TU Delft

Delft University of Technology

Navigating the bureaucracy
an analysis of implementation feasibility for the Mekong Delta Plan, Vietnam

Korbee, Dorien; Hong Quan, Nguyen; Hermans, Leon; Ho Long, Phi

DOI
10.1080/09640568.2019.1623014

Publication date
2019

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Journal of Environmental Planning and Management

Citation (APA)
Korbee, D., Hong Quan, N., Hermans, L., & Ho Long, P. (2019). Navigating the bureaucracy: an analysis of implementation feasibility for the Mekong Delta Plan, Vietnam. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, *62*(9), 1545-1561. https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2019.1623014

Important note
To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
Please check the document version above.

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

Takedown policy
Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

This work is downloaded from Delft University of Technology.
For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to a maximum of 10.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Environmental Planning and Management

ISSN: 0964-0568 (Print) 1360-0559 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjep20

Navigating the bureaucracy: an analysis of implementation feasibility for the Mekong Delta Plan, Vietnam

Dorien Korbee, Nguyen Hong Quan, Leon Hermans & Phi Ho Long

To cite this article: Dorien Korbee, Nguyen Hong Quan, Leon Hermans & Phi Ho Long (2019): Navigating the bureaucracy: an analysis of implementation feasibility for the Mekong Delta Plan, Vietnam, Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, DOI: 10.1080/09640568.2019.1623014

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2019.1623014

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 10 Jul 2019.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 132

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=cjep20

Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, 2019
https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2019.1623014

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Navigating the bureaucracy: an analysis of implementation feasibility for the Mekong Delta Plan, Vietnam

Dorien Korbee[a]*, Hong Quan Nguyen[b], Leon Hermans[a] and Ho Long Phi[b]

[a]*Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Delft University of Technology, Delft, The Netherlands;* [b]*Center of Water Management and Climate Change (WACC), Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM), Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

(*Received 1 May 2018; final version received 1 May 2019*)

Strategic delta planning focuses on strategic, long-term choices to stimulate sustainable development in deltas. Strategic delta plans outline a long-term vision to be embedded into the plans and activities of government agencies and semi-public actors at multiple levels. This implies a form of coordinated, yet decentralized, implementation. Although, its importance is widely acknowledged, there are few analytical approaches to assess the feasibility and possible bottlenecks of such implementation processes. This article applies a motivation and ability (MOTA) framework to assess the implementation feasibility of the Mekong Delta Plan in Ben Tre province, Vietnam. The results reveal diverging motivations and a perceived lack of ability among government actors at local and regional level. When not well-managed, this could hamper the translation of the strategic goals and visions into local and regional actions. This suggests the usefulness of the MOTA framework as a tool to help manage implementation processes for strategic delta planning.

Keywords: strategic delta planning; implementation; Vietnam; Mekong Delta Plan; MOTA; water management; actor analysis

1. Introduction

Deltas are an attractive environment for human settlements (Adger *et al*. 2005; McGranahan, Balk, and Anderson 2007). Deltas are subject to many problems, such as flood vulnerability, freshwater shortage, multiple claims on space, coastal erosion and salinity intrusion (Ericson *et al*. 2006; Nicholls 2004). Climate change is imposing a new perspective on sustainability in deltas, with a long time-horizon and a unprecedented degree of uncertainty (Adger *et al*. 2005; Dessai, Lu, and Hulme 2005; Harley *et al*. 2006; Wardekker *et al*. 2010). To address adaptation in delta areas, there is a need to integrate climate change adaptation and future planning (van der Voorn *et al*. 2017). Several approaches and methods have been proposed, such as adaptation pathways (Haasnoot *et al*. 2013), robust decision making (Lempert and Groves 2010), adaptive management (van der Voorn, Pahl-Wostl, and Quist 2012; van der Voorn *et al*. 2017) and strategic delta planning (Seijger *et al*. 2017). Strategic delta planning has emerged as an approach to support long-term (50–100 years) integrated planning in

*Corresponding author. Email: d.korbee-1@tudelft.nl

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

delta systems. The plan itself contains a strategic vision of the future, and allows for an adaptive framework to guide future actions (Haasnoot *et al*. 2013; Seijger *et al*. 2017; Seijger, Hoang, and Van Halsema 2019; van der Voorn *et al*. 2017).

Now that strategic delta plans are being developed in various deltas, such as Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Vietnam, England, the United States and Myanmar (Choudhury *et al*. 2012; Delta Stewardship Council 2013; Environment Agency 2009; Kabat *et al*. 2009, 2005; Louisiana 2012; Royal Haskoning, Deltares, and Rebel 2013; Schiermeier 2014; Seijger, Hoang, and Van Halsema 2019; van Staveren, van Tatenhove, and Warner 2017) questions regarding the implementation aspects of these plans emerge. A characteristic of strategic planning is that exact implementation efforts are not prescribed in the strategic delta plan, but are the result of decisions and negotiations at the operational level. The outcomes of these operational level actor decisions could result in strategic plans not being implemented in the way in which they were intended, or not being implemented at all (Haasnoot *et al*. 2013; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; van der Voorn *et al*. 2017).

To address the implementation of strategic delta plans a "soft implementation" perspective is proposed (Seijger, Hoang, and Van Halsema 2019). This perspective points to the importance of shared knowledge, ideas, commitment, consent and understanding between the actors involved in the implementation of strategic plans (Faludi 2000; Seijger, Hoang, and Van Halsema 2019). However, shared knowledge, commitment and consent are not always required and not always realistic to expect across the implementation spectrum. Rather, smart arrangements are necessary that can channel differences and lack of interest and commitment in ways that do not obstruct implementation (Haasnoot *et al*. 2013; Hegger *et al*. 2014; van der Voorn *et al*. 2017). Coordination is not the same as all stakeholders wanting and understanding the same things. Therefore, even shared knowledge and commitment could result in a situation in which a (strategic) plan lives in the heads of planners and policy makers, but is not substantiated on the ground. To counter possible implementation gaps, there is a need to better understand the interests, the perceptions on risks and solutions and the implementation capacities of the various local and regional actors who are expected to help deliver plan implementation on the ground. Such understanding is needed to identify specific actions that are required to facilitate the soft implementation of strategic delta planning at local and regional levels.

