

# Crafting Africa's Futures: National Long Term Perspective Studies

UNDP. African Future Programme

## Introduction

Since independence, countries in Africa have pursued various unsustainable paths to development. Preoccupied with crises, relief and drought management, most African governments have not succeeded in meeting the aspirations of their pre- and post-independence generations. In addition, the central planning and structural adjustment programs they adopted have failed to promote development management and achieve their stated objectives. Consequently, discontent with the performance of past approaches to development has grown. It has also become obvious that sustainable development can not be effected without productive partnership between the government, private sector, and civil society organizations. Moreover, in addressing macro-economic considerations, it has become clear that the development processes, would benefit from adopting a long term planning perspective, giving proper consideration to social, demographic and cultural variables.

These issues were debated in Maastricht at a high level conference on Africa organized in 1990 by the Dutch government. A consensus emerged recognizing the need to adopt long term perspectives as an appropriate framework for promoting sustainable development in Africa. Parties to the consensus included the World Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Subsequently, the donor community requested that UNDP channel international support to those countries in Africa wishing to create a long term vision for development. In order to accomplish this mission, UNDP established the African Futures/National Long Term Perspective Studies (NLTPS) program in 1992.

The objectives of African Futures are threefold:

- . To promote the institutionalization of the long term perspectives approach to development management in Africa by facilitating the completion of national long term perspective studies, and providing the necessary support for operationalisation of the resulting visions through policy reforms.
- . To build and strengthen national capacity in Africa for long term strategic management of the development process in such areas as futures studies, strategic management and planning, and policy analysis and forecasting.
- . To develop regional and sub-regional long term studies for Africa, covering a wide range of strategic issues, including governance, population, regional integration, economic development, food and water security , health, technological capacity , communications and information, peace, security and changes in the global environment.

This paper intends to highlight the various aspects of the standard NLTPS methodology and to examine the ways in which a few countries went about carrying out their NLTPS. It also points out some of the major lessons to be learnt from the country experiences and proposes some elements of the way forward.

## **The NLTPS Process**

African Futures has developed a methodology for carrying out NLTPS. It is an interactive approach which focuses on providing consistent long term development strategies and it is designed to provide answers to the following questions for each nation participating in the programme :

- . What are the long term aspirations and goals of the society? (i.e. what kind of a nation would the people like their country to be in the future, say in 25 years?)
- . What are the characteristics of the society and the issues facing it which could affect the ability of the country to create that desired future? (i.e. what are the main trends, uncertainties, future-bearing events, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the internal and external environment of the society that are important for the future?)
- . What are the alternative future scenarios? (i.e. given the issues and factors identified above, in what kind of environment would the society be expected to function in the future?)
- . Given the scenarios identified above, what should be the vision of the society? (i.e. what kind of a society should the nation be striving to create in the future given foreseeable possibilities and constraints?)
- . What are the strategic issues and challenges, that must be confronted if the society is to achieve its vision? What are the strategic options available to address these strategic issues?
- . What are the appropriate development strategies for the nation and how should it proceed with development?

In seeking to answer these questions, the NLTPS process proceeds in five broad interactive phases:

1. *Issue Identification* - consists of the identification of national aspirations as well as issues and themes that will be the focus of the NLTPS exercise;
2. *Basic Studies (Constructing the Base)* phase - includes the identification of critical trends and dynamics in society, key variables and factors, analyses of actors and their roles, of future-bearing events and of strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats facing the country as it tries to create a desired future;

3. The phase of *Scenario Construction* - includes the identification of assumptions and mapping out alternative scenarios for the future, as well as the creation of a holistic vision of the future based on the collective aspirations of the people, and guided by the possibilities and constraints ;
4. The *Strategy Formulation* - phase focuses on the development of broad strategies and policies for managing the development process based on the analysis of the country situation, as revealed in the previous steps;
5. The *Development Planning* phase involves the preparation of medium - and short-term plans and programs by government planning agencies to achieve the desired future, in successive phases.

In its ideal form, NLTPS is a people-centred learning process toward a shared national vision. It is arrived at by consensus, and should therefore prove to be reasonably implementable.

