

# SA's eco-prophecy

There are four possible outcomes for our ailing environment

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"Skorokoro", "Tata ma chance", "Going nowhere slowly" and "Laduma!" — these are the four environmental scenarios facing South Africa, says the consultancy at the forefront of the government-commissioned report, *South Africa Environment Outlook*.

The report, commissioned by the department of environmental affairs and tourism, and carried out by more than 30 researchers and specialists, found that the country's land, atmosphere, marine areas, inland water and biodiversity are already in extremely poor shape. (*Mail & Guardian*, June 29).

Last week the lead consultants in the stocktaking exercise, SRK Consulting, warned that the future of the local environment depends critically on the policies government adopts over the next five years.

"Our scenarios are stories about how our future can look," said Donald Gibson, manager of SRK's environmental business unit.

The scenarios show that while the government should provide environmental leadership, every South African has a responsibility.

The correct government policies, combined with the country's economic and technological strength and the participation of business and civil society, could square the needs of the environment and the economy.

SRK warns that depleting South Africa's environmental capital will create huge socio-economic problems. Without the correct interventions, it foresees a country reduced to a wasteland, with citizens fighting over resources.

"The lesson we see is that economic development and environmental policies must be integrated," said SRK's principal environmental scientist, Darryl Kilian. "It's not one at the expense of the other. They're not mutually exclusive."

Given South Africa's solid environmental governance framework and ever-improving awareness about environmental issues, Kilian and Gibson were optimistic that South Africa could achieve Laduma!

The scenarios, projected over 20 years, are as follows:

## Skorokoro

Poor governance and economic underperformance turn South Africa into a wasteland.

At first, the environment benefits as resource exploitation slows, but this eventually leads to ecosystem collapse.

Socio-economic decline widens the gap between rich and poor and, as poverty grows, people rely increasingly on ecosystems to survive.



## Going nowhere slowly

The state adopts a rational but centralised policy stance in this scenario, but has to struggle with weak economic conditions.

Economic growth tails off because of adverse global conditions and there is a national loss of confidence. The government, however, continues to press for a more equitable society.

There is understanding of the major environmental and social issues and strong commitment to appropriate governance systems. This improves service delivery in the short to medium term and poverty lessens to an extent.

In the longer term, social and environmental gains decline once more as the economic and skills resource base stagnates. There is also an influx of immigrants from Africa.

The slower economy hampers the country's ability to tap cross-border resources such as gas, water and hydropower. The effects of global warming and other environmental problems place ever-increasing demands on the country's finances.



environment-centred land-use planning, the large-scale roll-out of service delivery programmes, the elimination of slums and the reduction of unemployment to a manageable level. Strong leadership, including the emergence of charismatic patrons of the environment, keep the nation focused.

The poverty gap is significantly reduced, human vulnerability to disasters declines and ecosystem services improve in the region. Civil society is active, well resourced and effective, while natural resources in neighbouring countries are also looked after.

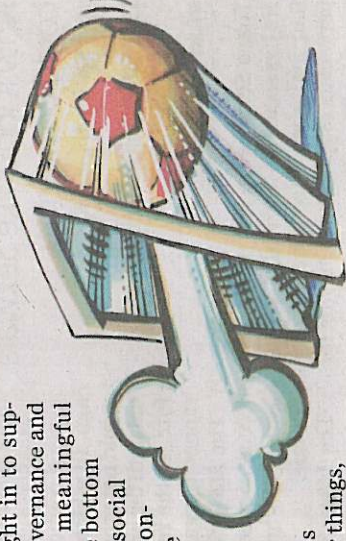
With political stability comes opportunity for regional natural resource management and use. This includes developing the agricultural, forestry and wildlife resource base of Southern Africa north of the Limpopo.

## Laduma!

In this scenario the people, the economy and the environment move together steadily in a sustainable direction. South Africa chooses sustainable development rather than pure growth and full cost accounting becomes the norm.

Measures are brought in to support self-regulating governance and there is widespread meaningful reporting of the triple bottom line — profitability, social equity and the environment — in the private sector.

The government succeeds in establishing sustainable human settlements through, among other things,



## Tata ma chance

In this scenario the economy develops rapidly, but environmental policies are fragmented and poorly developed and there is little policing.

Apart from islands of environmental advocacy in the private sector and civil society, environmental concerns are not a priority for most South Africans. There is pressure to create more jobs and these lead to unchecked environmental abuse.

Private corporations plunder resources as they maximise profits and pollution is rampant. The economy continues to rely on fossil fuels to meet its energy requirements with little progress in developing and using renewable energy sources.

In influential circles the resulting environmental damage is regarded as an acceptable price for a booming economy and growing personal wealth. Land and water are gobbled up as urbanisation intensifies.

Weak environmental controls allow over-exploitation of "free" natural resources such as fish stocks, communal grazing and soil.

Because of the widespread depletion of environmental capital, the initial increase in national wealth begins to slow down over the 20-year scenario period. The government

tries quick fixes but ultimately the economy starts to suffer and the "Tata ma chance" scenario degenerates into the wasteland of "Skorokoro".