

# NorthStar Scenarios

A community-owned process to explore the future of the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth



## THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE:

- Issue:** Community Leadership
- Geography:** Port Elizabeth, South Africa
- Duration:** 2010-2012
- Co-Convenors:** Northern Areas People's Development Initiative (NAPDI) and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Centre for Advancement of Non-racialism and Democracy (CANRAD).
- Scenarios:** "Falling Star", "Lucky Star", "Shooting Star", "Bright Star".



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## **The Context**

The North Star Scenarios are a set of possible futures developed for the Northern Areas of Port Elizabeth in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, Eastern Cape, South Africa. Approximately 250,000 residents live here, across 40 neighbourhoods and 11 ward councils. The area has a reputation for gang violence, drugs, and teen pregnancy, with unemployment, especially youth unemployment, higher than 60%. Violent tensions exist between “coloured” and “black” residents and between South African citizens and foreign residents. The area embodies many of the seemingly intractable challenges

of the “New South Africa”, with the community existing at the margins of the so-called “democratic dividend”, in which local residents, local government, and NGOs feel powerless to improve conditions. People say, it’s too complex! There are too many opposing interests! Where can we start?

## **The Convenors**

The scenario process was initiated from within the community by a small group of dedicated individuals with roots in the Northern Areas and subsequent professional careers. Through the Northern Areas People’s Development Initiative (NAPDI), these volunteers sought to use their skills, experiences, and influence to be “a voice in the community, an enabler of community empowerment, a mobiliser of people and resources, and a catalyst for systemic change”. NAPDI had capacity, dedication, and most importantly broad local legitimacy to convene diverse and opposing groups, due to its reputation for political neutrality. But the question remained of how to turn the commitment of a few individuals into a broad community-owned process, a process that could start to help diverse groups navigate through uncharted territory to overcome deeply entrenched barriers to working together.



In 2010, based on the reputation of the Dinokeng Scenarios, NAPDI invited Reos Partners to facilitate a scenario process for the area. Reos was able to complement and catalyse the convening capacities of local actors such as NAPDI and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's Centre for Advancement of Non-racialism and Democracy (CANRAD). Reos not only introduced the scenario methodology, but also acted as a neutral source of energy and commitment in support of a community still unsure of itself and the value of its concerns.

### ***The Process***

Over the next 18 months, Reos guided a highly diverse group of local volunteers through a uniquely participative creative process to explore their community's possible futures. This included training the volunteers in dialogue interviewing techniques, coaching them to engage residents in a research process to elicit perceptions of their community, and mentoring them to analyse and present their findings in ways that would help the community sense itself as a whole. The volunteers' report provided the basis for discussion by a scenario team of 25 individuals including business professionals, youth, community-based activists, sports administrators, educators,

health professionals, local government officials, and non-government workers, who met for five days over two months in September and October 2011.

The broad-based participation ensured that the resulting scenarios reflected the deep shared logic of the community, a community still able to "live, learn, work, play, and pray" and held together against all odds by the values of informal local leaders. Even though wracked by an uncertain and seemingly uncontrollable local political landscape, social fallout from lack of service delivery, and a challenging economic environment and employment picture, local leaders steeped in strong values emerged as the key dynamic that would give the community the strength to influence its own future. The scenarios illustrate that while no economic development and no leadership (Justin's Fallen Star) predictably lead to a dead-end, economic development without leadership (Lucky's Lucky Star) can do the same. Leadership without development (Gertie's Shooting Star) is like treading water, but leadership with development (Loliwe's Bright Star) is a viable and hopeful prospect.



## *Innovation and Learning*

The North Star Scenarios were an unusual project for Reos. Reos had not previously worked at the level of a local community and within a geographically (rather than thematically) defined space. Reos generally works with big, often scary challenges in which the facilitators first have to develop a sense of immediacy around challenges such as climate change, food security, and energy strategy. In the Northern Areas, danger and fear are hourly realities, and almost all of the participants in the scenario process had lost loved ones to gangs, drugs, and the hopelessness of chronic unemployment. This proximity to physical and structural violence heightened the courage required for participation in the scenario processes. Not only can it be personally risky for participants and facilitators to cross the interests of local “spoilers” if they are not integrated into the process, but it requires emotional bravery to face internalised fears head-on and find ways to imagine beyond them. Reos traditionally brings together selected individual stakeholders who already have influence and power and are seeking a systemic understanding of where to apply it. In the North Star process, the challenge was to move hundreds of thousands of people out of the trap of perceived powerlessness towards a systemic

analysis of their existing capacities that would allow them to take ownership of their own futures.

The highly participative process described above was an important innovation for achieving this empowerment aim, as was finding a simple, emotive, and universally legitimate language for communicating the scenarios. The presentation of the scenarios needed to enable different groups in the community (divided by generation, race group, language group, education level, class, gender, nationality and religion) to recognise themselves and to find shared pathways into the future. It needed to reach illiterate aunties as well as university students, gang youth as well as religious leaders. It also needed to capture the imagination of external stakeholders with an interest in the development of the region. Reos often draws on the power of stories, and so the scenario team decided to express each possible future through a person’s life trajectory over 10 years: the stories of Loliwe, Gertie, Lucky, and Justin.

## *Moving to Action*

These four “residents” were presented to the Northern Areas community in May 2012, with the goal of generating energy for creative responses to the situations outlined in the scenarios. Launched by



Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, one of South Africa's (and the world's) leading champions of citizen leadership, the scenarios brought national and international attention to the area, not as a crime-infested example of community collapse, but as a community with concerned, respected, and independent leadership seeking solutions for itself. In the months since the launch and through continued roadshows to disseminate the scenarios, NAPDI has been able to galvanise the energy produced through the scenario process into concrete community activities. These include a public space clean-up and recycling process in Hellendale, one of the harshest neighbourhoods in the Northern Areas, and within the Nelson Mandela Metro (cities of Port Elizabeth, Despatch, and Uitenhage), voluntary programme helping mature students gain their high school completion certificate, a significant market gap in education in the North Areas. These activities are funded by the provincial government) and through NAPDI itself from volunteer time-based contributions for the education programme and triggering other resources now recommitted to the area.

NAPDI has gained a track record as a committed and independent facilitator of local development, and the community has gained an understanding that it is

possible for diverse interests to work together.

For Reos, the North Star Scenarios illustrate that Transformative Scenario Planning is effective at many levels, including at the community level, and can shift seemingly unmovable situations where many other approaches have been tried and abandoned.

For more information on the NorthStar Scenarios, please see these related materials:

- [Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future by Adam Kahane \(Berrett-Koehler, 2012\). Available from Amazon.](#)
- [www.reospartners.com](http://www.reospartners.com)