CIVIC FORUM
A path to community engagement
# Table of Contents

**Abbreviations**

**Acknowledgements**

## 1 Introduction

## 2 Background: Local Governance in the Maldives

2.1 Evolution of the decentralisation system in the Maldives

2.1.1 The time of Chiefs

2.1.2 The ‘Green’ Constitution and the democratisation of the local governance system.

## 3 Civic Forums as a Means to Create Dialogue Between Councils and Communities

3.1 Decentralisation Act and community consultations

3.2 Introducing civic forums or Rayyithunge Ba’dhaluvun

3.3 Conducting civic forums in the Maldives
4 CASE STUDIES / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / 31

4.1 M. Muli 31
4.2 Gn. Fuvahmulah 35
4.3 Th. Hirilandhoo 39

5 PERCEPTIONS ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT / 43

6 CONCLUSION / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / 47

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / / 50


8.1 Problem-tree exercise 53
8.2 How to conduct a civic forum: Step-by-step guide 54
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADC</td>
<td>Atoll Development Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCSC</td>
<td>Family and Children Service Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESS</td>
<td>Hirilandhoo Education &amp; Social Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDC</td>
<td>Island Development Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFES</td>
<td>International Foundation for Electoral Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Government Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDP</td>
<td>Maldives Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNDF</td>
<td>Maldives National Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPM</td>
<td>Progressive Party of the Maldives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TI</td>
<td>Transparency International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Transparency Maldives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToT</td>
<td>Training of Trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Aid for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WDC</td>
<td>Women’s Development Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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During the last decade the political landscape of the Maldives has undergone significant transformation, with democratic gains made in a number of areas, all of which has opened up the political space for participation, competition and increased citizen engagement in the political process. The effects of these socio-political changes since the democratic transition in 2008, resonates across contemporary Maldivian society.

A new Constitution enshrining an independent legislature, judiciary and executive; and one recognising and protecting individual freedoms and liberties was introduced in 2008. With 16 registered political parties, multi-party politics has become the norm. Though marred by challenges and controversy, competitive elections have become the fundamental process by which citizens choose their representatives.

One of the key features of the 2008 Constitution is the vision it created to bring decision making power closer to the people by paving the way for a decentralised system of government where local representatives are to be elected, thus replacing the central-government controlled chieftain system. The landmark Decentralisation Act of 2010 provided the mechanics of how the decentralised system should operate in the Maldives. Since then, two rounds of local council elections have been held (2011 and 2014) and the elected Councils have become a fundamental part of the governance structure of island communities.

The new local government system is not without limitations
and has its share of challenges. Resource constraints, capacity issues, disputes between the central government and the local councils, and the political turmoil of the last few years continue to challenge the local government system. Furthermore, disillusionment with the tangible benefits of decentralised system of power in the Maldives has increased, stemming from the above structural limitations and the lack of consultation and engagement between local councils and citizens. The recently conducted Democratic Survey (2013) provided evidence for this by showing that half the population has no confidence in local councils.¹

Between 2013 and 2014, Transparency Maldives (TM) implemented a programme to promote democracy and by extension, support the strengthening of local governance through increased civic participation and capacity building of local councils. As part of the programme, TM conducted civic education workshops and civic forums in 16 islands, with the purpose of bridging the gap between local councils and the communities they serve. The objective was to create citizen awareness and knowledge on democratic values, norms and practices and inspire citizens to participate in community affairs. In addition, the project activities sought to create space for local councils and communities to interact and promote dialogue in addressing community issues through a participatory approach; and to promote transparency and accountability of local councils.

The purpose of this report is to capture TM’s experiences and the process that was followed in achieving the abovementioned goals. The intention is that the experiences, reflections and guidelines will provide practitioners and

stakeholders with a useful insight into how community consultations can be conducted in a Maldivian context; and with the tools to design and implement future interventions to strengthen local governance in the Maldives. The first part of the report provides an overview of the local government system in the Maldives including its historic context and the legislative framework. The second part provides explanations and details of civic forums, TM’s experience and case studies. The final part provides details of citizen perceptions on community engagement, followed by a conclusion.
Maldives consists of over 1,200 islands covering an area of over 115,000 km², scattered across the Indian Ocean. The population of the country, estimated to be at 399,939, is dispersed across 188 inhabited islands. This geographical dispersion has proven to be challenging for the government in terms of administration and provision of basic services such as water, sanitation, education and healthcare to far-flung communities. This geographical dispersion, coupled with the historically center-driven development, has created significant inequalities between the capital, Malé, and the outer-lying islands. This in-turn has promoted massive emigration from the islands to Malé—according to the preliminary results of the 2014 Census, 39 per cent of the population of the Maldives resides in Male.

2.1 Evolution of the decentralisation system in the Maldives

The foundations of the existing local government framework are built upon decades of institutional and legislative changes in local governance. The historical context of local governance in the Maldives illustrates the transition from an undemocratic centralised system to a democratic decentralised system of governance.

