COMMUNITY LEVEL PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: BUILDING CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN THE MALDIVES

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Date September 26, 2002
Abstract

Sustainable livelihoods depend on a strong local capacity to maintain access to economic opportunities, health and other essential services, and the attendant infrastructure and institutional capacity necessary to support these activities. Capacity building to support increased community level participation in governance and development planning is one approach to building sustainable livelihoods. My research focuses on the impacts of participatory programs and projects at the local level, and the key elements that facilitate community level participation and help projects meet their objectives and gain the support of both local and state actors.

The case study I employ is a UNDP-supported poverty alleviation and atoll development project in the Maldives which sought to build capacity at the community level in order to create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. The Project supported institutional and economic development in outlying areas as a means to mobilize and build the capacity of local communities to participate in development planning and implementation.

I base my research on personal observations and fifty interviews with community members, island leaders, and project staff that I conducted while working with the Project for four months in 2001, as well as a review of project documents, consultant reports, and literature related to community participation, governance, the Maldives, and Small Island Developing States.

Project outputs included the establishment of a locally managed Atoll Development Program, an Atoll Community Fund that provides loans to support income-generating activities, and formal relationships with existing national-level institutions to provide services such as a savings program through the Mobile Bank.

The successful elements of the Project include the flexible project structure, awareness-building components, community determination and prioritization of activities through participatory rural appraisal, support from the national government, administrative support for local organizations, and coherent strategies linking the Project with national policies and priorities. I conclude that achieving sustainable livelihoods amongst local people through participation requires support in the form of institutional and economic development, and an overall framework for local planning and policy development that carefully considers local needs in relation to broader regional and national concerns.
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Photo Credit: Photos from Hillary Nobles, used by permission.
Chapter One: Framing the Issues

I applied to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Internship Programme in December 2000 by introducing my interest in “the role of community level participation in governance, with particular reference to community development and infrastructure planning.” Through this project experience, I hoped to broaden my understanding of community development, and develop an awareness of the nature of community level participation. The principal questions I asked were: How does “capacity building” at the local level contribute to increased community level participation, and, what are the opportunities and constraints of community level participation in governance and development planning?

**Purpose**

The primary intent of this thesis is to examine the role community level participation plays in governance and development planning. My thesis explores the increasing pressure upon community groups, local levels of government, and private businesses to provide goods and services that contribute in a meaningful way to local development, while at the same time expanding the role they play in higher levels of decision-making, governance and development planning. The case study I employ is a project of the South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme under the auspices of the UNDP regional development framework in the Maldives which sought to “build capacity” at the community level in order to create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. In the region, the project is viewed as a success, and I will look at the structure of the project
and the process of change that it has initiated. I will then relate these changes to the larger framework of community participation.

This introductory chapter begins with a short discussion of my perceptions about community level participation in governance and development planning. A discussion of the overarching objectives of participation follows. I conclude with some of the contextual issues pertinent to my case study, and a number of the challenges germane to the application of participation.

Although participation is commonly assumed to be a simple panacea to cure the ills of ineffective project implementation, this thesis seeks to identify some of the critical grounding elements, such as institutional and economic support, that are needed to ensure effectiveness of the participatory process. Given that the problems of participation in development projects are legion, I want to identify the fundamental enabling and defining elements that contribute to the perception of my case study as a 'success'. Note that my research does not explicitly address or critique the causes behind the increasing pressure upon governments to implement decentralization strategies, nor do I argue that community participation is in itself a sufficient ingredient in development projects. Rather, my research focuses on the impacts of participatory programs and projects at the local level, and the key elements of a project structure that facilitate community level participation and help the project meet its objectives, and in doing so, gain the support of both local and state actors.
Methodology

My primary research involved observation of the UNDP projects as an intern documenting the pilot project in Noonu Atoll, and interviews with 50 key informants, from each of the inhabited islands in Noonu as well as from the government and UNDP partners. I used a mixed method for my research, gathering secondary data from project documents, government and consultant reports, and statistics from local authorities as well as from published sources. For a detailed explanation of my research methods, as well as a list of interviewees and interview questions, see Appendix I.

Framing the Issues

Defining Community Level Participation

Community level participation is widely viewed as the best way of improving project implementation, democratizing, and achieving sustainable livelihoods. Please see the end of this section for a list of references relevant to community level participation. I begin this section by discussing a few of the various terms frequently seen in the literature concerning participation, though it should be noted that these are more normative descriptions than strict definitions. I then describe some of the objectives of organizing participation at the community level. In the following chapters, I examine the process of change in the case I studied, reflecting on the ability of the current UNDP-supported development project to meet its participation objectives.
Community level

The community level, as I define it, is made up of local administrators, individuals, community based organizations, business people, and, in the context of development, marginalized people and those living in relative poverty or generally poor conditions. By using the term community level rather than local level, I hope to capture the richness of the diverse identities driving local activities. Not only are communities as I describe them based on a locality, but their associations also connote relationships and links between the people and organizations that make them up. In the context of my thesis, the community level describes a level of social organization based on a localized determination of and response to felt needs. I seek to explore how social organization contributes to the success of development projects. It is important to note, however, that the case studied involves an extremely small population, where the community level encompasses hundreds, or no more than two thousand, people, nearly half of whom are under the age of 14. This is significant, since in many places, local organizations are supplemented by neighbourhood organizations small enough to effectively engage people locally (Goss, 2001). In the case used here, there is no need for such a distinction, but readers should be aware that the community at the level I discuss it is in fact very small.

Participation

Participation can be defined as a voluntary process by which people, including the disadvantaged, influence or control the decisions that affect them (Narayan, 1997). Increasingly recognized as a contributor in democratization processes, participation is promoted in planning to ensure the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of
development activities. Participation has been shown to be one of the most significant factors that determines project effectiveness and the most important factor contributing to local capacity building (Narayan, 1997), and also serves to bind people to the implementation and maintenance of projects (Bhatta, 1990).

Participation may be applied at any stage, or, indeed, all stages of a project - decision making and planning, implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation. Beyond the project cycle, participation can help to hold the government accountable in fulfilling its responsibilities, as community groups become more informed and involved in development activities (Peters, 2001). Finally, participation can also empower local people who are normally excluded from processes that have significant implications for community and individual welfare and development (Nelson and Wright, 1997).

**Governance**

Governance is the process through which decisions and plans are made. Governance involves a number of actors, primarily the state, as well as influential individuals, private businesses, and non-government or community-based organizations. Goss describes governance as those “emerging new forms of collective decision-making at local level which lead to the development of different relationships, not simply between public agencies but between citizens and public agencies” (Goss, 2001, p. 11).

More participatory governance, however, typically requires a number of structural and even ideological changes. These changes include a supportive government, a clear set of
responsibilities at the community level, and the local capacities to carry out the required responsibilities. As described by the OECD, participatory governance attempts to improve coordination by “introducing maximum transparency and sharing of information in a process that includes all stakeholders…and leads to joint decision making wherever feasible” (Schneider, 1999, p.7). The structure of the government is important in that the extent to which the different areas of responsibility are managed comprehensively and coherently by higher levels of government has been demonstrated to have significantly positive implications for good governance at the local and regional levels (OECD, 2001).

**Development Planning**

While infrastructure planning and service provision are often identified by local people as the main goals of development, there are other important functions of development planning. They include decision making, information gathering and technical applications, as well as resource mobilization.

Since development planning requires the clear coordination and division of responsibilities between various levels of government and other organizations involved in development planning, there is also an important link to governance. Governance requires effective institutions and administrative capacity. In the context of community level participation, institutional capacity is frequently the weakest link in development planning (Picciotto, 1997). In particular, there is often a lack of adequate resources, knowledge, and skills at the community level. Utilizing participatory approaches is one method of ensuring that local knowledge is used in development planning, but it is
important that participation be supplemented with sufficient technical knowledge and resources, which may not always be found within the community.

**Objectives of the Research**

I focus on governance and development planning in my research on community level participation. By increasing the level and quality of participation in decision making and in planning for development, states and other actors attempt to meet those objectives demanded at the local, national, and international level (Larmour et al, 1985). In some cases, decentralization can share or devolve power and responsibilities to local institutions to increase participation while meeting varied development objectives, concentrating development resources in underserved areas to achieve certain economies of scale (Turner, 1999). This is the model used in my case study in the Maldives, and I will now elaborate on some of the issues influencing participation in the context of decentralization.

**Motives**

There is an increasing emphasis on decentralization as a means through which to secure the continued support of international aid agencies, both multilateral and bilateral (Bhatta, 1990, Turner, 1999). It is unclear, however, whether decentralization is an appropriate model for every governance structure and set of development objectives in every community. Decentralization is used in the context of *Small Island Developing States* in order to reduce migration from underdeveloped, peripheral regions to the capital, but the appropriate scale of decentralization is difficult to determine. The
development of regional growth centres or other areas of decentralized concentration demands significant institutional capacity and economic support, resources commonly found only in the capital or other highly urbanized areas.

Effective local governance demands a functional relationship and communication structure between local and national actors (Thomas, 1995). National governments unable to provide resources or support locally, may decentralize certain activities as a means of shedding some functions while retaining central control (Turner, 1999), but without the continued support of the state in both technical and financial areas, the effects of community level participation will not only be limited, but may ultimately be self-defeating.

An indistinct division of responsibilities creates problems of coordination at all levels of management (Turner, 1999). New governance structures for greater participation in decision making and development planning therefore require clear coordination and division of responsibilities. These arrangements are needed to enable effective communication and information sharing and to help community level organizations build capabilities for specific skills and tasks. Thomas (1995), argues that communities taking on new responsibilities should be clearly aware of their specific responsibilities and possess the power to carry them out. Failing to clearly delineate responsibilities can lead to conflicting expectations between the different actors.
**Strategic Planning**

The ability to engage in long-term strategic planning assists in the development of coordinated regional planning policies. The formation of regional bodies for decision making, for example, and the setting of priorities in mutual consultations increase opportunities for communities to access power and build economies of scale. Through strategic regional planning, isolated and vulnerable communities together can make better decisions about what resources they require, what resources they can access locally, and what communities they can work with in jointly developing the resources necessary to support the development decisions they make (UN, 1994).

