A Foresight Brief

Shaping the Arab Regional Priorities For Future Readiness

Produced via co-creation with regional stakeholders

Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

- This Strategic Foresight brief, titled " **Shaping the *Arab Regional Priorities for Future Readiness*"**, was developed for the membership of the ITU for the Arab States, **using the Strategic Foresight methodology and Playbook designed by ITU-D** to foster futures thinking within its membership. The methodology, incorporating tools and frameworks from the Playbook, guided the creation of this brief. The **process was collaborative and co-creative**, involving 40+ regional stakeholders in a week-long workshop in Dubai, UAE, in November 2024, to identify regional priorities for the next five years by leveraging futures thinking as an approach and strategic foresight for practical application.

- The Strategic Foresight Brief demonstrates **a new approach for ITU-D to support its membership through innovative processes** that ensure actions are designed from informed decision-making and consider the complexities of our Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world. Shaping digital ecosystems to be future-ready requires future thinking and foresight processes, enabling members to navigate this evolving environment with confidence and resilience.

- The ITU Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC) held in Kigali from 6 to 16 June approved a set of Regional Initiatives for the period 2023-2025. The Regional Initiatives outlined in the Kigali Action Plan address specific needs for each major region of the world to advance and accelerate digital transformation. The workshop in Dubai was conducted to identify the appropriate regional priorities, which will **inform the next set of ITU-D Regional Initiatives that will be adopted at WTDC 2025**.

- This workshop comes in implementation signed in-kind contribution agreement on the 10th of June 2024 between the TDRA and the ITU titled "The Strategic Partnership to Accelerating Digital Innovation Through the i-Codi Initiative". Moreover, it builds on previous iCodi workshop including a similar workshop held virtually in 2022 to ideate the Arab Regional Initiatives adopted in WTDC 2022.

Introducing the Regional Foresight Brief

Leveraging strategic foresight for a strengthened region

- **What are futures thinking and strategic foresight?** Futures thinking is a proactive approach to exploring possible and probable futures by identifying trends, uncertainties, and emerging issues. Strategic foresight builds on these insights to inform decision-making, helping anticipate challenges and seize opportunities. Together, they empower us to shape a preferred future rather than merely react to unfolding events.

- **What is this Strategic Foresight Regional Brief for the Arab State?** Shaping digital ecosystems to be future-ready requires future thinking and foresight processes, enabling members to navigate this evolving environment with confidence and resilience. The Strategic Foresight Brief on Arab Regional Priorities is a foresight-based analyses developed by regional stakeholders using ITU-D's strategic foresight methodology. This document presents a high-level summary of key findings from the foresight exercise conducted with regional stakeholders using the Playbook.

- **What are the opportunities for more Regional Foresight Briefs?** Foresight, as a process, is a well-known methodology, and the ITU-D Innovation Service has developed a robust framework to assist Member States in addressing key research questions that may impact the achievement of an equitable digital future. This Foresight Brief is the first in a series of briefs that regional offices can utilise to guide informed decision-making, shaping digital ecosystems to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

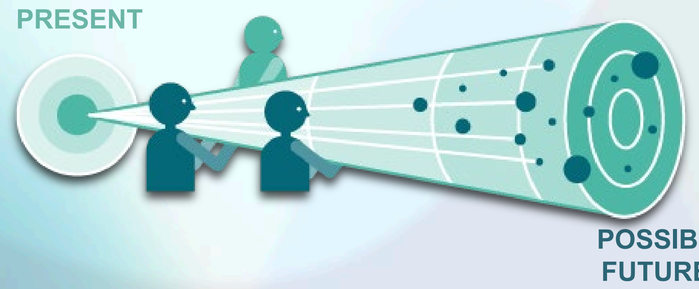


Figure: Visual representation of strategic foresight

The importance of futures thinking

Anticipating disruptions and shaping a sustainable future

- **Why is futures thinking essential in today's world?** In today's fast-paced, technology-driven world characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), futures thinking is crucial for anticipating disruptions and shaping strategic responses. It fosters innovation and builds resilience, enabling us to proactively shape change rather than merely react to it.

- **How can futures thinking enhance long-term planning?** Thinking about the future is vital for long-term planning and informed decision-making. It helps identify potential risks and opportunities before they materialise, fostering a culture of proactive problem-solving. By considering future scenarios, organisations can allocate resources effectively, prioritise initiatives, and align their strategies with evolving societal needs, creating resilient systems that can adapt to changes and meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Priority Identification

Defining Critical Focus Areas

This section presents the 6 priority umbrella topics shortlisted from 39 topics. These priorities represent key issues considered vital for advancing the Arab region’s development trajectory.

Key Topics Identified for the Region

Six critical areas identified through a process of co-creation

Infrastructure for the Benefit of Society

The emphasis on robust infrastructure and seamless connectivity reflects the demand for meaningful digital inclusion, e-governance, and smart cities to enable equitable access to services and drive innovation.

Advancing Cyber Resilience in the Arab World

Building trust and confidence in the digital ecosystem emerged as a priority through cybersecurity frameworks, digital governance policies, and the protection of critical national infrastructures to ensure secure and ethical technology use.

Innovation Ecosystems and Emerging Technology

The need for fostering innovation ecosystems was driven by the focus on integrating emerging technologies like AI and IoT into existing systems to unlock new opportunities and enhance regional competitiveness.

Skills Development, Entrepreneurship and Job Creation

Addressing critical skill gaps and fostering employment opportunities emerged as a priority to prepare the region's youth for future industries, reduce unemployment, and ensure equitable economic participation.

Sustainable Digital Futures for Key Sectors

This priority stems from the need for tailored advancements in key sectors like education, public services, and energy, aiming to enhance productivity, efficiency, and environmental sustainability while addressing unique challenges across sectors.

Fostering Economic Development and Digital Inclusion

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of bridging the digital divide, fostering public-private partnerships, and creating inclusive frameworks to ensure sustained economic growth and equitable access to opportunities.

Environment Scanning

Exploring Signals of Change

This section presents the signals and factors shaping the future of the Arab region, offering a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics across social, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal, and ethical dimensions.

Regional realities and opportunities

Signals and trends in the environment impacting the region

- The region faces some **social challenges**, including **youth unemployment**, **gender disparities**, and **rising illiteracy**, particularly in **conflict zones**. At the same time, **a tech-savvy generation** and **increasing consumer awareness** are driving demand for digital solutions, sustainability, and inclusive reforms.
- **Rapid advancements in AI, IoT, 5G, and smart city technologies** are transforming industries and fostering innovation. But challenges like the **digital divide**, **cybersecurity gaps**, and underrepresentation of women in technology highlight the need for inclusive and robust regulatory frameworks.
- **Climate change**, **water scarcity**, and **pollution** are pressing issues that **threaten agriculture, ecosystems, and public health**. **Growing investments in renewable energy** and **sustainable urban planning** signal regional efforts to combat environmental challenges, though more awareness and readiness are needed.
- **Economic diversification** into non-oil sectors, including **tourism** and **green energy**, is driving growth, but **inflation**, **poverty**, and **high youth unemployment** remain critical. The **rise of SMEs and startups** offers opportunities to transform sectors like health, education, and entertainment.
- **Geopolitical tensions**, ongoing conflicts, and political instability undermine regional development and investor confidence. Reform efforts focusing on transparency, inclusivity, and cybersecurity are key to fostering stability and resilience.
- **Evolving laws on data protection**, **labour reforms**, and **intellectual property** are gradually shaping **a more robust legal framework**. However, **outdated regulations and weak enforcement mechanisms** still hinder progress in emerging technologies and innovation.
- **Gender inequality**, **lack of accountability**, and **digital ethics** are pressing concerns in the region, undermining societal trust and inclusivity. Addressing **algorithmic bias**, **data privacy**, and **corporate social responsibility** is critical for fostering ethical and sustainable practices.

Forces of Change

Identifying Key Drivers

This section presents the emerging patterns, key trends, and drivers of change shaping future developments in the Arab region. It also highlights the mega drivers with broad, systemic influence spanning multiple domains, offering deeper insights into the forces driving transformation.

Forces shaping the future

Drivers of change for transformation in the region

- **Regional Cooperation:** Shared environmental challenges and economic pressures are catalysing a trend toward greater collective action and cross-border collaboration within the Arab region.
- **Economic Diversification and Innovation:** The shift from oil dependence to diversified economies is a defining trend, supported by the growth of SMEs, startups, and non-oil industries like tourism and renewable energy.
- **Climate Resilience and Green Economy:** Increasing water scarcity, pollution, and rising temperatures are accelerating a trend toward climate adaptation and investment in renewable energy projects.
- **Future-Looking Education and Capacity Building:** High illiteracy rates, digital exclusion, and the demand for new skills are driving a trend toward innovative, inclusive, and future-ready education systems.
- **Youth-Centric Digital Transformation:** The emergence of a tech-savvy generation and persistent youth unemployment are driving a trend towards adopting digital solutions to create jobs and enhance youth engagement.
- **Technological Disruption and Emerging Technology Adoption:** The integration of AI, IoT, and smart city technologies illustrates a trend of rapid technological disruption, despite regulatory and readiness challenges.
- **Consumer Awareness and Ethical Practices:** The rise in consumer demand for quality, sustainability, and ethical practices is fostering a trend toward transparency and responsible business operations.

