



# **An Actor-Oriented Approach to Effectiveness**

An Evaluation of the Green Climate Fund's FP007 Project in the Maldives

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# Abstract

**Background:** Continued global warming threatens the existence of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The Green Climate Fund (GCF) was established to help vulnerable countries adapt to climate change through easier access to funding and country ownership of financing decisions. However, research reveals that climate adaptation efforts often are inadequate and fail to meet the unique adaptation needs of SIDS.

**Aim:** This study aims to challenge current climate adaptation practices in SIDS, by proposing an Actor-Oriented approach to evaluating the effectiveness of climate adaptation projects. The concept of agency is central to this approach, highlighting the importance of local stakeholders' active participation, perspectives, and decision-making power in the design and implementation of climate adaptation projects.

**Methods:** A case study of the GCF FP007 project in the Maldives. Based on reports from the UNDP, GCF, and the Maldivian Ministry of Environment, it assessed the extent to which the FP007 project can be considered effective.

**Findings:** Our evaluation of the FP007 project reveals significant limitations in its effectiveness from an Actor-Oriented perspective. The project did not adequately address local stakeholder priorities, relied heavily on foreign consultants, and maintained a top-down approach, limiting local agency. Additionally, the project's organizational structure and normative evaluation methods perpetuated external superiority and failed to fully incorporate and value local perspectives.

**Keywords:** Climate change adaptation, Green Climate Fund, Sustainable Development, Actor-Oriented Approach, Small Island Developing States, and Maldives.

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# Abbreviations

GCF Green Climate Fund

NDA National Designated Authority

ME Maldivian Ministry of Environment

RWH Rainwater Harvesting

SIDS Small Island Developing States

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

# Introduction

As global temperatures continue to rise due to human activities, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like the Maldives are increasingly vulnerable to climate change effects, particularly the risk of significant land loss due to rising sea levels. The Maldives, an archipelago of 1,192 low-lying coral islands in the Indian Ocean, is acutely vulnerable in this regard (United Nations Development Programme et al., 2020). Alarmingly, over 80% of its land area lies less than one meter above sea level, putting the nation at significant risk of being submerged within the next century due to rising sea levels. This environmental challenge is exacerbated by climate-induced coastal erosion, water scarcity, and adverse impacts on coral reef ecosystems, which are vital for the nation's tourism and fisheries industries (Mycoo & Wairiu, 2022). Despite contributing less than 1% to global greenhouse gas emissions, SIDS faces some of the most severe impacts of climate change (Sovacool, 2012; Mycoo & Wairiu, 2022). Moreover, SIDS face unique challenges due to its geographic isolation, limited land resources, and economic dependencies. Many SIDS, including the Maldives, rely heavily on tourism and fisheries, and the combination of these factors with the severe impacts of climate change creates a situation where these islands are among the most vulnerable regions globally. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report, the necessity for robust and immediate adaptation strategies is crucial for the survival and sustainability of SIDS (Mycoo & Wairiu, 2022).

International climate funding often adheres to a universal framework outlined by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations. The Green Climate Fund (GCF), created within this framework, plays a critical role in financing climate adaptation projects globally, including those in the Maldives. However, critics have argued that international organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the GCF tend to operate with a set of standardized measures that overlook the individual context and needs of local communities - such as cultural, political and economic factors, which may sacrifice the effectiveness of development and adaptation initiatives (Long, 2001; McCarthy et al., 2012; Craft and Fisher, 2016) Within the study of sustainable development, it has increasingly become accepted that involving local actors, their knowledge and perspectives, is crucial for the effectiveness of development initiatives (Mycoo & Wairiu, 2022).

What makes the GCF particularly interesting in this context is the fact that it claims to operate a country-driven approach, where adaptation projects align with national policies and strategies, national stakeholders are included in the process, and developing countries can access funding directly (Zamarioli, Pauw & Grüning, 2020). The establishment of the GCF is the direct result of North-South equity negotiations on climate finance in the UNFCCC, as it is increasingly recognized that the more affluent and polluting countries have a moral obligation to assist smaller and more vulnerable nations that often suffer the most severe consequences of global warming.

Given the significant critiques and shortcomings of climate finance entities, we are curious to explore if the GCF's focus on direct access and a country-driven approach has resulted in effective adaptation projects in SIDS. Specifically, we have chosen the Maldives and the GCF project *FP007: Support of vulnerable communities in Maldives to manage climate change-induced water shortages* as our case study. The FP007 project aims to address critical water shortages for 105,000 people on the outer islands of the Maldives by implementing an integrated water supply system combining rainwater, groundwater, and desalinated water to ensure continuous supply to 49 islands dependent on emergency water deliveries for three months each year, while also enhancing distribution networks with decentralized, cost-effective dry season water supply systems and desalination plants on four larger islands.

An Actor-Oriented perspective is particularly relevant in this context as it emphasizes the importance of understanding and incorporating the viewpoints, experiences, and agency of local stakeholders in the design and implementation of development projects. It also provides the methodological steps necessary to critically investigate whether the FP007 project genuinely reflects the needs and knowledge of the Maldivian communities it aims to serve, rather than imposing external solutions that may not align with local realities. Consequently, we present the following problem formulation;

*“From an Actor-Oriented perspective, to what extent can the Green Climate Fund's FP007 project in the Maldives be considered effective?”*

# Background information

This chapter is dedicated to outlining the necessary context to comprehend the scope of the current study. This includes covering background information on the history of the Republic of Maldives, the structure of the GCF and the roles of key actors involved in the FP007 project.

## The Republic of Maldives

The Republic of Maldives, commonly referred to as the Maldives, is a small island nation in the Indian Ocean (Wadey et al., 2017). The archipelago consists of 26 natural atoll clusters, encompassing 1,192 islands, of which only 200 are inhabited (Lansford, 2021). Geographically, the Maldives spans over 298 km<sup>2</sup> in land area but covers a total territorial expanse of approximately 107,500 km<sup>2</sup>, extending 860 km north to south and 100 km east to west (Wadey et al., 2017, p. 134). With an average elevation of just 1 meter above sea level, the Maldives frequently experience oceanic flooding and erosion (Wadey et al., 2017) Research indicates that the global average sea level could rise by 2 meters by 2100 and 5 meters by 2150 (Sakamoto et al., 2022 p. 327).

In 2022, the World Bank estimated that the Maldivian population to be approximately 523,787 (*Population, Total - Maldives*, n.d.). The Maldivian population exhibits a blend of Sinhalese, Dravidian, and Arabic heritage (Lansford, 2021). The official language is Dhivehi, is related to Sinhalese, and Islam is the state religion, with a majority adhering to the Sunni branch (Lansford, 2021.). Malé is the capital of the Maldives with a population of 135,000 and a density exceeding 39,000 per square kilometer, is expanding due to population growth and urbanization (Bisaro et al., 2019).

Historically, the Maldives has been subjected to European colonial powers. In the mid-16th century, the Portuguese attempted to dominate the Maldives (Lansford, 2021). Following this, the British established their influence in 1796, and in 1887, the Maldives was declared a British protectorate (Lansford, 2021). Meaning that while the Maldives maintained its own government for internal affairs, the British provided military protection and managed foreign relations on its behalf (Armitage, 1992). The Maldives gained independence from Britain on July 26, 1965, after

negotiations that included agreements on economic assistance and the retention of a British facility on Gan Islands (Lansford, 2021). In recent history, the Maldives briefly left the Commonwealth in 2016 due to concerns over democratization but rejoined in 2020 (Maldives Becomes 54th Member of Commonwealth Family | Commonwealth, 2020; Lansford, 2021). Politically, the Maldives became a republic in 1968 after a national referendum replaced the sultanate, and adopted its present constitution in 2008 (Lansford, 2021).

