

Central Asia Scenario Project: “Mutually Acceptable Mechanism on Integrated use of Water Resources in Central Asia”.

- food - water - energy nexus
- informed dialogue
- shared understanding, ‘common ground’
- preventive diplomacy
- conflict resolution
- capacity building

The Project

EC-IFAS in cooperation with FAO (United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization) and UNRCCA (United Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia) is implementing project “Mutually Acceptable Mechanism on Integrated Use of Water Resources in Central Asia through Applying a Scenario Approach”. The project is funded by the Government of Turkey through the FAO/Turkey Partnership Programme (FTPP).

The project is designed and facilitated by Dr Peter Schütte (Schuette & Company Management Consultants, the Netherlands) and Ir Bart Hilhorst (independent consultant, Doha), with support of EC-IFAS and FAO resources.

Given the importance of the water resources to the national economies in Central Asia, effective regulation of the shared Aral basin waters is among the most significant areas of intergovernmental cooperation in the region. Discussions about alternative water management regimes are ongoing but parties have very different views about the principles that govern water allocation.

Management of the shared and scarce regional water resources in the Aral Sea basin is a highly complex political process that involves numerous players across the socio-economic spectrum. This complexity is steadily rising because of climate change, economic development and demographic trends, food security concerns, and the consequent increasing pressure on scarce water resources.

Objectives and Outcomes

With the aim to strengthen cooperation on joint management of transboundary water resources in the Aral Sea basin, the project set out to develop a comprehensive scenario set for the Aral Sea basin. The higher order objective is to strengthen regional cooperation through improved decision making and enhanced mutual understanding. The outcomes include: new insights gained and shared options developed through a shared learning process, and better understanding of the dynamics of the situation and the inter-sectoral relationships.

Scenario Approach

Scenario thinking has proven an effective mechanism for building a comprehensive logical structure of the water-energy-agriculture sector. It encourages a cross-sectoral perspective, and creates mutual understanding and alignment of views among participating parties. Scenario thinking aims to achieve process gains that are associated with rapid learning processes – both individually and collectively – when engaging into systematic thinking about the future, in a structured and multi-stakeholder process.

The scenario products will be used by various partners to facilitate an informed dialogue, and to encourage a comprehensive perspective, mutual understanding, and alignment of views among the riparian countries.

Scenario Thinking

Why scenarios?

Fundamentally, scenarios are used because the longer term future is inherently uncertain. No matter how we try to make reliable forecasts, things turn out differently in often unexpected ways. The future as it unfolds, therefore, is uncertain and in fact “unknowable”, and the world of the policy maker is one of uncertainty.

Decision makers, however, cannot afford to sit back and wait for the future to happen to them. Forward thinking is needed for sense making, anticipation, and planning. Scenario thinking is a tool for helping policy makers to take better informed decisions in an uncertain world.

What are scenarios?

Scenarios are stories about this uncertain future. Because of the unpredictability, it is not possible to develop just one future or story. In fact, different possible and plausible stories are imaginable that we have to take into consideration or prepare for. Scenarios are sets of multiple, equally plausible stories that describe how the future *might* unfold. Therefore, scenarios are not predictions. Rather, they identify - to the best of our ability - what might happen. They are plausible evolutions from the current situation, depending on how the major driving forces develop and interact.

We cannot predict, and therefore we should not try. The only relevant discussions about the future are those where we succeed in shifting from the question whether something will happen to the question: “*what will we do if it happened*” (Arie de Geus).

The bigger picture

If designed well, a scenario process helps users to steer away from a narrow problem definition, widening perspectives and allowing users to see the bigger picture, introduce novel elements and create a broader and richer solution space. By taking on the longer term perspective, we steer away from a

narrow focus on the - often problematic - here and now. Wisdom is offered by the world of systems thinking as nicely voiced by Donella Meadows:

As you think about the system, spend part of your time from the vantage point that lets you see the whole system, not just the problem that may have drawn you to focus on the system to begin with.

Dancing with Systems, The Systems Thinker, March 2002

Common Ground

The anticipated process gains of a joint scenario building exercise are: shared understanding among the participants, “buy in” and ownership by different parties, resulting in what we call “common ground”. The interaction involves the participants – often from different parties having different outlooks and interests – to share views, ideas and “mental maps” and the expectation of effective use of the scenario set is increased.