2.1.1 The time of Chiefs

(a) Katheebu and Atholhu Veriyaa

Prior to 2009, there was a two-tiered decentralised system of governance encompassing the 20 administrative atolls and all the inhabited islands. Each inhabited island had an Island Chief (Katheebu, often also referred to as Bodu Katheebu), who was appointed by the President. The Island Chiefs reported to Atoll Chiefs (Atholhu Veriyaa), who were also appointed by the President. At the central level, the work of the Atoll Chiefs was overseen by the Ministry of Atoll Development.

Whilst Island Chiefs were nominally appointed by the President, appointments were usually made based on the recommendation of the Atoll Chiefs. Island Chiefs were usually selected from among local residents and served multiple terms. Often, Island Chiefs were selected from one specific family and the position frequently remained within the same family for extended periods of time.5

There was no legal framework pertaining to the work of the Island and Atoll Chiefs; instead it was directed by Presidential decrees and regulations issued by the Ministry of Atoll Development. Atoll Chiefs were responsible for the overall management of their respective atolls. Their mandate was wide-ranging and included aspects of maintaining law and order; administration and supervision of the work of the Island Development Committees (IDC) and Women's Development Committees (WDC); monitoring the activities of government agencies in the atolls; and monitoring the work of all government employees in the atoll, among other functions. The Island Chiefs worked directly under the Atoll Chiefs and were responsible for the same functions at the island level. Malé, the capital, had special arrangements and was classified as a municipality, which was managed directly by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

(b) Women's Development Committees

In 1992, a Women's Development Committee (WDC) was established in each inhabited island. The mandate of WDCs was fairly broad and gender specific—attending to issues of relevance to women. In reality, this often translated into cleaning the island, conducting trainings on arts and crafts, and cultural and sports events. The WDCs were directed by regulations from the then Ministry of Gender and reported to the same Ministry.

6. Ibid., p. 3.
7. Ibid., p. 4.
8. Ibid., p. 3.
9. Ibid., p. 6.
(c) Island and Atoll Development Committees

In September 1999, under the Regulation on Atoll Development Committees, two structures were introduced: Island Development Committees (IDC) and Atoll Development Committees (ADC). This Regulation also incorporated a degree of electoral process in the appointment of members to the Committees.

Island Development Committee (IDC)

The IDCs consisted of ex-officio, appointed and elected members. The size of IDCs ranged from 5 to 10 members, depending on the size of the population of the island (see Table 1). It must be noted that for the most part, the process formulated in the 1999 Regulation was not followed and the number of appointed members were higher than the elected members, skewing the membership in favour of the Atoll Chief.

The Island Chiefs were by default the presidents of the IDCs, and a deputy was elected from among the remaining members.11 The Atoll Chiefs or his assistants were appointed as the chairpersons, establishing a direct line to the atoll level. As a rule, the president of the WDC had a seat in the Committee as well, but there were no additional rules or measures to ensure women were represented in the IDCs.

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11. Ibid., p. 5.
According to regulations, the elections for the IDCs were to be conducted through a secret ballot, where all citizens from the island above the age of 18 years were able to vote. The Atoll Chiefs appointed a committee of senior officials who administered these elections. In instances where the number of candidates running for a seat was less than the number of seats available, all candidates were guaranteed a seat. The Atoll Chief made appointments for any remaining seats.

These rules coupled with the inconsistent practices upon which these elections were conducted in different islands, indicated that these elections were not fair. More often than not, in contradiction to the rules, the Atoll Chief arbitrarily appointed members to IDCs.12

**Atoll Development Committees (ADC)**

The ADCs consisted of 10 to 20 appointed members who were appointed by the Ministry of Atoll Development, usually from among the presidents of the IDCs—by extension the Island Chiefs. ADCs were chaired by the Atoll Chief, or his

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12. Ibid., p. 6.
assistant. Though rarely applied, 25 percent of the seats in each ADC were allocated to women.

Planning and resources

There was no mandated planning function for ADCs or IDCs and development planning was generally led by sectorial ministries or donor funded initiatives. Even in instances where funds were generated locally for a specific developmental initiative, central level approval had to be sought before implementation.\textsuperscript{13}

The offices of Island and Atoll Chiefs were seen as extensions of the Ministry of Atoll Development, and all their recurring expenses were budgeted for in the Ministry's budget. In addition, there were also funds generated by sources within the islands and atolls. These sources included revenue shared with the central government, local fees and taxes, land rent and funds raised locally from specific initiatives.\textsuperscript{14}

WDCs received an allowance from the Ministry of Gender and Family.\textsuperscript{15} Additionally, WDCs were allowed to raise revenue from their own initiatives. However, the success of such initiatives greatly varied from one WDC to another. Some of the more successful WDCs raised substantial revenue through their own initiatives (e.g Th. Hirilandhoo WDC).

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 12.
2.1.2 The ‘Green’ Constitution and the democratisation of the local governance system.