In order to encourage organizations at the community level to participate in governance and development planning, a premium must be placed upon coordination, information sharing and transparency. Shared knowledge coalesces the more technical knowledge from the national level with the indigenous knowledge and motivated support from the community level. Open communication and clear roles help to prevent the exclusion of people and organizations at the community level who might otherwise have poor access to information and power in their localities. In addition, local elites will be less able to exclude others from engaging in community issues if information is available to all at the community level.

**Local Capacity**

I use the term *community level* to expand the scope of traditional participation from local administrators of the national government to include community members at large, as
well as representatives from various sectors, notably education, environment, and business. These community level participants may not, however, possess sufficient capacity to carry out their respective responsibilities in planning and managing development. Bhatta (1990) explains that generally, the major limitation in implementing projects and programmes is a lack of administrative capacity, not financial resources. Weak institutional capacity and a limited skills base are identified as one of the main barriers to decentralization and project implementation in remote or underserviced areas (Suryanarayan, 1993). Lack of institutional strength can limit the effectiveness of implementation and lead to negative perceptions of projects which in turn results in lower levels of community support.

The success of decentralization programs will therefore often depend upon an effective development of skills and practices (Clague, 1997). Agencies must have the capability to carry out their responsibilities at the community level, be they government administrators, NGOs, or local community committees. Turner (1999) says that while development is managed mostly at the regional and local levels, policy directions are determined largely at the national level, so that decision making capacity is generally weak or absent in communities that are characterized by historically low levels of participation in decision and policy making. This link between weak capacity and low participation means that capacity building is an integral component of decentralization and other development strategies that seek to devolve greater responsibility to the community level. In my case study, I will look more closely at the types of institutional
development and training that build capacity at the community level, focusing on the emergence of civil society organizations as actors in governance processes.

Clark (1991) says that civil society organizations improve the implementation of projects by leading to increased local participation. In addition, they are increasingly being recognized as important contributors to decision making because of their local knowledge, familiarity with local contexts and long-term impacts, as well as motivation and commitment to specific projects. Community level participation is integral to the development of a robust civil society, but Egger and Majeres (1992) caution that participation is limited by the level of responsibility and power that organizations at the community level can access.

Sustainable livelihoods

Sustainable livelihoods depend on a strong local capacity to maintain livelihoods, which I define as access to economic opportunities, health and other essential services, and the attendant infrastructure and institutional capacity necessary to support these activities. The process by which communities build capacity and increase their participation in local affairs is one by which they are given the best opportunities to seek development objectives that meet the needs of the community. Local, national, and international development objectives that support building local capacity to address issues of scale, and envision a greater role for development responsibilities and decision making at the local level encourage more sustainable livelihoods. This focus is important in regions characterized by isolation and vulnerability, as Redclift (1992) says that insufficient
resources at higher levels commonly result in the increasing divestiture of responsibilities to the local level. Without a sustainable process for supporting livelihoods locally, communities will be unable to take on the responsibilities transferred from higher levels of government.

Achieving sustainable livelihoods amongst local people through participation requires support in the form of institutional and economic development, and an overall framework for local planning and policy development that carefully considers local needs in relation to broader regional and national concerns. Such a high level of integration and support demands strong administration and clear coordination (Pestelos, 1989).

Specificities in the Maldives

The case that I study was a UNDP-supported development project implemented by the Maldivian government. The project supported institutional and economic development in outlying areas as a means to build the capacity of the local community to participate in development planning and implementation, with the ultimate goal of promoting sustainable livelihoods.

I selected the Maldives as a case for study because of its value as an example of active capacity building for community level participation. There are also a number of complex contextual issues that influenced my analysis. The Maldives is unique because it is a Small Island Developing State. Its situation informs the structure and function of the Maldivian patterns of governance and development. For example, Connell (1993) says
that the issue of scale becomes an essential component of any development strategy in a
Small Island Developing State, and frames much of the concern about isolation and
vulnerability. When decentralization is the strategy employed to provide more locally-
based institutional and other support to respond to problems of scale, as in the Maldives
(MPNDd, 1998), capacity to take on greater responsibilities at the local level is vital.

Building Appropriate Scale

Isolated and vulnerable communities often experience problems related to scale, because
it is difficult to provide reasonable levels of services and goods to a high number of
small, dispersed populations, with the attendant limitations of inadequate facilities,
infrastructure, and economic activity. I address the issue of scale in the context of Small
Island Developing States, although other outlying and rural communities share many of
the characteristics of Small Island Developing States. A strategy of decentralized
concentration is the designated response to problems of scale in this study; the Maldivian
case project that I study was undertaken within the context of a policy of population
consolidation and regional growth centre development. Since my emphasis is on
community level participation, I am looking at shifts in community organization, as well
as at the interface between the state and emerging civil society elements at the
community level. I am not presuming that there must be a delegation of powers to the
local level; rather my intent is to examine what responsibilities can be placed at the
community level, and how local decisions can be articulated between national and local
state and non-state actors.
Small Island Developing States

Small Island Developing States experience development challenges as a result of the extreme vulnerability of their economies and environments, due to their relative physical isolation and small size (UN, 1994). In an archipelagic state such as the Maldives, there exists only one urbanized centre with a relatively high population density and significant economies of scale. The remaining islands experience much less economic and service-oriented activity, as they are geographically isolated, with lower population densities, little infrastructure for transport and communication, and high unit costs for goods and services.

Through decentralization, small island states attempt to increase and diversify economic, planning and government activity. Larmour et al (1985) say that these decentralization activities are linked to participation and equitable distribution. Larmour et al (1985) also explain that there exists an assumption that one kind of decentralization will lead to another, for example, that the decentralization of administrative functions will lead to a dispersal of personnel, infrastructure and services. However, there is little certainty as that this link holds true in fact (Larmour et al., 1985). Geographic decentralization policies are designed to concentrate development activities and financial resources in outlying regional hubs so as to increase economies of scale, thus providing income and aid to outlying populations through a reduction in the unit cost of services and infrastructure (Turner, 1999). Further, decentralization is expected to provide incentives for local people to remain in their communities instead of migrating to a single developed area, and to make it easier for local administrators to respond to local conditions.
The expectations of decentralization are high, and coordination and capacity both pose significant challenges for decentralized concentration at regional levels as mechanisms by which to respond to concerns of scale. In the next chapter, I will describe the specific context of the Maldives that frames my study.
Chapter One: References Cited


For further discussion of community participation in planning, see the following:


Hoang, Ngoc Thanh. 1959. *Appraisal of the Community Development Program in South Vietnam (since March 1957)*. Quezon City: University of Philippines.


Chapter Two: The Political Economy of the Maldives

Looking down from the airplane as you arrive on a nighttime international flight to the Maldives, you will see a series of lights delineating the airstrip, surrounded by the lights of the airport buildings. Beyond that is black. The absence of artificial light results from the omnipresent sea, the most defining geographical feature of the Maldives. The one thousand two hundred islands of the Maldives are surrounded by the sea, a presence that defines and informs much of the Maldivian identity. Stories from the sea tell the story of the culture and identity of the Maldivian people. Descendants of Sri Lankan exiles, South Indians, traders and adventurers from Eastern Africa and Arabic regions (Metz, 1995), Maldivians have developed linguistic and cultural forms that reflect their unique island lifestyle in the Indian Ocean.
Map 1: Maldives Locator Map

Note: Miladhunmadulu Atoll is divided into two administrative Atolls: Shaviyani to the North and Noonu to the South.
The Maldives islands make up a chain of atolls that extends in a north-south direction for 820 km\(^2\) in the Indian Ocean, southwest of the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent. Spread over more than 1,200 islands, the total land base of the Maldives is only 298 km\(^2\). On the two hundred inhabited islands, excepting the capital of Male, where more than a quarter of the total population of 270,101 is concentrated, the population ranges from a few hundred to more than one thousand people. For a summary overview of population dynamics, see Box 1 overleaf. Significantly, the annual population growth rate is one of the highest in the world, and at present rates, the population of the Maldives would double in about 20 years.
Box 1: Maldives Population

The following statistics are from the 2001 Statistical Yearbook.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republic (Total)</th>
<th>270,101</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atolls</td>
<td>196,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>° Noonu</td>
<td>10,429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total population residing in Male 74,069

Registered to:

- Male 38,955
- Shaviyani 980
- Noonu 1,565
- Other Atolls 30,339
- Unregistered 1,923
- Not stated 301


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban (%)</th>
<th>27</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age distribution (%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 0-14</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth 15-24</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 60+</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age (years)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total population density per square km 854

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Annual population growth rate (%)</th>
<th>3.44</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate (/woman)</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Life expectancy at birth (years)

- Males 65.7
- Females 63.3
- Both sexes 64.5

1Source: (Table P-08) “In-Migrants of Male By Place of Registration” and (Table P-03) “Population by Locality and Sex”, Statistical Yearbook of Maldives 2001, Ministry of Planning and National Development. URL: http://www.planning.gov.mv/vrb2001/index_p.htm

Islands in the Maldives are physically isolated and vulnerable to environmental change and economic shocks. The relative isolation of the islands is compounded by inadequate transportation and communication infrastructure, which restricts the economy of most islands to little more than a subsistence basis. For the country as a whole, this vulnerability is heightened by sensitivity to global market fluctuations for what is, in practice, a very limited range of exports, chiefly fishery products and tourism. Moreover, in the longer term, the physical basis of life in the Maldives is threatened by rising sea levels (sea level elevations of 80% of the islands are less than one meter) and, given the high population growth rate, by potential over-exploitation of marine resources on which day-to-day life needs are dependent.

Most of the national services and modern infrastructure investments are concentrated in Male, which is also the only inhabited island freely accessible to foreign visitors. Foreigners are able to visit resort islands, which are classified as uninhabited islands, but must have special permission to visit inhabited islands outside of Male, where Maldivians reside. The majority of development resources have historically been dedicated to Male, and as a result, there is a significant disparity in income levels between Male and the other atolls. Outside of Male, the island communities are more economically self-dependent, with a strong dependence on fishing (Chandra et al, 1993). For details, see Box 2.
Box 2: Maldives Economy

(1999, at constant 1985 prices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP</th>
<th>267 (US$ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual growth rate (1999)</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita</td>
<td>962 (US$)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total commodity exports</th>
<th>63,952,000 (1999 F.O.B. value in US$)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparel and clothing accessories</td>
<td>24,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish and fish products</td>
<td>38,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrap metal</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total imports</th>
<th>402,162,000 (1999 C.I.F. value in US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| ¹Main employment in Male (in order of importance): government, services, self-employment |
| Main employment in other atolls: fisheries, manufacturing*, government |
| Median per capita household income in Male: Rf 26 per person per day (approx. 2.31 US$) |
| Median per capita household income in other atolls: Rf 15 per person per day (approx. 1.33 US$) |

*manufacturing includes activities like weaving thatch, coir-rope making, and brick building.

