

COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS



UNITED
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MALDIVES



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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMR	Ani-Microbial Resistance
CAT	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CCS	Climate Change Strategy
CCPR	Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CESCR	Covenant or Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
COP	Convention of Parties
COT	Crown of Thorns
CPED	Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRMW	Convention on Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CWD	Children with Disabilities
DC	Defined Contribution
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EmOC	Emergency Obstetric Care
EPPA	Environmental Protection and Preservation Act
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FCSC	Family and Children's Service Centres
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GCM	Global Compact on Safe Orderly and Regular Migration
GDI	Gender Development Index
CH4	Methane
GHG	Green House Gas
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOI	Government of India
GOM	Government of Maldives
GST	General Sales Tax
H	Incidence of Poverty
H1	First half of fiscal year



HDI	Human Development Index
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HR	Human Right
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
IFI	International Financial Institution
IHR	International Health Regulation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
JSC	Judicial Service Commission
Kg	Kilogram
KWp	Kilowatt peak
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
MAP	Maldives Agribusiness Programme
LNOB	Leaving No One Behind
MCCPF	Maldives Climate Change Policy Framework
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoGFSS	Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MNPI	Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure
MNU	Maldives National University
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MRPS	Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme
MTBF	Medium Term Budgetary Framework
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework
MQA	Maldives Qualification Authority
N ₂ O	Dinitrogen Monoxide
NALO	National Assessment of Learning Outcomes
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDA	National Drug Agency
NDC	Nationally Determined Conditions
NCD	Non-communicable Disease
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio



NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NMCC	National Ministerial Coordination Committee
NPI	New Policy Initiative
NPSD	National Programme for Sustainable Development
NSDF	National Strategic Development Framework
NSP	National Spatial Plan
NSPA	National Social Protection Agency
OABP	Old Age Basic Pension
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OOP	Out of Pocket
OP	Optional Protocol
p.a.	per annum
PFM	Public Finance Management
POE	Points of Entry
PPG	Public and Publicly Guaranteed
PSIP	Public Sector Investment Programme
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
RBB	Results Based Budgeting
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RIA	Rapid Integration Assessment
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAMOA	SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SBI	State Bank of India
SCA	Senior Citizen Allowance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
SEN	Special Education Needs
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SME	Small-Medium Enterprise
SOE	State-Owned Enterprise
SPECA	Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia
SR	Special Rapporteur
SST	Sea Surface Temperature
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STO	State Trading Organisation
TB	Tuberculosis
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
THE	Total Health Expenditure
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDESA	United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNRCCA	United Nations Regional Centre for Central Asia
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
UNW	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WAMCO	Waste Management Corporation
WB	World Bank
WEF	Women Enterprise Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Driven by international tourism and, more recently, construction, Maldives has achieved strong economic growth, which averaged 5.1 per cent annually from 2000 to 2019. The economy grew by 8.1 percent in 2022 and is projected to grow in real terms by 12.4 percent in 2023.¹ The country made tremendous progress toward reducing poverty, achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality and diseases, narrowing the gender gap in health, education, and income, and focusing on addressing the threat of climate change. Forty years of rapid growth fuelled by high-end tourism has brought the nation from least developed to upper-middle income status. Maldives has achieved improvements in important socio-economic indicators, and almost completed its demographic transition with the bulk of the population being of working age. Infant mortality and maternal mortality rates are at their lowest for the country.

In addition to obstacles common to other small island developing states, including the impact of climate change, Maldives' major challenges centre on the issues of inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainability. Until recently, the tourism sector generated limited local employment and economic linkages.² The economy is dependent on the state and state-owned enterprises for employment and most services. Regulatory barriers, inefficiencies, skills shortage, and competition for credit add to the disadvantages caused by a small market and dispersed population, slowing the development of a diversified private sector economy that is more resilient to external shocks. Many islands do not adequately treat waste and wastewater, affecting the quality of island life and the

integrity of the marine resources on which Maldives' tourism success depends.

A revival in tourism and an impressive vaccination rollout for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that saw more than 90% of the eligible population fully vaccinated enabled Maldives's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth to rebound by an estimated 37% in 2021 and 8.2% in 2022, the highest in South Asia. This was a notable turnaround after the pandemic shut down the tourism industry in 2020, causing the economy to contract by 33.5%, the country's deepest recession on record. The government's longstanding commitment to health and education for all has largely vanquished communicable diseases and illiteracy, but the pandemic has enabled economic vulnerability to re-emerge. The pandemic and the socioeconomic crisis it triggered could derail years of national efforts to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Successive governments have supported the development of government services, jobs, health centres and schools throughout the country, and the elaboration of a social safety net. However, recent governments have focused on short term goals, particularly on infrastructure, with serious issues around their quality, cost-effectiveness, ability to withstand shocks and capacity to provide minimum services during crisis, and social and environmental impacts. At present there is no participatory process for land use and development policy planning with those communities who are hard to reach and often left behind, no long-term vision for the nation nor a national development plan for sustainable development (beyond the five-year term of national administrations). This will continue to

¹ World Bank data 2023.

² Until the mid-1990s Maldivians dominated the tourism sector work. With the recent amendment brought to the employment act in 2020 and the minimum wage act there are many issues such as

increase of third party and casual labour in the tourism sector. According to recent census 2023 there are 52,396 workers in the tourism sector out of which 15,689 are Maldivians and 36,707 migrants.

reduce opportunities to capture the first demographic dividend of the Maldives' population structure, and face the challenges posed by rapid population ageing.

Over a decade ago, Maldives began a journey of democratisation, resulting in political turbulence, with increasing populism, low tolerance of expressed differences, emerging conservatism and extremism, and declining trust in independent institutions including the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. However, the current relative political stability (though still volatile) creates an opportunity for democratic consolidation. Local elections in April 2021 saw predictably mixed results and a low turnout. Presidential elections scheduled for 2023, will be an opportunity for the gains of democratisation to be reinforced, despite potential policy shifts or reversals.

The polarised nature of politics in the Maldives has created instability as borne out in competing national visions for the country. The opportunity for the government and the opposition to build a common platform for one vision for all Maldivians has not been taken.

The Maldives is in rapid transition and requires an inspiring vision of the nation's goals and identity. Without a national vision and plan that aligns with the SDGs through 2030, progress has been slow. Sectors work in silos and partners are not coordinated. Medium term plans have been developed across many sectors, while no long-term national development plan exists to anchor sectoral planning towards a common vision for Maldives' future. A 'whole-of-government' approach is needed to build capacity within sectors on planning and strategizing, budgeting, data management and statistical capacity. Defining a common vision for the future Maldives through a participatory process engaging citizens – including the hard-to-reach and marginalized communities – with government and the private sector presents a

unique opportunity for political, economic, environmental, cultural development and social harmony.

The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2019-2023 outlines the vision of the present Administration, but there is not yet consensus around key issues. These include whether to build upon traditional culture or follow a more conservative vision, challenges related to gender discrimination and inequality, the form of democracy and rule of law, and whether to build a centralised or decentralised state. An inclusive national dialogue is needed to build consensus on a common path all can accept for the Maldives of the future. In the absence of such, the risks associated with increasing political polarisation for making significant and sustained headway towards SDG achievement are real.

Accelerating progress towards the SDGs in the Maldives will require:

Building on established and relatively strong political, social and democratic institutions to quickly address systemic challenges that have negative domino effects across many dimensions of the sustainable development agenda. Of particular relevance are: tackling corruption, the rule of law and access to justice as well as improving implementation capacity. Modernization and digitalization should be at the centre of public sector reform to improve service delivery and overall socioeconomic outcomes.

Accelerating economic transformation by (i) leveraging diversification in the green, blue and orange economies to accelerate economic growth and create job opportunities for the youth; (ii) creating added value in the services sector while exploring environmentally sustainable production and consumption patterns; and addressing inequalities that put certain groups at risk of being left behind in socioeconomic progress. Several areas need to be addressed in order to increase productivity,

such as the limitations of the education and training system, the access to capital and the ease of doing business.

Protecting the diverse natural environment of the Maldives, which is threatened by climate change and natural hazards. Environmental and disaster risk management should be improved, especially in terms of bridging the gap between policies and their implementation, enhancing waste management (and production), reducing fossil fuel dependency for energy, investing in spatial planning and infrastructure resilience and enhancing disaster risk management and financing.

Addressing patterns of social exclusion and marginalization that occur despite a substantial increase in people's well-being, and which are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Sub-standard educational outcomes, insufficient inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWD), discrimination based on gender, and disparities across regions (especially between the capital and outer atolls) and exclusion of migrants are all issues of concern. Women's potential is not fully unleashed. While the country enjoys a robust social protection system, with a particularly good reach of children, not all those eligible actually use it, with significant gaps in the poorest quintiles and for PWDs.

Protecting the human rights of all inhabitants of the country. In terms of accessions to the main international human rights instruments, the Maldives has made significant strides. Nevertheless, some challenges remain, and the lack of comprehensive anti-discrimination

legislation, to prohibit discrimination on grounds such as sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, disability and health status.

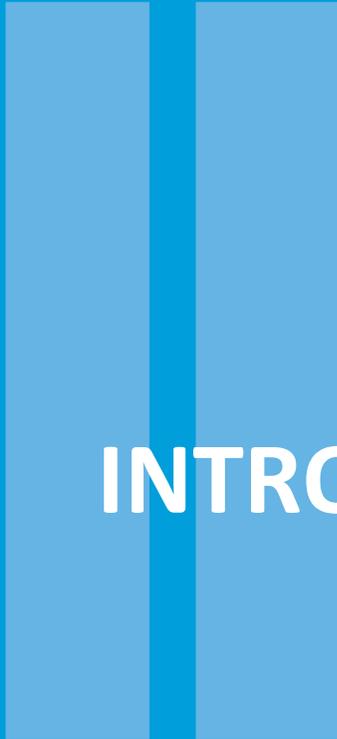
Exploring the financial landscape that can facilitate opportunities to achieve the 2030 Agenda in the Maldives. It is noted that debt and debt servicing costs have declined significantly. With a low Official Development Assistance (ODA), the country needs to explore innovative financing mechanisms. Undertaking an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) would be an important contribution in this direction.

In light of these analyses, the Common Country Analysis (CCA) adopts a systems thinking approach to highlight key issues and a web of interconnected challenges and related opportunities. Four key challenges have ramifications across all dimensions of sustainable development, namely: corruption and the quality of public service delivery; sluggish economic growth; climate change and natural hazards. These contribute to persistent poverty and inequalities, and the overall vulnerability of the country. Opportunities like digitalization and data innovation or exploring green energy and the circular economy have multiple positive connections across these challenges.

In reflecting on the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB), the report identifies five main groups: women and girls, children and adolescents, people living in outer atolls, people with disabilities, and migrants.



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INTRODUCTION

The Common Country Analysis (CCA) is designed to reflect the United Nations **integrated, forward-looking and evidence-based joint analysis** of the context for sustainable development in the Maldives, in view of achieving the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and as a basis for the UN programmatic support through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). The analysis is premised on the overall commitment to Leaving No One Behind (LNOB), the UN Charter and international norms and standards.

This report represents the first building block of the analysis, which will involve a continuous process of revision and adaptation as the context evolves and new evidence is made available. Four main data collection methodologies were utilized in the preparation of this document:

1. Analytical inputs from UN entities, resident and non-resident, with reference to their specific areas of expertise and mandate. These were collected through two main tools: mandate-specific data collection on topics of relevance to the agencies and a questionnaire on cross-cutting issues to capture entities' perspectives on areas considered to be outside their core mandate, identifying synergies and trade-offs.
2. Semi-structured interviews with key informants. Interviewees included resident and non-resident UN entities, including those outside of the current United Nations Country Team (UNCT), International Financial Institutions (IFIs), government officials and other stakeholders.
3. A risk matrix through which UNCT member entities were surveyed to provide a quantitative assessment of the major risks and their potential impact on the future sustainable development of the country.
4. Desk review of existing country and sectoral

studies and retrieval of statistical data from national and international sources, including government plans and reports.

Data and information have been disaggregated to the extent possible. The CCA highlights the data gaps, noting the need to strengthen capacity to collect data and continuously fill the gaps through future assessment. Targeted analysis has been undertaken by each of the UN agencies in line with their mandate. The greatest limitation to the CCA has been gaps in data to support comprehensive thematic analyses, or to map national realities against SDG targets. Secondly, there is a severe limitation in the availability of data disaggregated geographically, by gender, age, and other relevant characteristics in the Maldives.

Some of the guiding principles used in this document include the concept of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) and the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). Other principles that are reflected throughout the document are a focus on gender analysis and women's empowerment, as well as the pursuit of (environmental) sustainability, associated with building up resilience.

The report is meant to be a concise, yet comprehensive, overview of the country's challenges and opportunities to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Particular focus was placed on identifying intersectoral and transformative opportunities that could be seized for future joint planning and to unlock the country's potential to achieve the SDGs. With less than a decade remaining until 2030, the time for action is now and all sectors in society need to be engaged.

The preliminary findings of the CCA published in March 2020 were validated by UN and national stakeholders at a workshop. Extensive comments on the draft CCA were also made by the regional Peer Support Group. With the COVID-19 pandemic and given how it has

significantly impacted the Maldives, UNCT decided that the CCA would need to be significantly rewritten before UNSDCF process starts. This work was done internally, under the Resident Coordinator Office (RCO)'s facilitation, with inputs from all resident and non-resident UN agencies in the Maldives. The process took place in the last quarter of 2020 and the final version was endorsed by UNCT in January 2021. It is this version of the CCA that formed the basis

of our analysis for the development of the UNSDCF. UN agencies, funds and programmes based in the Maldives and beyond contributed to this review. The CCA is a living document, updated regularly as required³, to assure that the UNSDCF the UN's analysis of key issues remains current. The present report is being updated with new data / analysis we have gathered during the year and ensure that our analysis is still up to date.

³ The present report is the second update. Previous version is dated January 2022.



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PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 AGENDA AND SDGs



A | COUNTRY PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 AGENDA

Progress towards Agenda 2030 and achievement of the SDGs must ultimately be tracked comprehensively using nationally prioritised goals and targets. As this work remains to be done in the Maldives, it is not currently possible to report progress at these levels. However, recognizing that this CCA is a living document, progress towards Agenda 2030 is reported with currently available information based on the five Ps.

Under ‘**Prosperity**’ targets, Maldives promotes an open economy, and the economy has continued to grow despite the political turbulence and governance challenges of the last decade. Maldives is expanding and rapidly diversifying its sources of tourists, further increasing high-end resorts on tourist islands while expanding numbers of guest houses on inhabited islands. Guesthouses, being on inhabited islands, can provide more jobs for island inhabitants than resorts, which employ largely international migrant workers. And dependence on high-end resort tourism remains. Construction, the other major growth area of the economy, is also a sector which largely employs international migrant workers. Thus, progress on decent work has been slower than expected, with reductions in unemployment not tracking economic growth.

A low birth rate has created a ‘youth bulge’ in which people in their productive years outnumber young and old dependents combined. This creates the potential for a ‘demographic dividend’ of faster growth and high national savings, but it cannot be realized unless a dynamic private sector is created to

provide jobs, and measures are agreed to prepare for the demographic shift and the education system prepares youth to provide the skills the market requires. Currently only 8 per cent of women obtain more than a basic 10 years of education. Efforts to achieve these prerequisites are in their early stages with more women currently enrolled in higher education than men.

The proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is high at 23 per cent (and much higher for women than men). Meanwhile the migrant labour force has increased. The challenge is to provide young people with necessary skills for the job market through revised curricula in the public education system and to redirect current expectations for white collar and government jobs, toward skilled trades and private sector work. Although unemployment is higher in Malé than the atolls, poverty levels in the atolls are higher. To address poverty and break the cycle of the migration of unskilled youth to Malé the government’s central focus is on decentralization, and the development of transport, services, self-government and increasing opportunities for economic activity in the atolls. However, the country is under significant debt and the growth trajectory of the economy is largely dependent on continued external financing and tourism numbers that are subject to shocks. Women, especially in the informal sector, were strongly hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An analysis across the indicators suggests that much progress has been achieved in the ‘**People**’ targets. These include targets on poverty, and

major health and education targets. Poverty levels were 6.6 per cent in 2019 using the internal poverty line of \$1.25 (MVR70).⁴ Using a more nuanced approach to measuring poverty, the 2019 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) indicates the incidence of poverty (H) in Maldives was 28 per cent, and the average intensity (A) was 51 per cent. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was 0.145. In Maldives, more people were living in multidimensional poverty (28%) than monetary poverty (8 per cent were living below the poverty line of MVR 74 per day). 87 per cent of people who are multidimensionally poor were living in the atolls, and only 13% on the populous capital island of Malé⁵. At the national level, years of schooling contributed the most to overall poverty in Maldives at 19 per cent, and access to health contributed 16 per cent. Children bear the greatest burden of poverty and have a higher likelihood of being multidimensionally poorer than any other age group, with one third of 0–17-year-olds living in MPI poor households.⁶ Due to increased government spending on health, education and social protection, the financial burden of poverty is declining, and the focus now needs to shift towards minimizing the urban-rural gap in the quality of service provision and tracking poverty⁷. Maternal, child and neonatal mortality rates continued to decrease while childhood nutrition indicators improved⁸ and out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure decreased from 49 per cent in 2011 to 29 per cent in 2016.⁹ Further reductions in neonatal mortality and maternal

mortality can be achieved only with further investments and capacity for caring for premature births and addressing birth defect prevention through interventions such as folic acid supplementation for women of reproductive age, early detection and management through a comprehensive life cycle approach. Policies and practices related to nutrition and dietary habits, tobacco and drug use, and sedentary lifestyles pose major challenges towards achieving health targets related to NCDs.

