



Island residents battle against climate change: Case Study

PHOTO: Ali Nishan

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“The ocean used to be 250 feet away from the house, but now in stormy weather, waves lap at my front door”

*Resident of HA. Dhidhoo,
Zubaidha Abdul Razzak*

The sand bags piled on HA.Dhidhoo island’s beach to restrict erosion are visible from Zubaidha Abdul Razzak’s front door. The mother of four said the ocean used to be 250 feet away from the house, but now, during stormy weather, waves lap at her front door.

“The water in my well is salty. It corrodes the taps, and my children have had hair fall and skin problems because we shower with groundwater,” she said.

The main sources of water on Dhidhoo – an island of approximately 5000 people and a land area of 85 hectares – are groundwater, rainwater, and in recent years, bottled water. The groundwater in the island has become salty and contaminated due to erosion, overuse, and sewage water being pumped into the ground. In May during the dry season, the island now runs out of potable water. A population boom, mismanagement of water resources and unpredictable rainfall usually has led to this shortage. According to Dhidhoo Island Council, the government provides up to 90 tonnes of desalinated water (produced in neighboring Kulhudhuffushi Island) to plug the annual shortage in Dhidhoo.

In 2011, the Government of the United States announced and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Maldives for a total of US\$ 7.3 million project to provide an island-wide solid waste management and an island-wide desalinated water supply system, piped and metered to individual households in Dhidhoo and LH.Hinnavaru. On 27 September 2011, USAID directly subcontracted the water project to an American company Chemonics International. For this project the selection of the project was carried out by the donor directly.

However, with the exception of repeated announcements by the two most recent US Ambassadors to Maldives, there were no further news of the solid waste management system. Furthermore, to date the promised water supply system has not materialized.

Community Commitment

Public expectations regarding the water project are high on Dhidhoo. On July 10, 2012, the US Ambassador Patricia Butenis visited Dhidhoo and pledged to provide a safe water system and improve the existing sewerage system on the island.

USAID had chosen Dhidhoo and Hinnavaru Islands as the same agency had installed a sewerage system in Dhidhoo and assisted in the installation of a 30 tonne desalination plant in Hinnavaru in 2010.

According to Ministry of Environment and Energy (MEE), Chemonics International carried out several studies during 2012 - the first year of the project.

One such study, titled “A financial analysis of water and sewer infrastructure alternatives”, completed in May 2012, detailed out the financial capacity to operate the planned water supply system. The study concluded that there were insufficient funds for a piped water network and recommended alternative methods such as having a truck transport water to households. Chemonics International proposed to install a central water supply using

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rainwater storage in community water tanks by means of community tap bay.

However, MEE rejected the proposal, reminding USAID that the original project proposal approved by government was to install a piped and metered water supply to every household in both Hinnavaru and Dhidhoo. The ministry said these plans had already been communicated to the island councils as well as the beneficiary communities and said the project must be implemented according to the approved scope.

In December 2012, USAID informed the Government only US\$ 1 million remained for infrastructure development.

After several discussions and negotiations, in May 2013, USAID agreed to allocate an additional US\$ 3 million for infrastructure development; a figure only sufficient for a piped network in Hinnavaru, only one of the two islands. The government was left with the task of explaining to the community of Dhidhoo that the project will not proceed due to insufficient funds while at the same time it is unclear why this happened.

Lack of information

Dhidhoo, as the capital of Haa Alif atoll and comprising a large population, is a priority island for the government. However, the government had not included provisions for a water system for Dhidhoo in the state budget due to the USAID project.

Dhidhoo Island council member Abdulla Siraj criticized USAID saying: “For a long time we were unaware of what was going on.

They come to this island every two months, but we don't see what they do. Are they trying to show us a dream?" he said.