The Maldivian economy is heavily reliant on fishing and tourism, with fishing contributing 5.6% to the GDP and tourism 28% (Lansford, 2021). Tourism's significance is underscored by the dedication of approximately 100 islands to tourist resorts (Wadey et al., 2017). The Maldives have suffered three big economic crises which are the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the 2008 financial crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic (Lansford, 2021; International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept, 2023). The Maldives resorted to taking International Monetary Fund loans in response to these economic shocks (Lansford, 2021; International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Dept, 2023), this has inevitably put the Maldives into heavy debt.

In 2018, former president Abdulla Yameen lost power as he became more autocratic and closer with China, he is now serving an 11-year prison sentence for corruption and money laundering (“Mohamed Muizzu Wins Maldives Election in Victory for Pro-China Camp,” 2023). From 2018 to 2023, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih served as president and encouraged close relations with India and allowed Indian military presence in the Maldives (“Mohamed Muizzu Wins Maldives Election in Victory for Pro-China Camp,” 2023). The 2023 election of Dr. Mohammed Muizzu has introduced shifts in the political landscape. Muizzu’s administration is expected to strengthen ties with China, potentially leading to increased foreign investments, particularly in tourism and infrastructure sectors, contrasting the previous administration’s alignment with India (“Mohamed Muizzu Wins Maldives Election in Victory for Pro-China Camp”, 2023).

## **Key Actors in the FP007 project**

Access to GCF resources is managed through accredited national, regional, and international actors. The key actors of analysis in the current study are thus embedded in the structure of the



GCF (See Figure 1). Since the main actors in the FP007 project are entities, we can refer to them as ‘collective actors’. Such collective actors are made up of a network of individual actors with their own goals and ideas, who are mobilized to work toward the common goal of the entity they represent (Long, 2001). The next sections are dedicated to outlining the key actors of the FP007 project, namely the GCF, the UNDP, and the Maldivian Ministry of Environment.

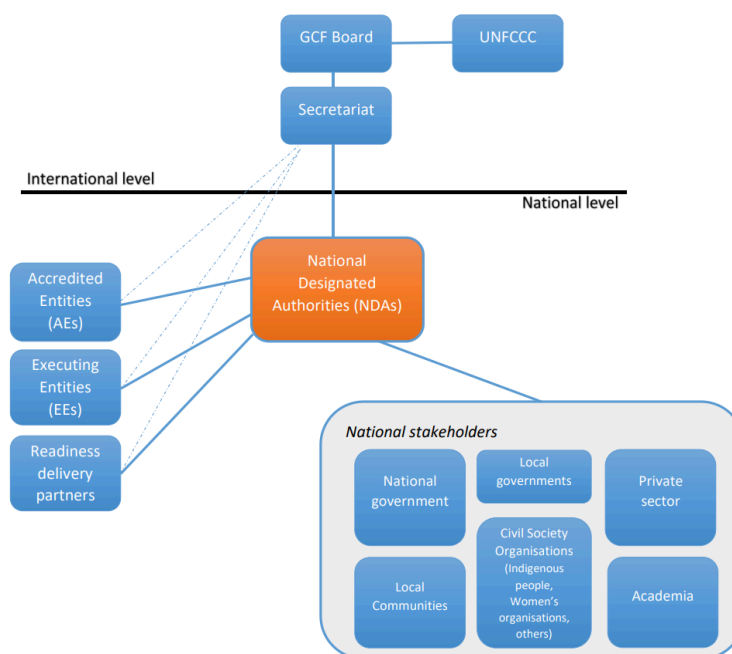


Figure 1. Key actors in GCF projects (Zamarioli, Pauw & Grüning, 2020)

## The Green Climate Fund

The Green Climate Fund, established in 2010 under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is a dedicated financial mechanism that is also currently the largest climate fund in the world. Its primary mission is to support developing countries in their efforts to address both climate change adaptation and mitigation activities. The GCF is governed by the GCF Board, which is formed by 24 Board members equally divided among developed and developing countries (Zamarioli, Pauw & Grüning, 2020). The board is responsible for the governance and oversight of the Fund’s management. This includes being in charge of approving national, international or regional entities for accreditation, and to review and approve funding proposals submitted by Accredited Entities.

When the Paris Agreement was reached in 2015, the GCF was assigned a critical role in supporting the Agreement's objective of keeping global temperature rise well below 2 degrees Celsius (*About Us*, n.d.). The GCF thus aims to “*promote a paradigm shift towards low-emission and climate-resilient development, taking into account the needs of nations that are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts*” (UNDP Project Portal, n.d.). The GCF was envisioned to deliver equal amounts of funding for mitigation and adaptation efforts, guided by the principles of the UNFCCC.

Proponents of the Fund, including representatives from developing countries and other supporters, advocated for direct access to become a central pillar so that developing countries could access resources from the GCF without having to go through an international entity as they would need to do at most other multilateral climate funds (Caldwell & Larsen, 2021). The GCF has lined up programs and policies to help ensure access GCF funding for a diverse range of actors. These include the Readiness Programme, the Project Preparation Facility, the Simplified Approval Process, and Enhancing Direct Access pilot (Caldwell & Larsen, 2021). Despite these efforts, data on direct access to funding indicates that there is room for improvement, as only a third of entities approved for direct access have had a project approved (Caldwell & Larsen, 2021).

## **The United Nations Development Programme**

The UNDP serves as the accredited entity for this project (See Figure 1). The accredited entity is responsible for carrying out a number of activities, typically tasks such as developing funding proposals, as well as managing and monitoring projects and programs (“Accredited Entities”, n.d.). The UNDP has thus worked alongside Maldivian actors to come up with ideas for the FP007 project, and has been responsible for submitting the funding proposal to be approved by the GCF.

## **The Maldivian Ministry of Environment**

The Ministry of Environment (ME) is the lead government agency mandated with the formulation of national policy on climate change and is the national designated authority (NDA) of the project. ME is also mandated to advocate on behalf of the Maldives and other SIDS on the

effects of climate change at regional and international forums. ME is the national focal point for the UNFCCC as well as the NDA of all current GCF projects in the Maldives. NDAs are governmental bodies that act as a liaison between each nation and the Fund (See Figure 1 above) (“National Designated Authorities”, n.d.). They oversee the GCF’s operations in their respective countries from a strategic perspective and convey the nation’s funding priorities for projects that aim to reduce emissions and enhance climate resilience. As the NDA, ME are key actors in the interplay between the GCF, the Maldives, and its national actors and stakeholders (Zamarioli, Pauw & Grüning, 2020). The NDA is limited to signing the application for accreditation of national or regional implementing entities and to endorse the projects and programs proposed by such entities (Zamarioli, Pauw & Grüning, 2020).

## **Literature review**

Our literature review is divided into three parts: ‘Climate Change Adaptation Challenges in the Maldives,’ ‘Climate Funding Strategies,’ and ‘Development Practices.’ We have structured it chronologically and thematically to discuss scholarly debates on our topic and touch upon their methodological choices.

### **Climate Change Adaptation Challenges in the Maldives**

Research has identified several challenges to climate change adaptation in the Maldives (Sovacool, 2012; Mastini, 2014; Magnan et al. 2016; Robison, 2017; Axisa et al., 2023).

The study most comparable to ours is Sovacool (2012), which examines climate change adaptation challenges in the Maldives through a specific adaptation project. Sovacool's methodology closely resembles Long’s (2001) Actor-Oriented approach, though he doesn't explicitly use this framework. He incorporates local actors' perspectives by collecting primary data by interviewing government officials, NGO representatives, community leaders, and business professionals (Sovacool, 2012). Additionally, Sovacool (2012) gathers secondary data

from documents by the World Bank, UNDP, and NAPA, aiming to triangulate and validate his findings.

When reviewing the literature within the field, we found several studies advocating for increased exercise of local agency while still stressing a need for external involvement (Mastini, 2014; Magnan et al. 2016; Bisaro et al. 2019).

