

Maldives Common Country Analysis

MARCH 2020

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AMR	Ani-Microbial Resistance
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCS	Climate Change Strategy CCPR
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 Contributions
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
H1	First half of fiscal year
HDI	Human Development Index
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HIES	Household Income Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HR	Human Right
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
IFI	International Financial Institution
IHR	International Health Regulation
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IOTC	Indian Ocean Tuna Commission
JSC	Judicial Service Commission
Kg	Kilo Gram
KWp	Kilowatt peak
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MCCPF	Maldives Climate Change Policy Framework
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MGFSS	Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
MNPI	Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure
MNU	Maldives National University
MPI	Multi-dimensional Poverty Index
MRPS	Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme
MTBF	Medium Term Budgetary Framework
MTEF	Medium Term Expenditure Framework NCD
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 Drugs Authority
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
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
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
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
UNRCCA	United Nations Regional Centre for Central Asia
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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Purpose and Development of the CCA

Following the recent reforms repositioning the UN development system, the UN system in Maldives' is developing a Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) as its planning and implementation instrument in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), with a commitment to leave no one behind and in line with human rights and other international standards and obligations. It will outline the UN's collective response to national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period 2021-2025.

The UN Maldives' new UNSDCF will support economic and social transformation, and the development of an equal, inclusive and peaceful society through sustainable development strategies specific to Maldives' country context and leveraging funding for financing for achieving the SDGs.

The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Maldives has launched the process of preparation and formulation of the new UNSDCF with a final independent evaluation of the ongoing 2016-2020 UNDAF and this Common Country Analysis (CCA). The CCA is the UN system's independent, impartial and collective assessment and analysis of the country situation, providing insights to guide the development of the new UNSDCF.

The UNSDCF will be centred around a set of priority areas where the UN will contribute to Maldives' development process over the next five years. These priority areas will be identified, in consultation with the Government and other stakeholders based upon the findings of this CCA, the UN's cooperative advantages vis-à-vis the Government and other development actors and be aligned with the Governments Strategic Action Plan 2019-2023 (SAP).

The CCA articulates the context, opportunities and challenges facing the Maldives, encompassing sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace and security, and humanitarian perspectives. The CCA has been largely informed by the situational analyses that the Government and members of the UNCT have undertaken. These provide background information on past targets, achievements and challenges as well as taking stock of remaining challenges.

The CCA follows the conceptual framework and structure set out in the current UNDSG guidance. The format has been adapted slightly to reflect the organisation of nationally available information.

This CCA has been largely based on secondary data from Government, national, international and UN sources. Additional primary information gathering to fill in gaps has been undertaken by the UN agencies in partnership with governmental and non-governmental actors, leveraging UN system convening power to consult and engage with the government and other stakeholders, including the most vulnerable and marginalized people and their organizations. Review of existing sources (assessment, publications, research findings, analytical tools, big data, national surveys,) of disaggregated data (sex, income, age and other factors) both at national and global level was also undertaken with an aim of adding value while building partnerships with key stakeholders.

Pertinent information has been obtained from a range of national sources, as well as a wide range of studies and reports of UN agencies, the World Bank, IMF, IDB, bilateral organisations and others. This review has included specific studies on critical areas such as policies and programmes to mainstream SDGs and climate change issues, generating employment (especially of youth), human rights and gender equality.

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 from existing data and resources has been undertaken by each of the UN agencies in line with their mandate.

The greatest limitation to the CCA has been the many gaps in data to support comprehensive thematic analyses, or to map national realities against SDG targets. This was partly occasioned by the fact that the government had not yet mapped the SDGs against national plans and strategies, nor chosen relevant indicators by the time work on this CCA started. A second issue has been a severe limitation in the availability of data disaggregated geographically, by gender, age and other relevant characteristics.

The preliminary findings of the report were validated by UN and national stakeholders at a workshop and through written comments after the workshop. Extensive comments on the draft CCA were also made by the regional Peer Support Group. A second workshop validated the semi-final draft.

The CCA will be a living document, updated regularly, as required, to assure that the UNSDCF the UN's analysis of key issues remains current. On a monthly basis, the UNCT discusses the socio-economic, political and human rights situation in the country, with a view to identify possible impacts on programming and interventions required from the team. This process will inform decisions on the updating and further elaboration of the CCA and provide an avenue for the CCA to be updated and kept 'live'. Executive decisions on the frequency of updating the document will need to be taken by the UNCT.

Executive Summary

The Maldives continues on a positive and transformative development trajectory. Forty years of rapid growth fuelled by high-end tourism has brought the nation from least developed to upper-middle income status. A longstanding commitment to health and education for all has largely vanquished communicable diseases and illiteracy. Extreme poverty has been eliminated.

However, the development and economic realities of the Maldives are fragile and uneven, with the country under high risk of debt distress for the medium term, and high levels of unemployment among women and the youth. This is coupled with increasing environmental vulnerabilities and social inequalities, with increasing gender inequality, and widening of the gap between the rich and poor, capital and the Atolls.

Over a decade ago, Maldives began a journey of democratisation, resulting in years of political turbulence, with increasing populism, low tolerance, emerging conservatism and extremism and declining trust in the independent institutions including the judiciary. However, the relative political stability being enjoyed currently (though still volatile) creates an opportunity for democratic consolidation.

The geography of the nation makes equitable and inclusive development difficult and expensive to ensure. 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 focussed on short term goals, particularly on infrastructure, with serious issues around their quality, cost-effectiveness and social impact. At present there is as yet no participatory process for 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. Without these it will be difficult to build on the opportunity presented by the first demographic dividend of the Maldives population structure.

Meantime, migration from the atolls to the capital, Malé has continued, leading to urbanization of the greater Malé area and rural depopulation. Large numbers of international migrants work (chiefly in tourism and construction) throughout the country. The serious challenges of urbanization in the context of high population density and the right to adequate housing, and further, sizeable projected population growth have significant implications for policy and planning. Responses have varied.

Since the early 2000s, decentralization has been on the development agenda. Despite being enshrined within the Constitution of 2008, the subsequent lack of consistency on policy by successive governments has resulted in a more centralized form of governance. The current government is committed to decentralization and has amended the law to empower and give more financial autonomy to the local councils which will additionally have 33% of seats reserved for women (when formed). And it has developed comprehensive plans to support communities.

Maldives was the first country in South Asia to reach Millennium Development Goals (MDG) plus status, having achieved five of the eight Millennium Development Goals. However, by the end of 2015 the country lagged behind in Goal 3 (promoting gender equality and empowering women), Goal 7 (ensuring environmental sustainability), and Goal 8 (developing a global partnership for development).

Prospects of Maldives achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Prosperity Maldives promotes an open economy that has continued to grow. While it is rapidly diversifying its tourism base and expanding from high end to mid-range accommodation, 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, driven in part by inequities and income disparities.

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, 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. Effort to achieve these prerequisites are in their early stages.

Decentralization is to be achieved through major infrastructure development centred on the creation of regional centres, and a national transport network, guided by a Spatial Development Plan. However, Maldives suffers from severe human capacity constraints and the plan is not yet coupled with a comprehensive capacity development plan.

People Poverty levels stood at 6.6 per cent in 2016 using the internal poverty line of \$1.25 (MVR70).¹ Using a more nuanced approach to measuring poverty, the 2019 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI – yet to be formally launched), indicates much higher poverty rates of 10 per cent in Malé and 40 per cent in the Atolls. Due to increased government spending on health, education and social protection, the financial burden of poverty is declining, and the focus now needs to be on minimizing the urban-rural gap in the quality of service provision and tracking poverty².

Gender equality scores are low across all the targets. 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. Very few women work in tourism, primarily due to cultural norms of a carer role assigned to women and social expectations and stereotypes. Previously largely self-employed, women have been 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. Social dislocation has strained families and communities and domestic violence has increased. There is a link between increasing youth extremism, gang violence, gender inequality and domestic violence with inadequate housing and lack of productive engagement and social support for young people and families. Conservative religious and social views have spread rapidly in the past decade, turning significant numbers of men and women against gender equality, while the level of women’s participation in politics is poor.

Maternal, child and neonatal mortality rates continued to decrease while childhood nutrition indicators

¹ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report IV: Poverty & Inequality

² Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

show double burden of malnutrition.³ Practices related to nutrition and diet, tobacco and drug use, and sedentary lifestyles pose major challenges towards achieving health targets¹⁷⁸. 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 particular for those living in the Atolls and for international migrant workers.

All children are now guaranteed 14 years of free education from pre-primary through first degree. One set of challenges with regard to education relates to preparing youth for employment: the quality of education, improving low levels of functional literacy and learning outcomes and increasing enrolment in higher secondary education⁴. Another is unavailability of secondary education in the atolls. At the island level there is only very limited access to lower-secondary and almost none for higher-secondary education. Many children end schooling early and can become engaged in risky behaviours or migrate to Malé, where they also become very vulnerable.

Almost 7⁵ per cent of Maldivians have a disability. A government social protection programme includes the provision of a disability allowance, however only 25.5 per cent of people eligible are receiving this allowance.

Drug use among youth is a severe problem, and criminalized responses do not provide abusers “second chances”. Gangs and extremist ideology provide marginalized individuals with dangerous outlets for their frustrations.

There is an urgent need for a major, comprehensive new focus on human resources capacity development, and improved effectiveness and availability of quality public services and institutions that is financed through the national budget and external sources.

Planet As an archipelago, Maldives depends on the sea for its livelihood, from tourism and fisheries. Rapid urbanization and growth have led to very serious overcrowding, fresh water and waste issues. The 2004 tsunami caused severe damage and underscored the extreme vulnerability of the country to extreme climatic events and climate change-driven sea and temperature rise: most of the country is less than one meter above sea level, and within 100 meters of the shore. And the ever-increasing use of imported fossil fuels is unsustainable.

The Government gives highest priority to environmental issues. The Government has raised concerns of unavailability of funding and of accessing to international finances. Capacities and technologically sustainable solutions are issues as Maldives explores the creation of a circular economy.

While there is progress on some SDG targets relevant to the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030, significant data gaps limit the possibility of conducting a robust assessment of the progress. Access to improved water and sanitation has improved, with 98 per cent of the population with access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation facilities⁶. However, waste management, energy and emission

³ Ministry of Health (2017). Health SDG profile.

⁴ Ministry of Education (2019). Education Sector Analysis

⁵ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Eskey (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results

⁶ Ministry of Health & ICF (2019) Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017

targets remain problematic. Efforts are underway to promote renewable energy sources, with the target to replace up to 30 per cent of daytime peak load of electricity with these sources but so far renewables are supplementing, not replacing fossil fuels. The lack of technical expertise, particularly in terms of data collection and management, as well as the lack of adequate resources for data collection and management, remain impediments for both progress assessment and the implementation of SDGs. The need for strengthened capacity for data management is particularly marked in relation to monitoring emissions and air quality, spatial data, waste, energy and the water sector.

Peace Progress on targets related to promoting a peaceful and just society is mixed, due to the country's recent political instability, and tensions between modernism and increasing religious conservatism and even extremism. There has been a strong, renewed commitment to the rule of law and accountability and human rights. Decentralization promises to bring decision-making closer to the people and to ensure a more transparent engagement on key issues. While the Government continues to express its commitment in building a culture of tolerance as a response to extreme ideologies, the political will to do so appears to be weak and the Maldives' social media shows a prevalence of hate speech.

Although gender inequality has grown, some progress has been made with enactment of appropriate laws, for instance in relation to increased reporting of domestic violence including violence against children and gender-based violence. However, as in other target areas of economic and social rights, implementation of policies is limited.

Inadequate implementation of policies and standards is also seen in prison conditions, juvenile detention standards, drug rehabilitation availability, availability of mental health services and protective services for victims, to name a few. The chief constraint is inadequate budgeting and investment in skills and knowledge development and making available the human resources to implement new laws and policies.

The key challenge in achieving sustained progress in peace and justice targets results from the recent history of polarized politics which has reduced already limited trust and created a high turnover of staff in 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.

Partnerships Progress is slow toward these targets without a national vision and plan that aligns with the SDGs. Sectors work in silos and partners are not coordinated in a comprehensive manner. A 'whole-of-government' approach is needed for building capacity within sectors on planning and strategizing, budgeting, data management and statistical capacity^{193,194}.

The localization of the SDGs has not progressed, and a number of data gaps exist, especially for the social and environmental dimension of the SDGs. For instance, while several of the SDG indicators call for data that distinguishes disability, among others, disability-disaggregated data is often unavailable making it difficult to track those who might be left behind. Limitations on the utility of the existing data systems and data management capacities are areas that need prioritisation.

Government is committed to integrate the SDGs into the national plans, 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 continued political support and commitment as well as broad based participation, as these will be critical to drive the national sustainable development agenda forward.

The national vision for sustainable development

The national vision for sustainable development is set out in the Strategic Action Plan, a medium-term plan based on the manifestos of the governing coalition. The national planning system was abolished by the previous government, and a long-term plan, mapped to the SDGs, is only now being drafted. The key national priorities and main goals are set out in the SAP, a Spatial Development plan, and a number of sectoral plans.

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

The Blue economy outlines economic priorities and how they will be delivered in a sustainable manner. It includes the productive sectors, labour and employment.

The Caring State outlines priorities relevant to social progress in the subsectors of health, education and higher education, social protection, and prevention of narcotic abuse and drug rehabilitation.

Dignified Families also outlines priorities for social progress, focussing on family, housing, youth, community empowerment, sports, and Islamic faith.

Jazeera Dhiriulhun (Island Life) outlines priorities relevant to community infrastructure and services. These include clean energy, waste as a resource, environment protection and preservation, resilient communities, information, communication, and technology, water and sanitation, transport network, arts, culture & heritage and decentralization.

Good governance outlines key governance reforms. These include national security and public safety, an accountable state, independent institutions and public service reform, rule of law and judicial reform, gender equality, foreign affairs and eliminating corruption.

Leave No One Behind

Issues around the national implementation of human rights commitments have a significant bearing on the inclusion, non-discrimination and equality of marginalised groups. The government is committed to the realisation of rights but lacks capacities to fully meet its obligations as duty-bearer. Cultural norms, increasing religious conservatism, especially around gender, also act as barriers.

The national dynamic makes it clear that specific groups are bearing increased challenges or are not benefitting equally from current patterns of development.

The three largest groups within which people face widespread issues of equality, non-discrimination and equity and participation are women, children and youth, and migrants. Significant proportions of all three groups are marginalized and have limited voice and support. Their vulnerabilities are further increased by exclusion factors that include being poor, living in the atolls, in a rural or broken family and/or with a disability, or having a different gender orientation or religious view. For women, being young, unmarried and

having a child out of wedlock increases exclusion. And conditions for at least some within each group violate human rights norms.

Other groups which risk being left behind are the elderly and people with physical and mental disabilities. Persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty than those without. Their right to a dignified life, non-discrimination and inclusion is severely affected with the lack of services and enabling social and physical environment.

All people at risk are negatively affected by the unravelling of traditional extended family support systems. Many but not all in these groups have been somewhat helped by modern social protection measures. However, these are limited to cash grants. These systems have been proven in recent impact evaluations to not effectively reduce poverty among the target groups. A unified, single national social protection system of services and support needs to be built for all vulnerable groups, and a universal child benefit should be prioritized to more effectively reduce inequalities and ease the barrier of having to apply for the most vulnerable families.

LGBTI people are in a particularly difficult position, as Maldives criminalizes same sex relationships, and proponents of equality are harassed by cultural conservatives. Building acceptance and inclusion, and a consensus in favour of legal reform will require advocacy, support, dialogue and public sensitization to human rights.

Given the increasing conservatism of society in recent years, there is a need to develop new strategies to address discrimination and exclusion, as well as the roots of extremism. A core challenge is that conservative narratives are used successfully to influence policy making and to discourage the efforts the government to address root causes of vulnerability such as productive engagement of youth and women's empowerment. Conservative political and religious ideas are gaining ground, promoting an increasingly extreme narrative. Opportunities must be sought through international partnerships, empowerment of community groups and professionals such as teachers and wider use of mass and social media to shift the current narrative to a more moderate perspective.

Regional, sub regional and cross-boundary issues

Cross boundary and regional issues are becoming increasingly important for the Maldives politically, and in terms of attaining SDG targets as they have implications for the country's economic growth, diversification, trade and regional cooperation.

A traditionally neutral country, Maldives received strong support from India and western partners during its earlier development. Under the previous government, it adopted a pro-China policy, and borrowed heavily for infrastructure. The current government has renewed close ties with India, which has committed to finance \$1.4 billion over a period of four years. It also maintains positive ties with China and can be expected to promote balanced relations with the large regional powers.

Saudi Arabia is playing an important role both economically and culturally in influencing the Maldives through their investments. These have included the promotion of religious conservatism.

The influence of extremist ideology led to significant numbers of youth fighting in Syria, and Maldives is actively engaged with partners in countering the extremist narrative.

A Small Island Developing State (SIDS), the Maldives is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), and currently chairs its Bureau. It supports the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action or SAMOA Pathway and a SIDS Partnership Framework. Maldives is a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The Maldives is a founder member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the nation plays a very active role in the association.

Maldives rejoined the Commonwealth in February 2020, reaffirming its commitment to work with like-minded nations to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Financing landscape and opportunities

As an upper-middle income country, the Maldives is no longer a recipient of significant levels of overseas development aid. In 2015 – 2017 average aid was around \$30 million annually, largely loans. Most of the aid came from regional sources, such as the Asian and Islamic Development Banks, and direct bilateral assistance from Australia, Japan and Kuwait.

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 (the MPI shows that the richest are thirty times richer than the poorest).

In broad terms, the Maldives has committed an impressively substantial proportion of its budget to SDG priorities, providing services such as free educational opportunity through university and healthcare for all. Now the SAP seeks to develop infrastructure to assure, for instance, that no one in the country is more than 30 minutes from medical care. Such efforts are taking place across many sectors.

Building capacities for implementation and enforcement of policies would require significant capacity building and an expansion of the public sector, requiring painful trade-offs with infrastructure investment, to maintain fiscal restraint.

Mobilizing domestically controlled resources held offshore is key to advancing the Maldives' future economic, social and institutional transformation. A campaign for national development could be promoted through a coordinated donor-national partnership mechanism for the SDGs.

Until recently there has been only limited coordination among Maldives development partners. The government is now using the new, medium-term Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2019-2023 as the basis for coordination of the sectors and development partners. The draft National Development Plan (NDP) 2019-2028, when approved, should provide a longer-term framework for such a renewed commitment to leveraging SDG financing.

In this context, it is important to develop an SDG financing strategy that will help the government mobilize internal and external resources to fund the SDGs in the country, as well as a public awareness campaign

about the SDGs. A national campaign for the SDGs could also include fundraising from individuals, both Maldivians and tourists, for NGOs and decentralized services.

Challenges and gaps towards achieving the 2030 agenda

The Maldives is in rapid transition and requires an inspiring vision of the nation's goals and identity. The SAP provides such a vision for the period of the current Government, but the SAP itself is not yet directly linked to the SDGs. And 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.

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.

The decline in the birthrate offers a demographic dividend, but only if the economy can diversify and generate attractive private sector jobs. Issues of youth employment must be addressed successfully, and multiple ways should be explored to help young people to better contribute to a healthy, productive, peaceful society. Active engagement of youth in a dynamic economy would also help overcome gender inequality and the exclusion that feeds drug use, gangs and extremism.

The country as a whole has reduced poverty in the last few years. However, many persons 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 gaps in the systems results in exclusion of most vulnerable and the absence of social protection for migrant workers is a major concern.

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 increasing religious conservatism is of particular concern with its negative impact already being observable in the different aspect of women's empowerment and gender equality.

The government faces a difficult landscape. 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.

Analysis of Risks The areas of risk which need to be closely monitored and for which mitigating action is required in the Cooperation Framework broadly relate to political stability, the environment and climate

change, economic stability and social cohesion, democratic space and the countering of the fundamentalist narrative, gender equality and discrimination. These risk areas are interlinked and if not prioritised for action have the potential to seriously impact the country's work towards the SDGs.

The polarised nature of politics in the Maldives creates instability as borne out in competing national visions for the country. The high number of political appointees further contributes to instability with changing governments disrupting much of the administrative structure of the country. Corruption is an underlying problem which affects the country's ability to achieve the SDGs, with the Maldives ranked 130 out of 180 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index.⁷

Growing gender inequality, increasing unemployment rates among women and signs of negative attitudes towards gender equality are serious areas of risk. In addition, social exclusion and discrimination, issues of youth and rising conservatism all hamper the ability of Maldives to capture the benefits of its demographic dividend.

External risks that could seriously affect Maldives and potentially become internal risks are regional power rivalries, extremist ideologies or terrorism. Increasing extremism is also contributing to increasing gender inequality as well as carrying implications for social cohesion and risk areas around justice and the rule of law. Maldives' geographic location also makes it vulnerable to drug trafficking and organized crime, affecting health and human lives.

Risks in justice and rule of law include a history of 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. The lack of effective investigation and enforcement of the law in sensitive areas such as GBV and high-level corruption is another risk factor, as is the effect on the administration of justice of the current increase in religious radicalization. Furthermore, the lack of understanding of legal rights and political polarisation are hampering the revival of public civic education on legal rights and human rights principles.

Economic risks are primarily; limited workforce planning and job creation for youth, missing the demographic dividend; failure to diversify, leading to severe impacts from external shocks to tourist demand; slow diversification of private sector growth; and a financial crisis caused by debt and economic costs associated with climate change and extreme events which can reduce government revenue and result in retrogression in enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. The risks to economic stability will have knock-on impacts on a range of additional risk areas including governance, social cohesion, access to services and migration.

Infrastructure risks include lack of human capacity development to match infrastructure O&M needs, and lack of meaningful access to social services.

Continued migration from the atolls to Malé poses challenges to the balanced development of the country.

The current migration management system is not effective in preventing the exploitation of foreign workers and minimising the number of undocumented workers, which can have labour market as well as health and security related impacts.

⁷ <https://www.transparency.org/country/MDV#>

Public health risks include growth of non-communicable diseases, mental health issues and disabilities. With a high number of tourists and international migrant workers travelling into Maldives there is also a risk of re-emergence of eliminated diseases or the introduction of new diseases (such as coronavirus).

Agriculture and food safety risks include losses of arable land and food safety issues. As most food is imported the fact that the country relies on single source countries poses a major risk for food security. In addition, there is no system to check the safety of imported food. There is no control or monitoring of fertilizer use in local agriculture.

Environment and climate change risks are numerous, including potential loss of low-lying island land from sea-level rise; a failure to cut oil and gas use; open waste burning continues to negatively affect the health of local communities; contamination of the human and natural environments by pollution and waste; a failure of Malé and/or the atolls to 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, including potential unplanned migration as a byproduct.

Chapter 1. Country Context

The Maldives consists entirely of atolls, coral reefs and low-lying coral islands. There are 22 geographical atolls comprising of about 1,200 islands, which are divided into 20 administrative units. By law, only about 200 islands are permanently inhabited.

In the most recent census (2014), Maldives had a total resident population of 402,071 with 338,434 Maldivians⁸ and 63,637 international migrants⁹, dispersed across 188 inhabited islands. All Maldivians share the same culture and speak the Dhivehi, the Maldivian language. Three geographic subgroups speak mutually intelligible dialects. Sunni Islam is the state religion, and all permanent residents must be Muslim.

The population structure of Maldives presents a potential demographic dividend; which is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older). In other words, it is "a boost in economic productivity that occurs when there are growing numbers of people in the workforce relative to the number of dependents".

The country has been a remarkable and sustained development success, based primarily on the development of high-end tourism. Over the last 40 years, interrupted only by the 2004 tsunami, it has experienced transformative growth, along with development of the country's infrastructure, services and connectivity that has brought improved living conditions to every inhabited island.

Ubiquitous and affordable public services for its people have resulted in impressive health and education indicators, with a literacy rate approaching 100%, and average life expectancy of over 77 years.

The country's GDP per capita - only \$200 in 1978 -reached \$11,890 in 2018. From a Least Developed Country it has quickly progressed to Upper-Middle Income Country status. Real GDP grew by 6.7 per cent in 2018, with strong performances in tourism, construction, and trade. While this is so, it must be noted the GDP growth masks inequalities between social groups and geographic regions.

The opening of new resorts, housing and infrastructure (led by expansion of the international airport and development of a connecting bridge) have fuelled the construction sector since 2014, and a current decline in construction reflects the completion of some large infrastructure projects. Tourist arrivals and bed nights increased by 18.7 per cent and 14.7 per cent respectively, year on year in the first quarter of 2019, supported by these investments and the expansion in the guest house tourism sub-sector in inhabited islands.

Maldives' inherent development challenges stem from potential risks from climate change, vulnerability to disasters and challenges in ensuring environmental sustainability with expansion of construction on land and filling of lagoons, and rising levels of solid waste. Almost half of all settlements and over two thirds of critical infrastructure are located within 100 meters of the shoreline and are under immediate threat from rising sea levels.

⁸ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2014. Statistical release 1: Population and households. P.13

⁹ It is estimated that the international migrant total is much higher than the number counted in the Census 2016

The additional challenge of the country's atoll-based geography is of its dispersed population across many small islands, which makes service delivery difficult and very costly, and can limit opportunities for job creation and economic diversification. Compounded by changes in family structure towards nuclear living arrangements, increasing Islamic conservatism and inclusion issues, this has caused relatively elevated levels of youth unemployment and low rates of women participating in the workforce.

The country has also experienced social stresses as a result of its very rapid modernization, recent democratisation and the effects of globalization on society. The capacities of the judiciary and independent institutions have not developed apace with these developmental changes. There also appears to be only a partial understanding of rights among the public, with demands for public benefits leading politicians to seek to please voters with unsustainable programmes, without full consideration as to the best course of action. Maldives seeks to promote individual's rights, but it has not yet inculcated a sense of civic responsibility.¹⁰ This has led to increased inequality, political polarization and populist policy responses. Additional, new issues include youth alienation, drug use and gangs, an epidemiological transition from infectious to chronic disease and mental health issues, and the emergence of extremist religious ideology.

To respond to these challenges, the current government has reversed centralisation policies of the previous government, promising to empower local councils by allocating them a portion of the annual state budget and to develop at least 5 regional hubs across the archipelago. The government has also embarked on a series of reforms to restore democratic institutions and the freedom of the press, re-establish the justice system, and protect fundamental human rights. Also high on the government's agenda are social issues and climate change.

Political Situation and Trends

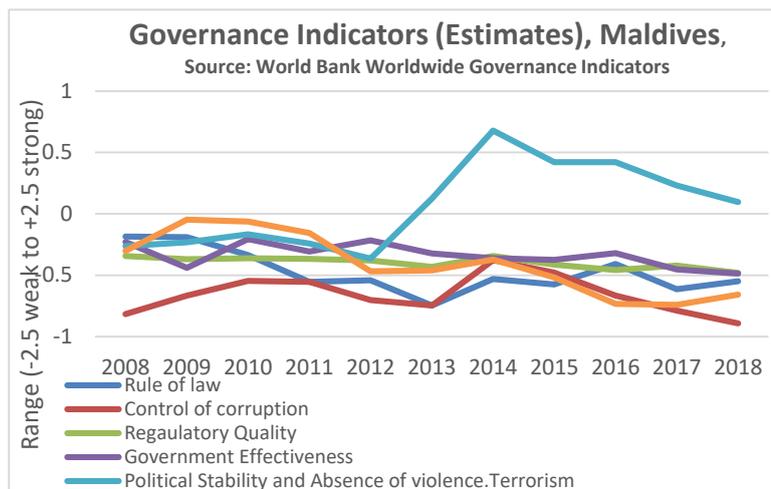
The new Constitution adopted by the Maldives in 2008 heralded an entirely open and liberal constitutional democracy with genuine universal adult suffrage and an extensive Bill of Rights enforceable by an independent judiciary. This radically new set of values and rules was not fully internalised by political 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 democracy¹¹.

The 2018 Presidential elections resulted in a change of government and 2019 Parliamentary elections provided a two thirds majority to the new ruling coalition. The new government has 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 bench, with potential consequences for both building trust and national reconciliation.

¹⁰ Stakeholder meeting, Attorney General Office.

¹¹ UNDP (2019). *Assessment of the Justice Sector Reform Proposals*: Final Report (unpublished)

Figure 1: Governance Indicators



While the country is enjoying a period relative calm and political stability, there are different triggers that could ignite political turbulence in the country, namely the fragility of arrangements within coalition governments and high polarisation over social and political issues. Weaknesses in the institutionalisation of the political party system in the Maldives could lead to instability in the lead-up to the next presidential elections as personality-

based politics could once more take centre stage.

The 2008 constitution also paved the way for decentralised governance. The 2010 Decentralisation Act details the objectives of decentralised administration: 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 Governance¹² in 2018 identified challenges as lack of political will to implement decentralisation, in particular, fiscal decentralisation; the politicisation of Local Government authorities; lack of capacity of some local councils and conflict with the administrative staff, who are accountable to the civil service and not the council.

In December 2019 amendments were made to the Decentralisation Act. These included provisions for one third representation of women on the council and allocation of forty per cent of government revenues from the particular atoll jurisdiction to its council. While these amendments addressed some of the legal issues, the challenges related to capacity at atoll level, politicisation and conflict with administrative civil service staff remain to be addressed.

Human Rights Situation

Since the change of government in Nov 2018, Maldives has stepped up its engagement with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and various UN human rights mechanisms. It has been a receptive and accessible interlocutor and reiterated its commitments to human rights. The government maintains an open invitation to all human rights mandate holders to visit the country.

Although, this is a welcome change from the position of the last government, the recent ban on a prominent civic human rights organization, Maldivian Democracy Network, is a cause for worry and a reminder of how vulnerable human rights groups and human rights defenders remain in the Maldives.¹³ Furthermore, overall approval rating of the Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) is has dropped from 39.9 per cent in

¹² Transparency Maldives (2019). Review of the decentralisation framework in the Maldives

¹³ The Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN) was shut down by the authorities in late 2019 against a backdrop of threats to the MDN’s staff from religious hardliners. The Maldivian government alleged that the MDM’s 2015 report, “Preliminary Assessment of Radicalization in the Maldives”, insulted the Prophet Muhammad.

2005 to 27 per cent in 2019, and the proportion of people who thought that the role of HRCM was to protect human rights had declined from 70 per cent in 2011 to 42.8 per cent in 2019.¹⁴

Reported civil and political human rights issues¹⁵ in the previous decade in Maldives included arbitrary detention by government authorities; ill-treatment and torture; unexplained deaths in prison; political prisoners; violation of due process rights; arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy; the repeal of the anti-defamation law; undue restrictions on free expression and the press; interference with the right of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom of religion and belief; severe restrictions on political participation; corruption; trafficking in persons; criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct; weak state responses to gender-based violence and child abuse including child marriages and labour.

The UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, during her visit to the Maldives in 2019, noted that fundamentalism is one of the greatest threats to the rich culture of the Maldives, including Maldivian practices of Islam. She noted that fundamentalist ideology has resulted in violence, including the disappearances and killings of dissenting voices, with some fearing recurrence despite recent political changes. The Special Rapporteur recommended that the Government speak out clearly, unequivocally and regularly against fundamentalist ideology and called for a loud and clear counternarrative to the fundamentalist narrative from a diversity of voices. She also noted that the education system is a key sphere in which to promote tolerance and human rights, recommending the Maldives to introduce human rights education to emphasize the diversity of cultural expressions and the values of tolerance and mutual understanding.

