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The Work That Goes Into Policy Transfer: Making the Dutch Delta Approach Travel

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ABSTRACT: The government of the Netherlands actively frames the country's delta planning expertise as a must-have solution for sustainable delta management in other countries. Texts that explain or promote the transfer of delta planning expertise tend to portray it as something that happens because of the intrinsic qualities of this expertise. The starting point of this paper is discomfort with this portrayal. This discomfort importantly stems from the hierarchy it assumes between the country of origin and the country of destination, with the former ranking higher in terms of degree of development and technological advancement. We mobilise insights from the sociology of translation and from the anthropology of development cooperation and scholarship on policy entrepreneurship to explore how the story of policy transfer can be told in ways that are more symmetrical and which recognise the contributions of all involved. Empirical material about the travels of the Dutch Delta Programme to Vietnam and Bangladesh reveals that policy transfer in these cases mainly consisted of two types of work: maintaining or developing alliances and creating political buy-in. The effectiveness of the actors involved in the work does not so much depend on the technical planning or water expertise for which many of them are hired; rather, it depends on their salespersonship, diplomacy, and skills in negotiation and dialoguing. Recognising that this is so provides a good basis for rethinking how capacities for effective transfer can be developed and nurtured, and how these are and should be distributed. It also supports more dialogical ways of writing and talking about transfer, ways that foreground the mutual learning that occurs between 'initiators' and 'receivers'.

KEYWORDS: Dutch Delta Programme, policy transfer, policy translation, policy entrepreneurship, Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, Mekong Delta Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Dutch government exports its delta approach to selected countries with large river deltas, presenting it as a must-have for sustainable delta management (Netherlands Water Partnership, 2014: 10). In addition to supporting others in making their deltas climate resilient, an important hope and expectation is that new delta collaborations will help make the transition from aid to trade (International Water Ambition, 2019; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013). The Dutch government, therefore, proactively mobilises efforts and resources to brand the delta approach as an attractive export product (Minkman and van Buuren, 2019). In this article we show that, in addition to the more visible efforts of branding and promotion, transferring the delta approach to countries like Vietnam, Bangladesh,

Indonesia, Mozambique and Myanmar also requires efforts that are much less visible (Hasan et al., 2020; Ivars and Venot, 2019; Laeni et al., 2020). The less-visible work is that of those engaged in the day-to-day activities that are needed to make transfers happen; these include the Dutch bureaucrats, diplomats, NGOs and private sector actors, as well as their partners in transfer destination countries. In most representations of transfer, the latter category of actor, and the work they do, hardly figures and they remain under-recognised. As we have explained in more detail elsewhere (Hasan et al., 2019, 2020), promotional narratives tend to describe policy transfer as a rational process of diffusion, attributing the mobility of the delta approach to its inherent qualities. This gives the impression that the approach travels almost by itself, making any attention to the involved actors and their efforts of only marginal importance in analyses of transfer processes.

Transfer-as-diffusion stories – in this case about delta planning – assume and confirm hierarchies of knowledge and expertise between the country of origin and the country of destination, with the former occupying a higher position than the latter. They rest on the idea that Dutch delta planning expertise is better, or more advanced, than that of, for instance, Bangladesh and Vietnam (Büscher, 2019). In this way, writing about policy transfer as diffusion matches a familiar theorisation of development, one that sees it as an almost evolutionary process of modernisation or civilisation, with some countries – the wealthier Western world – ranking higher on the ladder of progress than others (Mosse and Lewis, 2006). The modernity of these countries tends to be attributed to their more advanced technology and science, which is why the transfer of expertise from wealthier to poorer countries is important in strategies to achieve 'development'. In this same way, transfer-as-diffusion stories are useful in marketing, as they serve the purpose of positioning a product – in our case the Dutch delta approach – as something that is attractive and desirable, something that can bring about many benefits and much good.

This story of policy transfer is implicitly based on the idea of 'development as evolutionary progress'. There are important reasons to reject this idea and tell the story differently. For one, it has become increasingly difficult to deny that Western development and wealth was, and is still being, achieved at the cost of underdevelopment elsewhere. Still today, wealth and poverty remain connected by unequal terms of trade and divisions of labour that are maintained through the exercise of economic, political and military power. Secondly, climate change is forcing a rethink of what progress – in the form of change, modernity and development – is and should be about. The path of industrialisation followed by Western countries can no longer be taken as the standard and model for the rest of the world; hence, the Netherlands – and its water and delta expertise – can also no longer be unequivocally assumed to be an example for others. We thus do not uncritically support the idea that Dutch expertise is useful to supposedly less-developed countries, the idea on which accounts of policy transfer as diffusion are based. We think there is merit in a more agnostic comparison of how different countries deal with, and have dealt with, the challenges of socioecological change in deltas where problems are being compounded by climate change; we also feel there is merit in recognising the potential of expertise that is not developed in the Netherlands. The story of policy transfer, we feel, is told better if it starts from the assumption that countries with large river deltas – like Vietnam, Bangladesh and the Netherlands – can learn from each other's attempts to grapple with uncertain futures.

Several bodies of theoretical scholarship on policy transfer help make this alternative story possible. Rather than analysing what is being transferred and focusing explanations on the speed and direction of its transfer, these focus on the people doing the transfer. In explaining how and why a policy or technology travels, both the sociology of translation and anthropological studies of the workings of development cooperation explicitly foreground the actors and their actions. The sociology of translation conceptualises transfer as translation; it emphasises that the transfer of a fact, technology, or policy model from one place to another always involves adaptations and transformations and that, in the process, actors modify, deflect, betray, add on to, or appropriate the object of transfer (Latour, 2005). In a similar vein, the anthropology of development cooperation maintains that development happens through the active mediation of those who are responsible for the travel of ideas, technologies, or policy

models (Li, 2007). Thus inspired, in our previous work we developed accounts of the transfer of the delta approach to Vietnam and Bangladesh by tracing the actors and, based on their own recollections and reflections, documenting their efforts. Making the actors and their efforts central to understanding policy transfer, also helped highlight that the object of is transfer – the Dutch Delta Approach – changes in the process, sometimes making it difficult to recognise the original in the final outcome. (Hasan et al., 2019, 2020, 2021).