Mastini (2014) emphasizes integrating traditional knowledge with modern technology for effective climate adaptation, advocating for both local and international collaboration. His study involved interviews with policymakers and a comparison of primary data with secondary data collected from institutional and international NGO reports (Mastini, 2014). Mastini (2014) found that the existing climate adaptation framework may not fully support the integration of traditional knowledge with modern technology, potentially overlooking valuable local knowledge.

Magnan et al. (2016) conducted four case studies comparing the Maldives, Ethiopia, South Africa, and Bangladesh to assess the risk of maladaptive climate change adaptation. Methodologically, the nine academic authors held a three-day workshop to discuss their case studies and literature on maladaptation (Magnan et al., 2016). They conclude that to avoid maladaptive outcomes, it is important for both international and local policymakers and stakeholders to anticipate the risk of maladaptation (Magnan et al., 2016).

Bisaro et al. (2019) analyzed land reclamation in Germany, the Netherlands, and the Maldives, focusing on technology, cost-benefit, and public finance. They describe land reclamation as creating new land from the sea using materials like sand and rock to address space constraints (Bisaro et al., 2019). The Hulhumalé project in the Maldives, initiated in 1997, raised land by 2.1 meters above sea level (Bisaro et al., 2019). Bisaro et al. (2019) concluded that under certain conditions, land reclamation can leverage public adaptation investments, boosting the economy and increasing urban space, while also providing protection against sea-level rise.

However, several studies also highlight the challenges of a universal framework to climate adaptation which is seen in external involvement efforts (Robinson, 2017; Axisa et al., 2023).

For example, Robinson (2017) critiques the focus on incremental adaptation actions, noting that they maintain existing systems rather than achieving the transformational changes needed for long-term resilience. This approach offers short-term relief but fails to address deeper vulnerabilities (Robinson, 2017). Robinson (2017) also argues that SIDS complies with UNFCCC obligations due to their dependency on external resources, and concludes that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to climate change adaptation in SIDS is ineffective due to their varying geophysical, economic, and social structures.

Moreover, different island communities in the Maldives have unique adaptation needs. For example, Maamigili and Fenfushi face different challenges despite their proximity, necessitating tailored disaster risk reduction strategies (Axisa et al., 2023). Locals of Maamigili are concerned with flooding, marine pollution, and waste management, while those in Fenfushi are focused on reef degradation, water shortages, and water quality (Axisa et al., 2023 p. 18). This underscores the complexities of each island and highlights the importance of involving local actors in the planning process (Axisa et al., 2023).

## **Climate Funding Strategies**

Several scholars have dedicated their studies to evaluating the strategies of climate funding (Halsnæs & Verhagen, 2007; Sierra, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2012; Trujillo & Nakhooda, 2013; Bracking, 2014; Craft & Fisher, 2016; Chaudhury, 2020; Shumais & Mohamed, 2020).

Halsnæs and Verhagen (2007) argue that incorporating well-being indicators—assessing impacts on health, education, income, and environmental sustainability—into climate change adaptation and development policies provides a comprehensive evaluation of outcomes. They assert that applying these indicators in the energy, food, and water sectors in developing countries highlights the connections between development policies and climate change adaptation, aligning policies with broader goals and enhancing economic efficiency and sustainability (Halsnæs & Verhagen, 2007).

McCarthy et al. (2012) emphasize that the effectiveness of climate change adaptation initiatives hinges on aligning project goals with local needs and ensuring long-term sustainability. Similarly, Craft & Fisher (2016), who argue that effectiveness depends on evaluating the



adequacy of outcomes and their long-term sustainability within local contexts to enhance adaptation activities. Shumais and Mohamed (2020) further highlight robust governance, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement as critical success factors in Environmental Trust Funds in the Maldives.

Several scholars have focused on the GCF, providing insights into the challenges and impacts of its climate funding strategies (Sierra, 2011; Trujillo & Nakhooda, 2013; Bracking, 2014; Cui & Huang, 2018; Chaudhury, 2020).

Sierra (2011) criticizes current climate funding strategies for inadequate stakeholder engagement and poor integration with national development plans. She identifies significant shortcomings in several GCF projects, noting that despite the GCF's commitment to equitable distribution, adaptation projects frequently receive less funding compared to mitigation efforts (Sierra, 2011). This imbalance arises because mitigation outcomes, like CO<sub>2</sub> reductions, are more easily quantifiable compared to the complex and long-term nature of adaptation outcomes (Sierra, 2011). Sierra (2011) advocates for a more balanced approach to funding both mitigation and adaptation projects.

Trujillo and Nakhooda (2013) find that the GCF has facilitated more effective and impactful project implementation compared to earlier climate funding initiatives. They noted that these efforts are critical in addressing the various risks and barriers associated with climate finance (Trujillo & Nakhooda, 2013). However, they also pointed out that while the Adaptation Fund has made significant strides in promoting transparency and local ownership, its overall impact is constrained by financial instability and coordination difficulties (Trujillo & Nakhooda, 2013).

Bracking (2014) acknowledges the GCF's success in fostering innovative climate finance approaches but criticizes the influence of powerful countries and corporate interests, which prioritize financial returns over developmental and environmental benefits. This influence limits the fund's impact on the most vulnerable populations (Bracking, 2014). These concerns are echoed by Cui and Huang (2018), who argue that the GCF's financing remains unstable and heavily dependent on political negotiations, highlighting the need for clear and equitable financing mechanisms to ensure sustainability and effectiveness.

Chaudhury (2020) studies how the role of the GCF shapes climate financing. Using a mixed-method case study approach, he analyzed data from the GCF's website, its data portal, archival materials, public records, literature, and limited interviews (Chaudhury, 2020, p. 2). He finds that the GCF's goals of fairness and transparency are hard to achieve due to its evolving structure and the varied roles, agendas, and capabilities of its intermediaries (Chaudhury, 2020). Chaudhury (2020) concludes that projects that engage local communities and governments tend to achieve better results in sustainability and resilience building.

Evidently, researchers agree that there is room for improvement of the GCF's climate funding strategies (Sierra, 2011; Trujillo & Nakhooda, 2013; Bracking, 2014; Cui & Huang, 2018; Chaudhury, 2020). A significant body of literature has highlighted challenges of both previous and current development practices. Therefore, literature review will continue by exploring research surrounding these development practices.

## **Development Practices**

To apply an Actor-Oriented perspective to the field of sustainable development, it is necessary to review the field it stems from, the development field. Scholars argue that the field of development stems from the colonial and interventionist mindset (Tipps, 1973; Smith, 1986; Long, 2001; Hebinck et al., 2001).

A prominent theory stemming back to the late eighteenth century suggests that modernization was the logical path for all civilisation (Tipps, 1973). Modernization theory suggests that “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries differ fundamentally in their beliefs and values (McClelland, 1976). This theory further contends that developed countries, due to their homogenous beliefs and values, have achieved economic growth through industrialization and modernization (McClelland, 1976). In contrast, underdeveloped countries remain impoverished because they do not embrace the beliefs and values of developed nations (McClelland, 1976).

Modernization theory asserts that all societies aspire to modernize, by adopting industrialization and achieving economic growth in a linear process (Tipps, 1973; Rostow, 1991), ultimately aiming to resemble Western-style development (Tipps, 1973). The *Linear Stages of Growth Model*, grounded in structuralist economic theory, advocates for Capitalism and argues that

“developing” nations achieve economic modernization through five stages: “*traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity, age of High mass consumption*” (Rostow, 1991, p. 4).

Development theories such as the Linear Stages of Growth Model (Rostow, 1991) and Modernization theory have faced substantial criticism for their oversimplified, deterministic, and ethnocentric perspectives (Tipps, 1973; Long, 2001). Tipps’ (1973) study focuses on internal factors, utilizing quantitative data to compare various social indicators such as economic growth, education levels, and political stability across different countries to identify patterns and correlations that support the theory that modernization leads to improved societal outcomes. However, the study found that these theories tend to overlook the role of external factors such as the complexities of social change and the agency of local actors, portraying non-Western societies as passive (Tipps, 1973).

