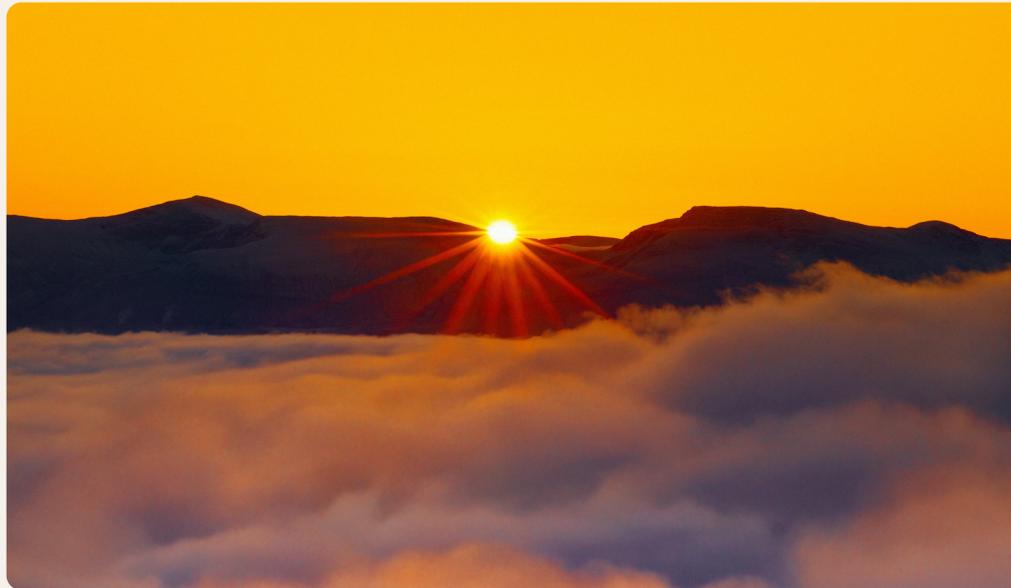
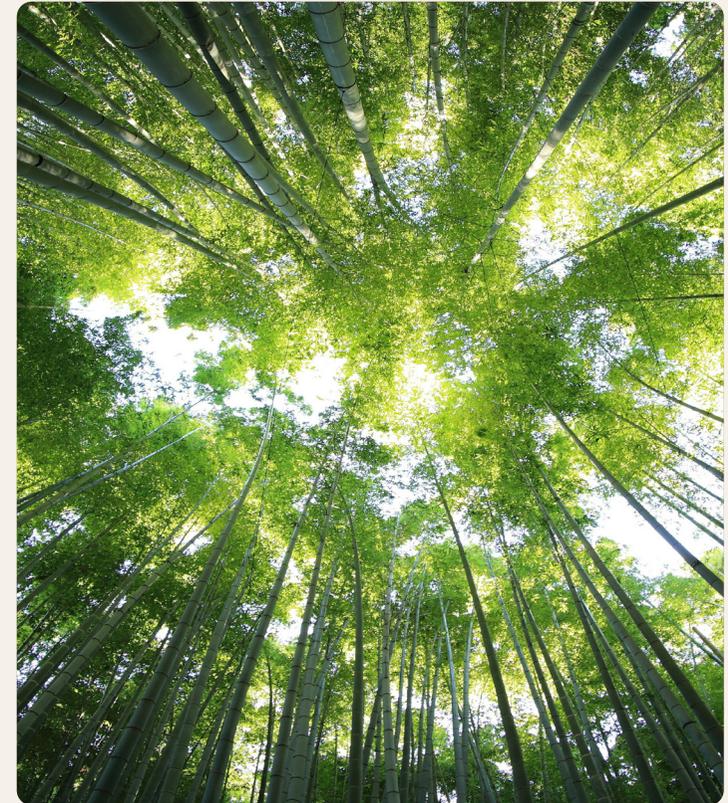


AEQUITAS GLOBAL

2026 Outlook

AEQUITAS
GLOBAL





“Some have said 2026 will be a reset year - a year for dust to settle after the storms. Others wonder if the worst is still to come.”

Dorothea Hodge CBE

Foreword

As we enter 2026, the world is moving into a more turbulent phase than we have seen for at least the last two decades. Today, we exist in an unstable environment where the world order shifts daily - chaos is normalised, and a polarised world struggles to find common ground. Disinformation rules.