### **Lessons of Experience**

African Futures has undertaken a comprehensive review of the African development management experience of the past three decades and concluded that any relevant development strategy must recognise the importance of a shared national vision, long term thinking and a stable policy environment for development. A truly shared vision, developed through national dialogue, is a key element of NLTPS. The vision must provide the people with a sense of direction and discovery, and should serve as the guiding framework for national development action. Leaders, must think and act strategically, and ensure that the policy environment is stable.

Thus far, African Futures has assisted 14 countries in Africa to undertake NLTPS : Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe. Lessons of experience are derived from case studies of seven national long term perspective studies, whose reports were presented at a workshop in Entebbe, in September 1998 .The workshop participants deliberated on the various problems and difficulties which each NLTPS encountered, how they were resolved, what methodological adaptations were made, and the general features of the NLTPS exercise).

These lessons from experience are presented -highlighting their commonalties -in the two annexed matrices. The tools and techniques used by each country - by methodological phase -are summarized in the first matrix, while the institutional arrangements that were set up by each country are summarized in the second. Clearly, experience demonstrates the importance of setting up an institutional framework which is appropriate to the country's existing social, political and

technical structures before the study is implemented. Those activities and stages which experienced the smoothest implementation, benefited from arrangements that minimized the ruptures imposed by the NLTPS stages. Studies that used either the Loop or the Sequential approaches had to make accommodations/adjustments on particular features or aspects of the NLTPS methodology.

Several ruptures are, the implementation of NLTPS. These occur most frequently between the study phase and the operational phase. They also occur at the level of the participation of various actors and new actors, of necessity, emerge at each phase. For example, the team undertaking the study is different from the agencies and entities implementing the strategy, in government, the private sector and civil society. Rupture can also occur at the activities level. As an illustration, phases I-IV are characterized by exploratory activities those designed to expose the feasible options for the future which the country may face while phase V involves normative judgement - where choices are made by the planning decision makers.

Many of these ruptures can be traced to fault lines in the institutional mechanisms set up for implementing the NLTPS, These breaks occur when the anticipated planning activities are not implemented and when the high-level support of the teams doing the initial studies, is absent during the latter stages of NLTPS.

In spite of effective institutional mechanisms and structures for securing high-level support for NLTPS, which several countries have successfully put in place, many of the NLTPS studies are only just now reaching the implementation phase. The lessons of experience show that some countries differ with respect to the anticipated objectives of NLTPS. Those countries that have identified achievable objectives, which are not as far-reaching as the NLTPS objectives, often succeed attaining those objectives. Those countries that really expect to be able to use the NLTPS approach to planning, find the objectives difficult to meet, relative to the final results of the particular NLTPS.

## **The Way Forward**

Some governments and donors are of the opinion that the NLTPS process should be shortened, and reframed into a more pragmatic, coherent framework. In order to minimize or avoid the rupture that can occur between the study phase and the operationalisation phase, the Entebbe meeting observed that:

- . Operationalisation cannot be carried out only by government. Actors from the private sector and civil society are critical partners.
- . The likelihood of a successful operationalisation of the strategy is greater when activities are undertaken within existing structure and organizations.
- . Programs and initiatives that are already under way are frequently not sufficiently considered prior to operationalisation, even when they are referred to during earlier stages of NLTPS.

The scenarios that the NLTPS studies employed were normative in nature. This approach limited the usefulness of scenarios in exposing alternative futures which a country may well face. Some consideration of exploratory scenarios must exist if the NLTPS report is to fulfil its potential for increasing the country's capacity for strategic planning and development management. Scenarios are useful and essential for portraying a simplified vision of a very complex reality .

Considering the enormous difficulties that the national teams encountered during scenario construction, the following measures for improving the methodology could be considered:

- . quantitative methods could be used downstream during the stages leading up to scenario construction, when the basis for scenarios is built. They serve to illustrate the quantitative nature of the resulting scenarios;
- . exploratory scenarios should be prepared for the internal consideration of the impact of the external environment, which was not always considered in NLTPS already completed;
- . there has to be a way to reconcile the rapid technological, social, and political changes that take place during the life span of NLTPS, with the long term 25 year horizon of NLTPS.