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 cases of torture.¹⁶ 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. During the last three years HRCM has investigated 11 cases where children were allegedly subjected to torture. None of these cases have been forwarded for prosecution due to insufficient evidence.¹⁷

The current government has undertaken to address human rights issues, and substantial efforts have begun in many areas, particularly those related to civil and political rights and the justice system. However, conditions within institutions remain a major concern, especially within 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

¹⁴ UNDP & HRCM, The “Rights Side of Life”, Third Report, final draft January 2020, page 34.

¹⁵ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018 United States Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

receive any rehabilitation services, nor access to education or psychosocial support while in detention. Moreover, the prison lacked a regulation for administration of disciplinary action against juveniles.

Once released, juveniles are left to fend for themselves and receive no reintegration support from the social service system. They are often at risk of falling back into their previous delinquency behaviours. A recent UNDP study shows that most young people holding radical views have been involved with the detention system.

With regard to public perception of the prison service, in 2019, 24.8 per cent indicated general dissatisfaction with the performance of prisons services with cited reasons being corruption (10.7per cent), lack of supervision (5.2per cent), abuse (4.2per cent) and torture (2.5per cent) of prisoners.¹⁸

Despite positive developments such as the appointment of the first female justices of the Maldives Supreme Court and the allocation of one third of seats to women in the local councils, women are still underrepresented in the Maldives' judiciary, parliament, and local governing bodies.

Although under the legal system men and women are equals, and are treated uniformly, issues such as inheritance are dealt with under the rules of Sharia, where women receive less than their male relatives. This is derived from specific interpretations of Islamic values of male guardianship and responsibility for female siblings and relatives, reinforcing the domestic role of women and the enforcement of their maintenance and protection, and unequal treatment with regards to inheritance.

Even though government owned land is allocated equally, there is a perceived preference for allocating property to men due to the supposed "bread winning" role of the male. Similarly, despite the rules on polygamous marriages having been tightened, the practice of polygamous marriages persists.¹⁹ According to judicial statistics, of 196 polygamous marriages in the Maldives in 2018, 84 were registered by island magistrate courts and 112 by the family court in Malé.²⁰ Furthermore, judicial processes are discriminatory against women; even though divorce initiated by the wife is possible through a court process, men can get an out-of-court divorce with payment of a fine.

Many advances in gender equality have faced a dramatic backlash in recent years. The effects of this backlash are 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% in 2011 and 85.4% in 2005).²¹ A similar decline was observed by gender; while 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. While more men believe in equal rights for women in the family (14.9 per cent), this is also a huge decline, from 67.3 per cent in 2011. Young people between 20-29 displayed similar low support for the idea that women should have equal rights, with 9.7 per cent saying that they strongly agree or agree with the assertion.

The human rights study showed that 11.4 per cent of respondents believed that the husband can hit his wife if she fails to obey him and 52.2 per cent agreed that the wife is duty bound to have sex with her husband even if she is unwilling, with more women (60.3 per cent) supporting this statement than men. 51.8 per cent

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/comments/CEDAW-C-52-WP-1_en.pdf

²⁰ <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/rules-tightened-for-polygamous-marriages-147053>

²¹ UNDP & HRCM, The "Rights Side of Life", Third Report, final draft January 2020, page 34.

of respondents agreed that a wife should display a submissive attitude towards her husband. More respondents from the rural regions (24.3 per cent) strongly agree with this statement when compared with urban dwellers (9.5 per cent). Another 2016/17 study²² found that 26 per cent of Maldivian women age 15-49 believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife in at least one of six specified circumstances, compared with 21 per cent of men. The same study reported 16.7 per cent of women 15-19 were subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months and 13 per cent had experienced female genital cutting.

Despite these attitudes, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services statistics show reporting of gender-based violence (GBV) has improved, albeit with fluctuations, with an average of 37 cases reported per month²³. In contrast, their 2018 human rights study showed that 34.69 per cent of respondents were disappointed with the performance of institutions in response to such issues, while 29.25 per cent reported satisfaction and 17.6 per cent were pleased with the institutions handling domestic violence cases.

It is posited that with increased religious conservatism, child marriages may be increasing. In 2018, 3 cases of underage marriage were investigated.²⁴

The Gender Equality Act (18/2016) 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 Gender Equality Act prohibits discrimination based on marital status, most health facilities outside of Male 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 cabinet has endorsed withdrawal of reservations to Article 16 (1) b, e, f, g & h and full withdrawal to reservations to Article 16 (2). However, reservations are expected to remain on Article 16 (1) a, c, and d relating to inequality in entering into marriage, divorce and parental rights, where Maldivian women face discriminatory laws, policies and practices.

Removing the reservation to Article 16 (2) addressing the minimum age of marriage and registration is a positive step by the government. However, this could potentially lead to an increase in unregistered marriages including child marriages, given the increase in conservative religious beliefs – a number of fatwas have been issued by religious scholars on recognizing marriages outside the legal system as long as they meet the minimum requirements of Sharia Law. This is further exacerbated by a lack of a proper monitoring system.

A withdrawal of all reservations to Article 16 would allow the government to align its interpretation of the Sharia on matters relating to Article 16 of the Convention with practices of countries with similar religious backgrounds and legal systems that have successfully harmonized their national legislation with international human rights obligations.

²² Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives

²³ Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, 2019. <http://gender.gov.mv/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/11/Case-Statistics-Report-Jan-Oct-2018.pdf>

²⁴ *ibid*

In the 2015 review of the Maldives, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women recommended the Government to “adopt strategies, including awareness-raising and educational campaigns for the general public, targeting in particular girls and women, parents and teachers, as well as conduct dialogues, forums and consultations with religious leaders aimed at the promotion of non-stereotypical and positive images of women and establish a baseline and clear indicators to measure the progress and results of such strategies.”

Maldives submitted its 6th State report on CEDAW in April 2019.²⁵ It identified as key challenges limited inter-ministerial coordination in the implementation of the rapidly changing national legal and regulatory frameworks, including information to local authorities across the islands; lack of harmonized monitoring; inadequate financial and technical resources including high turnover of staff and limited public awareness on determinants influencing gender equality.

The reconstituted Child Protection Act (19/2019) includes new provisions to protect children from discrimination, bias, harm, cruel punishment, neglect and physical and emotional abuse, and to ensure the right to education and health care, as well as special provisions to protect the rights of children with special needs. The law makes health protection measures such as vaccination of children mandatory and raises the legal age of consent for marriage to 18 years and protects children below 15 years of age from all regular judicial punishments. A related law, the Juvenile Justice Act (18/2019) outlines the rights of children and adolescents coming in conflict with the law and means to prevent juvenile delinquency.²⁶ It prescribes swift resolution of cases and rehabilitation, through a Department of Juvenile Justice; a specialised police department to address juvenile cases; designated State Prosecutors for children; a unit of probation and corrections; a juvenile diversion programme; rehabilitation programmes; and residential facilities and correctional centres. The law also prohibits the death penalty for minors. The provisions of these two laws largely remain to be implemented.

Maldives has signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and national legislation was passed in 2010. However, there has been limited action towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in national social and economic development.

Between June 2016 and May 2017, national authorities in the Maldives recorded eight trafficking in persons cases with 17 offenders. Of these, 10 were prosecuted and three were convicted. 11 were Bangladeshi and five were Maldivian.²⁷ During the same period, 12 victims were identified, three females and nine males from Bangladesh and Kenya. Before this period, a limited number of trafficking cases were investigated, but no convictions were recorded.

Although irregular entry and stay is a criminal offence, government has initiated steps to provide a pathway to regularise a stay in the country, allowing international migrant workers to change employers, if the latter was responsible for the irregular status. However, there is no publicly available information on the regularisation process. Migrants have reported being afraid to bring cases to the authorities, as they felt that

²⁵ Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (April 2019). Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

²⁶ Aboobakuru Z N (2017). A Maldivian perspective on juvenile justice. In Resource material series no. 102. UNAFEI.

²⁷ Statistics provided by the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Maldives to UNODC

their cases may not be heard due to the lack of evidence to counter their employers' statements or because of the challenge of finding translators.²⁸

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 recently recorded, as well as a surge in detected fraudulent travel and identity documents, and a range of other fraudulent practices linked to recruitment practices,²⁹ work contracts and visas for foreign workers. Such practices could also lead to trafficking and situations of forced labour for international migrant workers. While the absence of specific legislation on international migrant smuggling makes it difficult to classify cases, an analysis of the indicators observed by different government agencies points to the existence of international migrant smuggling from, into and through the country.

As the demand for international migrant workers has been increasing in the past few years in conjunction with an expanding economy, particularly with the growth in the tourism and construction industries, policy debates have been focusing increasingly on international migrant workers. There is also a recognition of the importance of reforming the labour management system for migrant workers to address exploitative labour practices and to create decent work for both locals and the migrant workforce, with a strong emphasis on employment conditions, public health and safety matters. Exploitative labour practices of employers of international migrant workers have also emerged as a concern.

Economic Context

Although it only graduated from Least Developed Country status in 2012, Maldives is now an upper-middle income country. This incredibly rapid shift illustrates the dual nature of the economy: a small island developing state (SIDS) with serious geographic challenges, and an open economy that is heavily dependent on tourism. Tourism, largely in high-end resorts, accounted for 73.4 per cent of GDP in 2017, followed by secondary industries (largely construction and transport) at 10.5 per cent and primary industries (primarily fisheries and agriculture) at 4.9 per cent.³⁰

Tourism-led growth in Maldives has (until recently) followed an enclave model, separating tourists from local inhabitants on designated islands. This model is reliant on imported goods, labour and finance, which limits the backward linkages that could otherwise spur indirect job and growth effects.³¹ There is now government commitment to the expansion of middle-range tourist guest houses on locally inhabited islands, targeting middle income tourists, but there are still unrealized opportunities for linking tourism to local communities (including but not limited to local provision of fish and agriculture products).

The guest house subsector has grown rapidly since the government's tourism policy changed in 2010. In 2018 guest house subsector totaled nearly 459 facilities with around 8,000 beds³². Moreover, the sector is

²⁸ Plewa P (2019). Migration in Maldives: A country Profile, International Organisation for Migration

²⁹ 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).

³⁰ National Bureau of Statistics (2018): Statistical Yearbook of Maldives 2018, Table 16.3: Share of GDP by Activity, 2003-2017

³¹ Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

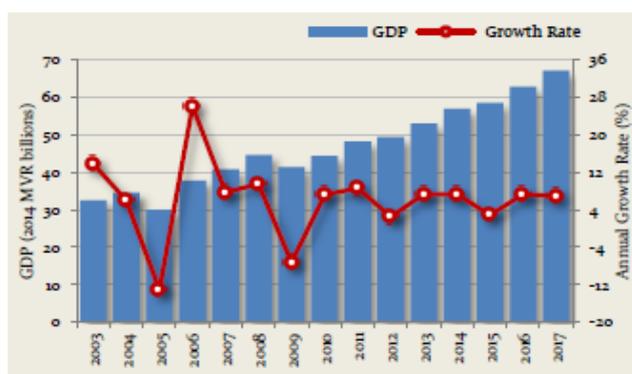
³² Maldives independent. Sep2, 2018. <https://maldivesindependent.com/business/guesthouses-to-control-half-of-maldives-tourist-bed-capacity-by-2028-140762>

projected to double in the next three years as global travel trends shift from luxury toward mid-level travel services with growing use of self-catering accommodations instead of traditional large hotels.

Opportunities for service-provision linkages are more limited. This is in part because many resorts already own and operate their support services and ancillary functions, due to both geo-spatial challenges (given islands' remote locations) and inadequate quality of local service provision. There is also a limited number of Maldivians with qualifications and experience to perform higher skilled jobs in the resorts. In particular, very few women work in the tourism sector due to cultural disapproval of women working in resorts, and the culturally assigned responsibility of caring roles in the household.

In addition to the tourism industry, fishing, agriculture and shipping are the key economic mainstays, despite their shrinking size in the economy in recent years. Construction is growing enormously.

Figure 2: GDP growth 2003-2017³³



Fishing is increasingly being threatened by overfishing, high fuel costs and rising ocean temperatures and its share of GDP decreased from 6 per cent in 2007 to 3.7 per cent in 2017. This is driven to some extent by lower engagement of Maldivian youth in the sector and the relative growth of other industries.

The share of agriculture in GDP declined from 1.8 to 1.2% during the same period. The small GDP

contribution of agriculture is due to the scarcity of arable land and fresh water, the limited size of the domestic market and high transport costs for agricultural products. Maldives imports 90 per cent of its food, except for fresh tuna (a main trade commodity) and coconuts. Maldives' staple food imports rely largely on single source countries which poses a substantial risk to food security in the Maldives from natural disasters or economic and political situations in the source country. In 2018, Maldives imported 95 per cent of its rice from India and 80 per cent of its flour from Turkey.³⁴ With fishing providing almost 10 per cent of food requirements, the fishing sector's vulnerability is a worrisome sign for the country's food security.

The future of agriculture in Maldives largely depends on demand in the tourism sector. However, concerns about the volume, supply and quality of locally produced food have reduced resorts' incentives to buy local agricultural products. As of 2018, resorts were buying the majority of the Maldivian grown products; bananas, papayas and watermelons, and cultivating themselves or importing all other goods.³⁵ Another perception that impacts on agricultural demand is a public view that imported food is of better quality. The nature of consumerism and uncontrolled imports of food, and challenges in marketing and selling local produce makes the growth of agriculture in the country difficult. Despite these issues, fisheries and agriculture still play a crucial role in food security as well as generating employment both for locals and foreign migrant workers.

³³ National Bureau of Statistics (2018): Statistical Yearbook of Maldives 2018, Table 16.3: Share of GDP by Activity, 2003-2017

³⁴ Najeeb, F (2019). Food security: Are we stable in staples. Maldives Economic Review

³⁵ Plewa P (2019). Migration in Maldives: A country Profile, International Organisation for Migration

Industrial development in the energy and other sectors is limited by Maldives' lack of mineral and oil reserves. However, according to the Ministry of Energy, ongoing renewable energy projects were planned to provide 13 kilowatts of renewable energy (solar photovoltaic), by the end of 2018. Renewables should have a significant impact on imported fuel costs in the medium term, increasing the feasibility of local manufacturing.

The absence of an active small and medium enterprise (SME) ecosystem is noteworthy. Limited entrepreneurial skills among youth, high costs of land, labour and raw materials makes it difficult for self-starters and limited seed funding/startup capital constrains entrepreneurial activities. The government has proactively fostered entrepreneurship for the past five years. There are three ongoing loan schemes to provide access to seed finance for new and existing businesses: the SME loan scheme; the Get-Set program; and the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF).³⁶ However, early results suggest challenges including poor quality of business plans, low success rate of the businesses that have received support, inadequate business support services and skills support, and low repayment rates.

Employment

In, 2016, the labour force participation rate was 58 per cent; 75 per cent male and 42 per cent female. The service sector accounted for 70 per cent of total employment followed by industry (18 per cent), public administration (15 per cent), trade (13 per cent) and agriculture (9 per cent).³⁷ The overall unemployment rate was 6.1 per cent, higher among men (6.4 per cent) than among women (5.6 per cent). The youth unemployment rate (18-34 years) at 8 per cent was higher than the national average.

In 2016, 97 per cent of the potential labour force (available non-jobseekers or unavailable jobseekers) were not seeking jobs. Studies were the main reason for young people (15-17years), ill health for older people (65+ years), and for those age 18-64 years the main reason was household work.³⁸

New graduates as well young people completing grade 12 typically seek administrative jobs, but these are in short supply, particularly in the private sector where employment opportunities are concentrated in the tourism and services-based economy. The large number of government jobs in the civil service and the many state-owned enterprises (SOEs) has created an expectation that "the state will provide"³⁹ – whether through social protection benefits, services, training or employment.

The high reservation wages limit attractive job opportunities for new entrants, who are priced out of the market by international migrant workers at both the low and high ends of the skills spectrum.⁴⁰ Several aspects of Maldives' recent development pattern highlight imbalances between labour supply and demand. For example, increasing educational attainment among the younger generation and expectations of an "office job" has coincided with the rapid growth in low-skilled service jobs associated with tourism and construction⁴¹. This has (or seems to have) resulted in unmet expectations of Maldivian job seekers vis-à-vis

³⁶ Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

³⁷ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment. p21.

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid*

available jobs. Recent improvements in household wealth, declining poverty and the introduction of generous social pensions have also raised the reservation wage of young labour force entrants.

A decade after the enactment of the Employment Act (2/2008), there is a need to effectively operationalize and enforce some of the rights enshrined in the legal framework, including the implementation of minimum wages. An adequate minimum wage system opens the possibility of increasing job opportunities that match the aspirations of nationals, especially the youth. However, a minimum wage policy by itself will not be able to increase the participation of national workers in the labour market.

Specific strategies are needed to increase employability and to close the gap between supply and demand for labour. Policy changes required to obtain better labour market outcomes include addressing capacity weaknesses in the education system for teaching technical, vocational and life skills, creating adequate up skilling programmes, proper public employment services, monitoring occupational safety, and cultural mind-set changes among youth towards productive work and self-sustenance. These are essential steps to ensure decent working conditions for all workers in the Maldives. The government is taking the initiative to roll-out a minimum wage system for the country.

The enclave model of tourism development – one resort, one island – has increased the imbalance between labour supply in the inhabited islands and the demand for skilled and unskilled labour in nearby island resorts. The growth of mostly luxury tourism services has outpaced the capacity of the Maldivian labour market to provide internationally competitive skills required by employers – both technical and soft skills. The persistence of traditional gender roles, particularly the caring role assigned to women, and the narrow scope of occupations deemed acceptable by young women (and especially their parents) have limited the female labour supply, particularly for many job openings in tourism-related services. The ensuing demand for labour has been easily and willingly met by foreign migrant workers. These include some higher skilled workers, but foreign migrants are largely lower skilled workers, who are present throughout the Maldives in great numbers. Many of these migrants are undocumented, and therefore often do not have an alternative to accepting significantly lower wages than nationals.

Many Maldivian youth are discouraged workers who have effectively exited the labour force and are best characterized as “NEETs” (Not in Employment, Education or Training). About 22 per cent of working-age Maldivian youth fall into this category.⁴² Whereas official youth unemployment rates are around 8 per cent, when NEETs are included, the share of youth failing to find work or continue education jumps to 25 per cent for the age 15-24 cohort, and 37 per cent for the 15-19 year old cohort - the age group with the largest number of new labour force entrants, due to low enrollment in higher secondary education and above.

The largest number of unemployed and discouraged youth (44 per cent) live in Malé, and the second highest number live in the south of Maldives.⁴³ Female youth have a higher propensity to exit the labour force compared to males: 22 per cent of female youth are NEET, compared to 17 per cent of male youth. Unlike other culturally similar countries in South Asia, Maldivian women have a relatively high labour force participation rate, at 42 per cent, (on par with other countries at the same level of development).

The NEET rate is very similar for men and women for ages 18 to 21 years, but then becomes much higher for women; 32% at 22 years, 56% at 32 years and 44% at 35 years. For men, the NEET rate decreases with age to

⁴² National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment. p7.

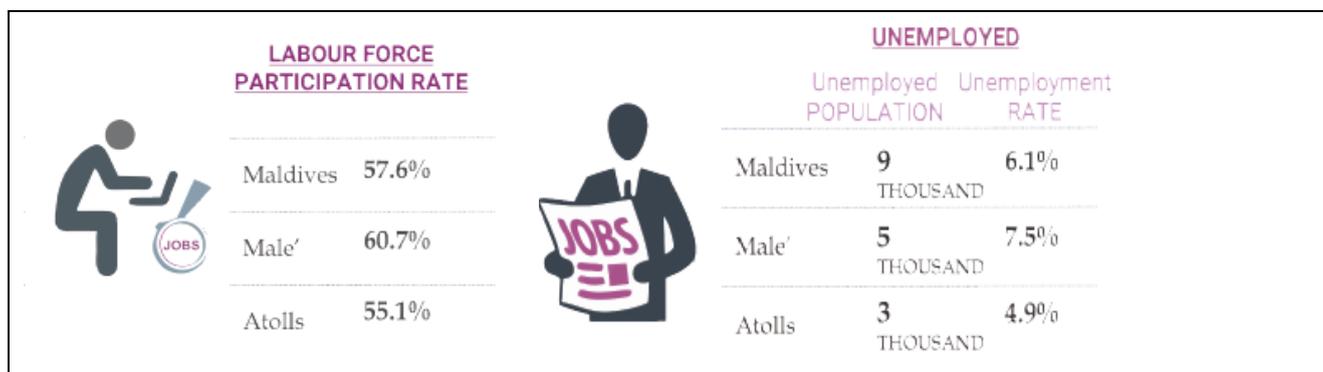
⁴³ *ibid*

4% at age 34 years.⁴⁴ A high NEET rate among women as compared to men is often an indication that they are engaged in household duties or the care economy, which reflects traditional gender roles.

The reasons for being out of school and unemployed vary by gender. Male youth indicate that the biggest reasons for unemployment are the lack of economic opportunities in their island of residence and inability to find suitable employment which matches their education or training. Fifty per cent of young females give household chores and childcare as reasons for economic inactivity.

There is growing concern over discouraged youth, due to their rising NEET rate, as it can be an indication of risk of exclusion, discrimination, victimisation by domestic and gender-based violence and being drawn to undesirable activities (gangs, drugs and extremism).

Figure 3: Labour Force Participation & Unemployment⁴⁵



The main challenges of unemployment in Maldives are not a lack of jobs, but the limited linkages with employment opportunities that results from skills mismatch of youth exiting the school system and preferences toward white collar jobs that limit job uptake by young Maldivians.⁴⁶ The tourism and construction sectors are the largest employers besides public administration jobs, but these sectors also register the greatest numbers of foreign labour participation. From the demand side, employers indicate that there are significant challenges with hiring Maldivian youth. The absence of a proper work ethic, the lack of discipline and commitment, the absence of a minimum wage, inadequate social, interpersonal, customer service and communication skills, and inadequate technical/vocational skills are cited as some of the key challenges to recruiting nationals.

Current laws, including the Employment Act of 2008, do not protect the formation of trade unions or safeguard workers from unfair labour practices. Several cases of worker mistreatment and unfair labour practices have been reported, with workers being arrested, dismissed, or transferred for complaining or attempting to organize. International migrant workers, especially those employed in the tourism and construction sectors, are particularly vulnerable to labour abuses. Labour authorities lack the resources and training to prevent, investigate, or penalize violations of workers' rights. Furthermore, there are no general regulations for occupational safety and health in the country, preventing labour inspectors from identifying and correcting hazardous working conditions.

⁴⁴ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment. p7.

⁴⁵ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment. p24

⁴⁶ Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

Fiscal performance

During the last few years, fiscal expenditure continued to grow at a faster pace than revenue. The government borrowed heavily for infrastructure development, largely from China. A large construction-driven deficit, reaching 9.1% of GDP in 2016, induced a rise in public debt as a percentage of GDP from 52.7% in 2010 to 73% in 2018, and was projected to expand further to 80%⁴⁷ of GDP by the end of 2019. The current account deficit increased from 22% of GDP in 2017 to 24% in 2018.⁴⁸ The largest contribution to debt in 2019 is expected to come from publicly guaranteed debt, as projects being implemented with guaranteed loans are near completion and the underlying loans are expected to be fully utilized in the short term.

It is projected that the real exchange rate and the current account will converge towards fundamentals with the winding down of large infrastructure projects, and since the Maldives maintains a defector peg⁴⁹, it is suggested that there is little room for monetary policy⁵⁰. However, the IMF notes the high contingent liability exerted by the State-Owned Enterprises' (SOEs) public guaranteed external borrowing and the need to limit such guarantees and reduce inefficiencies in SOEs⁵¹.

Domestic debt is expected to increase by 10% in 2019, on account of treasury bill investments worth \$150 million by State Bank of India (SBI). This investment is a result of bilateral ties between the Government of India and Maldives. Although an addition to direct debt, the Government of India will service all payments related to this investment, effectively removing the debt burden and any fiscal imbalances that may arise from this investment to the Government of Maldives.⁵²

External debt stood equivalent to 38% of GDP, at MVR 31,271 million in 2018. This includes both direct and guaranteed external debt. The largest share of external debt (40%) is held by commercial banks. The remaining includes 27% buyers' credit facilities, 16% from multilateral financial institutions and 11% from bilateral creditors.⁵³

The current government has reversed reliance on borrowing from China. This has been offset by new commitments from India, which has pledged \$1.4 billion to Maldives. Grants received at the end of June 2019 include \$25 million received from the Government of India (GOI). The GOI has also invested MVR 1,542 million in government securities and is also expected to invest a further MVR 771 million in government securities this year.

Total revenue and grants received at the end of June 2019 were 5.3 per cent more compared to the same period of 2018. The main reason for this is the growth experienced by the tourism sector in 2019.⁵⁴ In addition, import duties, business profit tax and general GST also increased due to the growth of the economy and the subsequent increase in imports.

⁴⁷ Ministry of finance and treasury (2019). Medium Term Debt Management Strategy 2020-2022

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ Although the Maldivian rufiyaa is not officially pegged to the dollar, the Monetary Authority of Maldives determines a reference rate that the exchange rate between the rufiyaa and the dollar is allowed to fluctuate around.

⁵⁰ World bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/309381562292055521/text/Maldives-First-Fiscal-Sustainability-and-Budget-Credibility-Development-Policy-Financing-Operation.txt>

⁵¹ IMF country report 19/156. Maldives 2019 article iv consultation—press release; staff report; and statement by the executive director for Maldives

⁵² Ministry of finance and treasury (2019). Medium Term Debt Management Strategy 2020-2022

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Ministry of finance and treasury (2019). Medium Term Fiscal Strategy 2020-2022

Total expenditure for the first six months of 2019 was 8 per cent lower than the amount for the same period in 2018. While there was an 8.8 per cent increase in recurrent expenditures during this period, capital expenditures declined by 39.8 per cent.⁵⁵ Despite the decline in capital expenditure, the capital contribution to SOEs and government lending increased over this period. Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP) spending notionally declined over this period compared to the last year, but funds are expected to be disbursed in the latter half of the year as most projects are expected to be awarded during that period. As the budgeting process is based upon line item budgeting it is difficult to assess the impact of the expenditure on specific programmes.

Reasons for the increase in recurrent spending include amendments to the pay structure of defense personnel and nurses in 2018 and additional allowances to staff of different line ministries. Furthermore, new programs to reduce social inequality were initiated by the government. They include a nation-wide breakfast program for school children, free education through first degree and harmonising the prices of electricity and staple foods in the atolls to the price levels in Malé. Compensation to private parties and SOEs and loan write-offs also increased.

Social Context

Population

The population of the Maldives grew at a rate of 1.65 per cent from 2006 to a resident population of 402,071 persons by the 2014 Census.⁵⁶ Maldivians represent 84 per cent of the population (43 per cent male and 41 per cent female) while 16 per cent of the resident population are foreign. The international migrant workers counted in the 2014 Census were chiefly from South Asia and 88 per cent were male.

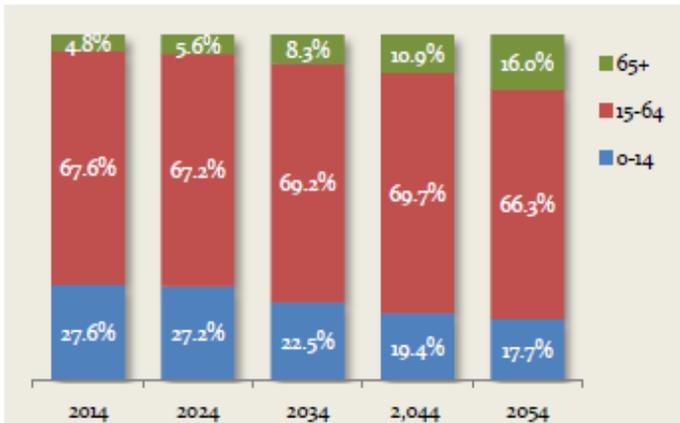
The birth rate has steadily declined, and the proportion of children under 15 years has decreased from 32 per cent to 28 per cent, while older persons aged 65 and above still account only for 5 per cent of the total population. Young people under 25 years comprise 40 per cent of Maldivians (and 43 per cent of the total population, including foreigners). According to the 2014 Census, the population continues to be concentrated in the capital city Malé with 38 per cent of the population. Similarly, the majority of the international migrant population is in Malé.

Figure 4: Projected population by age group 2014-2054⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ National Bureau of Statistics (2015). Maldives population and housing census 2014. Statistical release 1: Population and household, p13

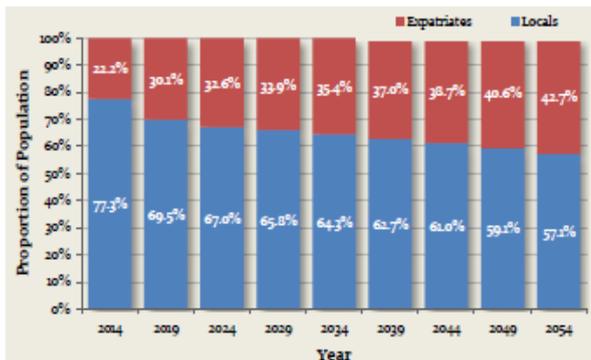
⁵⁷ National Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA (2016). Maldives Population Projections: Assumptions and Results Analysis.



Given that the Maldives is probably reaching the end of its demographic transition process, it can no longer be qualified as having a very young population, although nearly 50 per cent of all Maldivian residents are still less than 25 years old. This changing age structure has important potential benefits, because the economically active population has become much larger than the population of young and old dependents combined.⁵⁸ Indeed, the active adult population between ages 15 and 64 represents 68 per cent of

the total population. The challenge will be to capture the benefits of this first demographic dividend and invest to improve youth's human capital, reproductive health outcomes, and gender equality to prepare for population ageing with a productive and healthy population and an enabling environment.

Figure 5: Projected Migrant population 2014-2054



In order for such economic growth to occur, the younger population must have access to quality education, adequate nutrition and health including access to sexual and reproductive health services and information. However, this demographic window of opportunity will be limited in time because the population will inexorably become older when the country reaches the end of its demographic transition. The limited availability of the current demographic dividend makes it doubly urgent for

Maldives to invest in quality education, jobs and job skills, and in addressing the current gender inequality, and social problems of youth.

Population projections show that the resident population growth rate will slow over the period 2014-2054, from 4 per cent to 1.52 per cent by 2054. It is noted that the resident population consist of a huge working age population throughout the projection period mainly due to the foreign population of working age residing in the country for employment purposes.⁵⁹

Poverty

According to the national low poverty line (MVR 74, set at half the median of total expenditure in the consumption aggregate for the country), 8.2 per cent of the population in Maldives is poor.⁶⁰ In Malé, 1.7 per cent of the population is considered poor, but 12.8 per cent of the Atoll population is poor. Using the high poverty line of MVR 148, 21.3 per cent of Maldivians in Malé are poor and a striking 64.7 per cent of the

⁵⁸ May J.F (2016). *Maldives population dynamics: Policy prospects for human growth and opportunity*. UNFPA: Maldives

⁵⁹ National Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA (2016). *Maldives Population Projections: Assumptions and Results Analysis*.