Forces shaping the future

Drivers of change for transformation in the region

- **Regulatory and Legal Modernisation:** Outdated ICT regulations and enforcement gaps underscore a trend toward modernising legal frameworks to accommodate emerging technologies and ensure consumer protection.
- **Infrastructure and Connectivity:** Inadequate infrastructure and limited technological investments are part of a broader trend hindering the region's full integration into the global digital economy.
- **Public Health and Social Well-being:** The prevalence of chronic health issues like diabetes and obesity, coupled with food insecurity, highlights a trend towards escalating demands on public health and social welfare systems.
- **Cultural Evolution Amidst Preservation Efforts:** Shifting family structures and evolving gender roles signal a cultural trend of balancing modernisation with efforts to preserve conservative traditions and heritage.
- **Geopolitical Instability and Trust:** Ongoing regional conflicts, political instability, and resource tensions are shaping a trend of diminishing trust in governance and investor confidence across the Arab region.
- **Digital Divide and Equity in Access:** Low broadband connectivity and digital illiteracy reflect a persistent trend of unequal access to digital opportunities, widening the regional digital divide.
- **Socioeconomic Inequality and Migration Pressures:** Rising poverty, income inequality, and increased refugee flows reflect a growing trend of socio-economic strains and migration-related pressures on public services.

Driver Mapping

Assessing Impact and Uncertainty

This section presents the mapped drivers of change, showing their varying levels of impact and uncertainty. The analysis highlighted how different drivers influenced each critical topic differently, helping to identify the most critical and uncertain factors for strategic focus.

Key influencers in the region

Mega drivers shaping the future of the Arab region

The future of the Arab region is being shaped by powerful forces, each playing a crucial role in determining how education will evolve. These drivers offer both opportunities and challenges, and their impact and certainty vary, but together they paint a picture of the changes to come.

HIGH IMPACT

MEDIUM IMPACT

LOW IMPACT

Mapping these drivers based on their impact and uncertainty is a critical step in foresight.

It helps identify the forces that will have the most significant influence on shaping the future while acknowledging the unpredictability of their trajectories. By distinguishing between high-impact, uncertain drivers and more stable trends, this exercise enables us to focus on what matters most—preparing for a range of plausible scenarios and ensuring resilience in the face of uncertainty.

This approach provides a structured foundation for strategic planning, fostering agility and informed decision-making in an ever-changing landscape.

High Uncertainty

Medium Uncertainty

Low Uncertainty

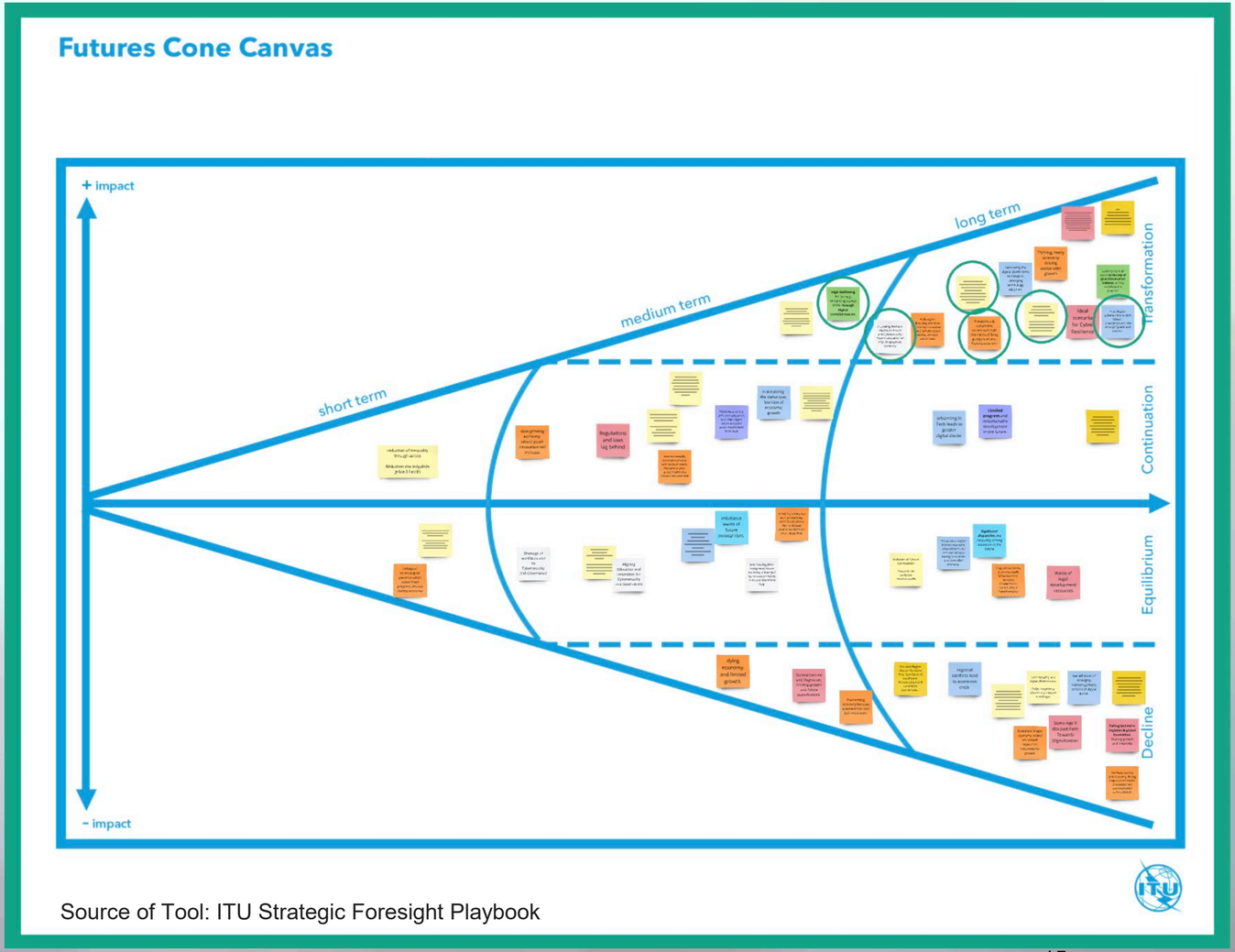
Scenario Planning

Exploring Future Possibilities

This section presents the development of future scenarios based on driver mapping. Key drivers are prioritised based on relevance to the topic, and used to craft four or more scenarios, exploring diverse trajectories shaped by combinations of impactful and uncertain forces. The drivers were visualised using a prioritisation tool, illustrating their influence and alignment with the vision over short- and long-term timeframes.

The Cone of the Futures

Prioritising the desired scenarios



By pairing combinations of critical drivers, stakeholders developed a diverse collection of **52 possible futures**—some positive, others negative, and some business as usual.

These scenarios captured a range of pathways shaped by varying levels of impact and uncertainty associated with the drivers per critical topic.

Through collaborative analysis, stakeholders then prioritized **six transformational desired scenarios** from these 52 possible futures that best aligned with the region's aspirations and opportunities.

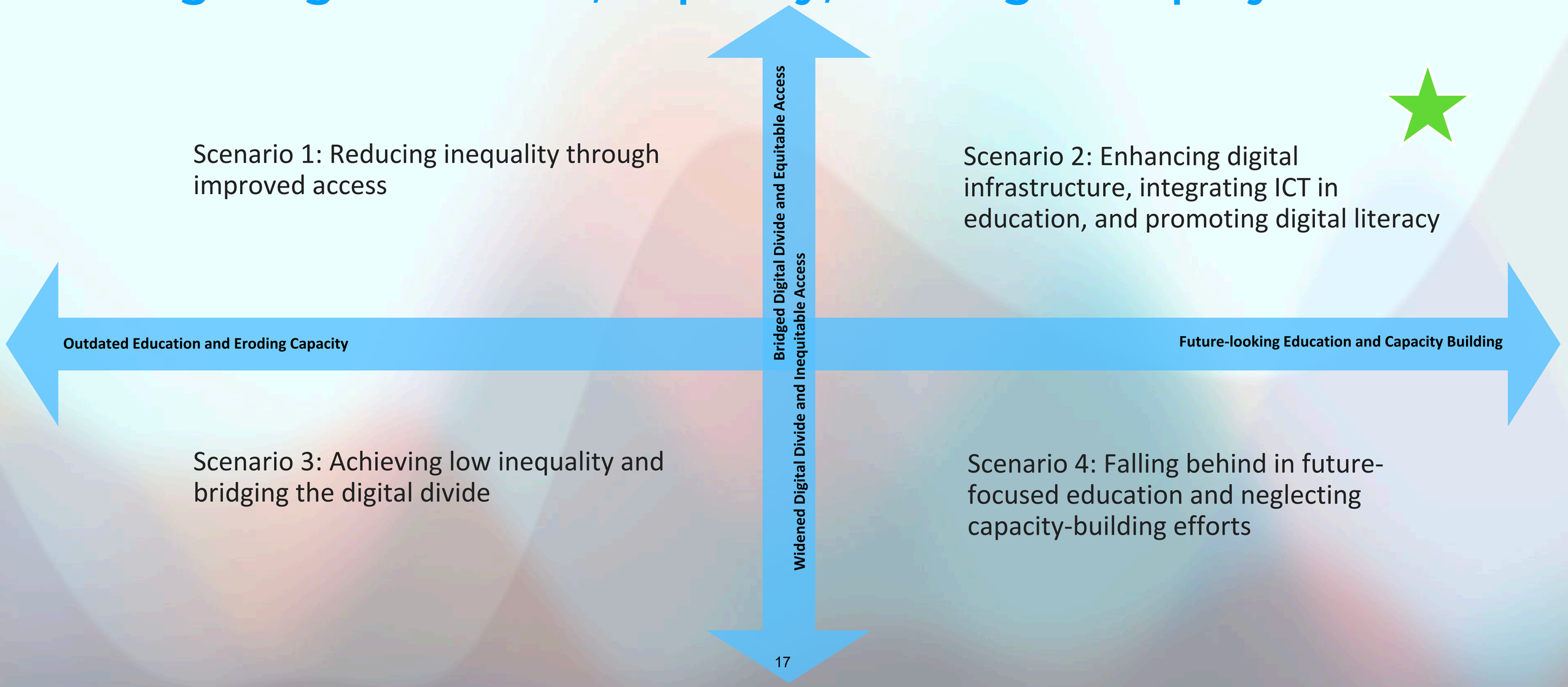
The futures of the Arab region

Possible scenarios for tomorrow’s risks and opportunities

*This section presents a set of scenarios across the six critical topic areas, with the desired scenario for each **marked with a green star**. These transformational scenarios are further detailed through a storytelling approach, bringing the vision to life and inspiring actionable outcomes.*