Accordingly the process of scenario construction should be simplified; training in scenario construction must be customized to provide useful results; cross-impact analysis must be fully exploited; the scenario construction process must be rendered adaptable to the different needs of the countries undertaking NLTPS.

Measures that need to be taken to reduce the risk of unattained objectives include:

- . ensuring that institutional mechanisms for implementation of the strategy are incorporated into the methodology from the beginning .
- . strengthening the efforts to engage political support for the process during entire process, and not waiting until the study phase is complete.
- . Involving the research teams, at least in an ad hoc manner, during the implementation of the strategy, as NLTPS is envisioned as a continuous and iterative learning process.

The operationalization difficulties facing the NLTPS are not unique to the study, or ascribable to the methodology .Indeed, many new initiatives require "champions" in the form of institutions, personalities, and marketing strategies, which help to familiarize the entire development community with the NLTPS process. This in turn has a multiplier effect on the national institutions, in government, private sector, and civil society , which share the responsibility for implementing the strategy .

The second phase of the NLTPS project was officially launched in September 1997. During this phase, the project aims to:

- . Extend NLTPS from 14 to 30 African countries.
- . Develop a framework for the operationalisation of the NLTPS. Undertake strategic regional and .sub-regional long term perspective studies. (RLTPS)
- . Institutionalize the NLTP approach through the establishment of a network of African centers .of excellence and capacities building in the area of strategic planning.
- . Create the African Regional Strategic Decision-making Information System (ARSDIS).

## **Conclusion**

The NLTPS process is meant to be all-inclusive, people-centred and interactive. In its implementation, some countries have followed its standard sequential approach, while others have introduced some modifications along the way. The most common methodological modification has been the loop approach, which has considerably shortened the time taken to complete phases one to four. The most difficult phase has proved to be the one of scenarios construction, while the operationalization of the studies completed thus far into planning and management tools is in its infancy.

African Futures is addressing these issues by re-examining its methodologies and approaches, pushing for the operationalization of the studies, and laying the groundwork for the sustainability of the NLTPS process by empowering several centres of excellence and the establishment of a mechanism for strategic development information.



Table 1. MATRIX OF TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES BY COUNTRY

	Phase I : Issues Identification	Phase II : Basic Studies	Phase III : Scenario Construction	Phase IV : Strategy Formulation	Phase V : Development Planning
Cote D'Ivoire	Questionnaire survey: Representative Population sample (1000) from population census	Retrospective Studies FACTS methodology Phases I and II combined	Strategic Diagnostic Matrix ESPECT domain FACTS variables SWOT analysis	Synthesis Group Reflections; 13 strategic Questions converging on 4 major questions; strategic options for each of 4 questions	32 strategic Options, grouped into priority programs to form the axes for Vision 2025
Guinea Bissau	Series of meetings/ debates with target groups at Sectoral, regional and National levels	Fields of study. Retrospective Studies SWOT analysis	4 scenarios based on 3 uncertainties; Vision based on tendential scenarios. Godet approach used	Visions provides objectives for strategy. 5 stage strategy elaboration done by a representative socio-professional group. Consultations followed an iterative mode	5 priorities identified objectives, actors, success factors, And expected results specified
Madagascar	Regional entry Points: 6 sub-Regional. 6 regional studies of national expectations. Repeat for base studies and strategies	Strategic Diagnostic Matrix to analyze quantitative and basis qualitative data uncertainties	2 critical uncertainties; 4 hypotheses 8 axes; 3 scenarios I	Collective elaboration of strategies : sub-regional  Elaboration of a development management model and of a regional strategy	4 components/ objectives of an Action Plan identified; measures to achieve proposed
Malawi	Nation-wide Consultations to Identify Aspirations. Loop approach for NLTPS. Model (Threshold 21) used to Monitor and evaluate perspective planning	Key issues identified qualitative Judgements and Used interpretations Computerformed basis of retrospective studies Strategic Intelligence Matrix (SIM) constructed	Relevant Scenario constructed on the basis of 2 or 3 critical uncertainties Five working groups, each treating a separate permutation of uncertainties to construct one scenario	9 strategic challenges identified at 1 <sup>st</sup> of 2 workshop. Loop method used where Phases II-IV were combined and structured around national workshop evaluate perspective	An Action Plan been prepared for implementation and testing using food security as a theme