Education targets show similar improvements; all children are now guaranteed 14 years of free education from pre-primary through first degree. This includes a 10-year compulsory cycle from grades 1 to 10. Seventy seven per cent of children (both sexes) are in pre-primary learning before official primary school age¹⁰ and the total Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary education stands at 88.5 per cent (both sexes).¹¹ The challenges with regard to education relate to quality, low levels of functional literacy and learning outcomes, improving life skills, particularly those related to sexual and reproductive behaviour, inculcating civic responsibility and volunteerism through education, and increasing enrolment in higher secondary education.¹²

Gender equality is low across all targets. Women experiencing gender-based violence is high, with one in four women experiencing some form of violence by their current or most recent husband / partner¹³. The labour force participation rate (LFPR) is low among women, which is the result

4 National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report IV: Poverty & Inequality

5 10% of population in Malé are multidimensionally poor whereas 40% of people in the atolls are poor.

6 National Multidimensional Poverty in Maldives. 2020.

https://ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/National_MD_Poverty_in_Maldives_2020.pdf

7 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

8 Ministry of Health (2017). Health SDG profile.

9 Ministry of Health (2019). National Health Accounts 2015-2017

10 From 92 per cent in 2018.

https://www.moe.gov.mv/assets/upload/School_Statistics_20201.pdf

¹¹https://www.moe.gov.mv/assets/upload/School_Statistics_20201.pdf

12 Ministry of Education (2019). Education Sector Analysis

13 Ministry of Health & ICF. Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/17

of cultural norms and the higher burden of unpaid care work for family members, which restrict their time to engage in formal and higher paying economic activities, enhance their education and training and participate in the public sphere. The number of women holding managerial positions is low (at 19.5 per cent)¹⁴ and they earn 20 per cent less than men.¹⁵ Across the country, women have significantly less assets and financial capacity than men, to be used as collateral to obtain bank loans for small and medium enterprises.¹⁶ Women's engagement in politics and other leadership activities is limited. In the 2019 parliamentary election, while 33 women contested for parliament, only four women won, and the number of women in parliament declined from 5 to 4.

The existence of nutrition challenges, low secondary and high school enrolment rates and high unemployment and NEET rates in a country with upper-middle income status is alarming and signals an urgent need for a major, comprehensive new focus on human resources capacity development, and effectiveness of the governance system and institutions. While several targets call for disaggregated data there is a huge gap in the national data system to track vulnerable groups.

As an archipelago, Maldives depends on the sea for its livelihood, from tourism and fisheries. Rapid urbanization and growth, as well as unsustainable and unchecked development practices across the islands, have led to serious overcrowding, fresh water, and waste treatment issues, as well as threatening the environment and future of the Maldives. Rapid expansion of tourism especially reclaiming of islands for

tourism development is a big threat to increase of waste, loss of biodiversity, and threat to environment including the removal of trees from inhabited and uninhabited islands to new resort development. While some of the 'planet' targets appear to be partially on track, data gaps limit the possibility of conducting a sound assessment of the progress that has been made. Access to improved water and sanitation has improved, with 98 per cent of the population with access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation facilities.¹⁷ However, waste management, energy and emission targets remain problematic, especially with the expansion of tourism and urbanisation. Efforts are underway to diversify the energy sector through introduction and promotion of renewable energy sources, with the target to replace up to 30 per cent of daytime peak load of electricity with these sources. Electricity, vehicles and waste management have been identified as the main sources of Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and while there are initiatives on energy production and waste management, there are no policy initiatives on reducing emissions from vehicles.¹⁸ With 80 per cent of land being less than 1 meter above sea level, and with 42 per cent of the population and more than 70 per cent of critical infrastructure within 100 meters of the shorelines, climate change and extreme weather events are a pressing and potentially existential threat. In 2016 alone, over 45 islands faced water shortages due to significant changes to weather patterns, including the hottest dry season recorded in 18 years. The warm temperature due to El Niño resulted in more than 60 per cent of coral reefs bleaching,¹⁹ which

14 National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment

15 National Bureau of Statistics (2019). Population and development in Maldives 2019. ICDP25+.

16 Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2014). Maldives Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors

17 Ministry of Health & ICF (2019) Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017

18 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

19 *ibid*

adversely impacts underwater life and natural resources vital for the economy and livelihoods. Information is limited and data is not available on the indicators of Goals 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, making it difficult to assess progress made. The overall lack of data for the environmental dimension of the SDGs is particularly evident in relation to monitoring emissions and air quality, spatial data, waste, energy and the water sector, with a strong need to strengthen mechanisms to collect, process, analyse and manage data and statistics related to these sectors.

Progress on promoting peaceful and just societies related to the ‘Peace’ targets is mixed, due to the country’s ongoing political uncertainty and widening opinions over social and religious issues. There is limited national data but progress on governance can be assessed with the international governance indicators. The VNR points to the legislative changes made to improve access to information and the criminal code,²⁰ which has since been enacted along with several judicial reforms that are currently underway. With regards to corruption, the Parliament publicised in May 2021 the MMPRC list of over 150 past and present leaders and office holders across the three pillars of government and political divide under investigation. Accountability for high profile cases of graft will be one of the tests of the rule of law.

Inadequate implementation of policies and standards is also seen in prison conditions, juvenile detention standards, drug rehabilitation options, and availability of mental health services and protective services for victims and survivors. The chief constraint is adequate budgeting and investment in skills and mindsets

and making available the human resources to implement new laws and policies.

There was progress in relation to domestic violence including violence against children and gender-based violence, with enactment of appropriate laws. However, a number of serious challenges exist with regard to awareness and implementation of these laws and providing protective services for victims. Widely accepted social norms that promote violent behaviours still exist.

The key challenge to achieving sustained progress in peace and justice targets is also related to the recent history of polarized politics - which has worsened already limited trust in institutions and created a high turnover of staff in government institutions and in the civil service generally. The loss of experienced senior staff is especially devastating in a small island nation, further limiting the national capacity to contribute to agenda 2030 across the SDGs.

Finally, porous maritime borders hinder state efforts to combat illegal activities taking place at sea, including drug smuggling and crimes in the fishery sector.

Under ‘partnerships’ targets, progress is slow without a national vision that aligns with the SDGs. Sectors work in silos and partners are not coordinated in a comprehensive manner. Further improvement is needed for adopting a ‘whole government’ approach, building capacity within sectors on planning and strategizing, data management and statistical capacity.^{21, 22} The localization of the SDGs has not progressed, and a number of data gaps exist, even though 80 percent of the data is expected to be available to be drawn from administrative systems. The

20 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

21 Auditor General’s Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals

22 Sobir R (2017). Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to assess the Maldives readiness to implement the SDGs. Ministry of Environment Energy & UNDP

limitations on the utility of the existing data systems and data management capacities are areas that need prioritisation.

Furthermore, coordination mechanisms do not have the participation of the Parliament and the judiciary that is critical for SDG 16 and a number of other SDGs.²³ This is noted in the VNR with a commitment to continue work on integration of SDGs into the national plans, to help prioritize SDGs and build strong coordination and cross sectoral collaboration between the government agencies, development partners, local governments and commitment by the private sector as well as civil society.²⁴ The implementation of Agenda 2030 also requires continued political support and commitment as well as broad based participation, as these will be critical to drive the national sustainable development agenda forward.

Importance of infrastructure to the achievement of SDGs

The importance of infrastructure to the achievement of the SDGs is magnified by the fact that 92 percent of all SDG targets revolve around infrastructure. This is because infrastructure is critical to service provision, employment and reducing inequalities that ultimately contribute to the alleviation of poverty. An apt example in the Maldivian context is the achievement of SDG 14: Life below water. Maldives' marine resources are essential to its social and economic development and health as it provides a valuable source of livelihood and subsistence from fisheries and tourism. However, these marine resources are prone to the impacts of climate change and pollution. Therefore, addressing such problems will require intervention across multiple infrastructure sectors: connecting

communities to wastewater treatment plants to prevent untreated discharge in waterways; providing adequate solid waste and recycling facilities to eliminate the emission of plastics and other wastes; incorporating coastal erosion in flood risk management plans; and regulating marine transport and contamination from fuels which are a major source of marine pollution.

Given the influence that infrastructure has on the achievement of the SDGs, it is imperative that the Maldivian Government embed sustainability and resilience considerations into infrastructure decisions that identify and prioritize infrastructure. This is possible through a systems approach to the planning and prioritization of infrastructure that goes beyond seeing infrastructure as physical assets that function in silos, to recognizing the inherent interdependencies between networked and non-networked infrastructure. For example, networked infrastructure systems like water, energy, transportation, and waste management are critical for the smooth functioning of non-networked systems – comprised of single assets, buildings or facilities that deliver a service to a community (e.g. hospitals, schools, community centres).²⁵

The importance of such an approach is more magnified considering the high cost and long-term nature of mega infrastructure projects and as such, unless diligently planned and prioritized based on evidence, can be to the detriment of the Maldivian people. As a SIDS, this situation is exacerbated through the stresses caused by rapid urbanization, changes in demographics and climate change.²⁶

The status and progress of SDG nationalization and localization

23 Auditor General's Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals

24 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

²⁵ Thacker S, Adshead D, Morgan G, Crosskey S, Bajpai A, Ceppi P, Hall JW & O'Regan N. Infrastructure: Underpinning Sustainable Development. UNOPS,

²⁶ *ibid*

Maldives is behind schedule on the proposal in the 2017 Voluntary National Review (VNR) which it presented to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), to identify resources and capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda and put in place a risk management process for implementation. Much of the work aimed at preparation for implementation, such as putting in place an effective monitoring, follow up, review and reporting process, is either at an early stage of implementation or is being planned. In October 2021 Maldives has decided to submit its second VNR at the HLPF in 2023. The government has started data collection, analysis and stakeholder consultation in the last quarter of 2022 and first quarter of 2023.

Institutional arrangements: With regard to the adaptation of Agenda 2030 into its national context, the Government has made substantial progress in setting up governance and institutional arrangements, with a National Ministerial Coordination Committee (NMCC) and an SDG division at the Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (MNPI) supported by a Technical Committee. While key stakeholders are represented in the Technical Committee to provide technical input to the process of preparedness for implementation, there is no representative from Parliament which is one of the custodian agencies under Goal 16.²⁷

Several challenges exist for these bodies to function: a lack of interest, participation and accountability within line ministries to support the SDG coordination process, and limited understanding amongst government officials of how the SDGs fit in the government's mandate and operation.²⁸ While effective coordination is critical to adequately prepare for the

implementation of the SDGs, there is a culture of line ministries and government agencies working in silos which could impede the progress towards implementation.

Policy alignment: The mapping of SDGs with the government's SAP has recently been completed. SDGs are reflected in sectoral policies and plans and are being integrated in newly developed plans. The absence of a long-term national development plan remains a key challenge for policy alignment with the SDGs. Maldives has thus far not prepared an SDG financing strategy, which negatively impacts its ability to mobilize both internal and external resources to fund critical areas that are lagging behind on specific SDG targets and indicators. The SAP is the basis for resource mobilisation and prioritisation, though not aligned or mapped to the SDGs. There is a lack of clarity regarding ownership of and accountability for SDGs, potentially arising from lack of coordination and communication among some line ministries and agencies.²⁹ With limited coordination among agencies, policies are developed in siloes and do not take into consideration the policy implications that one sectoral policy may have on the rest. Designations of accountable lead agencies and co-lead agencies and their endorsement by the NMCC or an oversight body determined by the government would improve ownership and accountability among various agencies involved in the SDG process.

Human resources capacity: Although the SDG Division is in place, there is a need for strengthening their facilitation skills for SDG based dialogues and planning exercises, data and analytical skills for SDG reporting budgeting processes and analyses. In addition, weaknesses

²⁷ Auditor General's Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals

²⁸ Sobir R (2017). Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to assess Maldives readiness to implement the SDGs. Ministry of Environment and Energy & UNDP

²⁹ Auditor General's Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals.

in institutional setup and capacity to gather and consolidate sectorial data needs to be addressed. There is no gap analysis carried out by any state agency or a line ministry to identify the resources and capacities required for the implementation of SDGs. Lack of a gap analysis could lead to inefficiencies in resource allocation throughout the implementation process. To overcome this in the long run, it has been recommended to emphasise building the necessary capacity within the MNPI and focus on capacity within sectors; and planning and strategizing, data management and statistical capacity³⁰ (including gender statistics and analytical capacity)

Data and monitoring: Significant progress has been made under the leadership of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) to map the existing data availability against SDG indicators and to organize existing baseline information against the indicators. The Maldives prepared its first Voluntary National Review report in 2017, but the report lacks comprehensive information and analysis on the status of the Maldives' performance against SDGs. Data gaps including disaggregated data, including by disability and for migrants, are especially evident for the social and environmental dimensions of the SDGs.

Some of the challenges to data and SDG based monitoring include bridging data gaps and limited capacity of line ministries in data extraction, analysis, and reporting processes. These challenges are exacerbated by the limited reliance on evidence for national and local-level planning and policies. The Government has communicated its plans to prepare a data quality assurance framework and design a process for monitoring, follow up, review and reporting in its 2017 VNR. However, these plans, including localisation of the SDGs have not materialised as envisaged in the VNR. The SDG division, in

cooperation with NBS, has initiated the preparation of a data quality assurance framework.³¹

The Government has not yet developed guidelines to monitor the baselines and milestones of monitoring, follow-up, review, and reporting. In addition, gathering the necessary data has been a massive challenge since most entities do not possess information systems to generate data and there is a lack of willingness to share administrative data with NBS on a regular basis. There is a weak evidence analysis and utilization culture in the Maldives, and most available analyses are based on surveys or census data, posing significant challenges to adequate planning and policy making to meet the emerging demands and needs of the country.

Financing: The Government has not identified nor secured the resources and capacities (means of implementation) needed to implement the 2030 Agenda.³² The rapid integrated assessment looked at the budgeting process and identified entry points to integrate and prioritize SDGs including the development of a screening criterion for medium term budgets known as 'new policy initiatives' (NPI) and to conduct SDG based budget analyses using the newly adopted functional budget classification of the government.

Some of the challenges in budgeting include the reliance on external/donor funding for some sectors and the challenges related to internal budget prioritization practices.³³ The capacity of the Ministries and Parliament to prepare, scrutinize, and criticise national budgets is weak and since budgets are prepared on a line-item basis it is difficult to critique the budget in a meaningful way. The efforts made to identify the gaps in available, prospective and secured resources, and innovative methods like

³⁰ ibid

³¹ ibid

³² ibid

³³ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Maldives' Voluntary National Review for the HLPF on Sustainable Development 2017

mobilised partnerships planned or used to secure resources and capacities, indicate that the sectors lack resources and capacity required to identify the challenges in securing resources. COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on the Maldives' economy and fiscal reserves. Together with the UN, the Government has launched an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF).

The INFF will play an important role in bringing together the SDG policy and priorities with financing initiatives in a holistic and systematic manner across Government. A public awareness campaign about the SDGs needs to be rolled out across the country, in line with mobilizing support for the reinvigoration of a longer-term national planning agenda.

B | HUMAN RIGHTS

Positive changes are being made across Maldives in relation to the deprivation of liberty, including: approval of the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED) and ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); reform of the Maldives Police Service; self-regulation of the legal profession by the Bar Council of Maldives, as well as initiatives to address past human rights violations, cooperation with international human rights mechanisms and remote court hearings.

There remains problems however within the criminal justice system putting defendants at risk of arbitrary detention. These include issues which effectively prevent persons from challenging the legality of their detention, the excessive length as well as widespread use of pretrial detention, inability of detainees from having (unfettered) access to legal counsel, oft-delayed criminal proceedings, and individuals being subjected to deferred sentences as well as being recalled to prison at any time.

The judiciary has been tainted by long-standing allegations of corruption, political influence and inefficiency. The Government's vision is to establish an independent judiciary that is accountable, accessible to the public, upholds fundamental freedoms and serves justice in a timely manner. The first step of implementing judicial reforms was an assessment on the deficiencies of the judiciary, and the feasibility of implementing proposals for justice sector reform. The assessment³⁴ revealed the urgent need to restore DJA's autonomy, establish an efficient case management system, ensure effective implementation of rules of conduct for judges and highlighted the need for gender parity within the judiciary. The absence of a continuing legal education regime affects the competency of judges and quality of justice.

Torture is considered a separate criminal offence under the Anti-Torture Act (13/2013) and Penal Code (6/2014) and the Prison and Parole Act (14/2013). From 2008 to 2017 the Human Rights Commission (HRCM) investigated 630 alleged

³⁴ National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21 - Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Thirty-

sixth session, 4–15 May 2020, Maldives, page 14. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/MVIndex.aspx>

cases of torture.³⁵ These included complaints related to arbitrary detention, search or seizure without a reasonable cause, denial of rights to legal counsel, right to be brought before a judge within twenty-four hours, right not to be detained without a valid reason, delay in prosecution and investigation, inhumane treatment of persons and conditions of detention facilities.

The material conditions of all prisons are seriously inadequate, but particularly so for juveniles. Juveniles in detention are not segregated from adults, or according to the seriousness of alleged crimes. They do not receive any rehabilitation services³⁶, nor access to education or psychosocial support while in detention.