¹These data are from the Economy Statistical Overview, The President’s Office, Republic of Maldives. URL: http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/v3/pages/body.phtml?ID=15&Table=Head3&PT


Note: The exchange rate in 2001 was 11.72.
Administration

The Maldivian central government is administered at three levels: the national level based in Male, the atoll level, and the island level. The country is divided into twenty administrative regions called Atolls, which are loosely based on the geographic atoll formation. Each inhabited island within an Atoll is an administrative unit. The Atoll Office, the administrative office at the Atoll level, is named for the respective Atolls it represents, and is presided over by an Atoll Chief. At the island level, there are four key government positions: the Island Chief, the Assistant Island Chief, the Mudhimu (responsible for the mosque), and the Judge (Latheef, 1992). See Box 3 for an overview of the political system in the Maldives.
Box 3: Maldives Politics

| Name: Republic of Maldives |
| Location: Indian Ocean |
| Capital: Male |
| Independence: July 26, 1965 from United Kingdom |
| National Holiday: Independence Day, July 26 (1965) |
| Constitution: June 4, 1968 |
| Suffrage: 21 years old; Maldivian citizenship (female and male) |
| Ethnicity: Sinhalese, Dravidian, Arab, African |
| Languages: Maldivian Dhivehi (national and official language), English |
| Religions: Sunni Muslim |

**Executive:**
- **President:** Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (b. 1937) (11/11/1978): elected by the Assembly, confirmed by popular referendum; 5 year term
  
  **Island Ministries:** appointed by the President

**Central Bank:** Governor Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (b. 1937)

**Legislative:**
- **Assembly (Majlis):** 48 members. 40 elected by plurality vote from 20 two-seat constituencies, 8 appointed by the President (5 year term).

**Judiciary:** High Court

**Local Government:** 19 atolls and 1 district (Male)

URL: http://www.polisci.com/world/nation/MV.htm*
Island and Atoll Chiefs are selected and appointed by the central government in Male (Latheef, 1992). The central government provides information and direction to the Atoll Chief, who provides the same to each of the Island Chiefs within the Atoll. The Island and Atoll Chiefs are responsible for keeping records and reporting to the successive levels above them in the administrative structure. Normal duties for the Island Chief include the “general monitoring and feedback of activities to the respective government departments, record keeping, community works, running the school and supervision of the work of other government positions” (Latheef, 1992, p. 15).

Government programs as well as community-based activities are generally carried out by the Island Development Committee and the Women’s Development Committee, in consultation with the Island Office. These committees are made up of islanders, and are charged with implementing many of the development activities that are undertaken at the island level. These committees also serve as organizing bodies to coordinate the volunteer work of islanders on projects such as island maintenance and upkeep of mosques and island powerhouses.

**Life In The Islands- Isolation and Vulnerability**

Seven years of basic education is nearly universal in the islands. Education in the atolls has improved significantly of late, due in large part to a change in attitude within many
communities towards education. This shift in attitudes can be attributed in part to recent campaigns promoting the importance of education for boys and girls alike. According to community members that I interviewed, families now believe that the future of their children must be secured through a good education. Mothers in particular are eager to improve the education of their children. Parents contribute significant amounts of money and time to schools, and actively participate in the activities of the school. A trained headmaster within each Atoll now manages schools in the region, which has led to greater efficiency and autonomy. However, despite the improved access to and use of education, I learned from teachers and island administrators that secondary education from eighth to tenth grade is still limited to a small number of islands within each Atoll, and eleventh and twelfth grade education remains available only in Male.

Island economies are entirely different from Male's. Country statistics mostly reflect activities in Male, and many of the industries listed there do not exist in the islands. Most islands depend on fishing or agriculture, supplemented by some production of thatch and rope made from coconut palm and fibres. There is little or no access to capital and financial service in the Atolls, which severely limits the types of economic activities that may be undertaken. Because of difficulties with transport, even if an island does produce an export product, such as crops or crafts, islanders that I interviewed consistently noted that access to external markets is severely restricted.

The government licenses some uninhabited islands to be used for industrial purposes such as canneries, factories, storage facilities, agriculture, airports, and resorts. These
activities are generally small scale, and except for resorts, have little economic importance to the country, though they may be relatively important in those regions with otherwise limited economic activities. Canneries and storage facilities for fish are exceptionally important resources in the atolls that allow fishermen from neighboring islands to process their catch for sale. I learned from fishermen on islands such as Maafaru in Noonu Atoll that without access to storage or processing facilities, they are unable to send their catch to market.

Most island families receive a great deal of their income from family members who are working in Male or one of the resorts, and by necessity, must spend much of their income on imported goods. I observed that commonly imported goods include rice and other staple foods, clothing, and fuel. In addition, the Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment (1999) notes that costs for infrastructure are approximately four times what they would be on the mainland in India or Sri Lanka. The isolation of islands results in a great deal of internal migration, as skilled people move to Male and the resort islands. The resulting concentration of human and capital resources in the capital reinforces the economic disparity between Male and the rest of the country, and further intensifies the isolation and vulnerability of the outer islands.

Both trade and the mobility of expertise in the form of government workers are severely constrained by limited transportation options. Travel from Male to the Atolls is very important, as most “expertise” in the country is available only from the capital. As a result, I observed that many Ministers and their assistants travel regularly to the Atolls.
The strain of visiting twenty atolls regularly, however, means that many experts visit only infrequently and for short periods. The resulting information gathered is not always accurate, nor is much expertise or knowledge shared.

Inter and intra-atoll transportation is generally by dhoni, a mechanized wooden boat used for fishing. Dhoni travel is not scheduled, and trips are normally quite expensive. Travel to and from Male is easier, since most trips operate between an island and Male, rather than between the islands of an atoll. If any stops are made, they are unscheduled and based on personal relationships, for refueling, or are in response to bad weather. Moreover, many islands are inaccessible by boat due to the lack of a jetty, or difficult access due to coral reefs and shallow harbours, as detailed in Box 4.
Photo 1: Island Access
Shallow water surrounding the island of Maafaru restricts larger ships from accessing the island. Smaller wooden boats are used to ferry passengers and cargo from larger ships anchored outside the reef onto the portable wooden jetty.
Box 4: Transport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transport Conditions</th>
<th>(% of atoll population affected)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dhonis going at least three times</td>
<td>Shaviyani (41), Noonu (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a month to Atoll capital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhonis going one or two times a month</td>
<td>Shaviyani (40), Noonu (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island not always accessible</td>
<td>Shaviyani (75), Noonu (70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No jetty</td>
<td>Shaviyani (&lt;10%) Noonu (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with harbour</td>
<td>Shaviyani (85%) Noonu (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with reef</td>
<td>Shaviyani (&lt;10%) Noonu (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment, 1999 (p. 31-32)*

*Note: Travel between islands and regions is limited by the scarcity of transport options, as well as physical obstacles such as reefs and poor landing facilities. Lacking any regular transportation system, individuals on the islands rely on paying for rides with dhonis, which do not travel on a regular schedule. The table above illustrates the lack of regular transport options (dhonis), and highlights the incidence of poor conditions for island access, including lack of jetty, difficulties with the harbour or reef, and also “island not always accessible”, which accounts for changeable conditions such as weather.*
Most information and communication technology is currently only accessible in Male, or is extremely limited in the Atolls due to prohibitive costs. The high cost and low speed of the internet in the Maldives has been attributed to the fact that access is dependent on satellite. Recent policy documents, chiefly *Vision 2020*, associate improvements in information technology with an improved quality of life in the Maldives, and have committed substantial government support to developing information and communication infrastructure. Telephone service has improved dramatically in quality as a result of government support predicated on the findings of the *Vision 2020* document. Public telephone booths were set up on all inhabited islands in order to provide access, despite the exorbitant costs of such installation. Most islands in the atolls have one or two lines in the Island Office, and one to four public telephone booths.
Box 5: Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited Communication</th>
<th>(% of atoll population affected, excluding Male)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No public telephone on island</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two hours to nearest public telephone</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No newspapers on island</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No [private] telephone</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No radio</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No television</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment, 1999 (p. 34)*
The cost of energy provision on the islands is also extremely high on a per capita basis. The sum total of the generator capacities installed on the 199 outer islands is 27.6 MW, while Male alone uses 23.5 MW. Most islands have electrical generators fuelled by diesel, and rely on imported fuel. Many islands have difficulty mobilizing the resources needed to support electricity generation, and often lack the technical expertise to manage and maintain them properly. Islands without jetties also experience extreme difficulty with transporting machinery, and in one case in Noonu atoll, a generator was lost when it fell off the small wooden boat being used to transport it from the cargo vessel outside the reef surrounding the island.

Damage to the islands due to a potential rise in the sea level poses immense challenges to the islands’ economic activity, which is largely dependent on the marine environment. Sea level rise leads to building damage, beach erosion, and increasing salination of the ground water lens. Islanders are now required to purchase imported building materials such as cement and bricks, as environmental regulations discourage them from using the locally available sand and coral they once used. Although the problem of coral reef destruction and beach erosion has been addressed in Maldivian environmental policies, there has been no effective governmental response to the economic difficulties associated with the high costs of these imported building materials.
Defining Development

The homogeneity of religion, history, culture and language has been cited as an important factor in the maintenance of political stability in the Maldives. According to the 2001 Sixth National Development Plan, this common base has "encouraged long term planning and introduced an element of continuity in the process of policy reform" (BFS, 2001, p. 1). Despite this strength in strategic planning, the Maldives experiences difficulty in implementing development policies and plans in the outer islands due to weak institutional capacity at the local level, the vulnerability of the environment and economy, and the geographic isolation of the Atolls, all of which increases the costs associated with physical and social infrastructure development in twenty Atolls.

