



**PARTNERS
FOR WATER**

Country Update Vietnam

December 2021

Foreword

Dear members of the Vietnam network,

We are pleased to present the third and final Country Update for Vietnam in 2021 and the last under the Partners for Water 4 (2016-2021) programme. In the new Partners for Water 5 (2022-2027) programme, Vietnam will remain a priority Delta country, and through the Strategic Partnership Arrangement with Vietnam, the programme will continue to support Vietnam in improving its integrated water management, climate change adaptation, and with its transition to sustainable agriculture (aiming at efficient water use), while simultaneously supporting Dutch organisations in realizing their international ambitions in Vietnam.

In this Update we start with a look back at the lessons learnt over the past 5 years of implementing the Mekong Delta Plan, followed by an update of the Mekong Delta Business Platform, an overview of the Vietnam Saline Agriculture Focus Mission, and highlights of the recent webinar Recover & Recycle.

With the end of the current Partners for Water programme, the role (co-implementing agent) of The Netherlands Water Partnership (“NWP”), publisher of, amongst others, the Country Updates, also comes to an end. As networking organisation for the Dutch Water Sector, NWP will of course continue to widely support and promote the Dutch Water Sector to make an even bigger impact on the water sector worldwide. All information and tasks related to NWP’s role in the Partners for Water programme are being transferred to RVO. For all Partners for Water related questions and requests for information after 31 December 2021, please contact Robert Proos (robert.proos@rvo.nl).

We wish you and your families healthy, peaceful and joyous end of year celebrations and all our best wishes for the New Year 2022!

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1. Looking back at 5 years of Mekong Delta Plan implementation and lessons learned



Over the past 5 years the Delta team Vietnam has supported the implementation of the Dutch-funded Mekong Delta Plan which was endorsed in 2013. The implementation of this visionary plan was initially driven by the approval of a World Bank loan of USD310 million. The sub-projects that fell under the loan were still based on traditional hard infrastructure development with a focus on fighting flooding and salinity. The loan triggered a reassessment to align those sub-projects to a coordinated delta management focusing on living with nature and sustainable livelihoods. Several Dutch experts were involved in re-thinking the interventions and preparing the Feasibility Studies. Implementation is now underway.

Another topic that emerged from the Mekong Delta Plan was water retention. The Dutch supported this work especially after the extreme drought in 2016. Apart from studies on potential retention areas, also groundwater infiltration in sand dunes was piloted.

In the course of time the topic of land subsidence became a prominent area of work for the Netherlands. Research and policy advocacy resulted in much publicity and early action. A Dutch-funded consortium supported 4 provinces in implementing their zoning and licensing procedures for groundwater extraction (the main driver of accelerated land subsidence).

Such governance initiatives were developed as an integral part of the implementation of the Mekong Delta Plan and received a boost with the approval of Resolution 120 of the Vietnamese Prime Minister in November 2017. Resolution 120 refers to the measures adopted to protect the Mekong Delta from the adverse effects of climate change, and create a sustainable and climate-resilient Mekong Delta. That resolution was instrumental to boost coordination, integrated planning and blended finance. All of these are linked to Dutch experiences and form the basis for further bilateral cooperation.

Lessons from groundwater governance

When Philip Minderhoud presented his scientific paper on land subsidence in the Mekong Delta, the Netherlands Embassy was told by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment that it had better not use the word 'land subsidence' but 'soil compaction'. It was politically too sensitive and would scare away investors. Now, four years later, newspapers frequently write about land subsidence in their headlines. The Netherlands and other development partners have supported Vietnam to acknowledge the problem and address it.

Dutch experts not only provided scientific information but also helped 4 provinces to implement decree 167, instructing them to regulate groundwater extraction. This support gave the project team good insights into how in Vietnam centralized policy was received and implemented far away from Hanoi. The team came up with many recommendations on how to improve this process: (i) do not only instruct but also provide the provinces with the means (data, budget, human resources); (ii) ensure that provinces take each of the seven confined aquifers as one water body that should be collectively managed in a coordinated way beyond the boundaries of each province; (iii) include stakeholders to co-create solutions and alternatives.

Lessons from rehabilitating a river

The Netherlands was asked by the World Bank and provincial authorities of Quang Nam to provide expertise on Nature-based Solutions for the rehabilitation of the Truong Giang river. This coastal creek had almost lost its flow and caused extensive flooding. Dredging would re-open the flow and provide for inland water transport. Embankments, by-passes and the wider landscape needed to be re-designed in an integrated spatial planning approach.

In Vietnam, spatial planning is often initiated or driven by private property developers that need a legitimate basis for their investments. This resulted in the draft plan which contemplated new neighborhoods in the Truong Giang floodplain and hotels too close to the coast. Those wastelands and marshes are cheap and 'empty'. The Dutch designers considered this a major cause for future disasters. Their spatial plan took the landscape as entry point. This option clearly indicates the flood levels and the integrity of ecosystems such as the dune area. These dunes have an important water function, namely the infiltration of rain water to decrease peak flood levels. In the Dutch spatial design, green embankments, water retention areas, room for the river and several other nature-based solutions were incorporated.