Where does this leave the progressive organisations, institutions, and leaders we work alongside, those committed to tackling some of the world's deepest challenges? I believe it leaves us with an opportunity to think differently about how we advance the values we believe in, even in a more uncertain and fragmented world. It is our role as communicators to lead with audacious hope - to convince the world not to wallow in the darkness but see the opportunities and galvanise energy. After all, it is the cracks that let the light in.

Some have said 2026 will be a reset year - a year for dust to settle after the storms. Others wonder if the worst is still to come. Wars may end, new wars may start.

But it is against this backdrop that we must still note how far we have come. Global development budgets shifted last year, but the world counted universal electricity access in 45 countries. Today, women hold 27 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide. Neglected tropical diseases have been eliminated in 54 countries. The journey may not be linear, but every day we continue forward.

There is much to be done - toward the end of last year, I was struck by the reality that instead of ending poverty, which was the ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals, 622 million

people are projected to be living in extreme poverty by 2030, with more than 680 million people suffering from hunger. These figures have stayed with me. Having worked across many parts of the world, I understand what these numbers mean for people's daily lives, dignity, and opportunities.

Perhaps the best metaphor for how we see the world in 2026 is the Japanese art of Kintsugi - we acknowledge the brokenness, but we don't abandon it - together with our clients, we are carefully and intentionally piecing the parts back together, honouring the original, and through our collaboration - creating something more exquisite.

There is beauty in the journey to repair - and we must focus on this, not on the chaos.

And let's not forget that when Artemis launches into space in February, 2026 might be the year we send a woman, and an African American, to the moon.

Dorothea Hodge

Dorothea Hodge CBE
Founding Director
Aequitas Global

The World in 2026 - Silence as intent

In 2026, the 'polycrisis' is simply our new normal; we are in a continued and lasting state of geopolitical fragmentation.

The world is not only shaped by major shocks, but by the pace at which they overturn long-held assumptions. For anyone working across borders, the central risk has shifted from operational disruption to reputational volatility. In a world where neutrality is increasingly read as avoidance, our silence is now liable to be interpreted as intent.

No one can predict the future, and it would be difficult to produce an exhaustive list of risks facing us in 2026. But to select just three forces that may define 2026, I'd say 1. The weaponisation of critical resources, 2. Digital fragmentation, and 3. A global demographic time bomb. These sit atop a wider backdrop of a global economy running on fumes. Governments are juggling high debt with low growth, while climate change is turning environmental shocks into drivers of political instability. The era of optimistic 'green transition' has been replaced by a raw scramble for security. Assertive nations in the Global South (like Chile and Namibia) are rewriting the rules, banning raw exports to leverage their critical minerals. But where governance is weak, this scramble deepens instability, leaving populations feeling pillaged rather than empowered.

Parallel to this, as we grapple with AI and its real-life impacts (good and bad), we are navigating three incompatible regimes: Brussels as the ethical referee, Beijing prioritising state stability, and Washington chasing market dominance. This divergence creates isolated spheres of reality, complicating not just strategy, but truth itself.

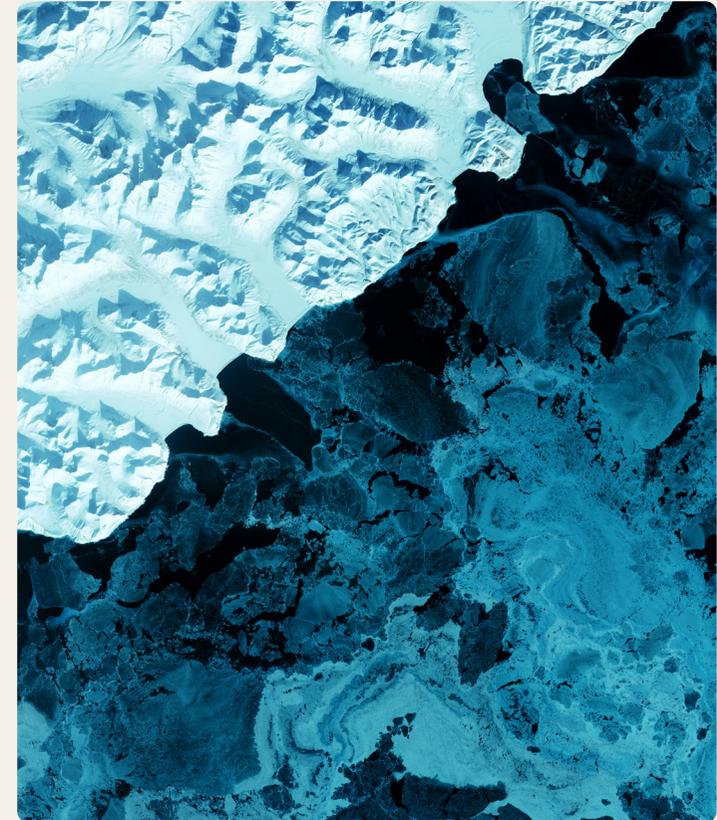
Simultaneously, we are facing a crisis of idle potential. A generation of unemployed youth feels locked out of the economic contract, catalysing social unrest that fiscally constrained governments cannot ignore, but also cannot afford to absorb.