The enactment of the 2008 Constitution facilitated the establishment of a decentralised system of governance. The Constitution formed island, atoll and city councils, replacing traditional island structures. Furthermore, the process of electing members to these councils were opened up for public participation through a secret ballot, the term of office for Councilors were limited to 3 years and the People’s Majlis (Parliament) was mandated to lay out the specifics of the decentralisation system.\(^{16}\) The Constitution also laid out the responsibilities of the councils, mandated the setting aside of an annual budget from the treasury for councils and empowered councils to raise their own finances and incur ownership of assets and liabilities.\(^ {17}\)

In 2009, by Presidential decree, 7 provincial authorities were established. The decree also created seven health and utility corporations and seven regional education authorities. Each Province Office had a State Minister, appointed by the President overseeing it. The Province Offices came under the purview of Ministry of Home Affairs. Ownership of assets previously owned by the island and atoll offices was transferred to these corporations creating tension between local communities and the government.\(^ {18}\)

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(a) The Decentralisation Act

In April 2010, the Decentralisation Act (Law number: 7/2010) was passed after a period of deadlock between the government and the People’s Majils. The final Act which was ratified deviated from the original bill proposed in that it did not establish the Province Offices or the utility corporations. Despite this they continued to exist and was a significant part of the decentralisation process.

Interestingly the ratified Act also changed the number of elected councillors for islands and atolls to 5. Earlier versions of the bill provided for only two elected councillors for each island and atoll, appointed on a part-time basis. Many observers noted that five members per council would add a significant strain on the national budget.

(b) Local Government Authority

One of the major additions to the decentralisation system from the Decentralisation Act was the formation of the Local Government Authority (LGA). The LGA is the central body which oversees the work of island, atoll and city councils and is mandated with ensuring, among other things, that the work of councils is conducted in accordance with law, and regulations set out by councils are consistent throughout the country.

The LGA is overseen by a board comprising of a government Minister, one member from the Malé City Council, a member elected from amongst additional City Councils, four members from Atoll Councils and two

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21. At the time of writing, Addu City is the only additional City besides Malé, therefore this seat is allotted for a member of the Addu City Council.
members appointed by the People’s Majlis to represent civil society and the general public. The President and the Vice President are selected through a vote from among the members of the board.

The LGA started functioning in 2010 and so far has issued various regulations and conducted training in order to build the capacity of councillors and support the development plans of communities. A 2013 UNICEF report highlighted the need to increase the capacity of LGA for it to be able to effectively provide technical support to councils.

(c) Island and Atoll Councils.

The formation of Island and Atoll Councils under the Decentralisation Act was a significant departure from the time of Atoll and Island Chiefs, as a range of additional powers and responsibilities were granted to the Councils. As a result of the changes brought about through the Decentralisation Act, the Councils were entrusted with the sole responsibility and authority of governing their respective communities.

The Atoll Councils are mandated, among other things, to coordinate and monitor the activities of Island Councils, assist Island Councils in seeking technical and financial assistance, ensure community participation in the development planning process and foster the growth of economic activities. The
The term of the Atoll Councillors is 3 years. The Island Councils are mandated to administer and oversee development projects, formulate island level policies and manage public resources and funds. Island Councils are also required to monitor the reefs, lagoons and natural resources belonging to the island; oversee the construction and maintenance of roads, harbours, ferry terminals, street lights and sea walls; provide electricity, water and sewage facilities; and maintain a land registry. As with Atoll Councillors, the term of Island Councillors is 3 years.

(d) Incorporating women into the decentralisation system.

The Decentralisation Act also re-established Women’s Development Committees in each island. The Committees are elected through a vote of all the voting-age women in the island or city. According to the Act, the Committees can generate income, acquire assets and conduct business transactions. The mandate of WDCs also shows a significant change from past WDCs. The new WDCs are required to conduct activities and programmes to increase women's political participation; and also envisaged as fulfilling an advisory function and as equal partners in development matters. As with the Island and Atoll Councils, the term of the WDCs is 3 years. According to the Act, all assets owned by the pre-2010 WDCs were to be transferred to the newly formed WDCs.
3 CIVIC FORUMS AS A MEANS TO CREATE DIALOGUE BETWEEN COUNCILS AND COMMUNITIES

One of the key features of the new local government system introduced in 2010 is the consultative and participatory vision the law creates for the system. The objective of the Decentralisation Act is, among other things, to allow island communities to empower citizens to participate in the decision-making process and to hold those that govern them accountable. The recognition that citizens are partners of development and not just recipients is testament to the participatory vision the Decentralisation Act envisaged for the local government system.

3.1 Decentralisation Act and community consultations

The Decentralisation Act mandates Island Councils to conduct consultative meetings with their respective communities to develop island development plans and to share information of how the budget of the councils are

22 Act on Decentralisation of the Administrative Divisions of the Maldives (2010), article 2.
utilised. Furthermore, the Act stipulates that Island Councils are required to organise two public consultations—one in February and one in July each year.23

In the meeting in February the councils must share the past year’s annual report, financial report and audit report with the public. The work plan and budget for the coming year must be shared in the July meeting. In both instances, the reports must be made available to the community 7 days before the meeting.

However, despite the legal provisions and the general vision for the local councils to adopt a participatory approach to their work, interaction with local communities and the elected councils are limited.