Dependency Theory transformed development research by highlighting structural inequalities in the global capitalist system, asserting that underdevelopment in peripheral nations results from exploitation by developed countries (Smith, 1986). Smith's (1986) study uses historical and sociopolitical analysis, emphasizing external factors like colonialism and global capitalism, thus criticizing modernization theory. However, while providing a critical lens on global inequalities, Dependency Theory has been critiqued for downplaying the potential for agency and resistance within dependent countries and overlooking internal dynamics (Smith, 1986). Thus, Smith (1986) calls for an alternative approach that balances the consideration of both external and internal factors to better understand the multifaceted nature of development.

Jaschik’s (2014) study uses interviews and media analysis, combining multiple theories to understand the influence of small states through both external and internal factors. He found that the focus on modernization and economic growth, modeled after societies of the Global North, often dismisses cultural factors, implying that non-Western societies need to adopt Western values and practices to develop (Jaschik, 2014). He argued that this approach risks imposing external solutions that may not be sustainable or culturally appropriate, marginalizing the agency of local populations and undermining their potential to contribute meaningfully to their development (Jaschik, 2014).

Proposing an alternative, Long's Actor-Oriented approach critiques earlier theories for approaching development in a structuralist and interventionist perspective. Long (2001) adheres to social constructivism, advocating for local actors to use their knowledge and agency to formulate their own policies and development strategies. Several studies within the field present findings in support of this approach (Hebinck et al., 2001; Klein & Juhola, 2013; Lama & Becker, 2019).

For example, Hebinck et al. (2001) analyze Norman Long's Actor-Oriented approach using historical and theoretical analysis complemented by ethnographic case studies, revealing the diversity of development outcomes based on local contexts (Hebinck et al., 2001). Connecting the approach to climate adaptation, Klein and Juhola's (2013) paper adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data analysis with qualitative case studies to develop a framework for Nordic countries to overcome bottlenecks in adaptation research by integrating local actors' agency (Klein & Juhola, 2013). Moreover, the "*Conflicts in Adaptation*" study by Lama and Becker (2019) employs qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and participatory observation to gather narratives about environmental changes and adaptation efforts. The study concludes that understanding local socio-political dynamics and incorporating community knowledge into adaptation planning lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes (Lama & Becker, 2019).

A commonality of the literature within the Actor-Oriented approach is the use of interviews and observations (Hebinck et al., 2001; Long, 2001). However, a potential knowledge gap exists in the intersection of Actor-Oriented perspectives with document analysis that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the process. While interviews and observations are highly relevant for understanding local actors' perspectives, we argue that an analysis of the framework behind these perspectives can tell us more about how they came to be.

Thus, applying the Actor-Oriented approach to the ongoing GCF project in the Maldives allows for a detailed examination of how local stakeholders' knowledge and viewpoints are involved in the planning and implementation of the FP007 project, and how this might influence project outcomes and effectiveness.

# Methodology

This chapter covers the methodological framework employed in our study. It begins by presenting the Actor-Oriented approach to development, which forms an understanding of the underlying assumptions behind our methodological choices. It goes on to introduce the concepts of agency and effectiveness, and how they form the analytical framework of our analysis. Lastly, it presents the reports on which the analysis was conducted.

## Actor-Oriented Approach

The current study is guided by Norman Long's Actor-Oriented approach as formulated in his book *Development Sociology - Actor Perspectives* from 2001, and developed in later publications. Originating from development studies, his approach to development emphasizes the roles, interactions, and perspectives of various stakeholders in development processes (Long, 2004). It posits that development outcomes are not solely the result of macro-level policies but also the actions and interactions of individuals and groups at different levels, and the social interfaces where these interactions occur (Long, 2004). By incorporating local actors' perspectives, this approach aims to enhance the understanding of how development initiatives are implemented and received (Long, 2001). It acknowledges that actors have their own capacities and strategies, which are shaped by broader socio-economic, political, and cultural structures. By examining these dynamics, the Actor-Oriented approach provides a comprehensive view of how development processes are socially constructed and influenced by power relations, ultimately aiming to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of development projects (Long, 2001; Long, 2004).

Long views 'development' from a decolonial, social constructivist perspective, through which development can be seen as a system that connects forms of 'knowledge' about the Third World with the use of power and intervention (Long, 2001). This process can be seen as simultaneously defining and constructing the 'Third World' in a subtle and often unquestioned manner (Long, 2001). Through this discourse, individuals, governments, and communities are labeled as 'underdeveloped' and are treated accordingly (Long, 2001).



Long believes the dominant way of thinking about development is driven by various forms of interventionist discourse that are fundamentally ‘diagnostic and prescriptive’ in nature (Long, 2001 p. 32). This implies that providers of development intervention tend to find issues in developing countries that can then be ‘fixed’ through development intervention from developed countries. So while Long recognized the importance of including local knowledge and perspectives in intervention planning, he also warned about the paradox that arises when this inclusion is facilitated by actors from ‘developed’ countries. The notion of inclusive development continues to enforce the idea that the powerless locals need to be given empowerment from the more knowledgeable ‘outsiders’ (Long, 2004). Therefore, Long argues that simply emphasizing the importance of inclusion and country ownership does not absolve researchers or practitioners from the managerialist and interventionist undertones inherent in the concept of development (Long, 2004).

Though much of the literature on social networks depict them as made up of relatively balanced and dense sets of relations based on principles of reciprocity, most social networks are in fact composed of partial and asymmetrical, yet formally recognized, sets of relations that point towards patterns of centralization and hierarchy (Long, 2001). In a centralized system, there are imbalances in exchanges and access to strategic resources. Additionally, a degree of centralized control and decision-making is carried out by an authoritative body claiming to act on behalf of the collectivity in its dealings with external actors (Long, 2001).

Long defines *social actors* as all the entities that have the ability to understand and plan appropriate responses to challenging situations. They can be individuals, informal groups, organizations, or larger entities like governments or international organizations. Collective actions are often the result of collaborations between different actors, overlapping projects, and the interplay of various discussions and viewpoints. This highlights the complexity and diversity of social action. It is crucial not to oversimplify or assume that larger entities like organizations or social movements always act in unison. Instead, we may think of them as coalitions of actors, each with their own projects and perspectives.

# Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework consists of the concepts ‘agency’ and ‘effectiveness’. The concept of agency, central to the Actor-Oriented approach, informs the lens through which we will define effectiveness. This means that the concepts are interconnected, and this conceptual framework ultimately seeks to inform the reader about how effectiveness will be measured through the lens of agency.

## Agency

The Actor-Oriented approach is based upon the assumption that all social actors hold the capacity to process their and others’ experiences and to act upon them (Long, 2001). Agency can thus be defined as the capacity of an actor (individual or collective) to process experiences, make decisions, and act upon them. The notion of agency implies both knowledgeability, where experiences and desires are consciously or unconsciously understood and absorbed, and the capability to command relevant skills, access material and non-material resources, and engage in particular organizing practices. Agency can be recognized when specific actions change a pre-existing state of affairs or course of events. Thus agency is embodied in social relations and can only be effective through them (Long, 2001).

Long's definition of agency differs from the definitions employed by scholars in the field of climate adaptation, who tend to discuss agency as a form of power held by actors with access to resources, e.g. land and finance (Woroniecki et. al., 2018). Schroeder (2010) related agency to *“the ability to prescribe behaviour and to obtain the consent of the governed”* (p. 320). Agency has also been defined as the capacity to improve and diversify livelihoods, change policy and behavior, and reduce dependencies on vulnerable livelihoods (Woroniecki et. al., 2018). These conceptualizations of agency differ slightly from that of Long's Actor-Oriented approach, in that they imply power and status as key components of agency, and thus the absence of the necessary resources to exercise agency implies the absence of agency itself.