So, how do you prepare for 2026? It requires more than polished CSR. 2026 calls for strategic empathy that moves beyond observation and into genuine alignment with the lived realities of stakeholders - from disaffected youth in cities the world over to the resource-holding communities in the Sahel. Success belongs to those who articulate a purpose that holds firm even as geopolitical temperatures rise. In a fractured world, the greatest risk is not saying the wrong thing, but failing to understand why the world has stopped listening.



By Harvir Sangha

“In a world where neutrality is increasingly read as avoidance, our silence is now liable to be interpreted as intent.”



Africa

Something extraordinary happens when 1.4 billion people decide the old story no longer fits.

Africa in 2026 stands at that precise inflection point, where decades of potential transform into undeniable momentum. If you walk through Lagos at dawn, Nairobi at midday, or Cape Town at dusk, you feel what the statistics cannot capture: the crackle of possibility, the weight of history shifting beneath your feet. This continent is not waiting for permission to rewrite its narrative. It already has.

The African Continental Free Trade Area now binds fifty-five nations into the world's largest single market. But forget the bureaucratic language. What this means is a woman in Accra can build software and sell it in Lusaka without the old colonial borders strangling her ambition. What it means is goods moving, money flowing, ideas crossing deserts and forests as though the artificial lines never existed.

Last year, African startups pulled in over £2.5 billion, and here's what matters most: African money fuelled it. Not Silicon Valley writing cheques it could revoke on a whim, but Lagos investors backing Lagos founders, Kenyan capital trusting Kenyan vision. The dependency narrative just died, and nobody bothered with a funeral.

Now consider the people behind these numbers. Sixty percent of Africa's population is under twenty-five. That's not a statistic awaiting interpretation. That's your Uber driver in Kigali who codes mobile apps between shifts. That's the university graduate in Nigeria launching a solar energy startup from her bedroom.

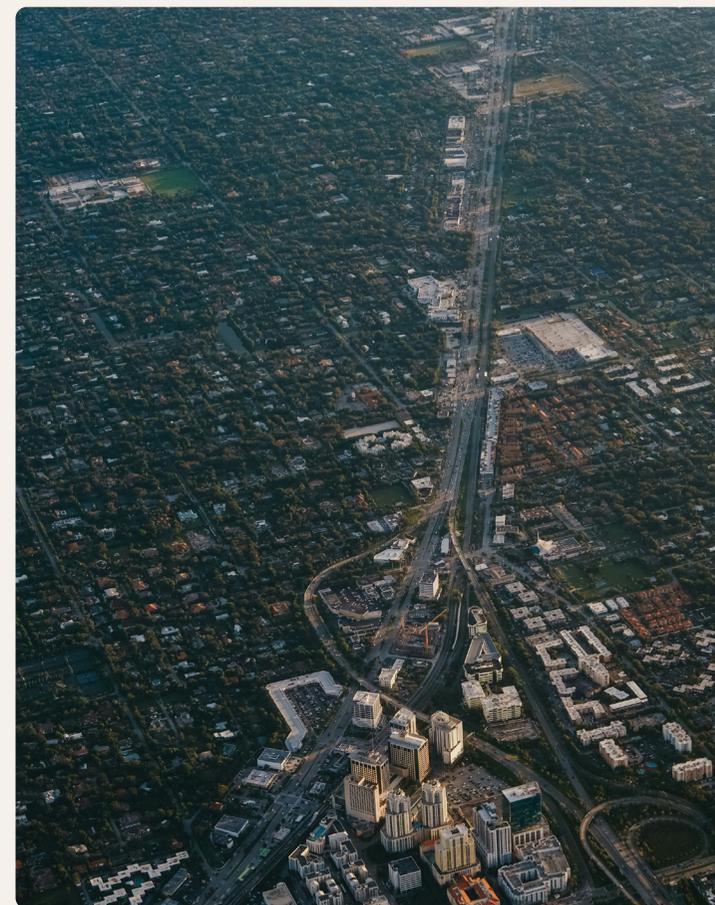
By 2030, 230 million jobs will demand digital skills, and this generation is not asking if they're ready. They're already building the infrastructure, teaching themselves Python at midnight, turning phone screens into doorways to global markets.