Infrastructure for the Benefit of Society

Navigating Education, Capacity, and Digital Equity



Scenario 1: Reducing inequality through improved access

Scenario 2: Enhancing digital infrastructure, integrating ICT in education, and promoting digital literacy

Scenario 3: Achieving low inequality and bridging the digital divide

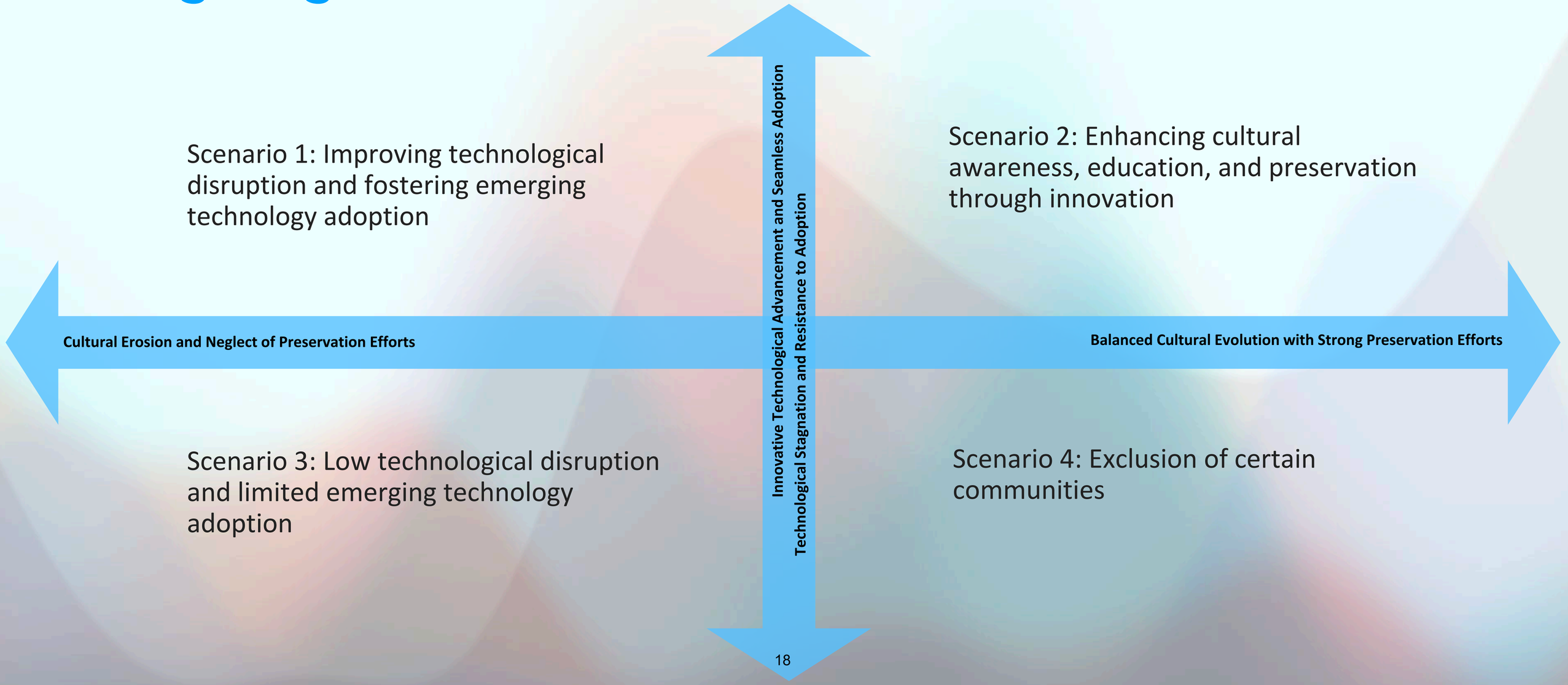
Scenario 4: Falling behind in future-focused education and neglecting capacity-building efforts

Infrastructure for the Benefit of Society

Navigating Cultural Preservation and Tech Advancements

Scenario 1: Improving technological disruption and fostering emerging technology adoption

Scenario 2: Enhancing cultural awareness, education, and preservation through innovation



Scenario 3: Low technological disruption and limited emerging technology adoption

Scenario 4: Exclusion of certain communities

Priority Scenario I: Deep dive

Enhanced Digital Infrastructure and Literacy

The Arab region envisions a future where digital infrastructure, ICT in education, and digital literacy are seamlessly integrated, transforming learning environments and bridging the digital divide. This scenario is driven by equitable access to technology and future-focused education that builds the capacity of both students and educators. Enhanced digital infrastructure enables public Wi-Fi initiatives, virtual classrooms, and the development of smart learning systems. These advancements promote inclusive access to education, ensuring that no community is left behind. Curriculum development and interactive learning methods leverage ICT to make education more engaging and accessible, while teacher training and technical support teams ensure that educators and institutions are equipped to embrace these changes. The scenarios indicates increased investments in broadband infrastructure and robust IT support as essentials to sustain these systems, along with community outreach initiatives to promote digital literacy.

However, the scenario also presents challenges. Increased screen time can lead to digital addiction, and job displacement or skill mismatches may emerge as technology evolves faster than people's ability to adapt. Privacy concerns, environmental impacts, and ethical and regulatory challenges highlight the need for careful planning and oversight. While negatives such as privacy issues and environmental consequences require mitigation, the benefits of integrated ICT in education promise a future of greater learning opportunities, reduced inequities, and empowered communities. By addressing these challenges collaboratively, the region can ensure digital connectivity becomes a force for inclusive growth and capacity building.