While there is no single explanation as to why local councils are unable to fulfil their mandate in consulting their community, a number of factors can account for this, including the lack of understanding and skills on the part of Councillors on the need to adopt a consultative participatory approach to their work. Owing to this lack of skills and understanding, Councillors also fear community consultations will turn into confrontations, aggravating community divisions. Furthermore, as a result of the polarized nature of politics in the country where citizens are aligned to one political party or the other, councils are at time perceived as extensions of political parties. Depending on which political party holds the majority seats in a particular council, citizens may disengage from council activities or councils may choose not to interact with a section of their community due to political rivalry.

23.Ibid., article 110.
A lack of capacity and understanding, fear that community consultations can turn into confrontations, and political polarisation keeps councils from engaging with the community.

3.2 Introducing civic forums or Rayyithunge Ba’dhaluvun

It was based under the above mentioned conditions and legislative framework that TM conceived and implemented the civic forum approach in the Maldives. Civic forums, a widely used approach in democratising countries to foster dialogue between citizens and decision makers, was applied to the Maldivian context not only because the law requires Councils to hold community consultations, but more importantly to provide a mechanism for dialogue between elected councils and citizens, and to increase civic participation.

Civic forums are used in many countries to foster dialogue between local governments and citizens.

Based on the notion, that development challenges can effectively be addressed through constructive dialogue in deeply polarized societies, the civic forum approach, when applied to the Maldives, provided valuable insight into how community engagements occurs across Maldivian communities.

(a) Community mobilization

Community mobilization is the process by which citizens come together and organise themselves to actively participate
in addressing common issues facing a community. Citizens get most involved in this process when the issue at stake relates directly to them. Effective community mobilization can be a powerful process in which the citizens come to the forefront of problem solving and decision-making. However, it must be noted that a strong sense of community needs to be nurtured and cultivated for effective community mobilization to take place.

A strong sense of community needs to be cultivated for community mobilisation to take place.

There are many examples of community mobilization efforts in the Maldives. There have been community-funded pre-schools (Sh. Komandoo); community-funded and operated powerhouses providing electricity to communities (Sh. Komandoo); and community-funded infrastructure projects such as installing street lights (Hdh. Kulhudhuffushi) and community funded pharmacies (Th. Hirilandhoo). Communities also usually come together for special occasions, such as the celebration of Eid and the World Cup, where youth groups raise funds to install projectors and screens in public spaces (K. Guraidhoo).

(b) Civic Forums

Civic forums are town hall style meetings open to the public, where local officials seek the views and opinions of citizens on community issues and actively take the initiative to involve the community in decision-making.

Civic forums are meetings where local officials and citizens discuss community issues.
Civic forums can be viewed as the first step of community mobilization, the conversation or dialogue that needs to take place before collective action can take place. Civic forum also ensures that citizen views and concerns are taken into consideration on all matters concerning the community and this consequently increases the receptivity and ownership of the entire community on a particular action or decision.

When local government officials conduct civic forums it provides them the opportunity to be more transparent through information sharing; more accountable by addressing citizen concerns; and legitimises their decisions due to its participatory nature.

### 3.3 Conducting civic forums in the Maldives

In the run up to the Local Council Elections, in January 2014, TM conducted a pilot programme to test the effectiveness of conducting civic forums in three different islands: Lh. Naifaru, Gn. Fuvahmulah and S. Hithadhoo. Based on the lessons learned from the pilot programme, several aspects of the civic forum process were refined prior to implementing it on a wider scope. Despite some challenges in the pilot phase, overall civic forums were seen as a viable mechanism to convene multiple stakeholders to deliberate on community issues.

and S. Hulhumeedhoo.

Civic forums were implemented in three phases: starting with a Training of Trainers (ToTs) for Local Councillors and Community-based Organisations (CBOs); civic education workshops for multiple stakeholders in their respective islands; and finally the civic forum open to the public.

(a) Training of Trainers

A two-day ToT was conducted for 2 participants—one councillor and one CBO member from each of the selected 16 islands.

The reason for mobilizing the Island Council and an active CBO from the same island was to ensure that a strong partnership, and sense of ownership is forged between them, both of whom were likely to play a key role in determining the success of a civic forum. As a risk mitigation strategy, it was envisaged that where an Island Council fails to hold a civic forum, the CBO would take the initiative to hold the civic forum. This was particularly important in islands where Local Councils may find it difficult to mobilize the public without CBO support or vice versa.

The ToT, spread over two consecutive days, consisted of multiple sessions to raise the awareness of the participants on democratic values and practices including human rights, rule of law, community participation, local governance, and a session on how to conduct a civic forum. Additionally, the training focused on developing public speaking skills, which included a session on facilitation and provided participants with the opportunity to make a presentation, followed by individual feedback.

Furthermore, towards the end of the ToT, participants were provided with the opportunity to facilitate a civic forum.
simulation, in order to prepare them for possible scenarios as facilitators at such meetings.

(b) Civic education workshops

Following the ToT, TM staff travelled to the 16 islands to conduct civic education workshops and civic forums. Civic education workshop consisted of multiple sessions to educate and raise the awareness of the participants on democratic values and practices including human rights, rule of law, community participation, local governance, and a session on identifying community problems, using the problem tree approach (see Annex 1). Civic forums were aimed at creating an avenue for all stakeholders in the island and citizens alike to convene and prioritize community concerns.

