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Reimagining policy transfer in the context of development cooperation

Hasan, S.

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THE TRANSFER OF DUTCH DELTA PLANNING EXPERTISE TO BANGLADESH: A PROCESS OF POLICY TRANSLATION¹

Abstract

Representatives of the Dutch government usually refer to the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 as an example of the successful transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh. Their storyline aligns with theorizations of policy transfer as a process of diffusion. These ascribe the mobility of a policy – or its capacity to travel - to its intrinsic quality. The belief in the quality of the Dutch Delta Approach is anchored in the renowned Dutch ability to deal with its own floods and flood risks. By making the contents of that what travels an important cause of its mobility, diffusion theories make it difficult to see, acknowledge and understand the actions and actors needed to make policy transfer happen. This is why in this paper we theorize policy transfer as a process of translation. Based on an identification of the Dutch and Bangladeshi actors involved in the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh, and by re-tracing their actions, we show that the transfer entailed an active process of engagement, negotiation, and contestation. In their attempts to develop a Bangladeshi version of the Plan, the involved actors made active use of old relations of collaboration and friendship, while also developing new ones. In the course of the transfer process, and because of the negotiations and contestations that it entailed, the delta plan became something else altogether. The paper concludes that telling the story of the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach as a story of translation is useful as it allows recognizing and giving credit not just to those who initiated the process, but to all involved. This, we hope, can in turn provide the basis for a more symmetrical dialogue between ‘senders’ and ‘recipients’ in international policy transfers.

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3.1 Introduction

On 4 September 2018, the government of Bangladesh approved the Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP 2100). It gave the plan the subtitle: “*the best gift for the future generation by the present generation*” (GED, 2018a). In her foreword message, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister emphasizes the importance of the plan: “*The BDP 2100 is the plan moving Bangladesh forward for the next 100 years. We have formulated BDP 2100 in the way we want to build Bangladesh*” (GED, 2018a). The plan was the outcome of the hard work of two groups of Dutch and Bangladeshi experts, who collaborated under the supervision of the General Economic Division (GED) of the Bangladesh Ministry of Planning. The development of the plan received financial support from the government of the Netherlands. The vision and ambition of the plan is to achieve a water secure, flood safe, climate resilient and prosperous delta, which ensures long- term water and food security, economic growth and environmental sustainability by means of robust, adaptive, integrated planning strategies and equitable water governance (GED, 2018b).

Both the government of Bangladesh and that of the Netherlands consider the development and approval of the BDP 2100 as a landmark success; a success that marks and manifests the quality of their long-term bilateral relations (see for example, Van Raaij, 2018). The Bangladesh ambassador to the Netherlands describes the approval of the plan as *nothing short of a sputnik moment for Bangladesh* (Belal, 2018). His Dutch counterpart then in Bangladesh was equally positive and called the Plan “*the crowning glory of the long-standing collaboration*”.² For the Dutch government, after the approval of the Mekong Delta Plan in Vietnam under the Dutch development cooperation programme (Hasan et al., 2019), the approval of the BDP 2100 by the Bangladeshi government provided a second successful case of the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to another deltaic country (Van Raaij, 2018). It thereby provided evidence that the idea of exporting Dutch Delta Planning expertise is a positive one. In turn, the Bangladesh government anticipates that the BDP 2100 will attract and help them acquire international investments in support of their efforts to maintain the economic growth needed to become a middle-income country. The Bangladeshi government considers the BDP 2100 as an ‘umbrella’ plan for future development in Bangladesh, a plan that will guide the development and implementation of macroeconomic, climate and water projects for the country. The interests and ambitions of the Dutch and Bangladeshi governments have come together and were re-negotiated in the development of a Bangladesh delta plan. In this sense, the BDP 2100 is an interesting case of a new wave of policy transfers happening in the name of climate adaptation, which take place in rapidly changing global geopolitical power constellations and collaborations.

There is no widely accepted definition of what the Dutch Delta Approach is (Zwarteveen et al., 2017). The Dutch government uses the term rather loosely to promote a package of planning activities that they brand as The Delta Approach. In a colourful brochure, they

² <https://next.blue/en/2018/08/28/interview-this-ambassador-praises-resilience-of-bangladeshis/>

present it as “*a must-have for sustainable delta management*” (Netherlands Water Partnership, 2014, p.10). The government constructed the Delta Approach around twelve planning principles and activities that have an empirical foundation in Dutch experiences and expertise with water, natural resources and spatial/urban planning and management. The government anchors the Delta Approach in the Dutch Delta Programme, which it presents as a unique system for governing and managing deltas (Van Alphen, 2014, 2013). These twelve principles help give the Delta Approach the appearance of a proven technoscientific method (Zegwaard et al., 2019), a method that is generic enough to be transferable to other deltaic countries (Hogendoorn et al., 2018; RVO, 2015). The Dutch government explains that the demand from other delta countries, like Bangladesh and Vietnam, for the Delta Approach stems from the reputation of excellence that Dutch delta planning knowledge and expertise have (Netherlands National Water Plan, 2016-2021; Netherlands National Water Plan, 2016 and 2009-2015; Netherlands International Water Ambition, 2016). For the Dutch government, the transfer of the Delta Approach to other countries is an important part of their International Water Ambition, aimed at extending bilateral support to these deltaic countries while simultaneously creating business opportunities for the Dutch water sector. In this sense, the Dutch government explicitly frames the Dutch Delta Approach as an export product (Minkman and Van Buuren, 2019). To continue selling this product, stories of successful transfer are important (Hasan et al., 2019). Hence, representing the development of the BDP 2100 as one of success serves the purpose of marketing Dutch water expertise, potentially increasing demand for it in other countries.

This representation of Dutch Delta Planning knowledge more or less follows what we call a *diffusion* model of policy transfer. It is useful in identifying what makes the Dutch Delta Approach special, and in distinguishing its specific features. Analyses in terms of diffusion are concerned with explaining the spread and pace with which policy models (or technologies) travel across time and space (for reviews of policy diffusion see for example, Mukhtarov, 2014; Dussauge-Laguna, 2013; Benson and Jordan, 2011). They tend to explain differences in spread and pace by a combination of the intrinsic qualities of that what is transferred; the friction or roughness of the route (i.e., the type and number of obstacles faced when traveling), or the responsiveness of the recipient (with words like ‘pioneers’ or ‘champions’ identifying those who are very responsive, and ‘laggards’ marking those who are slow in adopting new ideas or technologies) (Porto de Oliveira and Pal, 2018; Hassenteufel et al., 2017).

In this article, we show that there is merit in not limiting conceptualizations of the transfer of Dutch Delta Approach to those done from the vantage point of those originating it and in *diffusion* terms, identifying with the desire to make it into a success. We do this by more agnostically telling the story of policy transfer from the Netherlands to Bangladesh as a process of policy translation. The theory of translation on which we base this idea suggests that a policy model is taken up when the actors attached to it manage to interest ever more actors (Akrich et al., 2002, p.203). Analysing policy transfer in terms of translation thus draws attention away from that what is transferred to the actors and their efforts in making

transfer possible (Dolowitz et al., 2019; Mukhtarov, 2014). Ideas of translation have also been mobilized by scholars of development cooperation, who used it to emphasize that the success of development projects – in which the transfer of knowledge or technologies is often central – importantly depends on the creativity of the involved actors and on their ability to forge and maintain good relations with each other. That what is transferred in the process often changes and becomes something else altogether (Mosse, 2004).

Taking inspiration from these ideas, we use this paper to explore what emerges when the transfer of Dutch delta planning expertise to Bangladesh is told as a process of translation. We do this because we are interested in acknowledging the creativity, intellect and work of all the involved actors. This, we hope, will provide a basis for more symmetrical conversations between experts from different countries involved in and concerned about the future of the deltas they live in. Rather than a priori assuming the superior quality of the Netherlands' Delta Approach and asking the question of the spread and pace of its travel, our analysis is concerned with understanding the actions, interests and motivations of the actors, both Dutch and Bangladeshi, who happen to be engaged in the process of transfer. We are interested in how they interpret, construe and otherwise relate to the development of the BDP 2100, and in reconstructing how their actions have shaped and re-shaped the final outcome. We do this first by identifying who they are, after which we use their accounts, experiences and interpretations of the process of developing the plan to reconstruct the process. Rather than emphasizing why or to what extent the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh was a success, our aim is to understand how the transfer happened.

In the following section we further explain the theorization of policy transfer as a process of translation. In Section 3 we describe our methodology. This is followed in Section 4 by an account of the development of the BDP 2100. We organized and analyzed this account based on our empirical findings, from which we selected those anecdotes that best help show how the interactions between actors, their negotiations over knowledge and expertise, and their different ideas influenced the development of the plan and its contents. We then zoom in on the emergence of two specific building blocks of the Dutch Delta Approach in the BDP 2100 – scenario development and the delta governance framework - to show how these were translated in the process of developing the plan. We select these two building blocks because they are often highlighted as the “*salient features*” of the BDP 2100 in accounts of its development (see for example, Alam, 2019). In the final section we discuss the implications and present the conclusions of our analysis.