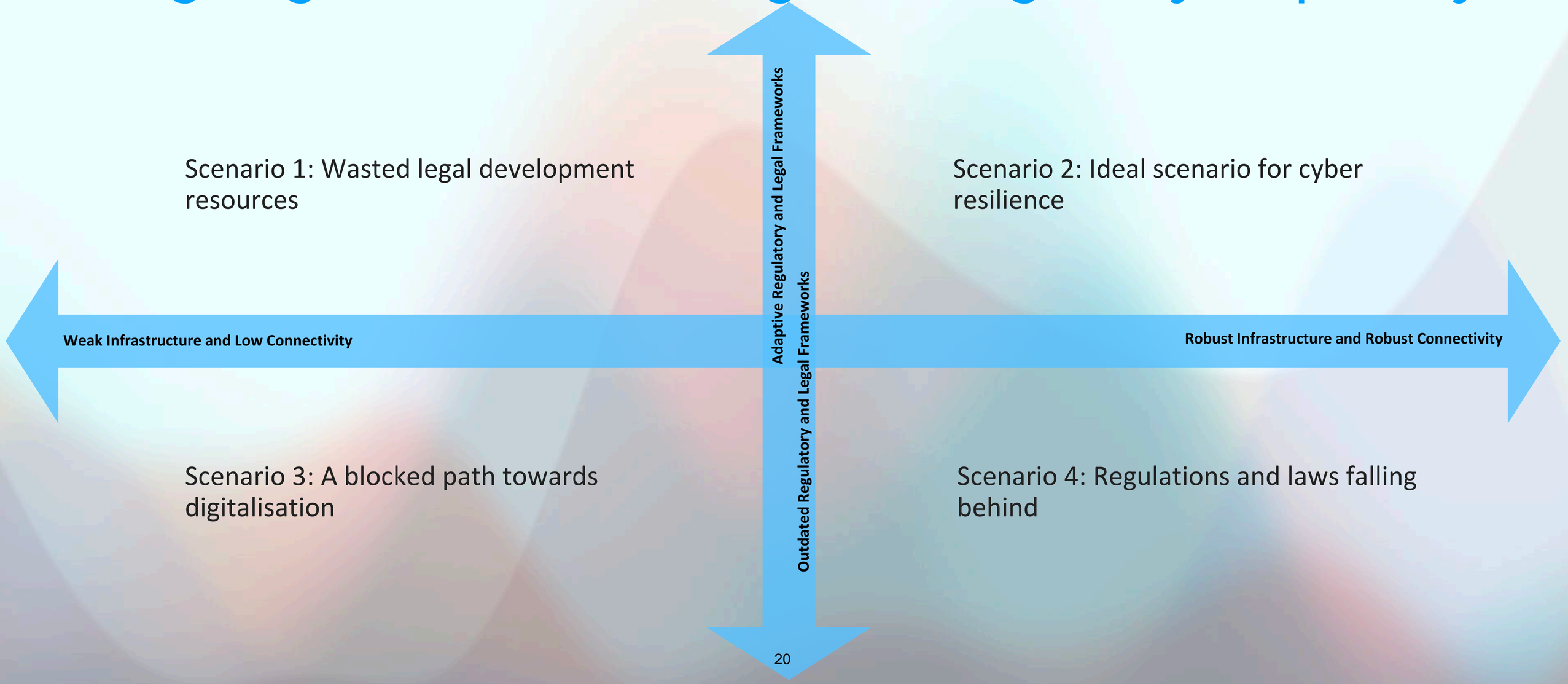
Source of Image: Generative AI

Advancing Cyber Resilience in the Arab World

Navigating Infrastructure Strength and Regulatory Adaptability

Scenario 1: Wasted legal development resources

Scenario 2: Ideal scenario for cyber resilience

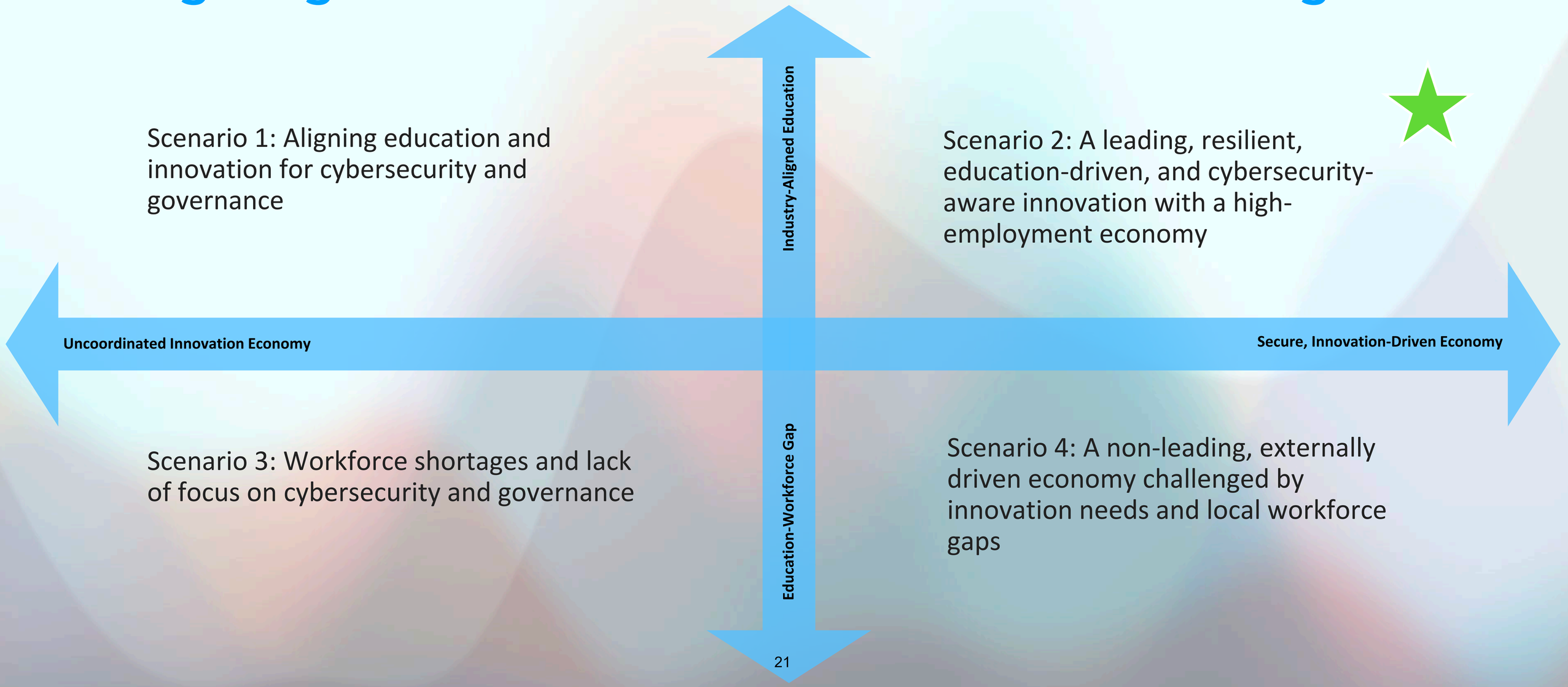


Scenario 3: A blocked path towards digitalisation

Scenario 4: Regulations and laws falling behind

Advancing Cyber Resilience in the Arab World

Navigating Economic Innovation and Workforce Alignment



Scenario 1: Aligning education and innovation for cybersecurity and governance

Scenario 2: A leading, resilient, education-driven, and cybersecurity-aware innovation with a high-employment economy

Scenario 3: Workforce shortages and lack of focus on cybersecurity and governance

Scenario 4: A non-leading, externally driven economy challenged by innovation needs and local workforce gaps

Priority Scenario II: Deep dive ★

Resilient, Education-Focused, Cybersecure Innovation Economy

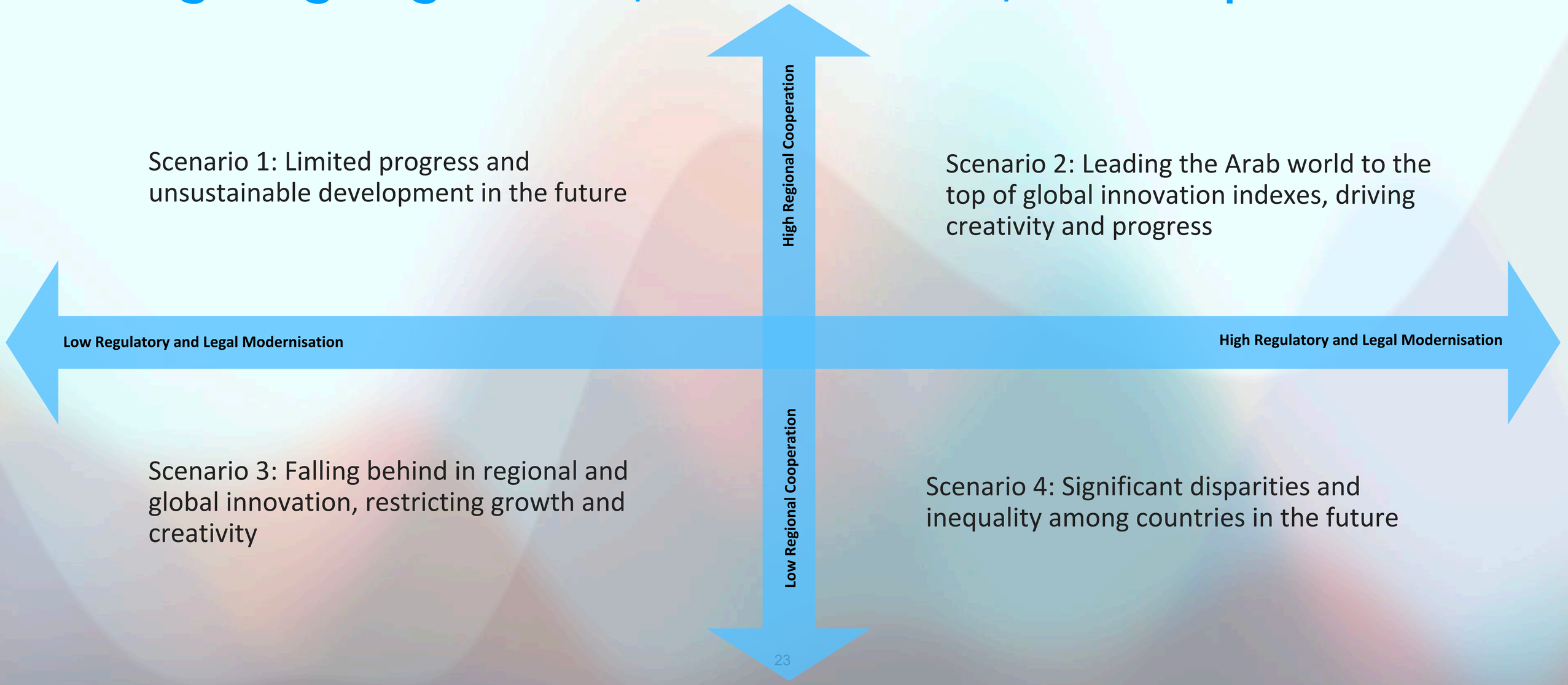
The Arab region envisions a future defined by a resilient, education-driven, and cybersecurity-aware innovation economy, fostering high employment and global competitiveness. This scenario is built on industry-aligned education and a coordinated effort to navigate the challenges of an unregulated innovation economy. With a focus on cybersecurity resilience and tech governance, the region positions itself as a global hub for cybersecurity and innovation. Investments in cybersecurity research and development, coupled with partnerships for technology exchange, enhance international influence in tech governance frameworks. The emergence of startups and entrepreneurship drives diversification, reducing reliance on legacy industries and unlocking new markets for employment in cybersecurity and technology sectors. Education plays a pivotal role, equipping a skilled workforce prepared for emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and IoT. Enhanced collaboration between academia and industries ensures curriculum alignment with market demands, boosting employment and reducing socio-economic inequalities. Increased digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness across all education levels foster public trust in digital infrastructure and governance.

However, this transformation comes with challenges. Regulatory red tape hampers startups, while over-reliance on AI-driven solutions and unregulated tech expansion risk volatility and ecosystem harm. Automation and tech monopolies further pose threats to employment and competition. Despite these hurdles, the region's focus on diversification, resilience, and innovation lays the foundation for sustained growth. By addressing challenges collaboratively, the Arab region can achieve a secure, inclusive, and highly competitive innovation economy, improving quality of life and fostering technological leadership.