The Actor-Oriented approach does not imply that actors from developed countries have more agency than those in developing countries, though struggles over power are of central concern to

the approach. Rather, the Actor-Oriented approach considers agency as something all actors possess, even those in extremely subordinate positions (Long, 2001). It is about considering actors in recipient countries as knowledgeable and capable of engaging in the organizing of developmental processes and shaping their outcomes according to their own beliefs and interests. With that said, the Actor-Oriented approach does not deny that actors in developed nations, due to their access to resources, information, and decision-making platforms, hold more power to shape the courses of events through their agency. Long recognizes how power dynamics in development intervention are inherently related to the access to resources: *“I have already described intervention practices as political struggles over access to, and distribution of, certain critical resources and, above all, as normative struggles over the definition of development and the role of the different actors.”* (Long, 2001 p. 41).

On this basis, our project employs a definition of agency aligning with that of Long (2001) and recognition that all actors possess it, yet recognizes that the ability to exercise it is closely connected to access to resources and the power to decide where to allocate them and for which purposes. When we undertake an Actor-Oriented approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the FP007 project through the lens of agency, we will consider that all actors possess the necessary knowledgeability and capability to influence project outcomes, however, recognizing that local Maldivian actors might be restricted in their ability to exercise this agency to influence decisions and outcomes.

We believe that the recognition of local actors' agency and their ability to exercise it is of central importance to the effectiveness of the project, and thus we will now account for how this project will approach effectiveness through the lens of agency.

## **Effectiveness**

Evaluations are an inherent part of the procedure in development intervention and are typically held to justify whether a project should be continued, altered, or abandoned based on a review of its effectiveness (Long, 2001). ‘Effectiveness’ in this type of evaluation can be described as *“the capacity of an adaptation action to achieve its expressed objectives”* (Adger, Arnell & Topkins, 2005, p. 81). In other words, the success or failure of a project is measured by how well it meets

its objectives without excessive costs to the organization or the target population (Long, 2001; Adger, Arnell & Topkins, 2005).

The current research project seeks to break with conventional evaluation methods, which it perceives as inherently problematic for various reasons. Firstly, even if a project is deemed a failure by conventional effectiveness criteria, evaluations often lead to reformulating and attempting the same goals again (Long, 2001). Secondly, conventional evaluations rarely question the very idea of planned interventions; instead, they blame external factors like farmers, environmental conditions, or market fluctuations for any failures (Long, 2001). As a result, conventional evaluations reinforce the belief that intervention policies are valid, even if influenced by market forces (Long, 2001 p. 37). The cumulation of conventional evaluations of various interventions over time should be seen as key in producing ideologies that justify the role and power of intervening agencies. Rather than focusing on policy failures, it is essential to understand that failures often lead to new rounds of interventions. This cycle can continue for decades, as new issues arise or goals remain unmet, supporting the business of intervention. Development, treated as a commodity by firms, consultancy groups, and government agencies, is driven by the interests of those involved in its promotion and execution, rather than its assumed functions (Long, 2001 p. 37).

Scholars in the climate adaptation field have suggested ways to conduct stronger evaluations of effectiveness through the consideration of local contexts. This involves considering effectiveness in terms of long-term efficiency and sustainability of project outcomes for local communities as well as the adequacy of initiatives in addressing the adaptation needs, particularly of the most vulnerable communities (Adger, Arnell & Topkins, 2005; McCarthy et. al., 2012; Craft & Fisher 2016). Since adaptation processes are context-specific, countries and their actors will have different objectives for adaptation (Craft & Fisher, 2016). On this basis, it is key that the assessments of effective adaptation draw from specific national objectives and priorities, which are developed in national planning processes or prioritization exercises. (Craft & Fisher, 2016 p. 13).

The current project aims to contribute to this body of literature, by proposing an Actor-Oriented perspective to evaluating the effectiveness of adaptation projects. Rather than evaluating effectiveness in terms of the extent to which goals were reached, we propose to evaluate the effectiveness of adaptation projects in terms of their success in formulating and reaching goals that align with the perspectives and knowledge of local actors, recognizing their agency and providing the necessary resources to exercise it. While conventional evaluations of effectiveness serve the interest of the actors who capitalize from development interventions, we believe that our Actor-Oriented approach to effectiveness will serve the interest of the local-national actors whose livelihoods are urgently threatened by the effects of climate change.

The next sections present how the concepts of agency and effectiveness are operationalized in the analysis of the current study. It also accounts for choices of data on which we perform the analysis.

## **Document Analysis**

Based on the concepts of agency and effectiveness, we have established indicators of effectiveness from an Actor-Oriented perspective to evaluate the FP007 project. These indicators include: ensuring that project objectives and strategies align with the priority areas identified by local stakeholders; setting project objectives that are ambitious enough to meet the goals outlined in national plans; prioritizing the achievement of set objectives over adhering strictly to cost constraints i.e. project planners are willing to allocate enough resources to reach the project goals; and having the project's own evaluation unit consider all potential responsibilities for challenges or delays in implementation, rather than attributing them to local conditions, particularly conditions related to 'underdevelopment'.

The analysis was based on official reports and documents from the GCF, the Maldivian Ministry of Environment, and the Government of Maldives. We conducted a thorough analysis of national planning reports, specifically the SAP, NAPA, and Country Programme, to identify the local perspectives we believe should be integrated into the FP007 project. By comparing the identified local viewpoints to the FP007 projects' objectives and achievements, we then assessed the extent to which these perspectives were considered in the project. Additionally, our evaluation included



a critical analysis of the Approved Funding Proposal and the Annual Performance Reports of the FP007 project, commenting on their content and evaluation practices from an Actor-Oriented lens and analyzing them through the indicators that we outlined in the above paragraph. This step focuses particularly on how the UNDP phrases the encountered challenges, what they blame them on, and how they propose to solve them. Finally, your findings were summed up to conclude on the extent to which the FP007 project can be considered effective from an Actor-Oriented perspective.

The evaluation of the FP007 project was based on the following reports:

**Approved Funding Proposal: FP007: Supporting vulnerable communities in Maldives to manage climate change-induced water shortages**

This document presents the funding proposal, including its objectives, strategies, budget and timeline.

**Annual Performance Reports (6 reports, 2017-2022)**

Submitted by the UNDP, the Annual Performance Reports present the overall implementation progress of the FP007 project, providing information on challenges encountered and mitigation actions taken.

**Maldives Country Programme**

The Country Programme Document for Maldives (2022–2026) seeks to support the Maldivian Government in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, aligning closely with the UN Cooperation Framework.

**National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA)**

Identifies the key areas of climate change related vulnerabilities, and outlines priority goals and adaptation strategies.

**Strategic Action Plan (SAP)**

Outlines the developmental priorities and targets of the Government of Maldives for the period from 2019 to 2023.

The Green Climate Fund's reports occasionally include confidential information, and only a redacted version is available to the public. This specific nature of the confidential information is unknown, but it is important to acknowledge it as a limitation to our study.

# Analysis

This analysis is divided into three parts to systematically address our research question. First, we define what constitutes 'local perspectives' in the context of the Maldives and the FP007 project. Secondly, we assess if the FP007 project allows locals to exercise their political agency. Finally, we provide examples of how the FP007 project tends to favor external solutions over empowering local agency.

## Local Perspectives

To assess whether 'local perspectives' and the agency of Maldivian actors were considered in the planning and implementation of the FP007 project, it is essential first to establish what is meant by local perspectives in this particular context. For this, we analyzed the NAPA and SAP reports (both authored by the Government of Maldives) and Country Programme (authored by the UNDP in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment). The current study regards these reports as able to represent the needs and priorities of the Maldivian people and nature. The subsequent three paragraphs outline the identified local perspectives that were particularly relevant for our evaluation of the FP007 project. Finally, we address additional reflections on the 'localness' of these perspectives before moving on to the second part of the analysis.

