

What is Transformative Scenario Planning?

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Photo: Tanvi Deshpande

Transformative Scenario Planning (TSP) is an approach that brings concerned stakeholders from different, often conflicting, perspectives together around pressing sets of problems to build stories that illustrate a range of potential futures that could come from taking different paths for dealing with those issues. By doing this, the involved stakeholders learn more about their present situation and about what dynamics in that situation are serving to help or hinder progress toward a more equitably beneficial future.¹

To date, most adaptation efforts have focused on reactive, short-term and site-specific solutions to climate-related vulnerabilities. Although important, these responses often fail to address the root causes of vulnerability, nor shed light on how to proactively spur larger-scale and longer-term adaptation that has positive effects on socio-economic development.

Using both research and practice to address this information shortfall, the primary aim of the Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR) project is to produce future-focused and societally-relevant knowledge of potential pathways to wellbeing through adaptation.

Why a TSP approach?

Sometimes social systems get stuck. There is not enough agreement among leading actors about what is happening or what could or should happen, for the system to be able to move forward. Confusion and conflict impede progress and create the risk of regress.¹

In such contexts, transformative scenario planning can be useful. This process enables politicians, civil servants, activists, businesspeople, trade unionists, academics, and leaders of other stakeholder groups to work together to construct a shared understanding of what is happening and what could happen in their system, and then to act on the basis of this understanding.²

The focus of transformative scenario planning is the development, dissemination and use of a set of two, three or four scenarios (structured narratives or stories) about what is possible. These scenarios provide a shared framework and language for strategic conversations within and across stakeholder groups about the situation they are part of and what actions they can, must, and will take to address it. Transformative scenario planning thereby offers a way for social systems to get unstuck and to move forward.¹

¹ Colleen Magner, Reos Partners

² Kahane, A. 2012. Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future. Berrett-Koehler Publishers

How TSP Works?

In a transformative scenario planning process, actors transform their problematic situation through transforming themselves. The aim is to assist participants to see the system, and their roles in it, from different angles. The process increases trust between participants and allows more empathy to work more efficiently in a team.¹

Transforming Understanding

The scenario team transform their understandings by seeing the current system, and their role in the current system, with fresh eyes and a shared perspective.²

Transforming Relationships

The scenario team transform their relationships with one another by working together as a cross-system team. Team work builds trust, empathy and an ability to work together.²

Transforming Language

Through the scenario process, the scenario team develops a common, shared language. The stories each convey key messages which are expressed by certain words and phrases that the scenario team need to create.²

Transforming Intention

By transforming their understanding and relationships, the scenario team see what they as individuals and potentially as a team can and must be done to tackle the problematic circumstances of the present.²

Transforming Actions

Based on the transformation of understandings, language, relationships and intentions, scenario team members transform their actions and thereby, transform their situation.²

ASSAR and TSP

ASSAR engages with a wide spectrum of stakeholders from communities, the private sector, civil society organisations, research institutions, governments and non-governmental organisations.

By guiding these stakeholders through participatory scenario planning processes ASSAR will help to build a common understanding of current adaptation needs and past adaptation failings, while promoting the co-production of adaptation responses that can yield appropriate, tangible and lasting benefits.



Photo: Lucia Scodanibbio

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.assaradapt.org

The overarching research objective of ASSAR is to use 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 across seven countries in East, Southern and West Africa, and South Asia, ASSAR regional teams conduct research focused on socio-ecological risks/dynamics that relate to livelihood transitions, and access, use and management of land and water resources.



CARIAA
Collaborative Adaptation Research
Initiative in Africa and Asia



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