There is an urgent need to ensure the independence of the court's internal administration, the importance of impartial and efficient functioning of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) and the need to ensure gender parity within the judiciary.³⁷

In 2019, Maldives acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, and the Government has implemented significant steps to strengthen the legal framework pertaining to the protection of children. A reconstituted Child Rights Protection Act (CRPA) enacted in November 2019 clarifies the rights of the child, responsibilities of parents in ensuring the protection and wellbeing of the child and establishes State apparatus to ensure the protection and unhindered provisions of the rights stipulated in the Act. The CRPA provides

for the establishment of a Child Rights Protection Council, and the Child and Family Protection Services. It further institutes a Children's Ombudsperson to oversee the implementation of the Act. The first Children's Ombudsperson was appointed in July 2020.

Maldives is a destination country for international migrant workers mostly from Bangladesh, but also from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and the Philippines. The Maldives is also a transit country for international migrants from the Middle East, South and West Asia, as well as Sub-Saharan Africa on their way to Europe. Migrant smuggling has recently emerged as an area of concern in the Maldives. An increase in irregular migration movements has been recorded, as well as a surge in detected fraudulent travel and identity documents, and a range of other fraudulent practices linked to recruitment practices,³⁸ work contracts and visas for foreign workers. Such practices have also led to trafficking and situations of forced labour of international migrant workers. It has also created an environment where migrant workers face challenges in reporting cases of exploitation or potential cases of trafficking in persons, seeking access to justice and redressal mechanisms, protection, and other assistance that may be needed.

Civil Society and non-profit organisations are integral to the country's development. Strengthening civic space is a must if active participation of all citizens is to be achieved, in line with the vision of the SAP. The ban on a prominent civic human rights organization,

³⁵ Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (October 2018). Submission from the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives for information on the initial report submitted by Maldives under Article 19 of Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

³⁶ The revised organizational structure of Maldives Correctional Service has established a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Command. Efforts are also underway to develop an all-inclusive rehabilitation centre within the largest prison establishment in the

Maldives. This will enable the engagement of many the prison population in rehabilitation programs.

³⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), August 2020.

³⁸ Including inflows and outflows (e.g. attempts at irregular entry, movements into irregular status, and possibly facilitated departures of Maldivian citizens for irregular entry in foreign countries).

Maldivian Democracy Network, is a reminder of how vulnerable human rights groups and human rights defenders remain in the Maldives.^{39 40}

The SAP's legislative agenda identifies over 200 laws to be enacted or amended. In 2019 the Act on Presidential Commissions, Legal Professions

Act, Heritage Act, Whistle Blower Protection Act, Juvenile Justice Act, CRPA were enacted. The Gender Equality Act, Criminal Procedure Act, National Wage Policy Act, and the Act to repeal the Defamation Act were recently adopted

C | LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The Government is committed to the realization of human rights but lacks capacities to fully meet its obligations as a duty-bearer. Social norms, increasing conservatism, especially gender equality and women rights, also act as barriers. Specific groups are not benefitting equally from current patterns of development, and experience inequality, discrimination, and inequity and limited participation. Women, children, youth, the elderly and migrants are the most impacted. Their vulnerabilities are further increased by reduced access to educational or training opportunities, limited access to income generating opportunities and/or productive assets, having a disability, being poor, living in the atolls, coming from a broken home, or having a different gender identity or sexual orientation, or religious identity or minority.

Women

Growing gender inequality, increasing unemployment rates among women and growing signs of negative attitudes towards gender equality are serious risks. Advances in

gender equality have faced a dramatic backlash in recent years, observed in the recent human rights study of 2019 that showed a drastic decline in those who thought women should have equal rights in the family to only 7.4 per cent (from 74.1 per cent in 2011 and 85.4 per cent in 2005).⁴¹ A similar decline was observed by gender. In 2011, 80.7 per cent of women believed that women should have equal rights within the family. This collapsed to a drastically low level of 3.1 per cent in 2019.

A HRCM study⁴² showed that 11.4 per cent of respondents believed that a husband could hit his wife if she fails to obey him and fifty-one per cent of respondents agreed that a wife should be submissive to her husband, with those in rural regions (24.3 per cent) significantly higher compared to urban dwellers (9.5 per cent). A 2016-17 study⁴³ reported that 16.7 per cent of women aged 15-19 experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months and 13 per cent had experienced female genital cutting.

³⁹ The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) was banned by authorities in 2019 against a backdrop of threats to the MDN's staff from conservative groups which alleged that the MDN's 2015 report, "Preliminary Assessment of Radicalization in the Maldives", insulted the Prophet Muhammad.

⁴⁰ CIVICUS Monitor, an index which tracks civic space globally, rates Maldives civic space as obstructed, a medium ranking out of five possible ratings.

⁴¹ UNDP & HRCM, The "Rights Side of Life", Third Report, final draft January 2020, page 34.

⁴² Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (October 2018). Ibid.

⁴³ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives

Harassment occurs in all realms: on the street, in the workplace and on social media. While the government continues to express its commitment in building a culture of tolerance as a response to extreme ideologies, social media shows an increase in hate speech. A study of root causes and drivers for marginalization of young people highlighted a lack of opportunities for higher education, specialized training, and employment available for youth in the Maldives. Corruption, education, drugs, unemployment, housing, gang violence and violent extremism were identified as contributors of social exclusion and dissatisfaction among young people, which affect men and women differently.⁴⁴ Emerging grievances from vulnerable groups act as precursors for violence.

The Maldives is both a destination and a source country for women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Children are trafficked from outlying islands to Malé, some of whom are reportedly subjected to sexual abuse and forced labour.⁴⁵ In 2018, the US State Department downgraded the Maldives on its watch-list for human trafficking, citing its failure to take steps to effectively investigate and combat trafficking. The Maldives has remained on the Tier 2 Watch List for two consecutive years. There are no formal shelter services available to victims of trafficking, creating challenges for protection and prosecution.

Children

The Maldives is fortunately free of many of the social barriers to children's rights that affect other countries. Access to primary education is universal, literacy almost universal, and there is little gender discrimination in access to primary and lower secondary education. Social norms

and practices in Maldives for the realization of children's rights require that all legislation and policies be in conformity with Sunni Islam, which can be incorrectly seen as in conflict with rights provided for by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This was evident in the reservations made by the Government, the relatively low levels of political participation and civic engagement by citizens, and limitations on service provision due to the geographically dispersed nature of the country's population.

Reports of child abuse, violence, and neglect of children are high with 1,282 cases of sexual abuse of children reported to the police in 2022⁴⁶. Although the new Child Rights Protection Act (19/2019) provides a legislative framework for the protection of children's rights and the right for protection from abuse, violence, neglect and discrimination inclusive of children with disabilities, mechanisms and resources, including human resources capacity, to implement the required systems and services are not in place. The multi-generational socio-economic vulnerabilities of the poor, who have limited access to social mobility, coupled with endemic substance abuse levels among parents negatively impacts children.

Negative social attitudes surrounding violence (including discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls), hesitancy to report due to social norms and stigma, and lack of functioning communication and referral mechanisms within institutions involved in child protection, all contribute to the persistence of this issue. Furthermore, delayed protection measures (including social service provision, investigative and judicial processes), and lack of availability and accessibility to support services (including

⁴⁴ "Youth Vulnerability Assessment", 2019, UNDP, with the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC)

⁴⁵ 2020 Trafficking in Persons report Maldives, US State department.

⁴⁶<https://gender.gov.mv/%de%9a%de%a6%de%84%de%a6%de%83%de%aa%de%8c%de%a6%de%87%de%b0/>

mental health support) for survivors further exacerbate the issue.

Holistic approaches and concerted efforts are required to achieve Agenda 2030, particularly SDG 16.2 (End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children) and 5.2 (Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation), and to ensure that no child is left behind.

The Maldives does not have a universal child benefit scheme, which negatively impacts the most vulnerable children. Households in which children have achieved secondary education are less likely to be living at or below the poverty line, and households with higher dependency ratios are more likely to experience poverty. Most dependency in Maldivian households is made up of children below the age of 14. Child poverty, and particularly child poverty in the atolls, requires ongoing attention from the Government if the country is to meet SDG 1.2 which requires a reduction by half in the proportion of all children living in poverty in all its dimensions.

Adolescents and Youth

Many young people are unwilling to take non-white collar jobs or work for the private sector, due to parental aspirations for 'office jobs' for their children once they complete high school. Others are poorly prepared for work. The youth unemployment at 13.9 percent is 9.3 percentage points higher than the national average. Approximately 26.3 percent of those aged 15-24 are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The structure of the dynamic tourism

and construction industries is driven by international migrant workers.⁴⁷ The paradox of national labour shortages and youth unemployment is a central issue. To attract more young Maldivians into the local workforce, there must be sustained efforts on both the demand and supply sides. Developing a dynamic private sector beyond tourism is essential. Equally essential are sustained efforts for improving working conditions that are family friendly, enhancing skills-matching and reintroducing a local labour market assessment to determine genuine labour shortages, together with more relevant education and vocational training that respond to market needs.

Many youth do not continue beyond lower secondary school. Many are exposed to drugs, drug dealing and crime, and find it difficult to find jobs, rehabilitation, or other support. A study on gangs in Malé reported that there are between 20-30 different gangs operating in Malé with 50-400 members in each group⁴⁸. The juvenile justice system and the drug court are meant to be rehabilitative, but they stigmatize, rather than provide second chances. Reform of drug laws and expansion of rehabilitative capacities are essential. Young Maldivians who end up in the penal system are at a higher risk of radicalisation, given their already marginalised status. Guilt and shame over drug abuse, punitive versus rehabilitative state practices, and a lack of Islamic education countering militant jihadist ideologies, can lead Maldivian inmates to join militant jihadists in prison for the sake of belonging, positive identity, drug rehabilitation, and religious redemption.⁴⁹

As the Maldives transitions from traditional to more urban and modern ways of life, many young people's value orientations are changing,

⁴⁷ 53% of the youth population are migrants. [UNFPA Maldives | Adolescents and Young people](#)

⁴⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/maldives/reports/rapid-situation-assessment-gangs-mal%C3%A9>

⁴⁹ <https://www.icsve.org/prison-based-radicalization-to-militant-jihadism-in-the-maldives/>

and becoming different from those of their parents and prior generations. This is resulting in a growing distance between older and younger generations, challenges for young people in finding their identity in society (which can lead to mental health problems) and seeking out risky behaviours. There are limited mental health professionals and services in the Maldives, something that should also be addressed within a human capital development strategy.

Drastic shifts in behaviour and perception are sometimes a reaction to such conditions. Extremism is one such reaction, affecting an apparently small but significant number of youths. Several factors likely contribute to this, including the human rights abuses that had occurred in the Maldives,⁵⁰ a perceived self-serving, corrupt and out-of-touch political class and increased levels of violence in society.

Migrants

Given its small and dispersed population, international migrant workers are an essential mainstay of the economy. Maldives has experienced an eleven-fold increase in its total migrant population since 1990 and is projected to be around 33 per cent of the resident population by 2029⁵¹. Migrants from neighbouring countries – notably, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka – come to Maldives for work.

International migrant workers can help address labour shortages in key sectors such as construction, education, health care, and tourism. Many migrant workers, however, lack access to their human rights, including sufficient labour protection, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Both migrants as well as Maldivians are exposed to shortcomings in labour protections. In

comparison to the national workforce, migrant workers are often subjected to substandard working and living conditions, and lack of access to basic health care.

It is estimated that women account for about 10 per cent of the approximately 180,000 migrant workers in the Maldives who are an important part of the country's labour force, mainly in tourism and domestic work. While only three per cent of migrants working in tourism are women, it is alarming that migrants do not enjoy the same labour rights available for Maldivian workers as per international standards, such as the standard for daily working hours, paid leave and sick leave provisions, as well as the special protection needs of migrant domestic workers. Moreover, the lack of a minimum wage for migrant workers should be tackled to ensure protection for women workers, who may otherwise be exploited. A significant number of migrant workers in the Maldives are irregular and working in the informal sector, which makes them unwilling to report incidents of labour violations or violence to authorities. Strengthening the labour migration governance framework will be critical to protect migrant workers including by ensuring that recruitment fees or related costs are not charged to them.

Multiple issues have emerged, including excessive recruitment fees and related costs, deception about working and living conditions, a lack of pre-departure and post arrival employment orientation/training, exposure to violations of labour and other human rights, unlawful subcontracting of workers, unsafe working conditions (and resulting health hazards), ineffective monitoring of recruitment and employment practices, weak sanctions for labour law violations, human trafficking and

⁵⁰ National Counter Terrorism Centre and UNDP, Youth Vulnerability in the Maldives, February 2019, p.25.

⁵¹ Data is based on official sources, which are believed to significantly undercount international migrants, due to the

prevalence of undocumented migrants. National Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA (2016). Maldives Population Projections

decent work deficits. Migrant workers, many of whom in low skilled sectors, often lack access to adequate housing, health care and other ESC rights. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants who protested against harsh quarantine and/or deprivation of liberty and unpaid wages, were vulnerable to deportation. The pandemic also exposed migrants to stigma, xenophobia, mental health issues, and discrimination.

There is no asylum adjudication system in the country, and no national refugee protection mechanism. The national legal framework does not provide sufficient clarity on the treatment of asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking and migrants. National instruments, including the Anti-Human Trafficking Act 12/2013, are silent on protection mechanisms for victims of trafficking who may have international protection needs and who fear persecution if returned to their country of origin. There is no mechanism in place to support those without identity documents to establish their nationality and prevent statelessness.

With regard to social security and health, while equal treatment for all is prescribed by law, inequality and gaps remain to be addressed. Despite an obligation of employers to provide all migrant workers with health insurance, the coverage provided – especially to lesser skilled workers – is typically the most basic. This results in migrants not seeking medical care until a health condition is acute.

Persons with disabilities⁵²

Currently, there are no official statistics showing the exact number of disabled people in the Maldives, nor is it possible to determine the type of disability. At the same time, various types of

congenital disabilities are increasing, and no data has been collected in the country. Therefore, there are many obstacles to providing state care to such people. There have also been difficulties in formulating policies and providing services for people with disabilities. The disability prevalence in the Maldives is estimated at 6.7 per cent.⁵³ The prevalence of any disability increases with age,⁵⁴ from 1 per cent of females below age to 5 to 10 per cent of those age 60 and over. Among males, prevalence rises from 2 per cent of those under age 5 to 11 per cent of those age 60 and over. It is estimated that 6.3 per cent of live births are born with a birth defect, with subsequent disability.⁵⁵ This figure is well below the global and regional average, presumably because disability is identified based on a medical model rather than a social model (in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which defines “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”). Such approach would impact persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the Maldives, including on their enjoyment of human rights. It is crucial to ensure a rights-based approach rather than a charity approach.

Access to treatment and rehabilitation therapy is limited mainly to Malé and physical therapy at regional hospitals with resulting gaps in service for a range of disabilities. Lack of access to a health care consultation is a major barrier confronting PWDs in attempting to gain access to services provided by the Government and in participating in activities targeted for them. Consultation is recognised as one of the primary

⁵² Drawn from Maldives’ response to an OHCHR questionnaire pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 31/6, 2016

⁵³ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Eskey (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives.p.17

⁵⁵ Faisal A, Ibrahim N, Rasheed H, Mustafa M (2019). Birth defects in government referral hospital 2016-2018

strategies in human rights-based development, particularly in policy formulation. Consultation must also be a core element in service delivery for PWDs. Although the Health Master Plan identifies the need for establishing services for the treatment and rehabilitation of PWDs, these services have not been prioritized.

The Child Rights Protection Act (Law No. 19/2019) requires the government to arrange treatment for children with mental and physical disabilities. In addition, it requires all efforts to be made to enable participation of children with disabilities in society, with special assistance being made available. There have been attempts for including children with disabilities in the education system, however, there are number of capacity gaps to the provision of inclusive education in the schools. Training of special education teachers and getting teachers to respect and protect the rights of children with disabilities are major challenges. There is virtually no access to or transition to secondary level education for children with disabilities. Another challenge facing young people with disabilities and their parents is the lack of planned transitions from school to work, vocational training, tertiary education, or other meaningful day-time activities.⁵⁶

A Law on Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and providing Financial Assistance (8/2010) guarantees a monthly disability allowance of MVR 2000 (\$129.70). Eligibility for the scheme is solely determined by the assessment conducted by a medical professional, without a means test. However, access to disability assessment is limited to only one centre in Malé, excluding the most

vulnerable living on the atolls and outer islands-only 25.5 per cent of people with disabilities receive this benefit.⁵⁷ Furthermore, an impact assessment study showed there was no impact on the quality of life of the people with disabilities receiving this benefit⁵⁸.

The most obvious gap in services provided to PWDs in the Maldives is lack of employment services. There is no government-organised support or services to PWDs for obtaining jobs. The challenges around employment include discrimination in the labour market and workplace and low expectations and assumptions about what PWDs can and cannot do.⁵⁹ Some PWDs need reasonable accommodation in the workplace for them to be effective and to work to their full capacity, or to retain a job following an accident which are not forthcoming. Accessible transport to and from work and accessible workplaces are also critical factors in ensuring people can work. In January 2023, the President of Maldives announced a National Disability Registry will be established, with the aim to ensure that the Administration would be better equipped to meet the specific needs and requirements of disabled people.

