

The Basins in 2050: Workshop Scenarios

By Charlotte Lau & Simon Cook

What is Future Scenario Thinking (FST)?

- Scenario thinking is a **disciplined method of imagining possible futures** by identifying and combining known trends and uncertainties
 - Captures elements that cannot be modeled
 - Includes subjective interpretations
 - Creates compelling narratives
 - Prevents you from being blindsided

“FST is essentially a study of our collective ignorance and a process of collective learning”

Workshop Setup

At a small Global Drivers workshop with mostly BFP invitees, Charlotte Lau and Amanda Harding led a step-by-step scenario thinking exercise. The workshop participants were split up into teams of two, representing 5 of the 6 basins. The groups were given about 3.5 hours to go through the exercise, with each team coming up with 2-3 different possible future scenarios. Some of these scenarios were shared at the end, and feedback was given.

FST: Our Methodology

While there are many different ways of executing a scenario thinking exercise (e.g., the popular “crossing of uncertainties”), we decided to experiment with a more global approach that would allow for vastly different scenarios, each taking into account different stakeholders, trends, uncertainties, and wildcards —and/or weighting these factors differently.

We gave each team paper worksheets and a PPT with directions, as well as paper rectangles (trends) and circles (uncertainties/wildcards), all color-coded (blue = political/institutional, green = environmental, yellow = economic, orange = demographic/social, pink = technological). Should we do this exercise again, we would also include a triangle shape for stakeholders. At the end, the teams were instructed to combine different shapes and colors to create cogent narratives of different potential futures.

Some excerpts from our scenarios



ANDES

“Continued global depression hits national economies in the region who have become dependent on minerals and off-farm income....Rural areas become increasingly separated from urban areas. Urban unemployment remains stubbornly high, yet migration continues to urban areas, leading to disaffection and political unrest. Major upheavals in national politics follow, coupled with polarization regionally that leads to conflict between politicians [many populist] who swing hard to either left or right. FDI, the mainstay of economic growth is reduced. Opportunities for the green economy are frozen internationally and within country... which leads to abuses and risks to the environment and the rural poor who depend on it... Severe climate change impacts niche production areas, and rural stakeholders who are dependent on these are unable to adapt...”
from “worst case scenario”



LIMPOPO

“...Industrialization and population growth lead to an increase in demand for food, including meat and increasing land scarcity. Market opportunities for livestock products continue to increase at local, regional and international level...Initial investments in mechanization are made from profits from livestock. The changes are supported by a political process that that brings in land reform that gives land to small-scale farmers, together with infrastructure development to improve links to market. Economic growth and market development is furthered by increasing SADC integration...” *Likely for SA, Bots and Zim, less for Moz.*
from “positive scenario”



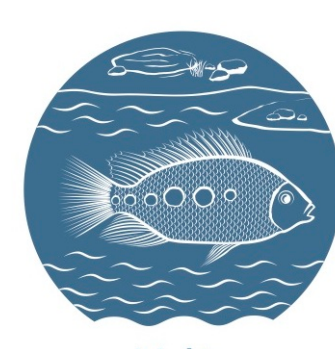
MEKONG

“Power demands in Thailand and Vietnam lead to a sharp increase in hydropower development. The dams are not fish-friendly, resulting in the obliteration of downstream fisheries. Widespread private sector corporatization of fish farming occurs. Local farmers’ and fishers’ livelihoods change, with remittances and migration factoring in strongly....CSOs begin to engage with decision-makers and advocate for change. Corruption skyrockets....The nutritional needs of society are of great concern, as less fish mean less protein available for the poor. However, as this does not seem to matter to investors, stakeholders eventually decide to surrender the fight.”
from “scenario 1: surrender”



NILE

“In the context of regional power imbalances, and against a backdrop of global economic uncertainty, FDI driven by self-interest leads to poor domestic economic development, characterized by inequity and land grabbing. Food and fertilizer prices rise, and a Nile pact is far away. The country strives for water security in a desperate attempt to keep control of this increasingly scarce resource. Domestic political instability is one ‘response’. There is no effective/responsible governance, and water competition and scarcity increase, for different users up- and downstream. Farmers cannot adapt to these shortages, and deforestation and land degradation worsen. The result is one of increased poverty and inequality, and poor adaptation to increased climate shocks.”
from “narrative 2: worst case scenario”



VOLTA

Following a period of instability, civil society and youth mobilises to bring about democratic representational government, seeing a shift in regional and foreign investment patterns as well as improved equitable Basin regulatory frameworks and resourced coordination and conflict resolution structures. Small holders in rural areas mobilise themselves, improve productivity and their incomes seeing less imperative for urban migration.
from “regime change, resilient communities”

For more information about these narratives, please pick up the chart of identified trends/uncertainties and the print-out of the full scenarios.