The government is promoting a population consolidation policy that focuses growth in "regional growth centres" to reduce migration from the islands to Male. The government is also encouraging the development of a sufficient scale of activities in each of the northern and southern regions, and capacity building at the local level for developmental activities. The current National Development Plan states that infrastructure development must be developed "within a regional development strategy which will be guided by the goal of dispersing the development process throughout the Atolls, and diffusing economic opportunities to make the development process both inclusive and a force for national integration" (BFS, 2001, p. 5). New regional growth strategies include institutional capacity building, the provision of services and infrastructure, and transportation and telecommunications improvements (for details, see Box 6).
An Emerging Commitment to Local Level Consultation

Vision 2020 was an exercise designed to engage people at the island and Atoll levels in a discussion about governmental policy priorities. Prior to the Vision 2020 exercise, policy decisions were made exclusively by the national government, which effectively meant that only people from Male were in any sense involved in policy making. The Vision 2020 process included a lengthy consultation process at island, Atoll and national levels, involving local leaders, community members, and prominent people in the islands.

The information and ideas gathered from the islands have now been woven into the fabric of new policies and plans, helping to ensure that island voices are reflected in the national exercise to define and build the country’s future. Key themes of the current (Sixth) National Development Plan are based on the objectives set out in Vision 2020. These are sustainable economic growth, a social agenda to promote equitable development and poverty eradication, and the effective implementation of the Plan through improved participative governance.

Regional Decentralization and Consolidation Policies

The population consolidation policy is a long term priority for the Maldives, as a response to both the high cost of providing infrastructure to relatively small populations on two hundred separate islands, and the risk of serious infrastructure damage to islands due to sea level rise. This policy requires the relocation of people to relatively larger
islands where development resource and planning efforts will be focused. Three out of
four pilot relocation projects were undertaken in Shaviyani Atoll. A total of 116
households were moved to Funadhoo Island from Firubaidhoo and Maakandhoodhoo,
and 66 households from Maakandhoodhoo were relocated to Milandhoo. Despite a
successful reception on the part of the local population, the project demonstrated that the
current nature of relocation projects is not viable given the size of the population that
must be relocated, and the expense of replacing housing and land resources for each
family.

The government currently supports the development of regional growth centres to assist
in the development of strategic development patterns in the Atolls and population
consolidation. These growth centres are comprised of those key islands identified by the
national government as having the physical capabilities to support economic and
demographic growth. These key islands are slated to receive government support for the
provision of infrastructure and services. It is anticipated that they will support the
population consolidation policy as they become more desirable for resettlement, offering
improved services and accommodations for families prepared to relocate. In addition, it
is hoped that the scale of population density will support an increased level of economic
activity and maximize the spin-off effects of larger investments. These increased levels
of economic activity will also provide housing and employment opportunities for skilled
labourers from the Atolls.
The development of these regional growth centres also presents an opportunity to decentralize the skilled workforce away from its traditional centre in Male. Regional growth centres could provide strong technical resources within each region, and while travel to individual islands may still be required, the time and distance will be reduced. Increased economic activity at these regional growth centres may result in less expensive infrastructure development, and benefit nearby islands in the process. Two Regional Development Management Offices were set up in 2000, staffed by island administrators trained and funded by the national government. The private sector is also expected to participate in the gradual shift to a more decentralized and service-based economy by developing both infrastructure and employment opportunities in these regional growth centres.
Box 6: Regional Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The regional growth management strategy includes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>➢ A more integrated approach to transport, taking into consideration, sea, air, and land modes, in which economic, environmental and social objectives are met through better demand management within an integrated transport system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Base load electric generating capacity to achieve desired economic goals. The use of alternative, low impact, energy sources such as solar energy to be introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Provision of social services such as education and health facilities of a high standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Research and development related to agriculture, fisheries and marine sciences relevant to the features and needs of the regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Introduction of tourism, especially ecotourism, cultural and sports tourism built on specific comparative advantages of the region.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A New Role for the Islands

The policies and plans currently being promoted suggest a blueprint for national development in which people on the islands play a key role. The central government provides policy support for development in the Atolls, but the islands are now more responsible for their own development. The government intends to move away from what it deems excessive dependence on subsidies by building governance structures and institutional arrangements that will serve to devolve resource management responsibilities and decision-making to rural populations. The government has determined that the “right approach to rural development and social transformation in the regions requires evolving new norms of decentralized administration to ensure the participation of the masses of people in the development process” (BFS, 2001, p.57).

Island communities are being recognized as important forces in Atoll development, and although they are not independent actors, they fit into a larger relationship between the administrative levels. They have begun to respond to the changing international development climate, which increasingly incorporates actors external to the government such as non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. The private sector is especially influential in Male. Locally developed NGOs are emerging, and there is some support from international NGOs.

Traditional island organizations like the Island Development Committees and the Women's Development Committees (previously the Island Women's Committees) are
undergoing a transition as their role becomes more autonomous from the Island Office and are beginning to behave more like NGOs. The Atoll Development Committees have maintained their close ties to the government, as most island representatives on the Atoll Development Committee are the Island Chiefs. These continue to serve as important regional decision making bodies, although the structure is such that the presiding Atoll Chief, who is directly responsible to the President, makes final decisions.

The unique challenges stemming from the dispersed nature of Maldivian islands, coupled with the social customs of the country, are increasingly being addressed through strategic planning. From the tone of consulting reports and supporting documents from the government for donor agencies, it appears that this planning is influenced by globalization pressures in the form of vulnerability to market volatility, and policy influence from international organizations. I observed that planning is also responsive to the more prominent role the individual islands are playing in the development process. These diverse forces contribute to the complexity of planning challenges in the Maldives, but they also provide rich resources for both decision making and development practice.

The distinct problems facing the islands provide the framework for building island level solutions that complement existing national policies such as the population consolidation policy and the development of regional growth centres. Through increased participation in governance and development planning, island communities will attempt to build capacity for “sustainable livelihoods”. The following case study illustrates the nature of community-initiated development activities in a pilot development project in Noonu
Atoll, with a particular emphasis on the structure of the project and the resulting processes of change.
Chapter Two: References Cited


Chapter Three: Case Study

Noonu Atoll

Noonu Atoll is the site of the five year South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme pilot project (Project), and is the case study for this thesis. The Project was executed by UNOPS using national professional personnel, with the Ministry of Atoll Administration as the national focal point, and supported by the UNDP. Designed to mobilize community members to play a greater role in development planning and implementation, the Project was undertaken as an experiment in the hope that its lessons might be applied in other Atolls. Following Project completion in 2000, development activities have received ongoing support from the permanent Noonu Atoll Development Program (NADP). This Project, one of several carried out in South Asian countries under the South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme, is considered a relative success because of the local and national popularity it enjoys. In the following pages, I hope to elucidate some of the specific elements of the project that have led to its perceived success, and explain the processes that have resulted in increased community level participation in governance and development planning. Further, I would like to assess the role that increased participation through social mobilization and capacity building plays in developing improved and sustainable livelihoods in the islands.

To familiarize myself with the Maldives, I worked for two months with the Shaviyani office responsible for replicating the Noonu Project. During my time in Shaviyani Atoll
working with the project staff and living with a local family, I learned a good deal about the local institutions, culture, social practices, and the national language, Dhivehi. Joining in the social activities of Funadhoo, the island where I lived, helped me to better understand the islander’s self-image and the development issues they face.

My introduction to Noonu Atoll began on Manadhoo, the capital island of Noonu Atoll. I arrived on a dhoni with women from each of the islands in Noonu Atoll who had been attending a women’s workshop. Over the space of a month, I visited every inhabited island in the Atoll, observing project sites, development activities, and conducting interviews with local leaders, community members and project beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries of local projects included administration staff from the Island Office and Atoll Office, Island Development Committee and Women’s Development Committee members, loan recipients from the Noonu Atoll Community Fund, as well as community members at large involved in volunteer development activities such as managing pre-schools and building harbours. During my stay in Noonu, I was also exposed to discussions about specific development issues that have emerged since the inception of the project in 1996.

I will describe life in Noonu with some important demographic and economic information drawn from statistics compiled by the Noonu Atoll Office. The total population in Noonu Atoll is 13,387. The atoll consists of fourteen inhabited islands, each approximately 2 km². The population on the individual islands ranges from 338 on Magoodho to 2108 on Velidhoo. Half of the islands have a registered population of
between 600 and 900 inhabitants, though some people may live on resort islands where they work for up to eleven months per year. The population totals for each island can be found in Appendix II. There are no resort islands in Noonu Atoll, and the main economic activities are fishing, boat building, thatch weaving, rope making, agriculture, brick making, house construction, fish hook making, nut processing, sewing, retail, office work, resort and cannery labour and shipping and transportation activities. It is important to note that all of these activities occur on a small scale. I observed many people engaging in these activities, and have included photos in Appendix III.
Map 3: Noonu Atoll
The number of public posts on the islands ranges from 16 on Kudafari and Fodhoo to 124 on the atoll capital of Manadhoo. Public positions include Atoll Office staff, Island Office staff, health post staff, school staff, and powerhouse staff. Out of a total of 572 public posts in the Atoll, 248 are held by women, and 324 are held by men. Many people registered as Noonu residents hold jobs outside of the inhabited Noonu islands, predominantly on Male and in resorts. The proportion of the population working outside each island varies significantly among the islands.

**Dimensions of the Noonu Project**

The mission of the Project, initiated in 1996 and completed in 2000, was to address atoll development issues. The Project was structured so as to engage the community in development activities through social mobilization. The Project was funded by the *South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *United Nations Project Services*, and executed nationally by the *Ministry of Planning and National Development* and the *Ministry of Atolls Administration*, with support from the *Maldives Monetary Authority*. Post-2000 Project activities continue to be carried out by the *Noonu Atoll Development Program* (NADP), which is organized and funded under the auspices of the *Noonu Atoll Development Committee*. The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* emerged as part of the lessons learned by community-based organizations and Atoll officials through the social mobilization process of the *South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme* in order to directly address rural issues.
The conceptual framework below represents my understanding of the basic intentions of the Project, as I derived them from the project documents. The Project was designed to support island level contributions to development, so that the islands would be more effective at directing, implementing and managing their own development locally. Finally, it was designed to help inform national policy and to build local capacity to efficiently carry out directions from Male.
Problem: How to decrease the disparity in development indicators between concentrated urban core at Male and outer island communities

**Policy response** (National Government) Implemented with support of UNDP (Atoll local office project)

**Process Outcome**: Increased and more appropriate development at community level, national resources distributed to atoll offices used efficiently within effective local governance structure

---

**Strategy**: Decentralization

---

**Policy-Project Implementation**
- (implemented at National Level)
- Capacity building (by project staff and expatriate experts)

**Implementation Principle**: Social mobilization

---

**Project Implementation**
- (implemented at Local Level)
- Community participation in governance and development

**Substantive Outcome**: Poverty alleviation

---

**Project Implementation**
- (implemented at local level through inter-agency cooperation)
- Community direction of needs, community projects (credit, environmental action plan)

**Process of Change**: Sustainable livelihoods
The Noonu Project recognized challenges specific to the local context, and acknowledged that the sectoral components of community development are linked and must all be part of any agenda for change. Though important, this breadth of scope made the project difficult to implement because it dispersed resources over a large number of activities and participants.

