



CAPACITY TO DECOLONISE

BUILDING FUTURES LITERACY IN AFRICA

C2D CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP REPORT

May 2020

<http://www.foresightfordevelopment.org/c2d>

The Logo

The logo is derived from the Ghanaian Adinkra proverb ("Nea onnim no sua a, ohu") meaning he who does not know can know through learning. The symbol represents the quest for knowledge. The logo was produced by young South African urban planner and designer, Ms Lindiwe Gusheshe (Bopa Mmuso).



CONTENTS PAGE

1. [Executive Summary](#)
2. [Introduction](#)
3. [The Big Idea](#)
4. [Participation](#)
5. [The Methodology/Approach](#)
6. [The Co-Design Workshop](#)
7. [Findings: Emerging Themes/Thoughts](#)
8. [Moving Forward](#)
9. [Annexures](#)

Executive Summary

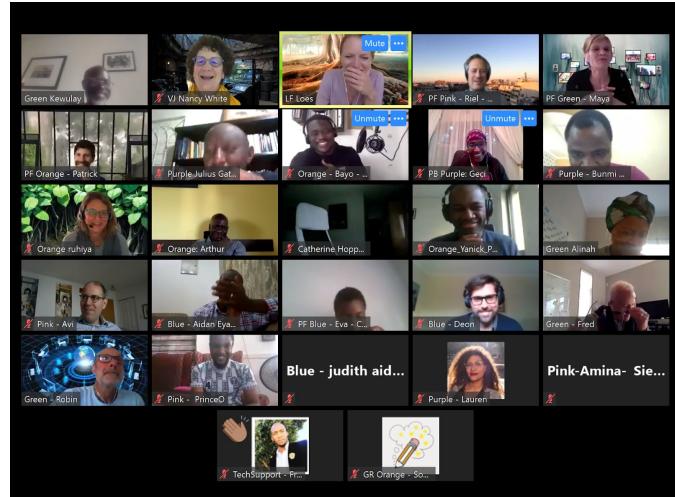
The report has been compiled in order to capture the proceedings of the design phase of a project titled *Capacity to Decolonise: Building Futures Literacy in Africa*, which was sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in 2020. The initial intention of the project had been to convene a set of selected co-design participants in South Africa for a week, however the global COVID-19 pandemic forced the co-design workshop to be moved online. The process was thus recast into a set of shorter virtual sessions spread over a longer period of time.

The project's objective was to co-design a multi-year, multi-country action research project in several African countries that would explore the idea of decolonising communities' futures, guided by the proposition that a capability-based approach to "development", through the building of our futures literacy (FL), would make a significant contribution to that goal. The capability would be developed through working with or into the existing institutions in the countries where the project engages. The design project process was orchestrated by a robust and diverse team which engaged through action-learning rather than only theorising about its implications and outcomes. A research paper was prepared by the core team based on extensive literature review to give scholarly reference to the basis and potential of the Capacity to Decolonise (C2D) project through Futures Literacy.

The outcomes of the C2D co-design process helped guide the development of a large project proposal which will be used to seek funding for implementation support (See Annexure). After a successful co-design workshop, the team has compiled this report which captures the essential aspects of the process and details future implications of the project. The next step is to circulate the proposal to mobilise support for the full five-year initiative.

Introduction

The Capacity to Decolonise (C2D) project is about designing a five-year project focused on strengthening futures literacy and using that capability to address challenges a community faces in overcoming coloniality in how it deals with challenges. Geographically the project focuses on Africa south of the Sahara. In an increasingly complicated and fractured world, it is even more important for communities to build the capacities to imagine and ultimately design their own futures – even more so in a post-colonial context. The premise is to use the future in capability-based development which makes that development efficient by strengthening a community's ability to use their own local traditions, culture and values in addressing critical local challenges.