Expectations are high on the island, Siraj said adding, "Everyone knows the money has been allocated. The US Ambassador came here. There is a project office, but we do not know what is happening. Of the total amount for the two islands, we do not know how much was allocated for Dhidhoo"

now being questioned as the final project is not being delivered and furthermore seen as wasteful as the issue of lack of funds for infrastructure component is raised by the donor. "They have wasted the allocated money on staff salaries, awareness programs and useless studies," Siraj said

Donors must understand the scope of the projects they commit to, MEE said. "When we say we want a piped network, they have to



Zubaidha Abdul Razzak's home - the ocean used to be 250 feet away but now, during stormy weather waves lap at her front door.

Raising awareness for phantom projects

Donors must not allocate funds for soft components if there is no money for infrastructure, the MEE has said.

"During this project, a lot of money has been spent on studying various options with various consultants. Similar studies have been done in other islands. I do not believe such studies need to be done every single time," a Director General at MEE said.

While the studies were ongoing, Chemonics International has subcontracted local NGO Live and Learn to conduct awareness projects on the island. A Live and Learn Staff Usman Ashraf said he has conducted three awareness projects this year on water management and safe use of drinking water. These activities are

understand what it means. We have emails and communications that very clearly states that the government wants a piped network in Dhidhoo and a piped network is expensive," they said.

According to MEE, the project had also been impacted due to the USAID focal point changing over time and different individuals visiting the Maldives for follow-up visits.

Who should raise the alarm bell?

Had Chemonics International been reporting to the MEE, the ministry could have intervened to stop use of funds on repetitive studies. The contractors did not report to directly to MEE on a regular basis because the project was implemented outside the

normal Government procedures. Projects are audited by the Auditor General's Office only by specific request of the donor. Alternatively such projects would be audited by a private audit firm, which may not capture the progress of projects against the intended work-plan nor analyse the benefit to communities and adherence to government policies. Such aspects are addressed by Auditor General's Office and government encourages more involvement of AGO in donor funded projects as well. Such projects also need to be reported on a regular basis to the central monitoring agency of the government, Office of Programmes and Projects who conducts onsite monitoring of projects they oversee. No government agency also visited the island to assess progress for this project. In addition, keeping the local councils more informed is also a crucial monitoring strategy. For this project, Dhidhoo council noted that they never received a workplan or a copy of the contract made with Chemonics and thus they were unable to monitor or report any delays.



Erosion has contaminated the groundwater diminishing the few sources of safe drinking water

Dhidhoo's water project demonstrates the importance of donors collaborating with the government in project implementation, monitoring and oversight. Dhidhoo further shows project designs need to align with community needs, and must be implemented with the participation of government and local councils.

Sustainable Solution

Meanwhile, Zubaidha continues to hope for a water system. She is waiting for a gutter system to be installed in her house so she can collect rainwater for drinking and cooking.

"But a tank is not a sustainable solution. We want safe water in our plumbing system too," she said. "I'm hoping we get potable water as soon as possible. We are constantly told we will get it soon, people are constantly coming to survey, but we have not seen a solution yet."

Aishath Reetho, Senior Planner at Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure said the government is now negotiating with a private party to develop the water and sewerage system in Dhidhoo under a public-private-partnership model. The private party is to be offered concessions to build luxury villas in an uninhabited island in Baa Atoll in return for 400 housing units and a water and sewerage system in Dhidhoo. If the project is approved, it will take another two years to complete the water system. While the community waits for this untested model to be successful, will they ever know why funds dried up for the promised project?

Transparency Maldives is the national contact of Transparency International, a global civil society organisation leading the fight against corruption. We raise awareness of the damaging effects of corruption and work with partners in government, business and civil society to develop and implement effective measures to tackle it.

The Climate Finance Integrity Programme was piloted in 2011 by Transparency International in six countries, including the Maldives, to monitor the increasing climate related finance, the governance of raising and managing these funds and the governance of these funds within selected countries.

The Climate Finance Integrity Programme published a national report for the mapping assessment conducted for climate finance governance in Maldives. See full report <http://goo.gl/mMdA8O>. This case study was conducted in Haa Alif Ihavandhoo as part of the Programme.