The Project opened the Noonu Atoll Development Program office on Manadhoo, and staffed it with a Social Development Officer and an Administrative Assistant. There was a one year transition period in the last year of the South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme/United Nations Development Programme (SAPAP/UNDP) project, where local project staff were trained in the administration of project activities, notably the Noonu Atoll Community Fund. A Program Executive Committee was also formed, consisting of members from the Noonu Atoll Office and staff from the Noonu Atoll Development Program. The Noonu Atoll Development Committee is responsible for overseeing the Noonu Atoll Development Program, while the Atoll Office and the profits from the Noonu Atoll Community Fund provide the resources for the Noonu Atoll Development Program. The Island Development Committee is responsible for managing the Noonu Atoll Community Fund on each island, reporting to the Noonu Atoll Development Program.

The Noonu Project initially developed an administrative governance mechanism for the program, and carefully incorporated community needs as identified through participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Project documents show that the implementation of the Noonu
Project followed three phases. During the first phase of establishment, the social mobilization process was initiated, and capacity building opportunities were offered to existing community-based organizations (CBOs). Community groups providing entrepreneurial services were activated in the second phase, and priority productive investments (PPI, also known as productive physical infrastructure) were implemented in the third phase. Implementation support included providing assistance to community-based organizations in island communities for the development of PPI plans, the writing of funding proposals, and the management and implementation of the PPI projects. The following table lists the PPI projects identified for each island.
Table 1: Productive Physical Infrastructure (PPI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Island</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hembadhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Construction of teachers quarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kulhudhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Extension of community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Construction of teachers quarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ken'dhikolhu</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Construction of pre-school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Maalhendhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Construction of seawall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Construction of school extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td>Construction of community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Kudafari</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Deepening of access channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Pre-school construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td>Construction of community centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Landhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Breakwater construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Water tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td>Pre-school construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Maafaru</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Water tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lhohi</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Jetty construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Water tanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td>Pre-school construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Miladhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Pre-school construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Magoodhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Jetty construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Installation of street lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Manadhoo</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Power house construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>Breakwater construction</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td>Pre-school construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Priority 2</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Holhudhoo</td>
<td>Breakwater construction</td>
<td>Construction of health centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Fodhdhoo</td>
<td>Deepening of harbour/breakwater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Velidhoo</td>
<td>Pre-school construction</td>
<td>Garbage disposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Project officers acted as catalysts for action, and the Project itself supported local activities through the provision of resources and funding. Resources included administrative assistance, training, and transport. Administrative support was provided in the form of typing, printing and faxing services, otherwise unavailable on the islands, and transport assistance consisted of a boat made available to Project staff for their travel between the islands. Through an arrangement with the Bank of Maldives, access to banking services was provided by the Mobile Bank. By leveraging the relationships between larger agencies, and creating a local body, the Noonu Atoll Community Fund, to provide financial services, the project was able to stimulate the banking sector to provide a wider range of services to support local economic activities. The difficulty of accessing capital on the islands, which had been a barrier to economic development, has been addressed through the creation of the Noonu Atoll Development Fund and training from the Noonu Atoll Development Program.
Photo 2: Mobile Bank
The Bank of Maldives provides basic financial services to islands in the atolls through the Mobile Bank. This boat visits inhabited islands and accepts deposits into savings accounts and dispenses money from existing accounts.
Social Mobilization

The concept of social mobilization informed the philosophy of developing the capacity of communities to undertake development activities, and, in the Maldives, was coupled with support from the state and the institutionalization of relationships between the communities and the national government. The process of social mobilization began with the raising of awareness amongst community members about the potential role they could play in development, thus laying the groundwork for shifting the responsibility for project planning, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation to the community. The Project was intended to help communities set, work towards, and ultimately achieve local development goals. This was done in order to internalize development inputs and guarantee the relevance of projects for the local community. Social mobilization would also contribute to capacity building in the communities as both skills and confidence were gained through their experiences. Finally, it was hoped that the Project would encourage economic activity to support the retention of technical skills within local communities.

An important element of the Project was the utilization of Island Development Committees comprised of islanders who would act with increasing autonomy as quasi-NGOs within the emerging Maldivian civil society. As communities assumed responsibility for development planning and implementation, their role would shift from that of a beneficiary to an actual agent of development. Accordingly, Project staff did not initiate specific development activities, recognizing that without the concomitant support
from island communities, development undertakings would not secure support in the long term. In the case of Noonu Atoll, the Project staff provided support for existing initiatives and worked with local leaders to identify and address local problems. The nature of the process was such that the community was fully aware of the limited resources available from within the Project budget. As a result, prioritization played a key role in determining the activities to be undertaken. This process augmented the strategic and comprehensive planning capacity of the community groups by framing decisions within the scope of local capacity and available resources.

In practice, social mobilization in the Maldives depends a great deal on the initiating agents of local development, as individuals are often initially reluctant to participate, having little past personal experience with development activities. As a result, islanders were vulnerable to political pressures to participate in a process with which they were unfamiliar. Although a strong tradition of participation exists in the Maldives, community involvement in the past focused on implementation, rather than the planning and prioritizing of development actions. The capacity building Project initially encouraged mostly small scale initiatives that would help build the confidence and planning capacity of community groups. Island leaders and community members on Kudafari, for example, did not initially support the Project, but once they mobilized resources to buy a printer for their school, a relatively small project, they built trust in the concept of social mobilization and the island of Kudafari came to be one of the greatest supporters of the Project. Once the islanders began to have confidence in their own ability to plan and undertake development activities, they initiated an electrification
project with 100,000Rf from the UNDP for cable, distribution boxes, a generator, and other materials.

**Change in the Islands: Project Structure Components**

Institutional development and economic development were the two primary components of the Noonu project. These two components were identified in Project documents as important for securing long term support for development activities and in ensuring the meaningful participation of people in development activities. Economic development, with a particular focus on infrastructure development, was the most easily recognized and commonly acknowledged benefit of development in the islands. However, rather than simply developing infrastructure or providing services, the project sought to build the local capacity necessary to undertake these processes.

Capacity building was achieved by lending support to local community organizations, while at the same time encouraging local government institutions to consolidate Atoll resources for development and make strategic decisions using participatory processes. Islanders were included in decision making and development planning processes primarily through two existing local committees - the Island Development Committee and the Women's Development Committee. The project capacity building activities included training and increasing support for those local economic activities capable of improving livelihoods and building greater concentrations of economic activity. Supporting capacity building while also stimulating other economic development activities provided
opportunities for trained and educated people to remain on their home islands, instead of moving to Male or resort islands to work.

One successful example of an income generating activity in the islands that was beneficial not only to individuals, but also to the larger economy of the community was a loan granted to a businessman who managed a ferry service. The man, from Landhoo, received a loan to upgrade his dhoni in order to ship cargo. Because there are few intra-Atoll transport services, he also provided a passenger ferry service when he was not shipping cargo. This service helped islanders who produced goods for sale but found it difficult to transport them to market in a timely and economical fashion. The retired Island Chief, Island Doctor, and the loan recipient all said in interviews that the ferry service and improved island access due to the jetty have increased the ability of islanders to sell products such as bananas, screwpines and London apples to other islands, and have enabled shopkeepers on Landhoo to sell a greater variety of products. In turn, they say that more money is spent and kept on the island. The ferry service benefited these people, and in doing so, helped encourage a wide range of income generating activities. As for the loan recipient, he used his income from ferrying to pay for the education of his children, and also to send one of his children to India for medical assistance.

The Noonu Project also supported the voluntary population consolidation policy, in that it facilitated a consensus-based decision making process about resource allocation amongst the islands. As with any decision, certain uneven power dynamics were clearly in evidence, but each island was represented by its respective Island Chief on the Atoll
Development Committee, whose meetings gradually began to reflect a shift towards thinking in a more regional fashion.

The Atoll Development Committee acted as a unified agent for development, channelling development efforts of islands throughout the Atoll. At an Atoll Development Committee meeting in July 2001, for example, the Atoll Development Committee agreed to purchase a large number of rainwater collection tanks for individuals on the islands to lease-to-own. The Atoll Development Committee agreed to give this a high priority, and used the large order to bring the cost of transportation down by securing a lower bulk shipping rate. Through this arrangement, the larger scale of the Atoll level offered greater support and resources to the islands, which were unable to independently finance such a large order.