3.2 Transfer of Dutch delta planning expertise as a process of translation

We anchor the analysis of this paper in a heuristic distinction between two models of policy transfer that we owe to Science and Technology Studies scholars (notably Latour, 1986 and 1996 and Callon, 1986). They are the model of *diffusion* and the model of *translation*. As noted, the diffusion model implicitly informs the dominant narrative of the Dutch government about the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh (and other deltas). The diffusion model is interested in explaining the motion and speed and spread with which a policy travels through time and space, in particular focusing on the identification of (and ways of removing) resistance, obstacles or blockades (Latour, 1986). For instance, transfer may slow down when reactionary interest groups resist, oppose, distort or otherwise remain apathetic towards it. Explanations of transfer in terms of diffusion identify a transfer project from the beginning as a success (or a failure) on the grounds of how well (or ill) it was conceived. Explanations of the why of the transfer then risk becoming circular, with final success (or failure) being primarily attributed to the quality (or lack of it) of that what was transferred (cf. Latour, 1996).

In contrast to the model of diffusion, the model of translation does not assume that transfer happens because of the intrinsic quality of that what is transferred, nor does it automatically identify with the project of those originating the transfer. Rather, the notion of translation has it that the unaltered and faithful transfer of a policy (or technology) is a rarity, something that cannot be assumed but needs to be explained (Latour, 1986). Its basic premise is that transfer occurs because of people, who happen to be engaged with or have stakes in (the object of) the transfer. Where the model of diffusion reduces the actors to mere instruments or mediums which either slow down or speed up the transfer process, the model of translation makes the actors and their deliberate actions central to the explanation of if and how transfer happens. Through their deflections, betrayals, modifications, additions and appropriations of (cf. Latour, 1986, p.267) that what is transferred – in our case the Dutch Delta Approach – changes. These changes are needed to create, exert or maintain enough interest in the transferred object by others to make some kind of propagation possible across time and space (Latour, 1986, p.267). The transfer of a policy thus is a continuous process of the (re-)shaping of this policy, something that is contingent on the actors involved and the relations between them. This is why Callon (1986) (with among others Latour, 1986 and Akrich et al., 1988) considered the term translation a better one for denoting what happens during transfer than the term diffusion.

Callon (1986) identified four stages in the process of translation of a policy model (or technology): problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization. In his conceptualization, the process of policy translation consists of a main actor (or set of actors or spokespersons) who translate a situation into a distinct diagnosis of a problem, simultaneously establishing her or himself as indispensable in helping solve that problem.

This main actor then sets out to convince others of the rightness of this diagnosis of the problem, and of the proposed solution (Wanvoeke et al., 2015). *Enrolment*, or the establishment of a wider supporting coalition, follows, through a process of coercion, seduction, or wielding consent. The spokesperson(s) thus seek(s) to engage with a series of others with the aim of forming a stable network of alliances. Callon highlighted that this phase of *problematization* is characterized by multilateral negotiations, power grabs or ruses; it enables the art of *interesement* to come to fruition. *Mobilization* occurs when the proposed solution gains acceptance in the network.

For their studies of the workings of development cooperation programmes, which have the transfer of knowledge, technologies or policy models as central elements, Mosse (2004) and Li (2007) have used similar conceptualizations to express that the successful transfer of a policy model or a technology is neither inherent nor given at the onset. Policy models become stable and dominant through aligning a range of actors to the particular interpretation of a problem or situation that the policy proposes to address. More than by the intrinsic characteristics of the transferred policy, therefore, development interventions are driven by the exigencies of the involved organizations and a need to maintain relationships (Mosse, 2004). Hence, Mosse suggests that policy models are important less for their precise contents, and more for who they bring together and how: what alliances, coalitions and consensus do they bring into being (Mosse, 2004, p.649). Because of this, there is always a tension between maintaining enough policy coherence to legitimize the policy interventions, and modifying the policy to make it attractive enough for others to become enrolled, allowing them to align their different agendas and interests with it (Mosse, 2004).

Li (2007) emphasizes that engaged actors make a development intervention happen through the intertwined practices of *problematization* and *rendering technical*. Similar to Callon (1986), Li identifies creating acceptance of a particular framing of a problem (or set of problems) for which a policy is proposed as a development intervention pivotal. Li illustrates that the practice of *problematization* implies a hierarchical relationship between the sender and the recipient of the policy; as it “*confirms expertise and constitutes the boundary between those who are positioned as trustees, with the capacity to diagnose deficiencies in others, and those who are subject to expert direction*” (Li, 2007, p.7). The trustees, positioned as designated development experts or consultants, have the difficult task of safeguarding their expert domain through a set of practices that range from constructing a plausible, fundable problem within the scope of agency expertise, to defending the problem with relevant data and strategic alliances, to operating within the lines of intelligibility of those who possess the policy knowledge. Li calls this process *rendering technical* as the trustees tend to re-pose political questions in technical terms, while substantiating the proposed solution and diagnosed problems as non-political.

Drawing on these theorizations of policy (and knowledge) transfer, we conceptualize the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach as an iterative process of translation. This draws attention to the travel of the Dutch Delta Approach as series of negotiations between

engaged actors, negotiations that simultaneously transmit and distort the initial signal (cf. Hasan et al., 2019). In our investigation of the development of the BDP 2100, we used Callon's systematization of acts of translation as a heuristic guide for data collection and analysis. This allowed to identify the actors and cultivated the needed sensitivity to their various engagements with the development of the BDP 2100 in order to map and understand their efforts, reasons and motivations, and their own interpretations of success.

3.3 Methodology

In line with the agnostic stance of "transfer as translation" approaches, the design of our methodology took inspiration from the growing interest in studying the transfer of policy models ethnographically (see for examples Mukhtarov et al., 2017; Peck and Theodore, 2015, 2012; McCann and Ward, 2013, 2012). These studies suggest that researchers "*follow (or travel with) policymakers, intermediaries or models, to connect sites of experimentation and emulation, or to expose nodes and networks of resistance*" (Peck and Theodore, 2010, p.172). Taking this suggestion to heart, we 'followed' the development of the BDP 2100 during the time period of September 2015 till January 2018.

In our approach, we first constructed an account of the development of the BDP 2100 based on empirical information. To gather this information, the first author carried out thirty-two in-depth interviews with a range of Bangladeshi and Dutch government officials, consultants, academics, and personnel of international financing institutions operating in Bangladesh. All of them were somehow engaged in developing the plan. We identified the interviewees and built contacts with them through the participation of the first author in several key BDP 2100 planning events in the Netherlands and Bangladesh (which also helped gauging the overall atmosphere that surrounded the plan) as well as through snowball sampling. In addition, the first author arranged a work space for a few weeks in February 2016 at the project office of the BDP 2100 Formulation in Dhaka Bangladesh, allowing her to observe and see what happened and who was involved from close by. On the request for anonymity from some of the interviewees, we identify them in our interpretation of the plan development in terms of their affiliations with specific organizations.

The first author designed the interviews to be pleasant interactive dialogues, aimed at allowing the interviewees to share what they know about, did in the making of, or think of the BDP 2100. The first author, who is from Bangladesh and lived in the Netherlands for this study purpose, had the advantage of being acquainted with social and cultural norms of both countries, which often helped to make sense of certain behaviours of the interviewees and the underlying meaning of their interpretation of the plan. During the interviews, careful attention was paid to the tone of voice, posture, and overall conduct of the interviewees. Important clues to their ideas also resided in the silences in the conversation, or in what they were reluctant to talk about or omitted. Several interviewees were met more than once, both in formal interview settings as in more informal ways during events and meetings. In the interviews, we invited the interviewees to recount their efforts in the development of the

delta plan in Bangladesh. We asked questions about their motivations and frustrations (if any), and about the quality of their interactions with other actors in the process. We explicitly tried to create enough space for them to freely share their ideas, reflections and interpretations of the BDP 2100 and its contents, and about the process of its development. Sometimes these conversations led to more general discussions about delta planning expertise in the Netherlands and Bangladesh.

We purposively re-interviewed some of the key actors, both to keep track of the progress in the development of the plan as to allow them to continue sharing their efforts and interpretations. We used their assessment of whether their actions and efforts were successful, and explicitly asked them to qualify what they meant by success. In addition, we discussed specific elements of the BDP 2100 planning contents and their development (for example, developing scenarios). We also maintained follow-up conversations with participants of some workshops and conferences in the Netherlands, Vietnam and Bangladesh that focused on delta planning. The participants were mostly Dutch and Bangladeshi government officials, and NGO personnel and researchers of Dutch, Bangladeshi, Vietnamese and American origin who were not directly engaged, but followed the development of BDP 2100 for personal and/or work interests.

Along with the in-depth interviews, the first author participated as an observer in some specific BDP 2100 planning activities. These included (among others) in the Netherlands the presentation of a plan framework to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister and the meeting at which a high-level Advisor of the Dutch Delta Commission explained the functionality of the Dutch delta governance approach to the Member Secretary of the General Economic Division (GED) of Bangladesh. The first author also attended some adaptive delta management courses that were tailor-made for selected Bangladeshi government officials, organized by a group of Dutch academics at a Dutch institute (IHE Delft, the establishment itself being a manifestation of the bilateral relations between the two countries). In Bangladesh, the first author closely observed the third panel of experts meeting where the designated experts reviewed the developed scenarios, which are often referred as a central component for identifying adaptive strategies in delta plans (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The first author was invited by the Dutch led consultant team (team A) to a preparatory meeting for reviewing agendas for the BDP Knowledge Agenda Roundtable Meeting held in March 2016. In addition, the first author followed some officials of the GED and the Dutch embassy in Bangladesh in conferences and workshops held between November 2016 to April 2017, and in January 2018 and February 2019. These were events where they were invited as chief and/or special guests to talk about the successful development of the BDP 2100.

