

INTRODUCTION

National Context

The Republic of Maldives is made up of 1190 small coral islands scattered in the Indian Ocean with an area of 90,000 sq. km. Of the 1190 islands 200 islands are inhabited, with the population of 245,910 (census 1994). The population is spread thinly with some islands having 200 to an average of 600-800 people in an island with the exception of Male, the capital

Most of the islands have minor variations in characteristics, and little differences in Dialect can be found in the south and up in the north. There is very little inter-island migration and islands have little contact with each other. The major Centre for all the activities is the capital. For health education and employment purposes one-fourth of the Population lives in Male'.

The country is small but the scattered population makes the provision of essential economic and social infra-structure extremely expensive and it does not rule out education. Communication is mainly limited to erratic mail service, telephones and *dhoani* (boats) as a link between Male' and the islands. There is no regular inter-island transport for whole country and therefore the isolation of some islands, make many of them an economic and social unit.

History of education – overview

The educational scene in the Maldives presents a unique mix of traditional and modern education. The country has a high literacy rate at 98.5% with a marginally higher rate for females than for males and presenting no rural urban disparities

There is a system of traditional indigenous educational institutions which are owned and operated by the island communities. These have developed and thrived on the wisdom, creativity and knowledge of the population and provided them with basic learning. This system has survived through the centuries and served the island communities well. Traditional schools provide basic religious education, Quranic recitation and basic literacy and numeracy for pre-school- age and school-age children. The traditional system operates through different levels and categories of institutions which include “*edhruge*” “*Maktab*” and “*Madhrasa*”

The traditional system operating through a variety of institutions. Offers the widest coverage as far as school age children in the islands are concerned . This explains the high literacy rates and the almost non-existence of male/female, rural /urban disparity

There is a Faculty of Technical Education (FTE) in Male, which produces skilled and semi-skilled workers in various trades. There are Rural Youth Vocational

Training Centres in the Atolls, imparting training in different trades, linked to the needs of the labor market and self-employment opportunities.

Continuing Education programmes are diversified in nature but have a limited coverage. The programmes address a wide variety of target populations and offer an equal variety of courses, including basic literacy, adult education classes, and condensed educational courses for over-aged children (second chance education), skill training, population education, Typing etc. In addition to these continuing educational courses, informal education is being provided by the “Voice of Maldives” which broadcasts various programmes of general interest to the public. Other ministries and department, such as the Ministry of Gender Development, Ministry of Youth Development, the Youth Centre, the Ministry of Health, provide short-term training in various trades and vocations in response to meet specific sectoral needs.

Literacy and continuing Education Programme

A nation-wide programme called *Asaasee Thauleem* (Basic Education) to eradicate illiteracy from the country was first launched in 1980. The intended programme was launched with a literacy rate of 81.5% (19,215 illiterates). This clearly shows the relatively high literacy rate even before the programme.

The programme is aimed to

- make up for lost opportunities;
- improve self-development;
- create love and interest for work;
- improve healthy living and;
- improve social development;

The programme was conducted through a community based volunteer campaign. Classes were organized and attended by mostly females as the men were away for fishing. With the regular classes educational radio-programmes were telecast based on the contents of the literacy. During the course of 10 years the programme attained the rate 98.6% with 2,014 illiterates of which 660 were female and 1,354 male.

The high literacy rate for women has largely been due the high participation of females in the programme. At present the programme is more geared towards functional literacy, as most of the illiterate and neo-literate men are out during most the day fishing or either work in a resort island. A motivation to attend the classes or continue learning is important by providing learning materials relevant to their work areas.

Even though a high literacy rate for both the male and the female have been achieved, the country faces the problem of the relapse of the neo-literates into illiteracy. Efforts

are being made by the Center for Continuing Education, responsible body for the implementation of the Literacy Programme, by providing literacy materials and conducting regular functional (post) Literacy classes. The lack of reading materials suitable (in Thaana) for neo-literates are greatly felt to meet the goals of National EFA Action Plan.

The role of functioning Community Education Centers

Presently in each atoll, provision of formal and non-formal education is centered at an Atoll Education Centre (AEC). In the Atolls, the AECs have so far functioned as formal schools and served mainly the school age inhabitants of the island, where the AEC is situated. Thus AECs have failed to serve the purpose for which it was established. The Atolls did not adequately, if at all, receive AECs contribution in the development, administration and supervision of education. In this scenario the development and the expansion of non-formal education in the atolls have been severely affected. To remedy this situation, Community Education Centres need to be established in order to carry out the continuing educational activities.

The first Resource Centre which also is to serve the community education was established in 1989 in Baa Atoll followed by Lhaviyani, Laamu and Gaaf Alif Atoll. Assistance was also provided to establish Centres in Noonu, Thaa and Seenu Atolls. These centres are situated within the premises of the Atoll Education Centre. In fact the resource centre is one-room, which was initially meant to be the Community Education room. Atoll Community Educators are appointed to some Resource Centres. They are to plan and coordinate Community Education activities in the Atoll, under the guidance of the Headmaster at Atoll Education Centre.

However this structure and the arrangement too have failed. Headmasters of the AECs are too involved in the day to day management of formal education to pay attention for the development of the non formal education programmes. At the same time the Atoll Community Educators did not have enough motivation to promote the community education activities. As result, the Resource Centres which even began some activities became gradually inactive and turned defunct.

Another problem with the community education centres are the level of the public interest shown. One of the reasons may be that the few reading materials which are in the centres are not relevant to the needs of the readers or it may be that the materials are too factual that they do not want to use them for pleasure reading.

However CCE is trying to promote the use of these centres by the island community by providing reading materials and creating opportunities for them to gain different skills through these centres.