Source of Image: Generative AI

Innovation Ecosystems & Emerging Tech

Navigating Regulations, Modernisation, and Cooperation



Scenario 1: Limited progress and unsustainable development in the future

Scenario 2: Leading the Arab world to the top of global innovation indexes, driving creativity and progress

Scenario 3: Falling behind in regional and global innovation, restricting growth and creativity

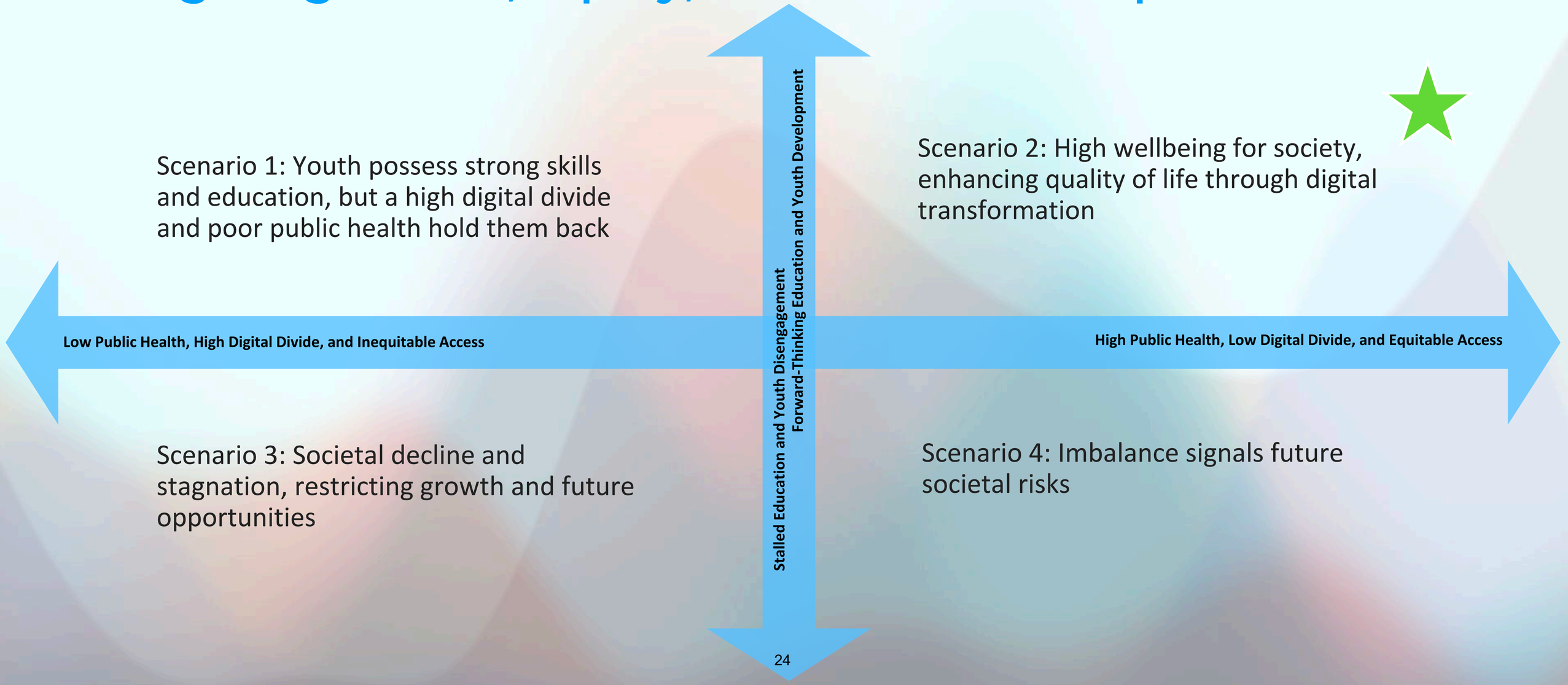
Scenario 4: Significant disparities and inequality among countries in the future

Innovation Ecosystems & Emerging Tech

Navigating Health, Equity, and Youth Development

Scenario 1: Youth possess strong skills and education, but a high digital divide and poor public health hold them back

Scenario 2: High wellbeing for society, enhancing quality of life through digital transformation



Scenario 3: Societal decline and stagnation, restricting growth and future opportunities

Scenario 4: Imbalance signals future societal risks

Priority Scenario III: Deep dive

High Wellbeing for Society through Digital Transformation

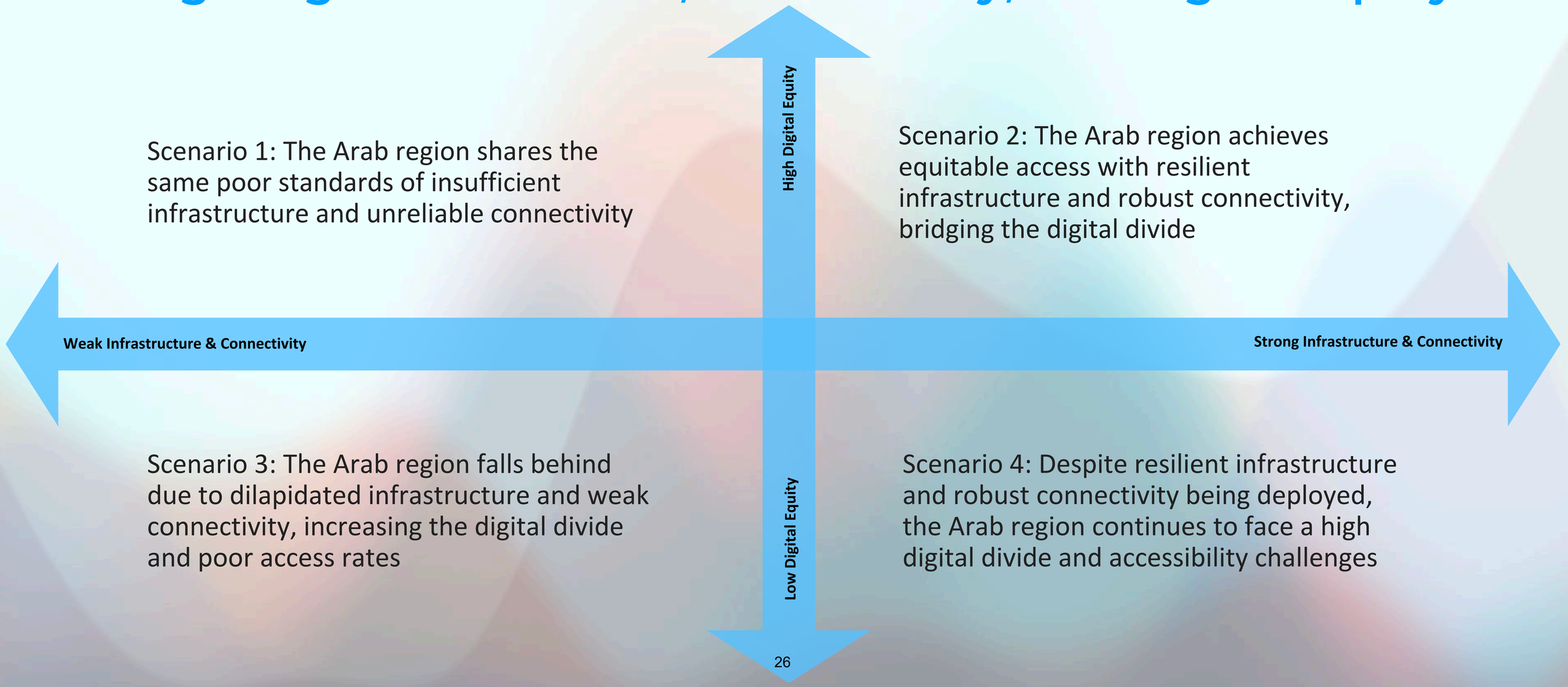
In a digitally transformed Arab region, the vision of High Wellbeing for Society comes alive, driven by innovation ecosystems and emerging technologies. At its core are two powerful forces: high public health standards with equitable access and forward-thinking education that prepares youth for future opportunities. This scenario envisions stronger public health systems, marked by better disease management, enhanced public health data, and resilience during crises. These advancements lead to increased life expectancy and proactive policy-making. Digital transformation reduces inequalities by enabling access to digital services, improving rural development, and bridging the urban-rural divide. At the same time, enhanced education systems and advanced skills training ensure a workforce ready for the future. Economic productivity thrives through increased exports of technology, a boost to GDP, and the emergence of vibrant innovation ecosystems. Startups flourish, fostering entrepreneurship and reducing inequality, particularly in rural areas. Public services become more efficient and accessible, with reduced corruption through digital monitoring.

However, challenges persist. Cybersecurity risks rise, and automation displaces jobs, potentially widening divides where access to technology is limited. Income inequalities may emerge between sectors, and low-income communities may struggle to adapt to new systems. This scenario paints a future where quality of life is enhanced by digital transformation, but it also highlights the importance of addressing inequities and managing risks. With shared aspirations and collaborative action, the Arab region can ensure that innovation drives inclusive and sustainable growth.

Source of Image: Generative AI

Skills, Entrepreneurship & Job Creation

Navigating Infrastructure, Connectivity, and Digital Equity



Scenario 1: The Arab region shares the same poor standards of insufficient infrastructure and unreliable connectivity

Scenario 2: The Arab region achieves equitable access with resilient infrastructure and robust connectivity, bridging the digital divide

Scenario 3: The Arab region falls behind due to dilapidated infrastructure and weak connectivity, increasing the digital divide and poor access rates