	Phase I: Issues Identification	Phase II: Basic Studies	Phase III: Strategic Formulation	Phase IV: Strategy Formulation	Phase V: Dvt. Planning
Mauritius	Sectoral Working Groups on Issues	Working Groups on Base Studies	1st National workshop for stakeholder representatives to draft vision and Strategy.	4 Segment groups for national consultations. 2 <sup>nd</sup> national workshop on vision And strategy	Loop method used from Phases I-V
Swaziland	Traditional Communication Structures used to Facilitate participation Meetings called by Chiefs, People's Aspirations collected From the country's 55 Administrative districts. Report submitted to King.	Brainstorming, silent reflection, seminars/ workshop nominal group techniques, open debates used for all stages	Scenario construction, vision and strategy formulation stages combined. Nationwide consultations by stakeholders representatives with constituencies carried out	Emphasis on consensus, ownership and full participation. A national workshop, facilitated by consultants, was organized to review the findings and draft the vision	The National Development Strategy will be used as the primary national planning document
Zimbabwe	Aspirations put forward Before the 1 <sup>st</sup> national Working group workshop NLTPS 5 stages methodology Followed	Base studies done based on inferences of aspirations; FACTS SWOT methods applied Structural Analysis ; Environmental Scanning Trend Impact Analysis Brainstorming; Workshop	Strategy Intelligence Matrix; SWOT used to review past and current policies; 2 special –day sessions held for scenario writers. Four alternative scenarios developed	National Working Groups for identifying broad and alternative strategies. Strategic Actions and Options addressed a large number of strategic issues. Literature Reviews. and Workshops. Synoptic and Incremental methods used. Latter used for relevance trees.	Vision 2020 will form the guiding framework for formulation of medium term Plans; will complement Current practices. Strategic Issues Will be translated Into actions plans Via medium-term Plans.



Table 2. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES AND MECHANISMS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NLTPS, BY COUNTRY

2.1. Co-ordination/Management

**Cote d'Ivoire** : Managed by a team of national experts (National Core Team). Rupture between national team undertaking the study and the govt. Departments implementing strategies. Institutional location : Ministry of Planning

**Guinea Bissau** : The study was co-ordinate and implemented by the Institute of National Economic Planning. The institute identified a national team, as well as specialists, experts and working groups. The national team arranged consultations.

**Madagascar** : Institutional responsibility for Study with the Ministry of Finance and Economy. National Team responsible for implementation. The NTLPS institutional structure adopted: co-ordination by a national team of 5/6 experts including a national co-ordination accountable to the Steering committee, responsible for co-ordinating the activities of the project including the budget and program implementation; 4/5 specialist to lead or supervise the various studies and research activities.

**Malawi** : Study conducted under the authority of Ministry of Economy and Planning. National Core Team (NCT) appointed by government, comprising 10 members from government, the private sector and university to manage the process. Monthly tripartite forum (NCT, gov't. co-ordinator Vision 2020, UNDP national economist/res.rep. set up to review progress, activities and budgets.

**Mauritius** : Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD) assumed responsibility for study. Co-ordination done by a small team, comprising the MEPD Director, a Principal Economist, and an Economist. A Core Group comprising the Chairmen and Secretaries of the Working Groups (WGs) provided overall guidance.

**Swaziland** National Development Studies (NDS) housed in the Moinistry of Economic Planning and Development An institution organizational chart drawn up by GTZ Co-ordination done by existing NDS co-ordination unit within the Ministry of Planning National Development Strategy Committee (NDSC) provides professional leadership and support for quality control. NDS co-ordinating co-ordinator provides administrative and logistical support.

**Zimbabwe** A Multi-disciplinary National Core Team of five expert consultants was recruited to operationalise and manage the NLTPS. The team was headed by a Project Co-ordinator and provided logistical support for the study. The national team also acted as Secretariat to the various bodies/committees. It was independently responsible for carrying out national consultations, as well as all the phases of the study. The national core team reported regularly to the NLTPS Steering Committee.

Table 2 .2 : Technical Aspects

**Cote D'Ivoire** : Technical Permanent Secretariat; Specialized Reflection Groups; National Perspective Commission appointed by govt.