Therefore, in this study, we aim to extend the soft implementation perspective of strategic delta plans, by adding action-oriented insights. To stipulate the importance attached to the action-oriented implementation of strategic plans, implementation is operationalised as the embedding of strategic goals and objectives into the plans and activities of regional and local level actors. A crucial link between the strategic and the operational (implementation) level are regional and local government agencies – or bureaucracies. They play a key role in translating the more abstract strategic goals and objectives of a strategic delta plan into practices on the ground. As other actors, these local level government agencies also cannot simply be expected to be persuaded by a better explanation of a strategic delta plan vision. As other strategic actors, these government agencies will also have their own view of the critical problems they need to address, as well as views on how they should address them (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Wilson 1989). Strategic delta plans will need to fit into this reality. Navigating these local bureaucratic landscapes, requires a good understanding of the setup and the motivations of the regional and local government agencies involved.

To navigate and assess these local bureaucratic landscapes, we apply a motivation and ability (MOTA) framework. This framework builds upon knowledge from existing

actor analysis methods (Hermans and Cunningham 2018; Hermans and Thissen 2009) and complements these with the inclusion of behavioural insights (Phi *et al*. 2015). Previously, the MOTA framework has been used to assess the implementation feasibility of strategic planning alternatives, mainly from the support among societal actors such as farmers, citizens or consumers (Phi *et al*. 2015). Using the framework to map the more bureaucratic administrative landscapes, where different government agencies are involved, is different.

We explore the practical usefulness of the MOTA framework for an empirical case study: the implementation of the Mekong Delta Plan (MDP) in Ben Tre Province, Vietnam. The MDP has been developed to provide a strategic vision for the Vietnamese Mekong Delta; a region highly vulnerable to sea level rise and salt water intrusion (Renaud *et al*. 2015; Royal Haskoning, Deltares, and Rebel 2013; Smajgl *et al*. 2015). The MDP has been extensively discussed at the national level; however, there is no indication as to how well this strategic plan fits with the reality on the ground. The case on MDP implementation in Ben Tre is discussed in more detail in section three. In the results section, we analyse how well the vision and ideas of the MDP fit into the local bureaucratic landscape, through the application of the MOTA framework. The discussion section provides reflections on the strategic delta plan for the Mekong delta and the usefulness of our diagnostic tool in advancing such plans towards successful implementation.

2. The MOTA framework and implementation of strategic delta plans

The implementation of strategic delta plans depends on societal support and the uptake capacity of societal stakeholders in industry and agriculture, as well as consumers and citizens. Equally important for implementation of strategic delta plans is public policy delivery and enforcement capacity. Within the government bureaucracy, strategic (inter)national visions will need to be translated into local actions, incentives and regulations. Government bureaucracies are not monolithic entities that can be hierarchically controlled. Rather, they consist of multiple agencies, at different levels, with different mandates, responsibilities, interests and means. Each makes its own decisions and, combined, these regional and local level decisions shape policy delivery (Bardach 1977; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Waldner 2009). Further translation of these local policy decisions into action is undertaken by street-level bureaucrats, who need to make their own judgements, on a case-by-case basis, for the translation of abstract rules and policy guidelines into specific decisions on services or goods delivered to producers, consumers or clients (Breeveld, Hermans, and Veenstra 2013; Gofen 2014). Also, government agencies are influenced by their different organizational cultures and structures, often inherited from earlier years and reflecting earlier attempts at public service delivery (Wilson 1989). As a result, the implementation of strategic delta plans cannot be assumed as a smooth process within government bureaucracies.

The understanding of complex actor structures is supported by actor analysis methods and models (Hermans and Cunningham 2018). To analyse the implementation maturity of delta planning alternatives from an actor perspective, a motivation and ability (MOTA) framework has been proposed (Phi *et al*. 2015). A first application by Phi *et al*. (2015) made no distinction between government actors, large private players and larger groups of societal actors, such as farmers or fishermen. In strategic delta planning, such distinctions might be of importance, as unorganized societal agents,

such as farmers, are likely to play a different role in plan implementation from the government agencies with an institutionalized role and mandate. Farmers, citizens or consumers, act in uncoordinated ways, but, as a group, are a significant force in the bottom-up implementation of plans. Local and regional government actors are smaller in numbers, but, through their formal role and mandates, are also a significant force in plan implementation. Hermans and Cunningham (2018) suggest that these two types of agents and actors require different analytical approaches. Nguyen *et al*. (2019) report a MOTA application targeted specifically at societal actors as agents in bottom-up implementation. In this article, we report a MOTA application targeted specifically at the local and regional level government actors as a critical layer to mediate top-down and bottom-up implementation perspectives.

The MOTA framework proposed by (Phi *et al*. 2015) unpacks change or action by actors into motivations and abilities. Motivations refer to the subjective side of behaviour, the interests, attitudes and perceptions on a topic. Abilities refer to the resources, means and opportunities actors have to act in their interests – or the resources they lack to translate interests into effective actions (Figure 1). Motivation and ability are properties of actors, which can be "triggered" to initiate change. Triggers can be climatic events, new policies or new supporting tools. It is important to note that the same trigger may have different consequences for the motivations and abilities of different actors, as the trigger might be perceived as a threat, or as an opportunity (Phi *et al*. 2015). The framework also provides a feedback loop, as the outcome of an action can result in a trigger, causing a change in perceptions and abilities.

The MOTA framework (Figure 1) treats the institutional embedding that structures and mediates actions as a source of ability – alongside financial and technical abilities. This recognizes that the formal and informal rules of the institutional setting enable and constrain the possible actions for actors, and that these also enable actors to coordinate their decisions and form coalitions (Phi *et al*. 2015, citing Scharpf 1997 and Ostrom 2005). However, when looking primarily at government actors, these institutional aspects are likely to play a much more prominent role – at least, the institutions that arrange the role and position of various government agencies in delta planning and management. For government actors, institutions are not only a source of abilities, but also a motivational factor. Government agencies are likely to act in accordance

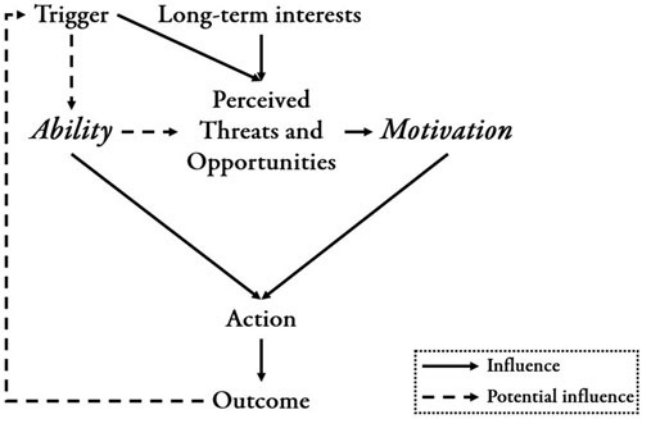

Figure 1. MOTA framework (based on: Phi *et al.* 2015).