Firstly, all the analyzed reports emphasized a development model that aims to preserve and promote *Jazeera dhiriulhun*, the Island way of life, in which sustainability, the voices and agency of the Maldivian citizens are a central aspect (Government of Maldives, 2017). Fundamental to *Jazeera dhiriulhun* is the decentralization of the governance structure in the Maldives through the empowerment of Island Councils, which was the goal of the 2010 Decentralization Act (Government of Maldives, 2017 p. 8). However the SAP reveals that in the years prior to publication there has been a *“reversal of the fundamental principles of decentralisation, whereby centralisation once again became the main policy upon which developmental agenda of the Government was executed. Local councils were disempowered and powers devolved were taken back by the central government”* (p. 252). The Government holds that significant development can be achieved only via empowerment of local councils and effective decentralization. Therefore, it proposes actions to counter the reversal of decentralization principles and restore

authority to local councils, which we see as a clear local perspective.

Second, the SAP reveals the wish for a complete provision of water supply to all inhabited islands by no later than 2026. It shared its target to provide safe water supply and sewerage facilities on all inhabited islands by 2023 (Government of Maldives, 2019, p. 317) . Similarly, the Country Programme pledged the provision to safe water supply and sanitation to all inhabited islands, with 30% of water management facilities across the country using solar energy for operation by 2026 (United Nations Development Programme et al., 2020, p. 20). However, in the SAP, the ME acknowledged that *“our success depends on our ability to generate the necessary resources needed for the implementation of this plan”* (Government of Maldives, 2019, p. 2). We perceive these statements as a local perspective that the FP007 project must reflect in its objectives and performance to be effective. This means that the project's effectiveness depends on how ambitious it has been in meeting these objectives, and whether the project was granted sufficient funding to achieve the targets set out in the SAP and country programme.

Lastly, the local perspective found in the NAPA revealed that the Maldives top adaptation priority is the protection of its coasts and land, and that issues of water supply are not the top priority. This ranking of priorities is based on the use of an analytical hierarchy process to prioritize 30 adaptation measures based on the opinions of local stakeholders. This analysis revealed that *“building capacity for coastal protection, coastal zone management and flood control”* was the highest-ranked adaptation priority of Maldivian stakeholders. *“Increasing safe rainwater harvesting and acquiring desalination technologies appropriate for small islands”* was ranked 16th and 30th respectively (Government of Maldives, 2017 p. 43-44). This local perspective tells us what locals wish from future adaptation projects such as the FP007, which we believe needs to be reflected in order for such projects to be effective.

Additionally, we found that the NAPA and SAP, and Country Programme, though they are intended to represent local knowledge and needs in the Maldives, were often developed with the financial assistance and expertise of external actors such as the UNDP and the GCF. This was particularly evident in the Country Programme, which was developed specifically to help the Maldives reach the UNDP’s sustainable development goals through investments from the GCF,

in consideration of the NAPA. As a result, the reports end up employing rhetorics that derive from the development paradigm, and the development goals and priorities they present are influenced by the standardized goals and priorities of the GCF and the UNDP.

This raises the concern that local Maldivian actors may form their knowledge and perspectives on adaptation and development based on discourses inherent to the conventional development paradigm. If this is the case, it might be argued that to form a truly local perspective, locals would need to think of adaptation outside of the paradigm of conventional development, which is a difficult task. A concrete example can be found in Sovacool's (2012) ethnographic study, where it was found that locals tend to want the same adaptation strategies as they see in the capital Malé, which they perceive as wealthier and more protected. Seen from a conventional development perspective, due to the extensive investments in its development and adaptation, Malé is the most 'modern' or 'developed' island in the Maldives (Sovacool, 2012). When locals express wishes for adaptation measures that replicate those they see in Malé, these 'local perspectives' are essentially formed based on knowledge deriving from numerous former development interventions.

All this points toward the possibility that 'local perspectives' are never, in fact, independent of, or in contrast with, 'foreign perspectives'. The Maldives have a far back reaching history of being constructed and represented in terms of their (under)development and vulnerability to climate change. Therefore, it is plausible to think that this legacy has shaped local Maldivian actors' perceptions of themselves and their aspirations for development and climate adaptation. The Maldivian history of countless development interventions has led the locals to form their knowledge and perspectives based on the perceived effectiveness of former adaptation projects.

## **The Political Agency of Locals**

To address our research question, it is necessary to analyze whether the Annual Performance Reports and the Approved Funding Report incorporate the local perspective. Using an Actor-Oriented approach, we will employ our conceptual framework and our indicators of effectiveness to analyze the FP007 projects effectiveness. In this 'The Political Agency of Locals' section of our analysis, we will study whether the FP007 project allows the Maldivian

Government to exercise its political agency.

All of the Annual Performance Reports from the GCF and UNDP reveal a consistent pattern of criticism directed towards the Maldivian Government's role in the project delays and budget overruns (United Nations Development Programme, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). One report attributes securing labor permits, construction delays, and budget increases to an unspecified 2019 governmental policy, which requires redesigning Reverse Osmosis plants to integrate with Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) systems (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). This policy shift necessitated governmental approvals and material procurement adjustments, resulting in a four-month delay and additional costs exceeding the initial project goals (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p. 11). Moreover, the Annual Performance Reports (United Nations Development Programme, 2018, 2019) repeatedly indicate that the Maldivian political climate is a significant factor contributing to delays in the project. As evidenced by statements such as “[...] *given the political circumstances unfolding, certain delays in progress might be inevitable.*” (United Nations Development Programme, 2018, p. 3) and “*Broader political context of the country during a presidential election year and unclear political directives delayed signing of major civil works contracts by 4 months.*” (United Nations Development Programme, 2019, p. 22). The UNDP and GCF have implemented certain strategies to address these delays, including attempting to resolve them (United Nations Development Programme, 2019) and setting strategies to improve the coordination between the Island Councils (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). However, these strategies can be perceived as undermining local agency by imposing external solutions to what the GCF and UNDP perceive as a local problem. The Annual Performance Reports indicate that the GCF and UNDP perceive the local political instability and bureaucratic obstacles as barriers to project progress, reflecting McClelland (1976) and Rostow (1991) Modernity discourse that implies the Global South must align with Western governance standards to achieve efficiency and democracy. Through the lens of an Actor-Oriented approach, these critiques highlight a top-down methodology that undervalues local knowledge and agency. By attributing delays and cost overruns to local political and bureaucratic factors, the GCF and the UNDP reports imply a deficiency in local capacity, thereby justifying the involvement of international consultants and external interventions. This illustrates how national actors are often blamed for challenges, rather



than recognizing potential inadequacies in project planning to accommodate the specific local contexts and needs. This not only marginalizes the role of local actors but also perpetuates a narrative that positions intervention from international entities as necessary for the success of development projects in the Global South. We argue that the FP007 project blames the local conditions for its delays rather than investigating their own methods, thus, according to our indicators of effectiveness, the project is not effective.

Even though decentralization of government authority and the Act of Decentralization is of crucial interest to the Maldivian people, the project proposal indicates that the Act on Decentralization has resulted in overlapping responsibilities between the Government and the Island Councils, and presents the current state of decentralization as a barrier to service delivery in the project (United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 12). Using an Actor-Oriented approach, this can be seen as an instance where the agency of local actors is undermined. Although the Maldivian Government exercised its agency by implementing the Act on Decentralization, it is still met with criticism from the GCF and UNDP. This further supports the argument that the GCF and UNDP do not place a high value on Maldivian politics. The FP007 project critiques the Act of Decentralization, implemented by the Government of Maldives, as a barrier for the project's success, it demonstrates that the GCF and UNDP blame local conditions for their project challenges. According to our indicators of effectiveness, this is a sign of the FP007 project's ineffectiveness.

