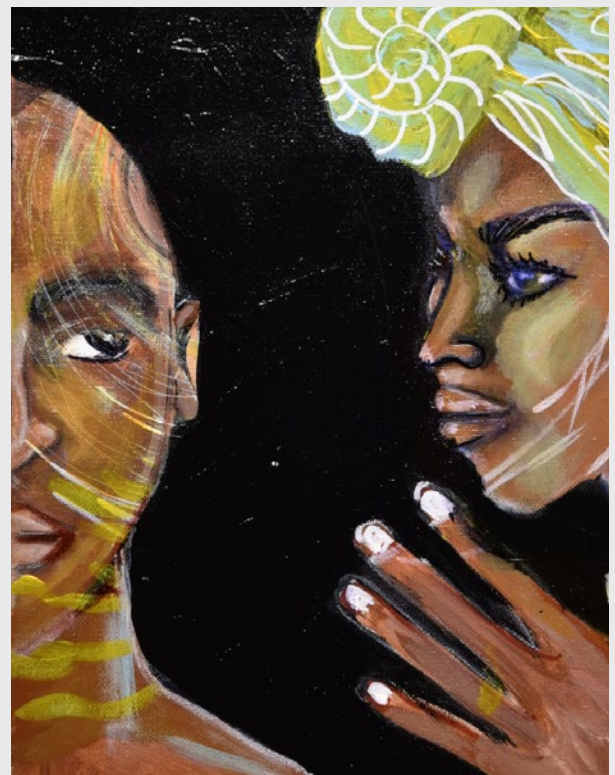
## Environment

The changing climate and its far-reaching impacts are a challenge without precedent, affecting the future of health and potentially the future of humanity, as reflected in many of the artists' works.

The devastating impacts of climate change, which disproportionately affect some communities (such as those in Pacific island countries and areas) more than others, were displayed clearly in the works of Ken Clarry. *Dark Matter #1 – Let the People Speak* imagines a future where some islands will disappear due to rising sea levels, creating the first climate change refugee nations. Danielle O'Malley's works accentuate the artist's deep-seated anxiety that we are essentially standing on *An Unstable Foundation* and living in *A Precarious Situation*.