The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System now shifts

currency across borders faster than traditional banks can process a single transaction. Fibre optic cables snake beneath African soil, stitching together innovation hubs that were isolated only about a decade ago. A teenager in Kampala can collaborate with a developer in Dakar in real time, building solutions the West hasn't imagined yet.

Something else stirs beneath the surface on the continent. Global powers queue for Africa's lithium, cobalt, rare earth minerals. But African nations no longer hand over raw materials and watch others profit. They are demanding processing plants on African soil, African jobs, African wealth retained.

The world should not be talking about Africa's potential any more. Potential is what you discuss when nothing's happening. What is happening across Africa in 2026 is transformation at velocity, the kind that redraws maps and humbles forecasters. The future everyone kept promising Africa has arrived early, and we're building it ourselves.



By Jesse Cheto

“This continent is not waiting for permission to rewrite its narrative. It already has.”



UK

As we enter 2026, the United Kingdom stands at a critical juncture, balancing domestic economic pressures with evolving geopolitical challenges that will shape the years ahead.



By Simon Benson

“Rebuilding confidence will require exceptional leadership, clarity of purpose and a measure of luck if Britain is to regain belief in itself.”

Economically, 2026 looks set to be a year of modest but uneven growth, with the UK continuing to face subdued domestic demand, constrained business investment, and persistent cost pressures that will lead to slower GDP expansion compared with recent years - but no recession. But the cost-of-living challenge remains central: households face rising housing costs and stagnant incomes, while firms contend with elevated wage and materials costs. Strengthening competitiveness and investment, especially in high-growth sectors such as AI and clean energy, will be crucial for sustainable expansion this year.

Amid these economic challenges, the UK's role on the geopolitical stage continues to evolve. The first week of January has seen European leaders scrambling to issue a joint statement about Greenland's sovereignty. But this plays to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's strengths. Whilst he has faced some criticism domestically, his stock rose substantially across the diplomatic world in 2025, navigating the UK toward closer relations with the EU whilst charming the White House with a mix of Royal invitations and mutually agreeable trade negotiations. This has positioned the UK as an important player in transatlantic diplomacy.

Indeed, the UK continues to engage in global diplomacy and security cooperation, especially with the ongoing war in Ukraine. Conversely, the UK is working to strengthen

ties with the United States and other partners on defence, intelligence-sharing, and technology governance - critical areas as alliances adapt to 21st-century threats. Engagement with international institutions, from the UN to the World Trade Organization, also positions the UK as an advocate for a rules-based order in a world where the established rules seem to be changing on a weekly basis.

At home, the government is preparing for further “EU resets” aimed at reducing trade frictions - a response to ongoing post-Brexit economic realities. Politically, Starmer will have to ensure this is not seen as re-entering the EU through the back door. Meanwhile, opinion polling for the May elections suggests voters are focused less on traditional party loyalties, creating momentum for Reform UK and the Green Party.

The UK's success in 2026 will depend on promoting economic growth, managing inflation, international collaboration, political leadership stability and policy clarity that brings confidence to businesses and households. One glimmer of hope for the government is the fact that the FTSE 100 has reached record highs, signalling that the markets are seeing stability. The choices the UK makes - from internal economic reforms to its role in international alliances - will be pivotal in shaping national resilience, confidence and prosperity.



By Stephen Boakes

“Economic insecurity, migration and national identity increasingly shape how sustainability and social value initiatives are judged.”



Europe

As Europe steps into 2026, its political centre of gravity is shifting.

