

Information leaflet, June 2017

## The NWO UDW project ‘Strengthening strategic delta planning processes in Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Vietnam and beyond’



<http://strategic-delta-planning.un-ihe.org/introduction>

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### What is the problem we want to address?

Urbanising deltas worldwide face many threats to water safety, water and food security and sustainable development. Changes and innovations in water and land use are required to prepare deltas for the future. There is an increasing interest for strategic delta planning to enable strategic and innovative choices across sectors in long-term perspectives. It differs from ‘normal’ delta planning in many ways, e.g. purpose, scope, type of plan, and time horizon. But do these planning approaches live up to their expectations? What is their role in enabling change and innovation in preparing deltas for the future, and improving local livelihoods? And what lessons can we learn on planning and implementing strategic changes in delta management?

### Objective of the project

The Strategic Delta Planning project aims to better understand the dynamics of delta planning. More specifically we focus on the role of strategic delta planning processes in enabling consent among key stakeholders over strategic priorities and innovative solutions, and we explore if consent is sufficiently stable to allow for implementation. We study the Bangladesh Delta Plan, the Mekong Delta Plan in Vietnam and the Dutch Delta Plan, while taking into account the different contexts of politics, planning, and culture. We study these dynamics from different perspectives: actor coalitions, innovations, and participatory planning tools.

In our project we take a reflective approach, by placing delta planning, innovation and change in a scientific context. Through our research we aim to provide lessons learned to the delta (planning) community on planning approaches and tools, and encourage discussion amongst deltas.

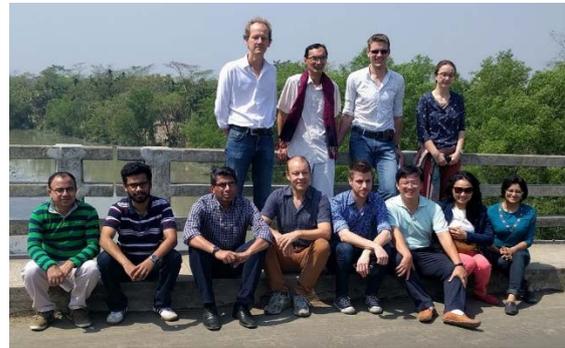


## How do we work?

- 'We' are a consortium of Vietnamese, Bangladeshi and Dutch knowledge institutions, civil society organisations and private sector.
- Our research is focused around the work of PhDs Shahnour Hasan (from Bangladesh on participatory planning tools) and Vo Thi Minh Hoang (from Vietnam on innovations), and the Dutch postdocs Dorien Korbee (actor coalitions) and Chris Seijger (coordination and integration). Each contributes to the jointly developed framework (Seijger *et al.*, 2016).
- Knowledge institutions and private sector participate in our project as they are interested in testing and improving the tools they offer, based on critical reflections.
- Our southern partner involvement make the project strongly connected to local issues and people's networks, enabling a local perspective on delta planning whilst keeping in mind local needs and local contexts. Our linkage to the ongoing delta planning processes supports the empirical grounding of research, uptake of results and contributions to policy practice.
- We contribute to capacity development e.g. through involvement of the local PhDs, outreach activities, training activities (e.g. on participatory planning tools in the Mekong delta in 2016) and curriculum development for universities and professionals.



October 2016. Participants of training workshop 'Participatory Planning Tools for Strategic Delta Planning and Management', Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



February 2017. Project consortium members during a field trip in Khulna province, Bangladesh.



January 2016. Interviewing rice-shrimp farmers in Tra Vinh province, Mekong Delta.



February 2017. Interviewing the Bangladesh Minister of Water Resources, Anisul Islam Mahmud, on sustainable strategies for the coastal polders.

## First lessons learned on the dynamics and role of strategic delta planning

### *Confirm relevance of our project*

1. The need for strategic delta planning processes is widely acknowledged and confirmed in various project meetings, field visits and training workshops.
2. Linking planning with implementation is of utmost importance as so many plans are not implemented.
3. There is not sufficient opportunity for learning in strategic delta planning processes. For various reasons there is limited attention for incorporating lessons from the past, or exchanging experiences between deltas like Bangladesh and Vietnam. Valuable insights are therefore lost, for instance on how the planning culture functions or why previous plans were not implemented. Our project aims to address this opportunity for learning in strategic delta planning processes.