The interview and participant observation data were supplemented with a desk study of available written documents. These include Dutch and Bangladeshi policy documents, reports on BDP 2100 planning activities (e.g., baseline studies, project documents, scenario development reports, mid-term assessments), report reviews, meeting minutes and official letters, scientific articles (mostly case study work) and (online) news clippings. The efforts

invested in creating a pleasant dialogue atmosphere during the interviews helped create interest in the research among most of the interviewees, many of whom became helpful in collecting (unpublished) meeting minutes, official letters, review and planning assessment reports for the first author.

In conducting this (semi-)ethnographic research, it became quickly apparent that the experiences of the interviewees with the development of the BDP 2100 are simultaneously professional and personal. For the interviewees, sharing these experiences implied exposing themselves in ways that could have negative repercussions for their future career, or destabilize their relations with some of the other interviewees. This is because most of the interviewees form part of a rather closely knit circle of friends and colleagues who have known each other for much longer already, and who hope to continue working together in the future – in the development and implementation of the BDP 2100, or in other water-centric development projects. This is why the process of ethnographically studying policy transfer in this context required investing conscious efforts in creating (and also continuously maintaining) a sense of comfort, and building relations of confidence and trust with the interviewees. This took time, and demanded persistence, patience, empathy as well as good communication skills. It entailed the cautious navigation of the professional networks and work schedule of the interviewees.

We used the empirical data to construct a chronological account of the process of developing the BDP 2100. We did this by literally patching together the findings from the interviews, participant observation and the document analysis. In the part of the re-construction that we used for this article, we foregrounded those anecdotes that show the deliberate efforts of some of the key actors to create interest among a wider group of actors in using Dutch delta planning expertise for the development of a Bangladesh Delta Plan. In addition, we distilled those specific anecdotes that help shed light on the development of the BDP 2100 as a process of translation.

3.4 Transferring Dutch delta planning expertise to Bangladesh

The Netherlands and Bangladesh have maintained relations of international cooperation that started before the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, and continue until today. A request from the government of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) for training their officials in the field of hydraulic engineering in the Netherlands marked the start of the cooperation³. Recurrent flooding and cyclones prompted East Pakistan to request support from the Dutch – who had themselves just experienced a dramatic flood event in 1953 - in dealing with and preventing future floods. The transfer of Dutch water management knowledge and expertise to help Bangladesh in solving its water management problems has since then been a core recurring theme in the relation between the two countries. Prominent ingredients in bilateral

³ See for example, <https://www.un-ihe.org/history>.

projects for instance are the construction of polders in the delta region following the Dutch example, and the training of Bangladeshi government officials in Dutch water management approaches and technologies. Both Dutch and Bangladeshi governments consider the development of the BDP 2100 as an important milestone in their relations, and now that the plan is developed the governments look forward to working together in the implementation of the plan with Dutch technical and knowledge support (see for example, Belal, 2018).

In the following sections we describe our empirical findings to identify actors (see Figure 3.2 in the Section 3.4.2) and analyze the interactions and ideas that influenced the development of the BDP 2100 and its contents. As noted, in our re-construction of what happened, we focus on specific anecdotes (see figure 3.1 below).

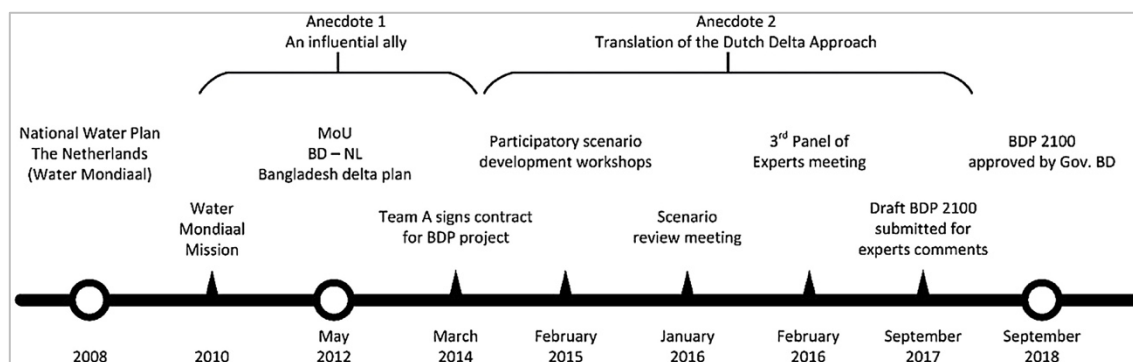


Figure 3.1: Timeline of the development of the BDP 2100, highlighting of the specific anecdotes described in this article. (Source: Author)

3.4.1 Mobilizing interests in developing a delta plan for Bangladesh

Since 2008, after a review of the Dutch development cooperation policy (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013), Dutch water management knowledge and expertise have come to figure prominently in attempts to combine aid with trade. The Dutch Delta Approach can be seen as arising from the renewed prominence of delta planning on Dutch political agendas that happened on the waves of a heightened awareness of climate change, in combination with the explicitly articulated desire to use development cooperation for the promotion of Dutch trade. In this context, presenting Dutch Delta Planning as a successful approach to solve deltaic water problems and become climate-resilient appeared as a smart move to market Dutch water expertise. In the National Water Plan 2009–2015, the Dutch identified Bangladesh as one of the international deltas that could benefit from Dutch delta planning knowledge and expertise. In the following sections we describe and analyze how this identification led to the project of developing the BDP 2100.

A survey conducted by the Netherlands Water Partnership⁴ among Dutch Water Sector organizations to identify their five preferred deltaic countries for international cooperation on delta planning and management (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013) identified Bangladesh as one of the more favourite target countries⁵. This identification prompted Dutch government officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Infrastructure and Water Management⁶, the Dutch embassy in Bangladesh, and designated consultants to start with efforts to create demand, receptivity and enthusiasm for Dutch delta planning expertise in Bangladesh. These efforts clearly belong to what Callon called ‘problematization’ (cf. Callon, 1986): to make Bangladesh seem suitable for Dutch solutions, the Dutch highlighted the similarities in the climate challenges faced by the two deltas. Indeed, referring to both countries as deltas itself was an important way to produce this similarity: the suggestion of bio-physical sameness that the delta label produces served as the anchor to argue that the two countries are comparable in terms of problems and solutions.

Hence, in meetings with high-ranking Bangladeshi government officials, the Dutch officials emphasized the vulnerability of Bangladesh to the future impacts of climate change. This problematization of course came with a solution: a delta plan based on the Dutch experience. The Dutch storyline was that such a plan would ‘make Bangladesh stronger’ through the explicit integration of climate change adaptation in anticipating its future (Delta Coalition, 2019). Supporting Bangladesh’ ability to conduct robust planning in the context of a rapidly changing environment would help ensure an optimal and efficient use of limited resources, while also bringing about water safety, food security, and economic growth. The Dutch underscored that the planning measures that Bangladesh needed were very similar to those adopted by the Dutch Delta Programme (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). In trying to convince Bangladeshi partners of the attractiveness of the Dutch solution, the Dutch made reference to Bangladesh’ own ambitions of maintaining a steady growth in its GDP and becoming (as expressed in the Vision 2021) a middle-income country by 2021 (GED, 2012). The Dutch argued that realizing these ambitions would crucially depend on strategically considering and anticipating climate change. This proved an appealing argument. The promise of attaining middle-income country status resonated with the electoral mandate and political aspirations of the Bangladesh government. For the Bangladeshi actors, the idea of having a delta plan fuelled hopes of maintaining or even reinforcing the bilateral relations with the Netherlands. A Delta Plan could perhaps bring in

⁴ The umbrella organization of the Dutch water sector. The organization promotes itself as a gateway to the Dutch Water Sector, with Dutch companies, NGOs, knowledge institutes and government agencies coming together in public-private partnerships. Approximately 95% of NWP’s income comes from the implementation of governmental programmes, mostly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; between 4 and 5% of its income comes from contributions by members.

(Sources: https://www.netherlandswaterpartnership.com/sites/nwp_corp/files/2018-11/NWP-jaarverslag-2016_0.pdf; and <http://jaarverslag2015.nwp.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/NWP-2015-flip.pdf>).

⁵ Vietnam, Indonesia, Mozambique and Colombia have been the other target countries.

⁶ Formerly known as ministry of infrastructure and environment.

future investments and attract development cooperation programmes from other bilateral and multilateral donors and financial institutions⁷.