At the same time, the Atoll Development Committee remained sensitive to development and prioritization decisions made at the island level, allowing the islands to make local decisions more independently. The prioritization of Island Development Plans formulated at the island level was accepted by the Atoll Development Committee without alteration, indicating a growing level of trust from the Atoll Development Committee in the work of island administrators. The Island Development Plans were subsequently accepted and funded by the central government.
**Development Administration: The Noonu Atoll Development Program**

The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* (NADP) was created as a mechanism through which to institutionalize project activities over time, and provide support and resources for development activities following the completion of the SAPAP/UNDP project cycle. The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* strengthened the function of Atoll and island level local community institutions as agents of development. The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* was designed to improve the coordination between Island and Atoll Offices, community organizations, the National Government, and donor agencies. The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* provided a system of support for local level development plans and initiatives beyond the scope of the five year SAPAP/UNDP project, and also assisted in harmonizing institutional resources at the atoll level for development. The presence of the *Noonu Atoll Development Program* permitted development activities to be promoted and supported locally, and consolidated development activities previously dispersed throughout the various sections at the Atoll and island offices. The continuity provided by the *Noonu Atoll Development Program* was a critical element in maintaining a high level of community support within the Atoll, and helped provide the momentum and expertise needed to continue development activities. The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* staff, one Social Development Officer and one Administrative Assistant, administered the *Noonu Atoll Community Fund*, wrote and directed funding proposals from islands to external donors, provided administrative support for those development projects initiated at the island level, and disseminated information about the *Noonu Atoll Development Program* as well as community development projects and priorities.
Information about the most marginalized families on the islands was gathered through the *Disadvantaged Household Survey*, where *Noonu Atoll Development Program* staff visited homes to collect data on household expenses and income. Disadvantaged households were identified at the beginning of the Project activities in the Atoll, and the *Noonu Atoll Development Program* staff visited the households after five years of project activities. Disadvantaged households were identified through the Island Office, which keeps a list of disadvantaged homes who receive support from the community through Zakath, the Muslim custom of donating a portion of a household income to disadvantaged households. The survey also gathered information about the number of individuals in each household. On the next page is a photograph of Abdulla Jinaah, the *Noonu Atoll Development Program* Administrative Assistant, asking questions as part of the *Disadvantaged Household Survey* in 2001.
Photo 3: Disadvantaged Household Survey
Abdulla Jinaah, *NADP Administrative Assistant*, asks questions about household size, income and problems as part of the Disadvantaged Household Survey.
Institutional Development

Institutional development consisted of the implementation of training programs targeted towards islanders wishing to develop employable skills, as well as the engagement of island leaders and government representatives in management of local development projects. Training topics ranged over a broad array of topics, from electrical mechanics and sewing to leadership and credit management. In addition to training, the institutional development component of the project included improving coordination between institutions, increasing access to resources through resource mobilization, and providing support for community-based organizations (CBOs). These community-based organizations, including the Island Development Committee and the Women's Development Committee (formerly known as the Island Women's Committee) built capacity by gaining experience from their involvement with locally initiated and managed development projects.

Women's Development Committees are responsible for many of the maintenance duties on the islands, such as regularly sweeping the public streets and catering public events. The emphasis on many islands is now changing, though, and women are learning greater management skills as they take more responsibility for all aspects of project development. Women tend to identify education as a focus for development, and on many islands, local Women's Development Committees have initiated the building and running of pre-schools. The island of Henbadhoo recently received funding from a New Zealand donor agency for a new pre-school building, pictured below, while the
community in Khuludhoo has spent Rf 9,293 on salaries for pre-school teachers in the past two years.

*Women's Development Committees* are also organizing to mobilize resources, and the *Women's Development Committee* on Khuludhoo called a meeting of the business people on the island, asking the shopkeepers not to sell phone cards. Instead, phone cards would be sold by the *Women's Development Committee* and the 10% profit margin from the telephone company, Dhiraagu, would be used for community projects. The shopkeepers agreed, and the *Women's Development Committee* has since made a Rf14,178 net profit in two years. The *Women's Development Committee* has also helped to build a rest house, purchase a computer for the school and a generator for the island.
Photo 4: Henbadhoo Pre-School
This Pre-School was funded by a New Zealand donor agency, and built by the local community. The Women's Development Committee was responsible for gathering and transporting some of the building materials.
Many islands emphasize health promotion, usually initiated by the Women's Development Committee. The Women's Development Committee on Landhoo engaged in a number of successful campaigns including mosquito control, non-smoking, and a campaign to prevent early marriage and encourage education for girls. In addition, the community of Landhoo requested a health post, which was subsequently supported by the government. As a result, basic services such as the monthly weighing of babies and vaccinations, which were very expensive due to the cost of transport to other islands, are now available on Landhoo. The Women's Development Committee on Henbadhoo focused on awareness of population control, addressing problems associated with early marriage, divorce, and the social problems experienced by women.

The two main aspects of institutional capacity building are administration and coordination. Administration is important because community participation is enabled through the establishment of local institutions to carry out development activities, and the involvement of local individuals and expertise in the construction of such institutions. Coordination is important for establishing clear roles and relationships between the existing and emerging local organizations such as the Island Development Committees, Women's Development Committees and youth groups which are beginning to take on the roles of NGOs.

The community participation aspect of the Project seeks to expand the traditional decision making role of local communities beyond project implementation to all stages of
the process. The Maldives has traditionally always involved the broadest representation
of people possible in any consultation process, since island populations are small and
island leaders as well as Project staff recognized that it is essential to prevent the
establishment of factions opposed to development. In addition to targeting more
vulnerable households, considerable care is exercised in ensuring that both the people
with close access to power and those who are relatively more disadvantaged with regard
to government power but may be influential through family relationships on the island
are involved and informed.

At the island level people were informed that no outside assistance would be provided
except for technical and administrative support to projects generated at the local level, as
well as limited funding to support these local initiatives. This emphasized not only the
independence, but also the responsibility of communities to engage in local prioritizing,
resource mobilization and development planning and implementation. Finally, the
Project was coordinated and implemented by the national government and through
national UNDP counterparts, ensuring that there was sufficient political, administrative
and institutional support for local initiatives. Accountability was built into several levels
of organization within the Project, through reporting responsibilities from the Island
Development Committee and Women’s Development Committee to the Noonu Atoll
Development Program, its Program Executive Committee, the Atoll Development
Committee and the Government of the Maldives.
Local committees are now acting with greater autonomy, and the role of the Island Development Committee is beginning to include planning, implementation and management of local projects. On Kudafari, the Island Development Committee initiated and now supervises expenditures for electricity and farming projects. On some islands, it is the contribution of the community that allows infrastructure projects to be undertaken. The community of Kendikholo built the school, mosque, jetty, powerhouse, women’s mosque, and the old Island Office. A local organization on Khuludhoo suggested a scheme to renovate an old mosque and contribute to community programs. The organization offered to work free of charge to tile and furnish the mosque, and asked that in return a percentage of the tiling be donated to other development projects on the island. As a result, and 5% of the tiles were given directly to the local organization to be contributed to other community programs.

Economic Development: Community Based Microcredit and Banking Services

In order to support a sufficient scale of development activities in the Atolls and stem the out-migration of skilled people from the islands, adequate economic opportunities must exist. In addition, there must be sufficient capital and financial services to support island level economic activities.

Economic development activities under the Noonu Project included community based microcredit and seed grants as well as the expansion of national banking services to the Atoll. Both the seed grants and microcredit helped encourage income generating activities. In addition the seed grants could be used in developing productive physical
infrastructure. The *Noonu Atoll Development Program* project also supported infrastructure projects by assisting *Island Development Committees* and *Women's Development Committees* in the writing and translation of grant applications to external donors. The island of Maafaru received funding from the Canada Mission Fund for water tanks as a result of grant-writing support from the *Noonu Atoll Development Program*. 
Photo 5: Maafaru Water Tanks
Abdul Raheem Ali, the Assistant Island Chief of Maafaru, stands beside the Community Drinking Water Tanks. The material for the tanks was provided by the Canadian Mission Fund, and the labour to build the base and install the tanks was provided by the community. There are 20 tanks, each with a capacity of 2,500 litres. The tanks are able to service the entire community on Maafaru for the duration of the dry season from August to March. The Island Development Committee is responsible for maintenance of the tanks.
Those income generating activities supported by microcredit lending schemes managed by the community provided a means of increasing economic activity and self-sufficiency within the island communities. The provision of financial support for local economic activity offered women and men the capital needed to enable their entrepreneurial skills.

The government carried out this project with UNDP assistance, intending to develop a mechanism that would allow islanders to continue their development activities with a long-term time horizon. The Noonu Atoll Community Fund (NACF) was a component of the Noonu Atoll Development Program, developed as a demonstration aimed at convincing local authorities, the government, and other development agencies in the country that community-based microcredit could be viable in the country context of the Maldives and would be required for emerging sustainable livelihood programs for Atoll development. This new institutional arrangement gave the Noonu Atoll Community Fund the power to administer loans at the Atoll and island levels without interference from the central government.

Prior to the availability of banking services through the Bank of Maldives, services were expensive and difficult to access. A resident of Velidhoo applying for a loan would have to travel to the nearest Bank of Maldives branch at Naifaru Island in Lhaviyani Atoll for a cost of approximately Rf 500, and spend a minimum of one day on the island waiting for the loan to be processed. The Noonu Atoll Community Fund made it possible to apply for and receive loans on any island in Noonu Atoll. Many people on the islands were thus
able to open savings accounts for the first time. In some islands, such as Kudafari and Henbadhoo, savings accounts were mostly in the name of the woman of the household. Savings were used for house building and repairs, emergencies, the support of small businesses, education for children (which often included periods of study on other islands), emergency medical needs and health care. Islanders appreciated the utility of savings accounts in enabling more individual control over the planning and management of personal financial matters.

The *Noonu Atoll Community Fund* was received positively on most islands, but some barriers to fund access still exist. For example, on the island of Maafaru there exists a perception that people who take out loans are by definition poor. In addition, because of possible favouritism, some islanders felt that loan decision making power should actually be exercised at the Atoll level, rather than the island level. Island people on Maafaru identified the lack of anonymity with the *Noonu Atoll Community Fund* as another barrier to more extensive utilization of the *Noonu Atoll Community Fund*.

As of May 31, 2001, the *Noonu Atoll Community Fund* had disbursed 81 loans. 58 loans were to men, and 21 to women. Two of the recipients were community groups, and the rest were individuals. The table on the following page details how the loans were used and which income generating activities were the most popular.
Table 2: Type of Income Generating Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of income generating activity</th>
<th>Number of loan recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of business: retail, bakery, café</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building: carpentry, welding and metal work, masonry and construction, making hollow blocks</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing and processing: producing salted, dried fish; reef fishing; freezing fish, replacing family fishing boat engine, purchasing fishing boat, upgrading fishing devices</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport: buying a small intra-atoll ferry boat, upgrading passenger boat, building passenger boat</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity: upgrading island electrification</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, poultry</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garment making/sewing</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting up a classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Technical training is one type of support for economic development provided through the Project. For example, people on Landhoo were interested in tasks involving skilled labour, but lacked the needed technical knowledge. As a result, they had to seek services on other islands, and at times on other Atolls. Following the Project, valuable skills such as carpentry, tiling, circumcision and agriculture were understood by trained people, and services became available locally.

The Noonu Atoll Community Fund provided opportunities for a number of income-generating activities that would not have been possible without the investment of the community fund. A number of the demonstration projects, however, proved to be unprofitable. In particular, the poultry and farming activities often failed. A poultry producing project on Manadhoo was abandoned when the chickens got sick and died; similarly, an agricultural project was abandoned when a pest destroyed all of the trees. A poultry project on Henbadhoo also failed after one year because loan recipients had not received training and did not know about the feeding habits of chicken, the temperature, and the treatment in case of sickness. Agriculture and poultry activities were largely undertaken by women.

