

# The Tidal River Water Custodian



Inception Report

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## Partners

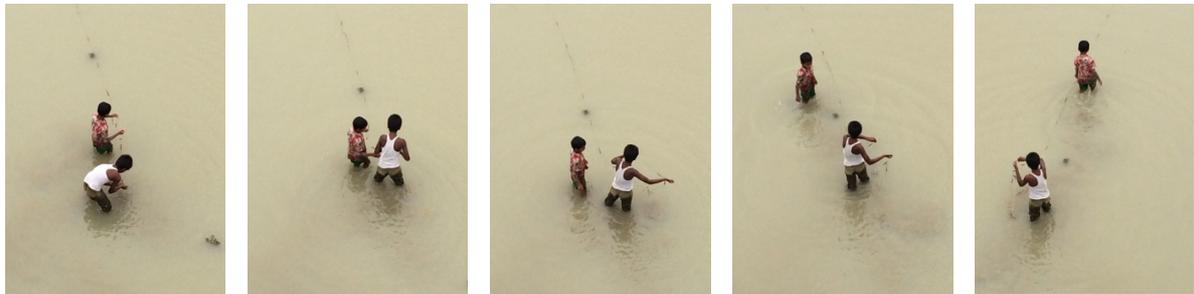
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## Table of Contents

<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>Objective</i></b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b><i>An approach based on 'Life Stories'</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Deviations from workplan in project proposal</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Inception phase: virtual meetings and discussions</i></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Team members and tasks</i></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><i>Task description</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Working group 1: Developing local life stories</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Working group 2: Develop links with policy making for water management</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b><i>Planning for March 2022</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>

## Introduction

Livelihoods in the South-West Delta of Bangladesh are under increasing pressure from changes in the physical environment, compounded by socio-economic dynamics such as population growth and a decreasing income from traditional agriculture. Over the last 50 years experts and engineers have been trying to deal with these adverse trends by developing optimized, rationalized polders following the Dutch examples. This approach however, resulted in ambiguous impacts. An increased salinity, increased soil subsidence and increased drainage congestion seems to be the adverse effects of these interventions.

Local populations seem to be less and less content with the intended solutions that were promised by the development of the polders, leading to some recent events of local farmers breaching the embankments around the polders in an attempt to increase the drainage situation of their inundated lands. Farmers are increasingly resorting to shrimp farming as an alternative way to make a living in these regions. These dramatic dynamics are further enhanced by a top-down approach to water management: communication and exchange of ideas between experts and local communities seems almost absent.

The real challenge in improving livelihoods is in handling the complex interaction between many diverse actors. Agriculture is recognized as one of the important stakeholder sectors, but the agricultural sector itself is heterogeneous, consisting of diverse groups ranging from large landowners to subsistence farmers and landless seasonal laborers. All these actors have individual stakes, incentives and thus individual perspectives and behavior towards the dynamic changes in land use and water management.

The 'Tidal River Water Custodian' decision making framework is about resilient livelihoods in the next 50 years in changing deltas such as South-West Bangladesh. Decision making is a process that needs careful design and a strong focus on the inclusion of all relevant stakeholders in the decision making process. The current limited focus on the geo-physical environment and an optimization of infrastructure and control structure misses the ultimate goal of defining adaptation strategies to improve the livelihoods of the local communities.

In previous projects we explored the concepts of inclusion of local communities' characteristics in formal Decision Support Tools and Decision Support processes. Our final presentation on the concepts of "You can not clap with one hand" strongly recommends that for proper decision making and strategic planning you need both hands: analysis of both the geo-physical system and the socio-economic-governance system.

## Objective

Enhance current decision-making processes with inclusion of a diverse mapping of local communities and their vulnerability profiles, while recognising a multitude of stakeholders with a large variation in stakes and incentives. The project aims at explicitly include this multitude of local actors and their characteristic stakes in the decision making process

To this end we develop a decision support process and decision support tool with explicit reference to the multitude of different stakeholders.

