

Can data drive policy?



What is Strategic Foresight?

*Strategic foresight is a **structured, participatory approach** that helps governments **anticipate change, navigate uncertainty, and shape resilient, inclusive futures.***

In practice: Horizon scanning → Drivers & trends → Scenarios → Vision & options → Near-term actions

Foresight is not about trying to **predict** the future.

It helps us understand a range of **plausible futures** that may lie ahead.

In SIDS, foresight enables resilient choices across climate, economy, and society.



Foresight ≠ Forecasting

“Our brains are wired to the past, but the past is not a guide to the future”



Forecasting builds quantified baselines and ranges. Foresight widens the lens, tests those baselines across multiple futures, and defines signposts to monitor.

Forecasting

- Uses historical data/models to produce **baselines and ranges**.
- Supports **targets, resource allocation, demand planning, risk monitoring** (e.g., energy load, enrollment, health demand, tourism).
- Works best when relationships are **relatively stable** and data-rich.

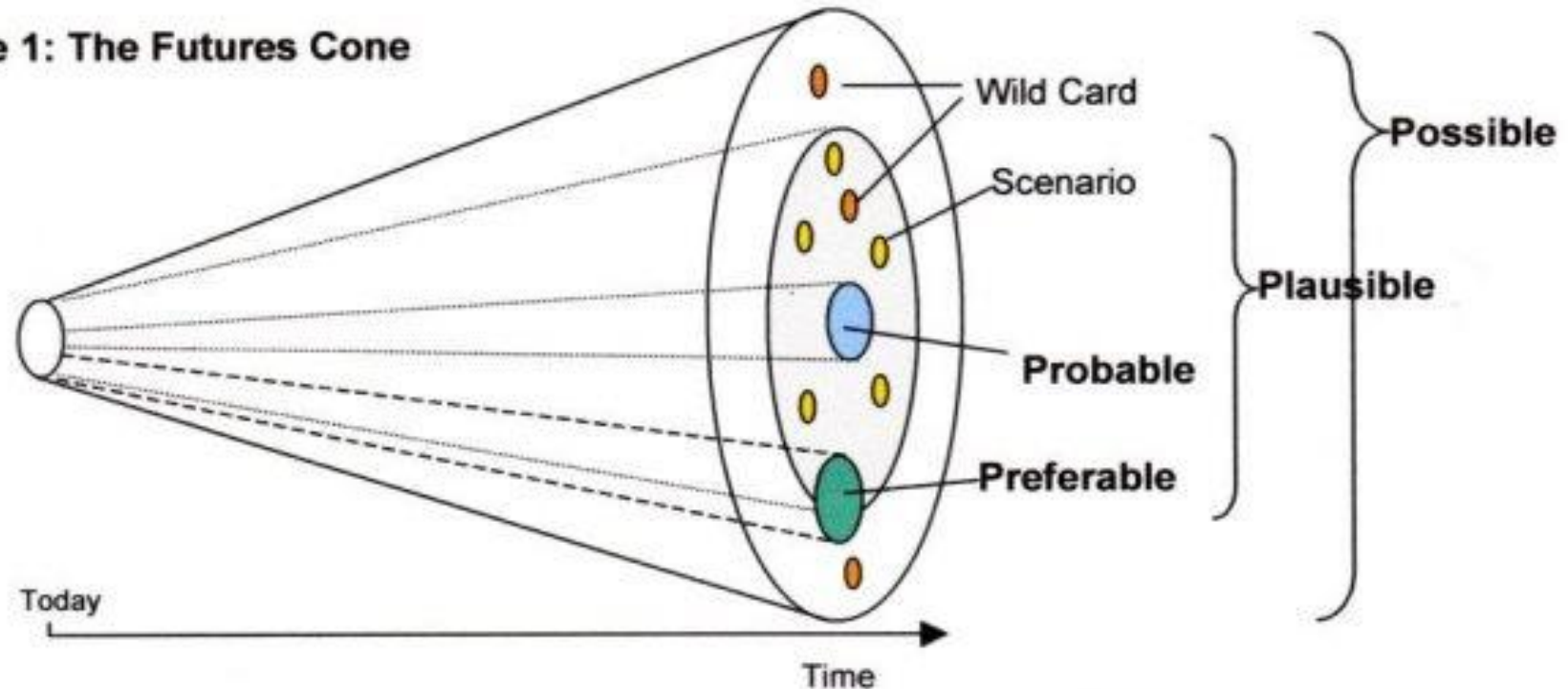
Foresight

- Scans **signals/drivers** and explores **alternative futures**
- **Stress-tests** assumptions and reveals **options, signposts, and early warnings**.
- Useful when uncertainty or change is **high**.