Even though the GCF and UNDP frequently characterize the political climate in the Maldives in a negative light, they commend the Maldivian Government when it follows their recommendations. For instance, the report states *“Though the project may not have adequate funds to implement the designed intervention, governments commitment to adopt the designs are positive.”* (United Nations Development Programme, 2023, p. 5) and *“The project greatly contributed to the formulation and enactment of water sector legislation and regulations in the country. The Water and Sanitation Act, and several subsequent regulation and guidelines were informed by expertise and research provided by the project.”* (United Nations Development Programme, 2022, p. 4). The GCF and UNDP also take credit for aiding the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Technology in formulating legislation and regulations (United Nations Development Programme, 2023, p. 5), while praising the Ministry's engagement

as pivotal for aligning their development strategies (United Nations Development Programme, 2022, p. 5). Statements like “[...] *These policy interventions will help shape the longer-term sustainable water resource management at national and sub-national levels.*” (United Nations Development Programme, 2023, p. 4) highlights that the GCF and UNDP consider the project's work essential for the Maldives’ sustainable development. These examples illustrate that the local perspective is heavily influenced by the presence and interactions of foreign intervention, which Long (2001) describes as ongoing social constructions. We argue that this involvement represents traditional intervention practices under the guise of sustainable development and climate adaptation, where the GCF and UNDP exert power over the Maldivian Government, diminishing local political agency and promoting Western policies. From an Actor-Oriented approach, we critique FP007 project’s type of intervention as it adheres to the belief that Western policies are superior and that the non-Western countries must adopt them to achieve sustainable development. An Actor-Oriented approach would challenge this type of socially constructed intervention by empowering local communities and advocating for local stakeholders to fully utilize their agency and knowledge in forming legislation. It can be argued that enabling local political agency could lead to more effective outcomes.

### **Favoring External Solutions**

In this final section of our analysis, we will yet again analyze the Annual Performance Reports and the Approved Funding Report to see if they incorporate the local perspective. As before, we will utilize the Actor-Oriented approach along our conceptual framework and our indicators of effectiveness to study the FP007 projects effectiveness. In this section ‘favoring external solutions’ we will analyze project priorities, hiring external experts, adopting external standards, inadequate funds, strategies, infrastructure, and programs trying to incorporate local stakeholders.

The Approved Funding Proposal said the following: “[...] *water security is the main adaptation priority expressed in national communication, NAPA*” (United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 44), indicating that water security was considered a top priority in the NAPA. However, we find that this statement matches poorly with the priorities outlined in the NAPA, where coastal protection was clearly ranked as the top priority, and issues of water

security, including the improvement and upscaling of rainwater collection and desalination was ranked 16th and 30th priorities respectively (Ministry of Environment, Energy and Water, 2007, p. 43-44). On this basis, we find it questionable that the FP007 project deals with the top adaptation priorities of local actors. From an Actor-Oriented perspective, we argue that the FP007 project does not ensure that its strategies align with the priorities of the NAPA. Thus, in accordance with our indicators of effectiveness, the FP007 project fails to align priorities of local actors and is therefore ineffective.

The Annual Performance Reports from the FP007 project frequently attribute delays in the project to the lack of local expertise. For example, they report challenges in finding qualified candidates (United Nations Development Programme, 2018), a shortage of local technical experts (United Nations Development Programme, 2019), and the need to hire international consultants to train the water sector (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p. 14), as well as training programs for the local stakeholders (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). To address this, the project adopted a variety of strategies to train the local communities. One such strategy was the establishment of the Environmental and Social Management Plan and the hiring of international supervision consultants to train local stakeholders—including roof owners, Island Councils, and utility owners—on improving work schedules, reporting formats, administration, mitigation measures, and project design (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p. 29). Additionally, international consultants, or experts, were hired to train local stakeholders such as utility and ministry staff on improving weather forecasting, groundwater assessment, and gender awareness (United Nations Development Programme, 2022, p. 4). The project also trained 22 stakeholders from different sectors to monitor groundwater conditions (United Nations Development Programme, 2022, p. 5). This reliance on international expertise can be interpreted as an indirect criticism of the local capacity. From an Actor-Oriented approach, we contend that the Annual Performance Reports, authored by the GCF and UNDP, reflect a top-down strategy that undervalues local knowledge and agency, favoring international experts over local stakeholders and thereby leaving the agency of the local actors largely unexercised. The GCF and UNDP's top-down model reflects the Modernity framework, wherein international experts' knowledge is seen as more valuable and modern, while local knowledge is often perceived as “underdeveloped” and in need of training. This hierarchical knowledge

preference for the expertise of consultants from the West over that of local actors allows the GCF and UNDP to exert significant influence over local populations. Consequently, despite possessing agency, local actors are deprived of the power to exercise it, as they are excluded from decision-making processes and compelled to conform to this hierarchical power imbalance, thus remaining marginalized within the development field's power structure. Therefore, we concur with Long (2001) that the development field, even in the context of sustainable development, adheres to colonial practices by exerting their power and intervention to spread their knowledge to non-Western states. As the FP007 project again blames the local conditions for their challenges, we argue that this presents an indicator of ineffectiveness.

In the most recent Annual Performance Report, the GCF and UNDP argue that their methods are optimal for the management of systems and designs for water resource management (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Statements such as “[...] *the project has provided trainings to various government bodies, utilities and local communities on operation and maintenance systems and tools developed under the project*” (United Nations Development Programme, 2023, p. 5) reflect the sense of accomplishment felt by the UNDP and GCF over this project. At one point the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment, and Energy expressed a desire to continue the systems established by the project (United Nations Development Programme, 2023, p. 5). From an Actor-Oriented perspective, we argue that the GCF and the UNDP adopt a traditional development philosophy, viewing their own knowledge as optimal as they aim to train the Maldivian Government to follow their systems. It can be argued that this approach leaves the local actors' agency unexercised, as the information adopted by the Maldivian Government largely mirrors the goals set by the UNDP and GCF—external Western organizations. This dynamic underscores a broader issue in development practices, namely that the valuable insights and capabilities of local actors are often overshadowed by externally imposed standards and practices.

Instances have shown that the Maldivian Government often has to conform to international goals, by co-financing projects due to insufficient funding from external sources (United Nations Development Programme, 2019, 2020). For example, the project attributed the Maldivian economy for cost escalating over the budget, noting that the construction boom had driven up

prices in the water sector, causing inflation (United Nations Development Programme, 2019, p. 3). When financial funds only were enough for three out of five RWH systems—a goal set by the GCF—the Maldivian Government pledged to finance the remaining two packages themselves (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). From an Actor-Oriented perspective, this situation exemplifies the tight constraints of adaptation funds. Despite the Maldives being already in high debt, the Maldivian Government felt compelled to fulfill the GCF goals by financing the last two RWH systems themselves. As earlier mentioned, in the SAP, the ME acknowledged that the Maldives' success depends on their ability to generate the necessary resources needed for the implementation of the plan (Government of Maldives, 2019, p. 2). It forces the Maldivian Government to adhere to the UN's SDGs, demonstrating how international actors exercise their political power over the Maldivian community. Therefore, we argue that these examples illustrate how the Maldives' long history of development intervention has shaped the local Maldivian perspectives, as seen in national documents outlining their aspirations for development and climate adaptation. Even though the nations in the Global North pollute more than the nations in the Global South (Jaschik, 2014), the Maldivians have to pay for their own climate change adaptation. Despite them not being the prime contributors to the global issue of climate change. This highlights the continued power imbalance between the Global North and Global South (Jaschik, 2014). Therefore, based on our indicators of effectiveness, it can be argued that the FP007 project has been ineffective as it has not properly accounted for the local perspective expressed in the SAP, as the funds could not cover all five RWH systems.

