

How Bangladesh is solving its water crisis

Many low-lying countries are under threat from the effects of climate change. In Bangladesh, the problems are regular cyclones and rising saltwater from the Bay of Bengal to the south, and annual flooding from the Himalaya to the north. Delta expert and publicist Joep Janssen travelled to the vulnerable country to see how his native Netherlands is collaborating with the Bangladesh government to formulate an ambitious delta plan.



ABDUR and Abdul Gain are standing in lungi outside their homes, surveying the vegetable garden and bald fruit trees

He is optimistic, because like the delta, Bangladesh is dynamic and resilient: thousands of coastal residents are forced to relocate several times in their lifetimes and so they are accustomed to creating new homes elsewhere. Because of global warming, Bangladeshis are further put to the test. Tropical cyclones are occurring more often and becoming more intense, average temperatures have risen by 0.65 degrees Celsius in the last 60 years and the mean annual rainfall has increased by 10 percent. Atiq Rahman predicts that millions of people in the country will be displaced if sea levels rise by one metre. And as the water rises, the salt penetrates deeper inland, which adversely affects agriculture and the food supply.



Bangladesh Delta (Ganges River).

PHOTO: JOEP JANSSEN

used for land reclamation, thus creating a buffer against sea level rise."

Handy, because Bangladesh needs new land. However, the researcher believes it has to be a broad dialogue and debate on reclamation, so that people will not regret a hundred years from now.

"Looking at it from a Dutch private sector interest, we are eager to participate in this process because our water sector has extensive experience on dredging techniques. However, we have to make sure that we don't push Bangladesh into the Delta Plan in a Dutch way. It must be designed for and owned by Bangladesh," Catharien says.

Lessons to be learned

This should be an important driving force behind the elaboration of plans for all those threatened delta areas in the world: giving hope and a new future to people who cannot escape the cycle of poverty.

In other words, do not make plans to earn money from the Bangladesh delta, but take the responsibility to change people's lives for the better.

The story relates yet another lesson. From above, the Netherlands looks harmonious and orderly, while the river delta and decision-making process of Bangladesh can be characterised as dynamic and informal. This will be very helpful in emergency situations, like during a cyclone, when Bangladeshis are at their best: they can quickly mobilise village communities into taking immediate action.

"We fish and live one day at a time," explains Abdur Gain as he overlooks the river: "On the other side, they are building a new village, because of sediments that have been deposited by the flow. Maybe we'll move there."

Joep Janssen is a Dutch urban delta expert and author of the book *Living with the Mekong*.

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Dutch experts to help Bangladesh

In order to repel the three-pronged danger of population pressure, saltwater and climate change, Dutch companies and knowledge institutes are on hand to help Bangladesh again. This time with the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, a long-term vision for water and food security, economic growth and sustainable development that should better equip the country to deal with natural disasters and climate change.

The Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 is now ready for approval by the Bangladeshi government. A consortium led by Netherlands-based consultancy agency Twynstra Guddie is guiding the process, with financial assistance from the Dutch government.

So far, the plan has been well received. The Bangladeshi government is decisive: in a short time all stakeholders have been consulted and the Delta Plan has been adopted in the national, so-called five-year plan.

Following a blueprint common in the Netherlands, a Delta Commissioner will determine and implement the Delta Programme annually, with support from a Delta Fund which has ambitiously

allocated 4 billion euros per year until 2050. There are 150 projects currently under review by the World Bank, which was involved in planning at an early stage.

The large-scale plan has come in for some criticism as well, however. According to some experts, Bangladesh leans too much on the input of foreign consultants seeking to take positions in the country. In addition, a lack of money and time means only existing knowledge has been brought together with no new research developed, which would make the quality of the basic studies too low. Finally, some Dutch experts raise the question of whether the Delta Plan has become too much of an engineering plan, insufficiently connected to the environment.

Moving from planning to success

One of the Dutch experts involved in the Delta Plan 2100 is Catharien Terwisscha van Scheltinga, researcher on climate adaptation and water

management at Wageningen University and Research Centre in the Netherlands. She is able to draw on her experience at home when considering the tangible steps Bangladesh should take to implement the plan.

"In a country that grew up with five-year plans, it's easier to take a decision about the plan at a high level than to actually get it off the ground," she says.

Catharien says the Bangladesh government has already started implementing the plan through improved coordination and collaboration between finance, projects and institutions such as the World Bank, foreign governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). "But it doesn't solve the water issues in delta areas; a successful approach requires a government strategy that is linked to the local people's tactics, and intertwined with local culture, history and interests," she says.

In other words, the Bangladesh

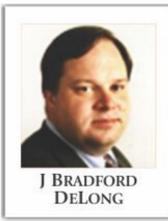
government must not only develop new projects, but also target existing good practices towards the long-term goals of the Delta Plan.

The Blue Gold Programme, for example, helps farmers in polder areas to boost agricultural productivity and profitability through training on improved agronomic practices, value chain development and effective water management. This is being achieved through a combination of actions: hard interventions such as sluices and elevating dikes; soft interventions including the introduction of improved rice varieties; and education for farmers.