Persons with mental health conditions

There is little research on mental health in the Maldives. A 2003 survey⁶⁰ reported that more than 29.1 per cent of the respondents stated that they had a mental health condition. The study also reported that nearly 5 per cent suffer from anxiety and depression and nearly 4 per cent reported somatic symptoms. More than twice as many women as men suffer from anxiety, depression, and somatic disorders. There has also been a trend of increasing

⁵⁶ Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (2010). Baseline assessment on activities addressing rights of persons with disabilities.

⁵⁷ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Eskey (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (2010). Baseline assessment on activities addressing rights of persons with disabilities.

⁶⁰ Niyaz H, Naz A. Mental health situation in the Maldives. Malé: Ministry of Health; 2003

suicides, particularly among youth. However, no formal research figures are available.

Most recently, mental health deterioration is increasing due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which will have a major impact on vulnerable groups. Mental disorders include an important human rights dimension and people with mental disorders are a vulnerable population group. There is significant stigma and discrimination associated with mental disorders, which can lead to denial of basic human rights such as health, education, employment, housing, welfare services and other civil rights.⁶¹ Mental health and wellbeing are linked to broader social issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, family disruption, educational failure, substance use, unemployment and poverty. These issues have important implications for the prevention of mental disorders and conversely, addressing mental health is important to tackling these broad social issues.

The results of a survey done in 2006 on Women's Health and Life Experiences showed that more than 1 in 3 women (34.6 per cent) aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical or sexual violence during their lifetime.⁶² This research also showed that psychological distress for women who have experienced physical or sexual partner violence is significantly higher than for those not experiencing violence.

The National Drug Use Survey 2011-2012 revealed that mental health problems were common in this population. Data on mental health problems among drug users implied that about 15 per cent of drug users in Malé and 9 per cent in the atolls had been diagnosed with a

psychological disorder.⁶³ Every one in five people experience different aspects of depression.⁶⁴

The mental health system in the Maldives is currently limited. Most mental health services are in Malé, with minimal services in the outer islands. There are psychiatric and psychological services in the private sector. The Mental Health Centre at the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH) provides mental health services to the public, mainly in the form of outpatient psychiatric clinics. Inpatient service for psychiatric patients at IGMH is very limited with no psychiatric ward. Over the past year, psychiatrists have been newly posted at the Regional Hospitals. Medications are available and free. However, there is a dearth of trained mental health workers in the country. While there is some mental health training at local institutions for counsellors, nurses, and primary healthcare workers, this is limited with little practical emphasis.

Older persons

Five per cent of the population is aged 65 and above.⁶⁵ This group is expected to more than double by 2030. While life expectancy of Maldivians has increased from 70 to 79 years in the past 15 years, the healthy life span is 70 years.

The Universal Health Insurance Scheme – Aasandha, introduced in 2012, has mitigated health care related financial burdens and ended health care related impoverishment of older adults. A state funded Old Age Basic Pension (OABP) scheme, in operation since 2010, covers all citizens 65 and above. Currently, the state

⁶¹ Health Protection Agency (2017). Mental health policy. Ministry of Health, Maldives

⁶² Fulu E. The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences. Malé: Ministry of Health and Gender; 2006.

⁶³ National Drug Use Survey Maldives, Malé: United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime; 2012.

⁶⁴ Findings of the STEPS Survey on Risk Factors for Non-Communicable Diseases undertaken by the Government and WHO (November 2022)

⁶⁵ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2014. Statistical release 1: Population and households. P.13

pension is MVR 5,000 (approximately US\$300) per month.

Traditionally, elderly family members are cared for in an extended family setting, but this has become less common due to inadequate living space and internal migration. In some cases, parents are left alone on remote islands. Presently, Maldives is moving away from the pattern of an extended family to a nuclear family. The tradition was that the elderly were cared for by family members, particularly the women.⁶⁶

There is limited information and data on older persons' participation in society, with emerging concern of exclusion of the elderly, increasing loneliness among older populations and limited options for productive engagement of the elderly in society. Respondents in one study conducted in Malé⁶⁷ preferred to live with their children and appreciated the level of care given by their children. The absence of modified homes and adapted built environments and suitable housing for families living with elderly parents means that healthy older adults' levels of physical activities, social interaction and independence are limited.

Maldives has no specific facilities for geriatric care. Age related minor illnesses are treated at tertiary-multipurpose hospitals. There are very few organisations for older adults. More needs to be done to support the ability of the elderly to live an independent life for as long as possible, through schemes such as adapted housing and home nursing support.

⁶⁶ Didi R., Implications of ageing in Maldives. Regional Health Forum – Volume 16, Number 1, 2012

⁶⁷ Nazra A., 'Perceptions of Ageing Among Older Adults Living in Malé, Maldives and Implications for Provision of Support', International Journal of Social Research and Innovation, Volume 2, Issue 1 - August 2018

⁶⁸ <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Income-Summary-v2.pdf>

Regional and urban/atoll differences

The geographic distribution of services across many small islands limits opportunities and often results in migration to Malé. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2019⁶⁸ highlights significant income disparity between Malé and in the atolls, with almost 60% of the atoll population getting less than \$250, while only 18% of the Malé gets this amount. Those living in atolls have unfavourable labour market outcomes. For example, employment-to-population ratio and labour force participation rate (LFPR) is 8.3 and 6.8 percentage points lower in atolls respectively compared to that in Malé. Inequality between Malé and the atolls has a negative impact on social cohesion. This can act as a trigger point for future social tensions if policy measures are not taken to address the underlying issues. Geography causes a relative disconnect between Malé and the atolls, and between atolls and small islands, encouraging reliance on local community-based structures and support networks, often consisting of just a few families. As adults and youth migrate to Malé, those networks are increasingly strained, with growing, negative social consequences.

An estimated 45.5 per cent of the population lives in urban areas.⁶⁹ Due to constant internal migration⁷⁰ from the atolls to Malé and a low fertility rate, it is anticipated that this will continue to increase. It is estimated that by 2030 that over half of the population will be living in Malé with this increasing to 64 per cent of

⁶⁹ <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/MDV/maldives/urban-population>>Maldives Urban Population 1960-2019

⁷⁰ National Bureau of Statistics, and UNFPA, Maldives Population Projections 2014-2054, <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Maldives-Population-Projections-2014-2054.pdf>. Analysis of data from the 2006 and 2014 census by the National Bureau of Statistics gives an estimate of 2,200 migrants from the atolls to Malé each year.

resident Maldivians living in Malé by 2054.⁷¹ This will have a significant impact on infrastructure and demand for services, including education,

health and social services, to the continued disadvantage of the atolls.

D | GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Maldives has a history of relative gender equality influenced by a strong tradition of women's self-employment, egalitarian cultural ideologies and flexible marriage and divorce practices.⁷² Whereas women in the Maldives are among the best off in South Asia by many standards, they still suffer from inequality.⁷³ While the country performs well in measures of health and reproductive care, it performs poorly compared with similar countries in terms of political and socio-economic empowerment. The country has a particularly low representation of women in national and local governments⁷⁴, low participation in the workforce, and now experiences high levels of inequality, with a growing gap between the rich and the poor.

The Maldives has shown strong engagement with United Nations Treaty Bodies, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Procedures. The creation of the National Mechanism for [Implementation,] Reporting and Follow-Up to implement recommendations adopted by international human rights mechanisms is a

positive step. Several indicators from the Sustainable Development Goals have been integrated into national policies such as the National Gender Equality Action Plan (NGEAP) 2022-2026. However, the Maldives' reservations to certain provisions of Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) concerning equality in marriage and family relations, on grounds of incompatibility with Sharia, are of concern. It is not acceptable under international human rights law for any religious doctrine to be used as a basis for discrimination against women and girls or to fail to prevent it.

The 2019 amendment to the Decentralization Act established a 33 percent electoral quota for women in local councils. However, some political parties limit women to run only for quota seats. Additionally, numerous challenges remain stemming from pervasive gender stereotyping combined with the burden of care responsibilities and absence of training opportunities to build the leadership skills of

⁷¹ National Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA, Maldives Population Projection 2014-2054, Assumptions and Results Analysis, p.13. This is an important finding as the current Government of Maldives (GOM) has set the consolidation of 70 per cent of the population in the Greater Malé Area by 2050.

⁷² Fulu, E. *Domestic Violence in Asia – Globalization, Gender, and Islam in the Maldives*, 2014, Introduction.

⁷³ The various Human Development Indices developed by the UNDP show significant gender differences in the Maldives when it

comes to economic opportunity and empowerment. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MDV.pdf and http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MDV.pdf

⁷⁴ There are some notable improvements in some instances though. <https://en.sun.mv/61297>

women councillors and candidates. Women local council members are either relegated to administrative roles and marginalized from policy discussions and decision-making, or their inputs are not taken seriously. The Decentralization Act highlights the importance of women's roles in local decision making and development by mandating the establishment of an island Women's Development Committee (WDCs) under each island council. The WDCs perform advisory functions to island councils on development concerns. The Act recognizes the role of non-government organizations in governance at the local level and opens opportunities for constructive engagement with local government bodies on various concerns including gender.

While many Maldivian women are well-educated and proficient to take on leadership roles, they are not well represented in the top levels of society, business⁷⁵ or government. Structural barriers to women's participation and stereotypical attitudes are also evident in women's political participation at the national level. Six out of 17 ministries are headed by women and only four out of 87 seats in the Parliament are held by women, which is very low. Prevailing negative social and cultural norms about women's roles in society are frequently employed to undermine women's political participation and can lead to them becoming targets of gendered verbal abuse, both online and offline, harassment, hate speech, political intimidation, and disinformation campaigns aimed at silencing them. Certain conservative narratives question women's competence to participate in public life and limit women's role only to serving the family and procreation. Whilst women perform better in education, this is not reflected in their representation in public

life. Most labour market indicators suggest that women have unfavourable labour outcomes. Labour force participation rate of women is 31.4 percentage points lower compared to men, employment-to population ratio of women is 29.3 percentage points lower compared to men, the share of women in managerial position is only 18.7 percent.

The Government has achieved gender parity in the foreign service and in the civil service. Since 2019, two women judges out of seven judges are serving at the Supreme Court. However, out of the 134 magistrates, only seven are women and merely three women judges preside over the lower and appellate courts. Across the judiciary only 20 out of 183 judges, i.e. 11 per cent are women. Notable efforts are being made in the police force to increase women's participation which is crucial for the public good.

The Gender Equality Act (2016) seeks to prevent discrimination based on gender, and to address ideas and practices that promote gender discrimination, while ensuring that women are guaranteed equal rights and opportunities in economic, political, civil, social and cultural life including access to reproductive health information and services. While the Act prohibits discrimination based on marital status, most health facilities outside of Malé are not providing contraceptives to unmarried people and spousal consent was included in older versions of the national family planning standards.

The Maldives is a State Party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW Committee reviewed Maldives in October 2021 and some of the recommendations included to expedite the family law reform, strengthen the judicial system to ensure women who report violations, especially gender based violations are

⁷⁵ Numbers of women in managerial positions are also low (at 19.5 per cent) and women earn 20 per cent less than men. Across the country, women have significantly less assets and financial capacity

than men, to be used as collateral to obtain bank loans for small and medium enterprises.

treated in a gender-sensitive manner, take measures to prevent reprisals against women human rights defenders, adopt measures including introducing temporary special measures to increase the representation of women in political posts.⁷⁶ A further reason for growing gender inequality is a decline in the number of women working outside the home.

About 39 per cent of Maldivian households are female headed, with poverty rates slightly higher than for male headed households.⁷⁷ The highest contribution to multidimensional poverty for women is from health, indicating lack of access. Women are also in lower paying jobs and engaged in informal and small enterprises. Additionally, unpaid care work by women is not considered and its contribution to the economy is unaccounted for.

The reported prevalence of intimate partner violence in the Maldives (at 16.3 per cent)⁷⁸ is lower than in other South Asian countries (except for Bhutan) due to a history of gender egalitarian norms, laws and traditions, historically highly flexible divorce practices (meaning that women can escape violent relationships more easily), a high level of female headed households and a traditionally moderate form of Islam, which does not discriminate against women or view them as inferior.⁷⁹ On 6 December 2021, the first amendment to the Sexual Offences Act (Law No. 17/2014) was ratified redefining rape, sexual injury and sexual assault. This in effect recognized marital rape as an offense with no conditions attached to its definition and also mandates rape evidence kits to be available at all government hospitals and

health centres in the Maldives. Globally, all countries, including the Maldives, have experienced an increase in domestic and gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the real scope of this crisis is yet to be reported. The Sexual Abuse and Harassment Prevention Act of 2014 aims to ensure a violence free work environment. However sexual harassment against women in the workplace is common, complaints are not taken seriously, and redress for victims remains elusive. This contributes to a hostile work environment, undermines workplace safety and security for women and hinders their participation in workforce.

There is a lack of explicit criminalization of domestic violence under criminal law. Overcrowded housing arrangements contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence and the impact of the exposure of young children to such acts. Special police and prosecution units were established to handle cases of gender-based violence and community outreach through neighbourhood watch programmes. To strengthen its response to gender-based violence, the Government should introduce a robust legislative framework adopting the principles of the Istanbul Convention, the most comprehensive global instrument on gender-based violence. This should include measures to: raise awareness, establish accessible complaints mechanisms for reporting, including hotlines, create sufficient shelters for survivors and ensure that complaints are duly investigated, and perpetrators are prosecuted.

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https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CEDAW/C/MDV/CO/6&Lang=En

77 National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance & Treasury, Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), Analytical Report IV, Poverty and Inequality, National Bureau of Statistics, 2016, Malé, Maldives, p.40.

78 The Ministry of Gender and Family, Government of Maldives, The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences, Initial

results on prevalence health outcomes and women's responses to violence, 2006, vii.

79 Fulu, E. *Domestic Violence in Asia – Globalisation, Gender and Islam in the Maldives*, 2014, quoted in Fulu, E. and Miedema, S. *Violence Against Women: Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model*, *Violence Against Women* 2015, Vol. 21(12) 1431–1455, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077801215596244> accessed 22.10.19.

There are serious barriers faced by women in their efforts to seek justice, including remedies for gender-based violence and in accessing family courts. There is a general lack of awareness of the laws and lack of adequately resourced police stations. Legal services are mostly located in Malé, often leaving women from the islands without legal assistance. Women from the islands seeking recourse face significant financial burdens when accessing courts in Malé city and, too often in civil matters, women do not have any legal representation. Women suspected or accused of crimes also face barriers due to the lack of female lawyers, female judges and female police officers, which often compromises their right to a fair trial and safety during investigations.

Impunity for perpetrators of sexual abuse is a leading cause of the lack of use of related laws. For instance, between 2015 – 2019, 364 cases of sexual abuse were reported, out of which only 49 cases have been prosecuted to date. The lack of

protection for women who report rape, the fear of re-victimisation and retaliation, the lack of female police investigators and social workers, inadequate shelters for victims of violence, and the lack of legal aid and support services particularly outside of Malé are of particular concern.

As the country transitions through a period of rapid social change, it is critical that gender equality is realized, and that women's rights are upheld. The newfound democratic space has paradoxically created openings for more conservative and even extreme thinking and practices. Though official figures are not available, there have been increased reports of child marriage, which are not recognised by courts, and which have been linked with increasingly extreme ideologies. Generating a similar space for the promotion of women's rights and creating policies to solidify the gains achieved is essential for inclusive and sustainable development.

E | CHALLENGES AND GAPS TOWARDS ACHIEVING THE 2030 AGENDA

The Maldives remains a country in transition. The fast-growing tourism industry, substantially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, aims to triple in the next three years. Yet this industry remains at a distance from mainstream Maldives and appears to benefit a relatively narrow economic group. Numerous challenges are posed by Maldives' geography composed of 26 climate-affected atolls in the Indian ocean, with population spread across remote Islands and a fast-growing capital city-Island, Malé, where

gangs and drug usage is allegedly rife. The looming threats of climate change weighs heavily on the low-lying country, and the Maldives has for the past twenty-five years been an exceptional agent of change on a wide variety of issues related to climate change and environmental degradation notably through the Alliance of Small Island States, including in 2015 when it assumed its Chairmanship.

The SAP provides a vision for the period of the current Government (through 2023), but there is

not yet consensus around key issues, further marred by risks of policy reversals precipitated by Presidential election results. These include whether to build upon past traditions, follow a more conservative or liberal vision, challenges related to gender discrimination and inequality, the form of democracy and rule of law, and whether to build a centralised or decentralised state. An inclusive national dialogue is needed to build consensus on a common path all can accept for the Maldives of the future.

Another key challenge for the Maldives is to balance large investments needed in infrastructure gaps (to boost tourism, increase resilience to climate change and improve service delivery) and the rapid accumulation of public debt. Overall indebtedness is high and reserves low. This has been significantly worsened by COVID-19.

The decline in the birth rate offers a demographic dividend, but only if the economy can diversify and generate attractive private sector jobs. Although unemployment stood at 5.2 percent according to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2019, the youth unemployment rate is 10.5 percentage points higher than the national average. Youth between 15 and 24 years of age represent 48 percent of the unemployed, even though they only account for 14 percent of the total population. An even higher number of youth are discouraged workers and are not in employment, education or training (NEET), with 25 percent of male youth (15-24 years old) and 30 percent of females in this category. Active engagement of youth in a dynamic economy would help support women's rights and gender equality and the exclusion that feeds drug use, gangs, and extremism.

On the whole, poverty has reduced in recent years. However, many remain clustered just above the poverty line and face the risk of falling back into poverty. The Gini coefficient reveals

inequality between Malé and the atolls, with almost 1 in 5 Maldivians in the southern atolls being poor (40 per cent using the MPI).