The lesson learned is that Dutch consultants not only deliver alternative plans and options. They also consider fundamental differences in planning 'schools' or traditions. They not only deliver an advice but they really advise through a communicative way of working and mutual learning. They do not transfer 'living with nature' but really translate what that would mean in the local context. The Dutch consultants participate in the Vietnamese exercises as much as that they seek the Vietnamese participation in their own exercises.

Outcomes of FAME (Freshwater Availability in the Mekong Delta)

In the Mekong Delta there is too much water in the rainy season and too little during the rest of the year. The question is how to balance water availability for agriculture in better ways? Through the Partners for Water programme, the FAME project (a collaborative, multiphase project focusing on scoping, piloting and providing upscaling advice to national partners in Vietnam on the implementation of shallow Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) systems) took lessons from the Dutch experience of using sandy dunes to store, balance and filter water. After careful site selection, a pilot was initiated together with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). IFAD was running a climate-smart agricultural project but had little attention for groundwater management. Yet, they potentially have funding for scaling up a successful pilot.

Well into the process, we learned that the surface water was too polluted to be used. This was a major setback and resulted in a delay of one year as well as a new project set-up. Now rain water from a reservoir is being infiltrated to test the technology. This also allows us to assess the economic cost-benefits for farmers. With that information, the next step to upscaling can be considered. And what will be done about this high water pollution?

For an excellent visual presentation of the FAME project, watch the following video: [Freshwater Availability in Mekong Delta \(14/12\) - YouTube](#)

2. Mekong Delta Business Platform update



Aim of the Mekong Delta Business Platform

As mentioned in earlier Country Updates, the Mekong Delta Business Platform (“MDBP”) is an initiative by the four Dutch Topsectors (Water & Maritime, Agri-food, Horticulture & Propagation Materials and Logistics) with the aim to:

- (1) Inform on developments in the Mekong Delta (“MD”);
- (2) Trigger the public-private sector to invest in the MD by facilitation matchmaking and;
- (3) Support in overcoming thresholds of investment (e.g., finding partners, financing).

The MDBP started in May/June 2021 with the concept and initiation of the project and set the goals for the year, including defining the focus while avoiding duplication.

Communication

In order to bring the MD developments further under the attention of the Netherlands and Vietnam, the MDBP set up a communications team with two colleagues from the Dutch Embassy. The aim is to trigger parties further to reach co-creation. This led to the following:

- More than 15 showcases on the website that show Dutch initiatives and innovations in the Mekong Delta. Note: more showcases are coming up soon!
- Information about MDBP and MD developments in Vietnamese sources such as the VCCI newsletter.
- The ambition is to further develop the platform functions of the website.

Connecting with the Dutch and Vietnamese public- and private sectors

From September 2021 onwards, many meetings took place with private- and public sector players with an interest in the Mekong Delta. Both sectors were asked about the type of support they need in order to take the step to invest in the Delta. This led to the following outcomes:

- The NL public sector strives for more visible business activity in the MD through Dutch projects or the integration of a Dutch approach. The VN government requires support in the agro-transformation (practices as well as policies).
- The NL private sector: the businesses that are new to VN require concrete demand (rather than opportunities) and a counterpart in Vietnam. Those that are already active in Vietnam need support to grow their businesses. The Vietnamese private sector demands innovations and technologies on matters such as improving product quality to boost exports.

What we can conclude from this is that in the MD there are “global challenges” such as salinity and land subsidence, where NL offers “global solutions” like technologies on crops, logistics, soil management etc. These need to be translated into “local solutions”, preferably captured in a business(plan) that can be executed.

Outcomes to-date

MDBP is facilitating private- and public sector (Vietnam and the Netherlands) with local solutions/business plan by providing the following:

- Overview of examples of NL approach (showcases on the website <https://www.mekongdeltaplan.com/>)
- Platform for communication, connection, and inspiration
- Thematic focus: starting with saline agriculture, the ambition is also to explore additional themes including aquaculture, high value crops...
- Growing cooperation between Vietnam and the Netherlands (through meetings, saline focus mission – see item 4: Overview of the Vietnam Saline Agriculture Focus Mission for more details)
- Presence/exposure at events to discuss MD developments (AIWW, VCCI conference)

Next steps

The ambition is to further build on the MDBP in 2022. More details will follow.