Meetings were held with stakeholders to invite them to the civic education workshop and the civic forum. These meetings were used to highlight the importance having their representation and participation to make the civic forums a success. These pre-meetings with stakeholders encouraged them to participate in the civic education workshops and civic forums.

Commonly consulted stakeholders include the schools or the atoll education centre, health centre or hospital, courts, Maldives Police Service, Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), Family and Children Service Centres (FCSC), Fenaka Corporation or utility service providers, political parties, WDCs, Island Council, and the Atoll Council.

The purpose of conducting the civic education workshop was two fold: to raise the awareness of stakeholders on
general civic issues and the importance of community participation and collective action. Sessions at the civic education workshop covered democratic values and concepts, decentralisation, rule of law, and community participation, followed by a ranking exercise to select the three most important issues faced by the community. A problem tree was then developed for each issue in order to gain a better understanding of the issue, the root causes of it and their subsequent effect on the community. This allowed for stakeholders to familiarize themselves with existing problems in the community prior to the civic forum and take ownership of the initiative.

The civic education workshop was an integral preparatory step for the civic forum, and provided an opportunity for the facilitators to interact with local stakeholders and gain an understanding of various issues present in the community. The workshop was also designed to increase receptivity of the participants; to understand the importance of inclusive and participatory decision making; and to encourage them to attend and support mobilization of participants for the civic forum using their networks.

(c) Civic forums or Rayyithunge Ba’dhaluvun

Civic forums were attempted in three phases: pilot
phase in 3 islands, implementation phase in 16 islands, and monitoring and evaluation phase in 5 islands. In all 21 attempts, civic forums were successfully conducted 18 times. All civic forums during the monitoring and evaluation phase were either Council led or CBO led with limited TM participation. Participation at these forums varied, with some forums attended by as many as 140 participants.

Conducted on the evening of a Thursday or Friday night, careful consideration was given to ensure that the forums were scheduled for the convenience of the community. Furthermore, targeted efforts were made to mobilize participants from a varied and diverse background. As such, concerted effort was made to increase the number of female participants at the forums in order to offset the usual high turnout of men at such community meetings.

_Banners, flyers, text messages, meetings with stakeholders and announcements on megaphones were used to inform citizens about the civic forum_

TM teams travelled to the islands with flyers, posters, and banners. In each island, banners, posters and flyers were used to create interest and inform citizens of the civic forum. Banners and posters were put up on locations where citizens frequented, like schools, health centres and council offices. Flyers were distributed at community gatherings like sports events (which took place frequently as TM trips were scheduled for the weekend), to households, coffee shops, political party offices, and in public spaces like the _holhuashi_ (communal sitting areas). CBO partners and
councils assisted with the distribution of flyers and spreading the word. Additionally, the island council office and political parties, mainly Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and Progressive Party of the Maldives (PPM), extended support and announced, over megaphone, the time and place where the forum will take place and urged citizens to attend the forum.

In most islands, during the run up to the civic forum citizens and stakeholders were sceptical about the success of the forums. Some feared that the turnout for the forums might be low, or even if the turnout was high that the level of participation and engagement might be low, or in other cases stakeholders and citizens were concerned that the civic forums might turn confrontational and hostile. However, in most islands the civic forums were well attended, participation and level of engagement was high, and overall the response was positive.

The many successes of TM’s civic forum process and the impact seen afterwards demonstrates that this approach for community consultation could feasibly be adopted not only by Island and Atoll Councils nationwide, but by CBOs, youth clubs, political parties, and WDCs. Applicable to a number of setting and audiences, civic forums proved to be a useful platform for the community to come together and discuss community concerns, and for the Councils to share information and be answerable to the community they seek to serve.

Based on TM’s experience in the process of holding civic forums, some factors to consider while planning a civic forum include timing, endorsement from the Island Council, and prior research and knowledge about the island, especially with respect to its socio-political context and the level of
community engagement.

**Timing**

Timing is an important consideration in order to ensure that the civic forum does not clash with other scheduled activities of political parties, government, CBOs, schools or any other stakeholders. TM held the civic forums at the height of the Parliamentary Elections campaigning, and hence, some trips coincided with the visit of high profile political figures, which posed a number of challenges in mobilizing participants to attend the forum. On other occasions, timing and day set for the civic forum coincided with the island’s school football tournament and school-organised island cleaning day. As a direct consequence of such activities, Island Council members, CBO partners and citizens found it difficult to provide support at times and in some instances, there was lower turnout than expected. However, these risks were managed by communicating regularly with Island Councils or the CBO partners.

**Support from the Island Council and/or local CBO**

Another important factor to consider is that the Island Council is consulted well in advance before the planned activities in the island, and that the their endorsement and support is sought throughout the whole process. The ToT provided the opportunity for TM to engage and build a working relationship with the Island Councillors and/or CBO partners from the outset, which proved to be the key determinant of achieving the planned activities during the implementation phase. Both the Island Councils and partner CBOs provided assistance in setting up stakeholder meetings, mobilizing participants for both the civic education workshop and the
Understanding the context

Prior research about the island should be done in order to understand the island and its socio-political context and the level of community engagement. Socio-political context including level of political polarization, women's participation, religious and cultural sensitivities should be understood prior to direct engagement as it would help to design effective strategies for mobilization efforts. In islands where one political party appeared to dominate through the Council, party membership and voter behaviour, targeted efforts were made to mobilize minority party members. TM also capitalized on the convening power of political parties by using their party network to mobilize participants for the forum. It was observed that in islands where political parties supported our mobilization effort, attendance levels were higher.