The 2024 European Parliament elections marked a turning point. Centrist parties lost ground as populist, conservative and far-right movements advanced across France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Central and Eastern Europe. Their growing influence is already visible. In late 2025, the Parliament moved to weaken corporate sustainability reporting and due diligence rules, triggering backlash from environmental and human rights groups.

That momentum is unlikely to fade. March 2026 elections could reinforce these trends. In Germany, state elections in Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate are expected to strengthen the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), constraining the governing coalition and hardening debates on migration, climate ambition and fiscal policy. In Slovenia, parliamentary elections may deliver a more

conservative or populist government, adding to the bloc of EU states sceptical of ambitious sustainability regulation.

Wider dynamics compound the challenge. France enters 2026 politically weakened, with legislative gridlock and the far-right Rassemblement National dominating debate. Paris is increasingly framing sustainability through competitiveness, cost and sovereignty. Alongside Italy and several Central and Eastern European governments, this points to a fragmented, cautious Union.

For communicators, the implications are clear: Europe is no longer a single audience. Public receptivity now varies sharply by country and constituency. Economic insecurity, migration and national identity increasingly shape how sustainability and social value initiatives are judged.

Although the EU remains a global climate leader, a growing “greenlash” is complicating the narrative. Green Deal policies are frequently portrayed as costly or disconnected from everyday concerns, particularly amid cost-of-living pressures and competitiveness debates.

Messaging on energy transition, industrial policy and the circular economy must adapt.

To stay credible, sustainability narratives must connect directly to social priorities — jobs, affordability, fairness and resilience — and demonstrate tangible local benefits. At the same time, organisations face tighter scrutiny, from EU political advertising rules in 2026 to transatlantic pressure on trade, defence and climate policy.

Strategic communications imperatives for 2026:

- Plan for regional variation: Tailor narratives to local political realities
- Reframe sustainability: Anchor environmental ambition in social and economic value
- Stay agile: Prepare scenario-led messaging for fast-moving political change
- Build trust: Demonstrate real-world impact to counter populist scepticism



The USA



By Kirsten Xanthippe

“The seeds of hope and the recovery plan begin with understanding the political psychology that dominates the electorate - grievance politics - and listening seriously to the people who aren’t being listened to.”

2026 began with the US catching all forecasters off guard, hastily rewriting predictions for the year ahead. The rhetoric of diplomacy and agreements between the US and Venezuela is being swiftly abandoned in favour of an unexpected show of military force.

Globally, liberal democracies have ceded too much narrative ground by defining themselves against opponents rather than articulating their own vision. In the US, that failure presents both danger and opportunity. The Midterms in November offer a chance for Democrats to achieve congressional wins in 2026, disrupting the final years of a Trump presidency, restoring checks and balances, and rebuilding a credible opposition.

But because politics around the world is being driven by complex emotions, the seeds of hope and the recovery plan begin with understanding the political psychology that dominates the electorate - grievance politics - and listening seriously to the people who aren't being listened to.

The American Dream ethos once served as an economic promise and democratic glue: work hard, recover from setbacks, and each generation would do better than the last. That

promise rested on representative democracy giving equity through a large, home-owning middle class. As quality of life improved, the Dream expanded, and social media and tech mythology made sudden wealth feel plausible. When reality failed to deliver, millions have found themselves poorer than their parents, locked out of housing, education, and financial stability.

The emotional fallout from people in many countries becoming poorer has been corrosive. Shame and resentment have turned the shrinking middle class into a reviled “elite”, and those who haven't been able to get ahead wrongly accuse policies that promote equity, such as DEI, or immigrants as primary causes of their failure.

Grievance has curdled into blame which has been radicalised and amplified online by bad actors promising salvation

without substance. The result is a rage-driven politics willing to burn democratic institutions for the fleeting joyful emotion of Schadenfreude in the satisfaction of destruction.

The absence of hope has hollowed out the centre, particularly the centre left.

Parties must prioritise electoral maths over moral vanity. The media must call out lies directly. And politicians across the Americas and beyond must articulate a stabilising - but genuinely new - vision for a democratic future that engages people with democracy in a way that they are - and feel - heard and respected. Change is coming. Hope can shape it.

Kirsten was a founding Director of Aequitas Global, and has worked at national and state levels for the US Democrats in policy, political campaigns, and communications.