In this article, we build on these analyses to dive deeper into *the kinds of work* done by the actors engaged in policy transfer. Our aims are both to make this work more visible, and to provide a more symmetrical account of policy transfer. For our characterisation we draw on, and creatively combine, theoretical insights from the already mentioned sociology of translation (Akrich et al., 2002a, 2002b; Callon, 1986) and anthropology of development (Li, 2007), while also taking inspiration from ideas about policy entrepreneurship (Kingdon, 1995; Huitema and Meijerink, 2010). The policy entrepreneurship literature describes how policy problems and ideas are translated into policy decisions, mostly focusing on political agenda-setting. Policy entrepreneurs are actors who actively aim to create alliances in support of specific problem diagnoses or solutions. Where much of this scholarship sets out to find ways to support policy entrepreneurs in doing their work better, we use it here to more agnostically analyse the work done in the course of transferring the Dutch Delta Approach to other countries.

As noted, more than focusing on the content of what is transferred, these bodies of work draw attention to the practices and behaviours of policy actors in explaining the dynamics (and the successes) of the processes of policy transfer. They therefore provide useful suggestions as to possible ways to identify and define the efforts, strategies, actions, and skills of these actors. We make use of these suggestions to typify the activities of those who were involved in the development of the Mekong Delta Plan (MDP; MDP, 2013) and the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 (BDP 2100; BDP, 2018) (Table 1). Rather than literally following the language and conceptual terms from the reviewed literature, however, we have used the spirit of their insights to come up with our own categorisation of policy transfer work. One important criterion was that the actors recognise themselves and what they do in the agreed-upon terms, as it was important for us to embed our analysis in an ongoing conversation about different ways of understanding, doing and organising processes of policy transfer and learning. To do this, the first author presented and discussed our findings at targeted thematic sessions on delta planning and management between October 2018 and April 2019 in Bangladesh and the Netherlands. These meetings were attended by expert consultants and by government officials who are actively engaged in the transfer of the Dutch delta approach, as well as by researchers studying development interventions in the deltas of Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Vietnam, and the USA.¹

Our analysis shows that policy transfer consists of two main types of activities: (1) creating and maintaining alliances; and (2) creating political buy-in. Both types of activities are intrinsically social and relational, and they both build on long-standing bilateral relations and prior development collaborations between the initiators and their transfer partners. We noted that the unfolding of the transfer process is importantly marked by those with whom the initiators engage and negotiate. We also noted that the effectiveness of people involved in the transfer process does not so much depend on the technical planning skills or water expertise for which many of them are hired and appreciated; rather, it depends on their skills in, for instance, salespersonship, negotiation and diplomacy.

In the following sections, we first discuss the insights that we inferred from the three reviewed bodies of scholarship, from which we arrived at a categorisation of transfer work as belonging to the two main types of activities mentioned above. We then present iconic examples from our analyses of the MDP and the BDP 2100 development processes in order to further explore how an account of policy transfer in terms of work done can help make the conversation more symmetrical. The final section of this paper

¹ We have explained the research methods in more detail elsewhere, which is why we have chosen not to provide the methodological details of our study here. For those interested, see Hasan et al., 2019, 2020.

offers some concluding reflections on how the transfer of the Dutch delta approach can be characterised. We discuss the implications of our analysis for broader theorisations of policy transfer, in view of the ambition to shift the terms of the policy transfer debate.

CONCEPTUALISING POLICY TRANSFER AS THE WORK OF PEOPLE

As mentioned in the introduction, we explored ways to conceptualise policy transfer processes such that they are recognised as the work and activities of people. This yielded three inspirational bodies of scholarship: the sociology of translation (Akrich et al., 2002a, 2002b; Callon, 1986); the anthropology of development cooperation (Li, 2007; Mosse and Lewis, 2006); and scholarship on policy entrepreneurship (Kingdon, 1995; Huitema and Meijerink, 2009 and 2010). In translation terms, Callon (1986) calls those who initiate a transfer and work to make it happen the "main actors"; Akrich et al. (2002a) refer to such people as "spokesperson(s)", while Kingdon (1995) refers to them as "policy entrepreneurs". Li (2007) calls them the "trustees" (of expertise): those who designate themselves as having the ability and expertise to help solve an identified problem. Although they use different terms, these various bodies of theoretical work resonate positively with each other in three major ways: (1) their conceptualisation of transfer processes as consisting of the work of people; (2) their consequent emphasis on the actions and strategies of the actors involved; and (3) their attention to the relational and political nature of transfer processes.

The first commonality among the bodies of scholarship is that all three conceptualise policy transfer as a complex, iterative process in which different actors negotiate to promote and protect their own interests or to push for their preferred interpretation of what is being transferred. Methodologically, foregrounding actors – by literally following them and focusing on what they do and why – means paying less attention to what is being transferred and more to how transfer happens. Second, all three contain interesting similarities in how they discuss and define the actions, behaviours and strategies of the actors involved in policy transfer processes. They all highlight that the initial actors need to frame a situation in terms of a policy problem in order to then position themselves as being indispensable to solving the problem. The next step in effective policy transfer requires that initiators of the transfer process persuade enough relevant other people of the salience of this framing or diagnosis of the problem and of the effectiveness of the proposed solution. Doing this successfully hinges on building and maintaining stable alliances; relations of trust, friendship and collegiality are crucial to cultivating receptivity to content. The work that goes into framing a problem and convincing others of the validity of this framing is referred to by Callon (1986) as "problematization". Building on Callon (*ibid*), Li (2007) shows how problematization tends to entail a process of rendering technical; she suggests that reframing intrinsically political problems as being technical helps position those doing the problematization as the neutral technical experts needed to help solve it. In the terminology of Huitema and Meijerink (2010), these acts of framing are strategies of developing and selling new ideas and building coalitions.