Following an explicit suggestion from the engaged Dutch officials, the Bangladeshi government sent a letter to their Dutch counterpart, requesting for their advice on delta management. This request letter served the purpose of signalling that there was demand for Dutch delta planning expertise⁸. The letter supported the problematization developed by the Dutch that the Bangladesh government ‘needed and sought for’ Dutch delta planning expertise to help address water management issues in Bangladesh. This problematization - Bangladesh needs a delta plan, the development of which requires the help of Dutch high-level expertise - is the one that dominates in official and popular accounts of Dutch interventions in Bangladesh. It is a narrative that makes the considerable work and effort by the Dutch actors to promote the Dutch Delta Approach and create interest in it among Bangladeshi partners disappear.

Upon receiving the request, the Dutch government mobilized a Water Mondiaal mission⁹ to further explore ways to extend water relations with Bangladesh, in line with the ambition to combine aid-and trade. In their review, the mission members warned that the existing water cooperation might stall in the long run. The reasons for this, they argued, were (i) a lack of capacity development in the Bangladeshi agencies that had been long-standing partners in Dutch government supported water projects, most notably those belonging to the Ministry of Water Resources; and (ii) a power struggle of these agencies with various non-water centric influential ministries, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture. To back up their analysis, they used the example of the partial implementation of the National Water Management Plan 2004 developed by one of the long-term partners of the Dutch, the Water Resource Planning Organization (WARPO) of the Ministry of Water Resources. The mission members also highlighted the limited success of some other previous Dutch water cooperation programmes related to infrastructure development for integrated water resource management. In their recommendations, they suggested that delta management and planning would provide an appropriate new umbrella to avoid such dis-appointments in the future. They argued that strategic delta management and planning could be used not just to maintain and reinforce the existing relations of cooperation, but also as an entry-point to

⁷ From the interview with a Bangladeshi water and climate expert. The interview was taken on March 14, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh

⁸ From the interviews with a Dutch embassy official on March 24 and 27, 2017, and with two Bangladeshi government officials involved in drafting the letter on March 06 and 08 and October 23, 2017, and on March 09, 2017 respectively.

⁹ Water Mondiaal is a programme launched by the Dutch government to cooperate actively with countries in low-lying delta areas, protecting them against floods and ensuring sufficient, clean water. Water Mondiaal is a result of the Netherlands National Water Plan, in which the ministries related to Water and Infrastructure, Economic Affairs, and Foreign Affairs came together to jointly engage in missions to establish international water programs between the Dutch government and five (deltaic) countries (as recipients of Dutch delta knowledge expertise). (Source: <http://www.climatedeltaconference.org/networks/water-mondiaal>). A group of officials from the Netherlands Water Partnership and ministries of Foreign Affairs (development cooperation), Infrastructure and Water Management, and Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation participated in the mission to Bangladesh.

extend collaboration with new knowledge institutes, the private sector and NGOs. The review (among others) resulted in the signing of a MoU (memorandum of understanding) by the two governments in 2012 with the theme “*a sustainable delta, a prosperous Bangladesh*”. In the MoU, the two countries agreed to be engaged in a new development cooperation programme, that of the Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP) 2100 Formulation Project.

This review of the Water Mondiaal mission highlights that the Dutch delta approach clearly did not sell itself. It required the creative strategies and efforts of a range of Dutch actors. They invested in constructing Bangladesh as a delta in need of a delta plan, and had to work hard to create interest among prominent Bangladeshi actors in this problematization. The success of their efforts hinged on making delta planning (and Dutch delta planning expertise) appear as a crucial instrument for Bangladesh to achieve the Vision 2021, become a middle-income country, attract future development cooperation programmes, and maintain bilateral relations with the Netherlands.

3.4.2 An influential ally, expertise and nationality of experts

In this section we describe the alliances and partnerships that were developed and nurtured in, and that were crucial for, the process of developing the BDP 2100. In the first part we describe the Dutch efforts to identify and establish a partnership with an influential counterpart in Bangladesh. We show how this was a purposeful strategy to make the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh possible. We describe the development of alliances, followed by the negotiation between groups of Dutch and Bangladeshi actors over the preferred organizational structure of the BDP 2100 Formulation Project. This narrative is accompanied with anecdotes of the negotiated outcomes that influenced the development of the BDP 2100.

Taking the conclusions of the Water Mondiaal mission seriously, the Dutch understood the importance of identifying the proper Bangladeshi organization as the main partner for developing the BDP 2100. This had to be an influential partner, as the assessment of the Water Mondiaal mission was that the lack of political and institutional clout of their long-term water project partners could impede the success and impact of the delta plan development process. Taking the Water Mondiaal report to heart, the Delta Preparatory Team¹⁰ (DPT) and the Dutch embassy in Bangladesh indicated that they would like to collaborate with the General Economic Division (GED) of the Planning Commission¹¹.

In Bangladesh, the GED has the responsibility of preparing policy frameworks and economic development plans in accordance with the government’s overall development

¹⁰ Mobilized by the Dutch government with a core team consisting of four Bangladeshi and three Dutch consultants.

¹¹ The central planning organization of the Bangladesh government chaired by the Prime Minister and co-chaired by the Minister for Planning. The General Economics Division is one of the six Divisions of the Commission. (doi: [http:// www.plancomm.gov.bd/](http://www.plancomm.gov.bd/)).

goals and political aspirations. The GED has the institutional capacity and political clout to coordinate with influential, senior level officials of various ministries. These powers and capacities were among the reasons why the Dutch were keen to have the GED as the key partner for developing the BDP 2100. Even though relatively inexperienced in water-terms, they preferred cooperating with the GED over their long-term water partners, most notably the Bangladesh Water Development Board and the Water Resource Planning Organization of the Ministry of Water Resources. Their assessment was that a non-conventional and more influential partner was needed to support and manage a non-traditional water management plan.

Yet, as the GED did not know much about the Dutch Delta Programme or about Dutch water planning expertise and projects more generally, the Dutch embassy and their assigned members from the Delta Preparatory Team had to work hard to persuade the GED to collaborate on a water-centric delta planning project¹². It required many long-winding discussions, in which the Dutch actors attempted to win over the GED officials by presenting the idea of a delta plan for Bangladesh as an opportunity for the GED to gain even more political influence. As part of their strategy to convince the GED, the Dutch also organized tours for selected GED officials and planning ministers to Vietnam, the country that had been the first transfer destination of the Dutch Delta Approach. This laborious strategy paid off in the end: the Dutch succeeded in creating interest for their ideas and the GED agreed to collaborate in developing a Bangladesh delta plan.

In the negotiations that preceded this decision, but also during the process of collaboration, the GED did not simply adopt the Dutch proposals but also promoted and pushed for their own ideas and opinions. These importantly stemmed from their long-standing experience in planning and policymaking for the government. Most important for the GED was that the Bangladesh delta plan should be aligned with and form part of a macroeconomic framework, one that explicitly positioned the delta plan as part of the ambition of Bangladesh to become a middle-income country by 2021. The GED insisted on a clear articulation of the plan's interventions, and also emphasized that the plan should serve the purpose of identifying investment opportunities. Hence, where the strategic Dutch Delta Plan is primarily meant to better prepare a country for a number of possible future scenarios, the GED was more interested in a macroeconomic and investment-oriented planning exercise. The GED experts insisted that the plan should be in line with the overall vision of the Bangladesh government: they warned the Dutch consultants and negotiators that their lack of experience in dealing with the Bangladesh government risked negatively affecting or delaying the approval and implementation of a delta plan for Bangladesh. Following their recommendations, they insisted, would ensure continued political interest and institutional support from the ministries and policymakers, and was therefore crucial for mobilizing enough political buy-in of the plan.

¹² According to a GED official and a DPT member. The interviews were taken on March 9, and March 13 and October 27, 2017 respectively in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The GED also insisted that the plan should be drafted by Bangladeshi experts with technical support from Dutch experts. From the Dutch side, accepting the strong preferences of the GED became instrumental to establish and maintain the newly formed alliance. The Dutch in fact had little other choice than to go along with the GED's suggestions to align the plan with a macroeconomic framework, and to have Bangladeshi experts take the lead in drafting the plan. In the language of the embassy officials, agreeing to the GED's ideas and conditions "*helped create ownership for the BDP 2100*". An embassy official explained that this was important to pre-empt possible criticism that the BDP 2100 would become another *donor and expat consultant driven* plan, as was the case for the National Water Management Plan 2004¹³. Nevertheless, the embassy did not simply agree to the GED suggestions; they also negotiated for their own ideas and interests with the GED.

As a representative of the Dutch government (which forms part of the European Union), the embassy needed to follow Open European Union Award procedures for the call for a tender that was launched to appoint an international consortium of consultants for the development of the BDP 2100. This implied that they had to open up tendering opportunities for consultants from European countries other than the Netherlands. Yet, the embassy narrowed down possible bidders by setting a pre-condition for applying for the tender: consultants were required to have prior experience with Dutch delta planning. This made it easier for Dutch water organizations to win the bid than for others.

The embassy also negotiated with the GED about the organizational structure of the BDP 2100 planning process. They agreed on the participation of both a Dutch and a Bangladeshi group of consultants to draft the plan. The embassy and the GED simply named the teams for the project team A (the Dutch/international consortium of consultants) and team B (a group of Bangladeshi consultants) (EKN, 2013; GED, 2013). The embassy wanted the team leader of the Dutch international consortium (team A) to lead the overall plan development. This reflected the embassy's desire for the Dutch to retain some degree of control about the process of transferring the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh. They agreed to give a supportive role to the Bangladeshi counterparts of team B.