Furthermore, in mobilizing participants for the civic forum, TM made effort to increase the number of female participants. This was to offset the usual high turnout of males and to ensure an inclusive approach. More female citizens were approached and invited to attend the civic forum in order to have more female representation.

Assessing the level of community engagement is also useful prior to organising activities in an island, specifically whether active CBOs exist in the island and if social or political engagements are high.
4 CASE STUDIES

4.1 M. Muli

Muli is a small island located in Meemu Atoll, about 140 km south of Malé. It is the capital island of Meemu Atoll and as such the Atoll Council is located at M. Muli. The population of the island is estimated to be at approximately 1,000. Public facilities and services available in the island include a pre-school, secondary school, regional hospital, police station, magistrate court and a Bank of Maldives branch.

Muli is a good example of where the Island Council embraced the idea of community consultations with successive civic forums held following the first forum conducted by TM.

Muli was an island where the level of community engagement was remarkably high. The civic education workshop was attended by multiple stakeholders including the police, Island Council, hospital, school, CBOs and WDC. At the outset, stakeholders were sceptical about how the civic forum would be received by the community. Some stakeholders expressed their concern that the forum may turn out to be confrontational, with blame-shifting and name calling.

Despite the initial concerns, the civic forum was well attended, the discussions were high engaging and rich with a focus on three key issues: a poor waste management system, the state of health care services and drug abuse.
Muli Council has held a total of six civic forums since then. The first two were held in March 2014, shortly after since the TM-guided forum. More than 70 people attended both forums. At these two forums the Council shared future plans for the community and sought their feedback on the plans. Two more meetings were held in May 2014 where the focus was on the upcoming land reclamation project. A total of 37 and 50 persons attended the meetings respectively.

Two more meetings were held in July 2014. One meeting was to discuss the WDC election and 22 persons attended this meeting. The other meeting held in July was part of a larger exercise to develop a 5-year development plan for the island. At the request of Muli Council, TM provided a resource person to develop the plan. The forum was held to brief the community on how the planning process was going to take place and the need for the community to engage in the planning process. This was followed by 3 days of consultations with different stakeholders, organised by the Island Council. At the time of publication, the Council has a draft island development plan and a committee selected to facilitate the process of seeking community feedback on the draft plan.

The success of Muli’s case was mainly due to the high level of engagement in the community, the participation of stakeholders and role of the Local Council. The initiative and ownership taken by the Muli Council to consult the community over successive forums illustrates the critical role Councillors play in community mobilization.
**4.2 Gn. Fuvahmulah**

Fuvahmulah is an island located about 400 km south of Malé with a population of over 8,000 people. Administratively, Fuvahmulah is considered an island as well as an atoll, which has implications on how it is administered. The island is one land mass but is administered as eight separate wards. With the introduction of the Decentralisation Act, each of these wards essentially started functioning as separate islands, with each ward allotted an Island Council. Oversight and coordination of these eight Island Councils is undertaken by an Atoll Council. Infrastructure and services available in the island include an atoll hospital, a number of primary and secondary schools, a Maldives National University campus, a higher secondary school, police and MNDF presence.

TM conducted one of the pilot civic forums in Fuvahmulah, with the pilot programme showing high level of engagement from multiple stakeholders and the public. Given the success of the pilot forum, a second forum was also held in Fuvahmulah, but with less participation than expected. Open Hand—a CBO from Fuvahmulah—played an active role in facilitating both the key activities, including delivering sessions at the civic education workshops and taking a lead in facilitating the civic forums.

In addition to the two Councillors trained at the ToT, the remaining Island Councils, in principle, pledged support to the activities. However, lack of coordination and collaboration amongst the separate Island Councils posed challenges. Consequently, alternative channels were used to mobilize participants for the civic education workshop and forum. With

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the support of Open Hand, all political parties were consulted and requested to use their networks to gather support for the workshop and the forum. This perhaps, explains why the first civic forum and both the civic education workshops were relatively well attended with wide representation from parties across the political spectrum.

The experience of holding civic forums in Fuvahmulah demonstrated the impact of having multiple Island Councils in one community. Competition, political rivalry and mistrust between the different Island Councils posed as a challenge in establishing a strong partnership and collaborative effort amongst the Councillors. This in turn deterred the Councillors from taking ownership and initiative in driving the process. Given that the identified issues at the civic education workshop included political polarization, poor healthcare services and the prevalence of drugs related problem—issues affecting all of Fuvahmulah—the artificial boundaries created by the administrative framework acted as a hindrance for effective community mobilization and collaboration between the Island Councils.