The three bodies of scholarly work provide complementary insights on how actors create alliances and negotiate consent. Callon (1986) identifies four overlapping phases that together constitute a policy (or technology) transfer process. Characterising these phases helps name and recognise the ways in which actors actively interpret and construe their roles and how they relate to the interests of others. Callon's phases are: problematization, interestment, enrolment, and mobilisation. He notes that beyond benevolent attempts to negotiate, convince and entice, persuasion and seduction also happen through manipulations of power and sometimes even through coercion. Callon emphasises that transfer processes always involve translation; this serves as a useful reminder that policies change when they travel, and makes it difficult to measure effectiveness or success as simply being the degree of resemblance to the original. For our purposes in this article, the term translation also serves as a useful reminder that policy processes are characterised as much by the actions and ideas of the 'receivers' as they are by those who initiate them. Focusing primarily on those who accomplish transfer and on the

goodness of what is transferred – more positively identifying with and therefore being somewhat less agnostic – Huitema and Meijerink (2010) use a review of practices in policy transfer from the policy science literature to identify five main strategies. They illustrate these strategies with empirical evidence from water-centric cases. In addition to (1) developing and selling policy ideas and (2) building coalitions, these strategies include: (3) recognising and exploiting windows of opportunity; (4) recognising, exploiting, creating and/or manipulating multiple venues for policy change proposals; and (5) orchestrating and managing networks. In discussing these strategies, Huitema and Meijerink (ibid) conclude that transfer actors need to be perseverant, passionate, reliable and competitive. In an attempt to come up with recommendations to help these actors become more successful in what they do, they suggest that they need to be willing to invest their time, reputation and knowledge, and to be flexible and strategic enough to reframe a policy problem to make it fit into a particular institutional and social context. They also stress the importance of good negotiation and communication skills, as these are needed by those involved in the transfer if they are to act effectively as advocates for, and brokers of, the policy ideas or concepts they promote.

Lastly, all three conceptualisations draw attention to how policy transfer is a deeply political process, with actions and interactions being shaped by power relations that are often outside of their direct realm of influence. Kingdon (1995) emphasises that transfer actors can only accomplish the development and selling of policy ideas when they align these ideas with larger political goals or ambitions. By situating politics and power in 'the context' of policy transfer, Kingdon admits that policy transfers are shaped by prevailing political – economic structures and institutions. He appears less interested in examining how the workings of power and politics can also be part of transfer processes. This differs from theorisations of transfer as translation, which more explicitly trace how power is enabled, accepted and diffused through the transfer process. In particular, the forging and creating of acceptance for the distinction between what Li (2007) calls trustees (initiators) and those who are in need of being improved or helped (recipients) is riddled with political and power hierarchies. Like Latour (1986, 1996) and Callon (1986), Li shows that power needs to be actively wielded in order to gain acceptance and respect as a trustee – the bringer of a solution.

We combine and mobilise these bodies of work to start tracing, mapping and characterising the actors involved in the transfer of the Dutch delta approach to Vietnam and Bangladesh. Our account of the transfer of the delta approach presents it as a continuous process of problematisation and translation in which the involved actors must work hard to (1) create and maintain alliances, and (2) create political buy-in (Figure 2). In identifying the actors, we were not just interested in those who initiated the transfer, but also in those they approached and with whom they interacted. We call the two groups of actors that we followed in the transfer of the Dutch delta approach to Vietnam (1) Delta Warriors – the Dutch experts involved in the development of the MDP, and (2) Retired Reformists – a group of Vietnamese retired academics and experts. In the Bangladesh case we followed (1) Dutch Water Flagbearers – a group of Dutch government officials, (2) Water Friends – a group of Dutch and Bangladeshi consultants, and (3) Macroeconomic Supporters – a group of government officials from the General Economic Division of the Bangladesh Planning Commission (Table 1). We gave the groups of actors these somewhat allegorical, innocuous names to protect their identity and also because some of them explicitly requested anonymity. In characterising their work, we give particular attention to the way in which they created demand, receptivity and enthusiasm for Dutch delta planning knowledge and expertise, as this was the phase of the transfer process that we were able to closely study. We also focused on understanding how they managed to forge alliances and political connections with a range of others, including representatives of government, academia and international development organisations.

Table 1. Actors involved in policy transfer.

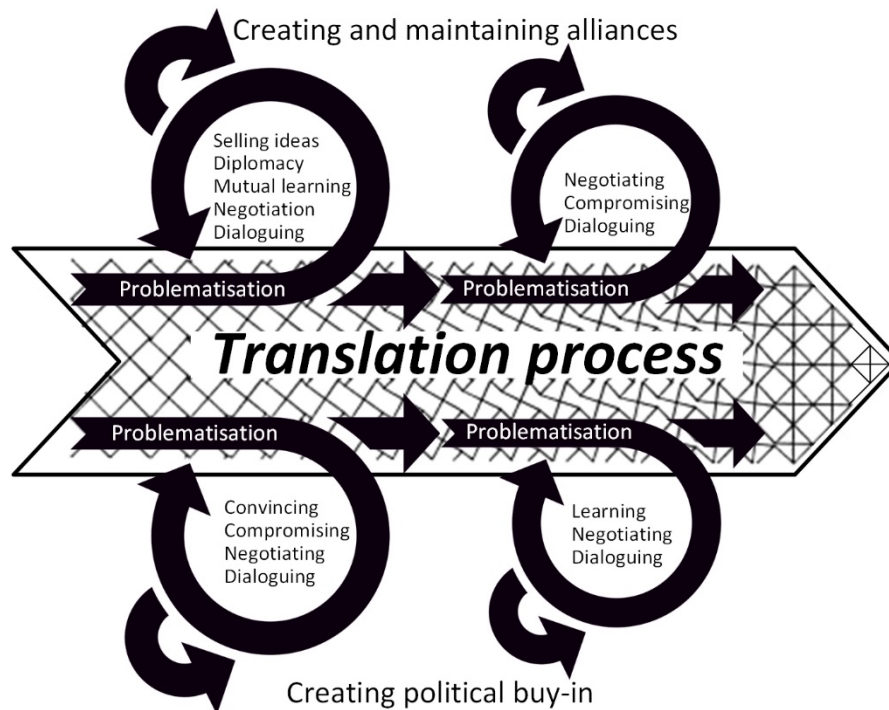
Actors	Who are they?	Major designated work
Delta Warriors	<p>a) A group of Dutch consultants selected to develop the Mekong Development Plan (MDP). Mostly coming from a (water) engineering background, the experience of these experts primarily stems from their engagement in water projects outside of the Netherlands.</p> <p>b) A former Dutch government official who made a passionate shift in his career to work as a water consultant.</p>	<p>a) To develop the MDP following the Dutch Delta Programme.</p> <p>b) To coordinate the MDP development project.</p>
Dutch Water Flagbearers	A group of delegated government officials mostly from the Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Infrastructure and Environment, ² and from the Netherlands embassy in Bangladesh.	To initiate the efforts to create demand, receptivity and enthusiasm for the delta approach in Bangladesh.
Macroeconomic Supporters	The chosen representative of the Bangladeshi government in developing the BDP 2100; prominent members of the General Economic Division of the Bangladesh Planning Commission, responsible for preparing policy frameworks and (macro)economic development plans in accordance with the government's development goals and political aspirations.	To monitor, supervise and approve the plan contents developed by the consultants.
Plausible-Future Makers	A group of mainly Dutch and some Bangladeshi consultants affiliated with academia, (Dutch) water consultancy, and government organisations.	To develop scenarios (plausible futures) for BDP 2100 following the Dutch Delta Programme.
Retired Reformists	A group of retired, influential Vietnamese water experts.	To convince the Vietnamese government and Communist Party leaders of the need for, and attractiveness of the MDP.
Water Friends	The consultants of the Delta Preparatory Team. Mobilised by the Dutch government, the core team consists of four Bangladeshi and three Dutch consultants.	<p>To create awareness, support, and (political) commitment for the BDP 2100 Formulation Project.</p> <p>To support the Netherlands embassy in identifying the Bangladeshi agency that could lead the project.</p> <p>To develop a plan outline.</p>