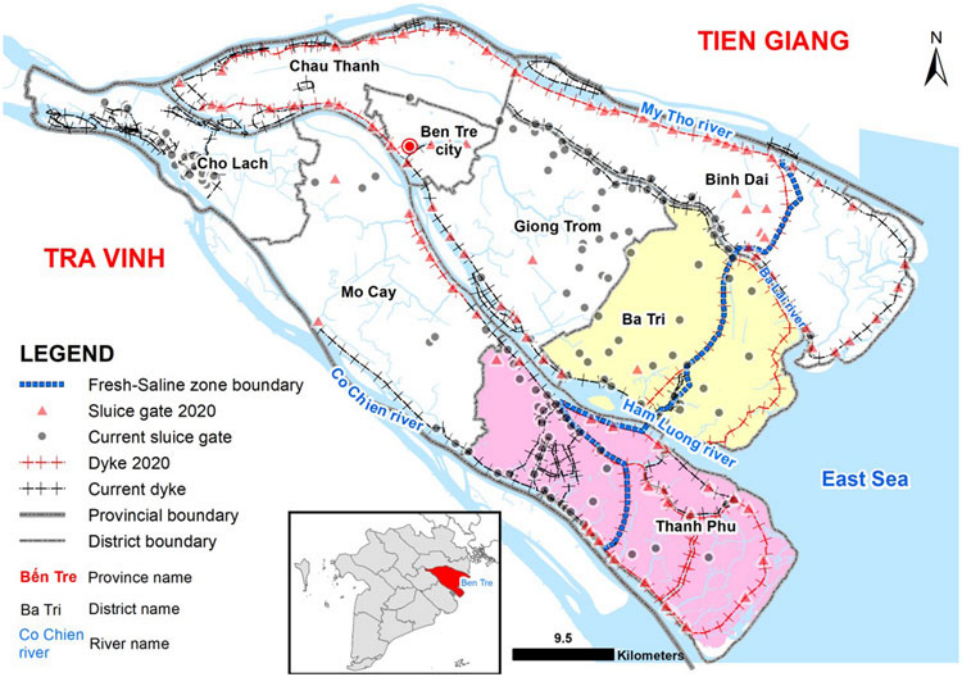

Figure 2. The location of Ben Tre province and Thanh Phu and Ba Tri Districts.

with their formal mandates. Therefore, motivations for government actors are assessed based on three aspects: perceptions of the risks and perceptions of possible solutions, and perceptions of institutional mandates. The abilities to change are assessed on three aspects: the financial abilities, the institutional abilities and the technical abilities.

3. Research design

We explore the usefulness of the MOTA framework as a tool to support implementation planning with a case study in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta, focusing on the strategic goals set for Ben Tre province. We have, therefore, applied a case study approach (Yin 2009). The Mekong Delta Plan (MDP) is selected for this study due to its current status; the plan has been accepted by the national government, but has not yet been implemented at the local level, meaning that the MDP has not yet been translated into local plans, programs and activities. Other strategic delta plans are already in the implementation phase (Kabat *et al*. 2009, 2005) or still under development (Choudhury *et al*. 2012).

3.1. Study area

A central element in the MDP is the development scenarios that form the basis of a set of measures. In short, these measures include controlling seasonal flooding in the upper delta, creating a system of coastal flood protection, economic adaptability and a shift in agriculture. These measures do not entail clear-cut implementation guidelines,

but focus on the strategic choices to be made to regain a sustainable delta (Royal Haskoning, Deltares, and Rebel 2013). These sectoral goals are complemented by plans to restructure the Vietnamese planning system. The MDP proposes horizontal and vertical integration of these plans and the MDP should serve as an orientation scheme for the revision and development of new plans. At the time of our study, the MDP served as a framework to test major investment plans supported by international donors (van Staveren, van Tatenhove, and Warner 2017).

The study site is Ben Tre province (Figure 2). Ben Tre is one of the 13 provinces in the Mekong Delta and has a total area of 2,359 km^2 and a population of 1,262,205 (Statistical Yearbook, Ben Tre). The primary land uses in Ben Tre province are rice farming, (brackish) aquaculture, fruit and coconut farming. Current problems in Ben Tre province mostly relate to water availability: a lack of fresh water and salt water intrusion in areas designated as freshwater sectors. Another issue is the illegal conversion of coastal land into shrimp ponds (IUCN 2011).

The province of Ben Tre was selected as the study site, as it endured severe salinity intrusion in the 2015/2016 season, requiring a provincial level response within the larger framework of the MDP. Previous MOTA research has been initiated in this province, focusing on the adaptability of local farmers and government officials, providing a good starting point for further data collection (IUCN and WACC 2016; Nguyen *et al*. 2019)

The MDP distinguishes two main challenges in Ben Tre province: adapting to salinity and modernizing the agricultural sector into an agribusiness model. An agribusiness model entails an integration of the agro-sector with market demands and should replace the existing system of government-controlled rice quotas (Royal Haskoning, Deltares, and Rebel 2013). These two goals are highly interrelated, with a dependency of the second goal on the first goal. The MDP will primarily influence the existing Socio-Economic plans, the Land-Use plans and sectoral plans, such as the Agriculture Plan and the Water Resources Plan.

3.2. Data collection

Empirical data on motivations, abilities and triggers was obtained through semi-structured interviews with representatives of key local and regional governmental actors. To select the appropriate actors for our analysis, we followed the governmental structure of Vietnam. The Vietnamese government system has two important tiers: the ministerial line and the party structure. The Communist Party system is represented at each level with a representative organ (People's Council) and an executive organ (People Committee). The People Committees have a direct operational and controlling relationship to the ministries (Kerkvliet and Marr 2004). The planning system follows the ministerial line (Figure 3); the administrative system follows the Party structure.

1. At the provincial level, we included the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE) and the Department of Planning and Investment (DPI). DARD and DoNRE have an important role in key sectors for delta planning, such as water resources, land use and agriculture. DPI is added to the analysis, as they are responsible for the allocation of funds for planning and implementation and have been given a leading role in regional cooperation between provinces.