This report outlines the approach we took to co-design of the project. The co-design workshop invited a very diverse group of individuals to participate in this virtualisation of the workshop. With participants from all over the Continent, as well as its diaspora, the project used an action research approach to co-design. It was conducted online with virtual tools such as Mural, Google Online Sheets and graphic harvesting. Zoom was the central platform. The workshop took place in two blocks of work, one to build community around an issue and the second to focus on issues where decolonisation was important to thinking about a way forward, and where there was an organisation keen to move forward. This report reports on the highlights from the workshop and next steps the team is taking to build a proposal.

The Big Idea

The Capacity to Decolonise (C2D) project is a multi-country Africa-focused action research project that explores the idea of decolonising communities' futures. The big idea is to create groups or communities which will use Futures Literacy to unpack context-relevant challenges and, through the use of their imagination of the future, to establish novel and innovative solutions. The project seeks to capacitate African communities and individuals with the Futures Literacy tools and skills for this purpose.

Freeing of the mind is the big idea. While this is a globally relevant and necessary pursuit, the project locates itself in Africa to begin - wherein it contends with a rich and complex context. Post-Africanism is a new philosophy that believes for the African mind to reach its highest creative potential it needs to free Africa from Fanonian anti-colonial paranoia and Afrocentric nativist narcissism with a view to opening the continent fully to its universal human vocation. This is done through developing new strategies of thinking (Ekpo, 2017). Hence the workshop seeks to bring together the first community of C2D, "in Africa", to collaboratively engage with the action research project. The collaborative effort ensures varied scenarios which secure applicability of the project in various contexts.

Using their imaginations to engage with various context based challenges, actors are engaged with the applicability of the project and through Futures Literacy Laboratories (FLL), wherein they will unpack various dimensions associated with their futures. Here they are able to integrate their traditional knowledge, and skills into decisions affecting their communities and livelihoods. The big idea of the project is that communities can be equipped to explore their futures through tapping into their imaginations, using the capability of Futures Literacy. This workshop sought to build its first Future Literacy community under the Capacity to Decolonize project. Essentially, this is a learning-by-doing process, an inclusive and participatory approach which can and should be infiltrated into communities to cater for fair and just decision making and inherently drawing from African cultures and traditions.

Participation

The core planning team consists of Geci Karuri-Sebina (Wits School of Governance - Research Fellow), Frederick Carden (Using Evidence Inc. - President), Riel Miller (UNESCO - Head of Futures Literacy), and Eva Kwamou Feukeu (UNESCO - Project Officer for Futures Literacy). An extended planning and delivery support team was constituted to include Oluwabunmi Ajilore (Centre for Development Futures - Research Lead), Nancy White (Full Circle - Virtual Facilitator), Frederick Beckley (Wits School of Governance - Administrative Assistant), Loes Damhof (Hanze University of Applied Sciences - Senior Lecturer) and Robin Bourgeois (CIRAD - Senior Research Fellow). Additional participants were also engaged as Peer Facilitators (Julius Gatune Kariuki, Maya van Leemput and Patrick van Aalst) and guides in the course of the process. In addition, Sonja Niederhumer from the company Graphic Harvest was selected (through a competitive international process) to be part of the co-design process, providing graphic recording services which were thought to be an important way to begin visualising the learning and design journey. In total 26 people participated in the workshop.

The participants in the Workshop included the core planning team, member/s of IDRC, and identified experts. Experts included the director of the [Society for International Development \(Kenya\)](#), [the Millennium Project](#) which has nodes in South Africa and in Kenya, and the [African Centre for Technology Studies \(ACTS\)](#) - all of which are active in futures work in Africa. The participants were convened to participate in an action learning collective intelligence knowledge creation process. The common characteristics across the participants were that they all had ongoing-working and institutional connections that are interested in using FL to address challenges that Africa grapples with (for example higher education, youth support, unemployment issues, innovation support etc). The objective was to have the participants from African contexts co-design the Capacity to Decolonise (C2D) initiative which was directed towards engaging with the needs of the African context. The first community of C2D was moulded out of this grouping, and the contributions from

the participants were from a range of traditional, cultural, academic and practical perspectives.

