



## Visionarios: Six Children in the Year 2030

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### ABSTRACT

The use of visionarios, or stories, to better understand events within a complex world has been under development for the last several decades as a major foresight tool. A visionario is a story, or scenario, that explores the systemic relationships within a complex social system: the interdependencies and interactions of elements and people in the system and how the system plays out. This visionario collection of six future stories is designed for those involved in education, policy, development or humanitarian work. These visionarios illustrate the power of narratives for understanding the impact that complex systems can have on individual behavior. The six stories developed examine specific assumptions and explore various themes. By reading the story from the child's perspective, you will also be able to read an analysis of the assumptions, trends and systemic interconnections. Each story has a child, a country, a theme and an assumption that is explored. Due to financial and time limitations only secondary research was conducted.

### KEYWORDS

Visionarios; foresight;  
complex systems; children

### Visionario methodologies

The use of visionarios, or stories, to better understand events within a complex world has been under development for the last several decades as a major foresight tool.<sup>1</sup> A visionario is a story, or scenario, that explores the systemic relationships within a complex social system: the interdependencies and interactions of elements and people in the system and how the system plays out. Complex systems are non-linear. That means that cause and effect relationships are not clear and the uncertainty that pervades our world is difficult, if not impossible to predict. The world includes the physical such as geography, social phenomena like economics, politics, religion, family structures and cultural inculcations, and technological manifestations that are both physical and social. Forces that have an impact on a complex system are ubiquitous. Trying to understand forces such as artificial intelligence, global climate change, genetic engineering or social radicalization and the impact these forces can have on future generations is an important concept for study to better prepare for how these forces may change the future or increase the acceleration of change in that future.



Visionarios can be developed and used for many different purposes, but the most important is to instruct and learn about how individual behavior will unfold using a specific set of assumptions within a context for decision-making. The range of visionarios used can vary tremendously. The stories examine specific assumptions and explore various themes. As you read the story from the child's perspective, you will also be able to read an analysis of the assumptions, trends and systemic interconnections. Each story has a child, a country, a theme and an assumption that is explored. Due to financial and time limitations only secondary research was conducted.

Each visionario:

- Is closely related to complexity and systems as well as second/third order implications
- Focuses on one theme, e.g. air pollution, its related complexity and how it impacts lives
- Has an actor(s) making an important decision, the outcome of which the narrative explores further

## **Visionarios**

The date is September 2038. The place is the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Students from many countries, as well as throughout Ohio and the United States, have come to this land grant school in the heartland of America to educate themselves to become diplomats, public servants, academics, researchers and policy-makers, but most of all to become people who fulfill the mission of the college: "Make a difference in the world".

Six students are among the many young people who are gathering to tell each other their stories as they begin to embark on their undergraduate Baccalaureate degrees. Ironically, eight years ago, all six students were featured in a report to the stakeholders of an NGO that explored the children of the world in 2030 and looked at ways that global forces were affecting them. Here are their stories of when each was ten years old – born in 2020.

### **1. Ali's story**

The Country: Libya

Theme: Water-Climate Change-War nexus

Assumption: Sometimes, leaving your country is the only way forward.

Today was Ali's tenth birthday. He was so excited. In addition to the many presents he was looking forward to, his parents were planning a charity birthday party for him. Like many children of privilege in Europe and the

West, Ali and his friends were planning a “country” theme party where each child would bring a different element of that specific country of which they hope the circumstances would improve. Because of their family’s tragic experiences, even though Ali has no memory of them, Ali decided to choose Libya which was the country of his birth. By the end of the day, the party would have raised money for the people of Libya who still lived in a war-torn nation and would support the many water projects that were still underway to help the people improve their country.