² In 2009, this was renamed the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management.

THE WORK THAT WENT INTO TRANSFERRING THE DUTCH DELTA APPROACH TO VIETNAM AND BANGLADESH

In this section, we mobilise insights from the theoretical bodies of scholarship presented above in order to discuss our empirical evidence from the development of the MDP and BDP 2100.

Figure 1. The work that goes into the transfer of the delta approach.



Creating and maintaining alliances

In the case of both the MDP and BDP 2100, the work of creating and maintaining alliances happened in a specific transfer context that lent it a distinct character, in that it formed part of long-term bilateral relations between two countries. The transfer of the Dutch delta approach thus followed from prior and ongoing development cooperation programmes on water and beyond (for example, health, gender, human rights, education, and business). These programmes often built on existing alliances and friendships, which were given new significance and shape as part of wider attempts by the Dutch government to reinvent their development cooperation and make it part of a trade agenda (Hasan et al., 2020). Much of the work of creating and maintaining the alliances that would make the transfer of the delta approach possible thus consisted of the careful nurturing and reviving of existing relations of diplomacy, friendship and collegiality that already existed between many of the actors. The transfer of the Dutch delta approach was significantly coloured by promises or expectations of future funds and projects, as it happened as part of longer development cooperation relations that combine the transfer of financial or economic support with the transfer of expertise (Hasan et al., 2019: 1588-89). Because of this tied nature of Dutch development cooperation, many actors in Vietnam and Bangladesh hesitated to be openly critical about, or to reject, the MDP or BDP 2100, even when many of them initially were not very enthusiastic. Prior relations of collaboration and the desire to maintain them – more than a widely shared problem diagnosis and broad agreement on a solution – shaped the willingness to go along with developing something akin to a Dutch Delta Plan. This may also explain why many of the ideas that started the transfer process were adapted and changed during the negotiations with Vietnamese and

Bangladeshi partners. Only gradually, and as the outcome of many negotiations and interactions, did a shared understanding of what had to happen in the respective deltas emerge; the Dutch delta approach formed only the beginning of this conversation. During the negotiations, what seems to have been at stake was the maintaining of diplomatic and trade relations, rather than the exact transfer of a Dutch original. We discuss this in more detail below.

In Vietnam, the Dutch government wanted to use the transfer of its delta planning approach to reinvigorate existing bilateral relations (Hasan et al., 2019). An outcome of the initial Dutch efforts was a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2009 between the two countries on integrated river basin and coastal zone management. The Dutch saw this MoU as a good basis from which to start creating Vietnamese interest in, and support for, the Dutch delta approach. In contrast, the Vietnamese government saw the renewed MoU as an opportunity to maintain and reinforce their bilateral relations with the Dutch, especially after the planned phasing out of Dutch development aid to Vietnam in 2012. Vietnam also hoped the MoU would help mobilise funds for future water development projects. To convince their Vietnamese counterparts of the usefulness and effectiveness of their planning expertise for the Mekong Delta, the Dutch government invited a high-level Vietnamese government delegation to the Netherlands. During the visit, they showed them the Dutch Delta Works: large hydraulic engineering structures that are an iconic manifestation of the Netherlands' advanced ability to deal with complex water problems. The Dutch strategy was to convince the Vietnamese government representatives that Dutch delta expertise could help make the Mekong Delta safe and resilient, particularly in view of climate change. Their strategy paid off; the Dutch received a proposal from the then visiting Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister to expand the newly signed MoU into a strategic development partnership. The signed strategic partnership arrangement between the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, and the Vietnamese Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) and Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) further paved the way for the Dutch government to start the process of convincing the Vietnamese that they needed a Mekong Delta Plan that was modelled after the Dutch example. The Vietnamese government was above all interested in creating opportunities to widen the scope for future collaborations between the two countries beyond water, to also include business and education. The alliance around the development of a Delta Plan, therefore, was not so much based on a shared problematisation, but rather on its ability to bring together a range of interests and agendas.

In the process of transfer, the Dutch Delta Warriors faced unanticipated challenges in maintaining the enthusiasm and interest of the Vietnamese government officials from the MoNRE (Hasan et al., 2019: 1591). Withdrawal from the project was not an option for the Delta Warriors, however, not just because it would endanger the long-term bilateral relations between the Netherlands and Vietnam, but also because it would damage the Netherlands' reputation of being a water leader, which the Dutch government was carefully building. In attempts to rekindle interest and support, the Delta Warriors identified new strategic entry points into the Vietnamese political arena. They approached some highly reputed, respected, and politically well-connected Vietnamese academics and retired senior government officials to help create acceptance and enthusiasm for their ideas. They fondly named these experts the Retired Reformists. The Dutch had worked with many of them before in Dutch water projects in Vietnam and had developed relations of collegiality and sometimes friendship with them.

In developing an MDP, the Delta Warriors outlined a future for the Mekong Delta that was based on agrobusiness industrialisation. Delta Warriors' concern over growing socio-economic disparities and environmental degradation in the delta made them prefer choosing one specific future rather than going along with a broader and more flexible strategic planning framework that resembled the Dutch Delta Plan. Despite its significant contribution to the national GDP through the production of three rice crops per year, much of the Mekong Delta is an economically poor and marginal part of Vietnam. In fact, the national triple rice policy is a cause of resentment between South Vietnam (where the delta is located) and North Vietnam (Hanoi, the political centre) (Benedikter, 2014). Abandoning the triple rice policy in favour of agrobusiness industrialisation was an idea that resonated positively with the Retired

Reformists; they had long been concerned about the consequences of the policy and its impacts on the delta and its inhabitants, but had till then not been very successful in questioning it.