The embassy appointed a consortium named BanDuDeltAS as team A, the team led by a Dutch organization and consisting of consultants of both Dutch and Bangladeshi organizations. Through another tender process, the GED appointed a group of consultants from a private research organization named the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh as team B. The team B consultants and the GED knew each other well, as they had a long history of collaborating on the development of the Five-Year Plans for the fiscal years 2011–2015 and 2016–2020. They had also been jointly involved in developing the perspective plan in which the goal of achieving a middle-income country status was embedded.

Convincing the GED to become an ally in developing the BDP 2100 shows the artful forging of alliances and diplomatic negotiations that Dutch actors had to engage in to make the

¹³ The interview was taken on March 12, 2017 and January 25, 2018, in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh happen. It entailed the negotiation of ideas and interests, as well as making strategic compromises, a process that the Dutch sponsored with development cooperation funding. Forging the alliance with the GED appeared more important for the sending country – in this case the Netherlands - than for the recipient counterpart Bangladesh. Clearly, the stakes for making the transfer into a success were high for the Dutch. That it takes influencing power to convince the recipient side to collaborate underscores that also the actors in the recipient country have agency and power in co-determining and re-shaping that what is transferred. The negotiations between the embassy and the GED also show the importance of the choice of the main partner. The strategic alliance with such a politically influential ally is important for the sending country, as it makes it easier to mobilize ever more political support for the transferred policy, without endangering diplomatic ties. For both parties, the transfer entailed difficult political navigations.

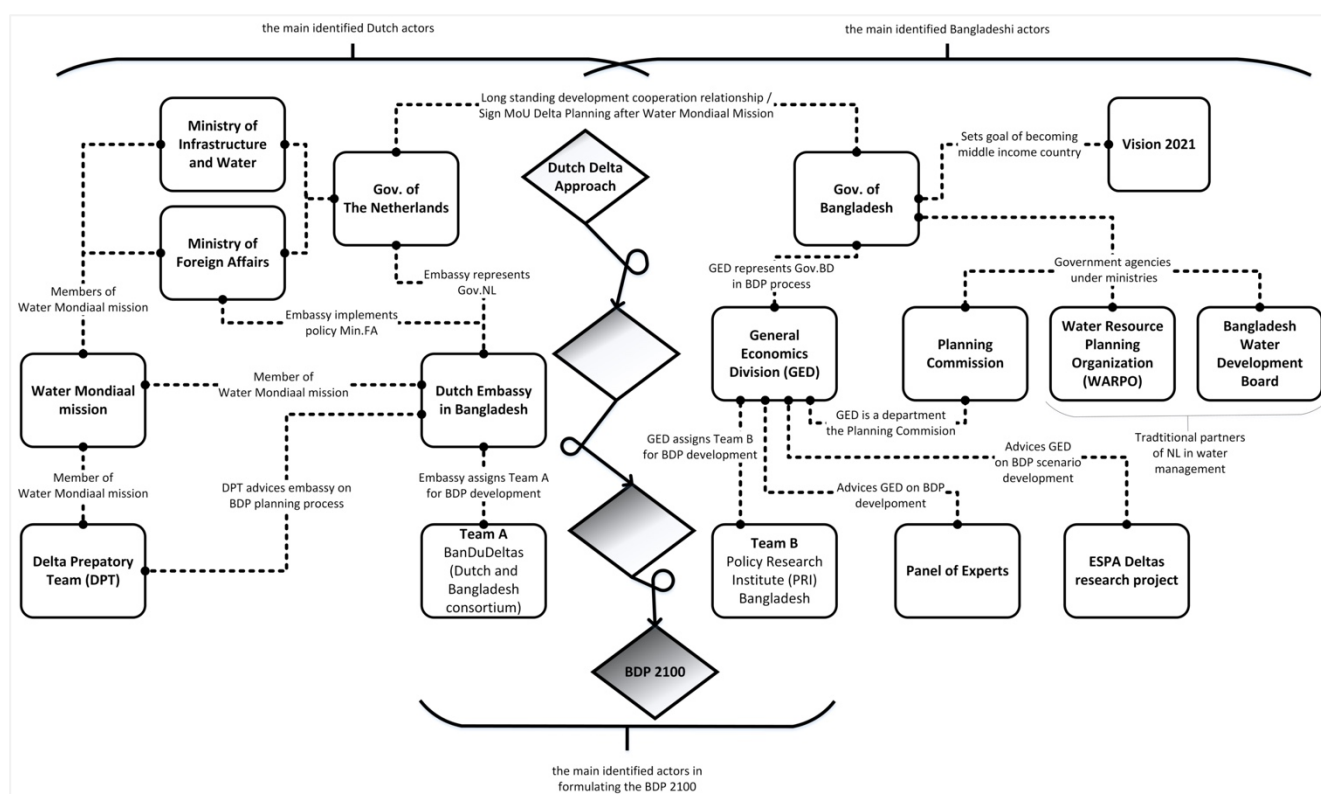


Figure 3.2: A constellation of actors in the development of the BDP 2100. Note: the actors are identified drawing on the specific anecdotes described in this article. (Source: Author)

3.4.3 Translation of the Dutch Delta Approach

In this section, we describe and analyse how two prominent building blocks of the Dutch Delta Approach, the development of scenarios and the delta governance framework, were modified and re-interpreted because of the efforts of and negotiations between the engaged actors: the GED, the embassy, and teams A and B. Doing this allows for a more detailed illustration of policy transfer as a process of *translation*.

3.4.3.1 Dealing with future uncertainties in the deltas

In the Dutch Delta Approach, the development of scenarios is an important element. Scenario development is a planning tool that consists of the development of coherent narratives of alternative hypothetical futures that are schematically presented on the x and y axes of a four-quadrant matrix (Terwisscha van Scheltinga et al., 2015). The scenarios are developed by using different combinations of two main external drivers, climate change and socioeconomic development. These depict different perspectives on past, present and future development trends. In this way, scenario development provides a tool to help make strategic planning choices, for example regarding land use policies or infrastructure development (Haasnoot and Middelkoop, 2012). The cradle of using scenario development in this way does not stand in the Netherlands, but in the United States: the tool was originally used to develop projections of future business uncertainties for the Royal Dutch Shell oil during the oil embargo of 1973-74 (Mahmoud et al., 2009). In the Dutch Delta Programme, the use of scenario development marked a shift in thinking about the future, from probability-based thinking on the basis of extrapolations of the past, to plausibility thinking based on future uncertainties (Zegwaard et al., 2019). Its use in the Delta Programme consisted of the development of contextual scenarios that provide images of possible future environments of the policy or system to be taken into account. Their main use in the Programme is to produce statements about the robustness of planning and policy interventions (Enserink et al., 2010).

Several consultants of team A were assigned with the task to engage in scenario development as part of the development of the BDP. These consultants were mostly affiliated with Dutch research and knowledge institutes: Deltares, IHE Delft, and Wageningen University. Guided by their Terms of Reference, they first intended to more or less replicate the Dutch Delta Plan of 2008 example by developing contextual scenarios. This intention changed when the more than one hundred participants in the scenario development workshop organised for the purpose, who were mostly representatives of various Bangladeshi ministries, identified external drivers other than climate change and socioeconomic development. Workshop participants emphasized population growth, land management and administration, political developments, transboundary water sharing and upstream development (among others) as other important drivers that would influence future uncertainties in Bangladesh. The participants of the scenario development workshop emphasized that the Dutch scenario drivers were not suitable for developing the scenarios for the BDP 2100.

In response, the consultants attempted to turn the contextual scenarios of the Dutch Delta Programme into something that would be useful and feasible for the context of Bangladesh. In doing this, they were not only guided by the outputs of the scenario development workshop, but also by concerns about how to create acceptance for Dutch expertise. In their efforts, they integrated some of the prioritized drivers identified by the participants in the workshop with the Dutch scenario drivers of climate change and socioeconomic

development. For the BDP 2100, the final scenario drivers that were decided upon were climate change and transboundary water management on the horizontal axis and socioeconomic development and land use changes on the vertical axis. Together, these formed the four-quadrant scenario framework. The scenarios illustrated the extremes of the plausible changes that would occur for flood management, water in agriculture, water supply and environmental protection (among others) (Van Aalst et al., 2016). The four scenarios developed in this way were contextual scenarios (cf. Enserink et al., 2010) similar to the scenarios developed for the Dutch Delta programme (Bruggeman et al., 2011).

When they reviewed the method of developing the four scenarios and their contents, the GED officials were of the opinion that the developed scenarios were *very subjective* as they predicted only with some plausibility what might happen in the future¹. The officials also considered the data used to develop the scenarios as inconsistent, backdated, and different from the data sources used by the Bangladeshi government. In particular, they questioned the data related to population growth and GDP projections. They also disagreed with team A's choice to use the IPCC global average climate data, instead of the locally available data. In addition to questioning the quality of the data and the methods used, the GED officials also suggested it would make more sense to develop future scenarios on the basis of the likelihood that these would occur in the Bangladesh delta, beyond the four scenarios identified. The GED officials were sceptical about the feasibility of four common scenarios for the entire country, pointing out that in the proposed outline of the BDP 2100 the entire delta country is divided into six geographical regions with distinct geo-hydrological features (identified as hotspots in the plan). One GED official suggested developing a specific land use scenario.