## An approach based on ‘Life Stories’

Based on earlier prototypes that were developed within the Living Polders Research project (University of Utrecht, Urbanising Deltas of the World Research grant), we aim to further develop the bridge between decision making based on geo-physical criteria and decision making based on socio-economic and livelihood criteria. In the earlier prototypes we developed a multi-layered decision support tool, including both pillars for geo-physical and livelihood criteria. The approach has been applied to a mock-up case study in the Bangladesh SW delta, but no real reference to a realistic situation could be made.

The Tidal River Water Custodian project uses an approach that is similar to the use of Personas in fields as diverse as Marketing and User Interaction development. For the Tidal River Water Custodian we develop Local Families as fictional archetypal characters that are assigned the primary characteristics of a group of users. Introducing a variety of Local Families (Personas) will help experts and decision makers to understand your users’ needs, experiences, behaviours and goals.

We aim to initiate a participatory and active organisational learning process in which we further develop a methodology for decision support processes. This methodology is to be supported by a set of tools and patterns that is used to map the mental models of local communities. We will use a serious gaming approach to start the initial process of mental mapping, and in a participatory workshop the mental models are further enhanced and operationalized.

## Deviations from workplan in project proposal

In the original workplan, an inception visit was planned end of January, early February 2022. Due to an increasingly difficult COVID situation both in Bangladesh and the Netherlands, this visit has been rescheduled, tentatively to end of February 2022. To ensure that this rescheduling of the visit would have no severe impact on the project progress, a number of virtual meetings were organized and planned to get the team informed about the project planning and project objectives. These meetings with individual team members were held during January 2022, and a group meeting is scheduled for second week of February. These meetings cover the contents of the project and the coordination of tasks and workplan. The virtual meetings could not cover the administrative parts and the signing of contracts with subcontractors. These administrative tasks are now foreseen to take place during the “delayed inception visit” end of February 2022.

## Inception phase: virtual meetings and discussions

Friday January 14, 2022

Myisha, Willem  
Outlining project

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Myisha, Willem  
Outlining project

Thursday, January 20, 2022

Myisha, Willem, Geoff Wood

Feedback and comments from Agriculture expert

January 25, 2022

Roundtable on agriculture

Networking for agriculture sector

Monday, January 31, 2022

Mahamuda, Myisha, Willem

Workplan and detailing tasks

Thursday, February 3, 2022

Myisha, Jahin, Willem

Workplan and detailing tasks

Friday, February 4, 2022

Netherlands Water Partnership, Myisha, Willem

Networking for policy making in water management Bangladesh

Friday, February 4, 2022

Shahnoor, Willem

Workplan and detailing tasks

Saturday, February 5, 2022

Myisha, Willem

Friday, February 11, 2022

Shahnoor, Willem

Outline of the project

Friday, February 25, 2022

Shahnoor, Willem

Discussing involvement of Bangladesh water sector

Saturday, March 5, 2022

Myisha, Mahmuda

Outline of fieldwork in Bangladesh, planning visit to Khulna, planning staff

Sunday, March 6, 2022

Shahnoor

Travel to Bangladesh, develop connection working group 1 and 2

Monday, March 7, 2022

Jahin, Willem

## Team members and tasks

**Myisha Ahmad**, MSc. Junior expert on linking livelihoods with water management issues.

**Jahin Shams**, MSc. Expert knowledge on policy and governmental process in Bangladesh

**Mahmuda Mutahara**, PhD, MSc. Expert in socio-economic aspects of Tidal River Management.

**Shahnoor Hasan**, PhD, MSc. Senior expert on policy transfer in international development

**Willem van Deursen**, PhD, MSc. Senior expert on integrated water resources management

## Task description

### Working group 1: Developing local life stories

Myisha Ahmad, Mahmuda Mutahara, Jahin Shams

**Objective:** Develop a broad portfolio of livelihood portrait of local communities. Develop vulnerability profiles for representatives of local communities.

**Location:** Bangladesh

### Working group 2: Develop links with policy making for water management

Shahnoor Hasan, Willem van Deursen

**Objective:** Develop network with links to key players and actors in policy and decision-making community in Bangladesh.

**Location:** The Netherlands, Bangladesh

## Planning for March 2022

Start of tasks for working group 1

Start of work for working group 2

Replan initial visit to Bangladesh

    finalizing contractual administration

    field visit to SW Bangladesh delta