

Using transformative scenario planning as a way to think differently about the future of land use in Bobirwa, Botswana

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The five-year ASSAR project (Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions, 2014-2018) uses insights from multi-scale, interdisciplinary work to inform and transform climate adaptation policy and practice in ways that promote the long-term wellbeing of the most vulnerable and those with the least agency.

KEY POINTS

- A widely held belief is that private land is more fertile than communal land. What takes to light is that there is no difference in the type of soil in villages compared to freehold land. Any difference in soil quality is a result of how the land has been used and managed over the years.
- The contents and implications of the 2015 Land Policy were not common knowledge to many stakeholders. The policy aims to ensure equal access to land, with one plot allocated per person (as long as they do not already have a plot/were allocated a plot but have sold it).
- The consensus was that there is a need for wildlife conservation and to protect local livelihoods. The grievances of people adversely affected by wild animals were aired, particularly the problem of elephants destroying crops.
- The group decided to develop scenarios that focused on how (a) conflict between humans and wildlife and (b) optimal land use, might affect the future of Bobirwa.

Transformative Scenario Planning in Botswana

The University of Botswana began working with stakeholders in the Bobirwa sub-district in 2014, establishing relationships with people concerned about land use. The issue of land use is a thorny one that involves a myriad of people and is complicated by the uncertainty of climate change. Opinions differ about the management of privately-owned land versus communal land. Land use is therefore something that involves a diverse range of perspectives and cannot be resolved by any single stakeholder working alone. Hence, a process that brings together conflicting opinions could help people to start thinking differently about the future of land use in Bobirwa.

Transformative Scenario Planning (TSP) is one such process, designed for situations in which people's perceptions of a problem, and perhaps of one another, have become stuck. Developed by [Reos Partners](#), TSP aims to help people to think and do things differently. One part of the process is bringing together people who do not ordinarily mix, with the goal of forging new relationships that allow people to work together to change the future.

This short report is designed to help stakeholders understand how the TSP process was applied in Botswana. Workshops are just one component of the TSP process, but they usefully illustrate the ways that scenarios can be used.

This report is a summary of the first of two workshops, held at Oasis Lodge Zanzibar, Botswana on 19th and 20th October 2017. Over these two days, workshop participants were guided through a series of steps that encouraged them to think together about positive futures for land use in Bobirwa sub-district through to the year 2035. The next workshop will take place in early 2018. More detailed information about TSP and workshops in other regions where ASSAR works is available [online](#).

DAY 1:

Working together to change the future



Introductions and group agreements

Unlike conventional workshops or conferences, the TSP workshop began by inviting all 35 attendees to sit in one big circle. In turn, every person introduced themselves and said what organisation they were from. It quickly became clear that, collectively, the people in the room had a wealth of knowledge and experience. The group of participants was diverse with representatives from grassroots organisations, commercial farmers, community development groups, local authorities, national ministries, academics and religious organisations.

An agreement was made amongst stakeholders to respect one another and avoid showing deference based on social signifiers such as gender, age and occupation. A list of other agreements was also collaboratively drawn up. These emphasised the importance of encouraging people at grassroots level to talk and requested that everyone spoke in Setswana (followed by an English translation). This session was important for setting the tone of the workshop, and emphasised that it was everyone's responsibility to ensure that discussions were not dominated by language or by people in positions of authority.



Role reversal: Cynics and believers

Often in workshops, it is assumed that everyone has faith in the process. However, this ignores the often-unspoken doubts that many people have about the value of workshops. TSP makes space for critique from the onset, rather than pretending that cynicism does not exist. On Day 1, workshop participants were asked to pair up with someone and chose to be either a 'cynic' or a 'believer.' If a person was optimistic about the process, they were encouraged to take the role of a cynic, and vice versa. In these roles, individuals talked for 2 minutes each, defending their position. The following is a selection of the arguments that were made by cynics and believers in the subsequent feedback session.

Believers

TSP has worked in other places, it could work for us here.

This is an opportunity to develop relationships between the government and the community.

The alternative is to do nothing. If we do not do anything, things will get worse.

Cynics

One workshop cannot change things because land use is a widespread issue.

We don't know what will happen with the climate, so anything we decide now may be irrelevant in the future.

Whatever we discuss here is unlikely to make a difference because there is no political will to change.