⁶⁰ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). *Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report IV: Poverty & Inequality*.p16

Atoll population is poor⁶¹. The depth of poverty shown through the Poverty Gap Index using the national poverty line (MVR 74) is relatively low at 1.6 per cent but the gap becomes larger using the high poverty line.

Figure 6: Poverty in Maldives 2016⁶²

Indicator	Total	Malé	Atolls
International poverty line (MVR70; US \$5.50)	6.6	1.5	10.4
National Low poverty line (MVR74)	8.2	1.7	12.8
National High poverty line (MVR148)	46.5	21.3	64.7

The Maldives' HDI value for 2018 is 0.719 which put the country in the high human development category — positioning it at 104 out of 189 countries and territories.⁶³ Maldives' 2018 HDI is below the average of 0.750 for countries in the high human development group, but above the average of 0.642 for countries in South Asia. In South Asia, countries which are close to Maldives in 2018 HDI rank and to some extent in population size are Bhutan and Sri Lanka, which have HDIs ranked 134 and 71 respectively. Between 1995 and 2018, Maldives' HDI value increased from 0.546 to 0.719, an increase of 31.7 per cent.

Economic inequality measured using the Gini Coefficient shows that inequality in Maldives is exacerbated by urbanisation. Inequality in Malé is higher (at 0.284) than in the Atolls (at 0.276).⁶⁴ The 'loss' in human development due to inequality is given by the difference between the HDI and the inequality adjusted HDI (IHDI) expressed as a percentage. As the inequality in a country increases, the loss in human development also increases. Maldives' HDI for 2018 falls to 0.568 when the value is discounted for inequality, a loss of 21.0 per cent due to inequality in the distribution of the HDI dimension indices. Bhutan and Sri Lanka show losses due to inequality of 27.1 per cent and 12.1 per cent respectively.

The Gender Development Index (GDI), based on the sex-disaggregated Human Development Index, is defined as a ratio of the female to the male HDI. The GDI measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health (measured by female and male life expectancy at birth), education (measured by female and male expected years of schooling for children and mean years for adults aged 25 years and older) and command over economic resources (measured by female and male estimated GNI per capita). The 2018 female HDI value for Maldives is 0.689 in contrast with 0.734 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.939⁶⁵ indicating that women continue to lag behind their male counterparts in human development. GDI values for Bhutan and Sri Lanka are 0.893 and 0.938 respectively.

Maldives' multidimensional poverty index (MPI)^{66,67} estimation with publicly available 2016/2017 national survey data shows that 0.8 per cent of the population (3 thousand people) are multidimensionally poor while an additional 4.8 per cent are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (21 thousand

⁶¹ Disaggregated data for specific population groups such as persons with disability and elderly are not available.

⁶² *ibid*

⁶³ UNDP (2019). Briefing note for countries on the 2019 Human Development Report: Maldives.

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ UNDP (2019). Briefing note for countries on the 2019 Human Development Report: Maldives. p5

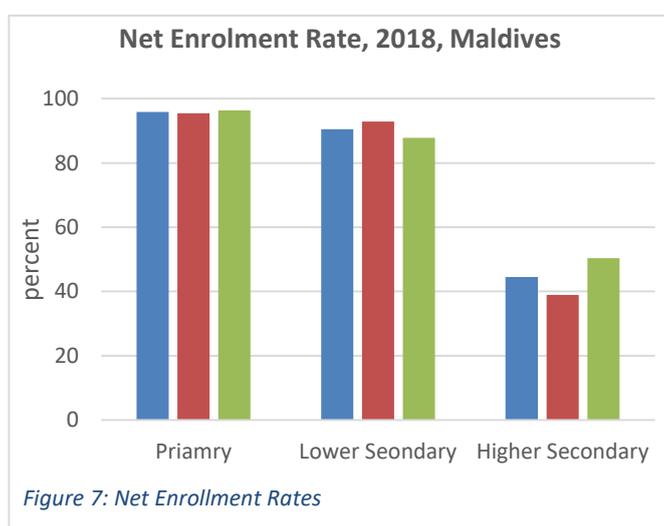
⁶⁶ MPI for the Maldives is calculated in relation to health (nutrition, access to health care), education and information (years of schooling and access to internet) and standard of living (drinking water, sanitation, overcrowding).

⁶⁷ National Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF (2019). National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) For Maldives. Unpublished

people). The MPI is the product of the incidence of poverty (percentage of poor people) and the intensity of poverty (average deprivation shares of the poor). The MPI for the country stood at 0.145. This index ranges between 0 and 1 where values closer to 1 refer to higher multidimensional poverty. The breadth of deprivation (intensity) in Maldives, which is the average deprivation score experienced by people in multidimensional poverty, is 34.4 per cent.⁶⁸ The MPI, which is the share of the population that is multidimensionally poor, adjusted by the intensity of the deprivations, is 0.003 (Bhutan has an MPI of 0.175). A comparison of MPI between Malé and the Atolls shows that multidimensional poverty was relatively low in Malé. While 10 per cent of the population in Malé was multi-dimensionally poor, 40 per cent of the population was poor in the Atolls. According to the MPI, female children and adults with a disability have the highest vulnerability.

Education

The Maldives allocates a significant portion of the national budget to education - 11.0 per cent in 2017, which accounts for 3.6 per cent of GDP.⁶⁹ Public education unit costs show a growth of over 6 per cent annually over the past 10 years while households spend about 0.5 per cent of GDP on education.



In 2018, the net enrolment ratio (NER) for both girls and boys at pre-primary level were over 92 per cent. For Primary level, NER was above 95 per cent. The NER starts to fall at lower secondary level to 90.5 per cent and steeply drops at higher secondary to 44.5 per cent (50.4 per cent for girls and 38.9 per cent for boys).⁷⁰ This is largely due to non-availability of higher education opportunities in the Atolls, which forces a number of adolescents to migrate to Malé.

While the NER is high in primary and lower secondary, the quality of education is not on par.

The education sector analysis notes that the

proportion of 4th and 7th grade students who have attained mastery level competence in language (Dhivehi and English) and Mathematics is low compared to many other countries. As per the national assessment of learning outcomes (NALO) 2015 and 2016, approximately 37.8 per cent of the students in Grade 4 and 43.24 per cent of students in Grade 7 failed to achieve the minimum pass percentage of 40 per cent. Girls perform better in achieving the desired outcomes than boys at both Grades 4 and 7 in Mathematics, English and Dhivehi language. There is a clear geographical difference in the results.⁷¹

It was observed that students scored generally lower in competencies based on higher order thinking. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) in the Maldives was revised in 2015. There is not yet an impact evaluation study to examine to what extent the curricula reform contributes to the improvement of learning.

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ Ministry of Education (2019). Education Sector Analysis. p.56

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.p4

⁷¹ *Ibid*. p6-7

The situation calls for a sharper focus on improving the quality of learning at the system level with particular attention to reducing disparities across geographical locations and gender.

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

Inclusive Education Policy and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) have received greater attention with a specialized department with a professional team at the National Institute of Education to support the schools. The inclusive education program of the Maldives is focused on 16 types of students from 3 distinct categories, collectively defined as 'children requiring an Individual Education Plan (IEP)'. In 2018, in the 212 Government schools there were a total of 3,215 students requiring an IEP based on the diagnosis or on suspicion of needing support through an IEP.⁷² Implementation of the SEN Policy however needs to be strengthened, primarily through increased awareness of what special needs involves, and clear leadership on the issue amongst principals and the Ministry of Education.

The integration of pre-primary education into the national education system raises major access, equity and quality issues. No significant progress has been made and quality assurance and regulation for nursery and daycare centres remain unclear.

The Snapshot of the Maldivian School System in 2016-2017 assessed schools and found that a large number of schools across the country needed additional buildings/classrooms and that 55 (or 20 %) of schools do not meet national minimum standards for educational facilities, including WASH requirements.⁷³ It found that 11 of the 55 schools assessed did not have toilets for students, affecting 21 per cent of the students enrolled in these 55 schools; with 10.6 per cent without access to hand washing facilities and 12.3 per cent without access to drinking water.⁷⁴

The student-teacher ratio in Malé is 12:1 while in the outer islands it is 8:1.⁷⁵ Proportionally, the number of expatriate teachers and untrained teachers are higher in the outer islands. The percentage of untrained teachers working in primary schools has dropped to approximately 6 per cent in 2018 from 23 per cent in 2010. However, with over 500 untrained teachers still working in the system, serious learning gaps are likely, particularly for children in the more isolated islands⁷⁶. One of the most significant efforts made to upgrade local teachers is a new requirement of a minimum of a diploma. There is an ongoing partnership between the Maldives National University (MNU) and the Ministry of Education since 2016 to train 3000 in-service teachers to bachelor's degree level. By the completion of this 5-year project, more than 80% of teachers should have a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree. However, since teacher training and preparation has not been aligned with the new curriculum implementation, there are several gaps in teacher

⁷² Ministry of Education (2019). Education Sector Analysis.p186-7

⁷³ Ministry of Education (2019). Analytical Report of Issues and Challenges from External School Reviews of 2016 & 2017

⁷⁴ Ministry of Education (2019). Assessment Report of the Disadvantaged and Underperforming 55 Schools in the Maldives

⁷⁵ Ministry of Education (2019). Education Sector Analysis.p205

⁷⁶ *ibid*

allocations for teaching different subject areas, especially from Key Stage 3 and up. Despite the innovative teaching and learning practices promoted in the NCF, some teaching practices continue the promotion of memorization rather than comprehension and higher order cognitive thinking skills. Furthermore, even though the curriculum includes health and physical education, this subject has not been implemented in Key stage 4 and 5, especially when the subjects includes comprehensive sexual education topics and associated life skills for healthy and productive behavior.

TVET programs for secondary school students at risk were also initiated and while options have grown, the school-to-work transition is still challenging due to (a) lack of soft skills and training in both technical and academic programs ranked high for getting jobs; (b) weak quality and relevance of TVET, which also reduces students' interest; (c) inadequate linkages between tertiary education institutions and private firms; (d) low quality of teaching in TVET; (e) a lack of competency and outcome based curriculum and assessment; and (f) limited career guidance and counselling to students. Although sector skills councils exist, there is insufficient feedback to the tertiary education institutions and policy makers.

The Higher education sector in the Maldives 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.⁷⁷ Although not officially recognized, the so-called 'block mode' teaching is widely used in HEIs. Currently, full-time equivalent programmes are conducted in the 'block mode', which is a part-time arrangement, while qualifications are awarded in the full-time duration.

The Ministry of Higher Education and the Maldives Qualification Authority, though mandated for regulation and quality assurance of higher education, do not have qualified staff to properly regulate the sector. The lack of qualified staff has been an issue that has been identified by higher education institutions as well. Though the MNU, the IUM and some private colleges have their own funds for research, there is limited research to guide policy making and no public research grant/facility available in the country.

In 2019, government announced a policy of free education through completion of undergraduate degree in-country and student loans for study abroad. This highly ambitious policy is laudable on its face, but without cost controls and workforce planning systems in place, its cost effectiveness and sustainability are open to question.

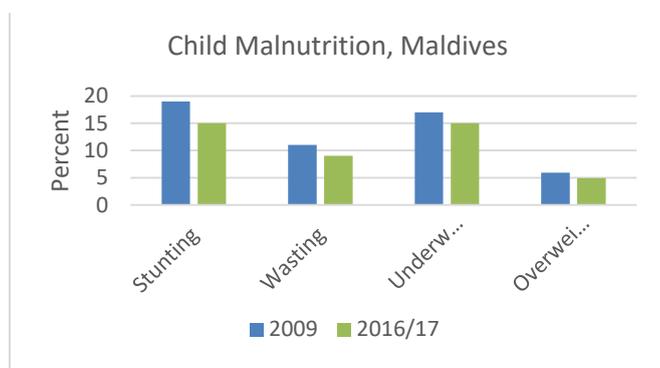
Nor is educational policy linked to the skills needed for the implementation of government priorities identified in the SAP. While a number of government institutions suffer from a high turnover of staff and lack of human and technical capacity, there is no clear policy or process to ensure recruitment and retention of trained and skilled staff in the civil service, nor is there a strategy to limit brain drain from the Maldives.

Health

⁷⁷ Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

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 73 years for men and from 70.1 to 74.7 years for women during the period 2000 to 2016.⁷⁸ 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

Figure 8: Child Malnutrition, Maldives



Emergency Obstetric Care (EmOC) at atoll level and antenatal care at the island level.⁷⁹ Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has decreased 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.⁸⁰

Health services in Maldives are currently delivered by a four-tier system comprised 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,⁸¹ 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. Managing logistics and supplies across the islands' centres and hospitals is challenging, and there is sub-optimal use of information and communication technology.

Although child nutrition status improved over the last decade, progress is slow with small improvements in stunting, wasting and underweight among children under 5 years. Nutritional parameters show both under and over nutrition with high levels of obesity or overweight among women 15-49 years (49 per cent of women, 33 per cent men)⁸² that predisposes to NCDs. At the same time, undernutrition is common among the 15-19 years age group, with 38 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men being underweight.⁸³ Micronutrient deficiencies continue to be a challenge with 50 per cent of children and 63 per cent of women being classified to have anaemia. While part of this situation stems from to the high prevalence of Thalassemia among the Maldivian population, unhealthy dietary habits are a major contributor.

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 also halted mother-to-child transmission of HIV and is on track to eliminate leprosy.⁸⁴ However, there is an increased public health threat from HIV, Hepatitis B and TB due to high risk behaviors related to drug abuse and unprotected sex among local and international migrant populations. Despite the elimination of Measles, in 2020 a case of measles was detected that risks reversing past achievements. With urbanization and climate change effects, vector-borne

⁷⁸ Ministry of Health (2017). Maldives Health Statistics 2015/16.

⁷⁹ *ibid*

⁸⁰ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives.p90

⁸¹ Ministry of Health (2017). Maldives Health Statistics 2015/16

⁸² Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives.p162-3

⁸³ *Ibid*.p153-4

⁸⁴ World Health Organisation (2017). Maldives: A journey of health

diseases such as Dengue fever and Chikungunya remain a major cause of morbidity.⁸⁵ The dengue outbreak in 2019 was not controlled and remained high at outbreak level throughout the year. The situation signals the need to place emphasis on the preventive health segment of the government's overall health spending for the health system to maintain past successes, particularly on disease surveillance and appropriate public health response.

Insufficient funding and inadequate human resources hamper many of the core capacities required for preparedness for public health emergencies. To a large extent this constrains a One Health approach to implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005.⁸⁶ Assessment of the core capacities for IHR indicated the need for improvements in areas such as food safety, workforce development, IHR coordination, zoonosis, points of entry (POE), chemical events, biosecurity and biosafety, amongst others, addressing financing gaps and issues in the retention of experienced and qualified staff.

With urbanization and improvements in living standards have come unsafe food products, reliance on traded food commodities, unhealthy lifestyles and environmental changes. 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 and 16 per cent of deaths are classified as premature death for the population aged 30-70 years.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ Risk factors for NCDs such as smoking and physical inactivity are high and growing among young people and adults in Maldives. 42 per cent of men use some form of tobacco and 22 per cent of households are exposed to indoor tobacco smoke.⁸⁹ Though Maldives has made combating NCDs one of its top priorities, progress to date is slow due to many challenges, such as limited political will to implement tobacco-control regulations or pricing measures on high sugar and salty food products, limited resources allocated for preventive measures, poor access to NCD diagnostic services and essential medicines, inadequate food and medicine testing capacity and weak NCD surveillance systems.

Current health challenges include addressing NCDs, cancers and associated unhealthy risk behavior, provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services, prevention and control of thalassemia and other inherited conditions, addressing increasing mental health burdens and disabilities including developmental disorders and addressing environmental pollution. Critical to this is to recruit, train and place the range of skilled health workers needed to address these challenges and to retain the health workforce in the health system, particularly in the public health services.

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.⁹⁰ 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 has also resulted in inefficiency, disruption of the health information systems, weak coordination and loss of trained local technical staff,

⁸⁵ Ministry of Health (2016). Health Master Plan 2016-2025.

⁸⁶ World Health Organisation (2017). Joint External Evaluation of IHR Core capacities of the Republic of Maldives.

⁸⁷ World Health Organisation (2020). Non-communicable diseases (NCD) Country Profiles 2018. Maldives.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Health (2017). Maldives Health Statistics 2015/16

⁸⁹ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives.p11

⁹⁰ Ministry of Health and Gender (2014). National health workforce strategic plan 2014-2018

threatening the sustainability of health service delivery.⁹¹ To further enhance accessibility to healthcare, outreach programs and innovative mechanisms to provide diagnostics and service enhancements including integration and digitalization of health system needs to be addressed.

The pharmaceutical supplies for government facilities are managed by the State Trading Organization but continuous supply and availability of essential medicines including modern contraceptive commodities is a consistent problem. In 2019, essential medicine availability at tertiary centers in Malé was about 80 per cent and was thought to be lower in the Atolls.⁹² Although the prescribed essential medicines are funded through the Aasandha public health insurance scheme, there is no expenditure and pricing control by Government over medicines. Supply, expenditures and pricing are predominantly controlled by the private sector.

In addition to the issues of availability of essential medicines, inappropriate, irrational use and overuse of medicines continues unchanged since 2011. There is no monitoring of prescribing, and the few clinical guidelines available are not adhered to. There are no drugs and therapeutic committees at hospitals, no continuing education on prescribing for doctors and no public education on prudent use of medicines.⁹³ There is also an emerging concern over Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) leading to continued risk of morbidity and mortality from infectious diseases.⁹⁴ The inappropriate use of medicines is reflected in spending on pharmaceuticals. The national health accounts indicators highlighted the increasing role of pharmaceuticals; they accounted for about 17 per cent of overall health spending in 2011, which went up to about 22 per cent in 2015, while in 2017 it accelerated to 32 per cent.⁹⁵

The management of medical supplies is poor with inadequate forecasting and inefficient procurement and stock management. The review of the expanded programme of immunization noted the centrality of improving vaccine management. This includes developing better temperature monitoring systems and installing computerised temperature monitors, training health care professionals in managing vaccines and the cold chain and scaling up the web-based system for monitoring vaccine supplies to a national level.⁹⁶

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 now 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.⁹⁷ 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. An analysis of spending by functional classification reveals that nearly 60 per cent of all spending is directed towards outpatient care expenditure,

⁹¹ World Health Organisation (2017). Maldives: A journey of health

⁹² Santoso B (2019) Technical Support for Development of Strategic Implementation Plan (2020-2021) of the Maldives National Medicine Policy (2018-2023).

⁹³ World Health Organisation (2014). Report prepared using the WHO/SEARO workbook tool for undertaking a situational analysis of medicines in health care delivery in low and middle income countries.

⁹⁴ Ministry of Health (2019). National antimicrobial containment policy 2019-2023.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Health (2019). National Health Accounts 2015-2017.

⁹⁶ Dutta, S. (2019). EPI Supply Chain Status: EPI Review and Effective Vaccine Management Assessment using 2.0 Tool.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Health (2019). National Health Accounts 2015-2017.

followed by hospitalization expenses (19%), medical goods (10%) and the rest is accounted by administrative expenses. Preventive care expenses accounted for less than 0.5 per cent of overall spending during 2015-17.⁹⁸ The lack of a mandatory co-pay or other cost controls raises questions of cost effectiveness and sustainability. Furthermore, despite the high expenditure, access to health care remains a major concern, and is the biggest contributor to multi-dimensional poverty among women.

Improving access to and availability of quality healthcare services has also been challenging due to 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.

Drug abuse

Illicit drug availability was identified in Maldives in the mid-1970s.⁹⁹ While many believe that there is a link with the introduction of tourism during the same period, there is no strong evidence to connect the two. Since this period also coincided with the introduction of drugs into other South Asian countries, it is equally plausible that drugs came with increased travel between neighbouring countries.¹⁰⁰ Subsequently, cannabis abuse (marijuana and hashish) took root among youth. 'Brown sugar', the low-grade heroin that is prevalent in the country, was introduced after mass arrests of Marijuana users in the early 1990s¹⁰¹. Since then, drug abuse has become a major problem. Over the last three decades availability of drug types in the Maldives has increased. A prison-based study in 2011 found that 70% 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).

The Maldives' geographic location makes it vulnerable to drug trafficking, with serious ramifications since this affects health and human lives, besides being an organized crime. From 2013-2018, drugs seized were smuggled into Maldives via sea and air, including through the postal services. Drugs are trafficked from Asian countries including Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Iran, UAE, Qatar, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Illegal substances were also trafficked from European countries including United Kingdom (UK), Belgium, Spain, Netherlands and Germany. Moreover, drugs were also smuggled from African countries: Ethiopia, Togo and Benin, and Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago in the Americas.¹⁰²

The findings from a recent study of wastewater from nine different sites across Malé showed that the most used illicit drugs were cannabis (THC) and heroin (700 and 18 g/day), with lower consumption of cocaine and amphetamines (0.1–1.2 g/day).¹⁰³ The consumption of cannabis in Malé was comparable to that measured in other countries, while the consumption of heroin was higher. Among cathinones, mephedrone was

⁹⁸ *ibid*

⁹⁹ Adyb, A. (2014). Maldives under the Burden of Drugs. *Journal of Alcoholism & Drug Dependence*.

¹⁰⁰ Stakeholder interviews, National Drug Authority

¹⁰¹ Adyb, A. (2014). Maldives under the Burden of Drugs. *Journal of Alcoholism & Drug Dependence*.

¹⁰² UNODC, communication on 27 January 2020

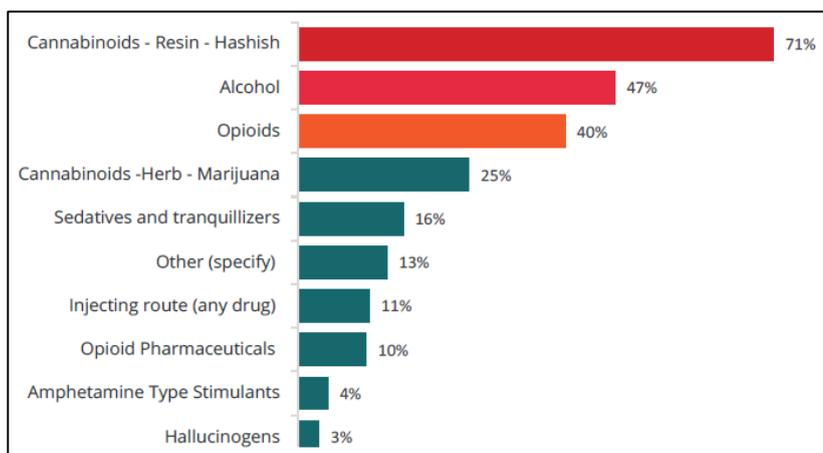
¹⁰³ Fallati, L., Castiglioni, S., Galli, P., Riva, F., Gracia-Lor, E., González-Mariño, I., ... & Vai, M. (2020). Use of legal and illegal substances in Malé (Republic of Maldives) assessed by wastewater analysis. *Science of the Total Environment*, 698, 134207.

detected at the highest levels similar to other countries. Consumption of alcohol, which is not allowed in Maldives, was found (1.3 L/day/1000 inhabitants).¹⁰⁴

The rise in drug abuse has been fueled 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 and low productive engagement among youth. Peer pressure and social acceptance also play a major part in escalating drug use, which is fast becoming the leading recreational activity for Maldivian youth.¹⁰⁵ The situation is fuelled by inadequate law enforcement to control gangs and trafficking groups. Youth become easy prey to such groups and are used as peddlers, as they receive more lenient punishment as juveniles. However, once they have a police record, it is difficult to get employment and the youth become trapped in a vicious cycle.

The 2012 amendments to the drug law established a drug court with a mandate for treatment and rehabilitation. The drug court functions well but because of very limited rehabilitation support services there still remains a huge back log of cases and the rate of relapse after treatment is very high. There is just one treatment centre and two detoxification centres for all of Maldives which are full, with a long waitlist;¹⁰⁶ there is no national strategy or policy for prevention, particularly at the young school age to influence behaviours and build resilience among young people. The NDA previously provided methadone replacement therapy, but it was discontinued due to a policy change in 2017.¹⁰⁷ Current statistics from NDA records show that the age of initiation to drug use is rapidly declining; synthetic drugs are increasing, and trafficking and distribution are becoming more pervasive.

Figure 9: Drug use pattern in Malé 2012



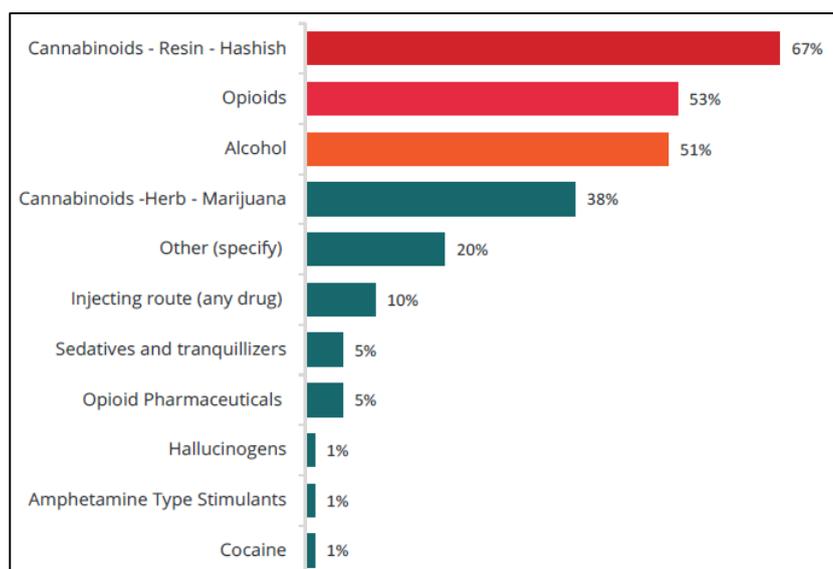
¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ Adyb, A. (2014). Maldives under the Burden of Drugs. *Journal of Alcoholism & Drug Dependence*.

¹⁰⁶ Stakeholder interviews, National Drug Authority

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

Figure 10: Drug use pattern in Atolls 2012



Additionally, the law does not cover rehabilitation for alcohol dependence which remains unaddressed. Although alcohol consumption is prohibited and punishable under Islamic principles, available statistics show that alcohol consumption is increasing in the Maldives. Because alcohol is entirely forbidden, there are no laws regarding its use, which goes unchecked. For instance, in 2009 the prevalence of alcohol consumption among children aged 13-15 years, was 6.7 per cent.¹⁰⁸ There is a data gap in the area of substance abuse including alcohol with no data updates for almost a decade.

In 2009, among student of grades 8 to 10 (13-15 years), there was a 5.4 per cent prevalence of drug use (7.5 per cent males and 3.2 per cent females). Among students who had ever tried drugs, 67.7 per cent were 13 years old or younger when they first tried drugs¹⁰⁹ The 2012 drugs use study¹¹⁰ estimated the prevalence at 6.64 per cent for Malé and 2.02 per cent in the Atolls. A majority of the respondents who had ever used drugs were 15-19 years.

The 2012 study indicated that almost half of the drug users in both Malé and Atolls were employed, and a majority were unmarried. About 15 per cent in Malé and 9 per cent in the Atolls had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder.¹¹¹ About 6 per cent in Malé and 16 per cent in the Atolls reported that they had experienced symptoms of overdose at least once. A large proportion of current drug users were aware of and informed about HIV, but not many were informed about or had undergone any testing or vaccinations against Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C or Tuberculosis (TB).

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 a drug user (either through voluntary treatment or the police system), the drug court requires the National Drug Authority (NDA) to undertake an assessment and propose a treatment plan. The criminal charge is suspended for those who complete treatment - if not they are

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Education (2009). Global school students’ health survey.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2012). National drug use survey, Maldives 2011-12.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

sentenced to prison.¹¹² NDA provides assessment and residential rehabilitation at Himmafushi and community rehabilitation in Malé , Hulhumalé, Fuvahmulah, Addu and Gaafu Dhaalu atolls. However, capacity is limited with over 500 persons waiting for residential and over 350 waiting for community rehabilitation.¹¹³ Furthermore, due to limited capacity at NDA, over 180 cases await assessment required by the drug court. This 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

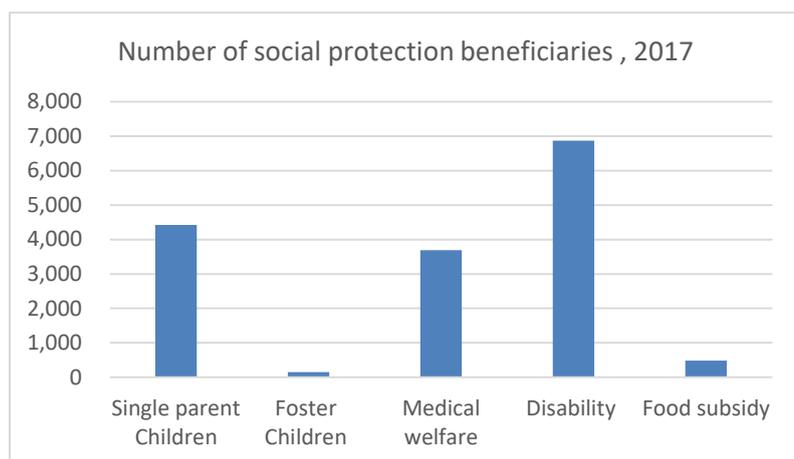


Figure 11: Number of social protection beneficiaries, 2017

Government adopted a ‘minimum social protection floor’ in 2009 and established the National Social Protection Agency (NSPA) to coordinate and implement national social protection programs.¹¹⁴ While subsequent government policies have made changes to the programmes, the social protection floor is more or less maintained. The social protection law enacted in 2014 governs social protection benefits provided by the

in 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.¹¹⁵

An evaluation of the single parent and foster parent benefit schemes showed that the design of the schemes subject beneficiaries and their children to unnecessary stigma, social exclusion and discrimination as well as encouraging dependence as a result of subjecting families to a means test.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it was observed that many eligible families miss out on assistance because of the complex and costly application process, and a lack of awareness of the schemes.

An impact evaluation of the disability benefit indicated limited reach to the eligible population (only 25.5 per cent receiving the benefit).¹¹⁷ This is driven largely by the non-availability of assessment services in the Atolls and it’s limitation in Male’ to only one facility. Furthermore, it was noted that there was a disconnect between the financial benefit schemes and social services related to the benefit schemes. For instance,

¹¹² Stakeholder interviews, National Drug Authority

¹¹³ National Drug Authority (10 December 2019). Personal communication.