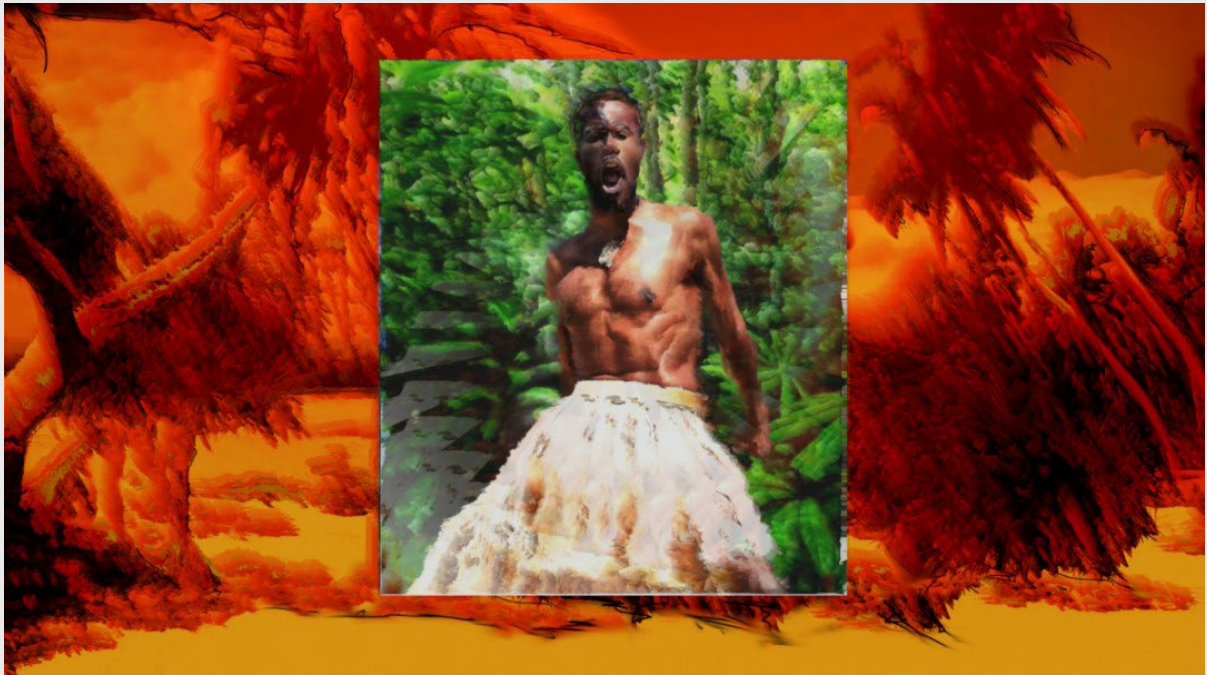


Hyun Joo Song: *COVID19 Visages of Other*



Tyrome Tover: *Stigma*





**Ken Clarry:** *Dark Matter #1 – Let the People Speak*



**Danielle O'Malley:**  
*A Precarious Situation*  
(left); *An Unstable Foundation* (below, left).



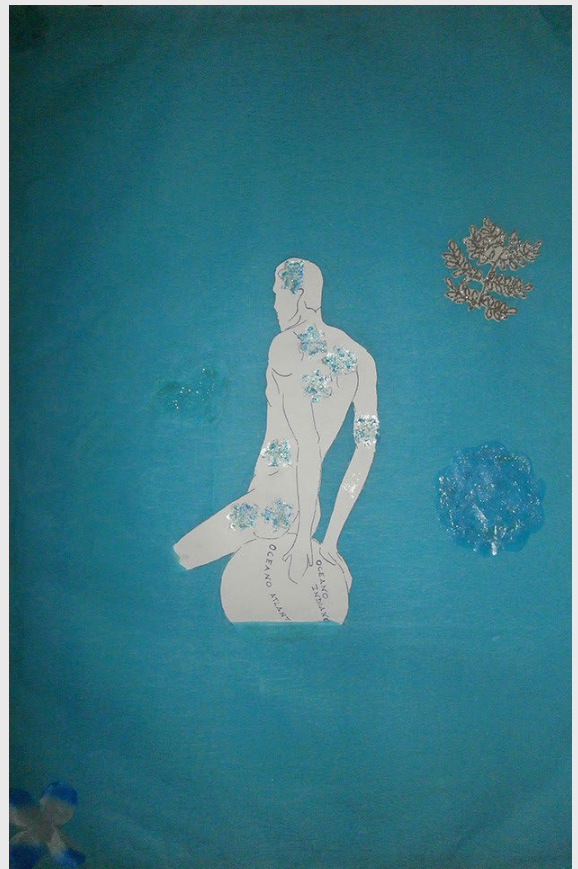


As shown in *The Man and Natural World among the Climate Changes of the Anthropocene* by Ciro Di Fiore, the responsibility to save the crumbling world belongs to all of us. Humans, throughout history, have rebuilt societies from the ashes, adapted to the most hostile environment, and displayed extraordinary courage and resilience amid unprecedented challenges. *Starman* by Adrian Novac and *Emergence* by Marie Negaard speak to humanity's powerful potential for adaptation and connection. The starfish in *Starman* symbolizes regeneration and our ability to "overcome difficulties, solve complex problems and strive towards a better future". However, for something better to re-emerge, Marie Negaard in *Emergence* reminds us that we as a society need to create a future of "giving more and taking less... a future in which we recognize that our condition is far more reliant on the well-being of our environment than we realized". Humanity could not thrive in a sick and decaying environment. The future of our health is intricately dependent on the health of our environment. The litmus test of our generation is whether we will heed this call before it is too late.

Jesung Bang in *2050 Dessert* and *2050 Meat Pie* powerfully captures the imagined consequences of society's indiscriminate consumption and the impacts of climate change on the future of food. *If It Isn't Safe, It Isn't Food* depicts a bell pepper with a mouth full of teeth, visualizing the danger of consuming unsafe food that should not be considered food in the first place. The artist, HuiMin Su, carries over this theme in *Over and Over* as he highlights the problem of plastic waste and how the waste we discharge so freely will make its way back to us eventually (through our food and water sources), sickening our environment and ourselves.