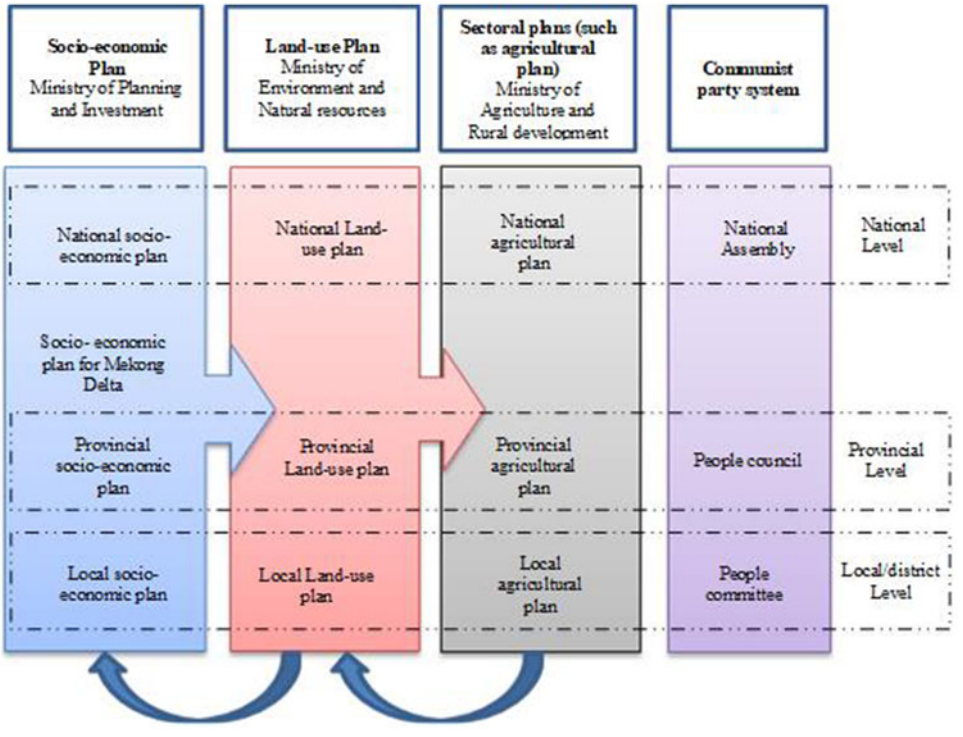

Figure 3. The Vietnamese planning system, with hierarchical and horizontal spheres of influence.

2. At district level, the main government institutes are the people committees. For our analysis, we focused on two districts; Thanh Phu and Ba Tri (Figure 3). Both districts are located near the coast, but differ in terms of fresh water availability. Ba Tri district is protected by a dike system, resulting in a fresh-water basin. In Thanh Phu district, this dike system is largely lacking, resulting in a large brackish water zone.
3. At commune level, we included a farmer perspective – in Thanh Phu this consisted of a farmer cooperative, and in Ba Tri, of representatives of local farmers in the communes of Phu Ngai, Ba Tri and Vinh Hoa.

The selected actors were approached for an interview, all actors agreed to share their insights with us. The format of the interviews comprised extensive group interviews, with selected representatives. This setting had both benefits and limitations. The benefits were that insights from several representatives of the organisations were captured, allowing us to include insights from the organisation as a whole. The main limitation is that we were not able to assess motivations and abilities at the individual level and that individuals might have been less open due to the presence of other interviewees. However, for the focus on the level of strategic actors, this individual level is of somewhat lesser importance.

The interviews typically lasted for approximately 3 h and were structured based on a pre-defined topic list. The topic list consisted of three major topics. First, the interviews started with open questions on knowledge about, and perceptions of, the goals

Table 1. Selected actors and number of interviewees per actor.

Level	Actors	Interviewees
Provincial	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	Five representatives (April 2017) Two representatives (October 2017)
	Department of Natural Resources and Environment	Five representatives (April 2017) Four representatives (October 2017)
	Department of Planning and Investment	Three representatives (October 2017)
	AMD	Two representatives (October 2017)
District	People committee Thanh Phu	Five representatives (October 2017)
	People committee Ba Tri	Two representatives (April 2017)
Commune	Farmer cooperative Thanh Phu	One representative (October 2017)
	Farmers Phu Ngai	Nine representatives (April 2017)
	Famers Ba Tri	Nine representatives (April 2017)
	Farmers Vinh Hoa	Nine representatives (April 2017)

and objectives stated in the MDP and the relationship between these goals and existing plans and policies. Second, questions were asked about motivations, comprising perceptions on risks, perceptions on possible solutions and perceptions on institutional mandates. Third, we discussed ability to change, comprising financial abilities, institutional abilities and technical abilities.

We conducted a first round of interviews in April 2017, and after an initial analysis of the acquired data, included a second round of interviews in October 2017. The second round of interviews was initiated to include a second district in our analysis, as well as the Department of Planning and Investment, whose strategic role within the MDP implementation only surfaced after our initial round of interviews. Table 1 lists the interviews conducted for this case study. These interview data were supplemented by case-related documentation and data obtained from earlier MOTA research activities in the region [see also (Nguyen *et al*. 2019)].

Based on these interviews and the analysis of the interview reports, MOTA assessment matrices for the actors were developed. These matrices follow the elements of the MOTA framework, as presented in Figure 1. Various analyses were conducted, including a comparative analysis of (the elements constituting) motivation between the studied actors; a comparison of the (elements constituting) abilities between the studied actors. These analyses provide information on the strategic actor network and insights into which actors could form coalitions to support the implementation of strategic delta plans. In analysing the data, we assumed a causal relationship: if motivations and abilities of the local level actors were consistent with the MDP problem analysis and proposed solutions, this would be more likely to lead to local implementation actions that are in line with the MDP goals.

4. Results

In this section, we present the results of our analysis. In the discussion of these results, we follow the topics that structured the interviews, starting with the general perceptions on the MDP followed by motivations and abilities. Hereafter, we discuss the actions of the actors towards implementation of the MDP goals and end with conclusions on the case.

4.1. General perception on the MDP

The interviews started with open questions on knowledge about, and perceptions on, the goals and objectives stated in the MDP. The results show a significant alteration between the two rounds of data collection. In the first round (April 2017), the interviewees were generally not aware of the MDP. Those interviewees who had heard of the MDP questioned the relevance of this plan for the local level, as the plan was considered to be "*too general*." In the second round of interviews (October 2017), the majority of the interviewees were aware of the MDP. The interviewees had all been made aware of the MDP and its importance in adapting to climate change and related risk due to the Mekong Delta conference in September 2017, which was organized in the region by the Vietnamese government, and primarily focused on regional (governmental) actors.

Although, now known at the local level, the interviewees stated that they were awaiting more concrete criteria and conditions before they would start to implement the measures in their regional planning. A major hurdle identified by the interviewees is a discrepancy between the long-term strategic goals set in the MDP and the more practical day-to-day planning practiced at local levels.