Strategic Foresight: Exploring multiple futures

The Futures Cone helps us explore uncertainty, clarify assumptions, and align actions with values

Figure 1: The Futures Cone



- ♦ *Wild Cards* → disruptive, low-probability events
- *Probable* → trend-based projections
- *Preferable* → vision-driven goals

Possible (everything that could happen)

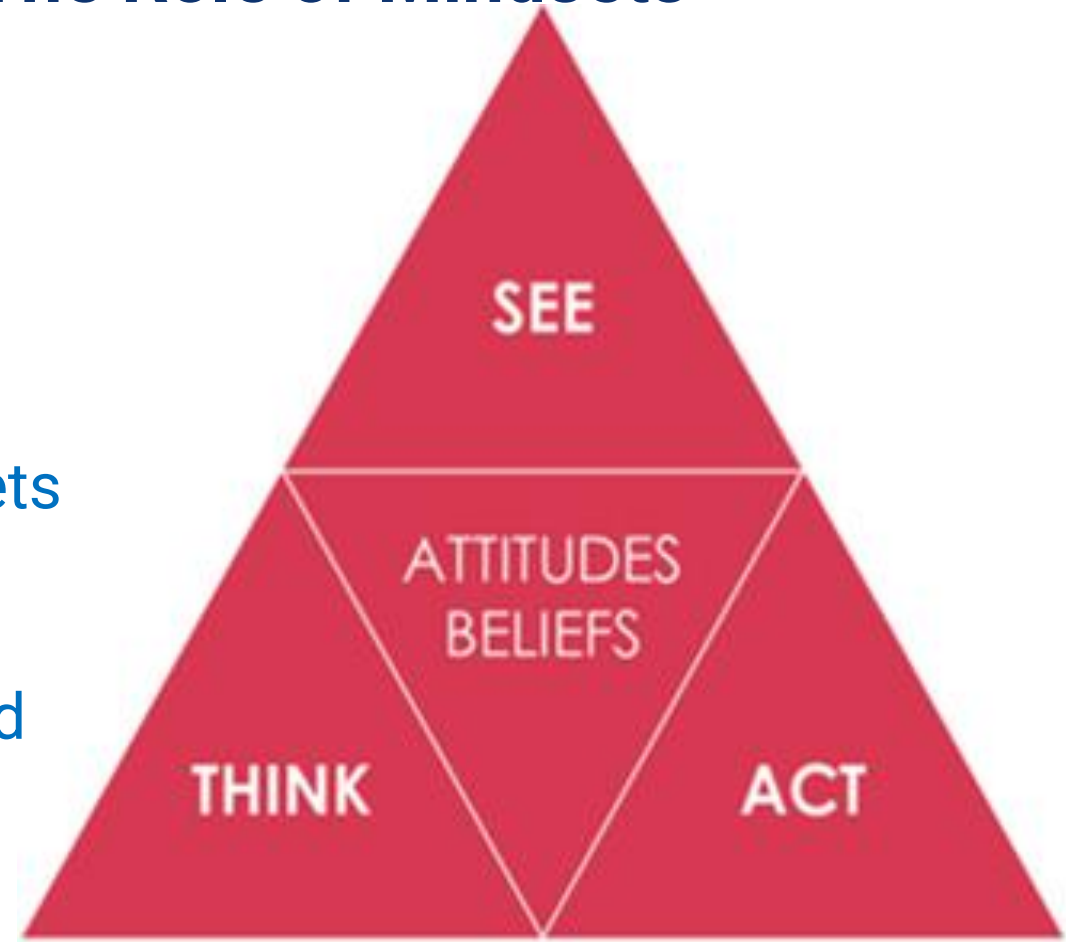
Plausible (what might happen based on current knowledge)

Probable (what's likely to happen)

Preferable (what we want to happen)

Why Isn't Evidence Enough? – The Role of Mindsets

- Mindsets shape how people **see, think,** and **act**
- Attitudes and beliefs filter what data gets noticed and used
- Foresight helps reframe uncertainty and unlock adaptive thinking

