

Section 8 Using scenarios

“ Since men have learnt to shoot without missing, the eneke bird has learnt to fly without perching.

—Nigerian (Igbo) proverb.

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Building the AIDS in Africa scenarios

Over three years ago, *UNAIDS* and *Shell International Limited* made a groundbreaking decision: to work together to develop a scenarios project exploring some of the possible long-term impacts of the AIDS epidemic. Since Africa was so badly affected by the epidemic, it was decided to create scenarios exploring the future of AIDS in Africa, looking forward over 25 years.

A number of other organizations were also invited to join the project, including the *United Nations Development Programme*, the *World Bank*, the *Africa Development Bank*, and the *UN Economic Commission for Africa*.

The project aimed to bring together a wide group of stakeholders from across Africa to create a shared and deeper understanding of the drivers, impacts, and implications of the AIDS epidemic in Africa. It is hoped that this might lead to a more coherent and sustained policy response across different sectors, institutions, and countries.

The AIDS in Africa scenarios project was launched in February 2003. Over the following 18 months, a series of workshops were held across the African continent: participants came together to raise and explore the crucial questions and to build scenarios. Supporting analysis and research continued throughout the project, gathered through interviews, symposia, focused research, and commentary—all helping to shape the scenario stories.

More than 150 people have given their time, experience, knowledge, and expertise to this project. The names of all contributors can be found in **Appendix 3**.

And there is more to come: the creation of the scenario stories is only a beginning. It is hoped that they will set a provocative and productive stage for further thinking—and effective action.

Tools for understanding

Like all tools, scenarios are only valuable when they are used effectively. The success of a scenario project rests not only on building a set of scenarios, but in their widespread communication and use.

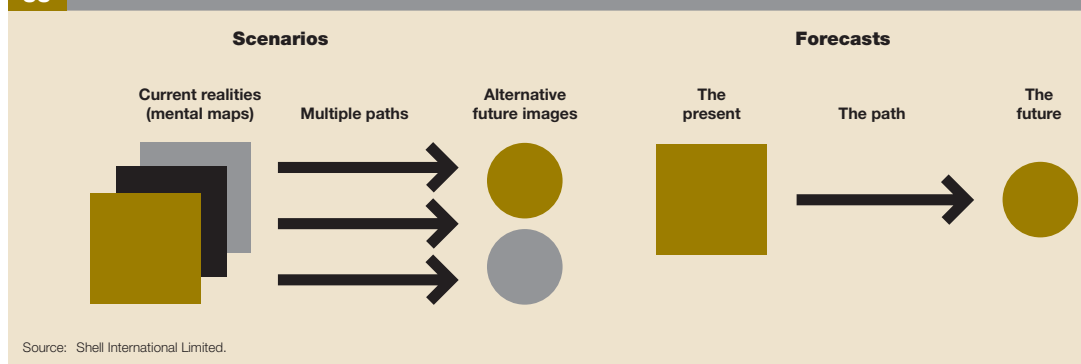
It is important that the scenarios are considered as a set, since the learning and insights come as much from comparing and contrasting them, as from exploring the implications of each. As a set, they also highlight key driving forces that, irrespective of which future unfolds, will influence the evolution of the AIDS epidemic.

Building scenarios can help us to better frame the questions and challenges we face and promote the generation of ideas across disciplines, rather than simply going over old ground. The building process encourages the involvement of different perspectives and helps ensure that important ideas are not excluded simply because they can't be 'measured'.

Scenarios may be used for a variety of reasons, ranging from individual learning, through awareness raising, to the testing of key collective decisions, strategies, and policies. They can be used to consider potential future developments and their implications and for preparing possible responses.

Scenarios provide their users with a common language and concepts for thinking and talking about current events and 'what really matters'. Building and using scenarios provides a solid, shared basis for making more successful decisions, by, for example:

- **Confronting assumptions:** our decisions about the future depend on how we think the world works. We (individuals, governments, corporations, institutions, and groups) all face decisions that prove to be turning points in our lives. At times, we regret that we missed something that, if we had only known, might have changed our decision—and our future—for the better. Using scenarios can help us explore the assumptions we currently hold—individually and



Source: Shell International Limited.

collectively—about the future and can help us to act more effectively in the present. Scenario thinking can help us to understand our own aspirations more clearly and examine whether these are rooted in a realistic understanding of our current position and capabilities.