¹¹⁴ Ibrahim A (2012). Republic of the Maldives: Updating and Improving the Social Protection Index

¹¹⁵ National Social Protection Agency (2019). Services. <http://www.nspa.gov.mv/v2/>

¹¹⁶ Tran A & Drucza K (2020). Evaluation of the Single Parent and Foster Care Social Protection Schemes in the Maldives. Unpublished

¹¹⁷ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Eskey (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results.

those receiving disability benefit need to reapply for an assistive device or vice versa. A universal child benefit scheme has been recommended to overcome these challenges.

The core capacity gap in the 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. 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. The MRPS first replaced the two pension schemes that were operating solely for government employees and extended coverage to the entire formal sector labour force. In the second phase, the scheme has been opened to self-employed workers who can subscribe to MRPS on a voluntary basis - they are encouraged to do so with a co-contribution incentive provided by the government. Employee and employer both contribute 7 per cent of employee's pensionable wage to his or her Retirement Saving Account in MRPS.¹¹⁸ Employees can contribute more voluntarily. In addition to MRPS, nine government institutions have also set up institution-specific pension schemes for their employees following a defined benefit model.

In 2014, the President introduced Senior Citizen Allowance (SCA) to all Maldivians aged 65 and above on top of OABP. As of Dec 2018, there are 16,835 Maldivians receiving OABP benefits and 17,310 receiving SCA benefits.¹¹⁹ Coverage is universal. The monthly pension benefit under OABP is MVR 2,300 while the SCA benefit is such that every eligible Maldivian senior should receive a total government benefit of MVR 5,000 (about \$325). OABP, SCA and the institution-specific pensions are all financed from the general budget and in 2015 they account for about 2.6 per cent of GDP.

Social protection services

Child Protection programs for institutional state care of children is a fully funded government program. Children taken into State Care are provided shelter in two Children's Homes in Villingili and one in Hulhumalé. The institutions provide basic needs to children of both sexes who meet general eligibility requirements.¹²⁰ In August 2017 they accommodated 66 children aged 13 – 18 years and 100 children below the age of 13.¹²¹ Children are taken into state care for reasons of abandonment, maltreatment and abuse by parents or guardians or where parents are in prison. Older children are sometimes returned to families after assessments and in rare cases are placed in foster care, but most stay in state care till they are 18 years of age.

The Home for People with Special Needs is a government-funded institution located in K. Guraidhoo and administered under the DGFPS. The main eligibility criteria for admission to the Home include medical

¹¹⁸ Ibrahim A (2012). Republic of the Maldives: Updating and Improving the Social Protection Index

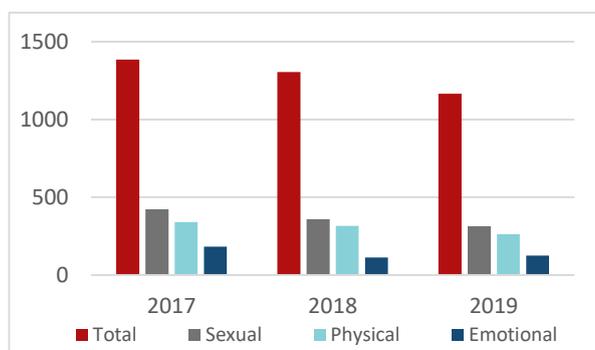
¹¹⁹ National Bureau of Statistics (2018). Statistical Yearbook of Maldives. Pension and Social Protection Tables: 18.4 and 18.7

¹²⁰ http://gender.gov.mv/en/?page_id=2799

¹²¹ National Social Protection Agency (2019). Services. <http://www.nspa.gov.mv/v2/>

certification that the applicant is suffering from severe mental illness, is without family support and could pose significant risk to communities if left untreated.¹²² The Home also allows abandoned elderly people without a caregiver to be accommodated at the institution. The benefits provided to the residents include medical care and rehabilitation programs.

Figure 12: Violence against children, Maldives¹²³



In addition to State Care, children who are victims of domestic violence, abuse and neglect are provided temporary shelter in Safe Homes established at the Family and Children’s Service Centres (FCSCs). The mandate of Safe Homes includes safeguarding the rights assured in the Constitution to women and children, who are provided temporary shelter and community reintegration services, as well as psychosocial support, if required. Currently there are FCSCs in all atolls and four

Safe Homes (located in H.Dh Kulhudhufushi, G.Dh Thinadhoo, Sh. Funadhoo and S. Hithadhoo).¹²⁴ The conceptualization of the FCSCs was done with good intentions, however, the required skilled staff and other required resources are limited and appropriate investments are not made to meet the demand for services at these facilities. In 2017 family protection services attended to 1372 cases of child abuse and neglect, 424 cases of gender-based violence, 116 disabled cases and 72 elderly cases of abuse and neglect.¹²⁵

Environmental Context

The main environmental drivers in Maldives are climate change, population growth, urbanization and overcrowding in urban areas, migration and rapid economic growth. These factors directly or indirectly impact the environment and bring about habitat destruction, biodiversity loss and deteriorate air and water quality. Factors such as population growth and economic development result in increased use of resources and waste generation.¹²⁶

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.¹²⁷ The economy of Maldives relies heavily on tourism and fisheries, which depend entirely on the coastal and marine environment. 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.¹²⁸ The main threats to coastal and marine environments include increase in sea surface temperature (SST) brought by climate change, pollution and coastal modification. Warming of ocean temperature due to climate change is a key factor impacting corals

¹²² Ibrahim A (2012). Republic of the Maldives: Updating and Improving the Social Protection Index

¹²³ Derived from Case statistics reports 2017, 2018, 2019. Ministry of Gender and Family.

¹²⁴ http://gender.gov.mv/en/?page_id=2799

¹²⁵ Ministry of Gender and Family (2019). Case statistics 2017.

¹²⁶ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016.

¹²⁷ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016.

¹²⁸ *ibid*

and altering coral reef communities. High SST is known to cause coral bleaching and is also associated with crown of thorns outbreaks.

Coastal and marine pollution arise from land-based sources such as solid waste and untreated sewage disposal, 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.¹²⁹ Some efforts towards protection and conservation of coral reefs include establishment of the Inter-Agency Task force on Coral Bleaching and a coral reef monitoring program.

Biodiversity

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 GDP¹³⁰. Various studies conducted in the Maldives report 429 to 583 plants including at least 14 species of mangroves. Marine diversity is outstandingly rich and highly diverse and includes internationally threatened species. The fish diversity comprises over 1,200 species of which gobies are the most diverse group. Significant species, among others, include the whale shark, the oceanic manta ray and the reef manta ray. 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.

International agreements related to biodiversity conservation to which Maldives is party include the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the International Plant Protection Convention. Maldives is a member of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). Maldives is also a signatory to the Indian Ocean-Southeast Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) prepared under the CBD serves as a protection and conservation policy and planning document.

There are 42 Protected Areas (PA) covering 24,494 hectares (0.2 per cent of the national territory) and one biosphere reserve. Only one is managed with an effective regulation (Hanifaru Marine PA in 2011).¹³¹ 103 bird species, turtles, rays and skates and the black turtle (Kanzu kahanbu) have also been protected. Species protected under the Fisheries Act include dolphins, Napoleon wrasses, giant clams, black coral, whale shark, conch, whales, lobster (berried females and those smaller than 25cm in length) and sharks. Baa Atoll was the country's first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve designated in 2012. Efforts are being made to designate the Maldives as a UNESCO biosphere reserve.

Fresh water

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 salt water ingress due to extraction of groundwater from shallow aquifers, often though illegal pumping during construction of

¹²⁹ ibid

¹³⁰ ibid

¹³¹ ibid

foundations.¹³² 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. In Malé 76 per cent of households use bottled water and 23 per cent use desalinated piped water for drinking.¹³³ The lack of space in highly built up islands such as Malé does not allow for water storage expansion.

In the Atolls 11 per cent of the households have access to desalinated water, 75 per cent of the households use rainwater for drinking and 5 per cent of households get rainwater from places outside their household premises.¹³⁴ 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.

Future rainfall projections show an increase over northern and central regions, but a decrease in precipitation in the southern regions for the years 2021-2050. For the years 2082-2100 an overall increase in precipitation is projected.

Currently, nearly 58 per cent of the total population has access to improved sanitation systems.¹³⁵ The various type of sewerage systems in place, among others include bore sewerage, conventional deep sewer gravity and sewerage vacuum sewerage systems. However, sewerage is untreated and piped sewerage discharges offshore.

At present, Maldives is moving towards an integrated water resource management approach to address water insecurity in a changing climate.

Climate change, sea level rise & natural disasters

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 2100.¹³⁶

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.

¹³² *ibid*

¹³³ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017.

¹³⁴ *ibid*

¹³⁵ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

¹³⁶ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

Climate change and extreme weather events are pressing problems and potentially threaten the enjoyment of the right to life and the right to health. Slow-onset disasters like water shortages due to significant changes to weather patterns and salinity intrusion impact people's right to water and sanitation which are derived from the rights to health and an adequate standard of living found within the ICESCR.

As most of the country is less than one meter above sea level, loss of land through sea level rise impacts the right to self-determination, the right to housing and the right to an adequate standard of living which ultimately can lead to issues of displacement and migration. The adverse effects of climate change have disproportionate impacts on the rights of person, groups and people in vulnerable situation such as children, women, people with disabilities, and people living in poverty.

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 Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights noted the importance of giving further consideration to potential conflicts of interest in decision-making around environment, development projects and tourism to avoid harmful effects and encouraged the Government to consider inviting the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights to visit the Maldives and to conduct further research in these areas. The Special Rapporteur also recommended that disaster mitigation efforts should incorporate cultural traditional knowledge, such as about the movement of sand and fishing practices, and cultural heritage as a powerful resource to address the challenges caused by climate change and as a means to build resilience. Noting that civil society expressed the need for further awareness-raising about climate change and initiatives to combat denial of climate change, the Special Rapporteur encouraged greater consultation with the civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policy, and, in particular, the further promotion of youth leaders.

The current national disaster preparedness plan was developed for the 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.¹³⁷ However, the plan was not formally adopted and so is not implemented in a systematic manner. Stakeholder discussions noted that large infrastructure development projects had been prioritized in recent years. Programmes for community empowerment for disaster preparedness are being supported by the Maldives Red Crescent.¹³⁸

In addition to the national plan, sector specific plans exist such as the UN Contingency Plan for Emergencies, Health Emergency Operations Plan and School Emergency Operational Plans and the Velana International Airport Emergency Response Plan, that guide preparedness and response activities. However, there is a shortage of resources to implement and scale up the plans.

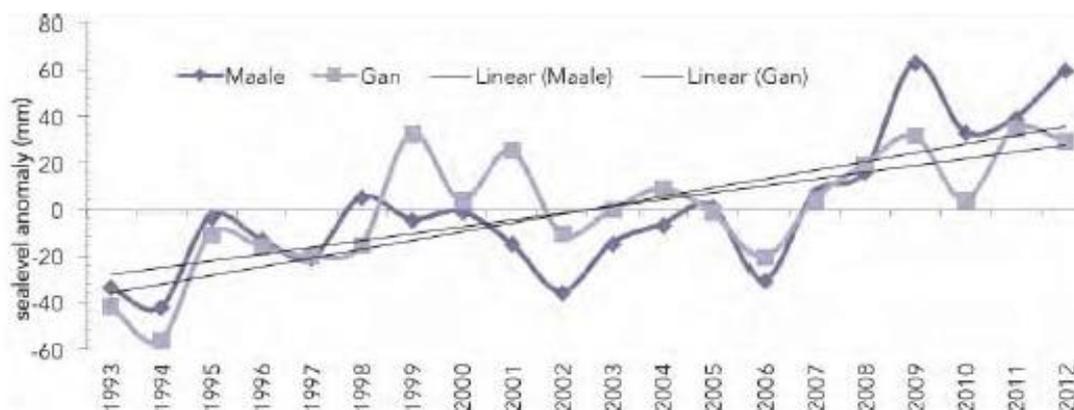
Maldives has incorporated climate change adaptation and mitigation into sectoral planning and development - the Maldives Climate Change Policy Framework (MCCPF) is the key policy document.

¹³⁷ Government of Maldives (2010). Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation 2010-2020

¹³⁸ Stakeholder interviews, Ministry of Environment

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, there is a current opportunity for linking the plan with the MCCPF and redefining its priorities.

Figure 13: Sea level anomaly for Malé and Gan from 1991 to 2012



Air quality

Rapid urbanization and increased economic growth have significantly contributed to the deterioration of the air quality in densely populated islands such as Malé, which is facing increased air pollution due to the dramatic growth of motorised land and sea transport, diesel power generation, construction and open burning of waste on the neighbouring island Thilafushi. In the islands, waste burning at dumpsites and in backyards contribute to air pollution.

In addition to local pollution, transboundary pollution is also observed to affect air quality of the Maldives. A receptor observatory to study long range transboundary pollution is strategically located in the Maldives. Measurements made by the Maldives Climate Observatory of Hanimaadhoo (MCOH) show that emissions from mainland South Asia can be transported to the Maldives over the ocean.¹³⁹

Significant pollutants affecting ambient air quality include PM2.5 and GHGs. The National Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory of 2011 reports that the main GHGs are CO₂, CH₄ and N₂O. The total emissions of Maldives for the year 2015 were 1,536.04 Gg of CO₂ equivalent with CO₂ comprising 96 per cent of that amount, CH₄ 3 per cent and N₂O 1 per cent of the total emissions.¹⁴⁰ While no studies have been conducted in Maldives to determine the link between health impacts and air quality, the morbidity of respiratory diseases remains high and shows an increasing trend from year to year. Maldives is signatory to a number of international conventions relating to air pollution control, however at the national level legal frameworks are weak.

The speed of Maldives' clean energy transition makes it a global leader in tackling household air pollution, with just 6 per cent of households now exposed to this form of air pollution.¹⁴¹ Maldives has joined the Breathe Life campaign, the first country in WHO South East Asia Region to join the campaign.

¹³⁹ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

¹⁴⁰ Ministry of Environment (2020) Maldives First Biennial update Report under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

¹⁴¹ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives

Energy, chemicals & waste management

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. The total solar capacity installed has increased from 52.1kWp in 2006 to 4,064.91kWp in 2014.¹⁴² 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. From 2010 to 2014, the expenditure on chemical imports has increased by 104.87 per cent, with an average increase of 26.21 per cent per annum.¹⁴³ Chemicals may have a range of adverse ecological and health effects, ranging from degradation of soil, groundwater contamination, marine pollution, to affecting fish and other biota. In addition, various health effects are associated with chemicals and their pollutants. The high dependence on chemicals and its potential consequences, combined with limited capacity makes effective management of chemicals a key issue in the Maldives. 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.

Over recent decades, waste generation increased in the Maldives, particularly driven by population growth, changing consumption patterns, barriers in transportation and rapid growth of the tourism sector. The per capita waste generation is estimated as 1.7Kg, 0.8Kg and 3.5Kg in Malé, atolls and resorts respectively.¹⁴⁴ The Malé region is responsible for a significant proportion of waste generated within the country. Waste is generally not segregated at household level and only a few islands practice composting. Waste from the Malé region and most resorts is transported to Thilafushi, where it is stockpiled and burned. The most common method of disposal is open burning, leading to pollution and generating conditions harmful to public health. The Maldives recognizes the importance of improving the existing methods of waste management. The first regional waste management centre established at R. Vandhoo is designed for integrated waste management.

Health care waste management has been improved with processes that are more scientific and environmentally friendly using autoclaves for disposal. A National Healthcare Waste Management Strategy for 2016-2021 has been developed and implementation initiated within 14 hospitals at Atoll level and 9 at island level.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

¹⁴³ *ibid*

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*

¹⁴⁵ Stakeholder interviews, World Health Organisation Maldives Country Office

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, the circular model would be based on three principles:

- Design out waste and pollution
- Keep products and materials in use
- Regenerate natural systems

Maldives has a potential advantage in introducing these principles, given its size and the opportunity to design new infrastructure for circularity.

The Maldives biennial climate change update report 2020 notes that capacity for measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) needs further enhancement with regard to legal, procedural and institutional aspects as well as MRV data systems. Other capacity gaps identified include technical and technological capacity for weather and climate monitoring, integrated national level geographic information systems (GIS) for disaster management, information, communication and coordination and monitoring and managing human health impacts of climate change, particularly floods, sea swells and air pollution. Underlying these capacity development needs are requirements of financing human resource development and providing regulatory authority at local governance levels for implementing the national regulations (including training and remuneration of environmental protection rangers at atoll levels).

There are also inadequate public measures towards environment protection and mitigation of climate change effects. Public awareness and empowerment programmes are conducted through school curricula and through 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 of regulatory actions, policy commitment and efforts to generate public support and trust in government institutions.¹⁴⁶

Interlinkages Among the Three Dimensions of Sustainable Development

The country’s population structure provides a potential demographic dividend - an opportunity to accelerate economic growth. With fewer births each year, the country’s working-age population grows larger in relation to the young and old dependent population. With more people in the labour force and fewer people to support, the country can exploit this window of opportunity for rapid economic growth – if the right social and economic investments and policies are made in health, education, governance and the economy. While the benefits of a dividend can be great, the gains are neither automatic nor guaranteed.

The current national developmental model, with a high concentration of services in a select few islands, coupled with a strong emphasis on health and education spending (particularly higher education), provides an excellent basis for a dividend-driven economic take off. However, several key elements are imbalanced or missing. Investment in infrastructure is not coupled with comprehensive human resources capacity planning and development. This is largely due to the endemic shortage of skilled personnel, due to the size

¹⁴⁶ Stakeholder interviews, Ministry of Environment

of the country, but also to the hollowing out of the civil service that took place over the past decade. It is also in part related to the policy prioritisation of populist projects limited to the election manifesto, an absence of programme and medium term budgeting and the tensions between political appointees and civil servants.

Additionally, beyond tourism, there is as yet no large scale effort to develop and finance the private sector, which must become the engine of growth for the dividend. And education is not designed to meet projected workforce needs.

It is imperative to invest in building a national skills base for a new, expanded private sector, and also for the policy implementation capacities of the public sector, in all service areas, and also in technical areas such as blue economy, environmental protection and biodiversity (especially with the incentive of keeping high tourist numbers), and research and data management to inform policy. The diverse initiatives of the Caring State, Dignified families, Island Life, Blue Economy and Good Governance of the SAP offer great scope for increasing local employment, but only with major new investments in job skills.

Given the high costs of delivering services to smaller and more remote atolls, Maldives' developmental policies have concentrated on larger islands (chiefly Greater Malé, but also islands in the five other regional centres). There, infrastructure is already present and services can be provided more affordably. Such policies have drawn large numbers of people from smaller islands - to Malé in particular - creating a housing crisis that is acute in the capital city, where almost one-third of the population now lives, together with a large expatriate population. Malé has become the fifth-densest city in the world, with more than 155,000 residents living on less than 2 square kilometres.¹⁴⁷ Inward migration, mainly for economic opportunities, access to quality education and healthcare has led to issues associated with overcrowding. It has also aggravated the island's social vulnerabilities and increased protection risks, as many unaccompanied young Maldivians migrate to Malé for education purposes at a very young and vulnerable age.

The reclaimed island Hulhumalé, developed in the lagoon of Hulhulé-Farukolhufushi reef where the main international airport is located, was designed with the intention to relieve congestion in Malé, and address serious concerns regarding affordability and quality of housing. In Malé, 61.5 per cent of residents are in rental accommodation, paying on average 53.3 per cent of their household income for housing. The development of new housing on a large scale will address this issue directly. This is of particular significance to young people, as they enter the job market and want to establish a family.

However, these policies have not been supported by comprehensive studies on the impacts of such relocations, and investments for appropriate social services. Maldivian culture is based on intimate communities, in which extended families provide mutual support, and living and livelihoods are conducted within the same space. The development of high-rise apartment buildings needs to be accompanied by accommodative measures to build social cohesion and avoid alienation, especially of youth and the elderly. It is perceived that inadequate housing and social services to safeguard young people who migrate for education purposes predisposes them to indulge in drug use, be recruited to gangs and become vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure (2019). National Development Plan 2019-2028 3rd draft. Unpublished

The current education and training model has created astonishingly high literacy, but relatively low workforce participation of young people. As a consequence of the limited availability of soft and hard skills in the local labour force, compounded by a tendency among many Maldivians to favour white-collar jobs over manual labour, the absence of a minimum wage requirement, as well as the cultural stigma associated with certain occupations, Maldives has experienced the paradoxical combination of major labour shortages with high NEET rates, especially among women and youth.^{148,149}

The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for men stood at 75 per cent and women at 42 per cent in 2014, showing that most women are still outside the labour force. One of the greatest barriers to women's equal representation and participation in the economy is the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work for family members and the cultural attitudes towards stereotypic work for women, which restricts their time and motivation to engage in formal and higher paying economic activities, enhance their education and training and participate in the public sphere.¹⁵⁰ This, "women's time poverty", undermines the wellbeing of women and girls, forces them to take up jobs that are informal in nature (and thereby low status and low income), leading to financial dependence on male family members. Women spend an average of 6 hours per day on household chores including unpaid care work for their family members, while men spend half that amount per day. The absence of childcare facilities make it difficult for women with children to remain employed and domestic responsibilities are cited as the main reason for women choosing to stay outside the labour force.¹⁵¹ Hence, provision of day care facilities for working women is likely to provide a welcome opportunity for women to engage in formal work.

The law and regulations prohibit discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, color, sex, political opinion, religion, social origin, marital status, or family obligations. The government has generally enforced those laws and regulations, with some exceptions that included unequal pay for women and (in past years) retribution for political association. Women tended to earn less than men for the same work and also tended to work in lower-paying industries. Discrimination against migrant workers was pervasive.¹⁵²

Overall, migration and migrant workers have massively contributed to the Maldivian economy and the labour market has become heavily dependent on international migrant labour within certain economic sectors and occupations. The tourism sector was initially subject to a limit on the number of foreign nationals it could employ. However, the limit was gradually reversed from a ratio of 55:45 (locals to foreign nationals) to 45:55, and the ratio is not strictly observed by all employers, as they find it difficult to attract local workers for various reasons, for example resorts' isolated locations, the stigma associated with work in resorts, and the lack of soft and hard skills among local jobseekers.

¹⁴⁸ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment

¹⁴⁹ Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Environmental & social management framework

¹⁵⁰ Abdullah F, Azfa A, Abdulghafoor H, Shafeega F (2019). Research papers on situation of women in Maldives. UN women and UNFPA.

¹⁵¹ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment.

¹⁵² Department of State (2019). Maldives 2018 Human Rights Report. United States. NGOs reported government agencies implemented discriminatory policies towards expatriate labourers.

According to employment visa approval records, the majority of foreign construction workers are from Bangladesh, and most teachers and doctors are from India.¹⁵³ Such a reliance on migrant workers has benefited employers in the short-term, as the lower-skilled are employed at low wages and provided very basic accommodation (often housed at the work site). International migrants also now predominate in fisheries, tailoring and informal sector work traditionally carried out by women, at cheaper costs, displacing women and making them more dependent.

To avoid long-term negative impacts it will be important to review the existing labour market systems in the country, to include and promote skills and job matching for the local population and to create family friendly workplaces.

The low quality of education and gaps in health, physical education, life skills and civic education, along with limited skills for employment pose a number of threats to health and wellbeing of the population. This includes unsafe sexual and reproductive health behaviours and decisions, unhealthy dietary and consumption practices and lifestyles, including drug use, poor psychosocial health and emergence of mental health problems. Young women are particularly vulnerable to these health effects. Furthermore, with poor health screening of international migrant workers and limited access to the health system by the international migrant population (due to inadequate local health insurance cover), there is a high risk of preventable morbidity and mortality in this population.¹⁵⁴

The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) emphasizes the interlinkages between environment and the economy:

“Maldives has a narrow economic base, with tourism and tourism related sectors contributing to more than two thirds of GDP. As a result, the economy is highly vulnerable to world travel patterns, as demonstrated by the economic slowdown owing to the international financial crisis of 2008. The 2004 tsunami also demonstrated the vulnerability of the country to natural disasters, along with climate related events that affected most of Maldives’ coral resource in 2016. Maldives is heavily dependent on imports for sustenance and livelihoods. Access to finance and capital markets, and suboptimal administrative and legal systems affect investment and trade potential.”¹⁵⁵

The environmental effects of climate change and development pose a high risk to sustained economic growth given the high reliance on tourism. The tourism industry depends on a pristine environment and the conservation of coastal and marine resources, as well as social stability.¹⁵⁶ While the beach is the most commonly cited reason for tourist arrivals to Maldives, the beaches are highly dynamic and beach erosion is one of the most significant challenges faced by islands.

Economic growth also leads to increased consumption and resource use, habitat destruction for infrastructure development and increased pollution. The tourism sector is responsible for a large amount of electricity use, transport use and waste generation within the country.¹⁵⁷ Increased consumption and

¹⁵³ Plewa P (2019). Migration in Maldives: A country Profile, International Organisation for Migration.

¹⁵⁴ Among the cases of Hepatitis B and Tuberculosis reported by Health Protection Agency between 2014 and 2016, most cases were among international migrant workers.

¹⁵⁵ SAP, op cit., page 84

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Tourism (2013). Fourth tourism master plan 2013-2017

¹⁵⁷ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016.

imbalances in the ecosystem lead to public health issues such as increased vector borne diseases, cancers and birth defects related to environmental pollution. Environmental degradation creates increased risk of natural disasters and a reduced ability to mitigate their effects at island level. Nevertheless, economic growth and associated revenue increases are essential to generate greater opportunities to adopt more sustainable planning and development measures, to minimise the degradation of the environment, and develop a circular economy and a healthy population.

Issues of governance, rule of law and human rights have wide implications for social cohesion, stability and sustainability of economic growth. Creating and maintaining a broad social consensus on governance – and on a culture that retains traditional values while adapting to modern patterns of life - is essential to provide a foundation for all of the initiatives and needs discussed, not only in the governance sector, but the economic and social sectors and in the regeneration and protection of the environment. The cost of instability and conflict is widely reflected in the loss of scarce human resource capacities, high turnover of staff and disruption of administrative systems across the sectors.

Chapter 2. National vision for sustainable development

Key development priorities and needs of the Maldives

The Maldives' development agenda is currently guided by the government's four-year strategic action plan

Figure 14: Five focus areas of Strategic Action Plan 2019-2023



2019-2023 (SAP). The SAP outlines the governments' priorities and targets for its term as the executive. The President's note to the SAP makes clear that the SAP 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.¹⁵⁸ 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 government'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. The five themes are **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 economy and well-being of the Maldives is tied to the health and wealth of the natural environment, primarily the ocean. The largest contributors to the economy, tourism and fisheries sectors are highly dependent on the wellbeing of the ocean, coral reefs, beaches and marine life."

The blue economy sector consists of six subsectors; fisheries & marine resources, agriculture, tourism, small and medium enterprise development (SME), labour, employment & migration, and economic diversification.

¹⁵⁸ Government of Maldives (2019). Strategic Action Plan 2019-2023

The Caring State

Maldives is now in the high human development category. Despite these gains, the SAP recognizes that inequalities in the Maldives continue to grow, especially in the provision of essential services, quality of education and healthcare, social protection, and access to basic infrastructure. Addressing these inequalities as recommended in the Human Development Report 2014, requires “innovative financing and service provisioning options, capacity building, and management”.

The focus of the SAP on a “Caring State” is analogous to the development of a rights-based approach to the relationship between public duty-bearers and citizen rights-holders. The SAP gives priority to policies that are critical to bridge the growing income and wealth inequality in the country, exacerbated by geography. Priorities aim to narrow the income and wealth gap and also address root causes of such inequalities such as providing avenues of childcare and flexible working hours to increase women’s employment and introducing a minimum wage. While state expenditures on healthcare, education, higher education, social protection are relatively high, to address growing socio-economic problems in the country the sector needs immediate reforms. This needs to be coupled with increased fiscal space to make meaningful investments in developing a skilled social service and social protection workforce with the adequate financial resources to reach the most vulnerable families and children. With a recognition of the endemic substance abuse problem, which results in rampant domestic violence and abuse and neglect of children, the government must also invest in better prevention and rehabilitation systems.

The Caring State has five subsectors; (i) Health, (ii) Education, (iii) Higher Education, (iv) Social Protection, and (v) Prevention of Narcotic Abuse & Drug Rehabilitation.

Dignified families

The rapid transformation and urbanization of the country has created social strains. The government gives the strengthening of the family a first-order priority, as the foundation of Maldivian society. Addressing key issues affecting family life, particularly gender equality and women’s empowerment will help improve quality of life and thereby the overall development of the country.

As the SAP explains: “Policies focusing on strengthening family ties and addressing socio-economic issues are a recurring theme in all sectoral policies. The government views that a special focus on building stronger families is central to addressing issues relating to domestic violence, child protection and youth vulnerabilities. Creating an enabling environment for families through provision of affordable housing schemes will help build stronger and resilient families. Growing problems of substance abuse among young people, school dropout rates, mental health, and an ageing adult population are issues that can be addressed through the family.”¹⁵⁹ It must however be noted that the changing family structure in Maldivian society and wider socio-economic determinants need to be considered in addressing issues affecting quality of life.

This sector has six subsectors; (i) Family, (ii) Housing, (ii) Youth, (iv) Community Empowerment, (v) Sports, and (vi) Islamic Faith.

Jazeeraa Dhiriulhun (island life)

¹⁵⁹ SAP, op. cit., page 185

The term conceives a development model based on citizen engagement, inclusivity and sustainability. Its ideology is living in harmony with the island environment. Citizens' livelihoods, cultural identity and well-being are to be derived sustainably through connectivity and management of natural resources. Citizen voice and agency is a fundamental aspect of the concept.

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

The Maldives' successful development has enabled it to progress from a low level of human development to a high human development ranking. This process has included the introduction of democracy. As the SAP states, the country's efforts to consolidate democracy have been challenging. The new Constitution in 2008 introduced a separation of state powers between the executive, legislature and judiciary; introduction of multiparty elections; establishment of independent institutions; decentralised governance; and a comprehensive bill of rights and freedoms for citizens.

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." It is also seen as an opportunity to implement policies that will increase transparency, accountability and regularize Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council elections.

This sector consists of 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 Long-Term Plans

While the government's priorities for the next four years are set out in the SAP, work is underway on reviving a national planning capacity and framework, after a decade without a national plan. A reconstituted National Planning department within the Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (MNPI) is working on the 8th National Development Plan (NDP) 2019-2028¹⁶⁰.

The draft NDP aims at "Transforming Maldives to an Equitable, Prosperous, Inclusive, Connected Island Nation". The principles of the draft NDP are:¹⁶¹

- Fostering evidence-based policy formulation
- Exploring blue economy concepts
- Developing global value chains
- Promoting environmental sustainability
- Complying with international commitments
- Advocating gender mainstreaming

¹⁶⁰ Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (2019). Third draft of the 8th National Development Plan 2019-2028

¹⁶¹ Maldives National Partnership Forum, Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure, 17th June 2019

- Adopting a human rights-based approach

The Ministry identifies five challenges to be addressed by the NDP: the geographic dispersion and isolation of much of the nation; the threats posed by climate change; the consequences of rapid urbanization and unplanned settlements; limitations of resources and capacity; and the tendency toward ad hoc development approaches and inefficiencies.