The future scenarios developed for the Plan projected that agrobusiness industrialisation would potentially create alternative attractive socio-economic development pathways for the delta as well as for the whole of Vietnam. To create additional support for abandoning the triple rice policy, the Delta Warriors convinced a large number of international development agencies operating in Vietnam of the attractiveness of the proposed scenario; key to this was showing how it would bring in new investment projects. A strategic alliance around the abandonment of the triple rice policy could thus be created among themselves, donor agencies, and the Retired Reformists. In the process of forming this alliance, the Delta Warriors and the Retired Reformists took inspiration and learned from each other in imagining a(nother) future for the Mekong Delta, one that did not necessarily fit the Vietnamese political consensus about delta management. Their alliance became important later in brokering agreement about the draft MDP among members of the Vietnamese government.

In the process of breaking up the initial alliance with the MoNRE and establishing a new alliance with the Retired Reformists, the original problem diagnosis of 'an unsafe and vulnerable Mekong delta to climate impacts' changed to 'increasing socioeconomic degradation in the Mekong delta, in particular the loss of annual target rice production, due to rising waters induced by climate change'. In the process, an integral part of the Dutch delta approach – that is to say, scenario development – changed. To maintain the newly formed alliance, the diagnosis of the problem had to keep changing until a draft of the MDP was in a form that would be accepted by the Vietnamese government. The proposition that informed the development of the MDP (2013) became, 'socioeconomic development of the Mekong delta hinges on the implementation of an agro-business industrialization'. Rising water induced by climate change was thus no longer the main problem; instead, it became something that Vietnam needed to embrace and strategically adapt to. In conclusion, the development of the MDP was not so much about creating acceptance of a diagnosis and enthusiasm for a solution; rather, it was about creating and maintaining alliances and relations between the two countries. In the process, what was initially transferred – the Dutch delta approach – was translated almost beyond recognition.

In Bangladesh, the Dutch Water Flagbearers proactively attempted to create interest for a Dutch Delta Plan among Bangladeshi government officials. In their meetings with Bangladeshi officials, notably with those closely associated with the Prime Minister's Office, the Flagbearers sought to underscore the importance of integrated, longer-term policy measures by highlighting that Bangladesh ranks among the five most climate vulnerable countries in the world.³ They argued that existing water-centric plans and development programmes in Bangladesh would not be sufficient for dealing with the impacts of climate change because of how they address very specific water problems for target stakeholders or regions. The Flagbearers also linked the importance of more integrated delta planning to the Bangladeshi government's ambition of maintaining a GDP of at least 7% in order to achieve middle income status by 2021; this was made central to their problem diagnosis. The strategy of the Flagbearers thus consisted of aligning their plans to the political aspirations of the Bangladeshi government, they stressed that anticipating and addressing the impacts of climate change was a necessary condition for achieving economic growth.

To create sympathy for their solution – a Dutch delta plan for Bangladesh – the Flagbearers drew attention to the similarities between the Netherlands and Bangladesh as both being located in two river basins with large deltas. As their reasoning went, these similarities meant that the two countries faced similar climate challenges and thus required similar adaptation measures and approaches. All of this underscored their central message, which was that for Bangladesh to be able to deal with climate change, the country would be well advised to follow the example of the Dutch in developing a delta plan: an

³ The projections are based on the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Stocker et al., 2014).

integrated approach to securing water safety and food security and to strengthening governance infrastructure (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). The Bangladeshi government officials went along with this problematisation, accepting that "Bangladesh needs a delta plan" (ibid), something that it could realise through engaging in an alliance with their Dutch counterparts. Another important reason for the Bangladeshi government to accept the Dutch problematisation was that they hoped and expected that the development of a delta plan would allow for the maintenance, or even reinforcing, of the bilateral relations with the Netherlands and that it would perhaps bring in future investments or would help attract other bilateral and multilateral donors and funds.

After the process of transfer had been set in motion with the signing of an MoU, the Water Friends built on the diagnosis of the Flagbearers to increase and widen support for the BDP 2100 Formulation Project among those considered to be influential; these included employees of relevant Bangladeshi government agencies, members of knowledge institutions, NGO personnel, and representatives of the media. Together with the Dutch embassy, they refined the initial diagnosis by stating that "sustainable socio-economic development and security of life and livelihoods in Bangladesh could remain beyond reach" without the development of BDP 2100 (Choudhury et al., 2012: 18). If developed and implemented, BDP 2100 would bring benefits and opportunities to Bangladesh; these would range from capacity building, to ensuring good governance, to strengthening cooperation with international development partners (ibid: 25).

The Water Friends, nonetheless, had to form a strategic alliance with the Macroeconomic Supporters in order to generate the necessary political support and acceptance for BDP 2100. The Macroeconomic Supporters belong to the agency responsible for developing (macroeconomic) development plans in accordance with the Bangladeshi government's social, economic and political objectives. Because of this, the Macroeconomic Supporters possess the political clout and legislative authority to coordinate many ministries and agencies. This is the kind of influence that those involved in previous Dutch water development projects do not have (for example, the Ministry of Water Resources and its two leading agencies, the Bangladesh Water Development Board and the Water Resources Planning Organization). The Dutch wished to make delta planning central to the Bangladeshi planning culture in order to prevent the fading away of its impact over time, as had happened with previous Dutch-funded water development projects. The Macroeconomic Supporters had also been the ones who articulated the government's goal of achieving middle income country status by 2021 (that is, Vision 2021) in the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-2021. To bring in and enrol the Macroeconomic Supporters required reconciling their distinct perceptions and interests with those of the Flagbearers and the Water Friends, something that took much effort.

Together with the Dutch embassy in Bangladesh, the Water Friends articulated the benefits that would be gained by the Macroeconomic Supporters from aligning themselves with the development of BDP 2100. They particularly highlighted the opportunities that BDP 2100 would offer the Macroeconomic Supporters to expand their work arena and influence from macroeconomic development to water management. This expansion would come with new authority and new powers to approve, monitor and supervise water-centric projects in the course of implementing BDP 2100. Initially, the Macroeconomic Supporters had little idea about, or interest in, Dutch delta planning; however, it was difficult for them to resist the diplomatic pressure of the Water Friends. The latter's strategies paid off in the end: they succeeded in enrolling the Macroeconomic Supporters in their project.