- Recognizing uncertainty: scenario planning provides a method for acknowledging, and working with, what we don't know (and even what we don't know we don't know!) Uncertainty makes many people profoundly uncomfortable and many of us prefer to ignore it. However, using scenarios can help us explore and identify the opportunities and the risks contained in uncertainty and help us prepare for when the unexpected or unimaginable happens.
- Widening perspectives: scenarios can help us address 'blind spots'. These may be whole areas that we know nothing about and issues that—individually or collectively—we fail to recognize as important to our aspirations. Scenarios help us expand our vision and combine information from many different perspectives and disciplines. When we plan for the future we need to build a more comprehensive picture of the wider context in which we are acting. We cannot do this alone and our blind spots leave us exposed to unanticipated developments. We need to combine our knowledge and thinking with that of others.
- Addressing dilemmas and conflicts: scenarios can help clarify or even resolve conflicts and dilemmas confronting their users. Action plans and decision processes can get stuck. Sometimes it is because a situation demands a difficult compromise, or because colleagues or wider stakeholders hold different opinions about how the future might unfold, or have conflicting values and disagree about what should be done.

By building sets of scenarios, we assemble different versions of the future simultaneously, working with both analysis and intuition, and not

seeking to force consensus. Scenarios enable us to respect and accommodate differences, seeking only to define them more clearly. The origins of conflicts and dilemmas often lie in what we don't know about a situation. Scenarios can help in such situations. They can bring greater clarity to difficult areas of decision-making because they acknowledge and focus on what we don't know, encouraging us to explore the nature of uncertainties. The surfacing of conflicts and dilemmas highlight the judgement required of decision-makers and allows us to take constructive action.

It is important to recognize the difference between scenarios and forecasts.

How to use the *AIDS in Africa* scenarios material

Writing scenarios is only a first step: they can then be explored and applied through interactive processes that encourage users to reflect on their individual and collective assumptions and understandings.

Clarifying assumptions, identifying goals, agreeing success

It is important to recognize that those using the scenarios may be doing so out of choice or perhaps because they are required to do so, and that people's reasons for wanting to engage with the scenarios may vary. In any situation, it is essential that people are able to relate the scenarios to their own views and be clear about what they want to achieve. To that extent, it is useful to allow people time to explore their assumptions and what they think might actually be happening before they listen to a new set of scenarios. This can help them more effectively relate new ideas and information to their own concerns and decisions.

In addition, what constitutes success will vary among the participants according to their purpose. If

possible, these different success factors should be considered and, where relevant, be agreed in advance. These can provide a valuable guide for preparing the engagement session and serve as a basis for evaluating the session afterwards.

These scenarios can be used as a basis for exploring a range of different objectives. Some examples are listed below, and **Appendix 6** provides additional information on making use of the scenarios.

1. Raise understanding of HIV and AIDS and the forces shaping their future in Africa.
2. Raise awareness of (and possibly challenge) the perceptions, beliefs, assumptions, and mental maps held about AIDS and its possible future.
3. Increase mutual understanding between various stakeholders, through the creation of a common language for discussions about HIV and AIDS in Africa.
4. Raise awareness and understanding of the factors, drivers, and fundamental uncertainties (and the systemic relationships between them) that determine the HIV and AIDS future(s).
5. Raise awareness of dilemmas and choices that may need to be made.
6. Identify what gaps need to be addressed, and in what sequence, in order to get an organization or country from where they are now to where they want be.
7. Generate and develop plans, strategies, and policies, and test or challenge the validity and robustness of any vision or strategy.
8. Analyse specific situations for a given country or region for specific risks and opportunities.
9. Provide a backdrop to a specific story that needs to be told, and create passion and support for a specific policy.

It may seem obvious, but it is important to take into account the different languages, as well as the preferred working and learning styles, of the

participants before designing or selecting an exercise. For example, the scenario materials can be customized to the needs and interests of the intended audience (although care should be taken to ensure that this does not mean the omission of key information).

Finally, it is important to remember that this process can take time: for some participants, new actions and decisions may be identified by the end of a session, but often people need time to digest the scenarios before they are ready to act on them.

Appendix 6 contains a range of interactive processes, ranging from simple exercises intended to raise awareness of the scenarios (that can be done quickly and with few resources), to more complex workshops for testing organizational policy and decision-making or for developing specific scenarios for individual countries. A companion CD-ROM containing additional resources is available from *UNAIDS*.