The GED invited team B, a representative of the Bangladesh Water Development Board of the Ministry of Water Resources, and consultants from the ESPA (Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation) Deltas Project to review the scenarios. The consultants from the ESPA Deltas Project were invited because they had also developed scenarios. Yet, their scenarios were explorative strategic ones that included policy options. They were made to partly fulfil their project objective of providing Bangladeshi policymakers with knowledge and tools to help them evaluate the effects of policy decisions on people's livelihoods. One of the project consultants observed that the scenario drivers proposed by team A did not include changes in soil salinity, seasonal water flow variations, sediment inflows, and upstream and local interventions in the coastal region. The ESPA Deltas consultants suggested the use of integrated modelling to assess the validity of the scenario drivers. As for the members of team B, a leading team B consultant observed that in developing the scenarios, an economic assessment had not been included. This team B consultant suggested to instead develop 'what if scenarios - with/without delta plan' that would integrate an economic analysis. According to him, this would make the use of the scenarios more appealing to the policymakers. The GED complemented the suggestions of team B and the ESPA Deltas

¹ Record notes of presentation on "Scenarios of Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100" on January 06, 2016 at GED.

consultants by (re-)emphasizing to team A that it was important that the development of the scenarios represented ‘a union (*marriage*) between economic and technical experts’. The final recommendation of the GED was for team A to update the four developed scenarios so that they could be presented to a designated Panel of Experts, which was formed to provide feedback on the developed contents of the BDP 2100.

Next to receiving comments on the methodology and contents, team A also received feedback from the GED and team B about the names they had given to each of the four scenarios. These names referred to the respective plausible futures that the scenarios represented: productive, resilient, congestion and stagnation. The latter two described the plausible scenarios of low economic growth under business as usual situations (traditional economy). The rather pejorative names of these scenarios drew criticism from the GED and team B. For team B the idea of a stagnant future was ‘impractical and its development a mere *waste of time*’. They considered the possible occurrence of a stagnant future negligible because of the continuous efforts of the Bangladeshi government to not let *the country go to ruins*². This conversation reconfirmed that team A used a different definition of a scenario than team B and the others. Where team A used scenario development to anticipate possible futures, trying to predict with some plausibility what might happen, the others saw the scenarios as representing the articulation of a desire, and indication of what should happen. Because of this, as a team A consultant who co-developed the scenarios reminisced: “*naming the scenarios became almost a highly political act because if it sounded too bad, people will think we in the delta plan desired a bad future for Bangladesh*”.³ The consultants considered to have no other choice than to rename the congestion and stagnation scenarios as moderate and active respectively.

The next step in the process was for two leading consultants of team A to present the scenarios to the Panel of Experts. The Panel of Experts consisted of selected reputed academics and representatives from various government institutions, professional (e.g., architects) and business communities. During the meeting organised for the purpose, the experts present in the meeting questioned the feasibility of the scenarios in the BDP 2100. Most of the experts considered that having only four scenarios was too limited; they would prefer to also integrate other uncertainties that might occur in the context of Bangladesh. They suggested developing a range of scenarios based on additional external drivers. The Chair of the Panel of Experts recommended to consult with relevant experts and integrate computer simulations in identifying a range of scenario drivers. The team A representatives disagreed to this suggestion, reiterating that the four plausible futures merely serve as the corner flags of the playing field of plausible uncertain futures. They highlighted that the development of four scenarios in a two axes matrix is a proven method used in the Netherlands and Vietnam. Not convinced, a member of the Panel of Experts challenged team A member’s promotion of developing the scenarios with a remark that (the

² Record notes of presentation on “*Scenarios of Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100*” on January 06, 2016 at GED.

³ The interview was taken on August 08, 2016 in the Netherlands.

development context in) Bangladesh is not similar to that of the Netherlands or that of Vietnam. Hence, according to him, the four developed scenarios would not necessarily function in the same way in the development of the BDP 2100 as they had in Vietnam or in the Netherlands.

The suggestion to develop more than four scenarios in the BDP 2100 required an extra round of negotiations between the GED (who was in favour of the idea), team A and the Dutch embassy. The latter two opposed the idea, as they considered that the four scenarios already integrated all plausible futures for the delta. Team A also argued that the remaining project resources of team A were insufficient for the required creative thoughts and efforts to develop additional scenarios. They also considered developing two additional scenarios an unnecessary task. One of the team A consultants said that they only agreed in the end because they wanted to create acceptance for the scenarios⁴. Through another negotiation with the embassy, Team A managed to get additional funding for doing the extra work. Finally, this resulted into the development and inclusion of two additional scenarios: business as usual and fast urbanization.

The development of scenarios for the BDP 2100 thus transformed into something very different than what it was in the Dutch Delta Plan. This process of translation was influenced by the motivation to get acceptance for the Dutch ideas from the team A side, and originated in differences of opinion about the purpose and function of scenario planning in the context of development in Bangladesh. In the end, the scenarios were translated in terms of their contents (from contextual scenarios to strategic policy scenarios⁵; from qualitative plausible futures to quantitative probable futures); numbers (from four to six scenarios); and in the way they were schematically presented in the BDP 2100.

3.4.3.2 Dealing with the uncertainties through economic projections

Further translations to the strategic scenarios happened during the drafting of the BDP 2100 by team B consultants. Team B interpreted the developed scenarios as ‘mere disparate assumptions with regard to what happens in the future if there is a change in specific externalities (e.g., climate change or population growth)’. They, therefore, decided to translate the scenarios into something that would be more easily communicable to policymakers and more suitable to the context of development in Bangladesh. They did this by placing the scenarios in a macroeconomic framework. In the end, they proposed only two scenarios on the basis of a macroeconomic analysis that they carried out. In their analysis, they integrated macroeconomic, employment, poverty and environment models (among others) for each of the six geographical regions (the BDP 2100 hotspots) with the

⁴ From the interview with a consultant who co-developed the scenario taken on February 19, 2017, in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

⁵ Strategic scenarios deal with images of the whole, i.e., they combine policies and contextual development. Strategic scenarios are used to clarify strategic choices between kinds of developments or policies by providing insight into the expected effects (Enserink et al., 2010, p.125).

use of data from the Bangladeshi ministries, bureau of statistics and knowledge institutes. They assessed the economic impacts of climate change with an emphasis on economic and environmental variables, and showed the implications on anticipated GDP growth, and employment and poverty reduction (among others).

The final two scenarios of team B were: what happens ‘without’ (business as usual) and ‘with’ a delta plan. Team B thus translated the strategic scenarios into policy scenarios (cf. Enserink et al., 2010), with the scenarios becoming policy options. In the business as usual option, team B consultants illustrated the projected impacts of climate change and natural hazards on the government’s anticipated GDP growth rate without a delta plan. They predicted an annual reduction of about 1.7% or more to the current GDP rate, which would result in reduced agricultural production, unemployment, and migration to urbanized areas. In their illustrations, they highlighted the impacts on per capita income, employment, infrastructure development, poverty and internal migration. In the delta plan policy option, team B depicted what would happen to the socioeconomic development trend when the government would implement the delta plan. They showed that the implementation of a delta plan would result in achieving the desired GDP growth rate of 8% by 2020 and an average growth rate of 8% or more until 2041, which would help the government achieving their envisaged status of a middle-income country by 2030, and upper middle-income country status by 2041. In addition, team B compared the two scenarios to make the point that the adoption and implementation of a delta plan would support the Bangladeshi government in the eradication of extreme poverty by the year 2027, instead of only reaching this goal in the year 2041 in case the government would follow the business as usual option. In this way, team B translated scenario development, turning it into an instrument of the GED’s efforts to align the BDP 2100 to the socioeconomic development goals of the government of Bangladesh.

There was a clear difference in the professional and academic expertise of team A and team B, as both represent different communities of practice: team A’s dominant expertise is in water management, whereas team B’s dominant expertise is mostly in macro-economic planning. Before meeting each other around the development of the BDP, there had been few interactions between members of these two teams and disciplinary traditions. Indeed, it is partly because of belonging to different epistemic communities (Haas, 1992) that misunderstandings and differences of opinion arose. Each team questioned the legitimacy of the other’s plan, culminating in a mutual lack of confidence and trust. In the absence of previous interactions and collaborations, developing an understanding for and acknowledging each other’s perceptions, expertise and work on delta planning became arduous.

Indeed, the GED clearly preferred to use the policy options of team B over the scenarios developed by team A. This was because in their opinion the policy options better allowed establishing a positive causal link between the BDP 2100 and the Bangladeshi government’s economic and political interests. The team A scenarios made use of a probabilistic approach, in which the level of probability remained unspecified. Team A tried to convince the GED

and team B that the use of policy options instead of their scenarios would not be feasible for developing the adaptive delta planning and management strategies that Bangladesh needed. The Dutch embassy was also reluctant to use policy options, because they considered these at best as “*strategies for plan implementation*”.⁶ Yet, the GED stood firm in their preference. They acknowledged that the preferred method as developed by team B was not an established delta planning approach, and that it differed from how the Dutch had developed their Delta Plan. Yet, they maintained that this is what they needed for creating political interest among and support from influential policymakers for the BDP 2100.