The approach taken by the draft NDP to achieve national transformation is through maximizing opportunities: the expansion and diversification of an inclusive and equitable economy; improving infrastructure and institutional capacities; reaping the demographic dividend and empowering youth; growing physical and digital connectivity; developing a strong international standing, and; conserving and promoting Maldives' unique environmental and cultural resource base.

The draft NDP is closely aligned with the country's national commitments such as the Maldives 4.0 Initiative and regional development and global commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Agreement, Nationally Determined Conditions (NDCs), the SENDAI Framework for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway. Their undertakings are reflected in the national priority objectives contained in the draft NDP, to ensure compliance and alignment. This alignment with global commitments and approaches will ensure that the implementation of an adopted NDP will pursue sustainable socioeconomic development and sound environmental protection for improving livelihoods whilst safeguarding human rights, protection of marginalised sections of society and promoting comprehensive risk reduction.¹⁶²

The National Strategic Development Framework (NSDF) outlined in the draft NDP provides proposed strategic long-term goals. It specifies 13 National Strategic Outcomes to guide the nation in its development effort. They are:

- 1) National Unity and Dignified Living for All,
- 2) Protected Natural Environment and Heritage,
- 3) Quality Equitable Education and Training,
- 4) Inclusive Affordable and Adequate Needs-Based Housing,
- 5) Robust Climate-Resilient Physical and Social Infrastructure,
- 6) Healthy Lifestyles and a Caring Society,
- 7) Transparent and Accountable Governance,
- 8) Inclusive Participatory Planning,
- 9) Connectivity of Islands through a Hierarchy of Settlements,
- 10) Accessible and Affordable Quality Healthcare for All,
- 11) Economy Driven by Clean and Renewable Energy,
- 12) Skills Generation and Job Creation, and
- 13) Efficiency and Competency in Public Services Delivery.

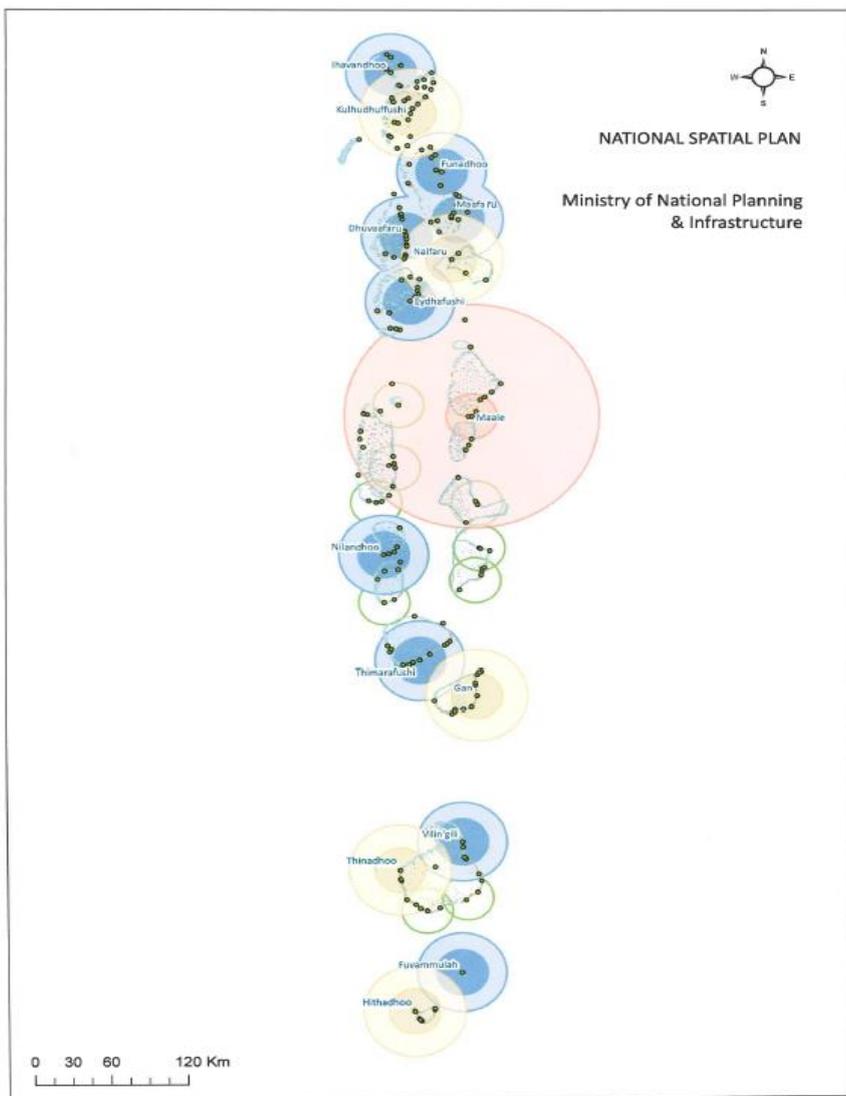
While all of these long-term goals reflect current government priorities and policies for the period 2019-2023, and are consistent with the SAP, there is as yet no process established for national dialogue and

¹⁶² Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (2019). Third draft of the 8th National Development Plan 2019-2028.

participation, or for the consultative elaboration and adoption of the Plan. The launch of the SAP has focused attention on the medium term, and the NDP remains a technical draft at present. No timeline or process for finalization of the NDP has been established.

Concurrently, work is ongoing for a long-term National Spatial Plan 2020-2040 (NSP) that 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

Figure 15: Proposed development hubs



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.¹⁶³ The NSP broadly integrates the national and international commitments of the country and will especially support the timely delivery of the SAP, work towards the draft NDP and the SDGs of Agenda 2030.

The NSP takes into account the unique atoll geography and island environment of Maldives and lays out a vision that seeks to break from current ad-hoc and centralized development efforts; bring about a more equitable distribution of development benefits across the nation; optimize use of resources; and harmonize social, economic and environmental

development efforts. A key aspect of the NSP is that it looks to create a National Transportation Network (NTN) as the foundation of the plan, which is also consistent with the SAP.

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

¹⁶³ Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (2019). Maldives National Spatial Plan 2020-2040.

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. Overall the exercise indicated the existence of some form of sectoral policy or plan for a majority 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.^{164,165} In local governance, 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.¹⁶⁶

The Maldives Energy Policy and Strategy 2016 is the key policy document guiding the development of the energy sector in the Maldives – it is aligned with SDG 7. The objectives of the policy include promoting energy conservation and efficiency, increasing the share of renewable energy in the national energy mix, and improving the reliability and sustainability of electricity while increasing national energy security.¹⁶⁷

The sustainable and sound management of waste poses as a significant challenge in terms of protecting human health and the environment. The National Waste Management Policy which was introduced in 2015, recognises these challenges and is geared towards institutionalising appropriate, environmentally sound and commercially viable and sustainable models for waste management in the country. A legal framework is being considered to reduce plastic pollution - that will contribute to the realisation of SDG 14 through reduction of marine pollution, in particular from land based activities. The Maldives is also implementing an Integrated Water Resource Management approach towards the provision of sustained sources of safe drinking water.

In the fisheries sector, although there is no specific reference to the SDGs, the Maldives is continuing its engagement with regional and international partners in making fisheries in the Indian Ocean more sustainable. In this regard, the country has been closely collaborating with the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission, by providing data and other necessary information to protect the marine environment as well as supporting the elimination of illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries in the region. These activities have significance for Goal 14.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Ministry of Health (2016). Health Master Plan 2016-2025.

¹⁶⁵ Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education (2019). Education Sector Plan

¹⁶⁶ Sobir R(2017). Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to assess the Maldives readiness to implement the SDGs. Ministry of Environment and Energy and UNDP.

¹⁶⁷ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

¹⁶⁸ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

The relationship between economic, social and environmental dimensions in the national vision for sustainable development, human rights, and peace

Policies and strategic actions envisioned across the economic, social and environmental dimensions in the national vision for sustainable development reflected in the SAP have wider implications for the human rights and peace dimensions of the SDGs.

The SAP envisions a prosperous society based on the wealth of the natural environment, primarily the ocean, as economic activities in Maldives are highly dependent on the wellbeing of the ocean, coral reefs, beaches and marine life¹⁶⁹. The policies under 'Jazeera Dhiriulhun' are cross cutting across a number of subsectors and relate to decentralized governance, protection of the environment and establishment of a national transport network and development of regional hubs, expected to improve access to social services and economic activity.

The ideology behind 'Jazeera Dhiriulhun' centres around living in harmony with the island environment, where citizen's livelihoods, economies, cultural identity, and well-being are derived sustainably.¹⁷⁰ However, SAP priorities are heavy on infrastructure development and aspects of human resource development for the proposed services do not appear to be sufficiently prioritized nor budgeted. For instance, the SAP policy on free education for undergraduate degrees is not particularly mapped to the human resource requirements for the proposed transport network, digital network or to the social infrastructure proposed for the regional hubs. This raises questions of sustainability and feasibility towards achievement of SDG targets.

Peace and human rights are central to both the 'Jazeera Dhiriulhun' vision for island communities, and the elaborated priorities under the Good Governance sector. The government is strongly committed to the twin priorities of democratic consolidation through justice, human rights and accountable institutions, and policies that meet international standards, and a decentralization that gives voice, participation and inclusion to island communities, women and youth.

Prioritised SDGs and indicators proposed in the draft NDP

The Strategic Action Plan is targeted at the broad national challenges addressed by the SDGs. While the SAP does not contain a national vision and framework towards achievement of national Agenda 2030 goals, its policies are consistent with them, and many could be mapped to the SDGs.

The draft NDP takes the policies of the SAP and develops them into 13 long-term goals for the national development strategic framework, the successful implementation of which are expected to support the realisation of many of the SDGs¹⁷¹. The draft NDP provides a list of priority indicators as priority (see table below), however this appears to be based on data availability and is thereby incomplete. For instance, it does not contain any indicators in goals 5, 10, 12, 16 or 17. The SDG division of MNPI has raised a number of concerns on data gaps and challenges to localize and prioritise the SDG goals and targets. As such the table below should be considered a 'work in progress', recognizing that SDG prioritization is incomplete and is

¹⁶⁹ Government of Maldives (2019). Strategic Action Plan 2019-2023.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*

¹⁷¹ Ministry of National Planning and Infrastructure (2019). Third draft of the 8th National Development Plan 2019-2028.

evolving based on data availability¹⁷². Furthermore, it must be stressed that the proposed NDP is in draft form and has not been adopted by the Government.

Figure 16: Prioritised SDGs and indicators proposed in the draft NDP¹⁷³

Indicator	Directive	2018
Inclusive Socio-Economic Development		
1 Access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities (% of population)	SDG 6.1	68
2 Access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities, rural (% of population)	SDG 6.1	58
3 Access to clean and safe water in adequate quantities, urban (% of population)	SDG 6.1	80
4 Access to central sewerage system (% of population)	SDG 6.2	45
5 Access to central sewerage system, urban (% of population)	SDG 6.2	60
6 Access to central sewerage system, rural (% of population)	SDG 6.2	40
7 Access to electricity (% of population)	SDG 7.1	10
8 Population with primary reliance on wood fuels for cooking (%)		5
9 Energy intensity (consumption of imported fuel per unit of GDP in MJ/MVR)	SDG 7.3	2.7
10 Energy intensity (power consumption per unit of GDP in kWh/MVR)	SDG 7.3	0.2
11 Renewable energy share in electricity generation (%)	SDG 7.2	67
12 Renewable energy share in total energy consumption (%)	SDG 7.2	13
13 Increase home ownership (% of total households)	SDG 11.1	25
14 Food sourced domestically compared to total food available (%)		32
15 Net enrolment rate for early childhood education (%)	SDG 4.2	95
16 Net enrolment rate for primary education (%)	SDG 4.1	99
17 Net enrolment rate for secondary education (%)	SDG 4.1	90
18 Perinatal mortality rate per 1,000 total births	SDG 3.2	6.5
19 Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births [SDG Target 12 by 2030]	SDG 3.2	8
20 Under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 live births [SDG Target 25 by 2030]	SDG 3.2	9
21 Maternal mortality per 100,000 live births (%) [SDG Target 70 by 2030]	SDG 3.1	44.0
22 Average Life Expectancy at Birth (years) Male		73
23 Average Life Expectancy at Birth (years) Female		74
24 Premature mortality due to NCDs (30-70 years) (%)	SDG 3.4	67
25 Prevalence of stunting under-5 (%)	SDG 2.2	15
26 Prevalence of wasting under-5 (%)	SDG 2.2	9
27 Doctors per 1,000 population		0.6
28 Population below USD 1.25/day, National (%)	SDG 1.1	6.6
29 Population below USD 1.25/day, Rural (%)	SDG 1.1	10.4
30 Population below USD 1.25/day, Urban (%)	SDG 1.1	1.5
31 Population below MVR 74/day, National (%)	SDG 1.2	8.2
32 Population below MVR 74/day, Rural (%)	SDG 1.2	12.8
33 Population below MVR 74/day, Urban (%)	SDG 1.2	1.7

¹⁷² The planning and mapping of SDGs with national policies and priorities can benefit through implementing the ESCAP led “EPIC (Every Policy is Connected)” tool. The usage of the tool will better ensure gender mainstreaming in the national policies.

¹⁷³ This is an initial draft and is being further developed by the SDG division of MNPI

34 Poverty Gini Coefficient (0–1) ¹⁷⁴	SDG 1.2	0.3
Transformational Strategic Thrusts		
29 Average GDP growth rate in period (%)		7.2
30 Income per capita (USD)	SDG 8.1	10000.0
31 Total Investment (% of GDP)	SDG 17.3	22.5
32 Private Sector Investment (% of GDP)	SDG 17.3	10.0
33 Public Debt (% of GDP)		65.0
34 Unemployment Rate (%)	SDG 8.5	8.5
35 Merchandise trade (% of GDP)		65.0
36 Tourism direct GDP (% of GDP)	SDG 8.9.1	50.0
37 Proportion of population covered by a mobile network (%)	SDG 9.c	98.0
Environmental Sustainability		
38 Reduction in Greenhouse gas emissions from 2018 baseline (NDC target) (%)	SDG 13.2	30.0
39 Establish MPAs targeting 30% of marine areas (%)	SDG 14.2	2.0
40 Areas under long term conservation (%)	SDG 15.1	5.0

These provisional indicators from the draft National Development Plan are incomplete but appear to broadly reflect the national realities the SAP seeks to transform and can be taken as a ‘proxy’ mapping of some of the SDGs to national plans. As noted earlier there are no specific linkages in the SAP with the SDG indicators in a number of areas. The absence of indicators relating to SDG 5 on gender equality is striking considering the situation in the Maldives. While a few other SDGs are also missing, the absence of SDGs 10 and 16 are also notable considering growing inequality and root causes related to good governance.

Although a number of gaps are evident in the proposed SDG indicators, it must be stressed that the policy priorities for the next four years are more fully outlined in the SAP. For instance, the SAP includes a subsector on gender equality under the Good Governance theme, and action on this subsector is expected to enable the country to progress towards Agenda 2030 goals of gender equality.

¹⁷⁴ The Gini Coefficient measures inequality and is linked to SDG 10.

Chapter 3. Country progress towards the 2030 Agenda¹⁷⁵

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 undertaken fully in the Maldives, it is not currently possible to report progress at these levels. Despite the fact that some work on selection of priority goals and targets has been initiated, as reflected in the drafting of a proposed National Development Plan, it must be emphasized that this draft is under development and incomplete and has not been adopted. At the time of developing this CCA there is little evidence of broader stakeholder participation, including vulnerable groups, to prioritise, monitor and follow up on the SDG indicators. 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. Guest houses, 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.

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.

An analysis across the indicators suggest that much progress has been achieved in the '**People**' targets. These include targets on poverty, and major health and education targets. Income poverty levels stood at 6.6 per cent in 2016 using the internal poverty line of \$1.25 (MVR70)¹⁷⁶ while in 2009/10 (using a different methodology) poverty levels were assessed to be at 15 per cent. In Malé, 1.5 per cent of the population lives below the \$1.25 poverty line while 10.4 per cent of the population in the atolls lives below that poverty line.

¹⁷⁵ In the absence of a national strategy mapping to the SDGs, this section is based on a sample review of key indicators against available data. The draft National Development Plan, when adopted, will provide a basis for a comprehensive assessment.

¹⁷⁶ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report IV: Poverty & Inequality

In this regard, the focus needs to be on minimizing the urban-rural gap in the quality of service provision and tracking poverty.¹⁷⁷

Maternal, child and neonatal mortality rates continued to decrease while childhood nutrition indicators improved¹⁷⁸ and out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure decreased from 49 in 2011 to 29 per cent in 2016.¹⁷⁹ Further reductions in neonatal 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 reproductive aged women, early detection and management. 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. Ninety-three per cent of children (both sexes) are in pre-primary learning before official primary school age and the total net enrolment ratio in primary education stands at 99 per cent (both sexes). The challenges with regard to education relate to its quality, improving the current low levels of functional literacy and learning outcomes, improving life skills, particularly those related to sexual and reproductive behavior, inculcating civic responsibility and volunteerism through education, and increasing enrolment in higher secondary education.¹⁸⁰

Gender equality scores are low across all the targets. Numbers of women experiencing gender-based violence continue to be high, with one in four women experiencing some form of violence by their current or most recent husband/partner.¹⁸¹ The labour force participation rate is low among women, which is the result 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. This 'time poverty' forces women to take up jobs that are informal in nature and which exclude them from the labour protections and benefits of the retirement pension scheme.

Numbers of women in managerial positions are also low (at 19.5 per cent)¹⁸² and women earn 20 per cent less than men.¹⁸³ 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.¹⁸⁴ Additionally, women's engagement in politics and other leadership activities is limited. In the parliamentary election held in April 2019, even though 33 women contested for parliament, only four women won, and the number of women in parliament went down from 5 to 4.

The existence of nutrition challenges, low secondary and higher school enrolment rates and high unemployment and NEET rates in a country with upper-middle income status is alarming and signals an

¹⁷⁷ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

¹⁷⁸ Ministry of Health (2017). Health SDG profile.

¹⁷⁹ Ministry of Health (2019). National Health Accounts 2015-2017

¹⁸⁰ Ministry of Education (2019). Education Sector Analysis

¹⁸¹ Ministry of Health & ICF. Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/17

¹⁸² National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment

¹⁸³ National Bureau of Statistics (2019). Population and development in Maldives 2019. ICDP25+.

¹⁸⁴ ADB (2014). Maldives Gender Equality Diagnostic of Selected Sectors

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.

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.¹⁸⁵ However, waste management, energy and emission targets remain problematic. 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 GHG emissions and while there are initiatives on energy production and waste management, there are no policy initiatives on reducing emissions from vehicles.¹⁸⁶

For the Maldives, where 80 per cent of land is less than 1 meter above sea level, and with 42 per cent of its population and more than 70 per cent of its 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 the past 18 years. The unusually warm temperature due to El Nino resulted in more than 60 per cent of coral reefs bleaching,¹⁸⁷ which 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 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, analyze 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 continued political instability. There is limited national data but progress on governance can be assessed with the international governance indicators discussed in Chapter 1. The VNR points to the legislative changes made to improve access to information and the criminal code,¹⁸⁸ which has since been enacted along with a number of judicial reforms that are currently underway.

Progress has been made in relation to domestic violence including violence against children and gender-based violence, with enactment of appropriate laws. However, as in other target areas, a number of serious challenges exist with regard to awareness and implementation of these laws and providing protective services for victims.

¹⁸⁵ Ministry of Health & ICF (2019) Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017

¹⁸⁶ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). State of the Environment 2016

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸⁸ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

The key challenge in 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 the 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.

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.^{189,190} The localization of the SDGs has not progressed, and a number of data gaps exist, even though 80 per cent of the data is expected to be available to be drawn from administrative systems. The 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 Judiciary that is critical for Goal 16 and a number of other SDGs.¹⁹¹ 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.¹⁹² 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.

The status and progress of SDG nationalization and localization

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.

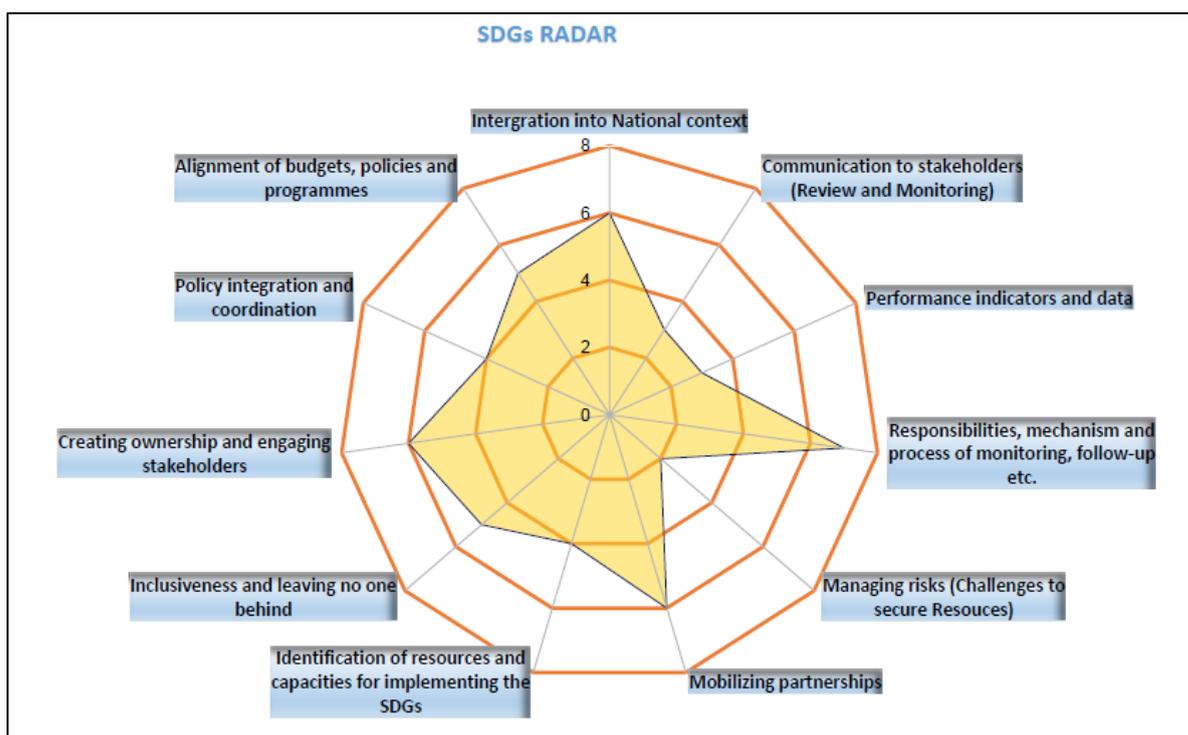
¹⁸⁹ Auditor General's Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals

¹⁹⁰ Sobir R (2017). Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to assess the Maldives readiness to implement the SDGs. Ministry of Environment and Energy and UNDP

¹⁹¹ Auditor General's Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals

¹⁹² Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

Figure 17: Progress towards identifying resources and capacities



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 16.¹⁹³

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 SDGs fit in within the government’s mandate and operation.¹⁹⁴ 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 not been undertaken. SDGs are reflected in sectoral policies and plans and are being integrated in newly developed plans. Although work is being done towards a long-term national development plan, its absence remains one of the main challenges for policy alignment with the Agenda 2030 goals. 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

¹⁹³ Auditor General’s Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals

¹⁹⁴ Sobir R(2017). Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to assess the Maldives readiness to implement the SDGs. Ministry of Environment and Energy and UNDP

mobilisation and prioritization, 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.¹⁹⁵ With limited coordination among agencies, policies are developed using a silo approach that does 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 based reporting and knowledge and familiarity with budgeting processes and budget analyses. In addition, weakness in institutional setup and capacity to gather and consolidate sectorial data needs to be addressed. There is no evidence of a 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 capacity.¹⁹⁶

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, 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. More positively, the SDG division, in cooperation with NBS, has initiated the preparation of a data quality assurance framework.¹⁹⁷

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.

¹⁹⁵ Auditor General's Office (2019). Performance audit of preparedness for implementation of sustainable development goals.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁹⁷ *ibid*

Financing: The government has not identified and secured the resources and capacities (means of implementation) needed to implement the 2030 Agenda.¹⁹⁸ The rapid integrated assessment looked at the budgeting process and identified several entry points to integrate and prioritize SDGs within it, 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.¹⁹⁹ 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 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.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹⁹ Ministry of Environment and Energy (2017). Voluntary National Review for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2017

Chapter 4: Leaving No-one Behind

Rapid economic growth, changing rural and urban dynamics, the high rate of internal migration to Malé and the high rate of growth of the greater Malé area, as well as political and social change has produced major social dislocation, disparities in access to services, increased inequalities and vulnerabilities, and uneven development overall. These changes have reinforced divisions and produced major issues. These touch everyone in Maldives, especially affecting many women, children, youth, migrants (internal and international), people in the atolls and those with special needs.

Challenges are widespread for women, children and youth. Over a quarter of women are either unemployed or not looking for a job. Youth unemployment is at 8 per cent. The government is the top employer among Maldivians. Tourism and construction, the main drivers of growth, rely mostly on foreign labour and male employment. About two thirds of Maldivians are employed in jobs not related to tourism, suggesting a misalignment between the drivers of growth and aspirations of jobseekers.

The SAP is focused on addressing issues faced by these and other vulnerable groups in society in a holistic manner. However, the social dynamics creating social pathology and exclusion are strong. Concerted efforts are required to assure that those at risk are not left behind.

Women

The Maldives achieved five out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ahead of target and effectively eradicated extreme poverty.²⁰⁰ However, gender inequality ranked high among the three remaining MDGs. Achieving gender equality and gender parity is critical to realizing the UN's Agenda 2030.

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.²⁰¹ However, the at present, the country has a particularly low representation of women in national and local governments, low in the workforce and now experiences high levels of inequality, with a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Women continue to bear the burden of childcare and domestic chores, and social expectations and stereotypes make it difficult for them to engage in economic and political activities on a par with men. The perception that the role of women is to be at home has increased with the growing conservatism in the country as evidenced by the drastic decline in those who think women should have equal rights in the family to only 7.4 per cent in 2019²⁰²

Maldivian society has traditionally followed a uniquely moderate form of Islam and civil laws have been described as embodying a 'gender egalitarian nature'.²⁰³ Gender disparities in enrolment rates from pre-primary to secondary school are significantly less evident than in the majority of other countries in the region.

²⁰⁰ Drawn in part from Shadiya Ibrahim, *Maldivian Women's Rights*, March 2017

²⁰¹ Fulu, E. *Domestic Violence in Asia – Globalisation, Gender and Islam in the Maldives*, 2014, Introduction.

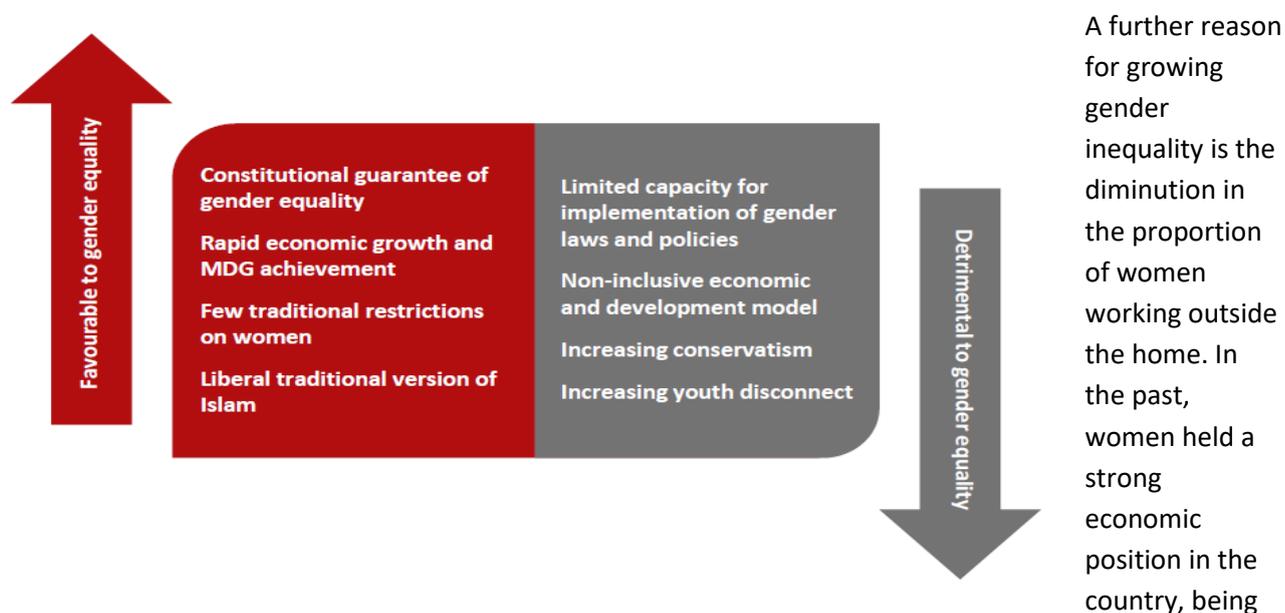
²⁰² UNDP & HRCM, *The "Rights Side of Life"*, Third Report, final draft January 2020, page 34.

²⁰³ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Maldives*, 2016, page 2.

However, dramatic changes to the Maldivian social fabric are challenging this equilibrium.²⁰⁴ During the last four decades the tourism industry has increased exponentially and has brought western influences to the country. At the same time, there has been a concerted propagation of conservative religious views. And there have been high levels of labour migration from other countries in the region, including from other Islamic nations.

These and other stresses of very rapid change have increased the prevalence of conservative Islam. It has been suggested that this period of rapid industrialisation, globalisation and social change has served to unbalance the moderate island life that has existed for so long in the Maldives and has contributed to conservatism and increasingly negative perspectives about women’s rights in the country.²⁰⁵

Figure 18: Factors affecting gender equality



responsible for drying, salting and preserving fish after the men delivered the haul to the shore.²⁰⁶ Women have lost ground in fisheries - with the industrialization of fish processing and with an increase in fresh fish exports, there has been a sharp decrease in women’s role in the industry. The influx of international migrant labour has also contributed to displacement of Maldivian women from industries such as tailoring and agriculture, as these industries too have been industrialised. And women largely do not work in tourism, due to cultural disapproval.

²⁰⁴ Fulu, E. and Miedema, S. Violence Against Women: Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model, Violence Against Women 2015, Vol. 21(12) 1434, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077801215596244> accessed 22 October 2019

²⁰⁵ Fulu, E. and Miedema, S. Violence Against Women: Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model, Violence Against Women 2015, Vol. 21(12) 1434, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077801215596244> accessed 22 October 2019; El-Horr, J. and Pande, R. *Understanding Gender in the Maldives: Toward Inclusive Development*, World Bank Group, 2016.

²⁰⁶ El-Horr, J. and Pande, R. *Understanding Gender in the Maldives: Toward Inclusive Development*, World Bank Group, 2016, page 14.

Women have become increasingly under-represented in the labour market, which in turn reduces their economic independence.²⁰⁷ Very few women participate in the tourism sector,²⁰⁸ because it is viewed as inappropriate for a woman to travel to other islands and work around tourists who drink alcohol and dress scantily. Although the tourism industry dominates the country's economy, women constitute only 7 per cent of the tourism labour force. Women suffer disproportionately high unemployment levels with a large proportion considered economically inactive. Women with disabilities are further marginalized²⁰⁹.

