Strategic Foresight – a recap

Azeema Adam

Senior Inter-regional Advisor, Strategic Foresight and Systems Thinking,

Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, UN DESA

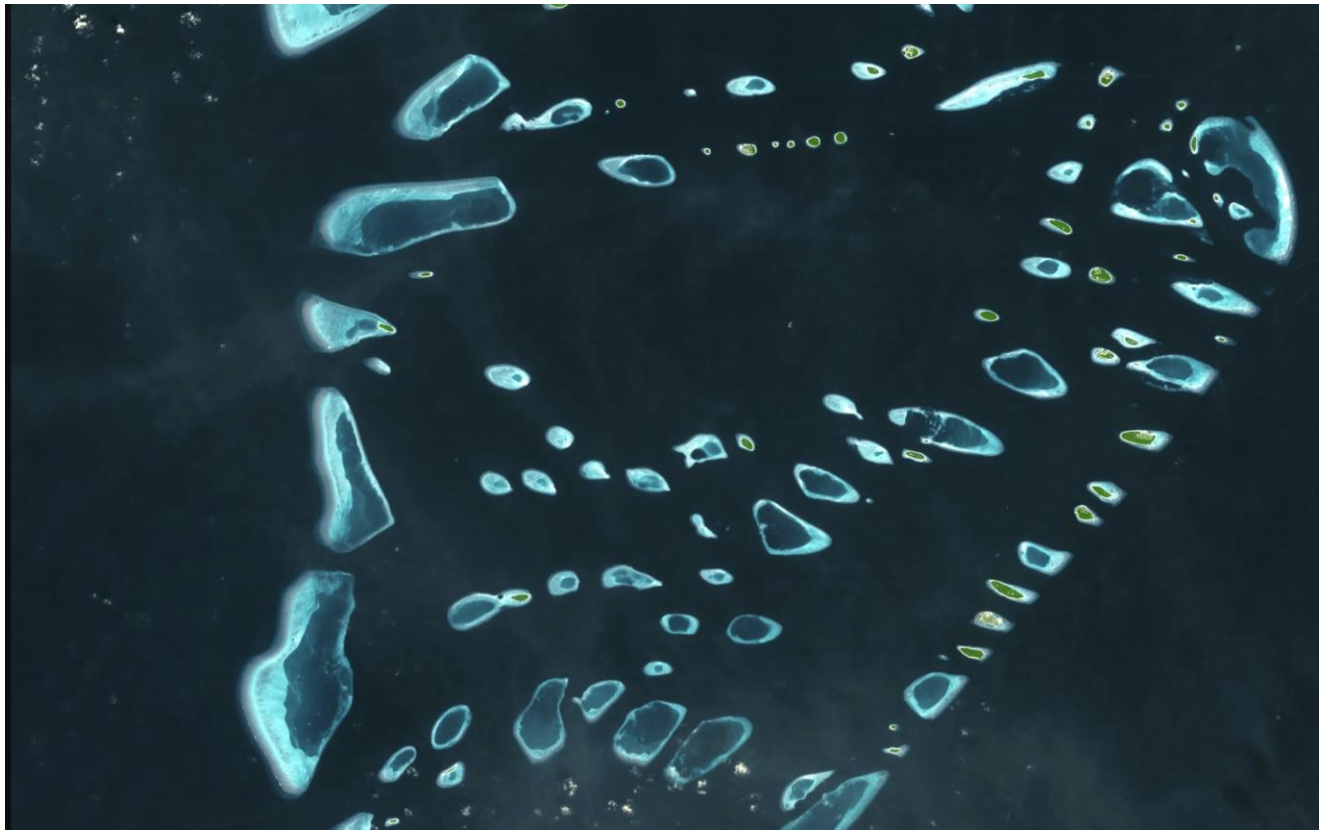
Why Foresight Matters for Big Earth Data

From Observation to Anticipation

Data = evidence of change

Foresight = anticipation of possibilities

Together → smarter, earlier action



Source: https://assets.science.nasa.gov/content/dam/science/esd/climate/2023/12/maldives_1920x1200.jpg

Big Earth Data gives evidence of change. Foresight uses that evidence to imagine what could happen next.