Hence, the GED’s preference for policy options over the scenarios developed by team A did not just stem from the desire to make more realistic projections of future uncertainties. The GED also developed the contents of the policy options as a strategy to convince the Bangladeshi government that the BDP 2100 would be an important instrument for achieving its political aspirations and development goals. For the GED, the policy options in the BDP 2100 were a tool to negotiate political buy-in for the BDP 2100. After all, developing a plan is as much a political process as it is an analytical process, and delta planning is not something that is detached from politics, as a GED official remarked⁷. The inclusion of policy options instead of the scenarios developed by team A thereby also marked a notable deviation from the original Dutch Delta Approach and Dutch expertise, turning the BDP 2100 more into a plan developed by and anchored in Bangladeshi knowledge and expertise.

3.4.3.3 Legislative anchoring of the delta planning

In the Netherlands, the narrative that water (in the delta) is too important to be influenced by short-term national electoral politics resulted in conceiving delta planning as something that should remain relatively detached from normal political processes. In Bangladesh, the development of BDP 2100 instead was deliberately inserted into normal political and bureaucratic planning processes. We use this section to elaborate how this translation of the original Dutch delta planning governance framework happened.

Along with scenario development, the delta governance framework is another important distinguishing feature of the Dutch Delta Planning approach, as highlighted in promotional texts. Its premise is that delta planning should remain relatively detached from normal and relatively short-term political processes. When following the example of the Dutch Delta Programme, the implementation of the delta governance framework in Bangladesh therefore would require the adoption of a Delta Act to legalize the establishment of a Delta Fund and a Delta Commission that can operate relatively independently from normal political processes (Van Alphen, 2014 and 2013). As in the Netherlands, the Delta Commission, led by a Delta Commissioner, would direct a multi-governmental process of delta planning,

⁶ The interview was taken on March 12, 2017 and January 25, 2018, in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

⁷ The interview was taken on April 03, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

policy development and implementation. It would monitor and annually report to Parliament, and be responsible for taking necessary step when problems arise.

The GED was not in favour of following the Dutch delta governance framework example when developing the BDP 2100, because it feared that implementation of such a framework would reduce the power and influence of the very actors whose support the GED needed for approval of the plan. Various Bangladeshi ministries that deal with cross-cutting water issues, notably the Ministry of Water Resources and also the Ministry of Planning under whose directorate the GED is positioned, were sceptical about shifting part of their authority to a Delta Commission that would select and prioritize their future water-centric projects submitted as part of implementation of the BDP 2100. Indeed, the Ministry of Water Resources and its two core institutions the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and WARPO were actively opposing the Dutch inspired governance framework, because they feared that it would reduce their influence in water management and planning in Bangladesh and shift power to the proposed Delta Commission.

In the proposed implementation of the delta governance framework, the GED took responsibility for developing the delta act and ensuring its approval from the parliament. The GED officials worked out the details of the structure of the proposed delta commission, specifying the roles and responsibilities of the commissioner and other personnel. They gave themselves the task of recruiting the members of the delta commission. In addition, they agreed to ensure that money for a delta fund would be mobilized, consisting of a 2.5% of GDP per annum. The opposing ministries considered these active engagements of the GED officials in establishing the delta commission as efforts of the GED officials to secure future positions and funds for themselves.

To deal with the opposition, one strategy of the GED was to spread the word about the approval of the BDP 2100 by the highest level of the government, even when the plan was still developing. This strategy, however, did not bring them the anticipated success. Reflecting on the opposition, a Bangladeshi consultant from team A remarked: “*power brokers are active in trying to kill this project (development of the BDP 2100).*”⁸ As a result of the continuing opposition, the GED had no other option but to re-negotiate the proposed delta governance framework. A team A consultant shared that the GED and team A worked together in dealing with the opposing parties. One of their main strategies was to give them a patient hearing; a method the consultant called ‘a silent measure of action’⁹. In the negotiations, the GED developed the idea to replace the Delta Commission with a Delta Governance Council (DGC) in which all ministries would be represented. They constructed the DGC as a high-level inter-ministerial forum chaired by the prime minister and co-chaired by the planning minister. Ministers from the (influential) ministries of finance; water resources; land and agriculture; environment, forests and climate change; fisheries and

⁸ The interview was taken on April 02, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

⁹ The interview was taken on March 06 and 08, and October 23, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

livestock; food; and shipping (among others) would form part of the DGC as its members. The GED struck a deal with their parent ministry, the Ministry of Planning, by providing them a leading co-chair position over other ministries in the DGC. Instead of establishing an independent delta commission, the GED thus proposed a governance framework that would give more voice and power to existing ministries. Members of the proposed DGC were to provide strategic advice and policy guidance in the implementation of the BDP 2100, making sure it supports *achieving the political commitments* of the government (GED, 2018a, p.668). By developing the DGC in this way, the delta governance framework proposed by the GED for Bangladesh became an intimate part of normal political and bureaucratic decision-making processes, as it would function under the supervision and guidance of a range of ministers and the prime minister.

In the process, the GED made sure to secure their own position and power. They negotiated to retain some power by giving themselves the responsibility for the coordination, facilitation, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the BDP 2100. They also proposed that the person with the highest rank in the GED would serve as the secretary of the DGC. They also obtained the chair position in the project/ programme selection committee (the second coordinating committee followed by the DGC); this is the committee that will be responsible for the selection of specific projects and programmes as part of the implementation of the BDP 2100. Thus, the GED translated the Dutch Delta governance framework (with a delta commission and a delta fund) into the DGC to decrease opposition from various ministries. Yet, they made sure to retain a powerful influence in the selection and prioritization of water-centric projects in Bangladesh.

The GED further negotiated for the idea of establishing local water management bodies with the promise to the Bangladesh Water Development Board to prioritize and allocate funds for a maximum number of their projects in the implementation of the BDP 2100 (see for example, the investment plan of the BDP 2100, GED, 2017). The original idea of establishing a delta fund through allocating a 0.8% to 2.5% of GDP per annum remained unchanged in the negotiation. This was possible because establishing such a delta fund would not influence the existing political power structure in Bangladesh. The leading international financing institutions in Bangladesh, nevertheless, have been critical about the proposed delta fund. They considered the delta plan a very expensive programme in terms of the required investments for implementation, and feared that establishment of the fund would result in the prioritization of water-centric projects by the Bangladeshi government at the expense of investments in other sectors such as health and education. They were afraid that the benefits of the development of the BDP 2100 would not outweigh the high costs of its implementation.

All in all, the GED translated the Dutch delta governance framework to the delta governance council (DGC) in order for the BDP 2100 to be accepted by politically influential actors in Bangladesh. In the translation process, they managed to safeguard an influential position for themselves. This reconstruction of what happened during the development of the BDP 2100 clearly highlights how policy translation processes are also deeply political: they provide

the occasion for (re-)negotiating or safeguarding (future) positions and interests by offering opportunities to secure (future) access to and control over funds, projects and political authority.

3.4.4 Merging of Dutch delta technicalities with the Bangladeshi political economy

An unanticipated outcome of the negotiations between the GED and the embassy, as mentioned in Section 3.4.2, was that two versions of the new delta plan were developed. Both team A and B came up with a plan, without having had much interaction with one another¹⁰. Both teams claimed that they had the responsibility for drafting the delta plan in accordance with their respective ToRs. In the end, they submitted two separate BDP 2100 plans to the GED. This provoked long-winding debates and negotiations between the GED, team A, team B and the embassy about which version would become the final delta plan for Bangladesh. In this section, we provide some more details about this negotiation process to show how the Dutch Delta Approach shifted shape when traveling to and landing in Bangladesh.