The Water Friends, nevertheless, had to continue their lobbying work in order to maintain the alliance that had been created. Once convinced, the Macroeconomic Supporters wanted to obtain an understanding of the contents of the delta approach and of how it could contribute to the macroeconomic development of Bangladesh. Following from a review that they conducted, they suggested the inclusion of a macroeconomic framework in the development of BDP 2100, making it also an investment-oriented development plan; they further recommended that a group of experienced Bangladeshi macroeconomic experts draft the delta plan, with technical advice from Dutch consultants.

In their view, Bangladeshi experts would better understand the planning culture and unspoken norms of the country and would be better able to express the plan in the language preferred by the Bangladeshi government. They would also be better positioned to negotiate and navigate the underlying political interests. They therefore emphasised that Bangladeshi expertise was indispensable for the transfer; in doing so, they fundamentally altered the original Dutch meaning and content of delta planning.

The Water Friends did not immediately go along with these suggestions; they emphasised that a macroeconomic framework does not belong to the strategic delta plan idea. The Macroeconomic Supporters nevertheless insisted that their experiences of planning and policy-making for the Bangladeshi government needed to be taken seriously if BDP 2100 was to become a reality. The Water Friends (and the Dutch embassy officials) had little choice but to compromise on some of their initial ideas for the sake of maintaining their much-desired and newly formed alliance. To prevent the Macroeconomic Supporters gaining too much power in the transfer, however, the Water Friends negotiated an agreement whereby the Dutch embassy – the representative of the Dutch government in the transfer – would be the main authority in managing and disseminating project funds, most of which would come from Dutch development aid.

The work of the Delta Warriors in Vietnam and the Water Friends in Bangladesh, and their interactions with their chosen allies, shows that the creation of alliances in policy transfer processes does not happen spontaneously; the choice of allies in both cases was importantly influenced by the existence of prior relations of collaboration. Much effort went into persuading them to collaborate, something that required making compromises. Rather than the transferred policy being the reason for people to come together, our cases suggest that it provided a good starting point for strengthening and sometimes renegotiating relations of diplomacy and trade. It is clear that the choice of allies is important in determining not only the direction and speed of the transfer; it also shapes and changes the content and nature of what is being transferred. In nurturing and maintaining alliances, actors need to make compromises or (re-)negotiate their position, ideas and interests. The allies then influence, or indeed translate, what is transferred; importantly, they co-steer the course of the overall transfer process. In this sense, the MDP and BDP 2100 provided important spaces and moments of conversation and mutual learning between all involved as to how to best deal with the future challenges of climate change in deltas.

Creating political buy-in for a delta plan

Next to the work that goes into creating and maintaining alliances, a significant amount of the work of transferring a policy consists of creating buy-in for what is transferred, in our case for the Dutch delta approach. Transfer happens as part of geopolitical and trade relations that are marked by differences in influence and negotiating power; the process is thus neither politically neutral nor symmetrical. Transfer also entails dealing with political relations and with planning and decision-making cultures and sensitivities in the places of destination. This work often happens behind the scenes, with those initiating policy transfer relying on partners in destination countries for key assistance in accomplishing this. In what follows, we have tried to make some of this work visible by analysing how the contents of the transferred policy changed during the transfer process; we considered those changes to be manifestations of translations and negotiations.

In Vietnam, the Retired Reformists, crucially, reignited the Vietnamese government's interest in the Delta Plan by approvingly referring to the draft MDP at high-level meetings of Vietnamese national development committees, in which many of them held influential advisory positions. At the same time, they tried in one-to-one conversations to convince Vietnamese vice ministers, ministers, deputy prime ministers, provincial party leaders, and prominent Communist Party leaders who held decision-making power in Vietnam's one-party state regime. In Bangladesh, in order to increase the chances of Bangladeshi policymakers buying into, and ultimately approving, BDP 2100, it was the Macroeconomic

Supporters who actively intervened in scenario development and in the delta governance framework – two integral elements of the delta approach.

In Bangladesh, the Plausible-Future Makers developed contextual scenarios for BDP 2100 that more or less replicated the example of the Dutch Delta Plan of 2008. In Dutch delta planning, the scenarios were used as a means to assess the robustness of the preferred delta plan strategies. Using different combinations of the two external drivers used in Dutch delta planning – climate change and socio-economic development – the Plausible-Future Makers came up with four plausible futures for the whole of Bangladesh as a delta. The Macroeconomic Supporters disagreed with this way of representing possible futures for Bangladesh; in particular, they questioned the merit of developing delta plan strategies on the basis of something that, without estimated probabilities, could only provide a vague indication of what might happen in future. In their critical reviews, they also questioned the use of the same four scenarios for regions in Bangladesh that are very different in terms of geo-hydrological features. They also disproved of the use of global climate projections for developing the scenarios, instead favouring available, localised climate data. They noted that the figures used to calculate population growth and GDP projections were different from those used by the Bangladeshi government. A major concern of the Macroeconomic Supporters was that the developed scenarios would not sufficiently speak to Bangladeshi planners, politicians and policymakers, and that this would make it difficult to gain their support for the draft BDP 2100.

Even after the Plausible-Future Makers included the recommendations and reviews from different groups of Bangladeshi actors in the development of scenarios, the Macroeconomic Supporters remained reluctant to endorse it (details in Hasan et al., 2020: 168-169). Those who provided comments were: (1) participants in the scenario development workshop, mostly representatives from Bangladeshi ministries and agencies; (2) scenario development experts who were experienced in developing exploratory strategic scenarios with policy options for Bangladesh; they were specifically invited by the Macroeconomic Supporters to review the developed scenarios; and (3) the macroeconomic experts of the BDP 2100 Formulation Project who reviewed the scenarios on the invitation of the Macroeconomic Supporters. These were the people with whom the Macroeconomic Supporters had established relations of collegiality and trust over many years of working together on developing policies and plans for the Bangladeshi government in line with its overall vision (which included Vision 2021 for achieving a middle income country status).