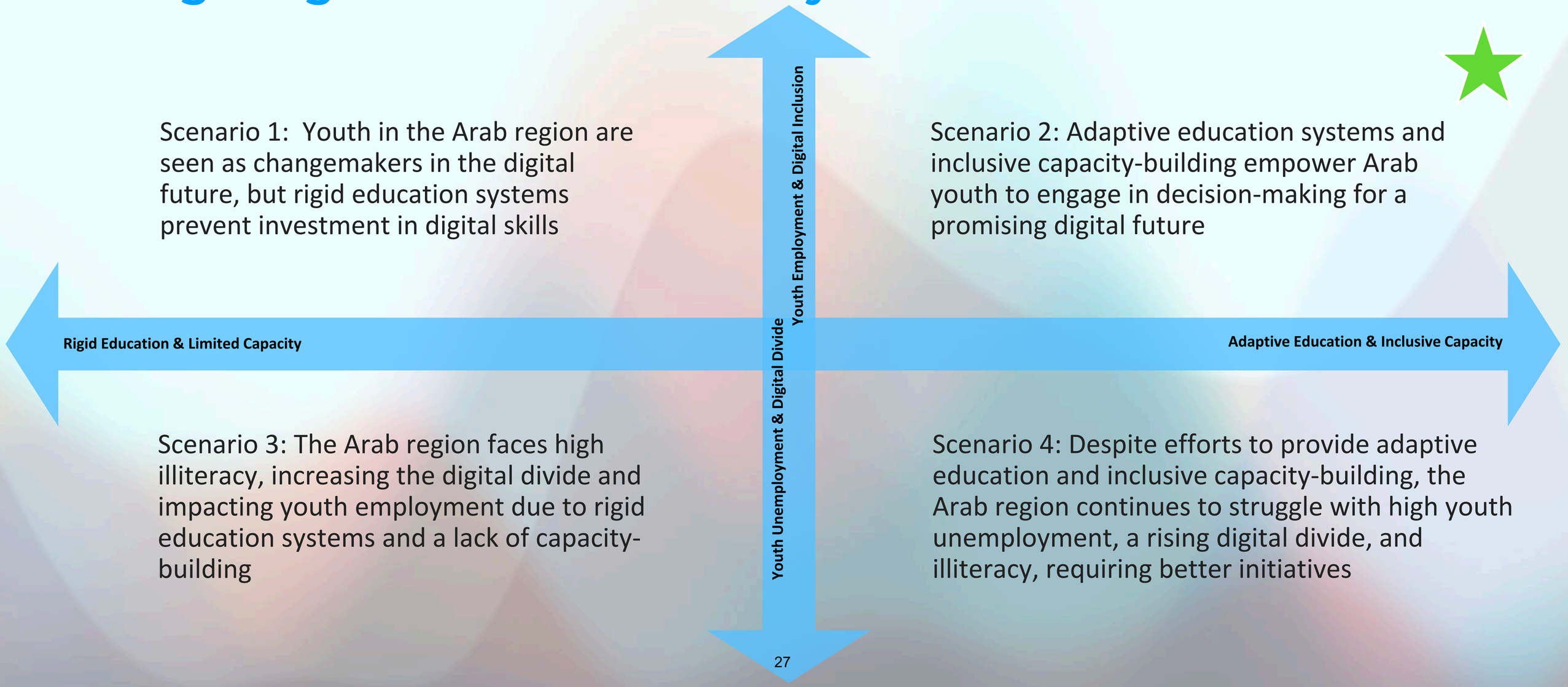
Scenario 4: Despite resilient infrastructure and robust connectivity being deployed, the Arab region continues to face a high digital divide and accessibility challenges

Skills, Entrepreneurship & Job Creation

Navigating Education Flexibility and Youth Inclusion

Scenario 1: Youth in the Arab region are seen as changemakers in the digital future, but rigid education systems prevent investment in digital skills

Scenario 2: Adaptive education systems and inclusive capacity-building empower Arab youth to engage in decision-making for a promising digital future



Scenario 3: The Arab region faces high illiteracy, increasing the digital divide and impacting youth employment due to rigid education systems and a lack of capacity-building

Scenario 4: Despite efforts to provide adaptive education and inclusive capacity-building, the Arab region continues to struggle with high youth unemployment, a rising digital divide, and illiteracy, requiring better initiatives

Priority Scenario IV: Deep dive

Adaptive Education Systems Empowering Arab Youth

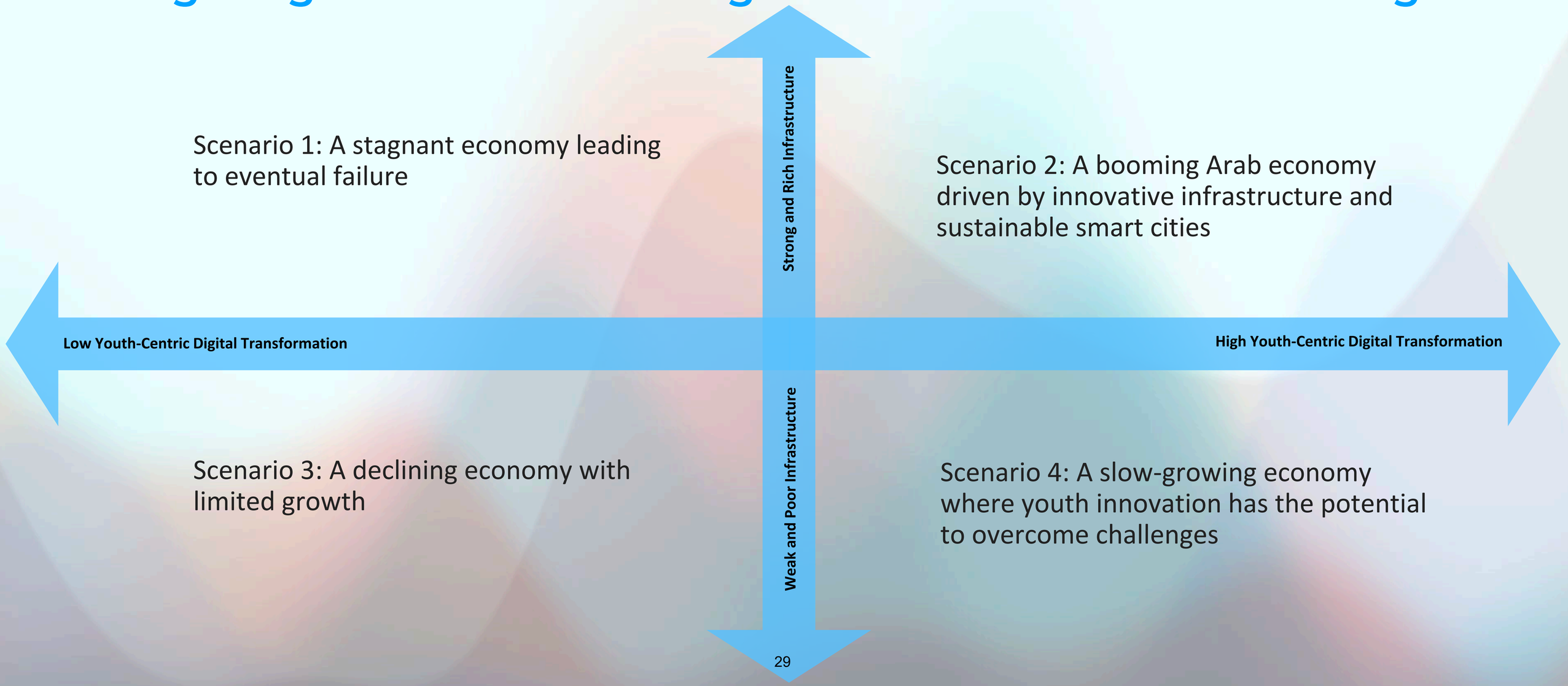
The Arab region envisions a future where adaptive education systems and inclusive capacity building empower its youth to actively shape a promising digital future. This scenario centers on fostering skill development and job creation by aligning education, industry, and governance to prepare young people for leadership roles in the evolving digital landscape. A focus on digital inclusion and youth employment leads to reduced unemployment, improved access to technology, and strengthened regional economies. Aligned educational programs and flexible learning platforms ensure that graduates are job-ready, while a culture of lifelong learning and continuous skills upgrading equips all age groups for emerging industries. Enhanced digital literacy among youth fosters innovation, creating startups that address regional challenges and attracting global investors to the region's growing tech sector. This transformation bridges rural and urban educational gaps, promotes inclusivity for marginalized groups, and boosts tech-driven employment opportunities, contributing to reduced socio-economic inequalities and increased social cohesion. By connecting education with industry needs, the region builds resilience against traditional market volatility and strengthens its competitiveness in the global tech market.

However, challenges remain. Talent migration may increase, and overdependence on technology could hinder critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Smaller startups may face barriers due to rigid policies, and unequal funding distribution might leave underserved innovators behind. Despite these hurdles, the region's commitment to empowering its youth through adaptive education and inclusive capacity building ensures a future of innovation, equity, and sustainable growth in the Arab region.

Source of Image: Generative AI

Sustainable Digital Futures for Key Sectors

Navigating Youth-Centric Progress and Infrastructure Strength



Scenario 1: A stagnant economy leading to eventual failure

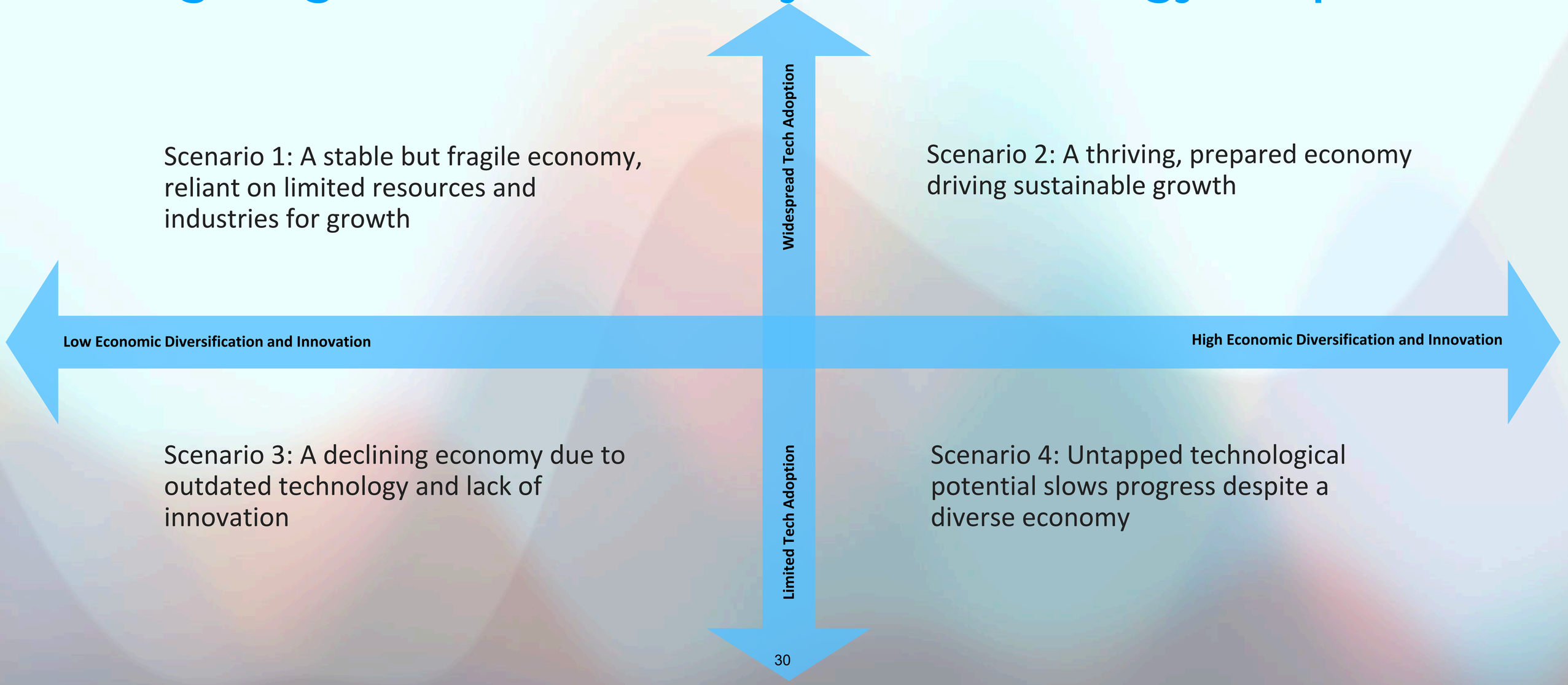
Scenario 2: A booming Arab economy driven by innovative infrastructure and sustainable smart cities