Climate

No more conversation: 2026 must be the year of climate action

2025 was a year of brutal climate reckoning. It opened with wildfires tearing through the United States and closed with deadly floods across Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The climate crisis is a lived reality for millions around the world.

That reckoning changes the conversation. The question heading into 2026 is no longer *how do we limit the climate crisis?* It is *how do we live with it, and who leads the response?*

COP has struggled to remain relevant in a fragmenting multipolar world. And yet, abandoning multilateralism would be a mistake. Beyond the grand promises, these global forums can also be spaces to form coalitions for action. In 2026 the world's second 'Global Stocktake' will take place, a moment to assess efforts to address climate change, followed closely by COP31, which will focus on practical implementation.

Although held in Turkey, Australia will act as 'President of Negotiations'. Australia epitomises the tension between escalating real-world climate impacts, accelerating energy transformation and reliance on fossil fuels. It continues backing coal in the face of all environmental evidence, as well as declining domestic and export markets. Whether understanding these tensions helps or hinders its role in negotiations remains to be seen.

At the same time, China's transition to world-leader in clean energy has re-written assumptions about what is possible, and at what speed.

Companies like Octopus Energy and Patagonia have also put planetary limits at the centre of their business models and are reshaping markets around them. In 2026, the global energy transition will be driven less by climate altruism and more by hard-nosed concerns about economic competitiveness and energy security. Far-sighted businesses will see the way to win is by throwing away the old playbook and breaking a system that is clearly failing.

More importantly, 2026 will be the year when climate adaptation moves firmly to the centre of the agenda. For our clients embedded in communities on the front line, the most urgent priority is the collective work that makes lives livable now. Farmers are planting drought-resistant crops. Neighbours are managing scarce water together. Companies like SunCulture, which loans solar-powered irrigation pumps, are growing by helping farmers adapt.

For organisations that have long-term strategic vision, the question is no longer *whether* to act, but *how boldly*. In 2026, communications that recognise this and support concerted, collective action - not spin - are the only ones that will matter.



By Annie Bruzzone

“The climate crisis is no longer a distant abstraction but a lived reality for millions around the world.”





Conflict

The majority of the world map will be marked in active conflict or at high risk of conflict in 2026.



By Ana Grube

“This year, the most resilient organisations will be those that can read the signals early.”

The two sides of news creation, communication teams and journalists, are now operating on wartime footing, in a fast-moving context reminiscent of early WWII, needing to succeed with fewer resources without losing credibility and value.

The conflict outlook now goes beyond frontlines and ceasefires; it is a system of pressures running through energy markets, sanctions regimes, shipping routes, news and social media feeds. Venezuela, Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan: these are not separate stories, but different expressions of the same reality. Hard power is back, international rules are weaker, states are increasingly using economic and informational tools to fight each other. For strategic communications and crisis support, the de facto operating model is now to stay nimble and flexible, ready to adjust a strategy in the wake of

relentless breaking news coming in hot from frontlines, summits, and press briefings.

Three implications stand out. First, defence and sanctions literacy is now essential. Media narratives will increasingly follow defence spending and money trails, and the way these shifting financial currents impact communities.

Second, conflict forecasting needs to move from security specialists into the core of communications planning. If indicators are flashing red in a country where you have programmes or partners, you should prepare strategies in advance: spotlight voices with lived experience, prepare lines of communication for potential upheaval and work to secure digital and physical operations.

Finally, neutrality can be read as a choice rather than an absence of one. We are seeing forced regime change, sanctions, asset seizures and information manipulation being used as tools by state actors, and organisations speaking about the impact of these changes will increasingly be challenged to take sides. Whether a geopolitical actor, a company, or an NGO, all will need to be radically clear about their purpose: protecting civilians, upholding international law, and ensuring that economic pressure is not borne by the most vulnerable.

This year, the most resilient organisations will be those that can read the signals early and understand the financial and political currents beneath the violence. The objective should be to communicate with integrity and clarity, neither chasing outrage nor hiding behind abstraction.

International Development

With global development budgets slashed and life-saving work grinding to an abrupt halt in 2025, it has been inspiring to witness the stoical perseverance of our clients in the face of uncontrollable events.