Being financially reliant on their husbands, women have less social mobility and less decision-making power, and less opportunities to leave abusive and violent relationships.

About 39 per cent of Maldivian households are female headed, with poverty rates somewhat higher than for male headed households.²¹⁰ Households headed by females have poverty rates of 8.8 per cent while those headed by males have poverty rates of 7.8 per cent. These higher poverty rates are most likely associated with differences in labour market characteristics of females. For example, labour force participation rate for women is 42 per cent compared to 75 per cent for men. The highest contribution to multidimensional poverty for women is from health, indicating lack of access.

The Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services has taken some steps to counter growing gender inequality. Since 2016, the Ministry has held an annual event titled "Girls Lead Initiative" to motivate girls to achieve their goals. This initiative however has not been widely publicised. In 2018, the Ministry expanded the activity to a six-day programme to promote the rights of the girl child and raise awareness on the challenges faced by girls within communities. In addition, activities were held to foster girls' interest for non-traditional roles as well as to provide career guidance from women working in sectors where women are largely under-represented.²¹¹

Women's participation in politics has been limited. Only 35 of the 386 candidates standing for election in 2018 were women, and only 4 were elected (11 per cent of those who stood for election) compared to 83 men (24 per cent of those who stood for election).²¹² UNDP in 2017²¹³ cited women's lack of support from family members, limited political connections and financial resources as barriers to participation as candidates. The Commonwealth Observer Group saw socio-cultural beliefs, economic disadvantages faced by women and the burden of women's traditional roles in the home as additional factors.²¹⁴ Transparency Maldives identified further factors: "a striking technical knowledge gap when it comes to effective

²⁰⁷ Fulu, E. and Miedema, S. Violence Against Women: Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model, Violence Against Women 2015, Vol. 21(12) 1435, <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077801215596244>> accessed 23 October 2019.

²⁰⁸ www.un.org.mv/un-news-room/maldivian-womens-rights/ accessed 2 October 2019.

²⁰⁹ At present there is a lack of data disaggregated by disability and gender.

²¹⁰ 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.

²¹¹ Ministry of Gender and Family, Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Children, Women, Elderly and Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2018.

²¹² Reports of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Maldives Parliamentary Elections 6 April 2019, p.24, https://thecommonwealth.org/sites/default/files/inline/MaldivesFinalReport_13-06-19.pdf accessed 12 December 2019.

²¹³ [UNDP - Women's Political Participation in the Maldives, February 2017](https://www.un.org.mv/un-news-room/women-political-participation-maldives-february-2017/) accessed 12 December 2019

²¹⁴ Reports of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Maldives Parliamentary Elections 6 April 2019, p.24,

campaigning, lobbying, fundraising, budgeting, legislative drafting, constituency relations, and public speaking,” which impacts on women's interest and confidence in running for political positions.²¹⁵

The Maldives is currently 184th out of 192 countries in terms of the number of women Members of Parliament.²¹⁶ The Commonwealth Observer Group urged the government and in particular the Majlis to make efforts to increase women's participation as political candidates in future elections and to accelerate implementation of the gender equality stipulations detailed in Maldives' Gender Equality Act of 2016.²¹⁷

Decentralization and the creation of local councils with substantive authority and resources is seen as a critical opportunity for women's empowerment, and 2019 legislation has reserved one third of council seats for women.

The reported prevalence of intimate partner violence in the Maldives is lower than in other South Asian countries (with the exception of Bhutan). Intimate partner violence is also far lower in Maldives (at 16.3 per cent)²¹⁸ than it is in other small island nation states, such as Fiji (64 per cent)²¹⁹ and Vanuatu (60 per cent).²²⁰ There are a number of reasons for the lower figure for gender based violence compared to other countries in the region, including: 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.²²¹

Maldivian culture traditionally prized calmness and rationality in men, rather than aggression and violence,²²² and Maldivians historically maintained a 'peaceful equilibrium' between men and women in the home and in society.²²³ More generally, Maldives prided itself on the absence of all forms of physical violence. However, in recent decades gender-based violence against women has become and remains a severe and entrenched problem. The 2007 Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences found that one in three women aged between 15 and 49 experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Of these women, one in five women experienced intimate partner violence and even more worryingly

²¹⁵ Transparency Maldives (2019), 'Women's Political Representation', Position Paper, Issue 01, 10 February

²¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Percentage of Women in national Parliaments, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=10&year=2019> accessed 12 December 2019

²¹⁷ Reports of the Commonwealth Observer Group, Maldives Parliamentary Elections, pp. 22-25

²¹⁸ 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.

²¹⁹ UN Women, Prevalence Data on Different Forms of Violence against Women, <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries#> Proportion of ever-partnered women aged 18-64 years experiencing intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Source: Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, 2013. National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/11): A Survey Exploring the Prevalence, Incidence and Attitudes to Intimate Partner Violence in Fiji. Suva, Fiji.

²²⁰ UN Women, Prevalence Data on Different Forms of Violence against Women, <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries#> Proportion of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 years experiencing intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Source: Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2011. The Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships. Port Vila, Vanuatu.

²²¹ 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.

²²² Fulu, E. and Miedema, S. Violence Against Women: Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model, Violence Against Women 2015, Vol. 21(12) 1434, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1077801215596244> accessed 22.10.19.

²²³ El-Horr, J. and Pande, R. *Understanding Gender in the Maldives: Toward Inclusive Development*, World Bank Group, 2016.

one in twelve experienced violence during childhood. The problem of intimate partner violence appears to be growing. It is suggested that violence is connected with the alienation produced by urbanisation, increasing conservatism and drug abuse, all of which increase women's vulnerability²²⁴. Systems and human capacities to protect victims of intimate partner violence are limited in the country.

Abuses are carried out in the name of family, religion and culture and are often hidden in the private sphere with perpetrators enjoying impunity as the law enforcement and justice system is mostly complacent to domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other social ills to protect the 'honour' of the family. Indeed, thirty per cent of the women justified husband beating for reasons as trivial as burning food, arguments, going out without telling, neglecting children or refusing sex. The 2011 Rights Side of Life study produced by the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives echoed similar attitudes among men towards women's rights.

Sharia Law governs personal conduct and family matters. However, it has not been codified until recently. The Family Law came into effect in 2001 and the Penal Code codifying *hudud* offenses was ratified as late as 2014. *Hudud* offenses include adultery and fornication and remain as offenses with non-negotiable penalties such as public flogging. However, apart from public flogging for fornication and pregnancy out of wedlock, other punishments for *hudud* offenses are generally not enforced. Evidence collection is based on self-confession and four eyewitnesses are needed to confirm any claim made by women. As a result, men often escape punishment while women are convicted. In 2006 almost 80% of flogging punishments for fornication were handed down to women. Women, particularly younger women, face considerable challenges when they give birth to children out of wedlock. Opportunities for emergency contraception are not available even when the pregnancy is the result of rape. Having a child outside of wedlock increases a woman's chance of being stuck in a cycle of exclusion and abuse continuing for generations. The women are labelled and stigmatized, and their children also become ostracized.

As the country transitions through a period of rapid social change, it is critical that women's rights are realized. The Maldives newfound democratic space has paradoxically created openings for more conservative and even extreme thinking, practices and lifestyles. 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.

The Maldives is both a destination and a source country for women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Some women are forced into sex work after being recruited for domestic labour or the tourism industry. Children are trafficked from outlying islands to Malé, some of whom are reportedly subjected to sexual abuse and forced labour. 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 since remained on the Tier 2 Watch List for two consecutive years. Further, there are no formal shelter services available to victims of trafficking, creating challenges for protection and prosecution.

Children and Youth

Children

²²⁴ Stakeholder interviews, UNFPA Maldives

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. Barriers to birth registration, children accessing education, health services or other essential services for children are primarily geographic.

The main challenges presented by social norms and practices in Maldives for realization of children's rights are: the necessity for all legislation and policies to 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), as 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 arising from the small size and geographically dispersed nature of the country's population.

Reports of child abuse, violence, and neglect of children are high with 1,200 cases of sexual abuse of children reported to the police in 2019²²⁵. Although the new child protection law (19/2019) provides a legislative framework for the protection of children's rights and protection from abuse, violence, neglect and discrimination inclusive of children with disabilities, mechanisms 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. Challenges of malnutrition and absence of appropriate physical and mental development opportunities for some children also limit full attainment of their rights.

The Maldives does not yet have a universal child benefit scheme, which also negatively impacts the most vulnerable children. Recent estimates of levels of child poverty are not available in the Maldives. However, as noted, households in which children have achieved secondary education are less likely to be living at or below the poverty line, and households which have higher dependency ratios are more likely to experience poverty, with the specific observation that 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

Maldives has a golden opportunity to turn the youth bulge in the current population into a demographic dividend. Yet adolescents have few opportunities for exploring their passions – for example there is no art or creative education, no life skills education, and no career guidance available to young people. Youth and particularly young women are subject to high unemployment and higher non-participation in the workforce.

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 structure of the dynamic tourism and construction industries is driven by international migrant workers. In comparison to the national workforce, migrant workers are often subjected to substandard working and living conditions. 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

²²⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/maldives/press-releases/unicef-maldives-office-press-statement-case-2-year-old-child-being-sexually-abused>

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.

Social stresses also lead to exclusion. Consultations across Maldives for the 2014 Human Development Report depicted a vicious cycle that children and youth often find difficult to break. Children from broken families or those with substance abusing parents face neglect and often become the centre of disciplinary issues in school. As a result, they under-perform, face suspension, low attendance and the risk of expulsion.

Most youth do not continue beyond lower secondary school. Many become exposed to drugs, drug dealing and crime. They then find it difficult to find jobs, rehabilitation or any other support. A study on gangs in Malé reported that there are between 20 and 30 different gangs operating in Malé with 50 to 400 members in each group²²⁶. The juvenile justice system and the drug court are meant to be rehabilitative, but they stigmatize, rather than providing second chances. Reform of drug laws and expansion of rehabilitative capacities are essential.

The lack of adequate sex education, and the remaining dichotomy between young people's sexual development, access to sexualized content online, and the stigmatized local discourse around anything related to sexuality poses additional challenges to many young people in the Maldives. Although there are no statistics, there have been reports of young women dropping out of school due to unplanned pregnancies. Recent statistics show that 29.5 per cent of pregnancies in the Maldives are unplanned, and the unmet need for family planning is 36 per cent,²²⁷ reflecting both socio-cultural norms and lack of access to reproductive health services. This limits young women's further education and employment opportunities.

As the Maldives transitions from traditional to more urban and modern ways of life, many young people's value orientations are changing, and becoming different to 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. A number of factors likely contribute to this, including the human rights abuses that had occurred in the Maldives,²²⁸ a perceived self-serving, corrupt and out-of-touch political class and increased levels of violence in society. Young

Seenu Hithadhoo Family Services Centre commented on the rise of extremist views in their area.

In December 2019, it was dealing with 8 cases where children as young as seven years of age were refusing to attend school on the basis that the school environment is not sufficiently Islamic: classes are not segregated, there no prayer breaks and the uniform does not meet Islamic dress standards. The children also disapprove of the manner in which the teachers dress.

²²⁶ <https://www.unicef.org/maldives/reports/rapid-situation-assessment-gangs-mal%C3%A9>

²²⁷ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives

²²⁸ National Counter Terrorism Centre and UNDP, Youth Vulnerability in the Maldives, February 2019, p.25.

interviewees²²⁹ give lack of opportunity and meaningful employment for youth as a reason for involvement in extremism, while others mentioned frustration and urban overcrowding.

The 2016 National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism recognises that taking a purely ‘law enforcement’ approach to radicalisation, particularly of children and youth, is not effective²³⁰. It seeks to take a holistic ‘whole of society’ and ‘whole of government’ approach. The Strategy acknowledges that it is necessary to enable and empower community leaders, especially women and youth leaders; enhance critical thinking as a learning process within the education system and promote inclusive and tolerant views by incorporating this into the national curriculum and expanding co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in schools as well as informal learning opportunities. It also recognises the need to address real or perceived grievances and ensure a greater degree of equality through promoting women’s and youth’s entrepreneurship.²³¹

Migrants

International migrants

In Maldives, 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 this population is projected to be around 33 per cent of the resident population by 2029²³². Migrants from less developed neighbouring countries – notably, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka – come to Maldives in search of employment opportunities.

International migrants now dominate the Maldives workforce and represent 16 per cent of the country’s population and are overrepresented among those of working age. Most migrants are young men from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, who work in low-skilled jobs in labour intensive sectors like construction. Others work in skilled or semi-skilled jobs in resorts. Still others, fewer in number, are doctors, teachers and other skilled professionals in short supply. While teachers and nurses are increasingly Maldivian, the majority of physicians are still international migrant workers, as these skills remain in short supply in the national workforce.

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. For instance, there are many young, working-age Maldivians, many of whom are neither working, studying nor are in training as evidenced by the NEET level of 25 per cent for the age 15-24 cohort.²³³ While the demand for labour in the tourism sector is growing, employers tend to have a preference for migrant workers due to the lower wages that they are willing to accept, their dependence on the employer for income and avoidance of deportation

²²⁹ Analysing the Situation of Children and Young People in the Republic of Maldives, UNICEF, 2019

²³⁰ See also United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT)’s Reference Guide for development of PVE National and Regional Action Plans, 2018.

²³¹ Republic of the Maldives, National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, Male, 2017, at p.8.

²³² 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

²³³ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) Analytical Report III: Employment. p7

in cases of irregular migration status. There are limited numbers of Maldivians with skills to work in higher-skilled and more technical positions due to non-availability of specific training in-country and lack of financing opportunity to go for training abroad. This gives rise to resentment against the international migrant workers.

The current labour recruitment and admission processes for international migrant workers are viewed by many employers as cumbersome and ineffective. Employers are less inclined to bear recruitment costs when hiring lower-skilled international migrant workers. This is also because the existing quota, employment approval and deposit levy systems for international migrant worker recruitment are indeed not effective.

There are often discrepancies between the terms in international migrant workers' contracts and Maldivian legislation regarding working hours, annual leave and other employment conditions. Often these discrepancies are a result of contract substitution upon arrival of a worker at their workplace, with a new contract with worse conditions. Variation in working conditions and wages also exists between the different nationalities of international migrant workers. There is little monitoring of compliance with laws and regulation driven largely by a lack of political will and the limited capacity of the government institutions in terms of information systems and human resources. Currently, influential employers are often not held accountable for following existing legislation, and there has not been political will to confront abuses in this area. Therefore, improving the systems and ensuring that employers absorb recruitment fees as a part of their business costs will be key but difficult challenges in improving the labour migration governance system in the country.

With regard to social security and health, while equal treatment for all is prescribed by law, inequality and gaps remain to be addressed. It is no longer mandatory for employers to enroll migrant workers in the Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme, and migrant workers, even long-term residents, are not entitled to any of the social security measures that citizens are entitled to. 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. In practice, this results in migrants not seeking medical care until a health condition is acute.

Employers seeking to recruit migrant workers are required to request a 'quota' with Maldives Immigration. Such quotas are determined by Maldives Immigration based, among other criteria, on information provided by the employer – but it does not necessarily take into consideration the labour market need.

The majority of migrants are recruited for specific employment, but once in Maldives many choose to find better positions or be compelled to escape from exploitative or otherwise abusive employment situations, possibly leading to the invalidation of their visa. Others enter on tourist visas and overstay. Such undocumented or irregular migrants are especially vulnerable.

In early 2015, the Government estimated there were at least 35,000 undocumented migrants in Maldives. However, a more recent regularization exercise was suspended after over 100,000 were identified - the real number of these irregular migrants is likely to be much higher although statistics are not available.

Data from immigration shows that the number of returnees (including deported, voluntary and non-voluntary repatriation) from Maldives was over 6,000 in 2016.²³⁴ A process for regularization of status allows migrants to change employers if the latter was responsible for the irregular status. However, migrants

²³⁴ Plewa P (2019). Migration in Maldives: A country Profile, International Organisation for Migration. p.66

who have absconded do not qualify as they are required to report the problem before absconding with the Labour Relations Authority or Maldives Immigration. Generally, few migrants are regularized due a combination of reasons, including inadequate regularization rules, poor publicity of the regularization process and migrants' distrust of authorities.²³⁵ NGOs who work directly with migrants have expressed interest in being consulted on the design and implementation of regularization procedures, as they feel they could positively contribute to the process.

A number of issues have emerged, including excessive recruitment fees and related costs, migrants' misconceptions and deception about working and living conditions; a lack of pre-departure and post arrival employment information; 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 and high recruitment costs; weak sanctions for labour law violations; human trafficking and other decent work deficits.

The Government has taken significant steps in recent years to prevent human trafficking, notably through the "Prevention of Human Trafficking Act" in 2013, development of related action plans and the establishment of an ad hoc committee.

However, with the Maldives endorsement of the Global Compact for Migration, there is a need for adoption of all relevant ~~newest~~ international labour and other migration standards, for national development strategies to align with those standards, and to ensure these standards and strategies are integrated into development plans and public policies in consultation with migrants and civil society stakeholders.

Internal Migrants

Internal migration is another key issue, as nearly a third of the nation's entire population now live in Malé, many having moved to the capital within the last few decades. Despite most internal migrants experiencing significantly lower quality of life in Malé due to high living costs and overcrowding, many more choose to migrate from their native islands to the city for a variety of reasons, including access to better hospitals, schools and services.

The government is now committed, once again, to develop regional centres for decentralised growth. In the past, to encourage voluntary internal migration to regional centres, a Population Consolidation Programme developed affordable housing, social services and communication infrastructure in five regional centres (namely, Dhuvaafaru, Gan, Kudahvadhoo, Maamigili and Vilufushi). People willing to relocate to those centres were promised new housing and a relocation grant. Additionally, the Government promoted land reclamation, resettlement policies and income-generating activities in "growth centres". But between 2000 and 2006, only 3,356 people migrated under the Programme. Many Maldivians living in the outer islands preferred to move to Malé instead of regional centres, resulting in overcrowding issues and social ills in the capital. Very few Malé - based residents – apart from women reuniting with their families, were interested in moving to the regional centres.

The current decentralisation programs are focused on infrastructure-led investment and local governance. These and other measures are designed to spark major job creation and service improvements, creating regional growth poles as alternatives to Malé.

²³⁵ *ibid*

Others at Risk

Persons with disabilities²³⁶

The Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019 estimated the disability prevalence to be 6.7 per cent.²³⁷ The prevalence of any disability increases with age,²³⁸ from 1 per cent of females below age 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.²³⁹

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

The Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children (Law No. 19/2019) requires the government to make arrangements for treatment of children with mental and physical disabilities. In addition, it requires all efforts to be made to enable participation of such children in society; with special assistance required in such cases being made available. There has been attempts for inclusivity of children with disabilities in the education system, however, as discussed earlier 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 major challenges. Furthermore, 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.²⁴⁰

A Law on Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and providing Financial Assistance (8/2010) provides 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 center in Malé, excluding the most vulnerable. This scheme covers children, and the allowance is paid to their caregiver until the child turns 18, after which it is paid to them. The benefit value is a fixed amount regardless of the degree of disability of the applicant. An analysis of the scheme in 2017-2019 found that only 25.5 per cent of people with disabilities receive this benefit,²⁴¹

²³⁶ Drawn from Maldives' response to an OHCHR questionnaire pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 31/6, 2016

²³⁷ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Eskey (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results.

²³⁸ Ministry of Health and ICF (2019). Maldives Demographic Health Survey 2016/2017. Ministry of Health, Maldives. p.17

²³⁹ Faisal A, Ibrahim N, Rasheed H, Mustafa M (2019). Birth defects in government referral hospital 2016-2018

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (2010). Baseline assessment on activities addressing rights of persons with disabilities.

²⁴¹ London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Eskey (2020). Maldives social protection and disability study 2017-2019. Preliminary results

reflecting the poor access to disability services. Furthermore, an impact assessment study showed there was no impact on the quality of life of the people with disabilities receiving this benefit²⁴².

The most obvious gap in services provided to persons with disabilities in the Maldives is lack of employment services. There is no government organised support or services to persons with disabilities in obtaining jobs. The challenges around employment include discrimination in the labour market and workplace and low expectations and assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do.²⁴³ Some persons with disabilities need equipment and workplace modifications for them to be effective and to work to their full capacity, or to retain a job following an accident which are not often forthcoming. Accessible transport to and from work and accessible workplaces are also critical factors in ensuring people can work. The Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services advocates for employment opportunities for persons with disabilities within the public and private sector. Some government institutions had allocated employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. However, most allocated posts were vacant.

The state initiated a social housing scheme for persons with disabilities, to allocate apartments for persons with disabilities. However, advocates for persons with disabilities raised concerns regarding corruption in the selection process.

High quality, comparable data on disability required for the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies are not available. There is a need for better coordination and cooperation for developing and updating the disability registry as required by law and integrating this data with social protection schemes and services.

Affirmative actions are not applied in the Maldives for combating structural discrimination against persons with disabilities, such as disability inclusive development in spatial and socio-economic spheres.

Person with mental health conditions

There is little research on mental health in Maldives. A 2003 survey²⁴⁴ 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 suicides, particularly among youth. However, no formal research figures are available.

Mental disorders include an important human rights dimension and people with mental disorders are a vulnerable population group. There is significant stigma and discrimination around mental disorders, which can lead to denial of basic human rights such as health, education, employment, housing, welfare services and other civil rights.²⁴⁵ 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.

²⁴² *ibid*

²⁴³ Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (2010). Baseline assessment on activities addressing rights of persons with disabilities.

²⁴⁴ Niyaz H, Naz A. Mental health situation in the Maldives. Malé: Ministry of Health; 2003

²⁴⁵ Health Protection Agency (2017). Mental health policy. Ministry of Health, Maldives

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.²⁴⁶ 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 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.²⁴⁷ More than a third of current drug users in Malé stated that they were affected by a mental health problem.

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 general 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.

There is no separate financing for mental health care, but psychiatric treatment and medications are covered by the social health insurance scheme. Some financial assistance for chronic mental health problems in childhood and intellectual disability is funded by the State. However, there is little financial assistance for disability associated with chronic psychiatric disorders.

Similar to disabilities, there is no recent data on mental health for the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies. There is a pressing need to conduct studies on mental health and disabilities for effective programming and service delivery.

A National Mental Health Policy 2015-2025 was adopted in 2017. In late-2019 the Maldives Health Ministry announced that psychiatric clinics would be set up in all island hospitals, and that it would initiate campaigns across the country to raise awareness about mental illnesses, and how families and society could care for such individuals. Major efforts will be required to meet the needs of the mentally ill.

Older persons

Presently, 5 per cent of the total population is aged 65 and above.²⁴⁸ This population 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 scheme, in operation since 2010, covers all citizens 65 and above. Currently, the state pension is MRf 5,000 (approximately US\$300) per month.

²⁴⁶ Fulu E. The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences. Malé: Ministry of Health and Gender; 2006.

²⁴⁷ National Drug Use Survey Maldives, Malé: United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime; 2012.

²⁴⁸ National Bureau of Statistics (2016). Maldives Population and Housing Census, 2014. Statistical release 1: Population and households. P.13

Most families in Malé live in apartments with small rooms. Older adults frequently have to share rooms with grandchildren. Traditionally, elderly family members are looked after in an extended family setting, but this is less common now due to inadequate living space and internal migration. In some cases, parents are left on remote islands to live their lives alone. Some without family support are sent to live in a public center for vulnerable adults in K. Guraidhoo.

Presently, Maldives is moving away from the pattern of an extended family to a nuclear family. The tradition was that the elderly were looked after by family members, particularly the women.²⁴⁹ Unfortunately, care giving for the elderly is required when the adult children have children or even grandchildren of their own and children's needs get prioritized in a nuclear family, negatively impacting the elderly parent's care.

There is limited information and data on older persons' participation in society and there is emerging concern around exclusion of the elderly from development, increasing loneliness among older populations and the absence of avenues for productive engagement of the elderly in society.

Respondents in one study conducted in Malé²⁵⁰ 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.

Unavailability of environmental, social and health support services that are dedicated towards elders negatively influenced their perspective of ageing. While some of the participants showed resilience and adapted to the circumstances, others perceived the physical and social barriers to ageing with fear and restricted their physical activities and social interactions.

Maldives has no specific facilities for geriatric care. Age related minor illnesses are treated at tertiary-multipurpose hospitals. There are very few organizations 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.

A national elderly policy was launched in 2017 with four main focus areas; care and protection, independence and participation, health and wellbeing and preparation for old age. However, the policy was not implemented, and the current government has launched a new action plan 2019-2021 focusing on actions in the SAP for addressing issues faced by the elderly²⁵¹.

Regional and urban/atoll differences

The geographic distribution of services across many small islands limits opportunities and has resulted in migration to Malé. This has an impact on social cohesion, with a strong division emerging between those who live in the capital and those who live on the atolls.

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

²⁴⁹ Didi R., Implications of ageing in Maldives. Regional Health Forum – Volume 16, Number 1, 2012

²⁵⁰ Nazra A., 'Perceptions of Ageing Among Older Adults Living in Male', Maldives and Implications for Provision of Support', International Journal of Social Research and Innovation, Volume 2, Issue 1 - August 2018

²⁵¹ <https://corporatemaldives.com/first-lady-launches-the-national-elderly-action-plan-2019-2021/>

few families. As adults and youths migrate to Malé, those networks are increasingly strained, with growing, negative social consequences.

At present, it is estimated that 45.5 per cent of the population lives in urban areas.²⁵² However, due to constant internal migration²⁵³ from the atolls to Malé and a low fertility rate, it is anticipated that this will increase in the coming years. It is estimated that by 2030 over 50 per cent of the population will be living in Malé with this increasing to 64 per cent of resident Maldivians living in Malé by 2054.²⁵⁴ This is likely to have a significant impact on infrastructure and demand for services, including education, health and social services, to the continued disadvantage of the atolls.

Challenges to Addressing Exclusion

The geographic realities of the Maldives consistently bring the government of the day to choose social protection responses to exclusion and vulnerability that are largely undifferentiated, as these assist all persons and are easiest to administer. The social safety net is largely made up of cash transfer programmes for specific groups such as the universal health insurance scheme (Aasandha) and blanket subsidies for electricity. Although simple and universal, these programmes have some unfavourable features; they are costly and lack a redistributive effect.

The current basket of social protection programmes lacks an assessment of the specific social protection needs of rights holders. Partners have therefore repeatedly recommended that the social safety net programmes be restructured to account for various vulnerabilities that face the population, particularly based on location, income and identity. Action is needed to develop criteria and preferences around these aspects and improve the feasibility and impact of the programmes.

Despite the enactment of the gender equality law (18/2016), growing religious conservatism in the country poses substantial challenge for gender equality and access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, particularly for young unmarried women. This situation also hampers the provision of health and social protection services for victims /survivors of gender-based and domestic violence.

Similarly, despite enactment of the law on disability (8/2010), there is limited access to health care and human capacity to improve access to care and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities including mental health and age-related disabilities.

The ongoing programme of decentralisation, including localisation of social services, can provide a foundation for the successful provision of targeted social services. This is a long-term project that will require building a national network of social services institutions and professionals at island and regional levels, and national capacities for policy guidance, monitoring and support.

²⁵² <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/MDV/maldives/urban-population>>Maldives Urban Population 1960-2019

²⁵³ 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 Male each year.

²⁵⁴ 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 has set as a broad policy the consolidation of 70 per cent of the population in the Greater Male' Area by 2050.

Chapter 5. Commitments under International Norms and Standards

The Maldives has engaged positively with the international human rights system with a large number of treaties ratified (see Annex 2). Since 2005, Maldives has joined seven of the nine core human rights conventions and five optional protocols, including individual complaints procedures under the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and CRC. Maldives has expressed its intention to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED) in 2020 but has not expressed plans to accede to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW).

On 18 December 2019, President Solih signed a declaration for the acceptance of Article 22 of CAT recognizing the competence of the Committee Against Torture to receive complaints or such submissions from individuals subjected to torture, provided that the victims were under the jurisdiction of Maldives. The Government of Maldives signed the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 4th September 2019. Reservations against Articles 14 (1) and 21 in the Convention on the Rights of the Child remain despite the observations of the 2016 CRC Committee recommending that the Maldives consider withdrawing its reservations to these two Articles.

Treaty Bodies

The current Government of Maldives has embarked on a very ambitious agenda to ensure compliance with its international treaty obligations and is constructively engaged with human rights treaty bodies. However, a number of reports to treaty bodies are overdue.²⁵⁵ The Maldives noted in the previous UPR cycle the challenges and limitations faced as a small island developing state and in fulfilling its reporting obligations under international conventions, due to lack of expertise, human resources, among other issues.²⁵⁶

HRC and Special Procedures

Maldives became a member of the Human Rights Council in 2010 and was re-elected for a second term for the period 2014-2016.

Maldives is in its third cycle of the Universal Periodic review (UPR).

Maldives has extended a standing invitation to all mandate holders of the special procedures under the Human Rights Council and has so far hosted seven visits of special rapporteurs.²⁵⁷ The recommendations made by special rapporteurs have led to a number of positive changes in law, policy and practice. In particular the 2013 visit of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers had a transformative impact on the Government's reform agenda.

²⁵⁵ ICCPR (two reports overdue since 2015); ICESCR (one report overdue since 2008); CERD (overdue since ?)

²⁵⁶ : A/HRC/30/8/Add.1

²⁵⁷ Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (2007); Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers (2007, 2013); Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living (2009); Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (2009); UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights (2019); Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (2019)

National Human Rights Framework

The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives was established in 2003 as an independent and autonomous statutory body by a Decree of the President. In 2006 the Human Rights Commission became a constitutionally established body on ratification of the Human Rights Commission Act. The Act was amended, in 2014, to give the Commission a greater degree of autonomy. The mission of the Human Rights Commission is to promote and protect human rights under the Constitution, Islamic Shariah and international human rights conventions ratified by the Maldives.

The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives important and positive institutional safeguards for human rights. However, their work still does not appear to ensure fully an effective system of oversight and accountability. For instance, no official has ever been held accountable for torture or ill-treatment, nor has any victim ever received redress, despite reports that several hundred complaints have been submitted since the Anti-Torture Act (2013) came into force. Inadequate budget, limited resources and a shortage of qualified, trained staff are seen as major constraints. The Commission has B status accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions It has not obtained A status on several grounds, including concern that it may be interpreting its mandate in a manner inconsistent with international human rights law, particularly with regard to recognized protection against all forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and with regard to the founding legislation that provides that all members of the Commission must be Muslim.²⁵⁸

The current Government established two transitional justice commissions, the most important of which from a human rights perspective is the Commission on Murders and Disappearances charged with investigating cases between 1 January 2012 and 17 November 2018 that have not been properly investigated, as well as a commission on releasing political detainees and a presidential commission on corruption and asset recovery.²⁵⁹ There have been a number of other recommendations related to transitional justice mechanisms related to alleged violations of human rights going back to 2003.

