



At a Glance

- Scenarios help people to develop ideas collaboratively and guide future decision making
- Developing scenarios in seven steps
- Using visual methods to represent scenarios and share ideas for the future

Participatory Scenario Development

Scenarios are stories of what may happen in the future. They are based on different assumptions with regard to potential drivers of change. They provide people an opportunity to plan and make decisions that may influence the future and also plan for the future they would like to see. Building scenarios can help people develop strategies to deal with uncertainties about the future. It can trigger discussions of issues that are of common concern, and the ideas generated can help support decision making and guide the development of better policies.

In COBRA, we use scenarios to explore the implications and outcomes of particular cross-scalar developments and drivers for indigenous communities in the Guiana Shield (see Briefing no. 12).

Why participatory?

Scenario development appeals to people's creativity and stimulates out-of-the-box thinking, particularly when working in groups. Different stakeholders may have different perspectives on the drivers of change and different levels of knowledge; some may speak from theory, others from realities on the ground. Power relations should also be taken into consideration when different stakeholders are participating in a scenario exercise, as well as ethnic, cultural or gender barriers. For example, in one of the participatory scenario workshops organised by COBRA, communities from Guyana's Rupununi area were divided into groups of men, women and youth to come up with different sets of scenarios.

How to do it

Participatory scenario development is a collaborative process in which different community members and stakeholders are involved. Hence, the scenario development process needs to take place in joint meetings or workshops and involves the following steps:

1. Identifying the drivers of change – People first need to identify the key issues and concerns for their future. This can be an open, exploratory exercise asking “what are the main factors or drivers that you think will affect your future?” and/or a more structured process using the categories of Social, Technology, Economic, Environment, Politics and Values (STEEP) as a guide. While the latter approach can produce better defined boundaries for the scenarios, the former could provide particular insights not gained from a distinct framework. Choosing the appropriate approach will depend on the composition of the participants involved; for example, using the STEEP framework with certain professionals/specialists could allow them to think beyond their disciplines resulting in a more holistic range of drivers. On the other hand, certain indigenous groups may not relate to the scientific/Western constructed categories of STEEP thereby limiting their creativity.
2. Prioritising drivers of change – From the list constructed, people identify which factors or issues are the most important based on their potential impact on peoples' lives and the environment.



3. Identifying uncertainties – Based on the list constructed, people identify which factors or issues are the most uncertain for the future. It is these uncertainties that will produce the alternative paths that are used to build the scenario stories.

4. Selecting the important/uncertain factors – People identify the key factor(s) that are very important and very uncertain as the basis of the scenarios.

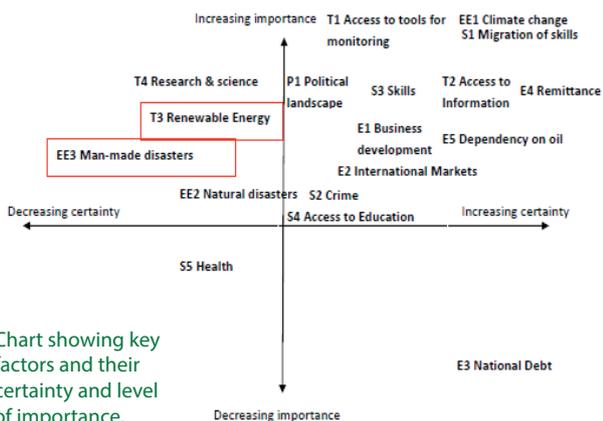


Chart showing key factors and their certainty and level of importance.

5. Identifying alternative scenarios – To create alternative scenarios people use the important/uncertain factor(s) and identify how these could potentially evolve in the future. It is useful to assign labels or themes to each of the alternative scenarios, which reflect the uncertainty in question or the value of that uncertainty.

6. Fleshing out the scenarios – This involves building the story for each alternative scenario within a specified timeframe and based on consistent and coherent sets of assumptions. One can start by describing the current situation and the end situation. Then think through the path that connects the two – what happens in the story to make the end situation a reality? Who is involved at different stages of the story? How do the key factors interact with other, less important or less uncertain factors that determine the future? Are there any events that happen along the way?

7. Sharing the scenarios - In workshops, where different groups may have built their own scenarios, presenting these to the whole group gives participants the opportunity to learn from one another and identify commonalities and differences. Sharing scenarios can also help participants if ranking and choosing the most likely and/or desirable scenarios are part of the overall aims of the process. It is also an opportunity for participants to provide feedback on the process.

Representing scenarios

Storyboards: Scenarios can be produced in a written form, but visual methods of drawing could also be used to represent ideas. Storyboards are illustrative representations of a story where pictures and/or images (with or without text) are drawn/displayed in a particular sequence. In scenario building, a storyboard can depict the different chronological steps of a scenario story.



Spider diagrams: Relevant issues, concerns or changes for a current or future situation can be schematically shown in spider diagrams. It is a way of structuring ideas and info where key issues or changes are written and linked to the current or future situation – e.g. How has the current situation changed? Are there any new issues to be added to the current situation?



Impact tables: While fleshing out the scenarios, the main 'plots' or storylines can be expressed in impact tables. These summarise the potential social and ecological impacts of each scenario either qualitatively (graphically, textually) or quantitatively.

Participatory scenario development in COBRA

In COBRA, the process of participatory scenario building is an important instrument to investigate the uncertainties that could unfold for both people and the environment in the future of the Guiana Shield. Ultimately, by exploring different scenarios, we are able to assess whether today's community owned solutions will be the community owned solutions for the future.