The decisions made in the offices of power (on both sides of the Atlantic) have had real impacts on the organisations we work for. Projects supporting women and girls that we visited and profiled in the press in 2025 will simply not operate in 2026. It is heartbreaking and infuriating. And yet we have listened to our clients reflect with gratitude for the years of support they received from foreign donors, whilst determinedly seeking new paths to continue the work that has been started.

Organisations are not giving up - rather, using this juncture as an opportunity to stop and re-route.

The rules for communicating have changed. Clients are asking more and more to be kept out of the headlines. Nobody wants to speak out for fear of jeopardising remaining fragile funding relationships. INGOS in 2026 will be prioritising internal comms to engage a bruised workforce shaken by redundancies, mergers and restructures. Stakeholder outreach will be done quietly but persistently.

2026 will be the year of reorganisation - embracing new paradigms and funding models, pivoting towards philanthropists and the private sector. The shift towards these new funders will necessitate new ways of working.

These audiences have a different attention span - organisations will need short, compelling impact reports, and standout case studies of their lifesaving work.

The mega-rich are now so rich that if combined, it is possible that the philanthropic spend could exceed what was withdrawn by governments. But these people aren't looking for soft power; they want to leave a legacy - eradicate a disease, educate a continent, provide power. Something tangible. Messages and brands will be sharpened as the lengthy grant applications of the multilaterals are replaced by attempts to catch the eye of billionaires looking to change the world.

Increased collaboration with corporates will shake things up - the interplay with the pharmaceutical sector will be critical as trials of the new Lenacapavir HIV vaccine take place both in South America and in several African countries. Done right - this 6-monthly preventative injection could transform the lives of millions, particularly rural populations who struggle to access healthcare.

What is clear in Africa is that never again will governments let so much of their country's healthcare be run by outsiders. Self-reliance is on the agenda. Ownership in global development shifts to the global majority.



By Sarah Randall

“Organisations are not giving up - rather, using this juncture as an opportunity to stop and re-route.”

Global Moments

2026 - the Year of the Fire Horse according to the Lunar New Year - marks the collision of symbolism and structural change, setting the tone for global politics, power and culture beyond the year itself.



By Odeta Konomi

Global Summits: Crowded Stage, Hard Choices

Global agenda-setting kicks off as the **World Economic Forum** (19 - 23 January, Davos) shifting the focus from recovery to resilience. **The G7 Summit** (14 - 16 June, France) will test Western cohesion, while the **Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting** (1 - 4 November, Antigua and Barbuda) reinforces the Commonwealth's role as a diplomatic convening power. **The year closes with the G20 Summit** (14 - 15 December, Miami), placing the Global South, climate finance and development at the centre of a US political moment. **COP31** (9 - 20 November), co-hosted by Australia and Turkey, is a credibility checkpoint. The gap between commitments and delivery is now the story.

Europe: Integration under Pressure

Bulgaria's adoption of the Euro (1 January) deepens monetary integration at a time of geopolitical strain. Cyprus assumes the Presidency of the Council of the EU,

influencing priorities on security, energy and enlargement as debates on European strategic autonomy intensify.

The United States: Power, Politics and Polarisation

2026 opens with the United States' withdrawal from the **World Health Organization** on 22 January, a sharp signal of multilateral disengagement with far-reaching consequences for global health governance; this will be followed on 4 July by the **US Semiquincentennial**, marking 250 years of independence amid deep political polarisation, where history is likely to be weaponised as a political instrument rather than framed as a unifying national moment; the year will culminate on 3 November with the **US Midterm Elections**, functioning as a de facto referendum on the Trump administration and carrying significant implications for international alliances, economic confidence and global policy alignment.

Elections: Democratic Stress Tests Worldwide

Votes in **Uganda** (15 January), **Thailand** (8 February), **Bangladesh** (12 February), **Colombia** (31 May), **Ethiopia** (June), **Sweden** (13 September), **Brazil** (4 October) and **Israel** (by 27 October) point to a year of volatile mandates, legitimacy challenges and contested outcomes.

Space, Sport and Soft Power

NASA's Artemis II mission returns humans to lunar orbit for the first time in over 50 years. The **FIFA Men's World Cup** (11 June - 19 July), hosted by the US, Canada and Mexico, expands to 48 teams, while the **Commonwealth Games** (23 July - 2 August) see Glasgow step in as host.

