



## **Transition towards Sustainable Delta Cities**

Network event at the HABITAT III conference on the New Urban Agenda,  
19 October 2016, Quito, Ecuador

In Quito, the Delta Alliance co-organized this network event jointly with the Government of the Netherlands as outgoing chair of the Delta Coalition, and with the City of Beira. The aim was to share best practices, sustain and create partnerships, and make next steps on concrete actions, innovations, proposals and research, as a follow-up to the results obtained at the Sustainable Urban Deltas Conference (Rotterdam, May 2016), and contributing to the implementation plan of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as they relate to delta cities. The event attracted approximately 120 attendants from national and local governments, NGO's, research organizations and private sector.

The whole event will be reported on the Delta Coalition website ([www.deltacoalition.net](http://www.deltacoalition.net)), the Delta Alliance focused on organizing and moderating one of the network event sessions, entitled ***Collaboration is Key – creating action in cities and deltas***. Knowledge exchange and assessments for informed planning and interventions in urbanizing deltas are *key* to foster and promote an action oriented attitude. It is essential to create interdisciplinary, multi-level and cross-sector (multi-stakeholder) alliances between parties such as governments, NGO's, private sector, researchers and designers to connect the local to the (inter)national, and *vice versa*.

The chair and facilitator of this session **Prof. Ishrat Islam**, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Bangladesh, highlighted in her plenary statement some paragraphs of the New Urban Agenda which are very relevant for concerted action in deltas: paragraph 68 on urbanizing deltas, paragraph 69 on coastal areas, their cities and nature based solutions, paragraph 157-160 on the role of up to date knowledge, on the need for data and monitoring progress, on capacity building, and on open data and knowledge sharing. And for this session she reiterated especially paragraph 154, which seeks for collaborative initiatives on best practices and innovative solutions to support the implementation of the New Urban agenda. She invited participants to address the following:

1. Sharing best practices and experiences between deltas - how best to organize this?
2. Monitoring progress as to support informed decision making for investments - what type of information is most needed?
3. Capacity building on a variety of topics relevant for the sustainable development of urbanizing deltas, and how to expand the knowledge base jointly?
4. Seeking synergies and collaboration among many actors - who commits to what, when?

## Snapshots of the lively discussions

Renske Peters, director of the Delta Alliance, made a strong plea for an implementation and action oriented attitude. The Delta Alliance is well positioned to engage with the knowledge driven actors and networks and aims to reach out to policy oriented dialogues. Comparative assessments, thought leaderships on specific topics and a delta monitor to measure progress are elements of the Delta Alliance programme of work. It provides the knowledge base to the Delta Coalition policy dialogues. She proposed to also actively share knowledge and expertise among deltas through fly-in technical assistance teams on request.

Christiaan Norde, European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN), suggested long-term knowledge oriented exchanges between deltas of personnel and trainees, to share practices, to create and foster connections, and to get better acquainted to the specific local context.

Mart Grisel, European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN), called for more standardized approaches for knowledge exchange, among them websites, e-seminars, but also face to face concrete sessions, small key expert meetings and policy labs.

Bert Diphooorn, AKVO, encouraged to embrace new developments and technological innovations. He also stipulated to adopt some common principles on the exchange of data, e.g. open source and cloud storage of data, and mentioned cell phone based data gathering as an example.

Ishrat Islam, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), underscored the important role of education institutes to hold and expand the knowledge base on deltas. Universities are crucial in sharing knowledge between deltas, both through various media and the exchange of scientists and students.

Francois Brikke, Global Water Partnership (GWP), shared a new initiative “Learning Deltas”, starting in 2017. GWP, jointly with the Delta Alliance and with possible interest from IFI’s, aims at hands-on sharing of experiences in sustainable delta development between deltas and their cities, starting off in Asian deltas. He sees IWRM as a good entry point for adaptive delta management, which should be closely linked to economics and financing to make things happen. He also referred to other good examples of learning partnerships with a.o. SIWI, AKVO and UN-HABITAT: local urban water hubs.

Hakan Tropp, Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), mentioned the *Source-to-Sea* multi stakeholder action platform as a good example of sharing experiences. The platform of 25 members facilitates the linkages between the political network and expert knowledge, having an added value in unpacking all the relevant IWRM links, upstream and downstream, confronting fresh water and coastal issues, and framed in a decision oriented setting. He suggests to link the platform closer to the Delta Alliance network, and to invest more energy on *cities in deltas*, as they are crucial in many domains, and engaging both policy makers and experts, while doing things on the ground.

Madhav Pai, World Resources Institute (WRI), elaborated on the importance of *stress maps* across the globe, as to contribute to the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and also to reach out to the public with open tools and data access for everyone. Examples she mentioned included high accuracy groundwater data with a risk analysis tool, a global forest watch tool, a drought and flood risk analyser Aqueduct, and a tool on the water-energy nexus linking water stress to present and future locations of energy plants. WRI works in partnerships with various countries, e.g. India, China, knowledge institutes like NASA, Deltares, and IT networks like Google to acquire data. She invited the participants to partner also with WRI on relevant delta issues, among others on Aqueduct.

Willem Ligtoet, PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, makes a plea for data information transparency: one should explicitly state what is in it, and for what purpose it can be used. Also, he stipulates monitoring over time is essential to keep and manage directions.

Sanne Vermeulen, CORDAID, makes an important and strong voice on not to forget to include the community voices. Listen to those solutions from the communities themselves, learn about their capabilities, these are crucial for real action in the field, which should be socially inclusive anyway.

Cees van de Guchte, Delta Alliance and Deltares, reported the wrap up in the plenary session panel, moderated by Henk Ovink (Special Envoy on International Water Affairs, Kingdom of the Netherlands), and Joan Clos (Director UN-Habitat), as a panellist.

## Take home messages

### Greater Action

- Focus on action oriented output
- Select a few themes of common interest
- Share knowledge and practices, to learn, and for action
  - o Suggestion to use or launch long term exchange programmes
  - o Suggestion to establish fly-in technical assistance teams
- Use novel technologies (cell phones!), open data and tools

### Recent Good Initiatives addressing delta issues

- Learning Deltas Programmes - GWP and Delta Alliance
- Urban Water Hub - GWP, UN-habitat, AKVO
- Source-2-Sea Platform - SIWI and 25 partners

### Manage Directions

- Monitor for knowledge based interventions and investments
- Join forces, seek complementarities and synergies
- Do not forget social inclusiveness

Essentially, the attending international organizations recalled the Paris COP21 agreed intentions to collaborate on delta relevant issues and enhance existing synergies in their programmes of work: GWP, UNEP, Delta Alliance, Ramsar, Wetlands International, IUCN, Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, Belmont Forum-Deltas, Future Earth Coast and World Water Assessment Programme. The Delta Alliance and Delta Coalition can be instrumental to further the commitments made in both the Climate Adaptation and the New Urban Agenda settings, for implementation on the ground!

In Quito, the Delta Alliance, Deltares, KWR (City Blue Print) and AGWA (Mainstreaming and Financing Delta Resilience) shared additional documents in an IT-USB version.

For more information, see [www.delta-alliance.org](http://www.delta-alliance.org) and [www.deltacoalition.net](http://www.deltacoalition.net)