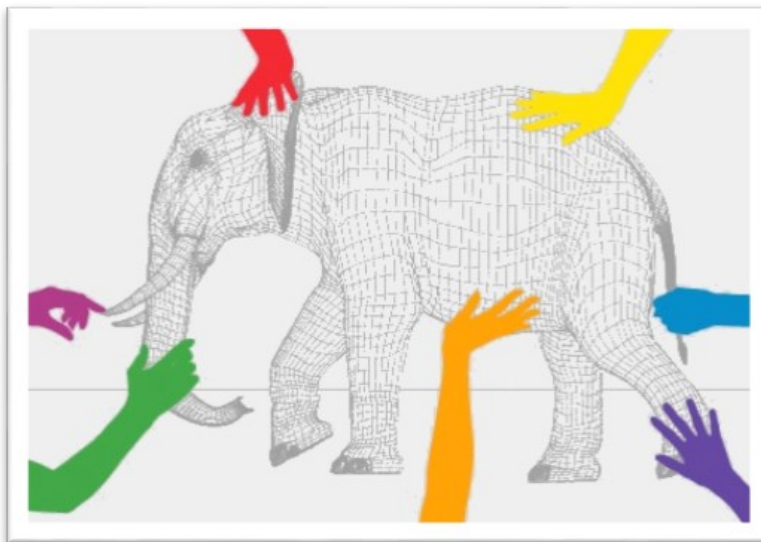


Taking a deliberate detour: It's a marathon not a short cut

In this session, facilitators explained the rationale behind undertaking a lengthy workshopping process rather than immediately concentrating on solutions. They explained that 'we want to see with fresh eyes' in order to not only change the world, but ourselves too. Such a shift requires taking a journey together and coming at the issue from different angles. Tackling land use was summed up by one stakeholder as being 'a marathon, not a short cut'. Participants were asked to consider an old Indian parable, which depicted an elephant being touched by many different hands, and to share what they saw (*see below*).

"It's about being successful together."

"Touches are gentle because each wants to feel and has something at stake."



"Each hand gives a different message."

"It is a young elephant that is not yet mature so each of the hands are trying to guide it."

The elephant was likened to Bobirwa and the hands were thought to be those of the workshop participants. The process invited stakeholders to contemplate different parts of the issue in order to have a better understanding of the situation as a whole. The hands were also thought to represent the multiple sources of information that are available, such as conversation, newspapers or research, which may have implications for how an issue is understood. Throughout the process stakeholders were warned that feeling bewildered was an inevitable part of transformation. In fact, the facilitators explained that 'we invite confusion'.

Land use in the news

To help think holistically about the issue, in the next activity, stakeholders sifted through newspapers. They looked for newspaper headlines that in some way had a bearing on land use in Bobirwa. These were then categorised according to whether the story was Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental or Political (STEEP). The activity aimed to help free peoples' thinking to allow them to consider the multiple, interconnected factors and forces that impact the current situation. This prepared stakeholders for subsequent activities in which scenarios about different possible futures were written.



Stakeholders then paired up with someone with whom they were not familiar and were asked to discuss two things. Firstly, what worried them the most when they thought about land use in Bobirwa? Secondly, what questions did they have about the future of land use that, at the time of the workshop, nobody had provided any answers to? The feedback from this session was used to list the main drivers of the future of land use in Bobirwa.



Voting on the most uncertain drivers of change in Bobirwa

In groups, stakeholders discussed in more detail the questions and concerns that had been identified in the previous exercise. Drivers that were predictable were set aside and a list of unpredictable drivers was composed. Each driver of change was posted onto the wall, with similar drivers grouped together to form clusters. Workshop participants were given four stickers, each of which represented one vote. They could distribute these four votes as they wished. For example, all four stickers could be placed on one driver if it was something that they felt strongly about. The drivers that received the highest number of votes were **‘human-wildlife co-existence’** and **‘changes in land policy’**, as shown in the table below with some of the other drivers.

Human/wildlife co-existence	Changes in land policy
Land ownership and access	Budget allocation for HIV/AIDS
The extent of agreement between tourism and agricultural industrial sectors	Demand for arable land
Integrated planning between local and central government	Climate variability

The group was asked to think carefully about these two drivers, and consider if they would be the most interesting and relevant *‘backbones’* of stories about the future. Importantly, the two drivers had to be factors that were independent of one another. A discussion ensued about how to word the two drivers so that they would effectively capture the key factors affecting the future of land use in Bobirwa. Clarity was sought over which existing policies addressed the issue of wildlife. There was also a substantial debate about the extent to which existing patterns of land use are certain to remain the same. Land use policy, land access, land ownership and equitable access to land were all interrogated as concepts. An overarching theme that arose in this session was the importance of the historical context of Bobirwa, because current tenure and access problems are rooted in how land was distributed and allocated in the past. Therefore, previous injustices were an important part of conversations about the future.

The day ended by bringing the debate to a close. Workshop participants were asked to reflect on what sorts of arguments they were fiercely defending, and what they might be willing to ‘let go of’ or hold on to a little less tightly.