**Ciro Di Fiore:** *The Man and Natural World among the Climate Changes of the Anthropocene*



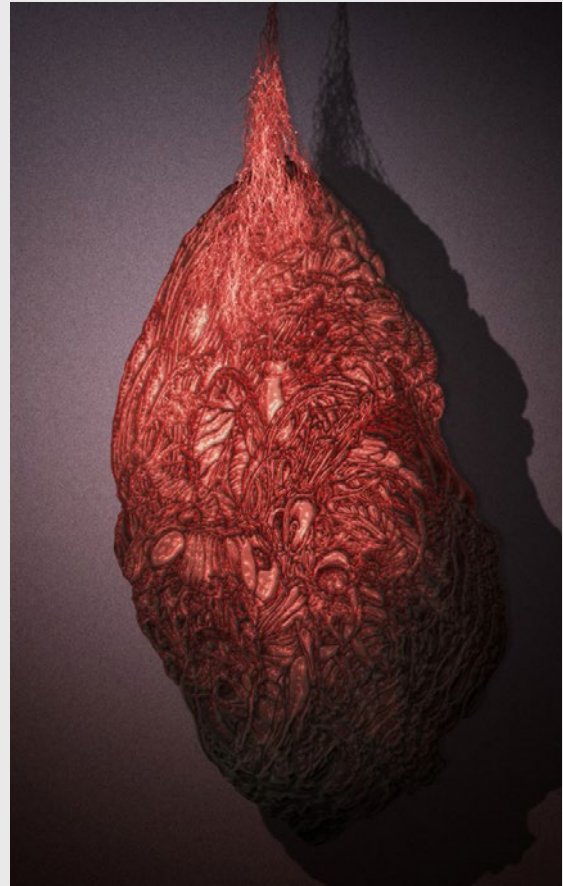
**Adrian Novac:** *Starman*



Marie Negaard: *Emergence*



HuiMin Su: *If It Isn't Safe, It Isn't Food* (above);  
*Over and Over* (below)



Jesung Bang: *2050 Meat Pie* (above);  
*2050 Dessert* (below)





## Technology

Technology plays an undisputed role in today's world, and people's reliance on it will only increase over time, with potential consequences far beyond our current imagination. The resulting marriage of humans, machines and data provokes ambivalence as the artists' reactions oscillate between optimism and apprehension. Zhaohui Su highlights the promise of innovative technologies, such as green energy, vertical farming, the Internet of things (IoT), virtual reality-powered metaverses, advanced mobility, and their potential to "significantly improve individual agency and autonomy", including bettering health outcomes. As technology becomes more ubiquitous, it also unleashes a host of other challenges, such as privacy, data security, cybercrimes and ethical dilemma, challenging not only the existing foundations of our society but also threatening to insulate people from a genuine connection with other human beings (as portrayed in *Alone* by Tyrome Tover). In *The Scientific Method of Escapism*, Cecilia Martinez reminds us that health innovations and, by extension, the future of health, will be dependent on society's ability to ensure inclusive and equitable education for young minds all over the world, or we might be missing out on what these minds can offer.

The widespread adoption of mobile technology and the role of digital media, including the explosive growth of social media and citizen journalism or user-generated content, are a double-edged sword, democratizing knowledge and information while creating a powerful echo chamber for misinformation and disinformation. The prevalence of misleading information about the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a harbinger of worse to come. In the *Overlook* series, Michael Laughlin juxtaposes familiar images overshadowed by layers of jarring lines, shapes and colours, resulting in a "discord of perception" as "what is familiar" is being "veiled by dissonance". The artist invites us to adopt "new sensibilities of observation" and "engage with misleading, irrelevant, fragmented and superficial information".



**Zhaohui Su:** *Farming, Vertical* (above)  
*Superhumans* (below);





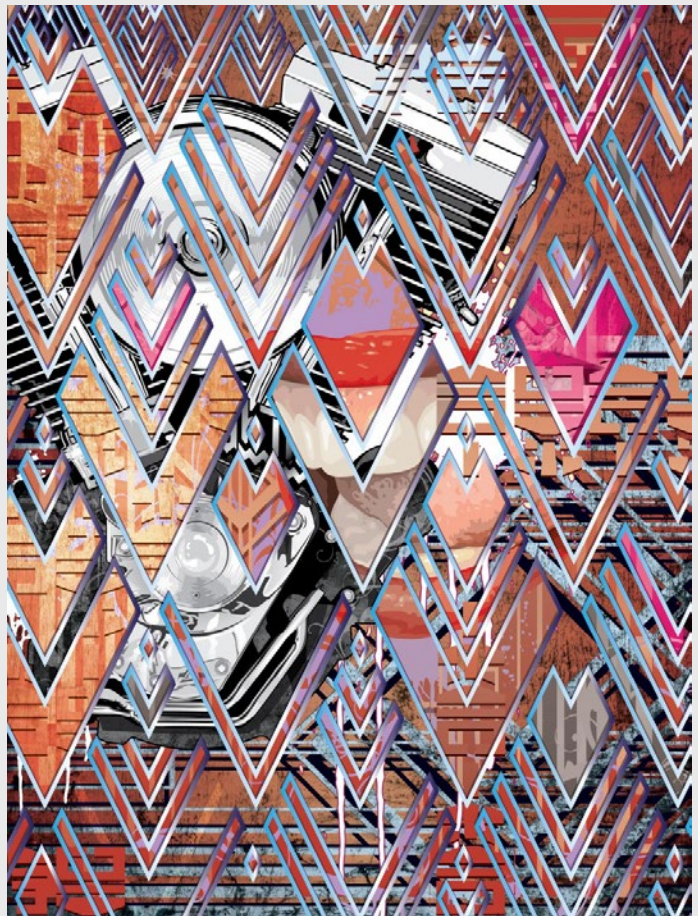


**Tyrome Tover:** *Alone*

Technology plays an undisputed role in today's world, and people's reliance on it will only increase over time, with potential consequences far beyond our current imagination.