In the views of the scenario development workshop participants, the development challenges that Bangladesh faces ranged from population growth and political unrest to transboundary water sharing; these were very different from the future challenges that the Netherlands identified in its delta planning exercise. They particularly emphasised that for Bangladesh, it makes no sense to isolate climate change from socio-economic development; however, they also underscored the importance of including other possible uncertainties. In the review process, the scenario development experts focused on how to improve the technicalities of scenarios to make them more valid for the Bangladeshi context (see Hasan et al., 2020: 168). The macroeconomic experts were primarily concerned about gaining enough political support for the proposed plans; for instance, they feared that if the scenarios were not accompanied by a thorough (macro)economic analysis, they would not be endorsed by Bangladeshi policymakers and politicians. They also signalled that the negative-sounding terms 'congestion' and 'stagnation' that were used to label two of the scenarios (to allow for the possibility of low economic growth under business-as-usual scenarios) might not be the best for sparking political enthusiasm; in their interpretation, alluding to the possibility of congestion or stagnation could be interpreted as criticism of political leadership. In the macroeconomic experts' overall assessment, the development and use of the scenarios in BDP 2100 was nothing but "impractical and a mere waste of time", something that would make it difficult for the Macroeconomic Supporters to get approval for the draft BDP 2100 from Bangladeshi policymakers.

In trying to accommodate all comments and suggestions, the Plausible-Future Makers found it hard to hold on to the original Dutch meaning of scenarios. If the transfer process was to go ahead, the Plausible-Future Makers had little choice but to adapt the scenarios in terms of content and method. In doing so, they had to navigate cautiously, as the final outcome needed to remain similar enough to the Dutch Delta Programme to continue to be seen as inspired by a Dutch example and to deserve financial support from the Netherlands and to require Dutch expertise; at the same time, it needed to be changed enough to fit the expectations of the wider groups of BDP 2100 actors so that it could continue counting on their buy-in. The Plausible-Future Makers proposed doing this by adding two additional external drivers to the scenario development exercise: transboundary water management and land use changes. They combined these with the already identified Dutch drivers of climate change and socio-economic development and they updated the four scenarios with illustrations of plausible extreme changes in, among others, flood management, water in agriculture, water supply, and environmental protection (van Aalst et al., 2016). They also agreed to rename two of the scenarios 'moderate' and 'active'. In doing so, they hoped that people would "no longer interpret the names of the scenarios as an act of desiring a bad future for Bangladesh".⁴

The Plausible-Future Makers, however, sought support from Dutch embassy officials for resisting the development of more scenarios, their reasoning being that the updated four scenarios already served as the cornerstones of a range of plausible uncertain futures. This provoked a long-winded negotiation. Together with embassy officials, the Plausible-Future Makers told the Macroeconomic Supporters that resources allocated for the scenario development exercise – funds and the time budgeted for expert inputs – depleted quicker than estimated in the project formulation. The most that the Plausible-Future Makers would therefore be able to do with the limited resources was develop two additional scenarios (that is, the business-as-usual approach and rapid urbanisation). Parallel to the negotiation with the Macroeconomic Supporters, the Plausible-Future Makers managed to negotiate for additional funds for the development of the two agreed scenarios.

Despite going along with the Plausible-Future Makers, the Macroeconomic Supporters remained doubtful about the use of the scenarios. They sought the help of their long-term allies, the macroeconomic experts, to make scenario development in BDP 2100 attractive enough to obtain approval from the policymakers. The macroeconomic experts proposed using the scenarios in support of a new problematisation, one in which BDP 2100 would become a tool to support the Bangladeshi government in achieving its desired socio-economic development by 2021. They developed and used a macroeconomic analysis framework to assess the specific contribution of BDP 2100 towards achieving middle income country status by 2021 and upper middle income country status by 2041. In doing this, they changed the meaning and method of the scenarios: from plausible predictions of future uncertainties, the scenarios became projections of the impacts of specific development interventions and projects.

The Plausible-Future Makers continued to try to convince the Macroeconomic Supporters as to the merits of the original scenario development exercise; however, they understood the importance of making the scenarios convincing enough to policymakers, which is why they agreed to combine their scenarios with the policy options developed by the macroeconomic experts. They were reluctant to completely let go of Dutch delta technicalities, however, as they wanted to continue emphasising the importance and usefulness of Dutch expertise for the development of Bangladesh.

Apart from scenario development, the Macroeconomic Supporters felt that to avoid political resistance and wield political buy-in for BDP 2100 it was necessary to also change the proposed delta governance framework. The premise of the Dutch delta governance framework is that delta planning should remain fairly detached from normal and relatively short-term political decision-making. This is

⁴ From the interview with a Plausible-Future Makers. The interview was taken on August 08, 2016 in the Netherlands.

done through a Delta Act, which legalises the establishment of a Delta Fund, with a Delta Commission which operates quite independently from normal political processes. As in the Netherlands, the plan was that a delta commission in Bangladesh would direct a multi-governmental process of delta planning, policy development and implementation – a role which was supposed to be assumed by the Macroeconomic Supporters. However, various Bangladeshi ministries responsible for cross-cutting water issues feared that the proposed structure would shift part of their authority and power to the Macroeconomic Supporters, who would then become responsible for selecting and prioritising water-centric projects during the implementation of BDP 2100. This is why the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Planning (under whose directorate the Macroeconomic Supporters are positioned) started to oppose the development of BDP 2100.