DAY 2:

Writing scenarios about future possibilities

Following on from the previous day, workshop participants were asked to share with a partner what they were still holding on to and what they were willing to let go of. When pairs started to feedback to the group, it became clear that there were questions and concerns that needed to be addressed before the process could continue. These were important indicators of the underlying tensions among stakeholders. The following is a summary of the issues raised and how representatives from the University of Botswana responded, which enabled the process to move forward while making sure that people's concerns were understood and recorded.

Questions & Concerns	Response
Are we representative of all the people that are involved in land use in Bobirwa? For example, we have been talking about freeholders but are there any freeholders here?	It is true that there are people that we would have liked to be here but that are not in the room. Due to constraints of space, the organising team thought carefully about who to include. Everyone who is in this room is here because they have been recommended as people that have something important to give to this process.
Local people are not represented well here. For example, local chiefs are not here. How will we share what we do here with local people?	The conversation between the project and local communities began long before this workshop. Chiefs have been informed of this workshop and although they are not here, ongoing consultation with them and community members will continue to be part of this process.
The University of Cape Town spearheads this process. This gives them an upper hand over the University of Botswana, even though local organisations are better placed to take things forward.	The Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR) project is working in <i>collaboration</i> between multiple partners across seven countries. Although some team members are based in Cape Town, each region is led by institutions with a stake in the area. The presence of three people who are based at the University of Cape Town is necessary for documenting the process to fulfil requirements of the funders, to whom the entire team is accountable. This TSP process is led by Reos Partners, not by UCT, because they are professional facilitators who specialise in a particular type of scenario planning method.
Skills are not necessarily transferred. Researchers who are outsiders come in, conduct research and then leave. How does this benefit us?	One of the fundamental aspects of the ASSAR project is that research should make an impact and be useful to the people who have been involved in it. Sharing research findings and continuing to strengthen relationships with stakeholders is at the core of what academics in the project are trying to achieve. We also share information with people in other regions who are struggling with similar problems to the ones being faced in our region. It was hoped that exposure to TSP as a planning method might result in participants acquiring skills that they can share with others.
Who will have ownership over what is produced in the workshop? Who has copyrights?	Anything that is produced in these workshops is 'owned' by the people in this room, and anyone that they choose to share their ideas with. As with any conversation, what happens as part of the project is not bound by law. What we produce and how we share it is entirely up to us as a group.

Bringing such concerns to light is an important part of the TSP process. Although it may take time, working through these worries is central to building trust between a group of people that do not know each other. The final word was that the University of Botswana accepted that communication of the aims and objectives of the workshop could have been better. However, this was the first time they had engaged in a TSP process and so this was a learning process for the whole team. This session highlighted the strength of the TSP process. For new relationships to be built, time needs to be made to discuss issues that might be bubbling under the surface,