4.2. Motivations and abilities

In this section, we will discuss the motivations and abilities regarding the elements of the strategic vision of the MDP in relation to adaptation to salinity and modernizing the agricultural sector into an agribusiness model. The first result of the analysis is that there are differences between these two elements of the vision, as shown in Figure 4.

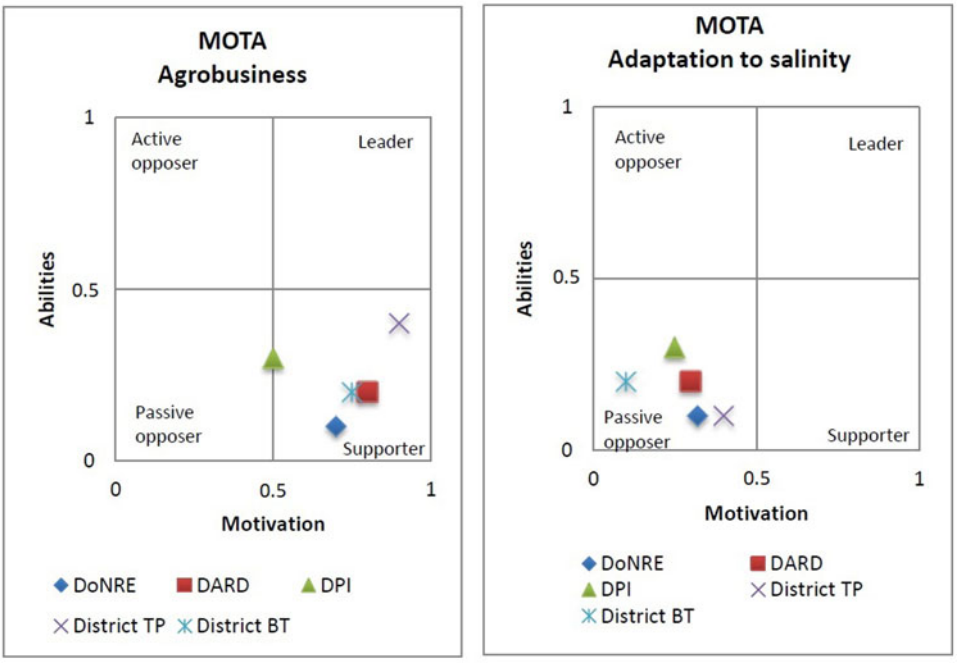

Figure 4. Motivation – Ability grid of local government actors regarding a) agribusiness and b) adaptation to salinity.

Table 2. Summary of results: motivations and abilities regarding (a) agribusiness and (b) adaptation to salinity.

	Adapting to salinity	Modernizing agriculture "agribusiness"
Motivations		
Perceptions on risk	• Salt water intrusion (reference to Salinity intrusion event of 2015/2016) • Land erosion • Climate change	• Control of market • Migration of youth
Perceptions on solutions	• Employ dike/dam structure • Invest in construction of sluices • Focus on erosion control	• Stimulate cooperation between farmers • Stimulate livelihoods that do not require human resources and mechanise • Cooperation with unions to provide on-site livelihoods, education and local capacity
Perceptions on institutional (mandate)	• Lack of balance between plans	• Power balance market – government • New planning law will make market more central
Abilities		
Financial	• 65–80% of total budget is allocated by national government • Other sources of income: lottery, international donors • Budget for planning activities is allocated, but lack of funding to complete construction of irrigation system	• Dependency on international donors to implement plans • Lack of funding to complete irrigation system • Funding from Sweden to incorporate Climate Change Scenario in Land-Use Plan
Technical	• Dependency on consultants • Time-lag between Climate Change predictions/scenarios and reality • Information is scattered, incomplete datasets • Need for training of staff	• Technical expertise for innovative livelihood systems is available • Establishment of value-chains requires cooperatives, at commune level; lack of capacity and knowledge
Institutional	• Good cooperation with other departments, People committees • Absence of regulatory framework; No regulations or "strong force" in place to address farmers that practice different land use • Change in national Land-use plan: only land for rice and mangroves is fixed. Flexibility for other land use purposes Close cooperation with others, on consultation of plans	• Hierarchical structure: modifications of plans have to be approved by all levels Time consuming • New planning law will abolishment plans for specific industries and products. Market demands will become leading • Clear division of responsibilities
Actions		
	• Incremental changes within the fixed (institutional) setting, by employing allocated flexibility in plans to adjust livelihood practices • Establishment of value chains and farmer cooperatives • Inter-provincial cooperation	

The analysis shows that there is a medium-to-high motivation to modernize the agricultural sector, but a low motivation to adapt to salinity. An explanation for this difference can be found in the interpretation of the risks and solutions (see Figure 1). Whereas salinity intrusion is primarily perceived as a risk, agricultural modernisation is perceived as an opportunity. Consequently, the risk of salinity intrusion should be controlled and monitored through the construction of additional dikes and sluices to safeguard the availability of fresh water. On the other hand, the opportunity of modernizing the agricultural sector into an agribusiness sector should be supported to improve the economic situation of the province. Hence, the interpretation of a threat versus an opportunity results in different motivations to change (which confirms Phi *et al*. 2015).

Perceptions on the institutional mandates, as the third aspect of motivations, does not differentiate between the two elements, but tempers the motivation to change in general, even though several actors beg to include more local input into provincial plans. One result of the hierarchical planning system is that planning activities depend on both hierarchical and sectoral inputs. In practice, this means that the provincial Department of Environment and Natural Resources depends both on requirements set at the national level (through the National Land-Use Plan) as well as on requirements set by the provincial Socio-Economic Plan. The same applies for the development of local (district and commune level) land-use plans, as well as for the socio-economic plans. This practice is hampering motivations to change.

In the ability assessment, there is greater consistency between the two elements of the MDP. Actors stress that, in general, Ben Tre is a poor province, and all actors have limited financial abilities. Budgets are allocated by the central government and, for this allocation, priority is given to plan-making over implementation activities. Government actors depend on external sources of income (such as international donors) for the translation of plans into programs and activities. This could lead to non-implementation of plans. Actors furthermore point to a lack of institutional and regulatory abilities, due to the absence of organised action and mandates to monitor and control misbehaviour. However, new legislation[1] stimulating regional cooperation increases institutional abilities. Technical abilities that are available according to the government respondents are the knowledge and expertise for the implementation of programs aimed to address alternative livelihoods at farmer level.