Born in Sirte, Ali’s parents, Mustafa and Farah, fled from their home to a refugee camp in Misrata where Ali was born in 2020. Fleeing from a war-torn area of the country in 2017 they left with nothing but the clothes on their backs. In the refugee camp they were trying to just survive from day-to-day, but the lack of food and clean water made life difficult. Cholera soon claimed the lives of Ali’s brother and sister in early 2018, before he was born. After his birth, Ali could survive because of bottled water donated to the refugees.

Mustafa and Farah knew the fresh water issue would only get worse in Libya and they heard from aid workers that the effects of climate change on Libya might be tragic. They realized that life in Libya, let alone Sirte, was precarious and reluctantly made plans to leave even though the interim government started to address the water shortage. In 2022, they were able to leave for Spain through a new European Union refugee assistance program.

In Spain Ali was raised while his parents constantly reminded him of what might have been if they had not been able to escape the refugee camp in Misrata where Ali was born.

### ***The contextual situation***

**Conflict & Humanitarian Crisis:** In 2017, Libya had many refugees fleeing from a war-torn area of the country. During the next five years, refugee camps constantly lacked food and clean water with a rise of Cholera and decline in child mortality.

Around 2022, many refugees were able to leave Libya with the assistance of a new European Union refugee infrastructure funded by Vladimir Putin in efforts to promote Russian influence in Europe. Spain made a deal with the EU to accept more immigrants in exchange for the extensive financial bailouts it received in 2020.

**The Environment:** The fish supplies from the Mediterranean Sea were increasingly imperiled due to the rising ocean acidity caused by much higher carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions in the atmosphere from higher atmospheric temperatures. This had a drastic effect on the food chain for fish.

Libya also had a growing fresh water crisis exacerbated by Climate Change. Even the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer system, also called the “Great

Man Made River” funded and built by Colonel Muammar Qaddafi in the 1980s with his own money, was expected to run dry. This vast water system tapped underground water in Libya’s south to supply cities in the north like Sirte. Other countries near Libya coveted its water, making any Libyan supply increase in the short run likely to lead to war or other armed conflict. In late 2021, the post Libyan interim government began to work in earnest with world environmental leaders to develop alternative energy sources and to begin new irrigation projects.

### **System map**

Below, we see the interrelated circumstances impacting Ali’s life. Causal relationships are indicated with arrows.

## **2. Winnie’s story**

The Country: Kenya

Theme: Religious radicalization

Assumption: Interconnectivity will transform forces of good -and evil- in developing nations

It was Tuesday morning. Winnie awoke excited since that day she was expecting to go to the plantation and visit with her friend, Mrs. Mary Bond, the wife of the plantation owner who spoke to her in English and whom she adored. Winnie was born in the Highlands of Kenya, west of the Rift Valley, at a high altitude, where even today her parents still work on a tea plantation growing one of the world’s most sought after teas. English was spoken on the plantation where Faith brought Winnie along to work frequently. Winnie had a command of English in addition to Swahili. Mrs. Bond had promised Winnie her first cell phone and that day, Winnie knew she would soon be able to speak English to people all over the world and even explore and learn online about anything in the world.

But the day did not unfold the way Winnie had hoped. The morning was wonderful. She and Mrs. Bond had a delightful conversation with morning tea, but when Winnie left to find her parents to show them her new cell phone, she saw three men with cell phones pulling aside several of the teenage males to talk. Winnie tried to join the men to show her friends her new cell phone when one of the men yelled at her and pushed her down to the ground and kicked her. It was only then that she noticed them carrying pistols barely visible under their partially zipped jackets. Winnie was so frightened she ran away to find her parents. She was shaking all over. She had seen their guns. Even the excitement of getting her first cell phone wasn’t enough to make her forget what had happened.

Unbeknownst to her, five years before her birth a militant group, Al-Shabaab, started to gradually establish a strong presence in Kenya, close to her home. Now Al-Shabaab finally had a personal influence on her life. As Winnie began to have more and more nightmares, she didn't want to go to the plantation any more. In fact, Winnie was even fearful of getting out of her small home and playing outside. There were times when she was so afraid that she had trouble getting out of bed and eating.

