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## Project benefit-impact matrix from the Maldives - a method for participatory evaluation

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### • Introduction

The objective of this paper is to describe the application of a participatory method called the 'project benefit-impact matrix'. This was recently used to evaluate the Nhilandhe Integrated Atoll Development (NIAD) Project of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Maldives.

The Maldives has 200 inhabited small islands. It is a classic case of a dual economy: the resort islands are prosperous tourist economies, while the traditional island communities are deprived, remote and are vulnerable to shortages of food, water and basic services. In the recent post-project evaluation of the UNDP-NIAD project, the evaluation team members (the authors) visited 8 traditional island communities in the two administrative atolls<sup>1</sup> of Faafu and Dhaalu and applied the project benefit-impact matrix as a major component of the participatory evaluation.

### Project benefit-impact matrix

The project benefit-impact matrix was the main method used for post-evaluation of the NIAD project. Each session lasted between one and a half and three hours, depending on the group size, the number of project activities, the time taken to recollect project activities etc.. The number of participants worked with in each of the different island communities varied from 10 to over 70 and included both women and men in separate groups.

In each case, groups of participants were provided with small cards and pens for listing, drawing and writing, as well as a wide sheet of paper for recording responses. They were first asked to remember and list the project activities and when they started (see Table 1). The participants then described the project activities and scored each of them in terms of their impact on individuals, the group or the community. For example, generation of electricity impacts upon the whole community, while handicraft training activity impacted only on some individuals.

After scoring, participants discussed the impacts of each of the project activities and wrote them on cards. This is shown in the fourth column of Table 1 and led on to discussions about the current status of the activity and reflections on its sustainability (fifth column). Finally, participants were asked make suggestions and recommendations for project follow-up. When the matrix was completed, the facilitators summarised the findings and presented them back to the participants for cross-checking and correction of errors and omissions.

<sup>1</sup> Administrative units of a group of islands with power of governance.

**Table 1. -An illustration from the field - project benefit-impact matrix (women), Island: Badidhoo, Dhaalu Atoll, Maldives**

Name of Activity	Year	Score	Impact of Activity	Status and Sustainability	Recommendations
1. health awareness programme	1993/1994	10	Community awareness has grown due to inputs in child care, food, child spacing and family planning. Such knowledge is also being applied.	The community, with health worker's support, continue to practice the new information.	For further sustainability, the women suggest preparation and distribution of reference materials.
2. handicraft training	1994	9	8 women took the training and can make small items like hand bags, lamps and hats with local materials.	Though the women are interested, they cannot practice it since there is no market for the product.	Sewing courses should be included in any project. There should be emphasis on planning and implementing income generating activities like shops or hotels. Training courses in home gardening should have follow up sessions.
3. honey bee keeping	1993	7	The island women committee members have gained some knowledge in bee-keeping	The members found it difficult to continue since training was incomplete. E.g. when the bees flew away they lacked knowledge about ways to get them back.	
4. credit scheme	1994	8	4 women borrowed money for sewing activities and still continue with loan repayment.	The scheme is useful but repayment is problematic due to no frequent local arrangement for repayment.	
5. electricity	1995	7	24 hours electricity available to the island community with manifold increase in regular income of Island Development Committee (IDC) from electricity charges.	The island women's committee helps in cleaning the powerhouse while maintenance is looked after by IDC.	
6. home gardening	1993	7	A specialist taught the women and school children for 8 months in preparing horticulture beds and applying fertilisers which resulted in women planting banana, papaya, tomato and pumpkins.	The women found it difficult to continue except for growing banana plants, since they lacked knowledge on plant disease and treatment.	
7. entrance deepening	1993	6	Has increased accessibility to the island where local fishermen are able to enter the island even after sunset.	Once a year the men clean the entrance while the women prepare special food for them.	
8. training in electric wiring	1994	5	Only one man was trained and applies his knowledge as and when required, though he does not charge for it.	More men should be trained.	
9. training in household furniture making	1993	8	11 men were trained who make cupboards, chairs and tables for income generation.	Men are earning good income and advance training course would be helpful.	
10. training in engine repair & maintenance	1993	6	A total of 26 men participated with one person each from the local fishing vessels. They are now skilled in handling engine problems thus saving large expenses on maintenance.	The course is very useful and an advanced course would be an added advantage.	
11. training in English language	1995	10	The teacher taught English for a month and left.	The community arranged for a teacher trained from India who is being paid by parents of the children.	

Note: impact prioritisation is scored out of 10, where a higher score means a higher impact.

## • Observations

As facilitators, a practical limitation of the project benefit-impact matrix was that with large groups of participants, many views arose and consensus building became an arduous task. Before arriving at a group score, the participants were encouraged to have a full group discussion. Often a tentative score was placed against a project activity and was altered, based on group consensus. Where difficulties were faced by the participants in arriving at a single score, they were encouraged to score separately and then discuss the issues raised in order to reach a consensus.

As most of the participants were literate, they wrote their points on the cards that were arranged in appropriate columns of the matrix. However, greater use of symbols could be made with illiterate groups.

Since both women's and men's groups were approached separately for the participatory evaluation, gender-based perspectives were articulated. For example, the women's group emphasised those activities which directly affected them and did not always list the range of project activities that the men listed. The status and sustainability of project activities were also perceived differently by different gender groups and thus the recommendations also differed.

The strengths of the project benefit-impact matrix include the following:

- It is a 'visual' method with the flexibility to provide a compact evaluation of a project and how it affects individuals, groups or the wider community. It is transparent and flexible and enables the participants to evaluate project activities as a group, and change their scores and views as and when required.
- It encourages wider participation: each participant is given cards, pens and seeds for scoring. The cards help those participants who are too shy to talk but who may be willing to write their views.

- Once the method is explained to the participants, they are able to construct their own project benefit-impact matrix without
- much outside facilitation. The process of constructing the project benefit-impact matrix can therefore be self-sustaining.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Table 1, the Island Analysts were Amira, Aneesa, Faheema Aminath, Mariyam, Ihusaana, Aminath, Aminath Ismail, Haseena Eesa, Mariyam Hussein, Arifa Eesa, Aishath Eesa, Aishath Mohammed, Lucky Star, Kashmeeru, Alivaage, Murigu, Femoaraage, Queen, Venice, Muraka, Riverside, Venus, Saveyra and Paris. The discussions were facilitated by Aminath Latheefa.

Thanks are due to Narinder Kakkar, Philippe Zysset, and Shaheem Razee of UNDP, Male, Republic of Maldives, officials of Atoll & Planning Ministry, Government of Maldives and the island communities of Faafu and Dhaalu Atolls, Nilandhe. All views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and all errors and omissions in the paper may be attributed to the first author.