The social protection system reduces the risk of financial burden throughout the life cycle of Maldivians. However, there is a lack of inclusive development policies that facilitate participation of persons with disabilities and elderly. The gap in the systems results in exclusion of the most vulnerable and the absence of social protection for informal and migrant workers is a major concern. The pre-existing vulnerabilities of the migrant population in terms of health and socio-economic wellbeing, including the lack of equal access to basic rights to social protection and health services, and adequate housing, have worsened during COVID-19, particularly due to the border closures and lockdown in the greater Malé area. The mandated health insurance package most migrants prescribe to, only covers inpatient care, while irregular migrants do not possess the documentation required for health coverage. Indeed, an estimated 60,000 migrants have little-to-no-access to healthcare. Moreover, migrants' large contributions to the informal sector impeded their access to the social relief packages offered by the Government.

The Maldives has a relatively young working population. Most male workers are employed, while many female workers remain outside the labour force. Youth unemployment seems to be on the rise, while low wages and existing working conditions do not attract Maldivians to many job categories. Young Maldivians also often lack skills required to access higher-paying jobs.

The Government faces a difficult landscape. The recent pandemic has exhausted the national budget due to additional expenditure on COVID-19 response and recovery work. Due to this factor, sustainability of current level of funding by government for social, health and education sector in the coming years is at risk. It must contain recurrent spending and improve the

efficiency of social spending through increased capital investments, while renewing efforts in economic and social inclusion of all regions across the country, fostering private sector job creation, building human capacities and skills

and reducing vulnerability by enhancing disaster risk preparedness. And it must do so while improving public sector management and budget credibility.

F | SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXCLUSION ANALYSIS

Education

The Maldives achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 on universal primary education in 2010.⁸⁰ Public school education is free and is a Constitutional provision until middle school, with all children having access to free education until the completion of lower secondary level. Ministry of Education data shows that student enrolment figures have been maintained over the past 5 years. Sustained at near parity, girls' enrolment in higher secondary education surpassed boys by 11 per cent in 2018, which is a slight improvement towards balancing the same disparity from 2014, to achieve parity for boys. Special Education Needs (SEN) are especially weak, which is evident in data showing the existing gender gap in school enrolment of girls with SEN. Compared to 2014, the data shows a significantly widening gap in girls' enrolment in SEN by 2018. This evidence shows the increased vulnerabilities of the girl child and compounding factors.

Data published by the Maldives National University (MNU) shows a significant and persistent gender gap in graduate numbers with a clear downward trend for women graduates,

which is inconsistent with the previously cited enrolment figures. Consulted stakeholders cite a series of challenges to women students to continue their studies, with the triple burden of paid work, unpaid care-work and study being unfeasibly challenging to many students. In February 2019, the Government introduced a scheme making undergraduate education at public and private institutions tuition-free, which may improve opportunities for women to remain in higher education to complete their studies.⁸¹

In 2019, the net enrolment ratio (NER) for both girls and boys at pre-primary level went down to 86.9 per cent (from 92 per cent in 2018). For Primary level, NER went up to 100 per cent (95 per cent in 2018). The NER at lower secondary went up to 100 per cent (90.5 per cent in 2018) and steeply drops at higher secondary to 37.2 per cent (44.5 per cent in 2018) (56 per cent for girls and 20.8 per cent for boys).⁸² This is largely due to non-availability of higher education opportunities in the atolls, which forces a number of adolescents to migrate to Malé.

The limited skills of teachers significantly impact quality of education. The education sector analysis noted that there is a need for the pre-

80 MDGs : Maldives Country Report 2010, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

81 *First degrees in Maldives made tuition-free*, Maldives Independent, 14 February 2019,

<https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/first-degrees-in-maldives-made-tuition-free-14376>

82 Ministry of Education official statistics

service teacher training institutions to incorporate training in many aspects of the national curriculum in a more explicit manner, and to improve skills for subject specific teaching. Technical expertise of staff must be improved, including school principals and leading teachers at the school level. Skills of teacher trainers need to be enhanced to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum. In addition, student-teacher ratios, especially in schools at both extremes of enrolment size, need to be further improved.

The higher education sector is growing with two public universities, nine new private colleges and two polytechnics, but there is no proper mechanism or regulation to assist in their governance. There are more than 200 higher education institutions (HEIs) registered and 35 of them offer programmes at diploma and above qualifications.⁸³ The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and the Maldives Qualification Authority (MQA), though mandated for regulation and quality assurance of higher education, do not have qualified staff to properly regulate the sector.

Health

The health of the people of Maldives has improved significantly in the past few decades. Life expectancy at birth has increased from 70 years to 79 years for men and from 70.1 to 85 years for women during the period 2000 to 2015.⁸⁴ Child survival has improved significantly with the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) falling from 17 per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 8 per 1,000 live births in 2016. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has come down from 143 per 100,000 births in 2001 to 44 per 100,000 births in 2016, owing to better Emergency Obstetric Care

(EmOC) at atoll level and antenatal care at the island level.⁸⁵ Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has decreased from 2.5 in 2009 to 2.1 in 2016-17, despite the drop in contraceptive prevalence rate from 35 to 19 per cent for any method during the same period.⁸⁶

Health services are currently delivered by a four-tier system comprising of island, atoll, regional and central level services. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé serves as the tertiary referral hospital. Six regional and 13 atoll hospitals across the country serve as the first referral while each of the inhabited islands has a fully functional health centre with a medical doctor, nurse and a primary health care worker. Maldives continues to rely heavily on international migrant health professionals, who account for 82 per cent of physicians and 55 per cent of nurses,⁸⁷ and it faces the challenges of not only high turnover but assuring the quality of health workforce performance, due to their unfamiliarity with national guidelines and protocols, as well as possible language and cultural barriers. Managing logistics and supplies across the islands' centres and hospitals is challenging, and there is sub-optimal use of information and communication technology.

Most communicable diseases have been controlled, and Maldives has been certified free of diseases such as malaria, lymphatic filariasis, measles and polio. The Maldives has halted mother-to-child transmission of HIV and is on track to eliminate leprosy.⁸⁸ However, there is an increased public health threat from HIV, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), Hepatitis B and TB due to high-risk behaviours such as unprotected sex related to drug abuse. Children born out of wedlock to drug using mothers are often taken up for state care.

83 Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

84 Ministry of Health (2017). Maldives Health Statistics 2015/16.

85 ibid

86 Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives.p90

87 Ministry of Health (2017). Maldives Health Statistics 2015/16

88 World Health Organisation (2017). Maldives: A journey of health

Maldives has made significant progress in sub-indicators within Early Childhood Development (ECD) such as early learning and vaccination, and overall achieving a high ECD composite index. However, the country does not have sufficient data on key SDG indicators (4.2) such as young children who are developmentally on track in health, learning, and psychosocial well-being, or young children at risk of poor development. Maldives does not have an ECD policy, nor a comprehensive programme or interventions delivered as a package. Interventions are delivered separately by respective sectors in silos. Parenting continues to emerge as a common thread in many of the social issues, yet there is no comprehensive parenting programme or a mechanism to reach parents of young children. The health sector is the only sector routinely in contact with children under 3 years and their parents, and the public health platforms are underutilized. The health sector, through growth monitoring and vaccination programs can play an instrumental role to promote early childhood development, positive parenting, and nurturing care.

Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) have emerged as the main cause of morbidity and mortality in the country. It is estimated that NCDs account for 84 per cent of deaths in the country, men have less survival chance and a 7 year lower life expectancy than women⁸⁹, and 16 per cent of deaths are classified as premature death for the population aged 30-70 years.⁹⁰ In terms of the number of lives lost due to ill-health, disability, and early death (DALYs), NCDs (inclusive of injuries) account for 78 per cent of the total disease burden.⁹¹

Current health challenges include addressing NCDs, a potential risk of drop in immunization coverage, nutritional issues among children as

well as adults, cancers and associated unhealthy risk behaviour, provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and HIV/STIs information and services, particularly in school and for young people, prevention and control of thalassemia and other inherited conditions, addressing increasing mental health burdens and disabilities including developmental disorders and addressing environmental pollution.

Attraction and retention of competent local health professionals remains a major constraint due to limited opportunities for career development, lack of retention policies, unattractive employment packages and a rigid organizational structure within the civil service.⁹² At the same time, there has been a shift towards facility-based curative care rather than community based primary health care. Frequent and ad hoc changes to the organization of health systems with changes in government and policies has also resulted in inefficiency, disruption of the health information systems, weak coordination and loss of trained local technical staff, threatening the sustainability of health service delivery.⁹³ To further enhance accessibility to healthcare, out-reach programs and innovative mechanisms to provide diagnostics and service enhancements including integration and digitalization of health systems needs to be addressed. During the COVID-19 lockdown in early 2020, service delivery platforms were optimized to maintain essential health services. This included strengthening digital health services by leveraging existing internet connectivity in the country. The strengthening of telemedicine services aided the continuity of care at all levels of the health system during a time of significant disruption. This has created momentum for integrating

89 National Bureau of Statistics, (2020) Statistical Yearbook of Maldives

90 World Health Organisation (2020). Non-communicable diseases (NCD) Country Profiles 2018. Maldives.

91 Ministry of Health (2020). Maldives Health Statistics 2020

92 Ministry of Health and Gender (2014). National health workforce strategic plan 2014-2018

93 World Health Organisation (2017). Maldives: A journey of health

digital health strategies into service delivery platforms in the future.

Mental health vulnerability among adolescents is a concern, with 13 per cent of students self-reporting that they had seriously considered attempting suicide. With the establishment of the Centre for Mental Health in 2019, Mental Health services are gradually expanding, yet the need exceeds the available specialists.

Essential health services are established in all inhabitant islands with speed boats as ambulances for emergency transfers. However, there are no specific actions to improve access to health care for vulnerable population groups such as those with disabilities, mental health conditions and the elderly. In order to ensure universal access to healthcare, all Maldivians are covered by Aasandha, a healthcare financing scheme fully funded by the Government. Spending on health is high in Maldives when compared to other countries in similar developmental situations with the Total Health Expenditure (THE) in 2015-17 being 8.5 per cent of GDP.⁹⁴ Over the last one and half decades, the level of per capita health expenditure has risen phenomenally from \$454 during 2000 to about \$1,048 in 2015-17. With the introduction of Aasandha and other improvements in the provision of public health-care services, out of pocket (OOP) expenditure for Maldivian households has decreased from 49 to 29 per cent. Improving access to and availability of quality healthcare services has been challenging. Factors include the geographically dispersed nature of the population, with unreliable transport networks, high reliance on international migrant health professionals (who are sometimes underutilized) and high turnover of the health workforce, as well as issues arising from total reliance on private and state-owned enterprises that operate on a business model for

the purchase and supply of medicines and medical supplies.

A robustness of the national health system was tested during a public health emergency such as COVID-19. The pandemic has exacerbated challenges faced by the sector in terms of capacities in the areas of procurement, supply chain management, forecasting, and stock management.

Drug abuse

Over the last 30 years, availability of drug types in the Maldives has increased. A prison-based study in 2011 found that 70 per cent of inmates were sentenced for drug use. Among this group, a majority had used heroin (69.1 per cent) and cannabis (63.3 per cent) followed by alcohol (47.9 per cent).

Increasing drug abuse has been fuelled by the large influx of adolescents and young people coming to Malé for education and to seek work away from family and parental guidance; overcrowding with poor housing conditions in Malé that forces young people to the streets, and unemployment (including voluntary unemployment) and low productive engagement among youth. Peer pressure and social acceptance play a major part in escalating drug use, which is fast becoming the leading recreational activity for Maldivian youth.⁹⁵ The situation is fuelled by inadequate law enforcement to control gangs and trafficking groups.

While the law seeks rehabilitation, its implementation is through the criminal justice system for all offenses. A substantial proportion of drug users (61 per cent in Malé and 79 per cent in the atolls) reported being arrested at least once. A significant proportion were convicted. As a result, large numbers of youth are “criminalised”. Once a person is identified as

94 Ministry of Health (2019). National Health Accounts 2015-2017.

95 Adyb, A. (2014). Maldives under the Burden of Drugs. *Journal of Alcoholism & Drug Dependence*.

a drug user (either through voluntary treatment or the police system), the drug court requires the National Drug Agency (NDA) to undertake an assessment and propose a treatment plan. The criminal charge is suspended for those who complete treatment - if not they are sentenced to prison.⁹⁶ The situation is alarming, as clients who await assessment are kept in prison. This is particularly detrimental for young substance abusers, who might otherwise have a bigger chance of recovery if supported at an early stage.

Social protection

The Government adopted a 'minimum social protection floor' in 2009 and established the National Social Protection Agency (NSPA) to coordinate and implement national social protection programmes.⁹⁷ The Social Protection Law (2014) allows for a total of 11 social protection schemes of benefits, the current four programmes implemented by NSPA include allowances for single parents, foster parents, persons with disabilities, fisherman's income assurance scheme, food subsidy, 'Aasandha' (health care financing scheme), and medical welfare for those services not covered by Aasandha.⁹⁸

Many eligible families miss out on assistance because of the complex and costly application process, and a lack of awareness of the schemes. Sharia is codified in the Family Act (2000) with fathers having to pay for child support after divorce. Implementation of the law is weak, and many women face challenges to access the support from biological fathers. Serial

monogamy and polygamy leave women in a vicious poverty cycle.

An impact evaluation of the disability benefit showed limited reach, with only 25.5 per cent of the eligible population receiving the benefit.⁹⁹ This is driven largely by the non-availability of assessment services in the atolls and its limitation to only one facility in Malé. A disconnect between the financial benefit schemes and social services related to the benefit schemes was also observed, such as those receiving disability benefit needing to reapply for an assistive device or vice versa.

The core capacity gap in social protection relates to the absence of a unified and universal system, and separate data systems and processes for each scheme. This results in a number of leakages and lost opportunities for providing social protection to the vulnerable and non-covered informal sector workers. Hence an integrated data system that draws on vital registration and links to health and education services is critical to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the schemes in terms of coverage and impact.

Maldives' pension system has witnessed tremendous reform since 2008. The Maldives Pension Act (2009) establishes a two-pillar pension system, including a new contributory pension scheme based on a Defined Contribution (DC) model with centralized recordkeeping - the Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme (MRPS), and a non-contributory citizen's pension - the Old Age Basic Pension (OABP), aimed at providing an income floor for all Maldivians aged 65 and above.

96 Stakeholder interviews, National Drug Agency

97 Ibrahim A (2012). Republic of the Maldives: Updating and Improving the Social Protection Index

98 National Social Protection Agency (2019). Services. <http://www.nspa.gov.mv/v2/>

99 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results.

G | ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION ANALYSIS

The Maldivian economy has made substantial progress in terms of economic growth, per capita GDP and human development indicators over the past decades. The economy has transitioned considerably from a subsistence economy dependent on basic fisheries (approx. 35% of GDP in 1980) to an Upper Middle-Income Country with a per capita income of over US\$ 9,300 and a growing services sector contributing to 66% of GDP¹⁰⁰. The improving business environment for tourism development generated fiscal resources allowing state financing of extensive welfare and social services.

Yet the Maldives continues to face great challenges in making growth more socially inclusive and regionally balanced. Economic disparities have increased between Malé and the other islands and between groups of different socioeconomic status. The wide dispersion of the population, coupled with limited transport infrastructure, hampers the creation of sizeable domestic markets, and presents a formidable challenge in sustaining growth and providing equitable and adequate public services. The benefits of growth have not spread evenly across sectors, across segments of the population, and across regions. Many remote atolls continue to be marginalized and cut-off from the mainstream growth trajectory. The current pattern of reliance on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in tourism and foreign labour for services and other professional activities has not spread the gains of growth to the less-skilled and less-educated population, to people living in the

more remote atolls, and to young people with new job aspirations. There are emerging labour market challenges for the youth, with rising aspirations.

In the past decades, the economy faced external shocks from natural disasters, health pandemics and hikes in fuel prices. COVID-19 has illustrated the risks of excessive reliance on the tourism industry as an economic driver. The Maldives need to identify potential priority areas that could drive forward the economy over the medium and long-term and create jobs.

The Government has set the objective of greater private sector participation in the economy. The Government's Strategic Action Plan (SAP) contains 'increasing the contribution of the private sector and FDI in strategic development initiatives and overall economic growth' as a policy priority. Many initiatives are underway to make the Maldives an easier place to do business. In the SAP, several targets have been identified to facilitate a conducive business environment, including targets to make 80% of business services by Government to be provided online by 2023, a 25% reduction in time spent for processing import and export transactions in 2022 as compared to 2018, and a 10% reduction in trade transaction costs by 2022 as compared to 2018. Several connective infrastructure projects are also underway that will improve trade costs for business, for instance, completing the Gulhifalhu Port by 2022 and improving Velana International Airport to become a top ranked airport in South Asia.

¹⁰⁰ Followed by the secondary sector 12.8%, and agriculture and fisheries 5.6%

There are four critical constraints to inclusive growth in the Maldives:

(1) Lack of professionals and highly skilled human resources. The education system is presently not in a position to provide the right variety of skills needed for industries such as ICT, health, and finance.

(2) Inadequate and poor-quality maritime infrastructure that constrains connectivity, limits provision of basic goods and services, and results in high transport and logistics costs.

(3) High public debt and narrow fiscal space, which limit public investment in infrastructure and social services.