4.3. Actions to change

In the analysis, we focused on the motivations and abilities vis-à-vis the planning system. In the MOTA framework, a combination of triggers, motivations and abilities lead to actions, through which the eventual outcomes are produced (Figure 1). Hence, low abilities and low-to-medium motivation would result in limited action. Our analysis confirms this relationship, as there are only limited "actions for change" in Ben Tre (see Table 2). The focus is on incremental changes within the boundaries of the current institutional and land-use setting. An example hereof is the use of space within the LUP to designate areas for alternative livelihood models. An important action to change is organisation of cooperation between the provinces, as initiated by the DPI. This inter-provincial cooperation, meant to streamline developments crossing provincial borders, is an important element of the MDP.

The government actors also pursue action in terms of implementing current plans and supporting farmers in the province. These actions include setting up a "brand" for the Ba Tri cattle to increase the market power of the farmers. In Thanh Phu district, 8 farmer cooperatives have been established with support from the District people committee. Farmer cooperatives are established based on a specific livelihood practice, such as clean rice, mango and shrimp. The district People Committee supports these farmers in setting up the value chain and connecting them with (international) companies. Although, the establishment followed laws and circulars that pre-dated the MDP process (such as Decree 92-2006 (PM 2006), Circular 05-2013 (MPI 2013), Decision 593-2016 (PM 2016) and Planning Law 2017 (NA 2017), these actions seem to be in line with the MDP strategy towards more market-based agriculture.

5. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of case results

The analysis shows that there is a high motivation to modernize the agricultural sector, but a low motivation to adapt to salinity. This motivation to change is not always substantiated in actions, due to a lack of (financial and institutional) abilities. The attempted changes (actions) primarily focus on creating an agribusiness model. We, therefore, conclude that the implementation of the MDP in Ben Tre province is negatively affected by a discrepancy in motivations between local and national level actors, and a lack of ability by local actors to initiate and facilitate change. However, our analysis also shows that these motivations and abilities of government actors are not fixed, but can be changed. Triggers, such as new policies, additional resources and events such as the Mekong Delta Forums can help to change plan implementation feasibility. The MDP programming phase is likely to lead to further triggers for changes in local level motivations and abilities.

The analysis shows, furthermore, that actors currently have low motivations and abilities to alter the current planning practices. In the case of the MDP, many of the local level implementation abilities are limited to the development of local level plans. The abilities for further actions to implement these local level plans seem to depend on financial and technical support from major international donors. A relevant question therefore becomes, whether the MDP will be mainly a framework to assess major investment plans by international donors such as the World Bank, JICA or GTZ or whether it will also contribute towards modifying the national institutional setting (Smajgl *et al*. 2015; van Staveren, van Tatenhove, and Warner 2017).

When it comes to changes in the national planning setting, we see two possibilities. First, an implementation strategy that follows a top-down governance approach. This would mean that all plans and degrees are checked by criteria in the MDP (Royal Haskoning, Deltares, and Rebel 2013). With this top-down approach the higher-level government determines the objectives and how the objectives will be accomplished. This might add yet another planning layer to the several existing sectoral and provincial plans, disguised as an additional "coordination" need, or it might lead to a reduction in plans, depending on national level government decisions. A second implementation strategy would combine bottom-up and top-down governance models. Under this combination, decentralisation should result in local government actors gaining more directive freedom in developing and implementing their plans. Based on our analysis, this strategy could lead to a situation in which localised solutions to salinity

intrusion will be sought. This could mean that completing the irrigation system will remain a top priority in the near future, but also provides incentives to transform agricultural livelihoods into a well-adapted system, as market forces could stimulate a more diversified agricultural landscape. Completing the irrigation system (closed water system, preventing saline intrusion) may be a lock-in solution that makes it difficult to diversify agriculture. This would be a bigger change, and hence be more difficult to implement, but it would also seem to be more promising when it comes to MDP implementation.

5.2. Discussion of MOTA as a tool to assess implementation feasibility

Based on the analysis of the implementation of the MDP in Ben Tre province, we see some points for further research in addition to the point on the role of institutions as mediating setting and as an element within the assessment of the abilities and motivations raised above. In this study, we have focused mainly on the local government actors. The inclusion of market, civil society and international development actors could provide a more complete overview of the implementation feasibility and would allow for the design of governance arrangements that would go beyond the realm of the state. For example, in another paper (Nguyen *et al*. 2019), it was found that market stability is a major factor affecting the livelihood adoptability of farmers. For this, the linkages between farmers, the authorities and entrepreneurs play an essential role in implementing livelihood plans. Furthermore, an integrated analysis of the MOTA outcomes at farmer level, that is, the adoptability of alternative livelihoods at farmer level, could be added to these implementation strategies. This might seem to be a lot of work, but it seems a wise and important investment to ensure that strategic national level visions can eventually be adapted for uptake and implementation at local level, in a governance setting that recognizes the state, the market and the local networks of users and producers as important key players.

Future work on the MOTA framework should, thus, include improvement in conceptual clarity. The applied framework relies heavily on the interaction of actors vis-à-vis the institutional setting. In this study, the institutional setting is included as both an element to assess abilities and motivations, but it also turns out to be an important contextual factor. This finding can probably be understood as part of the nested character of institutions; institutions exist on several layers and the institutions on one layer provide the context for institutional rules and changes at a lower layer (Ostrom 2005; Williamson 2000). This institutional context weighs much more heavily for local government actors than it does for farmers, consumers or private sector market actors. MOTA currently lacks the specific and precise concepts and relationships to fully incorporate this institutional dimension; and, perhaps, these will even need to be country and context specific.

6. Conclusions

In this study, we addressed the implementation of strategic delta plans. The implementation of strategic delta plans asks for a different approach to more traditional implementation studies that are “checking” whether or not a plan has been implemented as intended. The strong focus on strategic level goals and vision creation in strategic delta plans (Seijger, Hoang, and Van Halsema 2019) implies a “soft implementation”

perspective that emphasizes shared knowledge, commitment and consent to higher level planning goals (Cairney 2009; Faludi 2000; Mäntysalo 2013; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). We aimed to complement this soft implementation perspective with action-oriented insights into possible implementation strategies for the embedding of strategic goals and objectives into the plans and activities of regional and local level actors. Such action-oriented insights are, by default, highly context-specific, due to the decentralized, yet coordinated, nature of the required implementation trajectories.

The MOTA framework was explored as a method to provide such context-specific, action-oriented insight for implementation planning. This MOTA framework has, so far, primarily been applied to assess societal adaptability of plans and policies, assessing support for strategic plans among societal stakeholders such as farmers, citizens or consumers. We were interested to see whether there would be added value in separating societal adoptability from governmental implementation feasibility. Where Nguyen *et al*. (2019) focused on societal implementation feasibility, we focused here on government implementation feasibility.