Winnie's parents were distraught about the situation and expressed their fears to Mrs. Bond. Together they decided to send Winnie to London for her education. After being in London for a while, Winnie won a scholarship to pay the rest of her tuition in full and eventually became a student at Ohio State's John Glenn College of Public Affairs. She was glad to have escaped the region's political instability and the hard work of the plantation where her parents still labor. Although they handpick some of the world's best tea leaves available on the global market, it still keeps her family in poverty. Winnie would one day become a diplomat for Kenya.

### ***The contextual situation***

Al-Shabaab gradually infiltrated Kenya and grew extremely influential. By cleverly using social media, they manipulated the ethnic divisions between Christians and Muslims to create discord and disrupt government control. They also infiltrated the Rift Valley to recruit high school and even junior secondary students to fight against the government in the name of Islam.

With their clever use of cell phones and other high technology, al-Shabaab was able to coordinate its activities more effectively, keeping one step ahead of the Kenyan police most of the time, gradually increasing their terrorist assaults successfully.

### **3. Juan's story**

The Country: Peru

Theme: Water-environmental degradation interdependence

Assumption: High-technology irrigation and water sanitation methods can ameliorate the water situation in many developing countries.

Juan's village, Sandra Rosa di Ocana, was deep in the Ayacucho region of Peru where barley, beans, maize, chili peppers, onions, potatoes and snow peas were grown. Juan Carlos lived with his parents, Jose and Andria. In one of the poorest regions in the country, his parents Jose and Andria always worked hard on their small farm. He was born in 2020 and since that time his family's problems had been made considerably worse by the water crisis in Peru.

One day Juan rose early and was so excited because things were finally changing. The new solar panels were coming to help his family's farm generate its own electricity to support the water system to irrigate their land! The idea that he would not need to go into the village every day with his father to find and buy the water needed in their house, for drinking, cooking, bathing and irrigating, sounded wonderful. This had usually taken a major part of the day, but now he would even have time to play with his friends.

But there was more good news. The panels would also provide for the daily electricity needs of their home, and the providers assured Juan's parents that there would be enough electricity to also provide a sufficient amount to run their new touch pads. Each person in the household was getting one, and Juan couldn't wait. It was a computer, reader and phone all-in-one device that would open new worlds.

Juan had heard about the prospects of being connected to the world in ways he could only imagine before. Later that night, it was hard to go to sleep. Juan had spent hours on his new pad texting with his friends and just having fun.

As Juan Carlos grew over the years, so did his interest in high technology, agricultural diplomacy and using technologies such as hydroponics. It would become his life's ambition to find a way to help other people in distressed situations find a way out through peaceful means.

### ***The contextual situation***

Becoming a failed state: In the decade before 2020, Peru experienced an exacerbated water crisis stemming from the general deterioration and disrepair of the country's water system and pollution caused by a mineral extraction company. Even though the government already began trying to reduce Peru's water and sanitation problems in 2015 by collaborating with public-private partnerships between foreign governments, regional banks and large multinational corporations, the increased levels of CO<sub>2</sub> associated with climate change still led to years of drought that eventually made the water crisis catastrophic by 2022.

As a result, the government had to contend with riots and looting in villages, specifically in the Ayacucho region. There, that which was stolen was used to buy water on the black market. Matters were made even worse when private firms contracted by the government to transport water to villages, colluded to raise prices as high as the market would bear; in short, Peru was becoming a "failed state".

International Intervention: By 2025, the United Nations, upon request from the Peruvian government, authorized a humanitarian intervention mission to Peru to stop the violence and ensure that water would be delivered. The United

Nations expanded its operations in conjunction with several international non-governmental organizations to bring high technology irrigation and water sanitation methods to Peru. In addition, these non-governmental organizations worked with the Peruvian government to develop a United Nations funded international water supply chain with its sources in surrounding countries like Ecuador and South American countries to the north. The purpose was to create water repositories and a water distribution system for the Andean Community Free Trade Zone. The hope was that this project would stimulate trade and increase political and cultural connections. Many reservoirs and irrigation canals were built that permitted farms to collect rainwater and use it more effectively and efficiently to grow crops.