The Methodology/Approach

The action learning research approach and techniques enabled the core team to undertake a process-as-product strategy. It was the opportunity to walk the talk and expose people to Futures Literacy -- the core of FL is learning by doing. We used a participatory co-design in order to attain reflexivity and reciprocity in the process. The process was case-based: the projects, identified amongst experts invited to co-design, sought to nurture endogenous and grounded knowledge for the reimagining of African societal challenges and solutions.

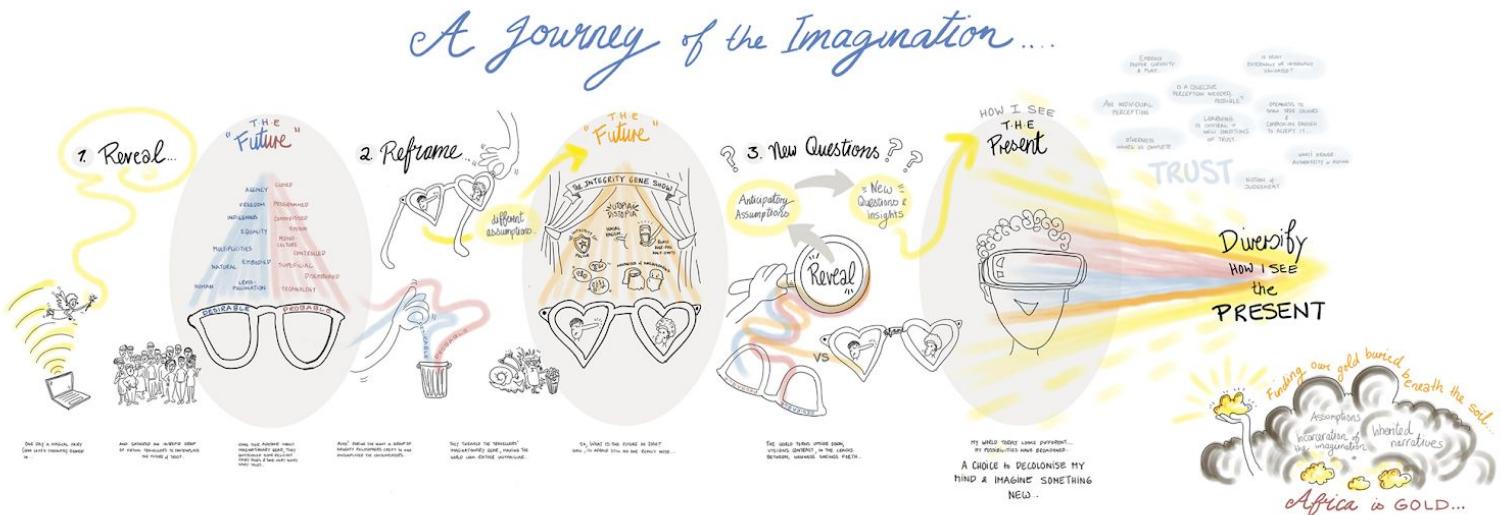
As an online event, the workshop was divided into two blocks of three days each, early May (Block 1) and late May (Block 2). There were two sessions of 90 minutes per day to allow maximum concentration and availability on Zoom, alternating between breakout rooms and plenary sessions (see 'Co-design workshop' section).

The first block of the co-design workshop followed the four-phases of a Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty (FLL-N) imagining the future of trust in 2050: Reveal, Reframe, Rethink/New Questions, Next Steps. The purpose was twofold: to engage the design team in a collective exercise to build community around a relevant issue; and to model the approach that would be used to build Futures Literacy capabilities.

1. During Block One, learners articulated images of probable, desirable and other possible futures to the new questions that emerge from such a reflection (see UNESCO, *Transforming the Future*, 2018). This part of the workshop was the opportunity to highlight the existence of anticipatory assumptions that we had remained unaware of, despite their discursive relevance. This is why Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty's are action-learning tools nurturing experiential learning through light peer facilitation.

The use of futures requires practice through learning-by-doing tools, manifested here as the Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty.