We applied the MOTA framework to assess the implementation potential of the Mekong Delta Plan in Ben Tre province, Vietnam, focusing on the local and regional governmental actors. These actors – also coined the bureaucracy – are responsible for translating abstract, strategic goals and visions into concrete plans and activities. The assessment of local implementation conditions, using the MOTA framework, indicates that this translation of the Mekong Delta Plan into local level plans and activities is hampered by diverging motivations and (perceived) lack of abilities. When not well-managed, by offering the appropriate triggers, this could result in partial or non-implementation, of the strategic goals and visions in local and regional plans and activities. Based on this study, we can conclude that the MOTA framework is well-suited to assess government implementation of strategic delta plans. This suggests the usefulness of the MOTA framework as a method to support implementation planning for strategic delta planning visions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note

1. Decree 92-2006 (PM 2006), Circular 05-2013 (MPI 2013), Decision 593-2016 (PM 2016) and Planning Law 2017 (NA 2017).

Acknowledgements

Fieldwork for this research was supported by the project "Transforming agricultural livelihoods for climate change adaptation in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta: A case study in Ben Tre province" (grant number: KHCN-TNB-DT/14-19/C20). We thank all key informants for sharing their experiences, perceptions and motivations. We also thank the four anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments, questions and suggestions that helped us to significantly improve the manuscript.

Funding

This research was funded by the UDW (Urbanizing Deltas of the World) Integrated Project on Strengthening Strategic Delta Planning Processes in Bangladesh, the Netherlands, Vietnam and

beyond, of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) under Project number W 07.69.106.

References

Adger, W. N., T. P. Hughes, C. Folke, S. R. Carpenter, and J. Rockström. 2005. "Social-Ecological Resilience to Coastal Disasters." *Science* (*New York, NY)* 309: 1036–1039.

Bardach, E. 1977. *The Implementation Game: What Happens after a Bill Becomes a Law*. Cambridge, Massachusetts (second printing, 1979): The MIT Press.

Breeveld, R., L. M. Hermans, and S. Veenstra. 2013. "Water Operator Partnerships and Institutional Capacity Development for Urban Water Supply." *Water Policy* 15: 165–182. doi:10.2166/wp.2013.018.

Cairney, P. 2009. "Implementation and the Governance Problem." *A Pressure Participant Perspective: Public Policy and Administration* 24: 355–377. doi:10.1177/0952076709340508.

Choudhury, G. A., C. T. Van Scheltinga, L. van den Bergh, F. Chowdhury, J. de Heer, and M. Hossain. 2012. *Preparations for the Bangladesh Delta Plan*. Wageningen, the Netherlands: Alterra Wageningen UR.

Delta Stewardship Council. 2013. *The Delta Plan: Ensuring a Reliable Water Supply for California, a Healthy Delta Ecosystem, and a Place of Enduring Value: Executive Summary-2013*. Sacramento, CA: Delta Stewardship Council.

Dessai, S., X. Lu, and M. Hulme. 2005. "Limited Sensitivity Analysis of Regional Climate Change Probabilities for the 21st Century." *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres* 110 (D19108): 1–17. doi:10.1029/2005JD005919

Environment Agency. 2009. *Thames Estuary 2100. Managing Flood Risk Through London and the Thames Estuary*. London: Environment Agency.

Ericson, J. P., C. J. Vörösmarty, S. L. Dingman, L. G. Ward, and M. Meybeck. 2006. "Effective Sea-Level Rise and Deltas: Causes of Change and Human Dimension Implications." *Global and Planetary Change* 50 (1–2): 63–82. doi:10.1016/j.gloplacha.2005.07.004.

Faludi, A. 2000. "The Performance of Spatial Planning." *Planning Practice and Research* 15: 299–318. doi:10.1080/713691907.

Gofen, A. 2014. "Mind the Gap: Dimensions and Influence of Street-Level Divergence." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 24: 473–493. doi:10.1093/jopart/mut037.

Haasnoot, M., J. H. Kwakkel, W. E. Walker, and J. ter Maat. 2013. "Dynamic Adaptive Policy Pathways: A Method for Crafting Robust Decisions for a Deeply Uncertain World." *Global Environmental Change* 23: 485–498. doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2012.12.006.

Harley, C. D. G., A. Randall Hughes, K. M. Hultgren, B. G. Miner, C. J. B. Sorte, C. S. Thornber, L. F. Rodriguez, L. Tomanek, and S. L. Williams. 2006. "The Impacts of Climate Change in Coastal Marine Systems." *Ecology Letters* 9: 228–241. doi:10.1111/j.1461-0248.2005.00871.x.

Hegger, D. L., P. P. Driessen, C. Dieperink, M. Wiering, G. T. Raadgever, and H. F. van Rijswick. 2014. "Assessing Stability and Dynamics in Flood Risk Governance." *Water Resources Management* 28: 4127–4142. doi:10.1007/s11269-014-0732-x.

Hermans, L. M., and S. W. Cunningham. 2018. *Actor and Strategy Models: Practical Applications and Step-Wise Approaches*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Hermans, L. M., and W. A. Thissen. 2009. "Actor Analysis Methods and Their Use for Public Policy Analysts." *European Journal of Operational Research* 196: 808–818. doi:10.1016/j.ejor.2008.03.040.

IUCN. 2011. *Viet Nam Situation Analysis*. Hanoi, Vietnam: International Union for the Conservation of Nature. https://www.iucn.org/content/building-coastal-resilience-project-update-viet-nam http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/rapidassessmentspecies_mark_charlie_robert15_dec2011.pdf

IUCN, and WACC. 2016. *Mekong Delta Community Motivation and Adaptive Ability to Livelihood Changes*. Final report. Hanoi, Vietnam: International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Kabat, P., L. O. Fresco, M. J. F. Stive, C. P. Veerman, J. S. L. J. van Alphen, B. W. A. H. Parmet, W. Hazeleger, and C. A. Katsman. 2009. "Dutch Coasts in Transition." *Nature Geoscience* 2: 450–452. doi:10.1038/ngeo572.

Kabat, P., W. Van Vierssen, J. Veraart, P. Vellinga, and J. Aerts. 2005. "Climate Proofing The Netherlands." *Nature* 438: 283–284. doi:10.1038/438283a.

Kerkvliet, B. J. T., and D. G. Marr. 2004. *Beyond Hanoi: Local Government in Vietnam*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Lempert, R. J., and D. G. Groves. 2010. "Identifying and Evaluating Robust Adaptive Policy Responses to Climate Change for Water Management Agencies in the American West." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 77: 960–974. doi:10.1016/j.techfore.2010.04.007.