At the time when the consultant teams were engaged in negotiations with the GED, both teams simultaneously sent a message to the outside world that their plan has been approved by the GED. They did this as a tactic measure to create pressure on the GED in the negotiations. A consultant who worked with both teams reflected on what happened: *“this was an intellectual fighting where each team intended to emerge as the champion of the BDP. Their inherent objective was to be at the top level in the water management (consultancy in Bangladesh)”*.¹¹ In the negotiations, the embassy officials appeared supportive towards their appointed team A and the plan the team submitted. In the interview with them, they emphasized the particular responsibility of team A to draft a BDP 2100. At the same time, they did not deny the position of team B and explained: *“actually for us - the embassy - it is only one team. May be some part is recruited by the [Bangladeshi] government. But for us it is one consultancy package. But GED took it differently”*.¹² A claim that the interviewed GED officials denied. They instead insisted in emphasizing that the process of developing the BDP 2100 importantly relied on their appointed team B’s capacity to develop a *“politically-palatable”* BDP 2100.¹³

The GED denied the claims by each of the consultant teams that they had approved their respective plan. The engaged GED officials informed that the delta plan that they were considering to finalize and get approval for from the Bangladeshi government would be an

¹⁰ As mentioned by the two consultants from team A about a lack of cooperation between team A and B. the interviews were taken on February 9, 2017 and March 6 and 8, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹¹ The interview was taken on March 14 and April 05, 2016 and October 22, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹² The interview was taken on March 12, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹³ The interview was taken April 03, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

amalgamation of the two submitted plans. The GED officials themselves selected specific contents from each of the plans. Hence, they selected those sections that provided information on the opportunities, challenges and socioeconomic conditions in the delta, and national and transboundary water management issues (among others) from the plan of team B. From team A's plan, they choose contents related to water resource management. They integrated the policy options developed by team B in the projections of future uncertainties, even though adaptive delta planning aligns better with the scenarios developed by team A. What motivated the GED in their selection and in the development of the final BDP 2100 in this way was to come up with a delta plan that would support the development of Bangladesh. As a GED official further explained: *“Team A was very useful to draw lessons of the Netherlands on how to develop a delta plan. We need Bangladeshi experts who have previous experiences of writing plans. That is why we have integrated the [expertise of] team B. That does not mean that we demeaned team A. We never did. We took the technical knowledge inputs from them. [...] It is now easier to say that we prepared it with our own genius taking technical help from the Netherlands”*.¹⁴

Team A and B both acknowledge the work done by the GED to merge their respective delta plans into one. Team B claims that what eventually emerged as the BDP 2100 closely resembles the plan they submitted. This happened because their plan was more relevant to the political economy and institutional arrangements (among others) of Bangladesh than the plan of team A. While acknowledging the quality expertise of the consultants of team A, team B pointed out that team A, in comparison to them, lacked experience in developing national plans for the Bangladeshi government. This lack of experience resulted in a plan that was an interesting combination of various planning notions, but that was less useful for the development of Bangladesh, a team B consultant explained¹⁵. Similar to team B, team A claimed that the final draft of the BDP 2100 largely consisted of their ideas. A team A consultant explained that the reason for GED to prefer their plan over team B's lied in their strategic efforts to already integrate *“some good elements”* from the plan of team B in their plan, in consultation with the GED.¹⁶ The consultant emphasized that the selected contents did not constitute more than around 10 to 20% of the total of their re-submitted plan. One example of the contents that they took from team B were the policy options: team A considered these useful in in showing that the BDP 2100 would contribute to achieving the government's envisaged middle-income country status by 2021. They integrated their developed scenarios as plausible futures with the delta plan policy options. While the GED denied the claims from both consultant teams, the embassy officials during the interview asserted that the final BDP 2100 was developed by team A in consultation with the GED and with some inputs from team B.

¹⁴ The interview was taken April 03, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

¹⁵ The interview was taken on November 10, 2017.

¹⁶ The interview was taken on March 06 and 08 and October 23, 2017 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Taking the efforts of the GED, embassy, team A and B into account, we observe that the GED became the main steering agent in the development of the BDP 2100, rather than the consultant teams. What appeared important for the GED in ‘appropriating’ sections of the two delta plans to merge them into a BDP 2100 was to develop a delta plan that would help maintaining the Bangladeshi government’s diplomatic ties with the Netherlands, and that supported the GED officials in achieving political support for the approval of the plan.

3.5 Discussion and conclusion

In this paper we documented and analysed the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach from the Netherlands to Bangladesh by conceptualizing it as a process of policy translation. Inspired by Science and Technology Studies’ model of translation (Latour, 1996, 1986 and Callon, 1986) and by insights from the anthropology of development (Li, 2007 and Mosse, 2004), the basic premise of this conceptualization is that policy transfer does not happen by itself, but requires the actions and engagements of many people involved. Translation approaches take it for granted that the object of translation (in our case the Dutch Delta Approach) changes in the process of transfer. In this concluding section, we highlight how a policy-as-translation approach allows to see, question and understand what happened when the Dutch Delta Approach travelled to Bangladesh.

In our reconstruction of the development of the BDP 2100, we foreground the interactions, struggles and manoeuvres of a diverse group of Dutch and Bangladeshi actors. All of them tried to creatively shape and re-shape the plan, in efforts to realize their own ambitions without unduly frustrating those of others. The development of BDP 2100 very much was (and probably continues to be in its implementation) a process of negotiating ideas and building coalitions between actors with different interests and positions. Among other things, what was at stake were future projects, political clout and the quality of the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and the Netherlands. The translation process was marked by and depended on the cherishing and rekindling of historical relations of friendship and collegiality, while also creating opportunities for forging new alliances.

Conceptualizing policy transfer as a process of translation thus helps draw attention to the relations of power, collegiality and diplomacy that always infuse and co-shape both how transfer happens and its outcomes. Important in a context of development cooperation, it also usefully emphasizes the agency of the so-called recipient country in creatively adapting and changing that what is transferred. What our analysis shows is that more than simply transferring a policy model or approach from one country to the other, the development of the BDP 2100 was a purposive means of continuing the longstanding bilateral relations between the governments of the Netherlands and Bangladesh. As a result of the need to maintain diplomatic ties and to avoid that any of the involved actors would lose face, it was of utmost importance that the process ended with something tangible, a developed plan. For all involved parties it was important to come up with an outcome that they could present as a success and use as a basis for future cooperation.

A policy transfer as translation account draws attention to the continuous adaptations and modifications that happen to the original plan. Where the accounts of the Dutch government actors tend to emphasize the similarities between the Dutch Delta Approach and the BDP 2100, probably as part of an attempt to promote and market Dutch water expertise, our analysis instead highlights that many things changed. In order to travel to and land in Bangladesh, the Delta Approach had to be reinvented as an indispensable tool to support the Bangladesh government achieve its political aspiration of making Bangladesh a middle-income and an upper middle-income country by 2021 and 2041 respectively. Rather than the speed with which a more or less stable object travels from one place to another, therefore, the success of policy transfer in this case would be more accurately measured by the ability of the involved actors to reach agreement about what a Bangladesh Delta Plan would consist of and try to achieve.

In the Bangladesh case, in the process of reaching this agreement, the power to control and steer changed hands over time: from the Dutch ‘sender’ to the Bangladeshi ‘recipient’. The GED of the Bangladesh government gradually assumed an ever more important role in the development of the plan. In doing this, the GED drastically re-defined and re-constructed the Delta Plan from a long-term strategic into a macroeconomic and investment-oriented one. The Dutch embassy went along with this change, as they wanted to create ownership on the recipient side. Thus, altering the nature of the plan was not just more in line with the GED’s normal line of business, but also allowed the GED to prominently position itself in the proposed delta governance structure, thereby safeguarding its future power and existence. The agency of the GED in the transfer sheds light on how the relations between a sender and a recipient in policy transfer are always power-laden. The influence of the GED calls into question how much steering power the originator or sender of a policy has on the outcomes of the transfer process. Indeed, in our account of the process, the Bangladeshi government actors appear as powerful as their Dutch partner in terms of their ability to influence the contents of the Plan.

In this way, a conceptualization of policy transfer as translation usefully helps draw attention to the influence and agency of the actors on the recipient side of the transfer in making changes to the developed plan and thus in making the transfer happen. By not identifying with the sender (or the transfer project) and by not assuming that what is transferred is good enough to travel almost by itself, translation approaches may provide an important basis for creating more symmetrical dialogues between actors from the country of origin and those in the country of destination. As our analysis has shown, many of the interactions and negotiations that happened between Dutch and Bangladeshi actors were respectful and open, with the actors often building on years of collaboration, collegiality and friendship. Indeed, mutual trust was an important ingredient of the successful transfer.

The promotional accounts of the transfer of the Dutch Delta Approach to Bangladesh from the Dutch government tend to focus on and emphasize the actions and efforts of the Dutch, thereby highlighting the ‘Dutch-ness’ of the plan. The accounts developed from the Bangladeshi side by the GED (see for example, Alam, 2019) instead emphasize the many

Bangladeshi inputs to the plan, and present the BDP 2100 as ‘Bangladeshi’. This is logical given how the reputation of actors from both sides depends on their ability to flag their influence and success to their representative governments and constituencies. This implication for those interested in understanding how policy transfer happens, is that it is important to remain reflexively aware of prior identifications and perspectives, as accounts of the involved actors themselves will always tend to emphasize their own contributions. In development cooperation contexts, the initiative and funding for transfer tend to come from the sender. Perhaps partly because the same sources of funding are often also used to study the transfer (and are aimed at making transfer more successful or smoother), most analyses of policy transfer identify with this sender. To avoid over-estimating the power and influence of those originating the transfer in shaping what happens, analyzing transfer as translation allows taking a more agnostic stance (cf. Hasan et al., 2019). A stance that acknowledges the roles and agency of all the involved actors and their efforts, recognizing how they navigate interests and politics to arrive at something that is satisfactory to all.

A translation approach will also be useful to re-think what involved professionals and practitioners need to do and learn when engaging in a policy transfer process. Much more than technical knowledge, our analysis suggests that they need to have skills in negotiation, diplomacy, conflict management, coalition building and mutual learning. When reflecting about their experience, both Dutch and Bangladeshi experts indicated that they had taken much inspiration from the process, and particularly enjoyed having co-created (new) knowledge in support of making Bangladesh a middle-income country by 2021.