### *New insights on the role of strategic delta planning*

4. A strategic delta plan has the potential to change directions in how a delta is managed. Its implementation is essentially about changing people's minds on priorities for delta management and strategies for sustainable livelihoods.
5. In this project Strategic Delta Planning is often considered as the 'golden solution'. Insights gained at project meetings, field visits and the workshop informed us on weaknesses and drawbacks. Lack of awareness, institutional arrangements and coordination, monitoring and learning, and ability to keep a plan 'on the table' constrain the implementation of a strategic delta plan.

### *Participatory planning tools*

6. The expectations of participatory planning tools are high. They are expected to enhance communication and discussion of the consequences of proposed plans, allowing participating actors to articulate their visions and interests (PhD Shahnoor Hasan).
7. Strategic delta Planning is a highly abstract concept that can be made explicit by the use of tools for learning and planning purposes (Workshop, Tra Vinh 2016).
8. Participatory planning tools can support learning in planning processes, but also to teach new generations students in integrated / strategic planning for deltas (Workshop, Tra Vinh 2016).

### *Innovations and actor coalitions*

9. Although there is a need for innovations in developing deltas incl. land and water management, the perspectives of people regarding preferred innovations are rather diffuse, which hampers implementation (PhD Vo Thi Minh Hoang).
10. Different types of actor coalitions exist in planning and implementation phases. Support during planning is thus no guarantee for support during implementation. (postdoc Dorien Korbee).
11. Vested interests and power relations should deserve continuous attention how they are treated in formulating and implementing a strategic delta plan (postdoc Chris Seijger).

### *Implementation*

12. It is important to assess the implementation feasibility of plans. The MOTA concept as developed by our local partner at WACC at VNU HCMC, offers a methodology to gain insight in the implementation feasibility in order to minimize the implementation gap (Phi *et al.* 2015).
13. Implementation of strategic delta plans is a piecemeal and incremental process. For instance through new research programs, modifications in policies, and initial projects. All these efforts should be pieced together, hold together against vested interests, and widely shared, until the new ways of thinking for managing a delta become mainstream (postdoc Chris Seijger).



February 2017. Polder 35/1 in Khulna province Bangladesh. Interviewing people on polder construction works (left), discussions between project members (right).

## Further reading

### Online

<http://strategic-delta-planning.un-ihe.org/introduction> - Our regular updated website with the latest news, events, and results.

<https://www.un-ihe.org/stories/insights-strategic-delta-planning-bangladesh-vietnam-and-netherlands> - Our project progress is featured as 'Impact Story' on IHE Delft website.

<https://www.iucn.org/content/strategic-delta-planning-lessons-netherlands> - Blog by Jake Brunner on Strategic Delta Planning Lessons from the Netherlands for Vietnam

### Peer-reviewed articles

Ho Long Phi, L.M. Hermans, W.J.A.M. Douven, G.E. Van Halsema and M.F. Khan (2015), *A framework to assess plan implementation maturity with an application to flood management in Vietnam*, Water International, 2015 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2015.1101528>

Seijger C., W.J.A.M. Douven, G. van Halsema, L. Hermans, J. Evers, Ho Long Phi, M.F. Khan, J. Brunner, W. Ligtoet, L. Pols, M. Vermoolen, S. Hasan, H. Vo (2016), *An analytical framework for strategic delta planning: negotiating consent for long-term sustainable delta development*, Environmental planning and management. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2016.1231667>

### Reports

PhD proposal by Shahnoor Hasan, *What do participatory planning tools do in strategic delta planning processes?*, IHE Delft and University of Amsterdam.

PhD proposal by Vo Thi Minh Hoang, *Co-evolution between Strategic Delta Planning and Technical Innovations*, Wageningen University.

Report of the training workshop 'Participatory Planning Tools for Strategic Delta Planning & Management' was held in Tra Vinh Mekong delta in 2016 hosted by partner VNU WACC.