Louisiana, C. 2012. *Louisiana's Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast*. Coastal Protection Restoration Authority Louisiana. Baton Rouge, LA: Coastal Protection Restoration Authority, Integrated Planning Team.

Mäntysalo, R. 2013. "Coping with the Paradox of Strategic Spatial Planning." *disP-the Planning Review* 49: 51–52. doi:10.1080/02513625.2013.859009.

McGranahan, G., D. Balk, and B. Anderson. 2007. "The Rising Tide: Assessing the Risks of Climate Change and Human Settlements in Low Elevation Coastal Zones." *Environment and Urbanization* 19 (1): 17–37. doi:10.1177/0956247807076960.

MPI. 2013. *Circular 05/2013/BKHDT on Instruction on Preparation, Appraisal, Approval, Adjustment, and Announcement of Social – Economic Development, Sectorial and Principal Product Plans* (Vietnamese: Thông tư hướng dẫn tổ chức lập, thẩm định, phê duyệt, điều chỉnh và công bố quy hoạch tổng thể phát triển kinh tế - xã hội; quy hoạch ngành, li¬nh vự c và sản phẩm chủ yếu). Ha Noi, Vietnam: Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI).

NA. 2017. Planning Law (Vietnamese: Luật Quy Hoạch). The Vietnam National Assembly (NA), Ha Noi, Vietnam

Nguyen, H. Q., D. Korbee, H. L. Ho, J. Weger, T. T. H. Phan, T. T. D. Nguyen, D. M. H. L. Pham, *et al.* 2019. "Farmer Adoptability for Livelihood Transformations in the Mekong Delta: A Case in Ben Tre Province." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/09640568.2019.1568768

Nicholls, R. J. 2004. "Coastal Flooding and Wetland Loss in the 21st Century: Changes under the SRES Climate and Socio-Economic Scenarios." *Global Environmental Change* 14 (1): 69–86. doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2003.10.007.

Ostrom, E. 2005. *Understanding Institutional Diversity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Phi, H. L., L. M. Hermans, W. J. A. M. Douven, G. E. Van Halsema, and M. F. Khan. 2015. "A Framework to Assess Plan Implementation Maturity with an Application to Flood Management in Vietnam." *Water International* 40: 984–1003. doi:10.1080/02508060.2015.1101528.

PM. 2006. Decree 92/2006/ND-CP on Preparation, Approval and Management of Social – Economic Development Plan (Vietnamese: nghị định về lập, phê duyệt và quản lý quy hoạch tổng thể phát triển kinh tế - xã hội). Prime Mininster (PM), Ha Noi.

PM. 2016. Decision 593/2016/QD-CP by the Prime Minister in Piloting Provincial Connections for Social - Economic Development of Vietnamese Mekong Delta in the period of 2016 - 2020 (Vietnamese: Quyết định 593/2016/QĐ-TTg ban hành Quy chế thí điểm liên kết phát triển kinh tế - xã hội vùng Đồng bằng sông Cửu Long giai đoạn 2016 - 2020). Prime Mininster (PM), Ha Noi.

Pressman, J. L., and A. B. Wildavsky. 1984. *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland: Or, Why It's Amazing That Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Renaud, F. G., T. T. H. Le, C. Lindener, V. T. Guong, and Z. Sebesvari. 2015. "Resilience and Shifts in Agro-Ecosystems Facing Increasing Sea-Level Rise and Salinity Intrusion in Ben Tre Province, Mekong Delta." *Climatic Change* 133 (1): 69–84. doi:10.1007/s10584-014-1113-4.

Royal Haskoning DHV, WUR, Deltares, and Rebel. 2013. *Mekong Delta Plan: Long-Term Vision and Strategy for a Safe, Prosperous and Sustainable Delta.* Amersfoort, the Netherlands: Production Consortium Royal HaskoningDHV, WUR, Deltares, Rebel/partners Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Hanoi, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Schiermeier, Q. 2014. "Floods: Holding Back the Tide." *Nature* 508: 164. doi:10.1038/508164a.

Seijger, C., W. Douven, G. van Halsema, L. Hermans, J. Evers, H. L. Phi, M. F. Khan., *et al*. 2017. "An Analytical Framework for Strategic Delta Planning: Negotiating Consent for Long-Term Sustainable Delta Development." *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management* 60: 1485–1509. doi:10.1080/09640568.2016.1231667.

Seijger, C., V. T. M. Hoang, and G. Van Halsema. 2019. "Do Strategic Delta Plans Get Implemented? The Case of the Mekong Delta Plan." *Regional Environmental Change* 19 (4): 1131–1145.

Smajgl, A., T. Q. Toan, D. K. Nhan, J. Ward, N. H. Trung, L. Q. Tri, V. P. D. Tri, and P. T. Vu. 2015. "Responding to Rising Sea Levels in the Mekong Delta." *Nature Climate Change* 5: 167–174. doi:10.1038/nclimate2469.

van der Voorn, T., C. Pahl-Wostl, and J. Quist. 2012. "Combining Backcasting and Adaptive Management for Climate Adaptation in Coastal Regions: A Methodology and a South African Case Study." *Futures* 44: 346–364. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2011.11.003.

van der Voorn, T., J. Quist, C. Pahl-Wostl, and M. Haasnoot. 2017. "Envisioning Robust Climate Change Adaptation Futures for Coastal Regions: A Comparative Evaluation of Cases in Three Continents." *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 22: 519–546. doi:10.1007/s11027-015-9686-4.

van Staveren, M. F., J. P. van Tatenhove, and J. F. Warner. 2017. "The Tenth Dragon: Controlled Seasonal Flooding in Long-Term Policy Plans for the Vietnamese Mekong Delta." *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* 20 (3): 267–281.

Waldner, L. S. 2009. "Into the Black Hole: Do Local Governments Implement Their Spatial Policies?" *Land Use Policy* 26: 818–827. doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2008.10.011.

Wardekker, J. A., A. de Jong, J. M. Knoop, and J. P. van der Sluijs. 2010. "Operationalising a Resilience Approach to Adapting an Urban Delta to Uncertain Climate Changes." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 77: 987–998. doi:10.1016/j.techfore.2009.11.005.

Williamson, O. E. 2000. "The New Institutional Economics: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead." *Journal of Economic Literature* 38: 595–613. doi:10.1257/jel.38.3.595.

Wilson, J. Q. 1989. *Bureaucracy. What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York: Basic Books.

Yin, R. K. 2009. *Case Study Research; Design and Methods*. London: Sage.