

Figure 1: Map of Maldives (www.mymaldives.com)

1.1 Geographic and demographic Setting

The Republic of Maldives is a small, island nation with a total of 1190 islands. Out of this, 196 islands are populated, 88 are resort islands and 34 have been developed as industrial islands. The country stretches 823 km north to south and 130 km east to west.

The sea forms over 99 percent of the Maldives and only 0.33 percent is land (Maldives_Geography at www.theMaldives.com:2007). The islands of the Maldives are small, and can be walked across in ten minutes; only a few are longer than two kilometres. Currently, there are 72 islands with a population less than 500. 39% of the islands have a population between 1000 and 500 and only 2% of the islands have a population of over 5000. The highly scattered nature of the population poses many different challenges for the provision of services especially issues about access to education provision that is of high standard and quality.

According to the March 2006 census (Ministry of Planning and National Development: 2007), the population of the Maldives is 298,693, out of which 147,509 are females. Nearly 1/3 of the population live in the capital Male'. According to the projected mid-year population of Maldives by Age, 2006-2025 (Ministry of Planning National Development: 2007), the population of the Maldives is projected at 309,575.

Currently, just over 1/3 of the population is of the school-going age. By 2015, it is projected that this will go down to a quarter.



1.2 Historical Setting

The Maldives has been an independent state for most of its history. Portuguese occupied the Maldives for 15 years in the 16th century. The Maldives became a British protectorate in 1887 and remained so until independence on 26 July 1965 (Maldives-History at www.theMaldives.com:2007).

Maldives was converted to Islam in 1153 A.D. Pre-Islamic data suggests that Buddhism was the prevailing religion in the country. However, there is evidence to suggest that Hinduism was also practiced in the islands (Mohamed: 2007). The language of Maldives, Dhivehi, is of Indic origin, and the people are of different ethnicities. The identity of the first settlers in the archipelago remains unknown, but the language and old place-names show Aryan and Dravidian origins, suggesting early migrations from the Indian subcontinent (<http://nclhr.gov.mv/history/>)

In Dhivehi, the script is known as *Thaana* and it is written from right to left, like the Arabic letters. English is treated as a second language and as the medium of instruction in

the schools. The prevailing low pass percentage of English at the end of lower secondary level has raised issues about language of instruction in the schools.

1.3 Economic and Social Setting

Like many small island nations, Maldives experiences a scarcity of natural resources with a small labour market and diseconomies of scale. Despite this, the main industries in the country; fishing and tourism enjoy a thriving economic stability which has largely contributed to the wealth of the nation.

During the past two decades, the development of the tourism and fisheries sectors, favourable external conditions, large inflows of external aid, and generally prudent economic management contributed to a steady rise in GDP of 7% per annum. Two decades of strong growth has led to some of the best economic, social and health indicators in South Asia- average per capita income of the Maldives is around \$2,600 (Asian Development Bank: September2007).

The Maldives is on the threshold of graduating from Less Developed Country (LDC) status to the middle-income group. The tsunami of December 2004 brought with it destruction and calamity to the island nations and its economic impact was that ‘for the first time in its history, the country recorded a negative (economic) growth rate ...5.5 percent in 2005 (The World Bank: 2006). The country has now regained its economic prosperity and will graduate to the middle –income group status in 2008.

The general developmental context in the Maldives is made up of a tradition of political stability and cultural homogeneity comprising of a common history, language (Dhivehi) and religion (Islam). It has always been culturally and socially important for the people of the Maldives to be educated and parents see it as their primary responsibility to send their children to school.



However, Maldives faces innumerable social challenges. The extremely dense population in the capital Male’ and most importantly the housing shortage means that the youth in the capital, are disadvantaged in terms of the social conditions with regards to basic facilities such as proper living space, and recreational facilities. According to a survey carried out on the issues of the youth (Ministry of Youth Development and Sports et al: 2005), ‘as many as half of the approximately 30,000 youth living in the capital Male’, aged 18-24, are unemployed’. This group faces the danger of going into substance abuse which is increasingly and alarmingly on the rise. Further, there is the potential risk of the spread of HIV/AIDS, drugs related crime and violence. Education policy and the quality of schooling have a large part to play in order to curb these issues.

According to the Health Master Plan 2006-2015, the health status of the people of the Maldives had shown significant improvement in the last decade with all health indicators showing a steady improvement (Ministry of Health: 2006). The infant mortality rate/000 live birth for 2005 was recorded at 12 and maternal mortality rate/1000000 live births was recorded at 72.49 (Ministry of Health: 2006), which indicates that these MDG goals are on track and will be achieved by 2020 (ISACPA:2007).