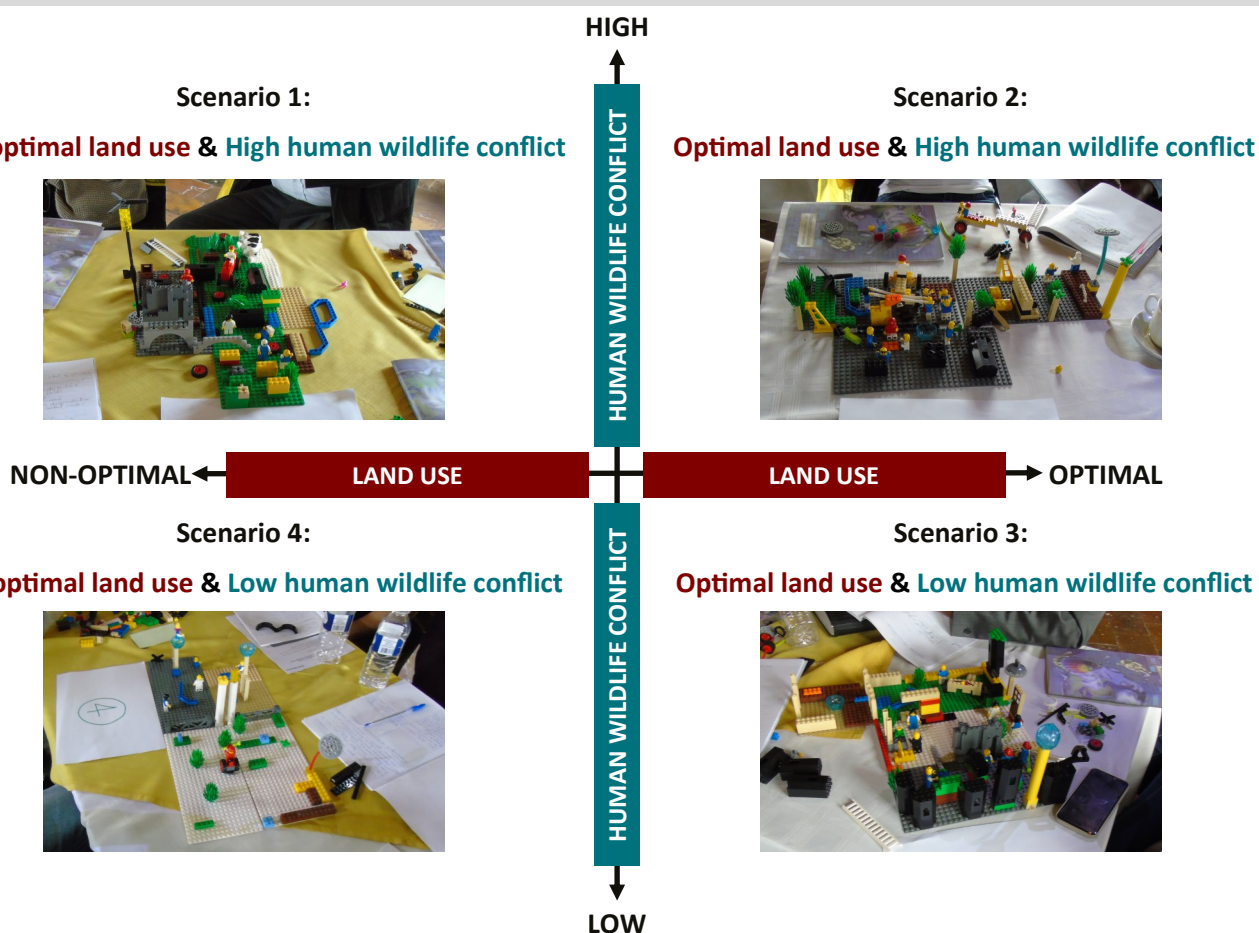
such as power dynamics. Clarity about the nature of partnerships paves the way for working collaboratively. In this case, it meant an overt acknowledgment by researchers of the traditionally unequal status of partners. Academics were committed to putting communities – who are most affected by land use – front and centre, rather than prestigious institutions. This session also underlined the importance of paying attention to language, and enabling people to communicate on a more equal footing. Participants therefore continuously reminded one another to speak in Setswana.



Finalising the framework for four stories about the future

After extensive debate about how to phrase the two most uncertain drivers of the future of land use in Bobirwa, stakeholders settled on the following: (1) **conflict between humans and wildlife** and (2) **optimal use of land**. These drivers provided the backbone to thinking about a set of four different but equally plausible stories about how the future could unfold between now (2017) and 2035. Stakeholders worked in four groups (one for each scenario) to tell an imaginary but realistic story about what land use in Bobirwa might look over the course of the next 18 years.

What could happen in Bobirwa if...



Thinking about the future together

To help stakeholders think creatively, each group was provided with Lego and asked to construct a picture of what Bobirwa might look like in 2035, under their specific scenario. Each group then presented their ideas back to the whole group, referring to their model to help illustrate their explanation. The audience posed questions to help each group refine their stories. It was emphasized that only questions that would help the group to think about their scenario should be asked, whilst questions or comments that criticised the work of others should be avoided.



The next round of group discussions involved thinking about some potential news headlines that would help build the skeleton of the story from now until 2035, for each scenario. Each group composed 10 headlines and plotted them on a timeline to show the key moments leading up to the scenario end state (i.e. what the group imagined in 2035). These were then presented and explained to the rest of the group, who responded with questions to help fill any gaps in a logical manner.



In the final round, each group worked to tell the whole story of events from now until 2035, using both a narrative and a poster. Each group nominated one member to present the story behind each scenario. These stories were recorded and safely stored to guide proceedings of the next workshop, which will be focused on developing strategic responses, including planning and action.

Final thoughts

In the final feedback session, the participants appreciated the TSP process and some acknowledged some transformation already. The facilitation by Reos Partners and University of Botswana staff was highly commended. The venue and the facilitation created an environment conducive for uninterrupted participation by all.



ABOUT ASSAR

ASSAR uses insights from multiple-scale, interdisciplinary work to improve the understanding of the barriers, enablers and limits to effective, sustained and widespread climate change adaptation out to the 2030s. Working in seven countries in Africa and South Asia, ASSAR's regional teams research socio-ecological dynamics relating to livelihood transitions, and the access, use and management of land and water. One of four consortia under the Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA), ASSAR generates new knowledge of climate change hotspots to influence policy and practice and to change the way researchers and practitioners interact.

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TSP - www.reospartners.com



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