Unlike forecasting, scenarios do not demand consensus, but rather to respect and accommodate differences, seeking only to define them clearly.

Scenario building encourages the involvement of a wide range of views, rather than seeking a single answer, so it is a process designed to accommodate multiple values and opinions. ***It allows people to explore their ideas about the future context without feeling threatened by the need to fix an immediate decision.***

Scenarios: An Explorer’s Guide, Shell, 2008

Project Setup

The Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (EC-IFAS) has directed and coordinated day-to-day project implementation with technical and operational support from FAO.

A total of 40 individuals from all Central Asian States and Afghanistan participated in the scenario development process that included four scenario workshops alternated by research phases. Participants originated from the government departments of agriculture, water, energy, and environment. Active participation was also ensured from the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the project countries.

The project also encouraged the participation of the following regional partner organization: 1) Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), and 2) the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) with its Scientific Information Center (SIC ICSD). They provided a supplementary

institutional base and used their network to inform national and regional non-governmental stakeholders about project progress and outputs.

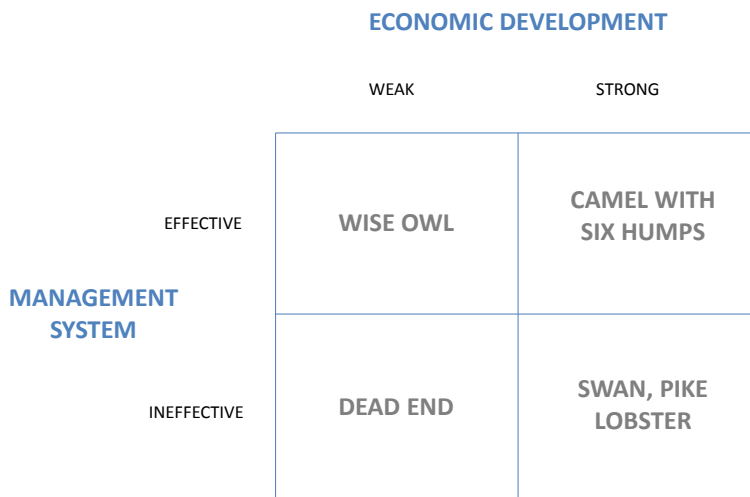
The scenario project has been subdivided into three phases and consists in outline of the following elements:

Project Implementation Setup

1	Scenario Development Collection baseline info Building scenario logics and developing scenario set
2	Preparation Communication Package / Training of Facilitators Fleshing out the detailed scenario narratives Preparation of detailed scenario booklet and presentations Preparation of video illustrating the scenario development process and explaining the scenario set Preparation of comprehensive package to use the scenario tool for diverse scenario thinking workshops Series of workshops to train scenario facilitators
3	Use of the Scenario Tool Use of scenario tool by government agencies, civil society, international agencies and others to analyze policy questions, options, common ground, etc within the context of the scenario set

The Scenario Set

In a systematic and highly participatory process, a scenario framework was developed that reflected those uncertain factors that were considered key to joint regional water resources management. These factors are: management system, and economic development. They form the axes of a two-dimensional scenario frame. Interestingly, neither of these factors is directly related to the water sector. It provides a hint of a broader problem definition and of seeing the bigger picture.



Four comprehensive scenario logics were developed based on the adopted scenario frame, and have been agreed upon by all participating countries. They were translated into scenario story lines.

Follow Up

We envision a two-pronged approach to enlarge the impact of the scenario exercise: inform people of the scenario stories and their possible implications; then engage a large group of Central Asian stakeholders and decision makers in a scenario-informed thinking process.

The second component is clearly more ambitious, and takes the form of a series of national and regional workshops. Here, the strategic conversation plays an important role and the workshops must be run by a trained facilitator.

During such workshops the scenarios are considered one by one. It is important to remember that all are plausible. The first step is to engage the participants in the scenario stories and have them

understand their drivers and causal structure. The next step is to use the scenario set as backdrop to examine relevant policy questions – in a ‘what if’ mode - from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. The workshop concludes with a dialogue about insights gained, questions remaining, directions to follow, actions to take, and, ideally, some common ground and ideas on how to take the process to the next level.

“What if” Thinking