2. Following this introduction to a practical expression of decoloniality, Block 2 was designed to lead to the identification of roles FL could play in accompanying efforts pursued by C2D practitioners and researchers on the grounds. Formulated as a capability for the building of any resurgent, resilient community, this FL-rooted project should not be exempt from any interrogations around its own premises: were we phrasing the issue(s) well? Were we allowing enough room for planned and unplanned value addition? Coming from the premises of the relevance of FL for ongoing projects within the C2D co-design community, block 2 used case studies as raw material. Since the participants were from a diverse range of constituencies, it was not the opportunity to design the project itself, but to 1) observe the importance of contexts for the project to make sense, 2) detect the power of collective intelligence to push the project further, 3) play with the reflexivity embedded in learners' thought process once they have gone through a Futures Learning experiment.



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The Co-Design Workshop

The co-design workshop allowed for the promotion of Futures Literacy (FL) as a tool in enhancing social and economic development, social inclusion and peace. The workshop was designed in two blocks. The agenda (see figure 1 below) was sent out to the participants alongside other preparatory documents. The participants were provided with documents highlighting the significant aspects of the project, the technical preparations for the (virtual) workshop and background knowledge on the C2D project. Block one took place over three days, 5-7 May; Block Two was held 26-28 May 2020. The workshop was facilitated with the help of ice breakers, virtual tools, such as mural and google docs, setting up of break out rooms, and graphic harvesting.

BLOCK 1: Learning-by-Doing

The Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty is an action based approach and aligns with emphasizing the significance of collective intelligence. The Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty's have themes and these require various actors to engage in order to reach feasible and sustainable solutions using the future.

Hence the significance of a shared experience in the virtual workshop, this creates a sense of community amongst participants. The shared experience also enabled the participants to easily share cases in which Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty can be used in their individual cases /challenges. Block 1 prepares the participants for the identification of roles FL could play in accompanying efforts pursued by C2D practitioners and researchers on the



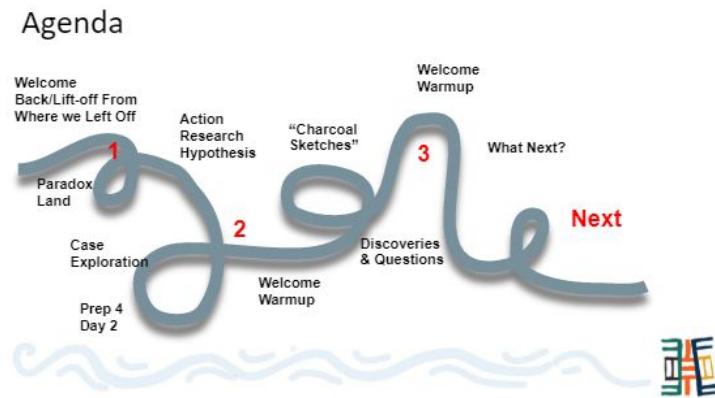
ground. Block 2 of the workshop unpacked these. The theme of this workshop was on the 'Future of Trust'.

The purpose of day 1 was to introduce the project, participants and unpack examples of phenomena through Futures Literacy Laboratory-Novelty. The participants were introduced to how they could use futures differently and creatively through their capacity to imagine.

By the end of Block 1, participants had engaged with probable futures (which involved looking into trends and statistics of the past) and desirable futures (which is using their imagination in relation to what they think will be present in the future). Participants presented different perspectives and assumptions relating to their perception of the future, with some similarity regarding their fears. The last day of block 1 was a day of reflection on the process and what the process enabled participants to engage with regarding the various assumptions/systems of phase 2. Participants revealed some significant insights and questions directed towards the title of the project and some process (FL) questions which highlighted some challenges with the process and applicability.