Despite the above mentioned challenges unique to Fuvahmulah, it is noted that a civic forum was held in Fuvahmulah organised by Dhoondigan Council in May 2014. This forum had an attendance of 130 participants and the Council shared information on ongoing projects and events, progress of council initiatives and planned targets and goals before the year end. Although it is difficult to ascertain whether this civic forum was held as a follow up to the previous civic forums, it demonstrates that where an Island Council takes the initiative and ownership, even under a restrictive legal framework and amongst a polarized community, community mobilization can be achieved.
The experience of holding civic forums in Fuvahmulah provides an interesting and unique case study as the island is administered differently and presented its own unique challenges. This required improvisation and use of multiple mobilization techniques to garner public support throughout the whole process.
4.3 Th. Hirilandhoo

Hirilandhoo is an island 215 km south of Malé, located in Thaa Atoll, with a population of over 1,000 people. Public facilities and services available in the island include a health centre, a pre-school, a secondary school and a police station.

Hirilandhoo is a good example of an island where a partner CBO took the initiative to organise a civic forum. TM partnered with Hirilandhoo Education & Social Society (HESS) to organize a civic forum in August 2014. During the forum, rich discussion took place on a number of community issues including poor health care and waste management.

The experience of holding civic forums in Hirilandhoo demonstrated the importance of understanding the social structures within a community. As the level of political polarisation in the island was high, with the community divided into two major political camps, it was challenging for HESS to successfully reach out to some groups due to differing political views. This meant that a segment of the community were excluded from the forum and highlights the need to make a stronger effort to reach out to all the different segments within a community.

The gender dynamics of Hirilandhoo also provided important lessons. In Hirilandhoo, men and women hold their community engagements separately, with rare engagements undertaken together. It proved to be very difficult to mobilize female participants. Only four women attended the civic forum--participants and organisers suggested that a separate forum for women be organised, as is the tradition in the island.

Since the first civic forum simulation exercise conducted
with TM's assistance in February 2014, HESS has conducted their own civic forum. In addition, Hirilandhoo Island Council has successfully held a number of civic forums to seek community feedback on the Council's plans. At the time of writing, the mandated community consultation in February of every year, has been scheduled for February 2015 and the community has been invited to attend the consultation. It is encouraging to see that in Hirilandhoo, both CBOs and the Island Council have adopted the civic forum model as a means to engage with the community.
Throughout the entire process participant feedback was collected for monitoring and evaluation purposes and in order to capture participants' view on civic participation. Valuable insight was collected through consultations, focus group discussions and feedback forms from more than 400 participants.

Each civic education workshop and civic forum was followed by a participant feedback form and a short focus group discussion to assess their perception on the importance of civic participation for community development, the importance of citizen involvement in decision making, and whether citizens believe that positive change can be brought through increased engagement with the Island Council.

The questions asked, and the findings, are presented below.
Question 1: In your opinion, is civic participation important for community development?

On a scale of “very important” to “not important at all,” an overwhelming majority (94%) of participants responded that civic participation is “very important” or “important” for the development of their community. None of the participants rated this aspect as “not important”.

Question 2: How important is it to get citizens’ opinion in decision-making?

When participants were asked of their view on a scale of “very important” to “not important at all” whether citizens should be consulted for their opinion in decision making, a 94% of participants responded that they felt it is “very important” or “important” to ensure that citizens' opinions are sought out in the decision making process.

Question 3: Do you believe that positive changes can be achieved through community consultation?

When asked if they believe that favourable changes can be brought to the society through increased citizen-island council engagement, a large majority (91%) of participants were hopeful that favourable changes
could be brought to their community through increased engagement with the community.

The findings from the feedback exercises indicate that participants regard civic participation as an important step in achieving community development goals, indicated their willingness and appetite for participating in the decision-making process, and signified that significant demand exists for avenues for community consultations.

Feedback indicates that participants strongly believe that they have a stake in the development of their community. Where issues of community development are at stake, participants want to engage, voice their opinion and participate in the decision-making process.

These findings provide valuable insight for Local Councils and CBOs—there is clear demand from participants for more community consultation. Island Councils and CBOs must cater to this demand and provide avenues for consultation and engagement, to effectively address community issues.

Participants are hopeful that positive change can be brought to their community through increased consultations with citizens. Based on the feedback from approximately 400 participants, it can be inferred that citizens remain hopeful and optimistic about their communities, and are willing to engage. This validates the need to create more avenues that will allow increased dialogue and engagement between citizens and councils. The need for increased interaction between citizens and stakeholders is further evidenced by the Democracy Survey (2013) findings, where 91 per cent of the population believe that dialogue is the best way to solve the problems of the country.
Perceptions on Community Engagement
6 CONCLUSION

Given the Decentralisation Act mandates Island Councils to hold community consultations twice a year, and the demand for civic participation and such consultations from across communities nationwide, it is paramount that avenues for citizens to interact with stakeholders are created and made available for citizens to participate in the decision-making process. The process of holding civic forums across the country has provided valuable insight on one method used to bridge the gap between citizens and their representative institutions i.e. local councils.

The civic forum model provides an effective and tested approach for Local Councils in their effort to include citizens' voice and opinions in formulating plans for their communities and in decision-making. Furthermore, it is hoped that this study provides practitioners, Island Councils, and other key stakeholders with the tools and strategies needed to conduct their own civic forum style community consultations and inspiration to design their own interventions and policies to strengthen the local governance system in the Maldives.