The problems with the demonstrations projects identified stemmed from the failure to provide technical training to loan recipients. Lack of technical know-how prevented them from effectively addressing problems when they arose. For instance, the Women's Development Committee on Landhoo cleared 40,000 square feet in the jungle to grow
chillies, but a pest destroyed the entire crop. The women, who still wished to pursue the project, requested assistance from the Ministry of Agriculture in identifying the pest. The pest was never properly identified, however, and the project was unable to continue.

Project staff and islanders alike agree that training must be provided to new businesses along with the loans from the Noonu Atoll Community Fund. A number of projects have failed due to a lack of technical knowledge. On Velidhoo, for example, one family took a loan to buy machinery for their bakery, but due to a lack of technical knowledge, had failed to account for the cost of the machinery maintenance and adaptation. The family purchased two machines for a total cost of 26,000Rf, one of which they were never able to use since it requires a 3 phase current, which would cost an additional 15,000Rf. The other machine is now broken. The bakery is still in operation and the family continues to make payments on the loan, even though the owner has had to take an outside job to help pay off the loan. The machine would have reduced the production time in half, but production had to return to manual operations. Besides this, the family also lacked marketing skills, and although production increased, they were unable to sell everything they produced.

Training and technical assistance alone are not sufficient for economic development, however, as opportunities for work must also be available. Training in tiling, masonry and carpentry on Kendikholo was successful for the individuals trained, but few professional opportunities were available on the island. Consequently, those trained had to leave the island to seek work. People who had successfully trained as boat builders on
Fodhoo left for work in island resorts where there is steady work, pay, food and lodging available. In short, anyone possessing marketable skills will have a strong incentive to leave their community where opportunities are severely restricted.

**Awareness Building**

Awareness building was the first phase of the Project. The process served to inform community members and leaders about the Project and its development objectives, and fostered a greater interest in the role the island would play in governance and development planning. The Project’s focus on awareness has had a significant positive impact on education, and has, in particular, led to more girls attending school, and for longer periods of time. On Henbadhoo, more girls now stay in school beyond the fourth grade, and some continue on to secondary studies. There are currently some women from Henbadhoo studying in Male, and others are undergoing a teacher training program that will allow them to return to Henbadhoo to teach and raise families. On Fodhoo, the focus on education has changed attitudes even further. When people have money, they now spend it on education rather than house-building. Families consider it a good investment if students come back to the island or send remittances from other islands where they have found work. For example, people will live in houses made from coconut palms, while paying for students to go to school. Later when the students finish school, they will start building a house made of brick.

The Noonu Projects’ broad scope enabled community members to make decisions they could support through institutional and economic development. Though the populations
in the islands are small, Project activities attempt to build regional relationships that will support a greater scale of economic activity and access to services. The increased level of community participation in governance and development planning has been achieved largely through shifting institutional arrangements between the national government and its island and atoll level administrators, and through building support for local initiatives.

I will reflect on these changes in the next chapter, and identify the features of the Project that could offer valuable lessons for other vulnerable and isolated communities. Further, I will analyze the theme of community level participation as a means by which to achieve development objectives.
Chapter Four: Reflections and Analysis

This thesis has examined community level participation in governance and development planning, using the Noonu Project as a case for study. The objective of the Noonu Project was to build capacity for sustainable livelihoods using community level participation. Below, I review the processes of change resulting from the Project, identify and analyze successful Project elements, and outline the structure and form of the new relationships that emerged following the projects’ implementation. I also discuss the implications of my analysis for community level participation strategies in governance and development planning projects in other vulnerable and isolated communities.

The Noonu Project was designed to support the implementation of the voluntary population consolidation policy. Two key techniques were employed to serve these objectives: institutional development and economic development. The small size of populations on the islands enabled a significant impact for Project activities, but effectively serving those small populations dispersed over a relatively large number of isolated outlying islands was challenging. The small populations of the target islands allowed for Project activities to target individuals within the island communities, specifically addressing development efforts to the most disadvantaged community members. The Project also benefited from a lack of competition or inter-group conflict. This lack of conflict was a product of the coherent and homogeneous cultural structure found in the Maldives.
Successful Project Elements

The success of the Project can largely be attributed to the successful incorporation and meaningful involvement of many interested and relevant individuals and groups into the Project process - community level groups and government administrators to name a few. Although this thesis has largely focused on the importance of attitudinal changes and capacity to undertake development activities at the community level, another essential element of the success of this Project is the active involvement of all levels of the Maldivian government. In the following section, I identify the elements of the Project that contribute both to the effectiveness of the Project and to its perceived success. I categorize these components of success by the role they play as either project, internal or external factors of success.

The Noonu Project was based on a South Asian model sponsored by the South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP) that is sensitive and responsive to the unique circumstances of the country in which it is being implemented. In the Maldives it was adapted to address those particular issues facing small, isolated communities that are vulnerable to economic change and environmental sensitivity. The Project was planned with the support of the national government, and constructed in such a way that it would be capable of drawing upon the strengths of existing community organizations. In doing so, the Project posed no direct challenge to those in power. Instead, it sought to further develop and strengthen existing institutions through capacity building and an increasing devolution of responsibilities, while developing new relationships between these groups and the central bureaucracy. The Project did not effect the same changes on every island,
but there was evidence of a greater exchange of information about development activities between the local administrators and the community, and between the national government and local administrators. This exchange of information increased the skill and interest level of the community and helped to build a greater impetus for development.

The Project structure incorporated a participatory approach allowing for flexibility from the onset. Through participatory rural appraisal, communities were able to identify and prioritize projects that would be supported. Because the communities were clearly and completely informed about their role, and provided with the relevant information, they were able to make more effective and strategic decisions. Project flexibility convinced community members that local development would be driven by their concerns, and was a critical element in helping to build trust. Not only did this help to strengthen autonomy within the community, it also contributed to a heightened and continued sense of responsibility and capability on the part of island communities.

Project activities were developed in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion, helping to instil in the community a sense of ownership and responsibility from the beginning. No projects would be initiated unless the communities first chose to do so. After taking this initial step, technical and financial support was provided by the Project. As a result, the Project only supported community developed initiatives and did not interfere in the existing planning process. While the community responses were often uncertain in the initial stages, once some small activities had been successfully undertaken, communities gained
confidence in their ability to assume responsibility for decision-making and development planning. Awareness of the role that community members can play in development activities was one of the most oft cited outcomes of the Noonu Project in the interviews I conducted with island leaders, community members and project staff.

The integration of institutional and economic development also helped to provide the support needed to pursue Project objectives. Its impact is difficult to measure, and will only become more apparent in the longer-term. Institutional development in the Maldivian context was provided through support for existing institutions. As a result, the Island Development Committees and Women's Development Committees remain active, and are forging new relationships with Island Offices as they become increasingly autonomous. Not all these committees have changed in a similar fashion, however, and some islands still favour a format where the priorities and activities of the committees are determined by the Island Office. As well, the committees still depend on the Island Offices for administrative support such as access to telephones, fax machines, typing and printing, and mail service. The development of greater capacity within these committees will benefit the island communities over the long-term, but this success is also contingent upon the success of the economic development initiatives.

In order to retain the necessary skills in the islands, it is essential that suitable and sufficient economic opportunities be available for skilled labourers on their respective home islands. The economic development initiatives of the Project were essential to ensure that at least some economic opportunities would be generated on each of the
islands. Again, this is a long-term goal of the Project and the results cannot be measured at this time. The Project anticipated a number of obstacles, and it was the integration of institutional and economic development that helped to overcome those obstacles. The question remains whether the scale and nature of these forms of development will be adequate to support future development. Certainly, the access to capital and banking services through the Noonu Atoll Community Fund and the Mobile Banking service responded to needs that had been identified in the islands. However, it remains to be seen whether the scale of this response and the overall national objectives of consolidating the population into regional growth centres will be able to sustain development in the future.

Internal to the Islands

Culturally, island communities are quite homogeneous. Island Development Committees and Women's Development Committees have existed historically as a medium for community involvement in island issues. The small populations on the islands makes the consultation of community members both possible and essential in order to generate the support for implementing decisions at the local level.

It would be very difficult to implement projects without the support of islanders. For example, one day on the island of Funadhoo I joined the neighbouring women in the scheduled sweeping of the island. Each household is responsible for sending one woman to participate, but that day, only half of the island’s households were represented. The women waited for more than an hour for the other women to arrive. When they did not, the women refused to begin work and informed the Assistant Island Chief that unless the
customary contributions were strictly enforced, the island would not be swept. In this way, the local customs required not only the support but also the participation of all community households.

The increased awareness of development issues in the islands is a successful outcome of the Project that has generated even more support for and commitment to Project activities. By announcing the meeting times and locations over the Island Office loudspeaker, or circulating the message via a “town-crier” circling the island with a megaphone on a bicycle, the Project was able to reach out to all islanders, not just those already involved. This emphasis on communicating with all community members through clearly advertised community meetings facilitated access to the Project for even the more disadvantaged community members.

External to the Islands

Several pre-existing political and cultural circumstances were supportive of the Project. First, the Maldivian government had prioritized development in the outer islands as part of its national development strategy. Second, the objectives of the national government were already being shaped by local concerns, through recent participatory processes such as Vision 2020.

The groups targeted by the Project included government policy makers, island communities, and staff from the relevant Ministries. This ensured that Project gains were used to build systematic support for community level participation in a cooperative
fashion with the related government administrators and decision makers. The actual
development objectives of the Project were part of a national strategy to improve living
conditions in the outer islands. This was to be done by reducing the disparities in income
and opportunity, building economies of scale and supporting population consolidation.
As such, the Project was designed to involve local communities from the beginning. As
was discussed, however, the tension between stronger community level structures at the
island level and the expectation that island populations will voluntary relocate to other
islands will undoubtedly continue to pose challenges. Community members from
Fodhoo, for example, have no intention of relocating. When asked what they thought
about the population consolidation policy, knowing that they were slated to be relocated
and would therefore no longer receive government support for infrastructure and other
development, islanders replied that others would be welcome to relocate to Fodhoo, but
they would not themselves relocate to another island. The community had developed a
strong sense of commitment and responsibility to its island by initiating and completing
the building of a new jetty which enabled greater access to markets and services on other
islands. The resolution of regional and national vs. local interests will require further
attention. Mechanisms supported by the Project, such as increased transparency and
information exchange, may assist in resolving such conflict.