"The Delta Plan is not about infrastructure only," Catharien adds. "We also need to invest in the culture of dialogue and development of knowledge, for example on subsidence and sand deposits. This is extremely important, because the large amount of sediments that flow from the river into the sea can be

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Keeping US policymaking honest



J BRADFORD DELONG

IN a recent appearance here at the University of California, Berkeley, Alice Rivlin expressed optimism about the future of economic policymaking in the United States. What Rivlin—who served as Vice Chair of the US

Federal Reserve, Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under President Bill Clinton, and founding Director of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO)—thinks about that topic matters a great deal. Indeed, America owes its current system of "technocracy"—which ensures that policymaking follows sound analysis and empirical evidence—more to Rivlin than to any other living human. When she was younger, however, Rivlin was denied admission to the graduate programme at Harvard University's Littauer Center of Public Administration. Her application was rejected, she was told, because of "unfortunate experiences" with previous admissions of "women of marriageable age."

In those phrases, you can almost hear the New England Puritans' unctuous sermonising about the seduction of Eve by the serpent, and her subsequent temptation of Adam. Of course, when Rivlin helped found the CBO in 1974 she was essentially eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and she was making the rest of us eat from it, too. We are all better for it. In her recent talk, Rivlin expressed confidence that, despite today's populist attacks on expertise, high-quality policy analysis will continue to flourish in the twenty-first-century public sphere.

Still, I have my doubts about the future. Rivlin believes that there is a general consensus within policymaking circles about basic economic principles, and that those principles will underpin the assessments, estimates, and models used in public-policy debates. She pointed out that no reputable economists today regard a simple monetary-policy rule as a magic bullet for avoiding

depressions and inflationary spirals, whereas many once did.

That is true, as far as it goes. And yet, until the announcement that Jerome Powell had been selected as the next Fed Chair, Stanford University economist John Taylor was a leading contender. Taylor is known for having developed his own guideline (the "Taylor rule") for how central banks should set interest rates. And he has long clung to this rule, despite a lack of evidence that it would have delivered better results than the Fed's actual policy decisions since the 1970s. Moreover, when US President Donald Trump appointed former American Enterprise Institute economist Kevin Hassett to lead the White House Council of Economic Advisers, many expected that Hassett would be a "normal" CEA chairman. Hassett, we were told, would safeguard the CEA's credibility, by ensuring that its estimates remained in line with those of the larger policy-analysis community. And he would understand that agencies and organisations such as the CBO, OMB, Joint Committee on Taxation, Tax Policy Center (TPC), and Center on Budget and Policy Priorities have a principal allegiance to facts, not to some donor or political master.

Yet Hassett has so far spent his time at the CEA tearing down TPC estimates, even though the organisation will undoubtedly

issue assessments in the future that are as inconvenient for his political adversaries as they are for him today.

According to the near-consensus among policy analysts, the share of corporate taxes borne by labour, and the share of lost revenues from a cut in corporate income tax that will be recouped through increased investment, are both 25 percent. Yet the CEA, under Hassett, now assumes that both are 82 percent. That claim, as well as Hassett's recent attacks on the TPC, made former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers angrier than I can ever recall having seen him with respect to a public-policy issue. According to Summers, Hassett's analysis is "some combination of dishonest, incompetent, and absurd."

Benjamin Franklin famously told the American people that the US Constitution would provide them with "a republic, if you can keep it." In her long, distinguished career, Rivlin and others like her have provided us with a rational policymaking process—if we can keep it.

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QUOTABLE Quote

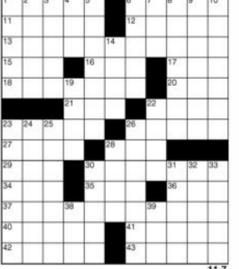


ALEXANDER PUSHKIN
RUSSIAN POET AND NOVELIST

Moral maxims are surprisingly useful on occasions when we can invent little else to justify our actions.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Trio of myth
 - 6 Characteristic
 - 11 Full of energy
 - 12 Bit of intuition
 - 13 Election official
 - 15 "Not - dare!"
 - 16 Gentle pull
 - 17 "Honest" president
 - 18 Some Louvre works
 - 20 Sturgeon eggs
 - 21 Twice uno
 - 22 Dessert fruit
 - 23 Woodland home
 - 26 Outdoes
 - 27 Clickable picture
 - 28 Road goo
 - 29 Chiding sound
 - 30 Intent
 - 34 Court figure: Abbr.
 - 35 Bible boat
 - 36 Lyricist Gershwin
 - 37 Supermarket fixture
 - 40 French student
 - 41 Dove's desire
 - 42 Harp's ancestors
 - 43 Classifies
 - 7 Baseball score
 - 8 Star in Scorpio
 - 9 Wind-driven vehicle
 - 10 Education fundamentals
 - 14 For all of us
 - 19 Norse god
 - 22 Llama's land
 - 23 Stronghold
 - 24 With intensity
 - 25 Soda worker
 - 26 Drive copies
 - 28 Matador's foe
 - 30 Confronts
 - 31 Indian lute
 - 32 Put up
 - 33 Challenges
 - 38 "-- had it!"
 - 39 Recent: Prefix
- DOWN**
- 1 Smile upon
 - 2 With no help
 - 3 Moon of Saturn
 - 4 Raiser of Cain
 - 5 Newspaper part
 - 6 Ruffians



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

CLOMP RISE
LAMER AMASS
IMAGE MOUTH
MAN DIP CAR
BRIDALS SUITE
EWE PLED
RESIN ABYSS
EVES FRO
BITTERSWEET
ADD VIE AXE
TEASE NAVES
ENTER ALERT
TEXT LASTS

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