Contact details: Jacqueline Barendse & Miriam Pot: info@mekongdeltabusinessplatform.com

3. Overview of the Vietnam Saline Agriculture Focus Mission



In early 2021, Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP) received funds from Topsector Water & Maritime to pilot a new initiative (“focus mission”) to bridge the largely virtual setting in which organisations found themselves as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus mission seeks to align with, complement and strengthen existing initiatives in the country. Contrary to a large-scale trade mission, the aim here was to stimulate a small, select group of Dutch organisations with complementary skills and experience, to jointly identify and work on, over a series of workshops and with local partners, solutions to a specific local challenge. The outcome would be to start a new collaboration (eg. A Public Private Partnership, a Partners for International Business (“PIB”) initiative) or at the very least create the framework for further business development. After selecting Vietnam as the focus country in Asia, together with the Netherlands Embassy in Hanoi, saline agriculture was selected as the focus theme.

- On 5th July, the first workshop discussed the current agricultural context in Vietnam, with a specific focus on challenges from increasing salinity in agriculture, to set the scene. The agricultural transition in Vietnam was highlighted to explain the need for innovations. 9 participating organisations (DFCD, Eurofins Vietnam, Fresh Studio, HZPC, HZ University of Applied Sciences, Royal Eijkelpark, The Salt Doctors, Witteveen+Bos and Wageningen University & Research) then each pitched their organisation’s expertise as well as expectations and motivation for involvement and their understanding and experience of the situation in Vietnam. This was followed by a group discussion to identify common goals and ambitions.
- The successful kick-off workshop led to a good exchange of experiences and inspired parties to get to know one another better. It was also clear that there was strong need for support from the Embassy to get in touch with the private sector players in Vietnam.
- In the 2nd workshop on 14th October, it was decided to dive deeper into the local context and experiences of the participating Dutch companies. In addition, two local organisations (Can Tho University and the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry “VCCI”) joined the session and gave presentations. During the group discussion that followed, the decision was taken to further narrow down the focus to high value crops based on local demand.
- For the third and final workshop, which took place on 14 December, 5 participants, selected on the basis of their existing projects related to high value crops, continued discussions in order to find a common denominator with regards to region and crop focus and to determine which other potential parties could fit

in the picture to take the ambition further. The main outcome was the decision to now develop a concept proposal for further follow-up, in particular the desire to establish a joint training and demo centre/program.

All in all, the pilot focus mission can be said to have achieved what it set out to do and proved to be a successful formula to bring a smaller group of committed parties together to get the ball rolling for a concrete outcome for business development. In this sense, it could serve as an example for future similar initiatives on different themes.

Finally, watch this video about using ICT to deal with salt intrusion made by IFAD recently as possible inspiration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5RFE708IHE>

4. Highlights of the Recover and Recycle: Dutch Water Technology for Vietnam webinar



On Tuesday 14 December 2021 the Netherlands Embassy in Hanoi and the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City co-hosted the webinar “RECOVER AND RECYCLE: DUTCH WATER TECHNOLOGY FOR VIETNAM”. The webinar was well attended by more than 200 international and Vietnamese participants from water companies, universities, research institutions, textile companies, industrial sector, contractors, associations, government agencies and many more. Speaking at the opening of the workshop, Mr. Daniel Stork, Consul General of the Netherlands in Ho Chi Minh City reiterated that the Netherlands is Vietnam’s key partner to address and co-create solutions for water and climate change and look for cooperation in transforming these sectoral challenges into opportunities. He emphasized “*Sound water management is about quantities and qualities: not too much, not too little, not too dirty or salty. To achieve this in times of climate change, the webinar aims to inspire Vietnamese stakeholders with the Dutch integrated and adaptive approach as well as with innovative technologies for the circular economy*”.

The event reflected both on Dutch initiatives on the agro-water-climate nexus in the Mekong Delta in 2021 as well as looking forward to 2022. The researchers had presented the technologies and approaches for sustainable water provision with a case study of Efficient Water Resource Consumption towards Self-sufficiency of Industrial Sector in Vietnam by Wageningen University & Research and Van Lang University. Challenges in wastewater treatment issues in the Textile Industry were shared from a practical perspective. From these challenges, Dutch companies were invited to introduce their latest innovative and adaptive solutions which captured great interest from the audience. Last but not least, the water and business networks of companies and institutions that offered cooperation and assistance to the stakeholders shed light on opportunities for cross-over business matching between Water, Agriculture and Textile industries.

- Recording of the webinar: https://youtu.be/BjtEOyu_YFY
- Presentations: [Link to download](#)

5. Events calendar

A date for the Mekong Delta Forum (“MDF”) has yet to be confirmed – the Covid-19 situation remains highly complex but serious planning for this will commence after TET (1 February 2022)

**Dubai Expo (22 Jan) - the full event will take place from
October 2021-March 2022**



SIWW (17-21 April 2022)



For more information or suggestions for the next Vietnam Country Update, please contact Simone Sweerts, Project Manager Asia: +31 70 304 3700, s.sweerts@nwp.nl.

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