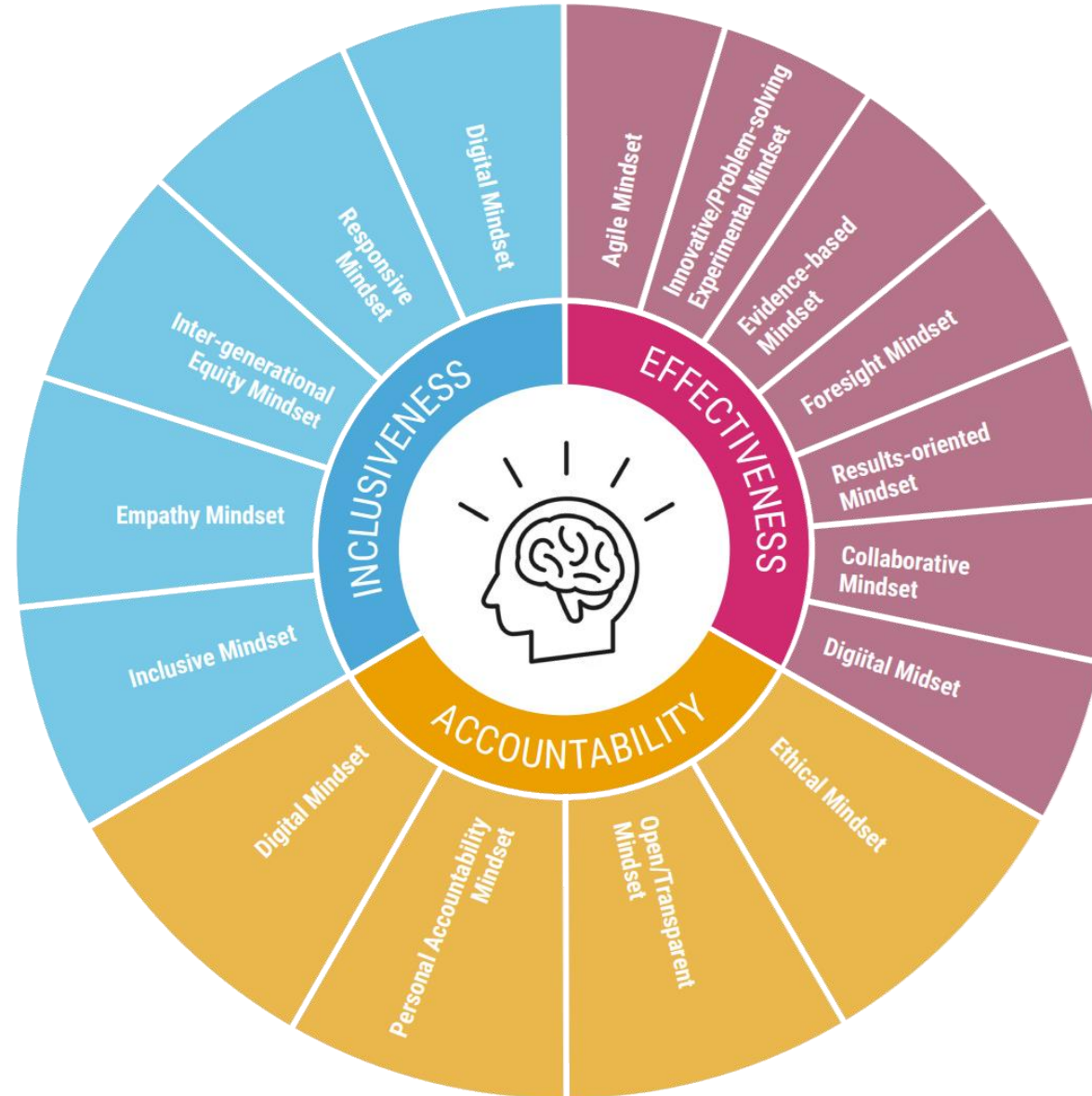


Policy decisions aren't just shaped by data—they're shaped by how policymakers' see, *think*, and *act*.

Mindsets filter what's noticed, how it's interpreted, and what actions are considered legitimate.

Why Isn't Evidence Enough? – The Role of Mindsets

Figure 1.3: Mindsets for SDGs implementation



What Can Data Scientists/Analysts Do?



- **Frame insights as futures**
- **Translate complexity with visuals and analogies**
- **Surface blind spots and build legitimacy**
- **Co-create with policy teams to stress-test decisions**

What Gets in the way?

Step 1: Recall a moment

- Think of a time when good data or analysis was available—but wasn't used, misunderstood, or ignored in a decision-making process.

Step 2: Identify barriers

- In your group, list 2–3 reasons why that happened. Use these categories to guide your thinking:
-  Individual: attitudes, skills, habits, fears
-  Institutional: rules, incentives, silos, culture