Incorporation of international human rights norms into national law

Revision of the Anti-Torture Act is needed to ensure that it provides for punishment commensurate with the gravity of the offence of torture and does not condition punishment on the duration of the victim's hospitalization, noting that some forms of torture may not inflict physical suffering at all.²⁶⁰

In 2010, the Maldivian parliament passed the Disabilities Act, which gave persons with disabilities the legal right to adequate and standardized social and health services.

Incorporating CEDAW provisions fully into the national legal system remains a challenge. However among positive legislative steps, Maldives adopted comprehensive legislation addressing violence against women, the Domestic Violence Act in 2012 and the Gender Equality Act in 2016.

In April 2013, a ministerial-level committee was established by the President to conduct a review and propose a holistic reform of the existing child protection mechanisms in Maldives. A new Child Rights Protection Act was ratified in November 2019 and provides for the appointment of a Children's Ombudsman.

²⁵⁸ CAT/C/MDV/CO/1, para 15

²⁵⁹ CAT/C/MDV/CO/1, para 7.

²⁶⁰ CAT/C/MDV/CO/1, para 20

A first Juvenile Justice Act was ratified in November 2019, prohibiting the death penalty for minors, and focusing on diversion and alternatives to detention, as well as better prevention and rehabilitation services.

Maldives is one of the 50 Bali Process countries and took the significant positive step in 2013 to pass the Anti-Human Trafficking Act, which makes trafficking in persons a criminal offence with perpetrators liable to 10 to 15 years imprisonment. The bill, which entered the Maldivian parliament – the People’s Majlis – in April 2013, also criminalizes offenses such as forced labour and fraudulent recruitment as acts of human trafficking.

Other important pending bills related to protection of human rights include the bills on legal aid, evidence, and witness protection.

Acts related specifically to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, include the Pensions Act (2009), the Social Protection Act (2011) to ensure the Right to Social Security, general Health Act (2012), Maternal and Child Health Bill, Education Bill, Protection and Financial Assistance to Persons with Disabilities Act (2010), Employment Act (2008).

Other multilateral treaty obligations

Maldives has ratified the Rome Statute.

Maldives is not a party to the 51 Convention on Refugees

Maldives joined the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2009. In 2013, Maldives ratified all eight of the core ILO conventions, after consideration for nearly two decades. It has not ratified any of the priority governance conventions, and only two of 178 technical conventions. Out of ten ILO Conventions ratified by Maldives, all are in force.

Maldives joined the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2011.

The Maldives participated in the adoption of the Global Compact on Safe Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) (2018), the first global agreement on a common approach to international migration in all its dimensions. The GCM is an important basis for better managing migration and ameliorating conditions for migrants and the resident population. Maldives is not party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

In February 2013, Maldives acceded to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

The Maldives ratified the UN Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Protocol (2000) in December 2015, and adopted it in the Maldives Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (PHTA) (2013)

Maldives ratified the United Nations Framework *Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC) and is a party to the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement as well as a number of other multilateral conventions related to climate change the protection of the environment. (See Annex 2).

Maldives was elected to the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in 2012.

Chapter 6. Cross boundary and regional / sub-regional perspectives

External partnerships and influences

Maldives has built and maintained positive relationships with neighbouring countries, Gulf and other Arab states, western nations, and multilateral organisations. In recent years its growing relationships with Saudi Arabia and China have become associated with challenges around modernisation, democracy and conservatism within the country. The challenges and potential negative effects of these relationships, e.g., the increasing levels of debt and their impact on maximum available resources for the progressive realisation of economic, social and cultural rights, and the rise of conservative Islam and extremism and their implications for the realisation of women's rights, have become central issues.

Other important issues have emerged from Maldives external relationships around links to the global economy and oil dependence, trade, environmental issues and migration flows and links to developments in countries that migrants predominantly come from.

From independence, the development path of Maldives has been broadly aligned with the creation of a modernising and religiously moderate form of government, and the country has been close to its South Asian neighbours, particularly democratic India and Sri Lanka. At the same time, while the country has followed a traditional, moderate form of Islam, Islam is the state religion, only Muslims are allowed to hold citizenship in the country and citizens are barred from practicing any faith other than Islam. And, from the 1970s, the religious influence of Saudi Arabia and other conservative Islamic nations has colored the development of modern institutions and the interpretation of Islam as practiced in the Maldives.

The advent of political democracy in 2008 heightened tensions inherent in the interpretation of democracy in Islamic society. Globally, Islamic religious scholars and intellectuals fall into three broad camps regarding democracy. Fundamentalists reject both democracy and secularism. This view has been the position of the Wahhabi clerics in Saudi Arabia. The second, conservative camp claims that returning to the "true tenets" of Islam will create the best kind of democracy. The third camp (more common among lay intellectuals than among clerics) advocates *ijtihad*, or reinterpreting Islam to make it compatible with the universal concept of democracy.²⁶¹

Changes in religious attitudes and practices have been linked to public and private Saudi Arabian efforts to promote Wahhabism.²⁶² In the Maldives the rise of Wahhabism can be linked to many of the Maldivian students who received free education from Wahhabi madrasas in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s²⁶³. Masjids have been built with Saudi public funds. The Saudi-headquartered and financed Muslim World League also supports Islamic associations, masjids, and investment plans. The Islamic Development Bank, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, strengthens "Islamic cohesion" between its lenders and borrowers, who are member states of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

²⁶¹ Olivier Roy, 'Islam: The Democracy Dilemma', The Wilson Institute, screen capture February 21, 2020. The export of Wahhabi influence from Saudi Arabia has been a complex reality. While some entities involved are government ministries and agencies, others are funded by the Saudi royal family, and still others are linked to the Kingdom's religious establishment.

²⁶² Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid, 'Islam as Statecraft: How Governments Use Religion in Foreign Policy', Brookings Institution, November 2018

²⁶³ <https://thediomat.com/2019/12/violent-extremism-in-the-maldives-the-saudi-factor/>

During the previous administration, the growing influence of Saudi Arabia in the Maldives was reflected in Maldives' decision to sever diplomatic ties with Iran in 2016. In 2017 Maldives became one of the first countries outside the Gulf to join Saudi Arabia in cutting ties with Qatar. Further, during that year there was an attempt to lease part of an atoll to a key member of the Saudi Arabian Royal Family as a Special Economic Zone.²⁶⁴

In early 2018, at the time of the previous government's State of Emergency in Maldives, as part of the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the Saudi Fund for Development and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development pledged \$160 million in support of the Maldives. This reflected growing co-operation between the two countries. Saudi Arabia had already promised the Maldives a five-year soft loan facility of \$300m when the country's previous president visited Riyadh.

During the time in office of the previous government, China became an additional, major source of support outside the western rights-based development consensus and without western-style conditionalities. Chinese influence, primarily through investment, has brought the country to a new level of development but has also created serious concerns regarding debt sustainability and local corruption.

China's recent interest in the Maldives, despite its small population, reflects its strategic location in a section of the Indian Ocean that touches the main shipping route between China, the oil suppliers of the Middle East and Europe. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) brought a major push by Chinese state companies to finance and build large-scale infrastructure projects across Asia and beyond, and the previous government's ambitious plans for Greater Malé made it a promising target for BRI projects. Chinese investment in the Maldives became significant in 2014, during the first ever visit by a Chinese head of state.

Concluding that it was unfeasible to provide decent public services to all the country's 200 inhabited islands, and that it was more logical to concentrate the population on Malé and Hulhumale, an artificial island created in stages since 1997 by filling in a nearby coral lagoon, the government tripled the size of the new island to accommodate 240,000 inhabitants, or more than half the entire country's current population. Chinese funding was central to these projects.

Maldivian finance ministry data show that well over \$1 billion in Chinese loans were agreed in the four years after 2014, all either borrowed directly or guaranteed by the Maldivian government.²⁶⁵ Chinese state companies lent \$547.9 million to fund the construction of 11,000 apartments in high-rise blocks that would be built in the second phase of Hulhumale. They lent a further \$180.9 million for work to extend the electricity grid to the new island, and \$421 million to expand the airport. The most celebrated project was the \$210 million Friendship Bridge, funded mostly by a \$126 million Chinese government grant and a \$68 million loan from Export Import Bank of China.

In 2016, state-owned China Communications Construction Company signed a contract with the leader of one of the parties in the government's ruling coalition for the biggest resort development deal in Maldivian history. The project was funded with debt from the Export Import Bank of China, with the loans guaranteed

²⁶⁴ <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-severs-diplomatic-ties-with-iran-124284>
<https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-severs-diplomatic-ties-with-qatar-131067>
<http://transparency.mv/v16/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/TM-Review-Issue-5-V3.pdf>

²⁶⁵ Simon Mundy and Kathrin Hille, 'The Maldives counts the cost of its debts to China', Financial Times, February 10, 2019

by the Maldivian government up to an amount of \$127.5 million. The terms of the deal remained secret until the new government took power. Officials in the current government say such arrangements were typical.

The current government has sought to reduce the sums owed, as well as amending the interest rates and repayment schedules for them. It has argued that the stated project costs, and the loans that funded them, were substantially inflated, with much of the surplus flowing to corrupt Maldivian officials. The new government's biggest concerns relate to the \$646 million of sovereign-guaranteed Chinese loans to Housing Development Corporation, the Maldivian state company responsible for developing Hulhumale. Work on these residential projects, including the construction of sixteen 25-storey tower blocks by China State Construction Engineering, is continuing. The economic logic for such large-scale development has weakened after the new government dropped the policy drive to concentrate the population in Greater Malé, instead promising decentralised support for communities in the atolls.

While some in the ruling Coalition claim that Maldives has fallen into a debt trap with China and oppose a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed with China, the President has not been publicly critical of Chinese influence and the debt accumulated during the previous regime. China in turn has stressed that no change of government would impact Chinese support to development in Maldives; that China has been a key development partner and is the largest tourist source market for the Maldives. China has also stressed that the FTA was signed by the two governments after years of negotiations and consultation on equal footing and that any further decisions would be made only after careful consideration.

India, whose coast lies less than 500km from the Maldives' northernmost atoll, has historically been the island state's most important diplomatic partner. But the relationship deteriorated severely under the previous government, as New Delhi became increasingly concerned by the Maldives' growing closeness to China. India reacted strongly in August 2017, when three Chinese submarines docked at a Maldivian port.

The relationship with India strengthened once more when Presidential elections in 2018 brought an opposition Coalition to power, and the later election of a Coalition super-majority in Parliament cemented not only a new national agenda but also a shift in foreign policy. A US\$ 1.4 billion Indian package of budgetary support, currency swaps and concessional lines of credit²⁶⁶ and the increase in India's aid to the Maldives from US\$18.1 million in the 2018 budget to US\$83.3 million in 2019 illustrate the importance India has placed on the relationship. Government officials continuously reiterate Maldives' "India First Policy". Economic, technical and security considerations are paramount for both India and Maldives. Renewed ties with India will give the Maldives additional leverage as it lobbies China for debt forgiveness. And while officials say they still see China as an important partner, they insist that future deals will be arranged with far greater care than in recent years.²⁶⁷

Maldives geographic position athwart the equatorial sea lanes gives it potential geo-strategic importance and the opportunity to promote beneficial relationships with both regional super-powers in the interest of potential support to much-needed areas of development (India is also a growing tourism source for its southern neighbour). India's investment in Maldives also signifies a strong interest in projecting influence into the Indian Ocean, while promoting stability near its southern coastline. China's strong interest to

²⁶⁶ https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30765/Joint_Statement_on_the_occasion_of_State_Visit_of_the_President_of_the_Republic_of_Maldives_to_India_December_17_2018

²⁶⁷ Simon Mundy and Kathrin Hille, 'Maldives Seeks to Renegotiate Over Belt and Road Debt', Financial Times, January 31, 2019

develop Maldives within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework, and the interest of Saudi Arabia and others in investment could provide important opportunities for Maldives.

Regional Cooperation in Trade, Connectivity and Disaster Risk Reduction

South Asia is often described as the world's least integrated subregion, with the value of intraregional trade less than one third of its potential on account of high costs, poor supply capacity in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the region, poor trade facilitation at borders, and the prevalence of a variety of non-tariff barriers.²⁶⁸ Maldives faces several challenges due to limited number of export products and land, logistics, and transport issues that negatively affect the economics of operating production facilities.²⁶⁹ Out of the top 20 products exported, 18 are fishery related products. Major export destinations are European Union countries, followed by Thailand, Sri Lanka and United States. Among South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) countries, according to data from International Monetary Fund from 2017, Maldives' top export markets are Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The largest import source worldwide to Maldives is Sri Lanka, with imported goods valued at \$160 million, with Bangladesh the next largest import source valued at \$3million (SASEC, 2018). The major trading partners of Maldives among the SASEC countries are Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in terms of export and import values.²⁷⁰ The ESCAP SSWA (2018) gravity model of export potential of trade shows that Maldives has an export potential of \$332 million dollars and the percentage of unrealized potential is as high as 87 percent.

Maldives, being a small island nation is susceptible to climate change induced disaster risks. Though Maldives has the lowest Average Annual Loss (AAL) (0.56 percent of GDP) as estimated by UNESCAP (2019) in South Asia, Maldives' economic stocks are exposed to geological hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis.

Partnerships for development and attainment of the SDGs

A former British protectorate, Maldives joined the Commonwealth in 1982. In 2016 the Maldives left the Commonwealth, weeks after the organization warned it could be suspended because of its lack of progress in promoting the rule of law and democracy.

The current government applied for readmission, which took effect in February 2020. Re-admission symbolizes the return of Maldives to a full partnership with Commonwealth member states. Members have no legal obligations to one another but are connected through their use of the English language and their stated shared values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter. The Commonwealth is a forum for the exchange of experiences and the development of coalitions among like-minded countries with similar challenges and experiences.

The Maldives became a member of [Non-Aligned Movement](#) in 1976. The Maldives is also a member of the [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation](#) (OIC) and maintains close cultural relations with Islamic countries. However, the Maldives has often distanced itself from political positions taken by the OIC.

²⁶⁸ UNESCAP SSWA (2018) Unlocking the Potential of Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in South Asia Potential, Challenges and the Way Forward, South and South-West Asia, New Delhi

²⁶⁹ Usman and Rasheedh (2019) Interpreting SDGs for South Asia: in search of a regional framework - a Maldivian perspective, South and South-West Asia Development Papers 1905, South and South-West Asia, New Delhi

²⁷⁰ *ibid*

Cross boundary and regional issues are becoming increasingly important for the Maldives in terms of attaining SDG targets as they have implications for the country's economic growth, diversification, trade and regional cooperation. Maldives has committed to regional frameworks and standards for the achievement of SDGs. The [Regional Roadmap for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific](#), endorsed by the UNESCAP Commission in 2017, serves as the guiding framework for regional cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and for regional cooperation on transboundary challenges, especially regarding National statistical systems needed to supply the statistical evidence necessary for monitoring of progress, integrated policy analysis and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

ESCAP member States also adopted [the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific](#), the world’s first regionally agreed disability-specific development goals, and the [Beijing Declaration and Action Plan to Accelerate the Implementation of the Incheon Strategy](#), consisting of strategic guidance on developing concrete policy measures for implementing the Incheon Strategy.

The [Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States](#) held in 2014 in Apia, Samoa resulted in the adoption of the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action – or [SAMOA Pathway](#). It also established a unique intergovernmental [SIDS Partnership Framework](#). Maldives is an active SIDS member. Maldives is a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, and currently chairs its Bureau.

The Maldives were a founder member in 1985 of the [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation](#) (SAARC) and the nation plays a very active role in the association. It has taken the lead in calling for a South Asian Free Trade Agreement, the formulation of a Social Charter, the initiation of informal political consultations in SAARC forums, the lobbying for greater action on environmental issues, the proposal of numerous human rights measures such as the regional convention on child rights and for setting up a SAARC Human Rights Resource Centre. The Maldives is also an advocate of greater international profile for SAARC such as through formulating common positions at the UN.²⁷¹

Maldives adopted the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018.

In 2019 Maldives became the 22nd member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which was established in 1995. IORA works on strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean region, with a particular focus also on fisheries management. Recent talks by Maldives in this association focused on challenges in the Indian Ocean such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, terrorism, trafficking in persons and arms.

Since 2019, Maldives has also been co-chairing the Group of Experts for Strengthening Regional Cooperation on Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific.²⁷² The contents of the modality and the related action plan will be discussed in May 2020, during the 76th ESCAP Commission Session.

²⁷¹ http://www.foreign.gov.mv/v3/?p=mem_in_int

²⁷² ESCAP, 2018. Report of the Committee on Social Development on its fifth session. Available from: <https://www.unescap.org/intergovernmental-meetings/committee-social-development-fifth-session>

Chapter 7: Financing landscape and opportunities

The financial landscape for the SDGs²⁷³

The Ministry of Finance²⁷⁴ medium-term economic outlook forecasts steady growth: an expected 6.8 per cent in 2019, 7.3 per cent in 2020 and 6.9 per cent in 2021. Forecasts are mainly based on tourism sector growth estimates, which are closely connected to the Velana International Airport development project. Its completion is expected to increase the volume of tourist arrivals as flights to the country increase. To meet additional demand, the number of beds is also expected to increase.

Growth in transport and communications, real estate and retail trade in the medium term is also expected.

As most ongoing infrastructure development will be completed within the next few years, construction is likely to slow. Despite this, the new infrastructure and housing now being built are expected to realize economic benefits. Transport, retail trade and real estate sectors are also expected to grow in the medium term.

Total government revenue (excluding grants) increased 50% in October 2019 compared with the prior year, entirely due to a marked increase in non-tax revenue.²⁷⁵ This growth was partly offset by a decline in tax revenue over the period. Total expenditure (excluding amortisation) increased by 15% in October 2019 compared with October 2018. The rise in expenditure was due to increases in both recurrent and capital expenditure, which grew by MVR189.8 million and MVR158.9 million, respectively. At the end of Q3 of 2019, government debt (excluding government guaranteed debt) amounted to MVR51.2 billion, a modest increase from Q2 of 2019. The increase was primarily due to growth in domestic debt.

The high level of public debt held by the Maldives is a concern of international financial institutions. According to a World Bank-IMF debt sustainability analysis, the Maldives remains at high risk of debt distress.²⁷⁶ Total public and publicly guaranteed debt (PPG) rose to 72 per cent of GDP in 2018, driven by an increase in external debt guarantees. About 50 per cent of external PPG debt is owed to China, of which 43 per cent is guaranteed. External PPG debt is expected to rise to 40 per cent of GDP by 2020 but then to fall to 33 per cent of GDP in 2028. Over the medium term, high primary deficits will raise domestic (as opposed to external) debt from 37 per cent in 2018 to 45 per cent of GDP by 2023, putting total PPG debt at 82 per cent of GDP.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ All charts from Ministry of Finance (2019) 2020 budget book (in Divehi)

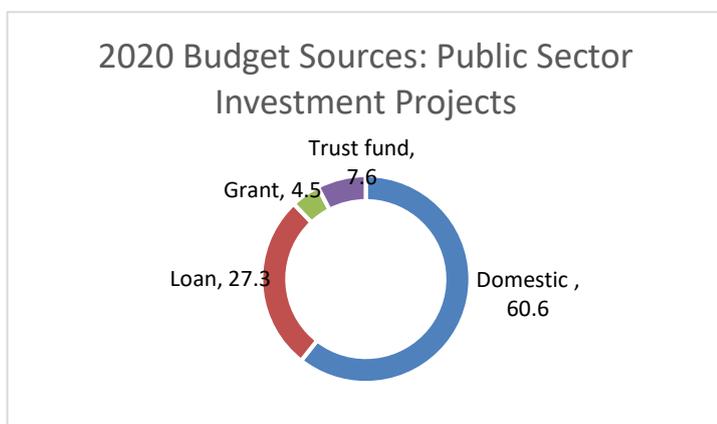
²⁷⁴ Ministry of Finance (2019), Budget in Statistics

²⁷⁵ Maldives Monetary Authority, Economic Update, December 2019, Volume 1, Issue 4

²⁷⁶ <www.worldbank.org/en/country/maldives/overview>

²⁷⁷ International Monetary Fund, <www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/dsa/pdf/2017/dsacr17357.pdf> accessed 12 December 2019

Figure 19: Investment project budget sources



It is not possible to fully analyse government expenditure, as there is no programmatic budgeting, nor is there gender responsive budgeting (GRB) or social audit analysis of expenditure.²⁷⁸ Planned expenditure is aligned with the medium-term Strategic Action Plan (SAP). The SAP is designed to maximize medium-term achievement of SDG-related goals, constrained by 1) the political choice to concentrate heavily on achieving more balanced development through

decentralization (institutions and infrastructure), 2) the country’s large debt overhang, and 3) the absence of an income tax (soon to be introduced).

Loan financing will be limited to 27.3 per cent of the budget, much on concessional terms. Grant funding plays an increasingly minor role, providing only 4.5 per cent of the budget. Domestic revenues and trust funds will finance two thirds of the budget. Should projections of continued growth prove accurate, Maldives is on track to implement SAP plans fully during 2020.

Figure 20: ODA to Maldives 2015-2017²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ GRB is in an early stage of development, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_Gender-Responsive_Budgeting.pdf
 A first Social Audit was published in 2018 by the Anti-Corruption Commission, <https://acc.gov.mv/en/2018/04/publication-of-social-audit-research-report/>

²⁷⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Country Data, <https://public.tableau.com/views/OECDACaidataglancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no?&:showVizHome=no accessed> accessed 12 December 2019.

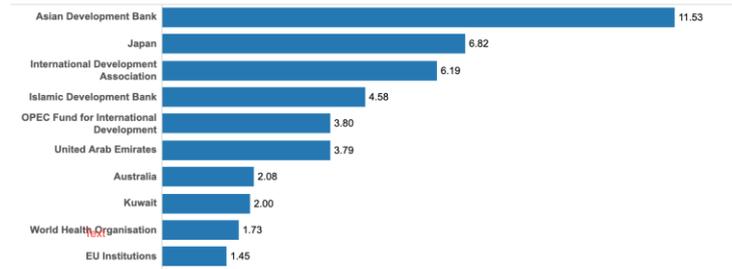
Receipts for Maldives

	2015	2016	2017
Net ODA (USD million)	26.8	27.0	41.9
Net ODA/GNI (%)	0.7	0.7	1.0
Gross ODA (USD million)	38.9	42.3	58.5
Bilateral share (gross ODA) (%)	48.7	38.7	32.9
Total net receipts (USD million)	130.5	19.4	17.1

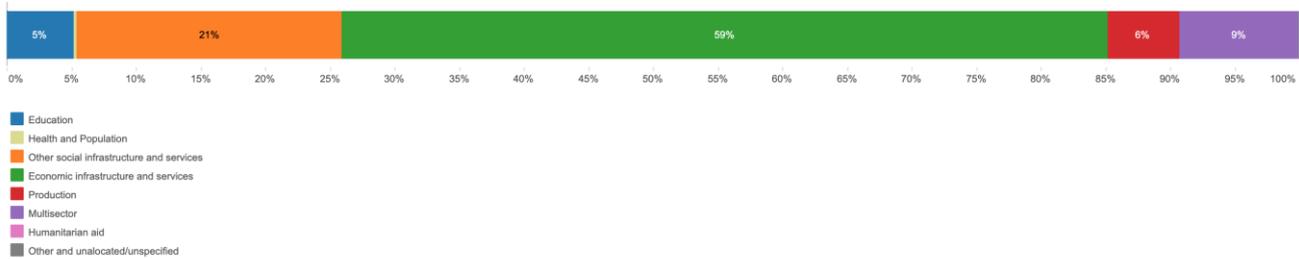
For reference

	2015	2016	2017
Population (million)	0	0	0
GNI per capita (Atlas USD)	8,190	8,740	9,570

Top Ten Donors of Gross ODA for Maldives, 2016-2017 average, USD million

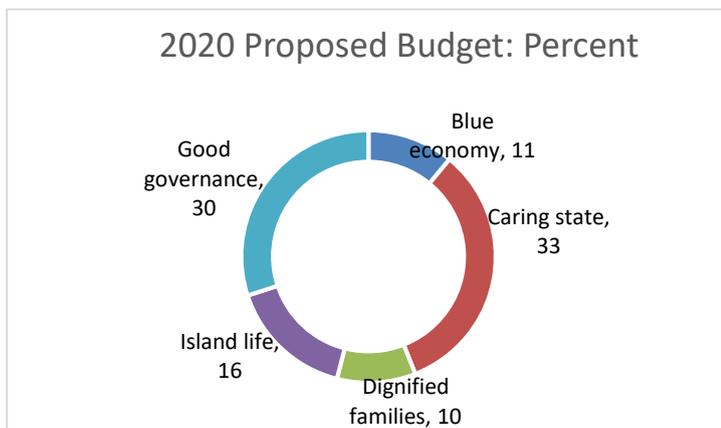


Bilateral ODA by Sector for Maldives, 2016-17 average



As a small, upper-middle income country, the Maldives is not a recipient of significant levels of overseas development aid (grants and concessional loans). In the years 2015 - 2017, the average net aid was around \$32 million annually. Around 70 per cent of this aid was directed towards developing the country's economic infrastructure and manufacturing base, with only 5 per cent being directed to education and 21 per cent to social infrastructure and services. The majority of the aid came from regional sources; loans from the Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, and bilateral grant assistance from Japan, Australia and Kuwait.²⁸⁰

Figure 20: National budget allocations

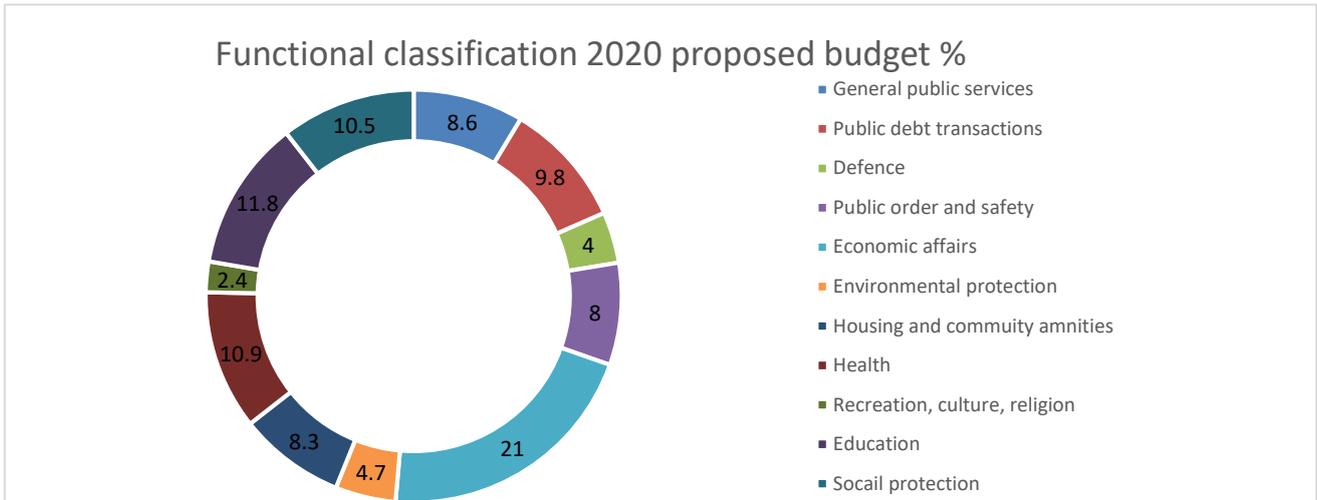


Maldives has committed an impressive and very substantial proportion of its budget to SDG priorities, providing services such as free educational opportunity through university and healthcare for all. Now the SAP seeks to develop infrastructure to assure, for instance, that no one in the country is more than 30 minutes from medical care. Such efforts are taking place across many sectors. Investment in infrastructure is not yet matched with a comprehensive plan for human resources and

institutional capacity development.

Figure 21: Functional classification of budget

²⁸⁰ Ibid.



Building capacities for implementation and enforcement of policies would require an expansion of the public sector, requiring painful trade-offs with infrastructure investment, to maintain fiscal restraint. Specifically, capacity building would entail an improvement in conditions of service for technical cadres. It will also require a step change in the availability and use of data, and in civic education around data-driven choices.

Foreign direct Investment

Foreign direct investment (FDI), is a principal means of financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a prominent means of implementation in Sustainable Development Goal 17. In Maldives, FDI is an important source of much needed, targeted infrastructure investment.

Currently, FDI inflows into Maldives are concentrated in large tourism and infrastructure projects. As the figure below illustrates, FDI inflows into the country have been on an upward trend since 2010. Between 2017 and 2018, inward FDI grew 12% to \$552 million. Much of this growth was due to large scale tourism projects and investment in wholesale and construction. Many of the investment projects that occurred in the Maldives in 2018 were led by investors based in neighboring countries in the Asia and Pacific region, including Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

281 FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

General Public Services: Executive and legislative, financial and fiscal affairs, external affairs; General Services; Public Debt Transactions

Defence: Military, Civil Defence, Police, Fire Protection

Public Order & Safety: Law Courts, Prisons

Economic Affairs: Economic, Commercial & Labour, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Fuel & Energy, Transport, Communication

Environmental Protection: Waste Management, Waste Water Management, Pollution abatement, Protection of Biodiversity & Landscape, R&D Environmental Protection, Environmental Protection N.E.C

Housing & Community Amenities: Housing Development, Community Development, Water Supply, Street Lighting, Housing & Community Amenities N.E.C

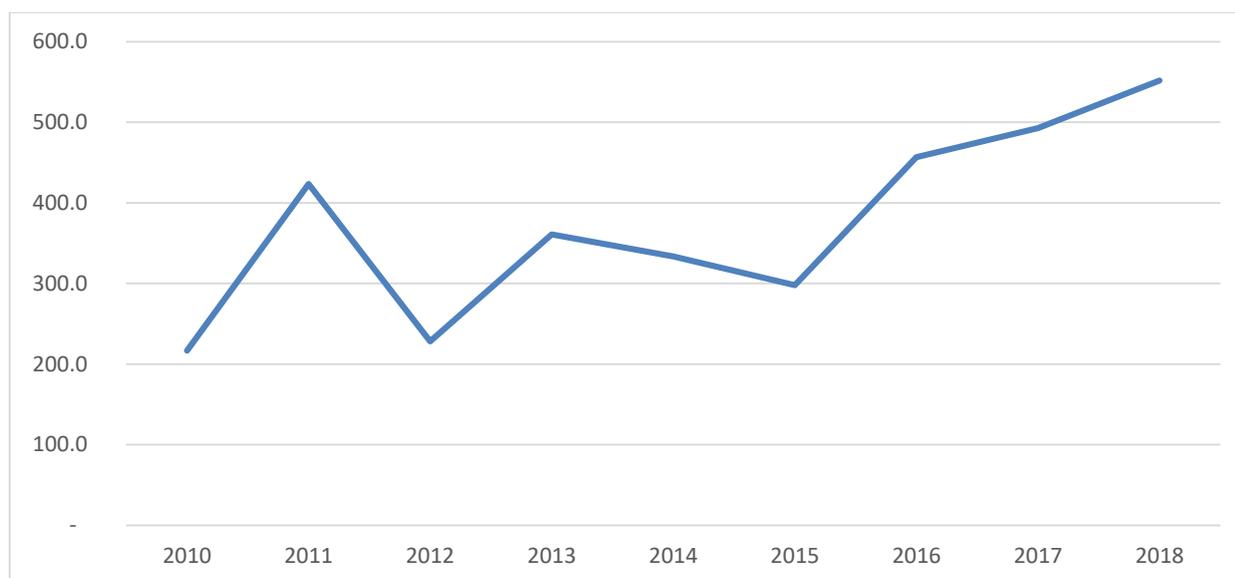
Health: Hospital Services, Public Health Services

Recreation, Culture & Religion: Recreational & Sporting Services, Cultural Services, Broadcasting & Publishing Services, Religious & Other Community Services

Education: Tertiary Education, Education N.E.C

Social Protection: Sickness & Disability, Old Age, Survivors, Family & Children, Social Protection N.E.C

Figure 22: Inward FDI Flows, 2010-2018 (US millions)



Source: ESCAP calculations based on UNCTADSTAT <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/EN/>

Although FDI has been on an upward trend over time, there is still significant room for it to grow and to make more of contribution to the sustainable development of the country. To this end, it is critical that investment facilitation efforts prioritise identifying, attracting and appropriately evaluating projects in key sustainable development sectors beyond just large-scale one-time infrastructure projects. For instance, attracting FDI in key sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency products and services, education, health, water and sanitation is essential. Such investment facilitation efforts, however, hinge on carefully yet swiftly developing and operationalising the necessary FDI policies and regulatory frameworks that maximize the sustainable development potential of FDI in the Maldives.