The process of Vision 2020 was only one of many participatory methods utilized to
inform the formulation of national policy. The acceptance of island prioritization at the
Atoll level shows a significant shift in the level of confidence in island level decision
makers. The inclusion of some Island Development Plans in the national budget also
illustrates a genuine commitment on the part of the government in devolving responsibilities to the community level.

The government has also committed to replicate the Noonu Project, and three similar projects are currently being undertaken in Shaviyani, Vaavu, and Laamu Atolls. Given the high level of involvement required by the central government to support the Project, the main challenge to the replication efforts is to maintain the government commitment to support increased self-determination at the Island level.

**Implications for Planning**

The Noonu Project successfully incorporated a complex array of development strategies designed to increase community level participation in governance and development planning. Though this Project was widely considered a great success, I would caution readers that the Project structure itself may not be sufficient in itself for other communities seeking to replicate the results achieved in Noonu Atoll. The perceived success of the Project is based only upon its short-term outputs, and it has yet to be seen whether the longer-term objectives of achieving "sustainable livelihoods" for the islanders can be secured, especially in light of the extremely small, dispersed populations and the dearth of natural resources.

What lessons for isolated and vulnerable communities can be learned from this case? I will begin by reiterating a number of the unique features in the Maldives, as these features had significant implications for the way in which the project was designed,
implemented, and ultimately perceived. The islands in the Maldives are very small villages really, which means that project impacts can be seen very quickly, and often with a relatively low level of investment. In addition, the high level of support and coordination provided by the national government has helped contribute to the success of the Project, even when individual government staff members were not overly supportive of the Project.

Through my experience with the Project, I witnessed a great deal of enthusiasm amongst local communities for taking on greater responsibility. I also noted, however, that with the completion of the Noonu Project, community members and government counterparts alike expressed less interest in their continued involvement than in the tangible outcomes of the Project. The visible outputs, such as infrastructure and services, were recognized as the primary benefits, instead of the success the Project had in building capacity that was fundamental to the Project design and will contribute to the sustainability of future development activities.

I would argue that the most important feature of the Project in Noonu was its careful consideration from its inception of the need to create and support institutions that would support Atoll development activities for the long term. The Project design was flexible, incorporating the priorities of the communities identified through participatory rural appraisal. Activities were initiated, planned, implemented and managed locally, and appropriate technical and financial support was provided. The Project helped to build institutional capacity locally and assisted in the development of innovative institutional
structures to support its activities. These included the Mobile Bank which for the first time provided financial services to the atoll and supported both the Noonu Atoll Community Fund and the Noonu Atoll Development Program. The Noonu Atoll Community Fund and the Noonu Atoll Development Program are locally designed and administered, and the Mobile Bank is nationally-supported.

Significant resources were dedicated to raising the community’s awareness of the role it could play in development planning and governance, and it was this awareness that encouraged broad participation in discussions about the direction of local development activities. This increased awareness about development activities resulted in improved support for the activities being undertaken locally. The emphasis on development planning at the local level also pressured local institutions and government administrators into being more accountable to the local communities, and raised the expectations of local representatives on regional decision making bodies. Increased dialogue between community members and government administrators about development issues also led to more interest in strategic planning. Finally, prioritization schemes helped to further foment discourse and decision making about potential development activities amongst community members.

Conclusion

The Project, as I observed it, succeeded in involving a greater number of local people in dialogue and decision making about development, and is clearly leading to a greater capacity for undertaking development activities locally. It has not yet successfully
addressed the conflicts between increasing island level participation and plans for regional consolidation and resettlement. Given the grand scope of the Project, including institutional and economic development to support Project activities, and the short time it has been operational, it has had a significant positive impact in the islands. But whether these changes can be sustained and how further resources will be mobilized remains unclear. Increased participation at the community level has undoubtedly motivated islanders to improve their skills and become better organized, but it would be unrealistic to expect islanders to provide all development services in place of the state. Such an unrealistic expectation can be held in participatory projects, I have observed. A good question is: how can community participation in development planning be increased in a way that truly affects governance and development planning?

I would say that the true success of the Project is found within the process of change it has initiated, encouraging community level participation in governance and development planning through capacity building. Significant support from the Maldivian government right from the beginning was critical to achieving this process of change, and the government's ongoing commitment to respect island-level decisions will be necessary to ensure that the development initiatives in the islands can be sustained over the longer term. The national government, however, is itself dependent on a great deal of international aid, which paradoxically may not be forthcoming in the future, as the standard of living in the Maldives improves.
Though it is not sufficient to support continued national development alone, community level participation in governance and development planning clearly serves to increase local awareness of and interest in development planning, enables long-term and strategic planning, and increases community and governmental support for development oriented initiatives to improve education, promote health, and build new infrastructure.
Bibliography


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Helping Disadvantaged Families to Uplift their Living Condition through Social Mobilization.


Success and Failure of “Group” Activities in Noonu Atoll.


Websites:


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Economic and Social Council (1a) Press Release ECOSOC/5910 27th Meeting (PM) 17 July 2000.
Appendix I.1 Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What development projects have been undertaken recently in the island?
2. How were these projects initiated?
3. Who is responsible for the project planning, implementation, and management?
4. How/are islanders informed about national policies like resettlement?
5. How are community meetings organized?
6. Do/how do islanders use the micro credit fund/savings accounts?
7. Were any of these projects done as part of the SAPAP project?
8. What are the biggest changes since the inception of the SAPAP project?
9. What is the impact of the SAPAP project on women?
10. What are the greatest challenges to projects/development/life on the island?
11. How have/have people/islanders expressed an interest in participating in development?
12. What income generating activities, training, other, have been used to support this participation?
13. Have there been any changes in the standard of living since the project began?
Appendix I.ii  List of Interviewees

The following is a list of all interviewees in alphabetical order by last name. The title of the interviewee is included where appropriate, and the home island name is preceded by atoll name. Katheeb refers to an Island Chief, while Kuda Katheeb is an Assistant Island Chief. Loan recipients received a loan from the Noonu Atoll Community Fund (NACF).

Abdulraheem, Mubeena Assistant Island Chief, Women’s Development Committee, Shaviyani Komandoo
Adam, Moosa Fathuhee, Assistant Atoll Chief, Shaviyani Atoll
Adham, Aishath, Women’s Development Committee President, Shaviyani Maaughdhoo
Ali, Abdul Raheem, Kuda Katheeb, Noonu Mafaru
Ali, Abdulganee, Kuda Katheeb, Noonu Magoodhoo
Ali, Yoosuf, Loan Recipient, Noonu Velidhoo
Aslam, Ahamed, Shaviyani Goidhoo
Dawood, Hanna, Women’s Development Committee President, Noonu Landhoo
Farook, Director, Ministry of Atolls Administration
Haleem, Adam, Project Coordinator, Atoll Development for Sustainable Livelihoods, Shaviyani Funadhoo
Hassan, Ibrahim, Kuda Katheeb, Noonu Fodhoo
Hassan, Mohamed
Hussain, Ahmed, Loan Recipient, Noonu Landhoo
Ibrahim, Abdul Gafoor, Shaviyani Maakandoodhoo
Ibrahim, Shafeeqa, Teacher, Shaviyani Komandoo
Imad, Mohamed, Spatial Planning, Ministry of Planning and National Development
Johnson, Neslyn Andrew
Kaleyfaan, Hassan, Atoll Chief, Noonu Atoll
Mahmood, Abdul, Katheeb, Noonu Kendikholo
Mohamed, Abbas, Businessman, Male/Funadhoo
Mohamed, Abdul Razzaag, Kuda Katheeb, Shaviyani Funadhoo (Katheeb, Filubhadhoo)
Mohamed, Aisath
Mohamed, Ibrahim, Katheeb, Noonu Mafaru
Mohamed, Shareefa
Moosa, Ali, Katheeb, Shaviyani Funadhoo
Moosa, Mohamed Waheed, Shaviyani Bileffaahee
Moosa, Sam’oon, Shaviyani Noomara
Muhusin, Abdul, Shaviyani Feydhood
Muslima, Fathmath, Island Development Committee Member, Noonu Kudafari
Naeem, Ibrahim, Katheeb, Shaviyani Lhaimagu
Najeeb, Abdullah, Academy of Computer Training, Shaviyani Komandoo
Nizaaru, Ali, Shaviyani Foakaidhoo
Qasim, Mohamed, Katheeb, Noonu Kudafari
Qasim, Saeed, Katheeb, Noonu Manadhoo
Raashid, Mohamed
Rameez, Moosa, Shaviyani Atoll Chief, Shaviyani Funadhoo
Rasheed, Ibrahim, Shaviyani Goidhoo
Rasheed, Ismail, Shaviyani Goidhoo
Rasheeda, Shaviyani Maajughoodhoo
Saleem, Adam, Teacher, Shaviyani Maajughoodhoo
Saleem, Ibrahim, Island Office Staff, Shaviyani Maajughoodhoo
Saleem, Mohamed, School Supervisor, Noonu Kendikholo
Shareef, Ahmed, Shaviyani Feevah
Shareef, Ali, Kuda Katheeb, Noonu Kendikholo
Shimana, Aminath, Women’s Development Committee President, Noonu Henbadhoo
Shukry, Ahmed Hussain, Project Coordinator, Ministry of Atolls Administration
Waheed, Ahmed, Katheeb, Noonu Kuldhudhoo
Waheed, Mariyam
Zaheen, Mohamed, Teacher, Shaviyani Kanditheem
Zahid, Mohamed, National Project Coordinator, Atoll Development for Sustainable Livelihoods, Shaviyani Funadhoo
Appendix II

Noonu Atoll Population Information

*Please note that the population registered to the islands includes people native to the island who live in Male or on resort islands for employment purposes.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Island</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Female Population</th>
<th>Female Population %</th>
<th>Male Population</th>
<th>Male Population %</th>
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<td>576</td>
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<tr>
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<td>196</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>197</td>
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<tr>
<td>Velidhoo</td>
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<td>1030</td>
<td>48.9</td>
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<td>6,540</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,847</td>
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Appendix III

Shop selling pans made Henbadhoo

Shop on Velidhoo
Fodhoo Brickmaker

Export palm from Kudafari

Boatbuilding on Lhozi