

Our Environment, Our Wealth



POLICY OPPORTUNITIES:

"Africans declare that we will no longer allow ourselves to be conditioned by circumstance. We will determine our own destiny and call on the rest of the world to complement our efforts." NEPAD 2001

Lessons from the scenarios

Scenarios are possible sets of future events which, unlike projections of trends in human affairs, may be legitimate over the short term, but not as time horizons expand over months and years to decades and generations (Gallopín and others 1997).

The scenarios provide narratives about four possible futures that may result from different policy choices. The four scenarios are Market Forces, Policy Reform, Fortress World and Great Transitions. All four scenarios are plausible but not equally probable.

Land

An understanding of the driving forces, indicators and policy options under each of the four scenarios is a prerequisite for positive action. Driving forces are seen as demographics, health, economics, social issues, culture, technology, institutions and governance, peace and conflict, and natural disasters and climate change. Policy responses are needed to alleviate, mitigate or suppress driving forces that may worsen land degradation. The scenarios explored in the land theme show succinctly that different policy options exist. The range of available opportunities, although affected by the magnitude and nature of the driving forces, depends mainly on institutionalizing sustainable land management practices.

- The objective of achieving food security for a rapidly growing population, while maintaining the productivity of agricultural land and forests, and avoiding land degradation, presents numerous challenges. There is no simple recipe for achieving this. Concerted government action will be needed to build the required capacity for Research & Development activities and extension services, provide well-functioning markets and adequate infrastructure, counter the perverse subsidies in developed countries, and implement incentives for a shift toward more ecologically friendly agriculture, forestry, and land-use practices.
- Improving the distribution of wealth, access to resources and economic opportunities are key factors to the success of regional, sub-regional and national land policies. The mitigation measures that would make land use environmentally sound revolve around improved conservation, and the effective use of marginal and low-potential agricultural lands.

- There is an urgent need to develop well coordinated country-specific and sub-region specific land degradation monitoring programmes. These programmes would produce and share information needed for land use decision-making and policy development on degradation, and in particular for disaster preparedness, mitigation and management.

Freshwater

The different scenarios illustrate the potential for meeting agreed goals and targets, such as those of the Africa Water Vision 2050 and the MDGs under different policy options. In particular opportunities for realizing the MDG targets related to access to water and sanitation. In addition the different scenarios hold distinct potentials for meeting economic and development opportunities. Taken as a whole, the scenarios demonstrate the complexity of the challenge of optimizing water use to meet human well-being and development targets, while ensuring the sustainability of the resource.

- One policy lesson that comes from various scenarios is the opportunities at all levels offered by adopting Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM). Addressing and reconciling different needs, in an equitable and productive manner will require policy and law reform, as well as investment in technology.
- Building human resource capacity also emerges, in several scenarios, as an invaluable means for enhancing opportunities. Further establishing collaborative management regimes at the national as well as at the interstate level is paramount to achieving sustainable water management.

Atmosphere

In all scenarios economic growth is a priority, however adopting policies which promote the adoption of cleaner technologies is an important aspect of this.

- Given the multiple impacts of unsustainable energy use at different spatial levels (local, national, regional and global) and for different sectors (industry, health, agriculture, and biodiversity especially forests) within in various time frames, this must become a key policy focus. The scenarios offer multiple lessons for addressing the energy issues.
- As the impacts of unsustainable energy use are not restricted to the country where such practices occur but are felt globally, this is an area where transboundary cooperation is essential. Without successful global cooperation the measures adopted in one country are unlikely to have a significant impact. Africa needs to focus on the opportunities for such global cooperation, while at the same time taking action at the regional, sub-regional and national levels.
- Adopting policies, which promote the adoption of cleaner technologies, is an important aspect of this. The scenarios offer various opportunities for this including the use of market mechanisms, increased investment in R&D, and increasing engagement with the public.

Coastal and Marine

Coastal and marine environments are particular sensitive. They face increasing pressure and threats from development and economic activities. These areas also have a high level of vulnerability to climate change and sea-level rise, and natural phenomenon and disasters. Consequently coastal and marine areas require a high level of care.

- It is clear that to promote sustainable development in these environments, the “business as usual” approach of the Market Forces scenario is not feasible. Responses under the Fortress World scenario exacerbate stress rather than mitigate it. The choice for Africa is to be guided in its developmental efforts by either the Policy Reform or the Great Transitions scenarios.

- The Policy Reform scenario has its attractive qualities for development in general and coastal and marine areas development in particular. First, it adopts an incremental approach to planning and decision-making. It will usually involve the periodic setting of objectives and goals on aspects of the environment, and then putting in place mechanisms for attaining these goals. For much of the history of African development, this has been the approach taken. The fact that environmental problems especially along the coasts have neither been eradicated nor seen to be decreasing at acceptable rates is an indication that a Policy Reform scenario for coastal and marine area management is inadequate. The Great Transitions scenario seems to offer better opportunities for development that is consistent with Africa’s aspiration. The challenge is how to translate the charts of the Great Transitions to viable policies for the development of the coastal and marine areas.
- The adoption of the Great Transitions scenario for coastal and marine environments implies the acceptance of the need to define a sustainable future on the one hand and to institute the mechanisms for attaining this future on the other. This requires major shifts in current practice. Very few coastal countries in Africa have embarked on ICZM, and the practice in many countries is to concentrate on exploiting coastal resources such as petroleum and fishing and depopulation of the mangrove forests.
 - Integrate environmental issues into national development frameworks especially in respect of poverty reduction efforts including those of the MDG goals.
 - Strengthen the decentralization of the management of coastal and marine areas and the role of civil society.
 - Reduce environment-related conflicts, between estate developers, civil society, industry, and tourism.
 - Enhance access to environmentally sound and appropriate technology.
 - Strengthen resource rights along the coasts and marine areas to reduce the vulnerability of poor people.

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