Scenario 3: A declining economy with limited growth

Scenario 4: A slow-growing economy where youth innovation has the potential to overcome challenges

Sustainable Digital Futures for Key Sectors

Navigating Economic Diversity and Technology Adoption



Scenario 1: A stable but fragile economy, reliant on limited resources and industries for growth

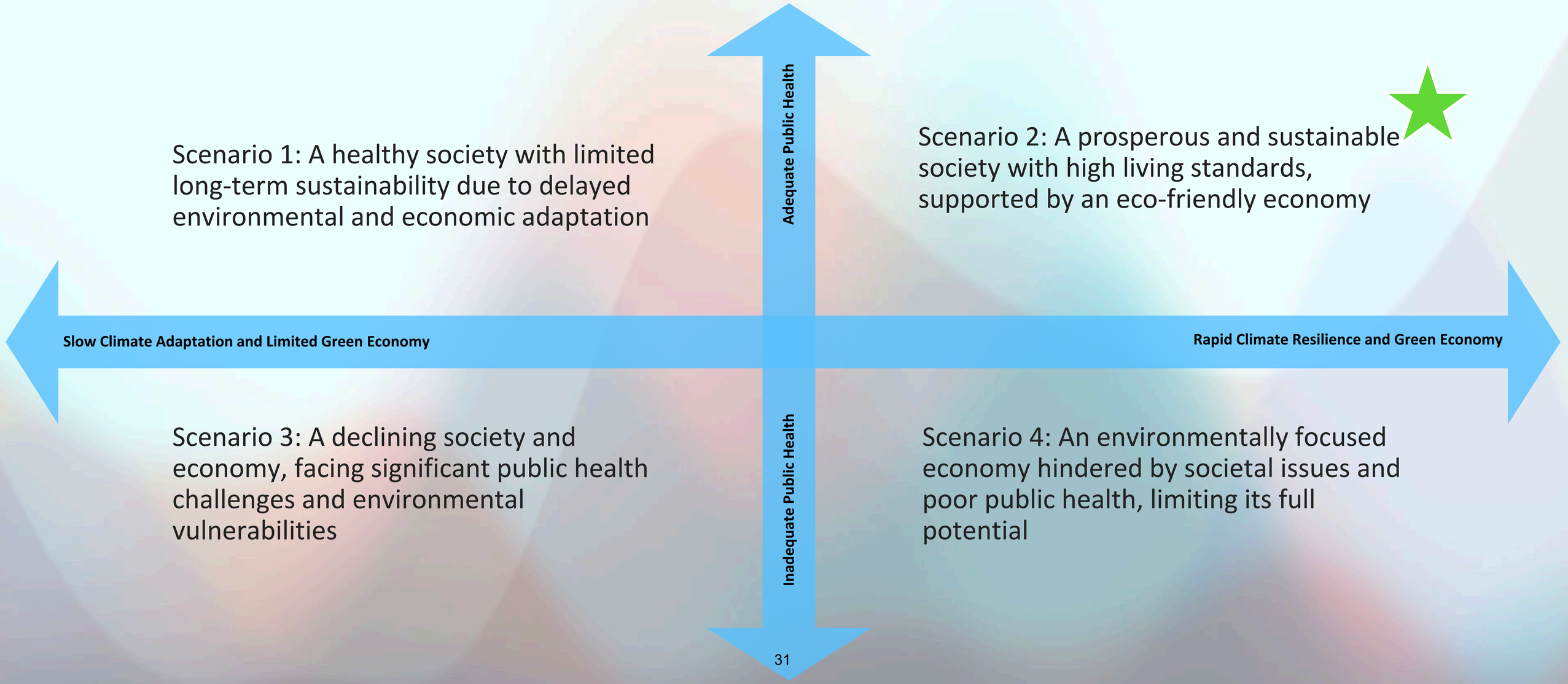
Scenario 2: A thriving, prepared economy driving sustainable growth

Scenario 3: A declining economy due to outdated technology and lack of innovation

Scenario 4: Untapped technological potential slows progress despite a diverse economy

Sustainable Digital Futures for Key Sectors

Navigating Climate Resilience, Green Economy, and Public Health



Scenario 1: A healthy society with limited long-term sustainability due to delayed environmental and economic adaptation

Scenario 2: A prosperous and sustainable society with high living standards, supported by an eco-friendly economy

Scenario 3: A declining society and economy, facing significant public health challenges and environmental vulnerabilities

Scenario 4: An environmentally focused economy hindered by societal issues and poor public health, limiting its full potential

Priority Scenario V: Deep dive

Prosperous, Sustainable, and Eco-Friendly Economy and Society

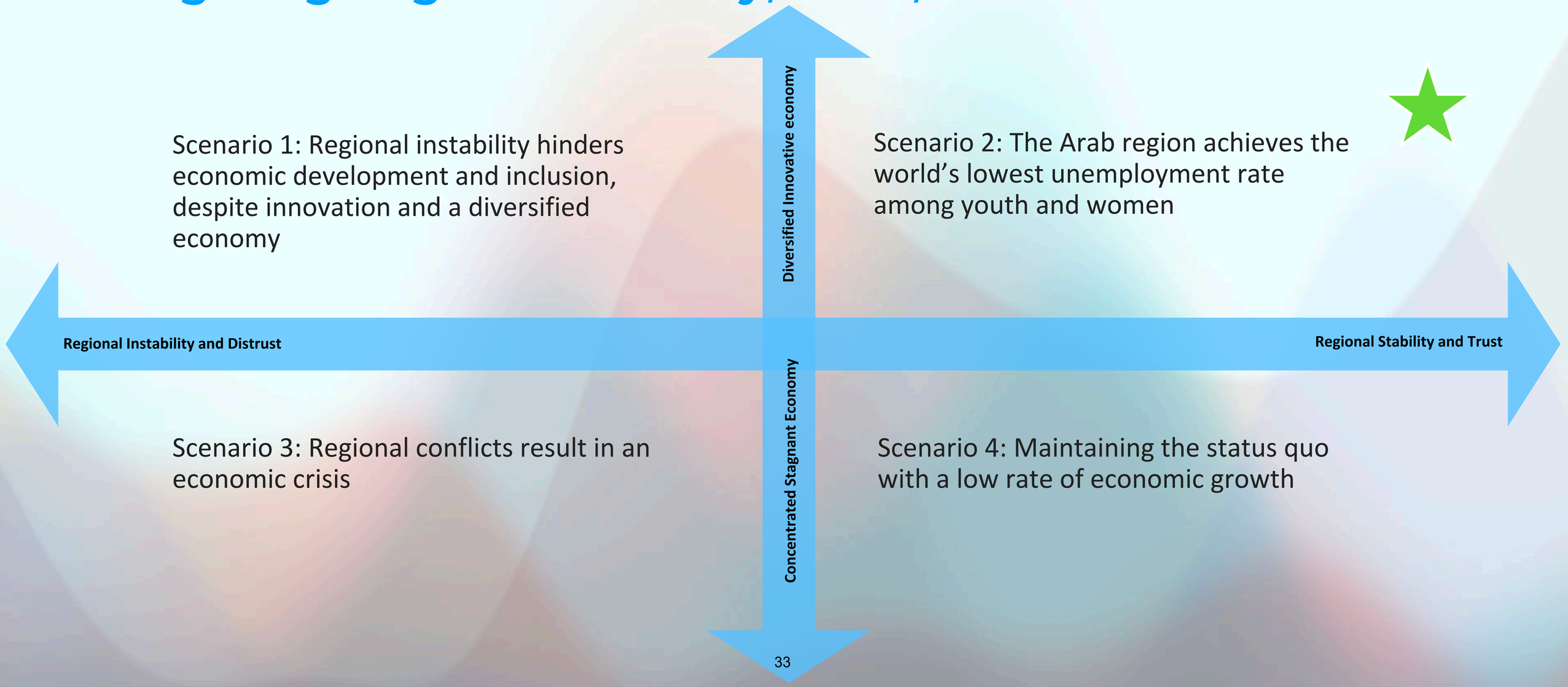
The Arab region envisions a prosperous and sustainable society with high standards of living, built on the foundations of sector-specific transformation and an eco-friendly economy. This future is driven by a focus on adequate public health and rapid climate resilience, promoting a green economy that balances environmental, economic, and social priorities. Sustainable practices transform traditional industries, reducing reliance on polluting technologies and fostering new sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable farming, and green technology. These changes attract foreign investment and create opportunities for SMEs in green sectors, contributing to economic stability and growth. Innovations in agriculture ensure food security by maintaining fertile soils and water availability, while smart technologies accelerate industrial efficiency, improving productivity and fostering long-term stability. The shift to sustainability brings significant environmental benefits, including reduced carbon footprints, lower air pollution levels, biodiversity preservation, and climate change mitigation. Enhanced urban and rural living standards, balanced development, and improved public health contribute to higher life expectancy and societal resilience. Education and awareness initiatives foster behavioral changes, such as reduced consumption and waste, creating a more environmentally conscious society.