Beyond improving the FDI policy environment and investment facilitation efforts, dedicated efforts and significant resources must be channelled into improving the business environment. The Maldives continues to rank below par on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Ranking, and even slipped down from 139 in 2018 to 147 in 2019. While progress in recent years has been made in terms of the ease of starting a business, in other areas conditions have stagnated or worsened, including for registering property, accessing finance, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, trading across borders, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvencies. Resolving such bottlenecks is critical to encouraging growth in both foreign and domestic investment from the private sector.

Efforts to improve the business climate will not only encourage foreign investors, but also support and enable domestic small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to flourish and contribute to economic growth and sustainable development of the country. To unleash the development potential of SMEs and enable them to make significant contributions to in-country sustainable development, SME policies and support in the Maldives need to address the following areas in particular:

1. Improving SME access to finance
2. Improving entrepreneurship development, particularly women entrepreneurship development, through education and training programmes

3. Strengthening and expanding networking and information dissemination opportunities to further support technology transfer and collaboration among firms as well as better business development services
4. Strengthening the linkages between foreign direct investors and SMEs

It is critical that policies to address these issues be tailored to the specific needs of the SME sector, i.e. based on the detailed assessment of the sector and what could work in it, and also that they are developed in consultation with key stakeholders in the sector so as to ensure buy-in.

Potential opportunities for leveraging SDG financing

Mobilizing domestically controlled resources held offshore by the wealthiest Maldivians is the key to advancing the Maldives' future economic, social and institutional transformation. Most of the revenue of the Maldives' high-end tourist resorts never enters the local banking system, and a significant proportion of these earnings is held offshore by a small cohort of owners. Until now, there has been no income tax in Maldives, and the tourism industry has contributed to national development through business taxes and fees on tourist stays. Currently, individuals are generally only subject to business profits tax if conducting business activities, while foreign workers are only subject to a 3% remittance tax.

The government has proposed a new personal income tax, with the support of wealthy Maldivians (many of whom may benefit by being able to avoid tax in other, higher tax jurisdictions). The [Income Tax Bill](#) submitted before parliament on 14 October 2019 would introduce a personal income tax on annual income as follows:

- Up to MVR 480,000 - 0%
- MVR 480,001 up to 720,000 - 8%
- MVR 720,001 up to 1,200,000 - 10%
- MVR 1,200,001 and over - 15%

Another important proposed measure of the Income Tax Bill is the broader application of withholding tax for payments to non-residents.

The government and its development partners could also explore a campaign for national development in partnership with this cohort of the wealthy, within a multi-stakeholder partnership. From a human rights perspective, a multi-stakeholder partnership would have greater potential to devise effective recommendations that benefit those most left behind.

Such a campaign should be promoted through a coordinated donor-national partnership mechanism for the SDGs as part of a national SDG Financing Strategy.

Further measures should include putting in place regulations and incentives to ensure that financing flows towards investments that advance the SDGs and prove the "additionality" offered by responsible investment and innovative finance models.

Government, in partnership with foreign bilateral (mainly regional) partners and the UN, philanthropy, businesses, investors, communities, civil society and academia, should seek to create momentum through initiatives like the SDG Philanthropy Platform, a global initiative connecting foundations and philanthropists

to deepen collaboration, leverage resources and sustain impact, or a pipeline of social impact bonds that bear potential for replication and can be turned into larger outcome-based facilities.

A national campaign for the SDGs could also include fundraising from the general public - individuals, both Maldivians and tourists. There is no tradition of giving to secular causes in Maldives, but targeted fundraising efforts could create a much-needed flow of funds for NGOs and decentralized services.

At present there is only limited coordination among Maldives development partners. The new NDP, when approved, should provide the framework for such a renewed commitment to leveraging SDG financing.

Chapter 8: Gaps and challenges towards achieving the 2030 Agenda

The country context analysis pointed to several tensions between economic, social and environmental sustainability goals in the country. The challenges and gaps identified below reflect the key cross-sectoral linkages between different SDG goals and targets through the lens of the five critical dimensions: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

The Maldives is in rapid transition and requires an inspiring vision of the nation's goals and identity. The SAP provides such a vision, but there is not yet consensus around key issues. These include the role of Islam, and its national expression, and the nature of democracy and rule of law.

Figure 23: The Five 'Ps'



The decline in the birthrate offers a demographic dividend, but only if the economy can diversify, generate attractive private sector jobs, and be used to create an environment where women can undertake livelihood activities (and have childcare facilities to enable that) and gender equality is the norm. Youth issues of employment, drugs, gangs and violent extremism must be addressed successfully

The vision and strategy for the nation has been contested politically over the past decade; autocratic or democratic, centralizing or decentralizing, traditional or modern. An inclusive national dialogue is needed to build consensus on a common path all can accept.

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.

There are large disparities in welfare and other socio-economic outcomes across regions. Poverty rates vary widely across atolls, with almost 1 in 5 Maldivians in the southern atolls being poor. Public sector jobs account for about 40 per cent of total employment. Public-private wage differentials and other benefits associated with public employment dis-incentivize young jobseekers from taking private sector opportunities.

The government faces difficult choices. It must contain recurrent spending and improve the efficiency of social spending, while renewing efforts in economic and social inclusion of all regions across the country, fostering private sector job creation and reducing vulnerability by enhancing disaster risk preparedness. And it must do so while improving public sector management and budget credibility.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Geography

- The spatial distribution of inhabited islands creates structural difficulties for development. Issues of transport & access receive priority but are hugely expensive to address. And, the dispersion of small

populations creates a constant barrier to policy implementation (i.e., difficulties investigating environmental violations or social welfare cases).

- ▶ Due to its geographical position and with the peculiar characteristics of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Maldives is particularly concerned by trade and trade facilitation. According to the World Bank 2020 Doing Business Report, Maldives overall ranks 147 in “Ease of doing business”, but only 157 in the “Trading Across Borders” category.²⁸² The most recent data from the UN Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation also reveal that Maldives is below the regional and global implementation averages.²⁸³ This indicates that significant opportunities exist to improve trade facilitation mechanisms.
- ▶ Paperless trade makes international trade more efficient and transparent while improving regulatory compliance, particularly if trade-related data and documents in electronic form are exchanged across borders. Joining the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific might therefore be the solution of choice to address Maldives’ trade facilitation needs, in particular in the context of a rapidly digitalizing global economy.²⁸⁴
- ▶ There is a huge cost to provide even routine services. As a result, many social and environmental services are absent or low quality, or even underutilized (one foreign nephrologist was reported to have seen two patients per year)

Management issues

Government capacities

- ▶ Many progressive laws and policies have been adopted, but the limited size of departments constrains full implementation. The resourcing of the departments charged with implementing laws and plans is a perennial issue in small island countries.
- ▶ There has been limited strategic planning (including urban and territorial planning) and implementation capacity. Goals have tended to be short-term and defined as activities or outputs, with plans made and implemented in silos. Coordination, within government and among partners, is being increased.
- ▶ Workforce planning is limited, and a capacity development plan has not yet been developed. Scholarships and subsidies are not linked to skill gaps. For instance, the hiring of health sector

²⁸² Doing Business 2020. Available from:

<https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/m/maldives/MDV.pdf> (accessed January 2020)

²⁸³ UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. Available from: <https://untfsurvey.org/> (accessed January 2020)

²⁸⁴ ESCAP (2017). Digital Trade facilitation in Asia and the Pacific. Studies in Trade, Investment and Innovation, No. 87. Available from <https://www.unescap.org/publications/digital-trade-facilitation-asia-and-pacific-studies-trade-investment-and-innovation-87>. See also ADB(2017) “Trade Facilitation and Better Connectivity for an Inclusive Asia and Pacific”, available from <https://www.adb.org/publications/trade-facilitation-connectivity-inclusive-asia-pacific>. Potential benefits from achieving cross-border paperless trade in Asia and the Pacific have been quantified in terms of trade costs reductions and trade gains. Region-wide full implementation of cross-border paperless trade would generate export gains of at least 16% for Maldives, leading to increased exports of amount USD 46 billion per year. A more recent study finds that, if Maldives fully implements WTO TFA together with cross-border paperless trade measures, it could achieve trade cost reductions of 25%, instead of only about 7% if it aims at basic compliance with the TFA.

personnel is not based on skills needs. In the same manner, education is not geared to needs of the job market. To the extent admission of migrant labourers is regulated (many are irregular), it is not tied to specific needs.

Data Issues

- ▶ As highlighted by the VNR submitted in 2017, lack of technical expertise in relation to data collection and management remains an impediment for the successful implementation of the SDGs.
- ▶ Strong support should be given to the ongoing development of a 'National Strategy for the Development of Statistics' (NSDS) for the period 2019-2030, as well as to its implementation.
- ▶ There is a need for stronger action on strengthening mechanisms to collect, process, analyze and manage data and statistics, especially for the social and environmental dimensions of the SDGs, including measures to promote data disaggregation.
- ▶ These include the deployment of technologies where appropriate, such as smart city technologies.
- ▶ There is increased connectivity and digitalization, but research is not disseminated, and data is not shared across departments.
- ▶ Data is not yet used effectively for decision making. Data is collected as a system of administrative inputs, not designed for analysis for evidence-based policy. And data is not disseminated among policy makers, including the Cabinet or President's Office.
- ▶ Monitoring and surveillance are weak. Decisions are made based on survey data rather than routine administrative data.
- ▶ There is a lack of disaggregated data by age, sex/gender, income, geographic location, etc.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- ▶ There is a weak culture of monitoring and evaluation in the Maldives. Limited experience with evaluations for policy making and absence of dedicated staff make this an under-resourced area for achievement of policy objectives.

The 5 Ps: challenges and gaps

Prosperity

- ▶ Rapid urbanization is straining ability to meet infrastructure needs, contributing to waste and pollution and increasing inequalities, all of which could threaten future prosperity.
- ▶ The financial sustainability of populist measures is a major issue. These include free health insurance cover and free education through a first degree.
- ▶ Low civil service salaries create retention problems at technical and managerial levels, which constrain policy implementation.

- ▶ The centralization fueled by the unconstrained growth of the “greater Malé” area is a countervailing force to decentralization efforts.
- ▶ The prosperity achieved by the nation is built on a narrow economic base. It is heavily reliant on high end tourism, which can be subject to shocks such as recession or terrorism, climate change and natural disasters. And the high-end tourism of Maldives requires levels of skill in its workforce that people from neighboring islands have difficulty in providing.
- ▶ The major expansion of the international migrant workforce in recent years has occurred without planning, adequate governance or protective labour standards or understanding of its long-term consequences for the local labour force.
- ▶ Migration should be made safe, regular and orderly and the developmental gains of international migration need to be identified and harnessed.
- ▶ The concentration of wealth (both among a small circle of persons, and spatially in Malé) has created growing inequalities and exacerbates social tensions.
- ▶ Young people are literate but lack skills for employability. The youth bulge – a potential demographic dividend – is characterized by significant youth unemployment & unreadiness for jobs
- ▶ Women’s exclusion from the modern economy is especially troublesome - gender roles and stereotypes constrain employment, and attitudes toward gender equality are becoming more conservative.

People.

- ▶ The rapid transformation of the Maldives over the past forty years has strained traditional systems of social cohesion. Changes in family structure and the urbanisation caused by migration to Malé have led in some cases to the collapse of intergenerational support, requiring the creation of public care facilities.
- ▶ After the turmoil of the last decade, and the disappointment of excessive expectations of democracy, people mistrust politicians and institutions, contributing to low access to justice and social polarization. The alienation of youth (seen in drugs use, gangs, extremism, etc.) has become a major concern. And there has been a backlash against modernity itself, leading to hardening attitudes toward gender equality, a more fundamentalist religiosity, and significant extremism.
- ▶ A mismatch of education with workforce needs contributes to the limited opportunities experienced by women & youth.
- ▶ The protection of children is vastly under-resourced, left to be dealt with through inefficient social protection cash grants that do not address the underlying protection vulnerabilities of their beneficiaries.
- ▶ Because of limited opportunities for education and employment, people migrate internally to larger islands, but find conditions difficult there.

- ▶ There is an increase in non-communicable disease – there are high levels of smoking and overweight and low physical activity, but there is still a “double burden” of i.e., undernutrition.
- ▶ Persons with disabilities and the elderly without caregivers suffer serious exclusion. Policy measures look to address some issues, but implementation is very limited.
- ▶ International migrants are vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace and in society at large and many are marginalized, with specific concerns related to a significant population of undocumented migrants.
- ▶ Mental health problems are a growing concern, particularly for young people who feel alienated by the older generation’s traditional views, the pressures to achieve results in modern society, and lack of life skills to develop resilient and positive coping mechanisms for the challenges faced in this transition.
- ▶ While protective legal frameworks exist, the absence of implementation capacity and the strength of traditional cultural norms result in unchecked violence against women, sexual abuse of children, and social exclusion of single mothers.
- ▶ The very limited availability of rehabilitative services for drug abuse has resulted in the permanent criminalization of most users who come in contact with the state.

Planet

- ▶ The experience and lessons of the 2004 tsunami have sensitized the entire country to climate change, and both adaptation and mitigation measures are supported. However, urban planning and measures for urban resilience require greater attention.
- ▶ The Maldives is highly dependent on imported fossil fuels, and that dependency is growing - renewables are an addition, supplying part of a net increase in demand. Though the national medium-term target is for 30% of energy to be from solar, it is not yet reducing fossil fuel use. Thus far, alternative energy pilots tend to be small scale. Air pollution is increasing.
- ▶ Marine biodiversity is under threat. There has been a decline in fish stocks due to overfishing. Coastal ecosystems have been damaged due to disregard for environmental protection in development, construction and land reclamation activities, as well as the pumping of raw sewerage directly into coastal waters. Sea temperature rise has led to serious coral bleaching, as in 2016.
- ▶ Malé and some other islands are seriously overcrowded and dredging and land reclamation (now banned) have damaged reefs. A lack of urban planning is contributing to environmental impacts.
- ▶ Waste is burned or buried. Sewage is pumped, untreated directly into the sea. There are small-scale alternative pilots. Measures have been taken to ban open burning and single-use plastic bottles in future, and there is strong interest in developing a circular economy, but there has been no source reduction yet – plastics use has increased.
- ▶ The fresh groundwater lenses of most islands have become unusable, due to contamination, fertilizer use, salination or extraction. Potable water comes from desalination or rainwater capture. As temperatures rise due to climate change, shortages increasingly occur during the dry season.

Peace

- ▶ There is a limited popular understanding of democracy and the role of the state – there has been no civic education for over a decade. Consequently, politicians and the public are trapped in a populist cycle of demands and promises, leading to unsustainable spending and a loss of institutional stability and trust.
- ▶ In some areas of government work, there is formal commitment to reform but limited follow through (progressive policies without implementation). At the same time, in areas that affect the interests of the powerful, like regulation of migrant labour terms and conditions, little action is taken. There is need for a human rights-based approach to such issues, based on multi-stake holder partnerships.
- ▶ While the current government has taken important steps against impunity and abuses, especially in the judiciary, there have been no prosecutions for torture, investigations into deaths in detention have been inadequate and many child abuse cases have lingered in courts for many years.
- ▶ . Though based on specific allegations against each judge, the wholesale removal of supreme court justices can give the appearance of a political ‘purge’, risking a cycle of ‘revenge’ after future political shifts. There is a need for a national process of dialogue and reconciliation. And, weak institutions of accountability must be strengthened.
- ▶ Politically, the country has oscillated between competing national visions of centralization and decentralization. This is symptomatic of a public polarization on a number of levels; chiefly, it is reflection of the tensions between modernizing and traditionalist perspectives. It also reflects divisions between Malé and the atolls, and local island residents and migrants to larger islands.
- ▶ Human rights have been a prominent priority of the current government, and initial results have been achieved in a number of areas, particularly the rule of law. Increased accountability is a priority for the government. Much also remains to be done. In part this is due to weak implementation capacities, insufficient budgetary allocations, and lack of popular support for crimes against women and girls - for instance, the unresponsiveness of the state to sexual abuse and GBV.
- ▶ Island youth wishing to continue school beyond lower secondary must leave home, often to Malé. Without a system of hostels, young people face overcrowded quarters, and pressures to join gangs use drugs. Drug use is criminalized, with the intention of rehabilitation, but the shortage of facilities makes the system highly punitive. The criminal justice system does not provide ‘second chances’, and prisons and juvenile detention are noted for harsh conditions.
- ▶ State care facilities for people with special needs, the elderly and abused or neglected children are new, small and lack adequate human and financial resources to fulfil their obligations towards the people in their care. Mental health issues are particularly underserved.
- ▶ Corruption and state capture by a perceived oligarchy are seen as serious problems which result in reduced government revenues for the promotion of human rights and development.
- ▶ Violent Extremism has gained adherents in Maldives – it is claimed that in per capita terms, Maldives has been a leading source of Foreign Terrorist Fighters. The government has successfully used

foreign partnerships to prevent domestic incidents and is actively managing the licensing of preachers. A facility is being established for the reintegration of widows and children from Syria.

Partnerships

- ▶ Development planning is only now being revived after a hiatus. The SAP and budget are not yet linked to SDGs, nor to a long-term plan. Four government coordination bodies have planning, oversight and coordination roles (the Office of the President, Development Planning & Infrastructure, Foreign Affairs and Finance). Coordination is not fully systematized.
- ▶ Donors are largely based offshore, though more missions are opening in Malé. The government is now more actively engaged in donor coordination. The UN System could play an important role in catalyzing the coordination of development finance for Maldives on behalf of government, including with non-traditional donors and partners such as India and China. However, the UN system itself is faced with limited and uneven resources among its agencies, given Maldives new upper-middle income status, and a new partnership model is needed.
- ▶ The physical presence of the UN in Maldives is also unbalanced (i.e., “environment overshadows the rest”). And, key nonresident agencies do not have an effective presence. For instance, there is a critical need for help in housing and spatial planning, but UN-Habitat is not playing a significant role in Maldives.
- ▶ The civil society sector is nascent in the Maldives and organised civic engagement generally weak. CSOs have a critical role to play, in the absence of government implementation capacities. They are desperately needed for service delivery to the vulnerable. Ad Hoc government partnerships with CSOs exist. However, most CSOs lack capacity to make proposals or manage projects, and large numbers of them are inactive. The culture of private giving to secular CSOs is absent in the Maldives, and this requires support from external partners.
- ▶ Resources for development have been greatly constrained by Maldives accession to upper middle-income country status - as an upper-middle income country, grant funding is limited, except for environment. SIDS status is a basis for support. However, in future sources of funding will increasingly have to come from non-traditional sources. Private sector partnerships around specific SDG goals are one possibility, as are innovative collaborations with major partners India & China, and around non-traditional new economic niches now under discussion (e.g., financing Halal tourism, becoming an Islamic finance hub).

UN Comparative Advantage and Partnerships

The United Nations is recognized as having made essential contributions to Maldives’ transformation, and is a valued partner in its continued development. In particular, the United Nations is uniquely placed to support the Maldives in leveraging global experience, financing, partnerships and technologies to support SDG achievement. Given the Maldives’ status as an upper middle-income country, it is not the role of the UN to directly provide services, but rather to help the government to meet its obligations to everyone under its jurisdiction as a duty bearer.

The unique strengths of the United Nations include a global perspective; neutrality and impartiality, a global network of partner countries with similar experiences around the world, access to and provision of world-class expertise, data and knowledge; wide recognition, support and credibility on sensitive issues, trusted policy advice on global commitments and sustainable development practices, and convening power.

The UN has a key role to play as an honest broker in consensus building on roadblocks to the achievement of the SDGs. In particular, the United Nations' normative role – support for implementation of international standards, norms and agreements, with the focus on human rights, its advocacy for inclusive economic development and socially and environmentally sustainable growth - is particularly important in the Maldives. In particular, the UN is in a position to assist government to comprehensively map the commitments made under the various international human rights instruments that have been ratified by the Maldives, including through ensuring enabling national legislation and assess its implementation.

The UN is uniquely relevant and positioned to provide long term support to efforts led by the Government to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs through i) focusing on inclusive and sustainable economic growth through long-term planning for the development of human capital and institutions; ii) support to integrating and aligning national legislation policies and their implementation and monitoring to agreed global norms; iii) ensuring social development through service delivery systems that leave no one behind; and iv) building the country's resilience through environmental change adaptation.

The UN system is well placed to facilitate partnerships with International Financial Institutions (IFIs), especially the non-resident ones, in order to work with and support the government on reforms. Due to its country presence, and ongoing dialogue and partnership with government partners, the UNDS could also help with the implementation of loans from IFIs in order to achieve the planned development results in an efficient and effective manner.

The United Nations can help the government to coordinate its diverse external partners, supporting the design and operation of mechanisms that focus partner efforts around the national strategic plan. It can also play a critical role in supporting the mobilization and strategic deployment of finance for sustainable development, to help Maldives accelerate the efficient disbursement of development finance.

Leveraging its convening power, the UN can bring together relevant actors, including the private sector, banking and financial institutions and development banks, and civil society, to accelerate mobilization of finance for the 2030 Agenda.

The UNDS can help government to balance a focus on economic growth and infrastructure investment with the scaling up of more effective and targeted social support systems, directing economic growth back to the ones left behind, for equity, social justice and human rights protection. To address priority challenges in the delivery of essential social services, the United Nations is the organization with the most comprehensive normative background and experience to address development gaps in operations and services for the vulnerable: women, children and youth, migrants, older persons, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.

The UN has special expertise in human capital issues, the linkages between economic growth and

social justice, women's rights and strengthening the empowerment of women. The UN also has a comparative advantage in balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability and resilience concerns.

Identifying and meeting the needs of those at risk of being left requires going beyond studies, policy development and advocacy, to approaches based on responsiveness to individual needs. This will require concerted efforts at capacity building of institutions - efforts to fill the gaps in the availability of community based social services. This is a long-term effort, but one which the government has begun to engage in, and where the UN has already some experience and lessons from the region and similar countries around the world.

This country analysis provides insights and identifies areas where the United Nations can strategically contribute based on its comparative advantage in the following thematic areas: inclusive and sustainable economic diversification for job creation; enhancing democratic and effective institutions at all levels; health and reproductive rights; inclusive education; combating inequality and promotion of social inclusion; mitigation and adaptation to climate change, disaster risk reduction, security and migration.

Cutting across these areas are a general need for improved quality, accessibility, disaggregation and use of data and deployment of ICT; enhanced governance and public finance management; the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights; application of the principle of leaving no one behind; and ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: 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 tendencies 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	Targeting, limiting the work of and closing human rights organisations	medium	medium	Number of active human rights organisations

	rights	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
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; Occupational gender segregation, gender wage gap
		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	
		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	high	high	Use of data analyses by parliament and presidency
		Integration of gender equality/gender analysis in national policy and legislative frameworks and national programmes not matched by implementation and enforcement capacities.	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
		Islands affected by worsening environmental degradation due to untreated sewage, pollution and waste	medium	medium	Ad hoc studies

		Social norms, practices 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	medium	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 (PWD) into the work world	medium	medium	CWD attending mainstream education Employment of PWD Qualitative studies on attitudes to inclusion of PWD
		Inequalities, discrimination and GBV remain invisible, due to lack of sex disaggregated data, or lack of use/ data sharing and culture of privacy around "family matters"	medium	medium	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; 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 organization 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 in society		high	high	Violence against expats/ foreign migrant workers	

		Rise in censorship/ curbs against fundamental freedoms	medium	high	Executive decrees, judicial verdicts and parliamentary resolutions
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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 and atoll population	medium	low	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			
		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, address issues of disappearances;
		Limited capacity for rehabilitation of violent extremist returnees	high	medium	
		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, which could impact governance, social cohesion or people's	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

	ability to satisfy their needs	Vulnerability of current economic growth model to fluctuations in tourist demand due to reliance on high-end premium market;	medium	high	Share of high-end tourism in GDP
		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; 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	Investments 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

		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 atoll to Malé) and/or international migration	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
		Conditions of work and health of international migrants continue to be inadequate, undocumented migrants lack access to basic	high	medium	Data on migrant numbers; Registration data; Health data; Prosecutions for trafficking Global

		services and human rights			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	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	Poor management of water and land resources leading to increases in land salination, and reduction in productivity and land available for food production	high	low	Land salinity
		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	<u>Environment and Climate Change</u> : risks to the islands, freshwater lenses, eco-systems and people resulting from issues associated with the environment, climate change and natural resources. Increasing risks of natural and man-	Oil and gas use make an increasing contribution to CO2 emissions, if their contribution is not cut;	high	medium	CO2 emissions from power plants and vehicles; Number power plants equipped with new technology to reduce emissions; Percentage of power needs generated by solar
		Lack of firm country commitment or nationally defined contributions under Paris Agreement;	high	medium	New climate change strategy and defined contributions adopted
		Risks to the economy, with multiplier risks for the retrogression in the enjoyment of ESCRs.	high	high	Benchmarks toward attainment of a circular economy

	made disasters, driven by climate change.	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	medium	medium	Sample surveys
		Malé and atolls not prepared to deal with floods or other disasters arising from extreme weather events	medium	high	Number of islands with comprehensive disaster management plans
		Exposure to flood, erosion, drought and hazards, and increasingly severe impacts of climate extremes;	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.

Annex 2: Core UN Human Rights Treaties, ILO Conventions & Environmental Conventions & Regulations

RATIFICATION STATUS MALDIVES		
Treaty	Signature date	Ratification Date, Accession(a), Succession(d) Date
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)		20 Apr 2004 (a)
Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (CAT-OP)	14 Sep 2005	15 Feb 2006
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR)		19 Sep 2006 (a)
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights aiming to the abolition of the death penalty (CCPR-OP2-DP)		
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CED)	06 Feb 2007	
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)		01 Jul 1993 (a)
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)		24 Apr 1984 (a)
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)		19 Sep 2006 (a)
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMV)		
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	21 Aug 1990	11 Feb 1991
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-AC)	10 May 2002	29 Dec 2004
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children child prostitution and child pornography (CRC-OP-SC)	10 May 2002	10 May 2002
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	02 Oct 2007	05 Apr 2010

ACCEPTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES FOR MALDIVES			
<u>Treaty Description</u>	<u>Treaty Name</u>	<u>Acceptance of individual complaints procedures</u>	<u>Date of acceptance/non acceptance</u>
Individual complaints procedure under the Convention against Torture	CAT, Art.22	N/A	
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	CCPR-OP1	YES	19 Sep 2006
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	CED, Art.31	-	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	CEDAW-OP	YES	13 Mar 2006
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	CERD, Art.14	N/A	
Optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	CESCR-OP	NO	
Individual complaints procedure under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	CMW, Art.77	-	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child	CRC-OP-IC	-	
Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	CRPD-OP	NO	

ACCEPTANCE OF THE INQUIRY PROCEDURE FOR MALDIVES			
<u>Treaty Description</u>	<u>Treaty Name</u>	<u>Acceptance of inquiry procedure</u>	<u>Date of acceptance/non acceptance</u>
Inquiry procedure under the Convention against Torture	CAT, Art.20	YES	20 Apr 2004
Inquiry procedure under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	CED, Art.33	-	
Inquiry procedure under the Optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	CEDAW-OP, Art. 8-9	YES	13 Mar 2006
Inquiry procedure under the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	CESCR-OP, Art.11	-	

Inquiry procedure under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child	CRC-OP-IC, Art.13	YES	27 Sep 2019
Inquiry procedure under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	CRPD-OP, Art.6-7	-	

ENVIRONMENTAL CONVENTIONS & NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORKS	Date of ratification / completion
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	09 – 11 – 1992
Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal	1992
CBD National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)	2016 - 2025
Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity	2003
Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS)	1– 07 - 2019
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	09 – 11 - 1992
UNFCCC National Communications (1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd)	05 – 11 – 2001 (1 st), 2011 (2 nd)
UNFCCC Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMA)	n/a
UNFCCC National Adaptation Plans of Action (NAPA)	2007
Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for Paris Accord	2016
UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	03 – 09 - 2002
UNCCD National Action Programmes (NAP)	03 – 09 - 2002
Stockholm Convention (SC) on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs)	17 – 10 – 2006
SC National Implementation Plan (NIP)	2017
Minamata Convention (MC) on Mercury	Not ratified yet
UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	2015
Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for the UN SDGs	2017

Others relevant conventions	
Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and CITES	11-09-2003
SC National Implementation Plan (NIP)	n/a
Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)	n/a
Maldives Energy Strategy	2010
GEF National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA)	January 2009
Strategic Action Programmes (SAPs) for shared international waterbodies	1995
NATIONAL LAWS/REGULATIONS/POLICIES	
Strategic Action Plan of the Government of Maldives	2019 – 2023
Addu City Protected Area Regulation	2018
Fuvahmulah City Protected Area Regulation	2018
Gender Equality Law	2016
Ozone Layer Protection Act	2015
Disaster Management Law	2015
National Waste Management Policy	2015
Maldives Energy Policy and Strategy	2015
Regulation to control import of bird species as pets	2015
Migratory Birds Regulation	2014
Dewatering regulation	2013
Regulation on Land Reclamation and Dredging	2013
Hanifaru Management Regulation	2012
Regulation on Environmental Impact Assessment	2012
Environment Liability Regulation	2011
Plant Protection Act	2011
The Law on the Maldives Fisheries, Plant Protection Act	2010

National Waste Management Strategy	2008
Uprooting of Trees Regulation	2007
Regulation on protection and conservation of the environment in the tourism industry	2006
The Land Law	2002
Tourism Act	1999
Uninhabited islands act	1998
Environmental Protection and Preservation Act	1993
Coral and Sand Mining Regulation	1993