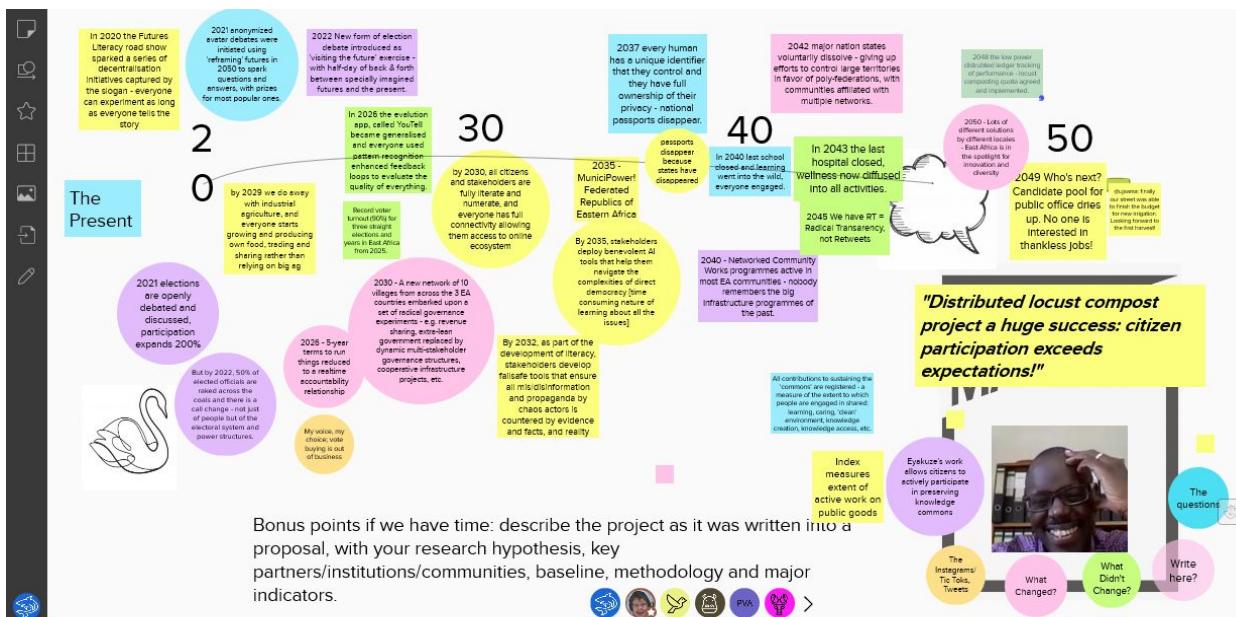
BLOCK 2: Exploring an Action Research Project

After a two week break, Block 2 of the workshop convened 26 - 28 May 2020. There was some engagement with the participants between the Blocks through a LinkedIn Group created for the purpose of selecting cases which would be explored in Block 2. The purpose of the meeting was to provide input to the design of an action research proposal defined as 'Discovering possibilities of how Futures Literacy helps local champions with their decolonisation efforts as a basis of an action research



proposal'. The collective selected two cases for discussion in the workshop and to explore Futures Literacy as a foresight tool.

Exercises completed collectively in groups (such as the Paradox exercise and the Charcoal activity - on Google Docs and Mural) helped put together the hypothesis for the C2D. The screenshot below is one taken during the Charcoal exercise. The guiding thread in the group discussions during the meeting was how Futures Literacy could help decolonise responses in potential cases, regardless of the issue or challenge. Peer facilitators guided the process in break out groups, primarily to ensure that the case was not unpacked deeply, rather the various perspectives of FL's implementation were explored.



Excerpt from MIRO board by one of the breakout groups working on a reframed Twaweza case

The outcomes of the day were insightful to the progress of the C2D initiative. The diverse perspectives of the participants enabled appropriate engagement with the purpose of C2D, the tools for building Futures Literacy and the proposal compilation. Significantly the hypothesis was a point of inquiry in terms of how it is a method of investigation adopted from western culture. This facilitated a discussion and modification of the proposal of the C2D.

Findings: Emerging Themes/Thoughts

What went well

The involvement of a series of actors/participants and not just universities was effective when unpacking the relevance and applicability of the C2D project and learning by doing approach. The actors identified factors that matter to effectiveness of the project through its action research approach and suggestions were made towards how the government and institutions can implement the project in such a way that people get Futures capabilities in practice. The tracking or evaluation mechanisms were identified as an element to be inherent to the project to ensure monitored outcomes, ensuring the progressiveness of the C2D project.