However, the transition poses challenges. High infrastructure costs, disruptions to traditional industries, and potential inequalities in access to green opportunities require careful management. Older generations and labor workers face difficulties adapting, while overconsumption and resource strain may arise during the shift. Despite these hurdles, this scenario offers a vision of harmony between economic growth and environmental preservation, ensuring long-term prosperity and a sustainable future for all.

Source of Image: Generative AI

Fostering Economic Development & Inclusion

Navigating Regional Stability, Trust, and Economic Growth



Scenario 1: Regional instability hinders economic development and inclusion, despite innovation and a diversified economy

Scenario 2: The Arab region achieves the world's lowest unemployment rate among youth and women

Scenario 3: Regional conflicts result in an economic crisis

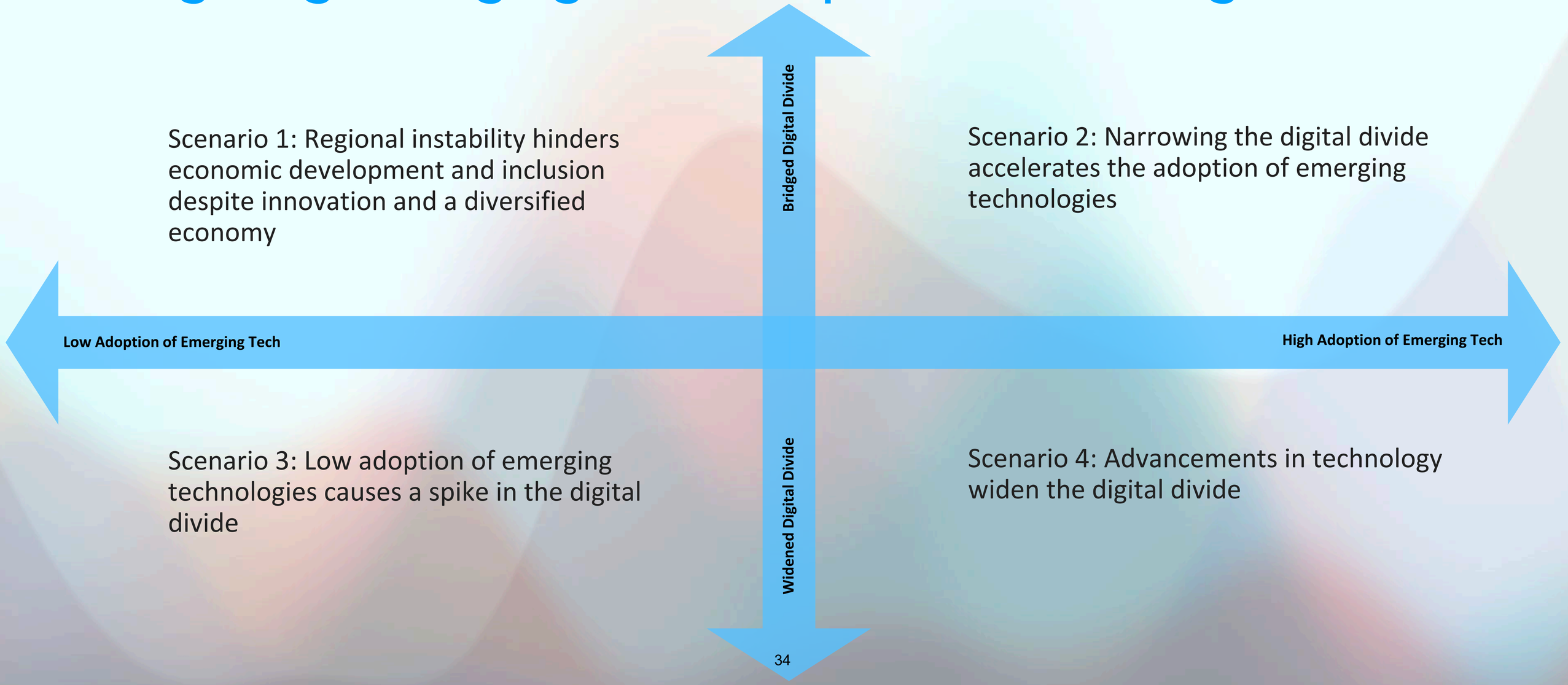
Scenario 4: Maintaining the status quo with a low rate of economic growth

Fostering Economic Development & Inclusion

Navigating Emerging Tech Adoption and the Digital Divide

Scenario 1: Regional instability hinders economic development and inclusion despite innovation and a diversified economy

Scenario 2: Narrowing the digital divide accelerates the adoption of emerging technologies



Scenario 3: Low adoption of emerging technologies causes a spike in the digital divide

Scenario 4: Advancements in technology widen the digital divide

Priority Scenario VI: Deep dive

World's Lowest Youth and Women Unemployment Rate

The Arab region envisions a future where it achieves the world's lowest unemployment rate among youth and women, driven by a diversified innovative economy and regional stability and trust. This transformative scenario fosters a thriving and inclusive labour market, reshaping societal and economic dynamics across the region. As employment opportunities expand, wages rise, leading to higher purchasing power and an improved quality of living. Increased talent retention and a shift towards local manufacturing drive global competitiveness, narrowing the digital divide and boosting regional productivity. Women's participation in the workforce grows, fostering financial independence and social empowerment while reducing gender inequality. These advancements strengthen family structures, contributing to a higher marriage rate and greater inclusion in all sectors of society. The ripple effects extend beyond economics. Reduced poverty and unemployment correlate with a decrease in crime rates and enhanced societal stability.

However, challenges such as inflation, overconsumption, and shortages in supply chains emerge as increased demand places pressure on specific sectors. Shifts in family dynamics and the work-life balance become areas requiring thoughtful navigation to maintain progress. This scenario paints a future of opportunity and inclusion, where the Arab region leads in empowering youth and women, ensuring regional stability, and fostering economic resilience. While challenges remain, collaborative efforts and innovative strategies can ensure that economic development translates into lasting social and economic equality while successfully navigating the anticipated risks.

Source of Image: Generative AI

Overview of Arab States' Desired Scenarios

Shaping a Future-Ready Ecosystem for Inclusive Transformation

The six transformational desired scenarios identified through the strategic foresight process envision futures where digital progress and human development intertwine seamlessly, fostering resilience, equity, and innovation across the Arab region.

In these futures, enhanced digital infrastructure becomes the backbone of societal progress, enabling ICT in education and promoting digital literacy to empower communities. A prosperous and sustainable society emerges, where eco-friendly economies drive high standards of living. Digital transformation enhances the quality of life, fostering a culture of wellbeing through thriving innovation ecosystems and emerging technologies. Adaptive education systems and inclusive capacity-building initiatives equip Arab youth to actively participate in decision-making processes, paving the way for a promising digital future. Economic development thrives as the Arab region achieves unprecedented inclusivity, boasting the world's lowest unemployment rate among youth and women. Meanwhile, a cybersecurity-aware and resilient region leads with education-driven innovation, ensuring stability and security in a high-employment economy.

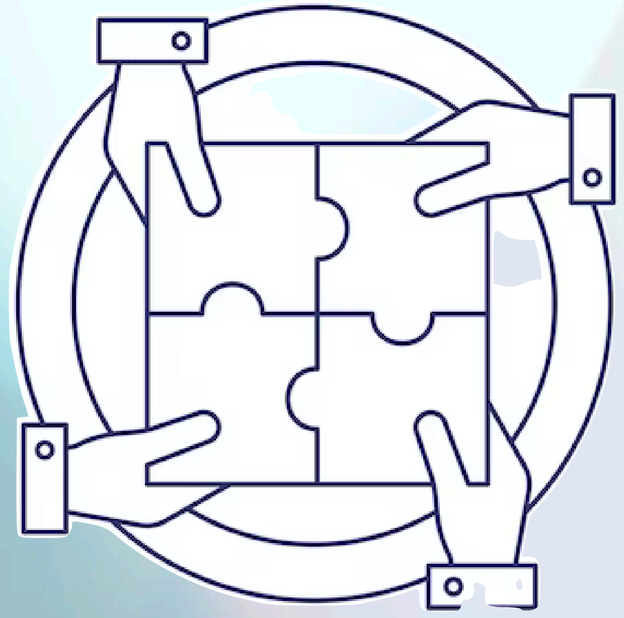
These scenarios offer a bold yet achievable vision where technological progress and human development go hand in hand, positioning the Arab region as a global leader in innovation, equity, and sustainability. Through this shared future, the Arab world charts a path of transformative impact that inspires and uplifts generations to come.

Paving the path to transformation

Accelerating the implementation of Regional Priorities

Realising the desired transformational scenario requires more than just vision—**it demands action**.

This roadmap not only addresses critical challenges but also **unlocks opportunities for sustainable growth**, laying the foundation for a future aligned with **shared aspirations**. However, achieving this vision depends on the **collective efforts of the right stakeholders**.



An **implementation framework is essential** to bring stakeholders together, foster dialogue on each priority, and **craft strategic projects** that embrace regional diversity as a strength. Such a framework would help establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each action and engage stakeholders i**n delivering the expected outcomes for the region's priorities**.

Identifying and engaging stakeholders through a well-defined process is critical. This pilot process for **shaping future-ready regional priorities**, leveraging systemic and future-thinking approaches, complements the new initiative launched by BDT to establish a **Regional Initiative Accelerator**. If these regional priorities are approved as ITU Regional Initiatives at WTDC, they can benefit from this framework to ensure alignment of goals and maximise the impact of resources through the Regional Initiative Accelerators.

Together, these efforts will propel the region closer to its desired scenario, **fostering resilience and creating a transformative, long-lasting impact**.

Thank you

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