(4) Weak financial intermediation that inhibits the development and expansion of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which are important for generating productive employment opportunities. Difficulties in accessing credit for the private sector (excluding tourism and construction).

Tourism and related service sectors contribute to two thirds of the GDP. The country is now extremely susceptible to global travel market conditions and trends over which Maldives has no control. Going forward, the Maldives needs to lay the foundations for a more resilient economy that can withstand external shocks. It thus needs

to steer away from an economy dominated by a single sector to a diversified broad-based economy.

The Maldives also needs to shift away from import dependency towards investment and net exports. The development goal for a diversifying strategy would be to promote the creation of high-quality jobs by improving competitive export industries. It needs to create new job opportunities that match the aspirations, skills, and interests of Maldivian youth.

It needs to shift to renewable energy sources to ensure a secure, low-carbon and sustainable energy.

Diversification helps to manage volatility and provides a more stable path for equitable path for equitable growth and development. Successful diversification is all the more important now in the wake of slowing global growth and the imperative to increase the number and quality of jobs. Trade expansion is central to creating new, higher productivity jobs that will facilitate growth through structural transformation.

Transformation and diversification would ensure that the economy delivers prosperity and opportunity for all Maldivians.

H | ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE ANALYSIS AND PROGRESS ON GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

The main environmental drivers in Maldives are climate change, population growth, urbanisation and overcrowding in urban areas, migration, and rapid economic growth. These factors directly or indirectly bring about habitat destruction, biodiversity loss and deteriorate air and water quality. Population growth and economic development result in increased use of resources and waste generation.¹⁰¹

Coastal protection is a high priority. Coral reefs, seagrass beds, lagoons, beaches, and areas of mangrove form the coastal ecosystem of the Maldives. The reef systems of the Maldives are the seventh largest globally and are highly rich and diverse, hosting several species which are globally significant.¹⁰² The economy relies heavily on tourism and fisheries, which depend entirely on the coastal and marine environment¹⁰³. It also plays an important role in providing food security, livelihoods, and income. The beaches are highly dynamic and beach erosion is one of the most significant challenges faced by islands. Wetlands or mangrove areas

are found in about 74 islands.¹⁰⁴ The main threats to coastal and marine environments include increase in sea surface temperature (SST) brought by climate change, pollution, and coastal modification¹⁰⁵. Warming of ocean temperature due to climate change is a key factor impacting corals and altering coral reef communities. High SST is known to cause coral bleaching and is also associated with Crown of Thorns (COT) outbreaks.

Coastal and marine pollution arise from land-based solid waste (especially one time use plastic) and untreated sewage disposal¹⁰⁶, or sea-based sources such as oil pollution and ballast water. Coastal modification including sand mining, cutting channels, reclamation and harbour development are significant threats to the marine and coastal environment.¹⁰⁷ Efforts towards protection and conservation of coral reefs include establishment of the Inter-Agency Task force on Coral Bleaching and a coral reef monitoring programme.

101 <https://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/nbs/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Water-and-Waste-Account-Review-Report-NBS.pdf>

102 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016.

103 According to ADB, as of 2017, 45 islands are very severely eroded, 20 are severely eroded, and 18 are slightly eroded.

104 *ibid*

105 Apart from land reclamation, several other human activities have increased vulnerability of land, beaches, and human settlements. They include construction of poorly designed coastal infrastructure, poorly engineered coastal protection measures, removal of coastal vegetation, and sand mining. Coral reefs have a critical coastal protection function, yet there have been a number of human stresses on the reef system such as coral mining, reef entrance blasting, dredging, solid waste disposal and sewage disposal that has affected the health, integrity of coast. Apart from

land reclamation, several other human activities have increased vulnerability of land, beaches, and human settlements. They include construction of poorly designed coastal infrastructure, poorly engineered coastal protection measures, removal of coastal vegetation, and sand mining. Coral reefs have a critical coastal protection function, yet there have been several human stresses on the reef system such as coral mining, reef entrance blasting, dredging, solid waste disposal and sewage disposal that has affected the health, integrity and productivity.

106 In the absence of sewage treatment, the collected sewage is discharged untreated into the sea via two outfalls, endangering the marine environment and putting fisheries and tourism at risk. This is particularly critical in Hulhumalé, which was reclaimed at high cost and is increasingly dependent on high-end tourism, international business, and commercial operations for financial sustainability.

107 *ibid*

Land reclamation has become part of the development in the country and a solution to the limited available land, transforming the islands over the years to accommodate more human activities. Nonexistence of regulations on land reclamation have been identified as a main challenge for the safety of built environment. Currently no guidance or regulation covers land reclamation. This is a serious gap that needs to be filled to ensure the construction safety of these sites as well as to reduce environmental impact and induced hazards. Land reclamation leads to drainage issues and flooding during heavy rainfall. The newly reclaimed areas do not have a coastal vegetation belt, increasing the risk of erosion and increases impacts from ocean induced flooding events. Associated environmental issues are experienced by inhabitants including ground water contamination, degradation of coastal areas, and depletion of vegetation.

The biodiversity of the Maldives contributes to 71 per cent of the nation's employment, 49 per cent of public revenue, 62 per cent of foreign exchange, 98 per cent of exports and 89 per cent of GDP¹⁰⁸. Marine diversity is outstandingly rich and highly diverse and includes internationally threatened species. Loss of habitat associated with dredging of harbours and reclamation, exploitation of resources, invasive alien species, pests and pathogens, unsound land use practices, poor land tenure policies and climate change are the main threats to biodiversity.

As governments introduce stimulus packages to support job creation, poverty reduction, development and economic growth, this needs to focus on "building back better", by ensuring that the health of the planet and natural resource base, as well as people's well-being are not undermined, while efforts should be made towards capturing opportunities for leap-

frogging to green investments, such as renewable energy, and smart housing, to be guided by the principles and standards of sustainable production and consumption. Expanding opportunities for valuing and investing in nature as part of the response to the COVID-19 crisis is essential.

The conventional freshwater resources available in Maldives mainly are in the form of a rain fed shallow groundwater lens on each island, small fresh or brackish water ponds on a few islands and rainwater. Groundwater aquifers on islands lie at an average depth of 1-1.5m below the ground surface. In many inhabited islands of Maldives, freshwater lenses have been depleted as a result of saltwater ingress due to extraction of groundwater from shallow aquifers, often though illegal pumping during construction of foundations.¹⁰⁹ The quality of groundwater has been further deteriorated due to disposal of untreated septic and wastewater into the ground and unplanned disposal of solid waste on land. In addition, development projects including paved roads decrease the ground surface availability for groundwater recharge.

Non-conventional freshwater resources available include desalinated water and bottled drinking water. Due to the current status of groundwater sources, rainwater and desalinated water are the most important sources of drinking water. The majority of the atoll population use rainwater for drinking purposes. Continuous requests for emergency water shipments show that the amount of rainwater harvested is not sufficient to last the dry season. Currently, nearly 58 per cent of the total population has access to improved sanitation systems.¹¹⁰ The various sewerage systems in place include bore sewerage, conventional deep sewer gravity and sewerage vacuum sewerage

108 ibid

109 ibid

110 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

systems. However, sewerage is untreated and piped sewerage discharges offshore.

Maldives is moving towards an integrated water resource management approach to address water insecurity. With the increase in construction, more water from the ground is pumped into the sea.

The Government is committed to boost its efforts to enhance climate resilience and implement multi-sectoral and sustainable solutions to mitigate damage to Maldivian ecosystems. In 2019, a Bill on Climate Change was introduced to Parliament which seeks to establish a Climate Change Council to scrutinize developmental projects for its impact on the environment, and a Climate Change Fund to enhance the implementation measures of adaption and mitigation which also envisages to enhance the public-private partnership.

Sea level rise is recognized as the greatest threat to Maldives, as this increases the probability of land inundation. The small size and low elevation of the islands increase vulnerability to coastal hazards. Extreme events have become frequent over the past decades, while some events have led to significant economic losses. Sea level records for the past 20 years shows a rise of 3.753mm and 2.933mm per year in Malé and Gan respectively. Maximum sea surface height is projected to increase between 0.40m to 0.48m by 2100.¹¹¹

Climate change scenarios also indicate increase in average annual temperatures which could affect fish production as higher sea surface temperatures lead to coral bleaching and could also affect influx of tourists who have been attracted by rich aquatic life.¹¹²

Natural disaster risks to Maldives as identified by the 2006 disaster risk analysis, include earthquakes and tsunamis, cyclones,

thunderstorms, floods (due to rain), drought, storm surges strong winds and tornadoes. The vulnerability assessment of the Adaptation Plan of Action 2007 identified the following areas which are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts: land, beach and human settlements, critical infrastructure, tourism, fisheries, human health, water resources and coral reef biodiversity.

The Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights in 2019 recognized climate change is an existential threat to the Maldives. She reported that some development projects approved in the recent past without adequate disaster mitigation plans resulted in increased flooding, loss of natural heritage such as mangroves, increasing sedimentation (which contributes to coral bleaching) and resultant loss of livelihoods, including by women.

The observed impacts and projected risks in natural and human systems due to the potential rise of global temperature to 1.5°C and higher levels¹¹³ presents major risks to way of life to the average Maldivian. Slow-onset disasters such as beach erosions, sea swells, storm surges and flooding with increasing intensity every year could exacerbate the economic and social conditions that forces island communities to relocate. This may lead to an influx of population from remote island communities to urban centres. As a country with a tourism model developed around its natural environment particularly the vast sandy beaches and the tropical coral reefs, the direct relationship between increasing global temperatures, intensifying storms, elevated thermal stress, and the loss of coral reefs presents a major risk.

The current Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation 2010-2020 was developed for the

111 Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

112 ADB. Multi hazard risk atlas.

113 Global Warming of 1.5°C an IPCC special report - https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_Low_Res.pdf

period 2010-2020 and identifies four areas of action; Enabling environment for good democratic governance; Empowered and capable communities; Resilient communities with access to technology, knowledge and other resources; and Risk-sensitive regional and local development.¹¹⁴ However, the plan was not formally adopted and so is not implemented in a systematic manner. Large infrastructure development projects had been completed in recent years. Programmes for community empowerment for disaster preparedness are being supported by the Maldives Red Crescent.¹¹⁵

Maldives has incorporated climate change adaptation and mitigation into sectoral planning and development - the Maldives Climate Change Policy Framework (MCCPF) is the key policy document. Maldives aims to undertake adaptation actions and opportunities and build climate resilient infrastructure to address the current and future impacts of climate change. As the national disaster preparedness and response plan needs to be reviewed and updated, and national and local-level Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies are still to be developed, there is a current opportunity for linking the plan with the MCCPF and redefining its priorities.

Due to a lack of conventional energy resources in Maldives, all its energy demands are met through imports of fossil fuel (80 per cent diesel). In addition to pollution generated by its use, the continued high reliance on imported fossil fuel increases the vulnerability of Maldives to external fuel price fluctuations. Limited fuel storage is a further challenge. High government expenditure on fuel imports is also identified as a risk to the energy security of the country. A notable achievement with regard to fuel use is

that more than 50 per cent of households have access to clean fuel for cooking.

Efforts are ongoing to introduce renewable energy technologies, as well as to promote energy conservation and efficiency throughout the Maldives. Ongoing projects are expected to increase solar energy generation to 33 per cent of energy production in the country. This includes increased use of solar energy generation in public infrastructure including public hospitals and schools. However, thus far the growth of solar has served to supplement capacity, especially in the atolls, rather than replacing fossil fuel use.

The main pattern of usage of chemicals in the Maldives is in the form of consumption of petroleum products. The high dependence on chemicals and its potential consequences, combined with limited capacity makes effective management of chemicals a key issue. Maldives has a cross-sectoral approach in chemical administration. However, due to the lack of specific legislation on chemical management, regulatory mechanisms for chemical management remain weak.¹¹⁶¹¹⁷

It is starkly apparent in Maldives that its future growth must look beyond the current global “take-make-waste” extractive industrial model. The Maldives is beginning to look toward developing a circular economy, one which aims to redefine growth, focusing on positive society-wide benefits. This would entail gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources and designing waste out of the system. Underpinned by a transition to renewable energy sources, a circular model would be based on three principles: 1. Design out waste and pollution 2. Keep products and materials in use 3. Regenerate natural systems

114 Government of Maldives (2010). Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation 2010-2020

115 Stakeholder interviews, Ministry of Environment

116 <https://www.itopf.org/knowledge-resources/countries-territories-regions/countries/maldives/>

117 <https://edition.mv/news/18943>

There are inadequate public measures towards environment protection and mitigation of climate change effects. Public awareness and empowerment programmes are conducted through school curricula and through Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) on aspects of environment protection such as reduction of waste and energy consumption. However, these appear to have limited impact on practices at household level, which need to be addressed with more consistent implementation and monitoring of regulatory actions, policy commitment and efforts to generate public support and trust in government institutions.¹¹⁸ There are heightened risks faced by women and girls across the islands due to climate change, environmental degradation and their lack of participation in decisions concerning the development of infrastructure. These have contributed to precarious environmental conditions leading to poor health outcomes, food insecurity, a higher burden of care work and the loss of livelihoods for women. It leads to disruptions in food supplies, as well as drinking

water and sanitation several times each year associated with frequent flooding, which is aggravated by the destruction of their natural habitat. Disaster responses appear to focus mainly on ad hoc mitigation activities and not adequately on prevention. The United Nations encourage mainstreaming of a strong gender component in disaster responses, considering that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by disasters.

Development projects for infrastructure and tourism, while much needed, are being implemented without gender impact assessments of natural resource management and without in-depth consultation with local communities, specifically women whose livelihoods are affected. The reclamation of islands and lagoons is affecting the fisheries industry, contributing to a loss of economic opportunities and threatening indigenous practices and handicrafts in which women are primarily engaged while creating new environmental risks.

GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The Constitution adopted by the Maldives in 2008 heralded an entirely open and liberal constitutional democracy with genuine universal adult suffrage and an extensive Bill of Rights enforceable by an independent judiciary. This radically new set of values and rules was not fully internalised by political stakeholders or Maldivian society. The decade after 2008 saw a succession of political confrontations and crises, often involving the Supreme Court. An

assessment of judicial reform concluded that the inexperienced and poorly trained judiciary had proved incapable of assuming the role envisioned in the 2008 Constitution, guiding inexperienced constitutional organs through their awkward early days in a constitutional democracy¹¹⁹.

The 2018 presidential elections resulted in a change of government, and 2019 parliamentary elections provided a two thirds majority to the

118 Stakeholder interviews, Ministry of Environment

119 UNDP (2019). *Assessment of the Justice Sector Reform Proposals: Final Report* (unpublished)

MDP party and its coalition partners which adopted an ambitious programme of reforms. While the constitution maintains a division of functions among Executive, Parliament and the Judiciary, current judicial reforms are directed by the Executive and the Parliament through their representatives in the Judicial Service Commission. One landmark intervention in 2019 has been the full replacement of the Supreme Court bench¹²⁰, with potential consequences yet to emerge for both building trust and national reconciliation.¹²¹

While the country is enjoying a period of relative calm and political stability, potential sparks could ignite political turbulence in the country, namely the fragility of arrangements within coalition governments and polarisation over social, economic and political issues. Weaknesses in the institutionalisation of the political party system in the Maldives could lead to instability in the lead-up to presidential elections as personality-based politics could once more take centre stage.¹²²

The Constitution also paved the way for decentralised governance. The 2010 Decentralisation Act details the objectives to allow island communities to make their own decisions in a democratic and accountable manner, to improve people's living standards through social, economic and cultural development, and to create an environment conducive for peace and prosperity. A review of decentralised governance¹²³ in 2018 identified

challenges as lack of political will to implement decentralisation, in particular, fiscal decentralisation, the politicisation of local government authorities, and lack of capacity of some local councils, and conflict with the administrative staff, who are accountable to the civil service rather than the council.

Maldives ranks as one of the lowest countries in South Asia for women's representation, with just four women in parliament. While the allocation of a gender quota in local council elections at the beginning of 2021 is commendable, problems remain. Amendments were made to the Decentralisation Act in 2019, including provisions for one third representation of women the councils and allocation of 40 per cent of government revenues from the atoll jurisdiction to its council.

At the local governance level women's representation is now at 39.5% compared to the 4.6% in Parliament. Maldives ranks 179th out of 185 countries for the number of women representatives in the Parliament.

While these amendments addressed some of the legal issues, challenges related to capacity at atoll level, politicisation and conflict with administrative civil service staff remain.

The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights acknowledged "the Government's commitment to judicial reform. Functional and effective courts are essential to prosecuting terrorism, violent extremism and

¹²⁰ It is the first time two women justices sit on the Supreme Court bench. Many religious scholars in the Maldives are of the opinion that women cannot be judges and is considered *haram*. As such, in anticipation of President's Solih's decision to appoint women justices, the Supreme Council on Islamic Fatwa of the Maldives ruled on 9 July 2019, with three views that women should be banned from becoming judges.

¹²¹ The progress made on the judicial front in terms of gender parity is commendable, with the first ever all-women bench conducting a trial at the High Court in November 2022.

¹²² The lack of policy consensus between the two leaders of MDP, President Solih and Speaker Nasheed, has slowed down the positive momentum built during the early days of the Solih

administration. This has led to the formation of two factions within the ruling party, which has significantly delayed progress on a number of policy issues. The PPM-led opposition appears to be capitalizing on the internal differences within MDP by gaining lost ground. However, their presidential candidate, Yameen Abdul Gayoom, is currently serving a jail term of 11 years on bribery and money laundering charges, a case that is yet to undergo a two-stage appeals process while he is on trial for a second graft case. The possibility of an acquittal in one or even both cases before the 3 August deadline to file nominations for the first-round polls set for 9 September remains unlikely.