**Cecilia Martinez:** *The Scientific Method of Escapism*



**Michael Laughlin:** *Overlook #1*

**Table 3.** Recipients of the Regional Director's Special Mention Certificate

Title	Artist
<i>2050 Meat Pie</i>	Jesung Bang
<i>A Precarious Situation</i>	Danielle O'Malley
<i>Alone</i>	Tyrom Tover
<i>An Unstable Foundation</i>	Danielle O'Malley
<i>Community, Smart and Green</i>	Zhaohui Su
<i>COVID19 Visages of Other</i>	Hyun Joo Song
<i>Dark Matter #1 – Let the People Speak</i>	Ken Clarry
<i>Famine and Poverty</i>	Abdoul-Ganiou Dermani
<i>Farming, Vertical</i>	Zhaohui Su
<i>Harmony United</i>	Zhaohui Su
<i>Hello Camera</i>	Zhaohui Su
<i>industrialization</i>	Sergey Dobrynov
<i>Overlook #1</i>	Michael Laughlin
<i>Overlook #9</i>	Michael Laughlin
<i>Panda</i>	Gilles Cenazandotti
<i>Sprawl</i>	Miguel Punzalan
<i>Superhumans</i>	Zhaohui Su
<i>The Man and Natural World among the Climate Changes of the Anthropocene</i>	Ciro Di Fiore
<i>The Scientific Method of Escapism</i>	Cecilia Martinez
<i>The Sky Above the Port was the Colour of Television, Tuned to a Music Video</i>	Miguel Punzalan
<i>These Days-extrusion</i>	Fan Zhang
<i>Water Filters</i>	Danielle O'Malley



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## Chapter 4.

# Conclusion – The futures belong to us



The Special Projects were designed to engage, stimulate and inspire communities and individuals in the Western Pacific Region in the discussion about the future of health. These voices will be leveraged alongside the experts' perspectives to create a more comprehensive picture of the future and inform government policies and WHO's work for years to come. Community-driven narratives provide powerful insights for understanding existing social constructs and how these contribute to the development of social contracts, shaping levels of trust in and support for government actions, and health systems and structures.

The outputs of the Special Projects complement the 14 dimensions of change identified by the think tanks but with different emphases. The Special Projects emphasized the following dimensions:

- ◆ Health is viewed as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”. Holistic health must be incorporated in the discourse and as part of any solutions to strengthen health systems.
- ◆ Concerns of social justice, inclusivity and equality are central to the visions of the future and the path to achieving this future.
- ◆ Climate change is perceived as a challenge without precedent, with far-reaching consequences that need to be aptly managed.
- ◆ Technology is seen as an ongoing source of innovations and disruptions, with spillover effects on essential issues such as privacy, automation and decentralization.

The Special Projects also yielded important insights to further inform WHO's futures work.

## Imagine multiple futures to make robust decisions.

The sheer variety of imagined futures portrayed in the Special Projects illustrates an underrated yet essential concept. There are always multiple futures. The future (a mental construct that we can only speak about in hypothetical terms because it simply has no factuality) is highly uncertain and cannot be known.<sup>4</sup> Due to human's preference for certainty, we, as individuals, often forget that everyone has their own version of the future. Thus, many of us find it difficult to imagine different futures, particularly those markedly different from ours. This makes foresight an even more critical tool since the scale and speed of change are moving faster than ever. According to Schwartz, imagining different versions of the future “helps us suspend our disbelief in all the futures: to allow us to think that any one of them might take place. Then we can prepare for what we *don't* think is going to happen.”<sup>5</sup> The goal of any future work is not to predict the future but rather to make robust decisions for all plausible futures.

## Diverse perspectives are a must-have. Thinking about the future provides a sense of agency and empowerment to those involved.