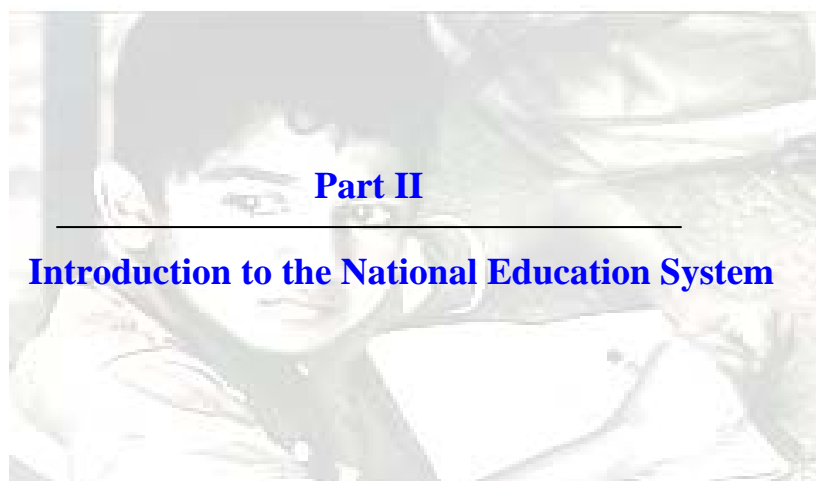
The economy of the country is such that it is precariously balanced on the sustainability of the tourism industry and the economic stability of the world economy. Further, the skills shortage means that the country has to rely on expatriate skilled workforce, which in turn further makes the economy more threatening. The government has plans to address this skills shortage which will have huge implications for the economy.

1.4 Political Setting

Maldives is a republic with an elected president as the head of government. It became a republic in 1968, three years after it gained independence as a British Protectorate. The Maldives has a longer history as a Sultan as the head of government and the current president is only the third president of the country. President Maumoon Abdul Gayyoom has been the president since 1978 and is in his sixth term in office.

The current constitution came into effect on the 1 January 1988, but political pressure from some local groups, led the president to embark on a democratic reform process with a more representative political system. In this reform process, the most significant milestone would be the new constitution that is being drafted, which will come into effect as soon as 2008. Multi-party politics have been established and human rights awareness and education has come to the forefront of the society. Three generations of educated population is active in the country and they are aware of their rights; politically, socially and most importantly individually. This awareness comes at a cost, as no formal channel has been established for information dissemination and most worryingly, in most cases, selective information is disseminated for political gain. This in turn is threatening the homogeneity and the social fabric of the society. The social values and the responsibility that comes with the rights have not been highlighted. Therefore, the education system in the country needs to give utmost importance to this issue and incorporate it into its policy framework.





Part II

Introduction to the National Education System

2. Education

2.1 Introduction

Education contributes to the economic stability of the nation by increasing the knowledge and skills of the people, leading to increases in income. In addition to economic stability, education promotes civil and international peace as well as cultural tolerance and understanding. It has multiple effects, empowering people to bring about informed and necessary changes in their lives. Thus, not only does education benefit the person learning, but also the community in which they live.

Maldivians attach great importance to education. As such, approximately seven percent of our GDP and 20 percent of our total expenditure is spent on education. Maldives also receives aid from international donor agencies and countries.

The Maldives has had a long history of semi-formal religious-based education for the masses and this is still practised today. The traditional system consisted of children gathering in homes called ‘edhuruge’ to learn Dhivehi language and the Arabic script and to learn to recite the Holy Quran. In addition, there were schools for young adults for navigation, languages, and for Muslim theology. Although educational attainment in the traditional system is low in terms of performance in formal examinations, the system has contributed towards achieving many educational objectives – the most important of which is the relatively high rate of literacy and the preservation of national culture and tradition.

The initial challenge to this traditional system occurred in 1927 with the establishment of the first government school in Male’. This school was first limited to the education of boys but later in 1944 a section was opened for girls and young women. Instruction in this school covered Dhivehi language, Islam, Arabic and Arithmetic. By 1945 each inhabited island had a traditional school (maktab) providing instruction at the lower primary level.