As they needed the support of these actors, the Macroeconomic Supporters felt compelled to propose a different delta governance framework, which they called the Delta Governance Council (DGC). Instead of making delta planning relatively independent from normal political decision-making processes, they decided to make the implementation of BDP 2100 part of normal political and bureaucratic planning processes in Bangladesh. The proposed DGC was to be a high-level inter-ministerial forum chaired by the Prime Minister and co-chaired by the Planning Minister, who is also the leader of the Macroeconomic Supporter's parent ministry. Ministers from the (influential) Ministries of Finance, Water Resources, Land and Agriculture, Environment, Food, and Shipping, among others, were given roles as strategic advisors in the implementation of BDP 2100. The Macroeconomic Supporters secured their own influence by negotiating with the leading ministries to be granted responsibility for the coordination, facilitation, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of BDP 2100. They also lobbied to obtain the positions of secretary of the DGC and chair of the BDP 2100 project/programme selection committee (the second coordinating committee followed by the DGC). By negotiating for these positions, they made sure that they would retain powerful influence in the selection and prioritisation of water-centric projects in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, it is clear that the development of BDP 2100 was heavily co-shaped by the Macroeconomic Supporters. This led to a plan that only remotely resembled the Dutch Delta Programme in terms of content – having changed, for example, from contextual scenarios to strategic policy scenarios-. The new plan also diverged dramatically from the original in its imaginaries of the futures of deltas. What unfolded with BDP 2100 was similar to what had happened to the MDP in Vietnam with the Retired Reformists. In the process of creating political buy-in for BDP 2100, the initial ideas about delta planning were continually renegotiated and modified, until finally enough political supporters had come together and enough resonance had been created with wider political agendas and powerful individuals and agencies.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this article, we build on, and expand, our earlier analyses of the transfer of the Dutch delta approach to Vietnam and Bangladesh (Hasan et al., 2019, 2020, 2021). By defining policy transfer as a process of translation, these analyses did not explain the mobility of the approach by referring to its intrinsic qualities. They also did not posit or assume a knowledge hierarchy between the country of policy origin and the country of destination, nor did they tell the story through foregrounding the deeds of the initiators of the transfer. Our accounts of policy transfer as translation instead highlight the work of all those involved in transfer, showing how the work of making a policy useful in an environment other than where it originated requires the efforts of both the initiators of the policy and its receivers.

In this article, we zoomed in more closely on the kinds of work needed to make policies travel. Through a careful analysis and categorisation of our empirical observations and data, we showed that most of this work consists either of forming and maintaining alliances or of creating political buy-in. Making policies travel – in this case the Dutch delta approach – depends importantly on continuous acts of diplomacy,

dialoguing, persuasion and negotiation; it also entails the cautious navigation of cultural and power differences. More than, or in addition to, the technical knowledge of the specific policy that is being transferred, doing this work successfully requires knowledge of cultural, political and governance contexts at the place of destination. Our analysis further suggests that successful transfer importantly hinges on the willingness and ability of the actors to engage with, and learn from, each other. Continuous investments in relations of collegiality and friendship are an important part of transfer work, with transfer becoming easier when building on historical relations of collaboration.

This article's analysis underscores the deeply social and relational character of transfer. In doing so, it helps recognise that the direction and nature of transfer processes are as much shaped by the actions and ideas of the initiators as by those of the recipients. Conceptualisation of transfer-as-diffusion assume a hierarchy between countries in terms of stage of development. Reconceptualising transfer as a collaboration between policy initiators and policy receivers is based and helps rejecting this assumption. Indeed, in our account of the travel of the Dutch delta approach from the Netherlands to Vietnam and Bangladesh, the relationship between the senders and the recipients emerges as quite symmetrical. It is a process of mutual learning and of continuous adjustment, in which those at the receiving end have considerable power and influence. In both Vietnam and Bangladesh, the active intervention of receivers helped turn the object of transfer into something that fitted their country's political agenda, governance reality, and imaginaries of the future. In fact, our analysis suggests that the position of the Dutch actors in both countries was rather precarious; they needed to keep their own governments and funders happy by upholding the reputation of the Netherlands as a source of advanced water and delta expertise, while at the same time satisfying their allies and partners. Accomplishing the latter often meant diluting the 'Dutchness' of the transferred expertise by changing and reshaping it to make it fit the context, needs and interests of the country of destination, which required much creativity and dedication. All involved in the process learned from each other; it was a learning process whose quality hinged importantly on the overall quality of the relations among actors from all sides.

In this way foregrounding the actions and efforts of those involved in accounts of the transfer of the Dutch delta approach also draws attention to the fluidity and malleability of the object of transfer. The Dutch delta approach emerges as a broad umbrella term denoting a range of climate adaptation projects, plans and initiatives that is broad enough to fit a variety of interests and to accommodate different storylines or development visions. The translation theory of Latour (2005), Akrich et al. (2002a, 2002b) and Callon (1986) suggests that relational work is needed to hold the transfer object sufficiently stable to make it fit for (or translatable to) the transfer destination. Our analysis instead suggests that in the case of Dutch delta planning, the stability of the transfer object was less important than was maintaining relations of diplomacy and trade between the involved countries. The Dutch delta approach thus appears to be a means to allow the creation or expansion of opportunities for future collaboration and trade, more than a strictly defined Dutch policy package that is needed by, or useful to, a delta country to help make it more resilient to climate change.

In this sense, it may be that the Dutch delta approach is a somewhat peculiar object of transfer, one that is different from, for instance, engineering solutions that are literally more concrete and less malleable. The broadness and malleability of the Dutch delta approach is perhaps both boon and bane. Both the MDP and BDP 2100 – which can be considered major outcomes of the transfer process – are very different from the original Dutch delta plan. To continue talking and writing about these plans as if they are inspired by Dutch delta planning is analytically not very useful; it can, however, itself perhaps be seen as part of a wider politics of knowledge in which the political and business stakes involved in safeguarding and even expanding the reputation of the Netherlands as a source of advanced water and delta expertise are very high. At the same time, maintaining the fluidity and malleability of the delta approach helps create future projects in which Dutch, Vietnamese, Bangladeshi or other partners can collaborate and learn from each other in solving development challenges in deltas around water and climate change.

Our analysis shows that better realising this mutual learning potential of policy transfer projects in the context of development cooperation calls for active efforts to diversify the conceptual languages used to think and talk about them. Adhering to conventional stories of transfer-as-diffusion may be useful in branding some types of expertise or promoting specific imaginaries of futures; however, this makes it hard to recognise the deeply dialogical and relational character of processes of policy transfer. Instead of focusing analytical attention only on the similarities between the original plan and what unfolds in the country of destination, there is also merit in showing the agreements reached and the relations maintained or strengthened. This helps reflect more explicitly on how capacities for transfers can be developed and how these capacities are, and can be, distributed. Better acknowledging the influence and efforts of those in the recipient countries, moreover, also usefully troubles simplistic notions of development that continue to implicitly inform stories of policy transfer-as-diffusion, wherein 'development' is a unilateral process of modernisation or civilisation. Recognising and respecting the expertise and ideas that are present in places and people that are considered to be not (yet) modern and developed, provides a useful starting point for more explicitly using policy transfer as an opportunity and occasion to rethink what development is, or should be, about and to engage in more symmetrical exchanges of knowledge and experience between countries that are faced with what may indeed be quite similar climate change and water challenges.

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