The breakout groups were effective in terms of sharing perspectives and engaging with issues even though time was often too short. Interesting and extensive questions were laid out and significantly around the applicability of the project and processes in different contexts. The linguistic competencies were assumed to be inherent in communities with strong social fabrics. Thus the implementation on the ground will require aligned interests, clear mandates and those who have power and position in the different structures or systems need to be inclusive and participatory in their decision making processes.

The first C2D community did a great job at unpacking what needs to be improved, considered and changed in the overall approach of the process and project. All the insights are considered in the design of the proposal. The group noted the importance of exploring tensions within the prescribed format and applicability was agreed as relevant for all cases as long as enough time is dedicated. The tools used were effective in capturing the data/information shared by participants. The graphic harvester was capable of tracking visually the points raised at different phases of the workshop. Grassroots were considered significant in mobilising C2D judging from the selection of participants who are on the ground and hands on. The anticipatory vantage is useful and powerful.

What were the challenges

The theoretical basis of the proposal questioned the use of a hypothesis which is considered to be a western approach to research therefore calling for a review/rethinking of the C2D project. The concept of decolonising was of concern for some participants. The term is defined in various contexts with varied significance to colonial oppressive regimes. Mobilising the project with institutions poses a challenge considering that they are traditional institutions of power and already colonising the knowledge domain. Inherently alluding to the trust dilemma between the people on the ground and those in power. There is a need for differentiation between learning and education in terms of the direction or path the project seeks to channel towards. The biggest challenge in schools is getting teachers to promote agency amongst their students. Participants expressed interesting concerns with regards to access to Futures Literacy considering the learning by doing approach.

Some participants were faced with connection problems from time to time but were usually able to overcome these. This poses a challenge for working in settings with weak connectivity in future if the work has to remain virtual. A further challenge in the translation from a face-to-face event to a virtual one was in working in shorter blocks of time without the informal connections after the formal workshop concluded.

The participants, after being engaged with the project during Block 1, were asked to provide cases in their respective contexts in which FL could be implemented. The cases allowed for various interests to arise amongst participants in various roles/structures in their context. New relationships were forged during the workshop, which may be the result of emerging new programmes and initiatives in partnership with UNESCO. Participants showed extended interests by committing to continuous engagement and possible collaborations with the C2D project.

The experience of completing the design workshop online highlighted challenges in how we design the proposal. It also made it clear that much can be done through online platforms

with appropriate facilitation. The lessons outlined above are informing the proposal development.

The two cases discussed in the workshop - transforming governance in Tanzania with Twaweza & Innovations in Community Development with Kabakoo in Mali and Badenya in Sierra Leone are being developed as full cases for the project. A third project on the future of the university will bring together at least two universities, one long-established (Witwatersrand in South Africa) and one newer university (Gulu in northern Uganda).

In addition to the relationships built for the research project, new relationships are being established with the UNESCO Futures Literacy program. Chairs in Futures Literacy are being explored with Gulu University (Uganda) and Dedan Kimathi University of Technology (Kenya), and the establishment of a new southern FL network with SAIIA (the South African Institute of International Affairs). These new relationships either emerged from, or have been accelerated through, side discussions during the co-design engagement, and we anticipate other relationships will continue as well. For example, some of the participants are being sought to provide ongoing advice and expertise on foresight work in Africa.

Moving Forward

The workshop enabled the community to provide insight on the feasibility of the project. This further enabled the development of a Proposal Package directly aligned with the Capacity 2 Decolonize project. The proposal package will include:

- The C2D proposal
- The research paper.

The proposal will be shared with potential funders and partners through presentations and dialogue as well as through the creation of an [online space for the project](#) on the Foresight for Development website created by the Millennium Project South Africa node. We are exploring (open access) publication possibilities for the research paper as well. The Capacity to Decolonize project will mobilize local champions, cover a wide range of topics using collective intelligence to bring life to the Global Futures Literacy Network.

Annexures

1. [Workshop Participant Biographies](#)
2. [Research Paper](#)
3. [C2D Large Proposal \(on request\)](#)