Rapid changes followed. In the 1950s the education system was remodelled to meet the requirements for trained people in a growing economy. In 1960 a dramatic change in the education system occurred with the introduction of two English medium schools in Male' as part of a conscious effort to prepare its citizens to meet the increasing development needs of the nation. However, this resulted in two distinct forms of education systems existing side by side. Nevertheless, until recently government schooling has been concentrated mainly in Male'.

The most recent historic development in education in the Maldives occurred in 1978, with the decision to move to a unified national system of education and to promote a more equitable distribution of facilities and resources. The policy focus was on providing Universal Primary Education for All and thus the strategies involved the formulation of a unified curriculum for Grades 1-7, improvement of teacher training and the establishment and upgrading of new schools in the atolls. Two government schools (one Atoll Education Centre (AEC) and one Atoll School (AS)) were established in each atoll and today these schools represent the availability of high quality basic education for the children in their locales.

Recent educational development of the country is characterized by a very rapid increase in student enrolment and the number of educational institutions. During this period, the provision of basic education remained the main priority of the sector for a number of years. Many schools have been constructed, a national curriculum was introduced and later revisions were carried out, and local textbooks and teacher guides have been developed for all the primary education grades (grades 1-7).

School enrolment has risen rapidly (from 15,000 in 1978 to 102,073 in 2005) and the education sector's share of total Government expenditure in the last 5 years (up to 2006) has been an annual average of 15.8 per cent. Access to primary education (grades 1-7) has been universalised, secondary education is being expanded at a very fast rate, access to tertiary education has been provided, and various projects have been started that support students to go on to tertiary education locally and overseas.

Present plans for education emphasise access to 10 years of universal basic education by the year 2010; expanding and improving early childhood care and education; inclusive education especially for children with special needs, continuing education for all; equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills, increasing curricular relevance; expanding national capacity for secondary teacher education and post-secondary education; strengthening of partnerships with parents and the community to support educational expansion and development; and enhancing the quality of education.

The impact of the 2004 tsunami had an unexpected effect on the Maldivian economy and was a massive setback for education in the Maldives. Many schools were either totally or partially damaged. In some schools, furniture, equipment and books were completely washed away. However, with the help of donor agencies and countries, the Maldivian government started to accelerate and minimize the setbacks occurred in the disaster.

2.2 Government Policy

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is the government body responsible for education in the Maldives. With recent changes in the government organisational setup, the work of MOE has changed with the focus of providing “school” education to Maldivians, both formally as well as informally; and higher education and training has been removed from its mandate.

The various responsibilities of MOE are delegated to its different sections and educational institutions functioning directly under its supervision, as well as schools. The Ministry also sets guidelines and monitors the service of private and community educational institutions including schools and tuition classes.

Since the re-conceptualisation of the educational policy in 1978, remarkable progress has been made in the sector. Early childhood care and education has been expanded, primary education has been universalised, secondary education has seen marked growth, illiteracy has been nearly eliminated, and higher secondary opportunities have been expanded by establishing several schools in the atolls.

The education system continues to face new challenges, and the expansion of educational opportunities is ongoing. Access to and equitable distribution of educational opportunity regardless of geographical location is seen to be critical. At the same time, issues of diversity and curriculum revision are given equal emphasis. Today the policies of the MOE are geared towards expanding and improving the quality of early childhood care and development, improving the quality of basic education through consideration of the relevance and outcomes of the structure, content and process of basic education, expanding secondary education opportunities in an equitable manner across the country, introducing vocational technical education at school level, developing higher secondary education and diversifying educational opportunities for youth and adults through non-