The Maldives Country Programme highlights that high borrowing costs and competition from larger international firms significantly hinder private sector engagement and the capacity of local businesses to participate in GCF-funded climate adaptation projects (United Nations Development Programme et al., 2020). This underscores the need for more accessible financing options and supportive policies to encourage broader private-sector involvement (United Nations Development Programme et al., 2020). However, the Funding Approval states: “*Direct involvement of Maldives’ private sector is limited by the current regulatory and tariff setting framework in the country [...]*” (United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 38). In this context, the Maldives’ limited funding abilities are attributed to local actors, rather than acknowledged as a consequence of the GCF’s structure not aligning with local needs. In

accordance with the Actor-Oriented approach, local suppliers are better equipped at providing operation and maintenance solutions that align with local needs. Consequently, the domination of external suppliers undermines the ability of local actors to exercise their agency. The Approved Funding Proposal fails to consider the priority areas highlighted by the Maldives Country Programme, resulting in misalignment with the objectives of local stakeholders. Based on our indicators of effectiveness, this misalignment indicates the project's ineffectiveness.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the GCF and UNDP critiqued the Maldivian infrastructure and means of local transportation, as these factors were used to justify delays in the project (United Nations Development Programme, 2021, 2022). For example *“Logistical challenges, import delays, etc. delayed supply of materials for civils works/ construction, both in international delivery as well as local transportation (by boats) to the different project islands“* (United Nations Development Programme, 2022, p. 45). From an Actor-Oriented approach, local communities possess valuable knowledge regarding their environment. The GCF and UNDP's tendency to blame project delays on local conditions, such as boat transportation, can be seen as a way to legitimize their development interventions while undermining local expertise and agency. From our indicators of effectiveness, we argue that the FP007 attributes local conditions of infrastructure for delays, thus performing ineffective evaluation of their own project.

It is important to note that some of the Annual Performance Reports try to include community consultation and communication (United Nations Development Programme, 2019) and stakeholder meetings (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, 2022) with the aim of involving local stakeholders in the implementation process. From an Actor-Oriented approach, we argue that it is challenging for GCF to operate outside the established developmental framework. Even when they attempt to incorporate local perspectives, they still operate within the sustainable development goals set by the UN. Despite performing these community consultations, local actors cannot fully exercise their agency, as the decisions are primarily made by the GCF and UNDP, who have the final word in terms of allocation of resources.

# Discussion

In this chapter, we wish to discuss the results of our research. Here, we will delve into the limitations of the project, as well as reflect on what our findings mean in the broader context of the literature on the topic. Followingly, this chapter will lead to our conclusion.

Firstly, we acknowledge the limitation that arises from assessing the presence of local perspectives based solely on reports published by the Government of Maldives and the Ministry of Environment. The complex cultural dynamics that shape local responses to climate adaptation initiatives cannot be fully assessed from these reports. Ideally, our study would have included the perspectives of specific local actors who were directly affected by the FP007 project. This methodology aligns with the Actor-Oriented approach, as proposed by Long (2001). However, due to time and resource constraints, we were unable to conduct ethnographic research to obtain these perspectives, posing a limitation to our study.

While much of the assessed literature on climate funding strategies investigate climate funds in terms of effectiveness or similar terms, there is no existing literature measuring effectiveness through the lens of agency. This particular combination of concepts guided by the Actor-Oriented approach is thus our own interpretation of how this approach can be applied to our research question. Therefore, we acknowledge that the chosen indicators for effectiveness through agency may not fully encompass all dimensions of the project's impact. Other factors, such as long-term sustainability and unintended consequences, might not be fully addressed within this framework as the project is still ongoing, and should therefore be further explored once the project is completed. Thus, this framework is relatively untested for evaluating climate adaptation projects, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, although only few scholars have applied the Actor-Oriented approach to the field of climate adaptation, we found that the findings of many scholars highly reflect the assumptions of the approach. Thus, the combination of agency and effectiveness is reflected throughout the field of research on the topic, which we find to support the applicability of our methodology.

Furthermore, a vast amount of literature is seen to critique both climate funding strategies and development practices in line with our findings. Nevertheless, research has yet to establish a viable solution to these challenges. However, Tipps (1973)'s research serves a particular interest for our findings; He criticizes modernization theory for the concept of "modernity" being derived from Western historical experiences and values, noting that it makes it difficult to create a truly universal theory that applies equally to non-Western societies without imposing Western norms and biases. Thus, he argues that despite its substantial critique, the practices of modernization theory will continue until an alternative approach succeeds in solving this issue. We found that our research aligned with Tipps (1973) as we found that the practices of modernization theory are significantly visible in the GCF project's implementation process. Thus, it can be argued that despite the Actor-Oriented approach's relevance for considering the agency of local actors, the approach does not offer a universal framework for understanding and implementing development globally. This complexity imposes barriers for international development and climate adaptation organizations and projects which cannot be solved by recognizing the importance of local actors and contexts - as is the case of the GCF.

While development research has come a long way in acknowledging the diversity of societies, even newer theories, such as dependency theory, contradicts our findings by not acknowledging the agency of local actors (Smith, 1986). History has shown that reframing the way we think about and structure development and climate adaptation is a slow process. Supporting this statement, Robinson (2017) has criticized adaptation actions for maintaining existing systems rather than attempting to improve them. Nonetheless, it is evident that the risks of climate change are urgent, and in the case of the Maldives, the absence of immediate action may prove fatal to the country's entire existence (Mycoo & Wairiu, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our evaluation of the FP007 project reveals significant limitations in its effectiveness from an Actor-Oriented perspective.

Firstly, it was found that the objectives and achievements of the FP007 were not adequate or



relevant from a local perspective. Local stakeholders had ranked coastal protection significantly higher in adaptation priorities, suggesting that the FP007 project might be addressing an issue that is not the most urgent from a local perspective.

Secondly, the FP007 project relied heavily on foreign consultants that would build equipment and train local stakeholders to adhere to the systems implemented by the GCF and the UNDP. This reflects a top-down approach, despite efforts to include local stakeholders through community consultations and meetings. From an Actor-Oriented approach, the decision-making power remains primarily with the GCF and UNDP, limiting the full exercise of local agency.

Thirdly, the Annual Performance Reports were overly critical of local conditions, tending to attribute delays of implementation on political, economic, and infrastructural challenges within the Maldives. This criticism reflects a top-down methodology that undervalues local agency and perpetuates a narrative of external superiority. The reports showcased the removal of local political agency and reinforced ongoing socially constructed interventions by significantly influencing the formulation of local legislation. Furthermore, the Maldivian Government, despite being in debt, were compelled to co-fund parts of the project, highlighting the FP007 project's inadequate budgeting and overall ineffectiveness. Further, delays and budget overruns were attributed to inflation in the Maldivian economy and logistical challenges, such as the reliance on boats for transportation and infrastructure. From an Actor-Oriented perspective, this normative way of evaluating project performance plays part in the justification of further interventions, representing the diagnostic and prescriptive nature of the development field that this study is critical towards.

Our analysis suggested that the GCF, despite its country-driven approach, operates under an organizational structure that is rooted in traditional development practices. From an Actor-Oriented perspective, since the FP007 project operates under such a structure, it is incapable of incorporating local perspectives and recognizing the agency of local actors.

Moreover, the analysis revealed that local Maldivian perspectives on adaptation and development needs may have been shaped by the country's long history of interaction with

development organizations. This presents a paradox, as these local perspectives to some extent are formed through knowledge that is not inherently local, but rather a result of North-South power relations and the discourses of Modernity and underdevelopment. This explains why local adaptation plans strategically adhere to universal adaptation and development goals, as these are more likely to receive funding. This may complicate the notion that incorporating local knowledge is sufficient for ensuring the effectiveness of adaptation projects.

Drawing this conclusion back to the points in the discussion, we call for a change in the field of development, and, most crucially, climate adaptation. In accordance with the Actor-Oriented approach, we find that international development and climate adaptation efforts ought to promote a decentralization of the system that breaks with the idea of intervention practices as the solution to development and adaptation challenges (Long, 2001). However, we acknowledge that there are significant challenges to this process. Thus, we propose that future research within the field investigates these possibilities further.

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