USAID RESILIENT WATERS PROGRAM DELIVERS AN OPEN ONLINE COURSE ON ANTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

**USAID Resilient Waters** is a five-year, $32 million project implemented by Chemonics International. Its goal is to build more resilient and water secure Southern African communities and ecosystems through improved management of trans-boundary natural resources and increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation services.

Drawing on the expertise of researchers at the Centre for Sustainability Transitions (CST) in the fields of foresight and futures literacy, social-ecological resilience, and complex adaptive systems, this self-paced, open, online course highlights the approaches and tools for exploring how to foster governance capacities to explore, envision, and plan for change and uncertainty.

**WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE COURSE?**

The course introduces the concept of anticipatory governance as an approach for dealing with complexity and future uncertainty, by governing in the present in a way that is adaptive to or can shape uncertain futures. The field of Anticipatory Governance is cutting edge in theory and practice and, although a lot of the ideas developed in this space come from Europe, the more interesting and important work is being done by the African experts that we convened for this course. Deemed by planning experts as the best way to deal with complexity, uncertainty and constant change, the notion of ‘anticipation’ offers an alternative to assumptions and strategies based on certainty and equilibrium. **Anticipation is not to be equated to ‘predicting the future’ and is instead defined as the process of acting on a variety of inputs to manage emerging situations.** As a type of ‘action learning’, anticipatory governance approaches involve asking questions in conditions of risk and favoring actions based on that, rather than finding the answers to questions that have already been defined by others.

“As a planner, I spend a lot of time thinking about the future. This course helped structure my thinking in a very practical way, while also helping me contextualize the challenges in my country in a broader context of development and change.” - Planner from South Africa
The anticipatory governance course has three learning objectives:

- Introduce diverse definitions of, and approaches to, anticipatory governance.
- Identify key participatory futures tools for envisioning and navigating towards sustainable and just futures.
- Explore case studies of how anticipatory governance has been applied in different ways across a variety of contexts, with a focus on examples from Southern Africa.

Aimed at practitioners, researchers, and managers, this course identifies key participatory foresight and futuring tools that can improve decision-making and the governance of complex systems. Case studies from Southern Africa, covering both the Okavango and Limpopo River basins, showcase the ways in which these tools have and can be applied to co-design desirable visions of the future and to identify the diverse pathways for navigating towards socially just and sustainable futures.

Since the course began in November 2021, 1,215 learners have enrolled, and 130 certificates of completion have been issued.

“The anticipatory governance course has expanded my reasoning about the future and opened new senses of thinking to tackle some issues common to my country. I really appreciate the opportunity given by the course to help chart a new path for tackling issues of climate change, …. water availability, flooding… in Nigeria.” – Professional from Nigeria

WHAT HAS RESILIENT WATERS LEARNED FROM ROLLING OUT THE ANTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE COURSE?

Dissemination is an essential part of the cycle of knowledge generation

Knowledge generation is an important area of work for the USAID Resilient Waters Program. While dissemination is an extension of this, the creation of this open online course has highlighted that knowledge generation is a cycle, and while the course was developed to facilitate learning for others, hosting and facilitating a learning community also feeds into a dynamic process of knowledge production. Many of the people who opted into the course are already active in debates around resilience and anticipatory governance, creating a lively and engaged community that will shape the way Resilient Waters understands and acts on anticipatory capacities.
Collaboration is central to enriching an online learning experience

By bringing together a variety of experts with different organizational perspectives, the course helped each contributor innovate from their own area of knowledge. This led to a dynamic course, bringing together new material and content, and innovating framing of a well-established concept. It was particularly important to bring together scholars, policy makers, youth, and representatives from institutions working in the field of anticipation and futures literacy, so each could use the material to contribute to transformation from their own area of specialization.

“I was impressed by the coverage and diversity of material… I liked the readings very much – they are a great resource... I think this is an important course for future policy at every level worldwide..... I will go through the course again because there is much more in it than I took in the first time.”

Academic from a Research Centre in the United Kingdom (UK)

Learning communities can strengthen the implementation of Resilient Waters’ goal of building resilience

With impact level results in anticipatory capacity, the Program is building on the course material already to ensure that our theory of change, programme design, and measurement tools are in keeping with cutting edge practice to strengthen resilience in the region. These lessons are currently being brought into the Program’s planning.