Diamonds in the Delta

Manifesto/mission statement

Who we are

Diamonds in the Delta (DiD) is an international research-action network of scholars, water professionals and civil society advocates who are concerned about how climate change compounds problems of flooding and subsidence in delta cities. We – the people in the network – are united in our conviction that the needs, experiences and aspirations of communities that are actually or potentially most affected by these problems should be the focus when designing and implementing solutions. We collaborate with these communities to jointly identify ways to reduce risks, optimize adaptation strategies and create the conditions for sustainable livelihoods now and in the future. We also join forces with them to critically engage with ongoing climate adaptation and flood management projects and plans, in order to make these more inclusive and fairer. Our research and actions are permeated with critical awareness of how different groups and individuals have different preferences, interests and understandings. Opportunities to voice concerns or mobilize funds and political support also vary, often along intersecting axes of social difference (class, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.). Experiences gained in previous projects show that what is a solution for some may create problems for others. Searching for community-based inclusive solutions and transformative change therefore requires not only co-producing with and actively engaging those most affected and concerned, but also understanding and challenging the wider causes of processes of urbanization that created unevenness in the first place.

What we observe

Urban deltas face a variety of interrelated challenges such as land subsidence, flooding, salinization and coastal erosion, all of which are exacerbated by climate change. As a result of past and ongoing processes of uneven urbanization, these dynamics affect some individuals and communities more than others. For example, those whose livelihoods depend on natural resources – such as farmers and fishers – are particularly vulnerable, as are those who live in flood-prone areas. In many cases, people do not remain passive in the face of adversities and risks, but engage in a range of creative coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies that are often informed by intimate knowledge of local socio-ecological dynamics. Because conventional delta adaptation strategies continue to be dominated by top-down technocratic engineering approaches, they hardly build on such strategies and knowledges. Worse still, existing plans

may further marginalize and impoverish those already most at risk. Especially where finance for implementing interventions is expected to come from the private sector, there is a tendency to prioritize the needs of more powerful and wealthy actors. Experiences in cities like Jakarta, Beira and Manila have shown that poorer and marginal communities may be forced to relocate to safeguard the futures of economically better off places and people. The structural neglect of marginal communities in adaptation strategies also leads to unforeseen externalities, posing new threats to deltaic life. Making delta interventions more inclusive and participatory therefore requires more than merely including marginal communities in the plans of governments and international consultancy firms: it necessitates a more fundamental re-thinking of planning processes and priorities.

Our mission

Our core mission is to facilitate dialogue between mainstream actors involved in delta planning and the communities that are actually or potentially most affected by the combined effects of subsidence and flooding in delta cities. We pursue this mission by collaborating with members and representatives of these communities in co-creating knowledge and actions in support of risk-reduction and the design of climate-resilient livelihoods. We use situated understandings of flooding and land subsidence in the context of climate change as the starting point for a dialogue with those responsible for delta plans and projects, and for reflection on how to make these more inclusive.

Our approach is a reaction to ongoing top-down interventions in which governments and donors come together around technocratic and supply-driven solutions that tend to prioritize the protection of some to the disadvantage of others. Because deltas are complex systems, problems in urban deltas are inherently wicked, with diagnoses and proposed solutions depending on positionality and perspective. This makes it all the more important to design delta planning processes in truly participatory ways that include the perspectives and experiences of all those affected. It also means that unfolding dynamics may escape planning control – something that warrants remaining flexible and adaptive.

Our network and partnerships aim to turn the tide and move towards longer-term, grounded and people-centred strategies to imagine and help realize sustainable, resilient and equitable futures.

Our activities

Research: We adopt a social learning approach; that is, our research is designed as an interactive, dynamic process with a multitude of actors who learn through dialogues, with knowledge being co-created through continuous interaction and iterative action–reflection cycles. This approach is designed to contribute to longer-term transformative change by creating a firm collective basis for networked action. Our research activities are both action- and solution-oriented, geared towards strategies to reduce risks, prevent enforced displacement and prepare the way for climate-resilient development.

Comparison and exchange: Our research design is based on learning between different deltas through horizontal forms of comparison of experiences of delta adaptation – within and beyond our network – in ways that cut across disciplinary boundaries and knowledge hierarchies. The network serves as a platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange among the DiD network partners from various delta cities.

Multidisciplinary approach: We draw from various scientific disciplines – such as urban planning, disaster risk reduction, land and water governance, (feminist) political ecology, and development studies – that we combine with the more experiential knowledge of communities in deltas. To help bridge the gap between scientists–professionals and community–practitioners in managing deltas, we anchor research in practices – of individuals, government officials, experts, investors, planners - of living with and adapting to the risks of flooding.

Multi-stakeholder meetings and advocacy: We facilitate dialogues and critical conversations with donors and policymakers who are interested in developing more grounded and people-centred approaches, engaging in critical reflection and experiments with them to design more inclusive and sustainable planning processes.

Institutions

The Netherlands

Utrecht University	Prof. E.B. Zoomers	(E.B.Zoomers@uu.nl)
IHE Delft	Prof. M. Z. Zwarteveen	(m.zwarteveen@un-ihe.org)
ITC University Twente	Prof. R. V. Sliuzas	(r.sliuzas@utwente.nl)
Universities of Applied Sciences (Hogeschool van Hall Larenstein, Zeeland and Rotterdam)	Dr. A Heijmans	(annelies.heijmans@hvhl.nl)
Both ENDs	Danielle Hirsh	(d.hirsch@bothends.org)

An Giang and Can Tho, Vietnam

An Giang University	Tran Lan Phuong Pham
Can Tho University	Li Quoc Dang and Thai Van Nguyen
Can Tho City Government	Qui Kuang Vinh
Mekong Organics	Dang Nguyen Minh and Van Kien Nguyen

Barranquilla, Colombia

Universidad del Norte	Alejandro Camargo

Beira Mozambique

Cescmoz	Emma Cardoso and Raul Chambote
Universidad Catolica de Mocambique	Ali Atumane

Chennai, India

Indian Institute of Technology	Balaji Narasimhan
ATREE	Veena Srinivasan

Khulna, Bangladesh

Khulna University	Dilip Kumar Datta and Md. Ghulam Murtaza
University of Dhaka	Muhammad Badrul Hasan
JJS	Zakir Hossain

Manila, Philippines

ACCORD	Erica Bucog
CARE	Celso Dulce and Mary Joy Gonzales
EMI Megacities	Mary Luanne David and Ruby Ann Marie Magturo
Kalikasan	Enteng Bautista, Leon Dulce and Gianina Camille Glarino
University of the Philippines	Baleng Lagos

Semarang, Indonesia

Amrta Institute for Water Literacy	Nila Ardhianie
Unisulla University	Mila Karmilah
Universitas Diponegoro	Dr. Artiningsih
Universitas Gadjah Mada	Rijanta Bapak, Erlis Saputra and Amalinda Savirani

Network partners