#### **4. Burak's story**

The Country: Turkey

Theme: Secular governance

Assumption: It is possible to live with secular values in a religious society.

Burak, his older brother, Yusef, and sister, Yasemin were managing their family's historic seafood restaurant on the banks of the Bosphorus in the Bebek neighborhood of Istanbul. It had been started by his grandparents and Burak worked there every day after school.

His parents had emigrated to Germany. In the past his mother, Beyza, had been a volunteer who worked at a camp for refugees, taking in many from Syria and other parts of the Middle East, desperate to find new homes. Her work reinforced her feelings about her ties to the Middle East and Islam, but she felt the need to live in a secular society, which at the time seemed impossible in Turkey.

Burak could still remember how police officers came to the house to question his parents about their ties to the secular, pro-western Republican People's Party (CHP) to which they belonged, and about possible ties to the liberal Fethullah Gulen.

His mother had quite an influence on Burak. During her work at the refugee camp, Burak would often accompany his father, Emre, to visit his mother. Those experiences, especially after he had befriended a refugee family his parents were sponsoring, enhanced his own feelings about his Turkish identity, the need to help refugees and to promote social justice issues. Himself feeling displaced between the worlds of secularism and the Middle East, Burak decided to work with displaced families as a career goal and to study political science in the interim, because he knew how much good he could accomplish working for an international non-governmental organization.

The three siblings continued to live in their parents' spacious home and when Yasemin were getting married, Burak would live there with his brother. Their

decision to use the family restaurant as a meeting place was an idea his brother had when their parents moved to Germany to open another family restaurant.

The political turmoil that embroiled the country over the past several years had subsided and had made the restaurant a major meeting place for secularists who wanted moderation in the government and promoted a new Turkish discourse. This was making Burak's daily routine exciting as people, both old and young, especially from the refugee camps, were welcomed to their family restaurant and were talking about political reform.

Now that secular discussion was once again permissible and coming back into fashion, Burak was determined to get an education so he could make a life helping people get out of the refugee camps and create value in the economy of Turkey. The thrill of change was sweeping this ancient country, the place Burak and his family called home home.

### ***The contextual situation***

The tension between the secular and religious: In the past, support of Ataturk's secular, pro-western Republican People's Party (CHP) in Turkey became increasingly unpopular. At a certain stage, there even was an attempted coup to accelerate the Turkish push away from the West and secularism towards a more Islamic oriented society. The lingering effects of this aborted coup d'état were palatable for many years thereafter.

This was because of Islamic revivalism's growth and continued efforts by Turkey to join the European Union. These efforts largely failed due to French and Greek opposition and questions about Turkey's commitment to the human rights regime. One of the most influential political figures advocating for a more tolerant Islam, Fethullah Gulen, continued to remain in his Saylorsburg compound in Pennsylvania after an assassination attempt in the U.S. had been made against him.

Technology and the media helped to depicted competing visions of Turkey's future in sharp relief like never before, while the government also used it to promote its own vision of a Turko-centric Middle East.

Many pro-western Turkish secularists were confronted with having to make a choice between continued marginalization and the possibility of physical danger or efforts to emigrate to Europe. Eventually, however, some of the tension in Turkey did ease.

## **5. Priya's story**

The Country: India

Theme: Air pollution

Assumption: Through technology the effects of air pollution can be ameliorated.



Priya was born in New Delhi. Her parents, Mahesh and Tanvi, had many mouths to feed and very little money. Living in squalid conditions, for a long time Priya suffered from malnutrition and respiratory problems. She was getting sick very often, and because she had such a delicate physical constitution, her parents were not sure she could survive the severe haze of air pollution when it fell over the city.