¹²³ Transparency Maldives (2019). Review of the decentralisation framework in the Maldives

other acts of violence, bringing justice to victims of these crimes. She is concerned at allegations of lack of accountability, independence and impartiality, as well as political influence, collusion, corruption and lack of effectiveness of this sector in both regular and highest courts, from all walks of society, including the political establishment in power. This undermines the

fragile confidence that the public places in the judiciary to address complex and sensitive issues addressed in this report. She also notes that there are concerns related to the presence of the Attorney General on the newly established Bar Council's Executive Committee.¹²⁴

J | NATIONAL VISION AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN VIS-À-VIS THE 2030 AGENDA

The Maldives' development agenda is guided by the government's five-year Strategic Action Plan (2019-2023). The SAP outlines the governments' priorities and targets for its term as the executive. The President's note to the SAP makes clear that it provides both a comprehensive and accessible outline of the administration's intended development agenda for the next five years, and also holds government accountable to citizens by making clear what its deliverables are and when results can be expected.¹²⁵ As such, the SAP consolidates the manifesto pledges of the coalition political parties with existing priorities. It contains a powerful and comprehensive description of the administration's goals.

The SAP does not provide a long-term vision for national development. It was not developed through a planning exercise. It is not aligned to the SDGs, nor linked to its targets. However, it does include the priority actions for attainment of the SDGs to which Maldives is committed. The SAP is the key document that currently guides

resource allocation from budget and development assistance. The Government has committed to broad public finance reforms to better monitor and track the impact of public service investments.

The SAP is positioned around 5 themes with 33 subsector policies and related actions, namely: Blue Economy, Caring State, Dignified Families, Jazeera Dhiriulhun (Island Life) and Good Governance.

The Blue Economy: The Government asserts that the economic priorities of the SAP derive from a clear understanding of the central role of the ocean.

The Caring State: The SAP gives priority to policies that are critical to bridge the growing income and wealth inequality in the country, exacerbated by geography. The Caring State has five subsectors; health; education; higher education; social protection; and prevention of narcotic abuse and drug rehabilitation.

Dignified families: The rapid transformation and urbanization of the country has created social

¹²⁴ Report from the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism. 2022, Para 25.

¹²⁵ Government of Maldives (2019). Strategic Action Plan 2019-2023

strains. The Government gives the strengthening of the family a first-order priority, as the foundation of Maldivian society. This sector has six subsectors; family; housing; youth; community empowerment; sports; and Islamic faith.

Jazeeraa Dhiriulhun (island life): The term conceives a development model based on citizen engagement, inclusivity, and sustainability, living in harmony with the island environment. The sector has six subsectors: decentralization, a national transport network, environmental protection and preservation, clean energy, waste as a resource, water and sanitation, resilient communities, information, communication and technology, and arts, culture, and heritage.

Good Governance: In the view of the Government, the current requirements of the democratic transition in the Maldives are to “strengthen the independence and capacities of state institutions to design and implement policies as well as deliver services that spur human development.” The sector has seven subsectors: rule of law & judicial reform; national security & public safety; eliminating corruption; an accountable state; independent institutions & public service reform; gender equality; and foreign affairs.

National Planning: The National Spatial Plan 2020-2040 (NSP) outlines the strategies for infrastructure development required for the country to achieve SAP goals. The Maldives NSP is a plan for spatial realization of the core SAP policy of decentralising development, creating growth poles and service centres in the regions,

and shifting development pressures away from Greater Malé. As such it is proposed to develop a total of 21 NSP Regions including the Central Region, an additional 14 Urban Regions and 6 Satellite Regions.¹²⁶ The NSP broadly integrates the national and international commitments of the country and will especially support the timely delivery of the SAP, and progress towards the SDGs.

In addition to these comprehensive national plans, there are several sector specific long-term plans, including for education, health, energy, waste management, water and sanitation and fisheries. These have all integrated Agenda 2030 towards achievement of the SDGs.

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) report of the Maldives (2017) catalogued new policies and plans that directly incorporate SDGs, through a national exercise carried out to map the existing sectoral policies, plans and laws to SDG targets. The VNR indicated the existence of some form of sectoral policy or plan for most of the SDG targets. This includes (for instance) the National Food Safety Policy developed by the Ministry of Health in line with SDG 2. The Health Master Plan 2016-2025 and Education Sector Plan 2019-2023 are other plans aligned to the SDGs and the Agenda 2030 framework.^{127 , 128} The Local Government Authority has aligned its five year Development Plan (2017-2021) with the SDGs, which will be implemented by the newly empowered Island Councils. Other SDG target areas include health, poverty, gender equality, water and sanitation, responsible consumption and production and climate action.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (2019). Maldives National Spatial Plan 2020-2040.

¹²⁷ Ministry of Health (2016). Health Master Plan 2016-2025.

¹²⁸ Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Education Sector Plan

¹²⁹ Sobir R (2017). Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to assess the Maldives readiness to implement the SDGs. Ministry of Environment and Energy and UNDP.

K | FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

2022 has seen the Maldives back on pre-pandemic development pathway. Tourism is the main driver of economic growth which was driven by more-than-expected tourist arrivals. (1.6m) While the Russia-Ukraine war initially reduced tourists from Russia – one of Maldives’ key markets – Russian arrivals have been recovering since the resumption of Aeroflot flights in May 2022. The recovery of arrivals from traditional European markets and new interest from Middle East countries have further bolstered growth. The recovery is expected to continue in the near term on the back of strong tourism growth and associated spillovers to related sectors such as transportation and trade. However, as an economy that is also heavily import-dependent, Maldives is now facing significant current account deficit (-29% of GDP in 2022, the highest in South Asia) which is expected to remain elevated due to higher imports; and inflationary pressures (4.2%) due to the sharp rise in global commodity prices, which is also putting pressure on public finances. Although medium-term growth prospects are promising, the short-term outlook remains uncertain. Countries in South Asia are also grappling with rising commodity prices, supply bottlenecks, and vulnerabilities in financial sectors.

Despite the downside risks, robust growth is expected on the medium term and revenue mobilization measures are projected to help narrow the fiscal deficit. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Maldives remains at a high risk of external debt distress and a high overall risk of debt distress. Public debt is still at unprecedented levels (120% of

GDP) while the MMA and banks’ exposure to sovereign climbed. Medium term debt vulnerabilities remain high, in particular the 843.3 US\$ million external debt servicing in 2026. Sustained fiscal consolidation relying on both expenditure rationalization and domestic revenue mobilization, and supported by conservative debt management, is a priority.

Reforms are needed to improve the fiscal outlook and ensure debt sustainability. More effective revenue mobilization measures, coupled with reforms to health care system and existing subsidy programs, and better investment management are critical to bring down the high level of public debt, replenish fiscal buffers against future shocks, and lower the cost of growth-enhancing investments.

The inherent structural constraints facing this small island developing economy remain a challenge. Maldives has a narrow economic base that relies heavily on tourism and fisheries and its economy is extremely vulnerable to external shocks. To promote more sustainable growth, the Maldives is gradually focusing on diversifying the economy and assess the potential of other sectors besides tourism, for example fisheries,

agriculture¹³⁰, and information and communication technology.

A key challenge for the Maldives is to balance large investments needed in infrastructure gaps (to boost tourism, increase resilience to climate change and improve service delivery) and the rapid accumulation of public debt. Overall indebtedness is high and reserves low. Yet the Maldives continues to face great challenges in making growth more socially inclusive and regionally balanced. Economic disparities have increased between Malé and the other islands and between groups of different socioeconomic status. The wide dispersion of the population, coupled with limited transport infrastructure, hampers the creation of sizeable domestic markets, and presents a formidable challenge in sustaining growth and providing equitable and adequate public services. The benefits of growth have not spread evenly across sectors, across segments of the population, and across regions. Many remote atolls continue to be marginalized and cut-off from the mainstream growth trajectory.

Ensuring the stable growth of the economy in and sharing of its benefits in an equitable manner will be challenged unless the Maldives diversify its economy, renew efforts in economic and social inclusion of all regions across the country, foster private sector job creation, build human capital and skills, and reduce vulnerability by enhancing disaster risk preparedness.

¹³⁰ The agricultural production system of Maldives is improving as part of the effort to ensure food security and to sustain the livelihood of farmers. Over the years, agriculture sector has been developing with technical innovation and solutions to tackle various issues of the food system. As such, developments in fertilizer and pesticide applications to increase production and to prevent pest and diseases are on the rise. The use of agrochemicals reduces economic cost and help achieve much needed timely results.

The socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the limited reserves and capacity that the country has available to tackle the recovery for a more resilient Maldives, in line with the 2030 Agenda. In the absence of a meaningful international agreement for supporting countries such as the Maldives to access affordable debt alleviation, and to finance the recovery taking into account a green and inclusive recovery, the country will face significant obstacles in meeting its international obligations.

As an upper-middle income country, the Maldives is no longer a recipient of significant levels of overseas development aid. The Maldives has thus far not had a programme or results-based budget, making it extremely challenging for parliament or the public to oversee and scrutinize the budget, establish accountability, and address corruption. It is also difficult to determine what is being spent on the SDGs, and what fiscal space exists for further investing in reducing inequalities. Now the SAP seeks to develop infrastructure to assure, for instance, that no one in the country is more than 30 minutes away from medical care. Such efforts are taking place across many sectors.

The government has yet to secure the resources and capacities (means of implementation) needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on the Maldives' economy and fiscal reserves. Together with the UN, the Government has launched an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). The INFF

However, the irresponsible use of agrochemicals has been associated with environmental degradation and health consequences. The hazards posed by agrochemicals need to be identified, with the gaps in management and better solutions to overcome these challenges in order achieve sustainable agricultural production. [\(PDF\) Impact of Agricultural Chemical Inputs on Human Health and Environment in Maldives \(researchgate.net\)](#)

will play an important role in bringing together the SDG policy and priorities with financing initiatives in a holistic and systematic manner across Government. A public awareness campaign about the SDGs needs to be rolled out across the country, in line with mobilizing support for the reinvigoration of a longer-term national planning agenda.

Until recently there has been only limited coordination among Maldives development

partners. The government is now using the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2019-2023 as the basis for coordination of the sectors and development partners. The UN Maldives is convening development partners and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in line with the SDGs and the financing agenda around various SDG themes.

L | STAKEHOLDERS / PARTNERSHIPS

Progress is slow, without a national vision and plan that aligns with the SDGs through 2030. Sectors work in silos and partners are not coordinated. Medium term plans have been developed across many sectors, while no long-term national development plan exists to anchor sectoral planning towards a common vision for Maldives' future. A 'whole-of-government' approach is needed to build capacity within sectors on planning and strategizing, budgeting, data management and statistical capacity. A common vision for the future Maldives is absent from the political, economic and social realms. Localization of the SDGs has not progressed, and data gaps exist, especially in social and environmentally related SDGs. While several SDG indicators call for data that distinguish disability, among others, unavailability of disability-disaggregated data makes it difficult to track those who might be left behind. Utility of the existing data systems and data management capacities needs to be prioritised.

The Government is committed to achieving the SDGs, but progress is slow. The implementation of Agenda 2030 requires policy analysis using

disaggregated data, supporting adequately resourced programmes designed to reach vulnerable communities in ways that address the causes of disparity and exclusion. This will require increased political commitment and broad-based participation of social partners including workers and employers' organisations to drive the national sustainable development agenda forward, with the development of a long-term national development plan at its core.

Counter-terrorism practice has a long and testing history in Maldives with serious consequences for the protection of human rights. The use of counter-terrorism legislation against political opponents, critics, religious leaders, and members of civil society was previously endemic. This has created an evident suspicion and concern that counter-terrorism powers may serve to undermine rather than to support democratic process and institutional reform. Institutions that were central to the exercise of those powers, including the police, suffer a trust deficit in their capacity to use such powers appropriately and in a human rights' compliant manner.

The Special Rapporteur on the promotion for human rights underscored the clear and present dangers that exist for civil society actors in the Maldives; in particular closing of civic space, and attacks upon human rights defenders, whose legitimate actions are limited by various pieces of legislation regulating freedom of expression, religion, association and ‘extremism’. The

Special Rapporteur concluded that they are falling through the cracks of protection and highlights the obligation of governments not only to not impede but to actively protect civil society. She notes particular challenges faced by women human rights defenders and their vulnerability to online digital harassment including threats of violence.¹³¹

¹³¹ Report by Special rapporteur on Human rights, *ibid*, para 31.



UNITED NATIONS
MALDIVES



CONCLUSIONS



CHALLENGE #1 | ENSURING EQUITABLE AND STABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SHARED PROSPERITY

Ensuring the stable growth of the economy and sharing of its benefits in an equitable manner will be challenged unless the Maldives can balance the large investments needed in infrastructure gaps (to boost tourism, increase resilience to climate change and improve service delivery) and the rapid accumulation of public debt. Ensuring equitable economic growth that benefits all – leaving no-one behind - requires strengthened fiscal planning and management; economy diversification, particularly in the private sector; the Maldives to grasp the current demographic dividend; and more systematic workforce planning and job creation, particularly for women, youth, and populations located in specific geographical areas.

Improving fiscal management: Despite high public revenues, the cost of providing subsidized services to a dispersed population, and heavy government borrowing and guarantees to finance large infrastructure and social housing projects undermine fiscal sustainability. Persistent budget deficits increase public debt and crowd out the private sector from financial markets. The COVID-19 pandemic has exhausted the national budget due to additional expenditure on COVID-19 response and recovery work. Consequentially, sustainability of current level of funding by government for social, health and education sector in the coming years is at risk. It must contain recurrent spending and improve the efficiency of social spending through increased capital investments, while renewing efforts in economic and social inclusion of all regions across the country, fostering private sector job creation, building human capacities and skills and reducing vulnerability by enhancing disaster risk

preparedness. This must be done whilst simultaneously improving public sector management and budget credibility.

Diversification of the economy: Dependence on high-end tourism remains. Both tourism and construction, the other major growth area, largely employ foreign migrant workers. Maldivian school-leavers are not prepared for existing skilled jobs and eschew manual trades: labour shortages coexist with youth unemployment and high non-participation in the labour force. Without a long-term national development plan, an effective tertiary and vocational education system to build the skills for jobs of the future cannot be achieved.

Grasping the demographic dividend: A low birth rate has created a 'youth bulge' in which people in their productive years outnumber young and old dependents combined. This creates the potential for a 'demographic dividend' of faster growth and high national savings, but it cannot be realized unless a dynamic private sector is created to provide jobs, and measures are agreed to prepare for the demographic shift and the education system prepares youth to provide the skills the market requires.

More systematic workforce planning: The situation of young people will continue to worsen unless a systematic review and overhaul of the education and labour force skills is conducted. A combination of policy levers will be needed: from reimagining a future economy through 2050 which aims to strengthen resilience and protection from global shocks, consolidating technical and tertiary education capacities and streams in order to deliver the skills needed to support this future economy.

Leaving no one behind: There is a lack of inclusive development policies that facilitate participation of persons with disabilities, migrants and elderly. Specific groups are not benefitting equally from current patterns of development, and experience inequality, discrimination, and inequity and limited participation. Women, children, youth, and migrants are the most impacted. Their

vulnerabilities are further increased by reduced access to educational or training opportunities, limited access to income generating opportunities and/or productive assets, having a disability, being poor, living in the atolls, coming from a broken home, or having a different gender identity or sexual orientation, or religious identity or minority.

CHALLENGE #2| ENSURING LIFELONG GOOD HEALTH, WELLBEING AND FULFILMENT OF THE POPULATION

The Maldives geography and dispersed population makes equitable and inclusive social development difficult and expensive to ensure. The country faces challenges in providing equitable access to quality social services and economic opportunities across the islands, overcoming overcrowding in Malé and unaffordable housing, improving learning to allow young people to benefit from and contribute to the 4th industrial revolution, and putting systems and structures in place to deal with the ageing population.

Promoting healthy lifestyles: Despite the universal financial cover for health care cost of the Maldivians, access to health care, particularly for those with disabilities, mental health and long-term condition remain a significant challenge for those living in the atolls, and foreign migrant workers.

Ensuring education access and relevance of learning for future work and life: Education does not prepare young people for employment. Access to secondary education in the atolls is a major limitation, with only limited access to

lower-secondary and much less for higher-secondary education. Many children end schooling early and face uncertain futures – sometimes leading to risky behaviour.

Quality social services for all: The extremely dispersed population across 200 islands has meant that providing easily accessible quality social services – particularly education and health – is unaffordable. This has contributed to the rapid urbanization over the past 30 years. The use of digital platforms has a unique potential for the Maldives to deliver quality social services.

Accelerating a decentralized approach to urban development: Large-scale migration to the Malé region – while most atolls have experienced a shrinkage due to outmigration – has led to severe overcrowding that is aggravating social and environmental vulnerabilities of inhabitants. To address demographic pressures in Greater Malé, the Government has pursued a two-pronged approach: (i) A focus on the sustainable development of the Greater Malé region; (ii) A regional development strategy looking to reduce

migration pressures through the provision of needed economic, social service and cultural assets in outer atolls.