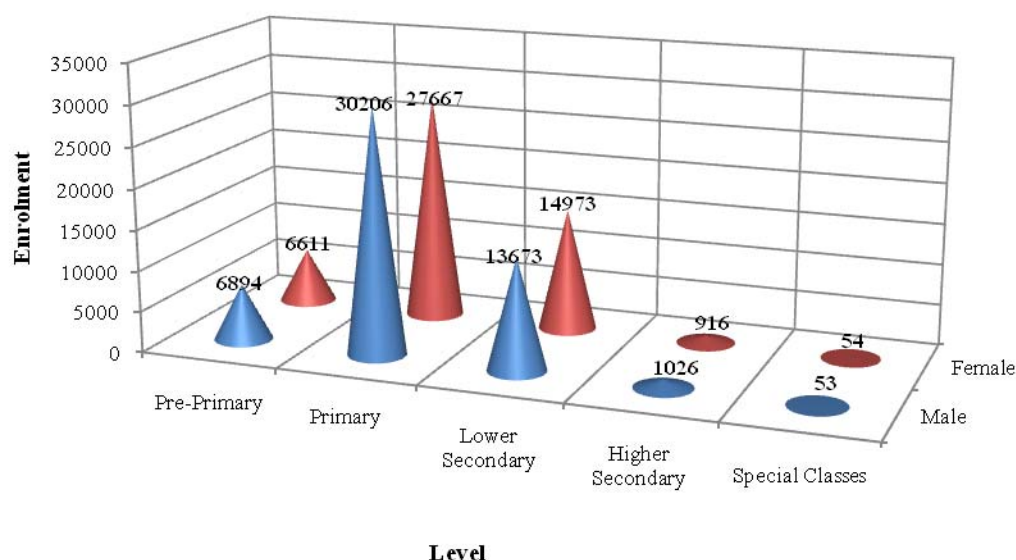
formal education. The successful achievement of these targets is very much dependent on the availability of trained competent teachers. As such renewed emphasis is placed on teacher training and professional development.

2.3 Overview of the Education System

There are three categories of schools in the Maldives: government, ward/community and private schools. Although education is provided largely by the government, the community and the private sector also play an active role. The government supports community and private schools by providing a certain percentage of teachers depending on school size, and by providing infrastructure, facility support and financial subsidies. In order to minimize the differences in giving provisions to schools, 135 community schools in the atolls were converted to government schools in 2005.

In the capital, Malé, formal schooling is preceded by two years pre-primary education in the lower and upper kindergarten. This form of pre-primary education is now increasing in the atolls, especially in highly populated islands. The alternative to this form of education is *edhuruge* (traditional learning centres based in the house of a learned person). Modern pre-schools and traditional *edhuruge* provide the first organised learning opportunities for 90% of pre-school aged children.

Student Enrolment by Level and Sex, 2005



- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-Primary | - Nursery, LKG, UKG |
| Primary | - Gr. 1 - 7 |
| Lower Secondary | - Gr. 8 - 10 |
| Higher Secondary | - Gr. 11 - 12 |
| Special Classes | - Classes that are conducted for children with disabilities |

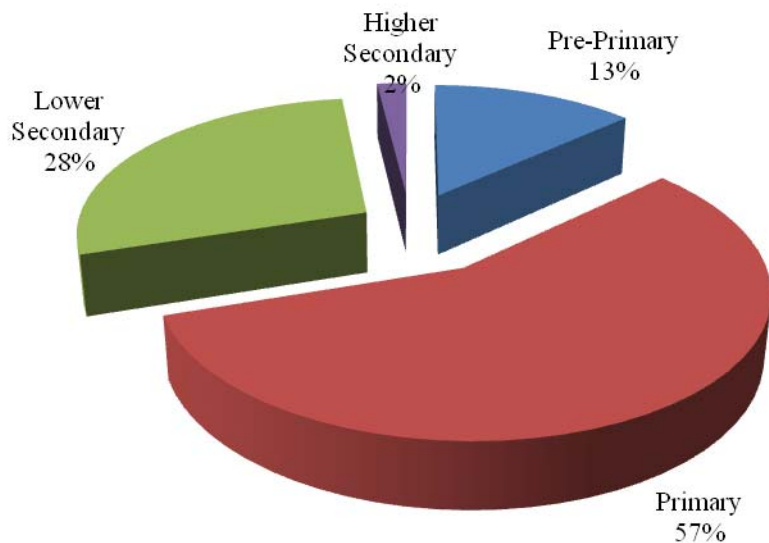
Source: *School Statistics 2005*
Ministry of Education

Primary education begins at the age of six, age at which children enter a 7-year cycle, starting in Grade 1 and ending in Grade 7. Universalising seven years of basic education was one of the landmark achievements of the country. Today the Net Enrolment Ratio for the first seven years of basic education stands at 100%. Assessment in these grades is at school level, on the basis of continuous assessment in Grades 1 to 3, and school based examinations held three times a year in Grades 4 to 7.

Secondary education in the Maldives consists of Grades 8 – 10 (lower secondary) and Grades 11 – 12 (higher secondary). Secondary education was provided only in Malé until 1990, but has been extended to the atolls through the gradual addition of Grades 8 – 10 classes in some Atoll Education Centres and Atoll Schools on set criteria, and by the establishment of two regional secondary schools. In 2005, the criterion for introducing Grade 8 in existing primary schools was revised so that more students would get easy access to 10 years of formal schooling.