This situation continued for three years until she was given a mask! The mask was a donation from an NGO, together with an air filter for their little apartment and free enrollment for a food programme. This enabled Priya to get better and return to school and finally catch up on all the work she had missed. Every day when Priya woke up, she would clean her mask for her walk to school. Now healthier than ever, she actually gained a few kilos and began to grow again on her daily donated diet of rice and lentils with a few vegetables, fruit and of course naan.

Priya's teacher was so impressed with her recovery and her brilliant marks at school that the school honored her with a scholarship to one of the best schools in India: Vasant Valley School. This would change her life forever. It would permit her to escape the poverty and squalor of her home and create a different life for herself, learning how to help communities grow jobs without hurting the environment. She wanted to learn how to make a difference for her family, city, nation and the world by making the air clean again. Plus, she would have enough money to buy medicine and masks!

### ***Contextual situation***

In New Delhi, the haze of air pollution frequently made it difficult to breathe. In these often-extreme circumstances, few could escape the bad haze. The poor also had no option for treatment of illnesses caused by polluted air.

Because of an intervention program, air filters were provided to many families that had children with respiratory problems, but more importantly, the root causes of the pollution from global climate change and industrial pollution were starting to be addressed by both Indian Government, NGO and United Nations efforts.

## **6. Maria's story**

The Country: Philippines

Theme: Rising sea levels due to global warming

Assumption: People will migrate inland as rural coastlines are disrupted by climate change.

Today was the most wonderful day of Maria's life, but her story didn't begin that way. Until recently, her family had lived on Manila Bay in the coastal region of Luzon, where her father had been a fisherman. Living near precarious waters had many risks including flooding, and they had become accustomed to the dangers of living in the path of powerful storms. But by the time that Maria was born in 2020, many farmers on plantations farther inland were experiencing severe irrigation problems as cash crops died from fresh water contaminated with salt.

As time went on, it became clear to her parents, John and Kate, that the fishing industry was imperiled and that their home was in real danger of being lost to the sea. Her parents sold their home by 2029, and gave up fishing before climatic conditions made their home impossible to sell. They moved to Manila where her parents retrained to become workers in a manufacturing company. This was a very difficult transition for them, but gradually enabled them to put aside a good portion of their income to ensure Maria would be able to pursue her education.

It was now 2030, one year since they had moved, and Maria was 10. The past year had been difficult for Maria. After all the tears of leaving their fishing village, and the trauma of losing everything she ever owned when her room in their old home was flooded and ruined her few possessions, Maria was trying hard to fit in. With all these changes, she was having trouble acclimating to the crowded city, the crowded school and the loss of her friends.

But Maria loved school and was a very good student. Her teacher saw the potential in her learning ability and spirit and nominated her for a scholarship to the wonderful International School in Manila. A while later Maria received news that she was selected! John and Kate were ecstatic about the prospects that Maria would be going there and be on her way to a new life! She would now have a chance at a future by learning the skills needed to help people manage the effects of sea levels rise in places like Manila Bay, developing highly-valued skills and taking employment that would not be susceptible to resource depletion or weather and seasonal fluctuations.

### ***The contextual situation***

Rising sea levels impact coastal communities: By 2015, it became clear that global warming, in large part due to increased CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, was making weather problems worse and increasing ocean temperatures. That, in addition to increased glacial ice melting, led to the rise in ocean levels worldwide and put coastal countries like the Philippines at unusual risk of land loss. Even as global scientists convened in Europe and China to design new global measures to tackle some of the more immediate problems, the local coral

reefs were dying off and the fish food supply was in demise. By 2019, sea water had seeped into the fresh water reserves which farmers used for irrigation, destroying cash crops. During the next decade, many local farmers and fishermen migrated to cities to retrain and work in manufacturing-based companies.

## Note

1. The Project on National Security Reform, Vision Working Group Report and Scenarios, 2010.