Ensuring dignified housing and living conditions:

Overcrowding in urban areas has also contributed to Maldives facing a crisis in affordable housing, driven by limited land, low earnings and savings capacity of the population, limited supply of affordable housing, and an under-developed mortgage market. The Government's affordable housing finances schemes appear to be ineffective in obtaining

buy-in from the banks, while the social housing programs are not adequate to meet growing needs.

Preparing for an ageing population:

Whilst the country is currently experiencing a current youth bulge, it is also rapidly moving towards an aged population. There is an absence of suitable housing for families living with elderly; and there is a lack of environmental, social and health support services that are dedicated towards the elderly.

CHALLENGE #3| PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment of Maldives comprises a delicate and complex series of ecosystems that are unique to the tropical world and many have found it a pleasure to gaze upon. The Maldives has a rich biodiversity, and the coral reef ecosystem is one of the most productive ecosystems. However, the Maldives is very vulnerable. The very small size and virtual isolation of the islands make their ecosystems, both on land and the sea, particularly fragile. Until the past 20-30 years, the lifestyles of Maldivians had minimal impact on the environment. However, the rapid socio-economic development and fast-growing population have greatly contributed to the degradation of the environment. Environmental issues for Maldives include beach erosion, coral bleaching, coral mining, dredging, biodiversity loss, population growth and its impact on distribution and lifestyles, freshwater availability, soil degradation, and most importantly, the rising sea level due to climate change and global warming.

Mitigating the impact of climate change:

Environment and climate change risks are high and numerous. These include potential loss of low-lying island land – including the limited arable land - from sea-level rise, a failure to cut

oil and gas use, open waste burning, contamination of the human and natural environments by pollution and waste, a failure to adequately prepare to deal with floods or other disasters arising from extreme weather events, and exposure to flood, erosion, drought and hazards, and increasingly severe impacts of climate extremes.

Ensuring environmentally friendly development practices:

Rapid urbanization and growth, as well as unsustainable and unchecked development practices across the islands, have led to serious overcrowding, fresh water and waste treatment issues, as well as threatening the environment and future of the Maldives.

Sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems:

Management of natural resources in a sustainable manner which takes account of the highly fragile ecosystems of the country needs particular and sustained attention.

Overcoming reliance on fossil fuels:

The ever-increasing use of imported fossil fuels is unsustainable. Efforts are underway to promote renewable energy sources, with the target to replace up to 30 percent of daytime peak load of electricity with these sources but so far renewables are supplementing, not replacing fossil fuels. Significant and dedicated actions,

together with high levels of climate financing, will be required to make this a reality.

CHALLENGE #4| ENSURING MORE EFFICIENT AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE AND JUSTICE

The national planning system was abolished by the previous government. The UN is supporting the development of legislation for a new National Planning Act (January 2021). The absence of a longer-term development plan is a barrier to making tangible progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Pursuing and promoting decentralization: Comprehensive plans to support communities have been developed but the financial crisis will challenge the government's ability to roll out substantive programmes without incurring more debt. Due to COVID-19, the island council elections were postponed (until April 2021), and the roll out of the decentralization agenda, and the yielding of its potential dividends, has been delayed.

Establishing accountability and addressing corruption: The Maldives has thus far not had a programme or results-based budget, making it extremely challenging for parliament or the public to oversee and scrutinize the budget, establish accountability, and address corruption. It is also difficult to determine what is being spent on the SDGs, and what fiscal space exists for further investing in reducing inequalities.

Systematic human resource capacity development: A decade of polarized politics has reduced already limited trust and created a high turnover of staff in institutions and in the civil service. The loss of experienced senior staff is especially devastating in a small island nation. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive

review of human resources capacity development, to improve effectiveness and availability of quality public services.

Broadening development financing options: Mobilizing domestically controlled resources held offshore is key to advancing the Maldives' future economic, social and institutional transformation. Advocacy for private sector financing of the SDGs has not been featured in Government approaches, however it is anticipated that the launch of the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) in 2020 will see the launch of these efforts accelerated.

Accountable justice and human rights: Institutional instability and a limited culture of judicial independence, limited safeguards, a failure to demonstrate accountability for past abuses, the limitations of systems, and weak capacities are major risks for the justice sector. Extensive reform is required in terms of infrastructural, law reform, training and capacity building within the judiciary.

Democratic space and social cohesion: As an emerging democracy, the concept of a social contract is in early stages of articulation. Conservative narratives are used successfully to influence policy making and to discourage the efforts to address root causes of vulnerability, such as productive engagement of youth and women's empowerment. Opportunities must be sought through international partnerships, empowerment of community groups and professionals to shift the current narrative.

CHALLENGE #5| ELIMINATING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND ENSURING GENDER EQUALITY

Growing gender inequality, political participation of women, gender-based responses for DRR, increasing unemployment rates among women and signs of negative attitudes towards gender equality are serious areas of risk. While modernization has opened new opportunities for women, it is important to address the root causes of discrimination and inequality to ensure women can also benefit. Largely self-employed, women were displaced from traditionally important economic roles by the advent of industrialized fish processing and

commercial tailoring. The rate of female participation in the labour force is low, with women most often engaged in daily work or short-term contracts, which have been most affected during the COVID-19 crisis; and they bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Violence against women and girls in all its forms, including harmful practices, threatens to undermine inclusive development. Increasingly conservative religious and social views have witnessed significant shifting of views away from gender equality.

CHALLENGE #6| BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Many of the communities on outer islands in Maldives lack any reliable access to digital technology; and for many others across the country, wireless technology is unaffordable, even when available. People without robust internet access are being left behind academically and economically. Through early investments and targeted deployments, lower-cost internet access will create value across local and the national economies and contribute to economic stimulus. As being experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, internet access and use of digital platforms can transform the delivery of social services like education and healthcare, job and skills training, as well as promote civic engagement. The impact of digitalization has been shown across the world to improve logistics and supply-chain resilience – priorities for the Maldives with the dispersed population.

Annex: Analysis of Risks

SDGs	Risk Areas	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact	Early warning indicators
All SDGs	<u>Political Stability</u> : risks to stability of established government structures and strategies in the Maldives resulting from politically driven factors	Highly politicized, competing national visions create risk of abrupt reversal of national strategy (centralization/decentralization) upon change of government	Medium	High	Absence of national vision and long-term plan developed with participation of all political alignments. Number of political appointees Transparency Indices Perception of corruption
		High number of political appointees in government risks serious capacity loss on change of government	High	Medium	Numbers of political appointees
		Lack of defined role and powers of the opposition leads to “winner take all” mentality and polarization in politics	Medium	Medium	Opposition participation in national processes (commissions, committees & etc.)
		Low accountability/transparency provides space for corruption and rent seeking	High	High	Transparency International ranking
16, 17, 10	<u>Internal Security</u> :	Extremist ideology leads to internal conflict and violence (i.e., attacks on tourists, moderate social voices)	High	High	Numbers of incidents, online threats
		Failure to successfully promote inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity leads to violent extremism	High	High	Support for inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity in Rights Side of Life surveys
16, 17, 10	<u>Democratic Space</u> : limited roles and capacities of civil society and the political opposition result in shrinking civic space and polarization around civil and political rights	Targeting, limiting the work of and closing human rights organizations	Medium	Medium	Number of active human rights organisations CIVICUS Monitor Freedom of the World Report World Press Freedom Index
		Lack of defined role and powers of the opposition leads to “winner take all” mentality and polarization in politics	Medium	Medium	Opposition participation in national processes (commissions, committees & etc.)
		Democratic space is occupied by non-moderate political actors	Low	High	Analysis of local media and social media including during elections

SDGs	Risk Areas	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact	Early warning indicators
1, 4, 5, 10, 13	<u>Social inclusion and cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination</u> : risks to social unity and equality resulting from direct and indirect discrimination, geographic inequalities, and demographic trends	Limited opportunities for Maldivians to access decent jobs lead to higher income inequalities, migration to larger islands, resentment of international migrant workers and loss of human capital	Medium	Medium	Share of employment of Maldivians in high-end resorts, share of self-employed, average wage in fisheries & agriculture compared to average national wage.
		Young people face increasing barriers in entering the labour market, due to limited skills not matching labour force needs, jobs located away from home islands	Medium	High	Occupational gender segregation, gender wage gap
		Unequal treatment, including public perceptions, of undocumented migrants leads to further marginalization and exploitation	Medium	Medium	Inclusion of undocumented migrants in studies and surveys
		Lack of access to quality population and other social data prevents accurate targeting of policy measures	Low	Medium	Use of data analyses by parliament and presidency
		Inadequate implementation of policy recommendations and legislative provisions on gender equality	High	High	Rate of enforcement of gender sensitive policies
		Negative attitudes toward gender equality increasing	High	High	Perception surveys
		Urban and outer island inequalities in access and quality of public services persist	High	Medium	Key health/education indicators by urban/outer island
		Social norms, practices, religious fundamentalism and attitudes act as barriers to women entering higher education, vocational training, and senior positions in political and economic structures as well as to pursue their own professional careers, influencing the reproductive health decisions and gender power dynamics in families	Medium	High	Qualitative studies on social attitudes on women and men's roles
		Inadequate disability-inclusive policies, coupled with social stigma and limited accessibility hold back inclusion of children with disabilities (CWD) into mainstream education, and inclusion of persons with disabilities (PWDs) into the work world	Medium	Medium	CWD attending mainstream education. Employment of PWD Qualitative studies on attitudes to inclusion of PWD

SDGs	Risk Areas	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact	Early warning indicators
		Inequalities, discrimination and Gender Based Violence (GBV) remain invisible, due to lack of sex disaggregated data, or lack of use/ data sharing and culture of privacy around “family matters”	Medium	High	Open access guaranteed to a robust SDG data base.
16, 17	<u>Regional and Global Influences</u> : Risks to the integrity, stability, safety and prosperity of the Maldives and its people as a result of the actions of external actors, or the influence of external events or ideologies	Rivalry for influence among major powers, leading to conflicts or interventions in national affairs and regional geopolitics	Low	High	Analyses of debt and financial inflows. Reports on national and regional responses to terrorism, violent extremism. Perception surveys on tolerance. International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicators on migrants. Global Compact for Migration (Objective 17)
		External promotion of fundamentalist Islam leads to heightened social conflict	Medium	High	
		Absence of an open and evidence-based public discourse on migration and migrants leads to negative perceptions of migrants in society	Low	High	
16,18	<u>Rise in violent extremism</u> : Risks of a rise in intolerance fueled by unchecked hate speech, exploitation of perceptions of internal marginalization by violent extremist actors and action by State forces during counter-terrorism operations.	Individuals rally people on basis of perceived threats to faith and practice;	High	High	Analysis of content and organisation of mass protests
		Overly broad definition of terrorism in current laws leads to misuse of Counter-terrorism capabilities as well as legal and penal provisions	High	High	Human rights data, judicial verdicts
		Rise in instances of hate speech deepening polarisation	High	High	Violence against expats/ foreign migrant workers
		Rise in censorship/ curbs against fundamental freedoms	Medium	High	Executive decrees, judicial verdicts and parliamentary resolutions
16, 17	<u>Justice and Rule of Law</u> : risks to the fair, effective and comprehensive implementation and application of law and accountability	Lack of access to legal aid for women, child victims, asylum seekers / refugees, and atoll population	Medium	Medium	Progress in meeting treaty body and Rapporteur recommendations
		Lack of system guaranteeing human rights safeguards during criminal proceedings in practice: independent judicial control over detentions, effective investigation of torture allegations, legal aid, fair trial.			
		Inadequate budget allocations and expenditures linked to access to justice			

SDGs	Risk Areas	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact	Early warning indicators
		Mistreatment, including physical abuse and torture, of persons while under arrest or incarcerated			
		Limited rehabilitation services for drug users results in their criminalisation	Medium	Medium	Recommendations to improve prison conditions, and allow access to independent observers to monitor closed facilities,
		Limited capacity for rehabilitation of violent extremist returnees	High	Medium	Address issues of disappearances.
		Lack of confidence in investigations of past human rights abuses	High	Medium	Publication of findings
		Weak capacity of the human rights machinery	High	Low	Number of complaints processed and leading to accountability
8, 9, 17	<u>Economic Growth & Stability</u> : risks to the economic, financial, and fiscal stability of the country, and inequality which could impact governance, social cohesion, or people's ability to satisfy their needs	Limited workforce planning, investment in quality education and job creation for youth lead to missing potential demographic dividend	High	High	National human resources capacity plan; Employer satisfaction with capacity of new hires; Number of private sector jobs created
		Vulnerability of current economic growth model to fluctuations in tourist demand due to reliance on high-end premium market; disruption in supply chains, global demand (tourism influx) and COVID-19 pandemic	Medium	High	Share of high-end tourism in GDP Unemployment rate, disaggregated by sex.
		Slow progress in diversification and lack of conducive environment for private sector growth	High	Medium	Share and composition of private sector.
		Debt burden and/or investment climate change causes financial crisis and debt service impacting on the availability of revenue for economic, social and cultural rights	Medium	High	Size of debt burden and debt service; Share of FDI in GDP; Diversity of FDI origin by country; diversity of FDI destination by sector.
4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 17	<u>Infrastructure and access to social services</u> : risks to society and the population resulting from a lack of availability or limitations on access to physical infrastructure, and or quality social services	Urban and outer island inequalities in access and quality of public services persist. Investment in physical infrastructure not matched by sufficient quantity and quality of human resource capacity to deliver public services, leading to slow progress in improving maternal and child mortality rates, and tackling NCDs.	High	Medium	Use of MICS data to collect maternal, child, infant, neonatal mortality rates; and access to pre-school by urban/rural, accessibility of schools. Budget expenditures to social services, including health, social protection, education.

SDGs	Risk Areas	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact	Early warning indicators
		Water stress risks increased by droughts.			
		Slow progress on promoting disability rights and disability-inclusive development, including improving accessibility for CWD and PWD	Medium	Medium	Incidence of key non- communicable diseases disaggregated by region, and urban and rural areas, Washington Group disability indicators;
		Lack of community-based social services means that vulnerable households and individuals fall through the cracks, and their needs cannot be addressed in a cross-sectoral way.	Medium	Medium	Number of social workers trained and employed in communities
8, 10, 16, 17	<u>Migration</u> : risks to the population and social cohesion resulting from improperly managed internal (domestic atolls to Malé) and/or international migration / asylum seekers / refugees	Large numbers of atoll residents continue to migrate to Malé, exacerbating social and environmental strains	High	Medium	Internal migration data; employment data on internal migrants; MICs data
		Inadequate governance of migration continues to limit access to jobs in resorts for Maldivians	High	Medium	Employment data on resort industry
		Absence of an open and evidence-based public discourse on migration and migrants leads to negative perceptions of migrants in society. Conditions of work and health of international migrants continue to be inadequate, undocumented migrants lack access to basic services and human rights	High	Medium	Data on migrant numbers; Registration data; Health data; Prosecutions for trafficking Global Compact for Migration
3, 13, 17	<u>Public Health</u> : risks to the population, the economy and stability of the territory resulting from actual and emerging public health emergencies and impact of pandemic in disrupting supply chains, demand and leading to livelihood losses.	Lack of data on migrant health may lead to unpreparedness to cope with communicable disease outbreaks (potentially including TB)	High	Medium	Incidence of communicable diseases in migrant population.
		Urbanisation may lead to increases in NCDs	Low	Medium	Incidence of cardio-vascular illnesses
2, 17	<u>Food Security, Agriculture</u> : risks to people, agriculture and/or food production in the territory resulting from crop, food production. Reliance on food imports,	Poor management of water and land resources leading to increases in land and water salinisation, and reduction in productivity and land available for food production	High	Low	Land salinity

SDGs	Risk Areas	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact	Early warning indicators
	impacts of global and regional shocks (such as pandemic) and climate change with regards to food security.	Limited capacity for food safety leads to biological, chemical or physical foodborne illness	High	Medium	Food safety checks performed to international standard
9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17	<p>Environment and Climate Change: risks to the islands, freshwater lenses, eco-systems, and people resulting from issues associated with the environment, climate change and natural resources.</p> <p>Increasing risks of natural and man- made disasters, driven by climate change.</p>	Islands affected by worsening environmental degradation due to untreated sewage, pollution, and waste	High	Medium	Reporting of island erosion Decrease in water quality and purity
		Lack of firm country commitment or nationally defined contributions under Paris Agreement; Limited capacity and financing for adaptation.	High	Medium	New Climate Change Strategy (CCS) and defined contributions adopted
		Open waste burning continues to negatively affect health of local communities;	Medium	Medium	Ad hoc studies of waste burning
		Contamination of human and natural environment by pollution and waste	High	High	Progress toward a circular economy
		Climate induced internal migration among islands leading t overcrowding in underserved settlements, access to housing, WASH, etc.	Medium	Medium	Sample surveys
		Damages and losses, e.g. disruption to access to services, livelihood disruptions, increased costs to provide emergency relief (drinking water, etc.) Malé and atolls not prepared to deal with floods or other disasters arising from extreme weather events. Projected sea level rise and coastal inundation and increase average precipitations from climate change projections.	Medium	High	Number of islands with comprehensive disaster management plans
		Exposure to flood, erosion, drought and hazards, and increasingly severe impacts of climate extremes; leading to increased vulnerabilities in terms of food security, water security, infrastructure disruption and damage, damage and losses on productive sectors, livelihood losses, etc.	High	High	Monitoring of Sendai Framework Targets and Indicators on human (mortality, people affected), economic (losses across sectors) and infrastructure impacts due to disasters, and strategies and actions (early warning systems, investments) reducing disaster risks.