As a result of the civic forums and the established relationships with Island Councils and CBOs, numerous Island Councils and CBOs continue to seek TMs assistance in holding community consultations and expert advice on legal issues, organisational strategic planning and community development plans.

Civic forums are not an end goal, but are the start of a process that TM hopes will allow communities to engage
in dialogue and practice democracy at the community level through increased civic participation. In a country with a history of centralised governance, high inequality between Malé and the outer islands, combined with increasing public disillusionment with the benefits of democracy, it is important that local institutions such as Island Councils and CBOs are brought to the forefront in building confidence in democratic institutions and finding solutions to community problems.
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दो के मक्खन के रूप में।
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY


Prevalence of drug abuse in the community

- High level of juvenile delinquency
- Gang culture
- Waste of resources
- High crime rate
- Low economic productivity

- Health issues
- Divorce
- Family problems
- Youth labelled as criminals

- Corruption
- Lack of social activities
- Weak law enforcement
- Low sense of belonging among youth
- Young persons turn to gangs to gain a sense of belonging

- Unemployment/lack of job opportunities
- Lack of awareness on drug use and its effects
- among users and vulnerable persons
- among parents
8.1 Problem-tree exercise

The problem-tree exercise was used for the purposes prioritizing and understanding community issues to be discussed at the civic forums. The problem-tree model is easy to use and understand, and is an excellent tool to identify the root causes and the effects of a particular community issue or problem.

It is an effective model to use if you are interacting with various groups with different interests and agendas at the same time, and would like to get everyone to focus on a particular problem. It can also be a tool to increase the understanding of a particular problem as it forces participants to unpack and dwell deep into an issue.

Similar to other community issue identifying models, it is important to consult with all stakeholders to gain a deep and meaningful understanding about the issue and to ensure the ownership of the community. Involving the whole community at the problem identification stage would make identifying solutions easier and in the end increase the receptivity of the community to the solution proposed.
8.2 How to conduct a civic forum: Step-by-step guide

Before the forum
(a) Ensure that the community issues are identified and prioritized by multiple stakeholder consultation or group exercise using a problem-tree model. These problem-tree charts should be visible for the audience at the civic forum.
(b) Ensure that the tables/chairs are set appropriately and if it is a larger audience ensure a microphone is set up.
(c) Among the team, assign who will take notes, who will pass the microphone and who will lead the moderator team.
(d) Ensure that prompt open-ended questions for each key issue are prepared in advance.

Start of the forum
(a) Begin by introducing the lead moderator and the team.
(b) Thank the participants for their attendance.
(c) Explain the objective and the purpose of the civic forum.
(d) If the forum is held in partnership with an CBO or the Island Council, acknowledge it (if applicable).
(e) Explain how the discussion topics were selected using the problem-tree model so that participants can see how these issues were prioritized and mapped out from the charts seen on the walls.
(f) One facilitator should walk over the pasted flipcharts with the ranking and explain that there are many issues we can discuss but to start a discussion we need to prioritize.
Ground rules:
(a) Establish ground rules from the start:
   - Ask the participants what they think the ground rules should be?
   - Note them on a flipchart and paste it on the wall in a way that is visible for all participants.
(b) The key ground rules are:
   - Raise your hand if you wish to say something
   - Wait for your turn to speak
   - Respect each other's opinion
   - Do not use abusive language or verbally attack an individual – no mud slinging.
   - Keep mobile phones on silent. If you have to take an urgent call, take it outside of the forum room. Leave the room in a manner that does not disrupt the ongoing forum discussion.
   - Focus on understanding the problem and finding solutions, rather than putting blame on individuals/institutions.
(c) Once the ground rules are established, pick one topic and ask X participant or the audience why they think X issue was chosen by the community.

During the discussions
(a) Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak.
(b) Deflect questions from the audience to the audience—avoid the 'expert trap'.
(c) If the conversation dries up, ask prompt questions from the prepared question list.
Sample questions:
- What does X (eg. Council) think of this issue?
- How do you think we will solve it?
- Who do we need to speak to?
- What do you think are the root causes?
- How can we overcome X obstacle?
- Is it a budget constraint that is causing it or a lack of motivation or active participation?
- What do you foresee in the future?

Moving from one topic to another
(a) Take note if a discussion topic is drying up, if everything that needs to be said has been said, the facilitator should announce:
- “That was a very interesting discussion we had on X topic and I am sure we have all gained a better understanding of the issues around it and we have heard some very useful approaches to solve it.
- At this point we can perhaps now move on to the next topic, which is about X?”

Ending the forum
(a) Thank everyone for their attendance and participation in the discussion.
(b) Explain next steps including who will follow up on the discussions and advocacy for the suggested solutions.
Transparency Maldives, the National Contact of Transparency International (TI), is a non-partisan organisation that promotes collaboration, awareness raising and other initiatives to improve governance and eliminate corruption from the daily lives of people. Transparency Maldives (TM) views corruption as a systemic issue and advocates for institutional changes that will punish and prevent corruption.

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