Thank you

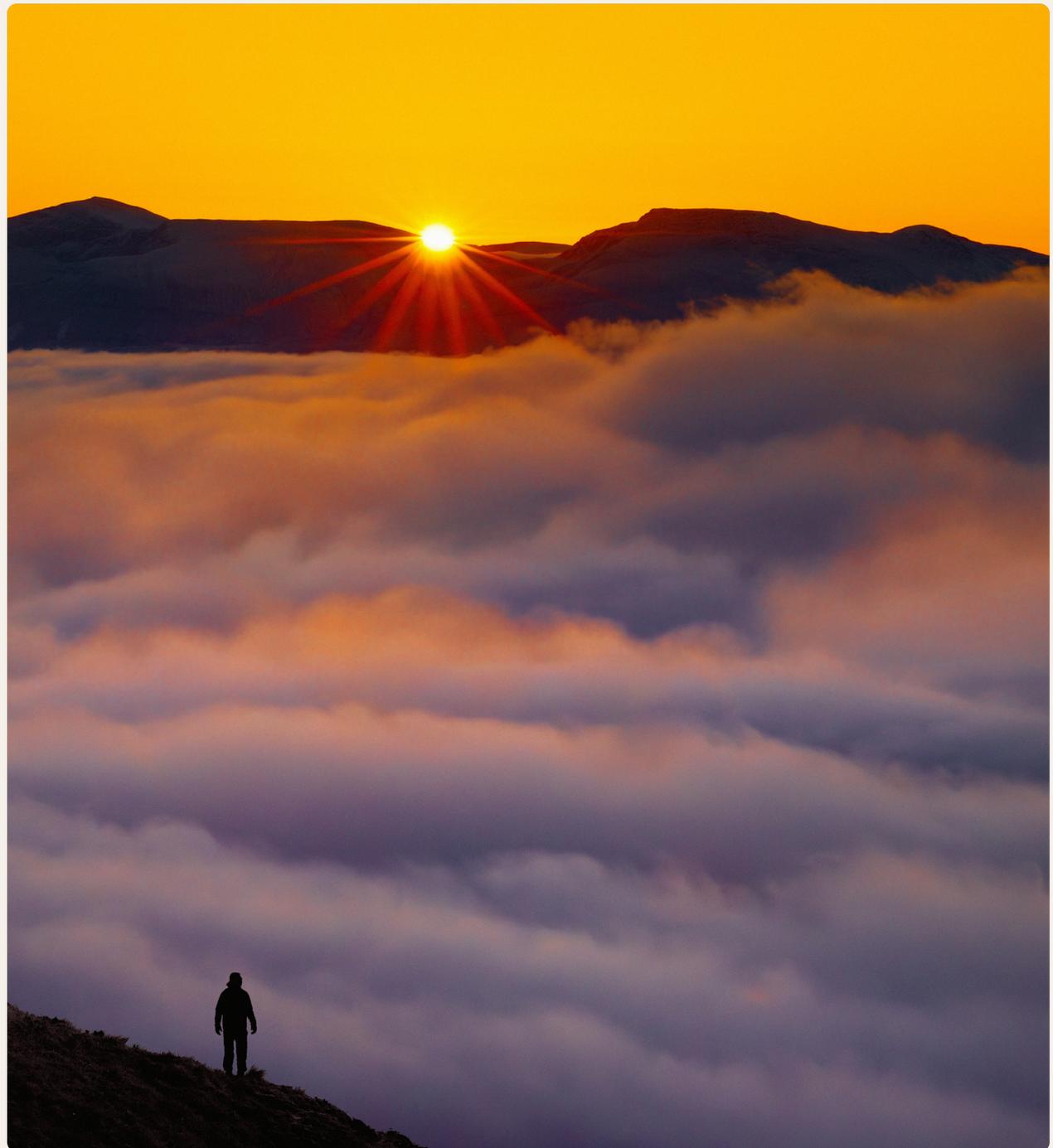


By Sophie Campbell

We're immensely proud of our team at Aequitas Global. We draw on years of communications expertise in global development at all levels - from politics and diplomacy to grassroots social innovation. We are resilient and optimistic. We care deeply about the issues we work on and bring unique insight through the work we do.

We look forward to working with organisations ready to navigate 2026 with clarity and impact, so if these perspectives resonate we'd welcome a conversation about how Aequitas Global can support your work in the year ahead.

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