Our individual pictures of the future are always context-dependent, influenced heavily by our backgrounds, experiences and many other factors. If we were to replicate the Special Projects with the same participants at different times in the future, the results would vary because their experiences and concerns at that time would be different. Incorporating diversity in futures work is imperative because varied perspectives will invariably produce a richer and more nuanced picture of the future. The more diverse the participants, the more comprehensive the picture of the future will be. Research shows that balanced and diverse groups tend to outperform homogenous

4 Gabriel J. A scientific enquiry into the future. Eur J Futures Res. 2014;2(31). doi :10.1007/s40309-013-0031-4.

5 Schwartz. The art of the long view: planning for the future in an uncertain world: 195.

groups since they are more likely to consider, discuss and integrate disparate knowledge, information and perspectives, which typically leads to better decision-making and spurs creativity and innovation.<sup>6</sup>

Engaging diverse perspectives, especially those we typically do not often hear, is also a win-win solution. They provide a uniquely different lens to imagine the future, illuminating blind spots and cognitive biases. Allowing people to imagine and shape the future also empowers those involved. By thinking through many versions of the future, people are trained to see the interconnections between different issues. The COVID-19 pandemic, which started as a local outbreak, has touched and upended the life of nearly everyone in the world. What began as a public health issue has fundamentally affected our society's economy, politics, social interactions, technology and environment. Foresight tools help individuals and organizations perceive these interconnections, realize our interdependence, and understand how and in what ways our decisions today might affect the future.

### **Embrace different ways of thinking when conducting futures work.**

How the future and future issues are conceptualized is critically important. Asking participants about the future of the world versus the future of health yields not just different answers but also different types of answers. As shown in the SenseMaker Project, the more open-ended questions resulted in the sharing of more general ideas that varied widely in terms of topics, function and purpose. In comparison, asking participants specifically about the future of health in the art exhibition and Crowdsourcing Project produced ideas that were more focused on solving particular issues. Foresight methodologies employ divergent and convergent thinking. Convergent thinking is typically utilized to find answers to more defined problems, whereas divergent thinking aims at generating

and exploring ideas. Alternating between both types of thinking is useful in helping to see both the forest and the trees. Divergent thinking helps to catalyse original, unthought-of or out-of-the-box ideas. Convergent thinking is useful in structuring and making sense of complex ideas. Thinking about the future through a longer time horizon also helps individuals (with strong present bias) imagine how critical drivers of change might play out in different versions of the future to be able to appreciate their consequences/impacts.

### **Utilize a full range of foresight methodologies to harvest different insights.**

The different methodologies and formats of the Special Projects helped to unearth visions of the future at a deeper level, reflecting anxieties, fears and hopes from different points of view. Moving beyond the analytical level to emotional and personal levels is often considered impractical from an organizational perspective. The results might seem more disparate, less practical and functional. However, the outputs of the Special Projects clearly illustrate the importance of tapping into the participants' emotions, intuitions, judgments and meanings because they typically reflect fundamental values or value systems (not just the issues) that are important to consider when imagining and shaping the future.

### **The future is not predetermined.**

Thinking about multiple futures helps to avoid excessive optimism and pessimistic fatalism. Since the future is unknown, attempts to predict a longer-term future are mostly unhelpful. Forecasts can only carry us so far. Whether technological, political, economic, societal, environmental or health related, humanity's biggest challenges resemble more of a mystery than a puzzle. As explained by Kay and King: "A puzzle has well-defined rules and a single solution, and we know when we have reached

<sup>6</sup> Loyd DL, Wang CS, Phillips KW, Lount RB. Social category diversity promotes premeeting elaboration: the role of relationship focus. *Organ Sci.* 2013;24(3):757–72.

that solution. Mysteries offer no such clarity of definition and no objectively correct solution. A mystery cannot be solved as a crossword puzzle can; it can only be framed by identifying the critical factors and applying some sense of how these factors have interacted in the past and might interact in the present or future.”<sup>7</sup> No single solution or actor can act as a silver bullet. Transforming health systems requires policy-makers to embrace profound complexity and radical uncertainty. Robust decision-making, therefore, requires deep and wide collaboration, a multiplicity of perspectives, knowledge and skills, and a long view.

Going forward, a key challenge will be how to continue nurturing, harnessing and incorporating the creativity and voices of people who typically do not have a seat at the table when thinking about the future of our world. The Special Projects should mark the beginning, not the end, of a strategic conversation driving the health system transformation agenda in the Region. The imagined futures and the path ahead require that we as a society build back health systems that will be more robust against a range of possible futures, more inclusive of voices at the margins of society, and more holistic in the definition of health and well-being.

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<sup>7</sup> Kay J, King M. Radical uncertainty: decision-making beyond the numbers. New York: WW Norton & Company, Inc.; 2020:20–1.