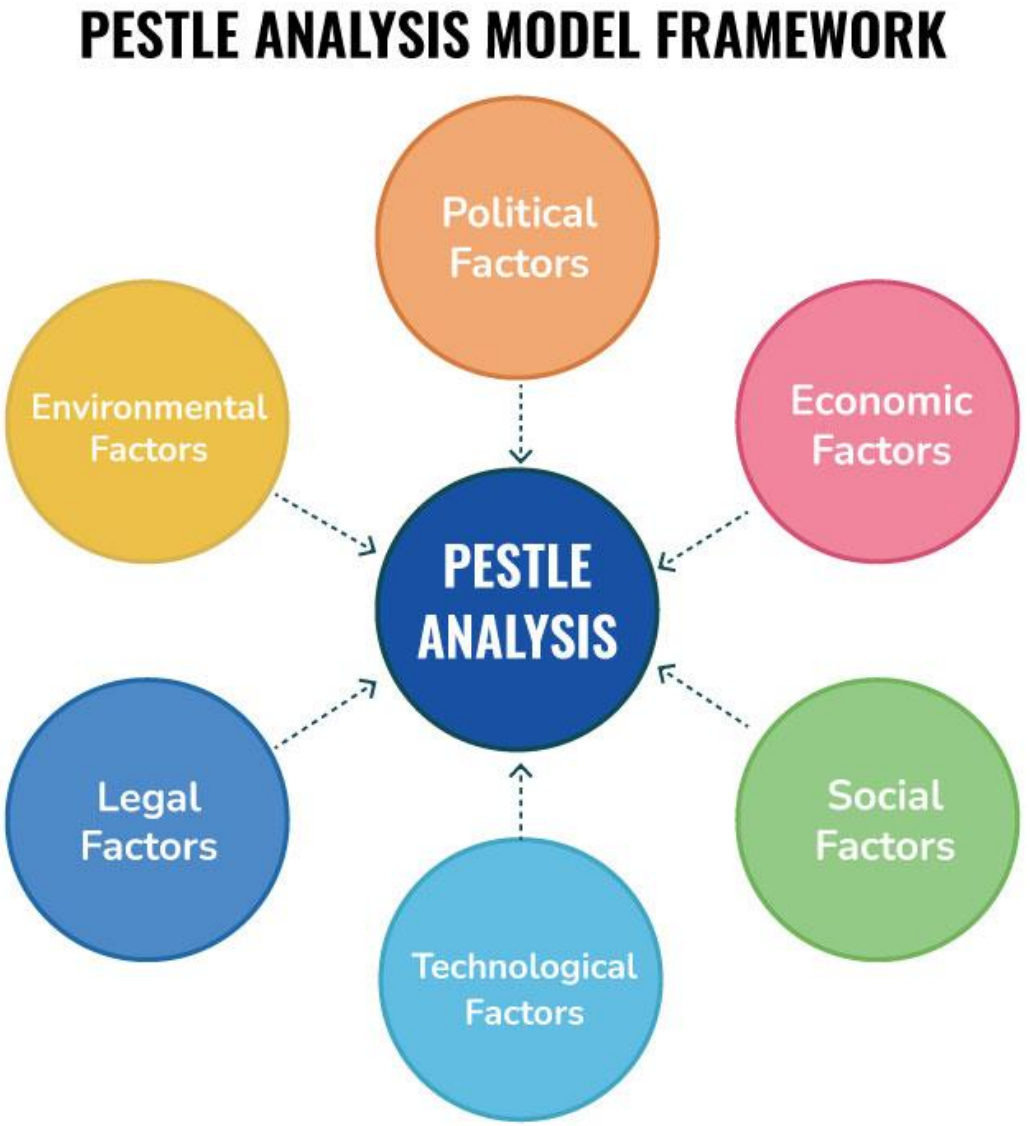
United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Horizon scanning – Spotting what is emerging

Horizon scanning systematically looks for early signals of change so government can anticipate emerging risks and opportunities.

- **Identify** emerging changes that could have a big impact on a country or a specific sector.
- **Make sense** of disruptions and weak signals to reveal patterns and drivers (PESTLE).
- **Shift** from reacting to the past to preparing for multiple plausible futures.

- Helps organize Big Earth Data signals so emerging patterns and risks can be understood in context.
- Ensures that space and geospatial data translate into policy-relevant insights for decision-making in SIDS.
- Supports governments in connecting data trends with real-world implications across sectors.



How Horizon Scanning Links Data to Decisions

Horizon scanning systematically looks for early signals of change so government can anticipate emerging risks and opportunities.

Frame: Define the topic and time horizon (e.g., coastal resilience, 2030).

Scan: Gather signals from Big Earth Data and other sources.

Interpret: Group signals into trends and assess impact.

Sensemake: Discuss what these mean for policy and action.

Report: Feed insights into national and sector plans.

Big Earth Data & Strategic Foresight — A Complementary Approach for SIDS

🌍 Why They Work Better Together

- **Big Earth Data** tracks *what is happening now* (e.g., sea-level rise, deforestation, erosion)
- **Strategic Foresight** explores *what could happen next* (e.g., scenarios, risks, opportunities)
- Together, they support **anticipatory, coherent, and risk-informed STI and DRR strategies**

✅ Shared Value for SIDS

- Make planning more **visual, grounded, and future-ready**
- Connect science, data, and long-term governance decisions
- Support integration across climate, disaster, and development policies

Next Steps: Horizon Scanning for Your Big Earth Data Work

🔍 Start scanning for weak signals outside your usual information sources

🌍 Look at intersections: Where do Earth data, tech innovation, and SIDS priorities meet?

💡 Ask: 'What emerging capability could transform our use of Earth data?'

📊 Build early warning systems for opportunities, risks, and game-changing developments

What UN DESA is Doing in SIDS on Foresight

Capacity-building workshops: Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, the Maldives, Seychelles, Saint Lucia and Mauritius on strategic foresight and systems thinking for resilient governance.

Supporting integration of foresight into national planning and climate-resilient recovery strategies and STI Roadmaps.

Knowledge products: Developing training manuals and e-learning modules, with SIDS learning path on anticipatory governance.

Upcoming work: Embedding foresight into public-sector induction programmes in Saint Lucia (2025-2026); foresight for climate resilience in Pacific SIDS (2026–2028) and establishing foresight units in countries.

Let’s Build Future-Ready SIDS

If you have any questions/would like follow-up activities

or

If your governments are interested in building capacity on strategic foresight, please contact:

Azeema Adam
azeema.adam@un.org