**Guinea Bissau** : The national team was responsible for synthesizing the various strategies and options, working with national experts and panels in an iterative process of reflection and validation.

**Madagascar** : Multi-disciplinary working groups were formed consisting of highly qualified and experienced national experts, to support the national team through its research and studies activities, as well as in social mobilization. For strategy formulation, Strategy Committee formed, one for each of six strategic issues.

**Malawi** : NCT set up expert networks to provide advice when necessary. NCT assisted by a 90 member Working Group (with broad-based government and civic representation).

**Mauritius** : Eight autonomous Working Groups (WGs) were set up to do sectoral studies and detailed inputs. The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Technology Management also provide technical assistance to the NLTPS team. WGs were free to identify their members and to employ outside expertise.

**Swaziland** : Phase I done by an Economic Review Commission, commissioners were appointed by the King. National Core Team of Researchers provided technical advice. 8 Sector Committees facilitated the research and debate on thematic issues, and the writing of background sector papers. University of Swaziland did Phase II. A Stakeholder Group was set up to formulate the NDS.

**Zimbabwe** : Specialist studies and research papers were written by national experts. National Working Groups held workshops to produce draft reports. Strategy Formulation done at Workshops, with Stakeholder representation. A 9 person national team assisted the NCT in the execution of their duties. They were critical for consensus building based on stakeholder' analysis. Members from the National Economic Planning Commission (NEPC), and the Ministry of Finance were included in this team.

Table 2.3 : High-level Support

**Cote d'Ivoire** : A Presidential Adviser included in Technical Secretariat from Phase III onwards.

**Guinea Bissau:** The National team brought together members of the government and the opposition parties for strategy formulation. The National Assembly was involved in the validation of strategies. Decision makers assured the applicability of strategic issues. National debates during the finalization of the study facilitated ownership of strategies and consensus.

**Madagascar** : A Steering Committee was formed to keep government informed about the progress of the NLTPS. This committee provided political support. The national team was given autonomy to carry out the study.

**Malawi** : Members of Parliament, representatives of political parties, traditional Chiefs, trade unionists were included in the Working Group.

**Mauritius** : Four Stakeholder Consultation Segments (Groups) included a Cabinet level segment.

**Swaziland** : Head of State and Cabinet members involved from the beginning. Stakeholder Group mobilized through existing structures. Technical work groups, policy and decision-making bodies, and political decision-making structures were designed in an organizational chart : facilitated implementation, communication, consensus and ownership. The National Development Policy Council (NDPC) provided overall policy direction for the NDS.

**Zimbabwe** : Buy-In Workshops were conducted for Stakeholders. Major workshops were held for the Youth, Women and the Military. The National Steering Committee, made up of stakeholders' representatives, provided support and policy direction, as well as overall guidance. Also acted as disseminators of information to , and from constituencies. They were appointed from government, the private sector, and civil society.



Table 2.4 Diffusion/Communication

**Cote d'Ivoire** : Synthesis report prefaced by the President, Printing and Distribution of report by Ministry of Planning. Weak communication between national team and govt.

**Guinea Bissau** : The national team did the final articulation of the strategy. A national seminar was the forum for the final validation of the strategy and vision document. The stages of consensus went from specialist groups to the population, passing through decision makers and economic operators. International partners were informed.

**Madagascar** : The participatory approach was operationalised at each regional level and sub-regional levels. Before formulating a national strategy consensus and ownership for each stage and set of activities of the study were encouraged at each level.

**Malawi** : An Information-Education-Communication Strategy was instituted, which served to solicit participation, disseminate findings, and publicize the process and its outputs.

**Mauritius** : National Consultation, including a National Conference, were efficient for achieving consensus on the vision.

**Swaziland** : Nation-wide consultations by stakeholder representatives with their constituencies; a national workshop organized to review findings of Phases III-IV and draft vision. Representation to the NDSC, the Sector Committees and the Stakeholder Group was broad-based : government, non-governmental, and private sector.

**Zimbabwe** : Provincial/District and Special Interest group seminars and workshops, live debates through media were held to identify issues and aspirations. Advertising materials intensified awareness campaign. Radio debates continued throughout the process.