Introduction of higher secondary schooling in the atolls began initially in two atolls, in 2001, followed by another one in 2002. Further expansion of the opportunity for providing higher secondary education in the atolls continued, by establishing Grade 11 in 10 eligible, existing secondary schools in 2004 and by establishing another 4 schools in 2005 and 6 in 2006. Due to unavailability of eligible students, 1 school terminated high secondary level education in 2006. Hence, altogether 24 schools are currently offering higher secondary education across the country.

Student Enrolment by Levels, 2005



*Source: School Statistics 2005
Ministry of Education*

In addition to the school examinations held three times a year, at the end of Grades 10 and 12, students are expected to sit for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level examinations and GCE Advanced Level examinations of the Cambridge International

Examinations (CIE) or the London Examinations, Edexcel International. National assessment is based on the results of these examinations. Since October 2002, almost all the students from the secondary schools have been sitting the IGCSE and GCE O/L syllabuses of the Cambridge International Examinations. In 2005, 142 centres (including both school and private centres) entered the October/November session of the CIE examinations out of the 156 centres that are registered at CIE.

An alternative to the national English medium education is offered by Arabic medium education. Madhrasathul Arabiyyathul Islaamiyya offers preparatory level classes and the Kulliyathul Dhiraasaathil Islaamiyya offers secondary as well as higher secondary level classes.

To diversify the provision of secondary education, vocational subjects and training are gradually being introduced in the secondary schools, and trained technical trainers are provided to them. The MOE launched vocational subjects initially in Malé, and then gradually expanded to selected secondary schools in the atolls. In addition, the establishment of a vocational technical school is proposed for external funding.

The establishment of Vocational Education Centres in 3 Focus islands as part of the tsunami recovery and reconstruction effort is designed to provide the vocational training facilities to these islands and the nearby islands. The Centres will be run as part of the existing school facilities in the 3 islands selected for the project. The island communities will immensely benefit from the provision of the vocational education, especially in recovering from the negative impact of the tsunami of 26th December 2004, in building the livelihoods of the communities and providing further employment opportunities to the island communities.

The project will provide the building infrastructure, machinery and materials for the training as well as initial training for the teachers, who would be taking up the responsibility of delivering the Vocational Education Curriculum to the students.



Student Enrolment in Schools by Level and Type, 2005

Locality	Type	Level					Total
		Pre-Primary	Primary	Lower Secondary	Higher Secondary	Special Classes	
MALÉ	Government	113	12397	5581	1372	101	19564
	Community	4025	936	2146	0	0	7107
	Private	430	541	2289	105	0	3365
	Total	4568	13874	10016	1477	101	30036
ATOLLS	Government	1490	43698	18340	465	6	63999
	Community	2738	0	0	0	0	2738
	Private	4709	301	290	0	0	5300
	Total	8937	43999	18630	465	6	72037
REPUBLIC	Total	13505	57873	28646	1942	107	102073

*Source: School Statistics 2005
Ministry of Education*

2.4 Management

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for the formal education system and for a large number of the non-formal and occupational training programmes in the Maldives. The Ministry of Education is functionally divided into sections and departments. The sections of the Ministry are:

1. Minister's Bureau (MB-Section)
2. Foreign Relations (B-Section)
3. Project Management and Co-ordination Section (PMC)
4. Schools Administration Section (SA-Section)
5. Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section (ESQIS)
6. Finance Section (C-Section)
7. Human Resource Management Section (D-Section)
8. Policy Planning and Research Section (E-Section)
9. Administration Section (F-Section)
10. Budget Planning, Financial Control and Internal Audit Section (FB-Section)
11. Physical Facilities Development Section (G-Section)
12. Information Technology Services Section (IT-Section)

The departments of MOE are:

1. Department of Public Examinations (DPE)

2. Educational Development Centre (EDC)
3. Centre for Continuing Education (CCE)

The administration of the schools in the country has been restructured recently by grouping the atolls into 6 zones in accordance with their geography; namely:

1. North Zone – responsible for schools in H.A., H.Dh. and Sh. Atolls
2. North Central Zone – responsible for schools in N., R., B. and Lh. Atolls
3. Central Zone – responsible for schools in K., A.A., A.Dh., V. and M. Atolls
4. South Central Zone – responsible for schools in F., Dh., Th. and L. Atolls
5. South Zone – responsible for schools in G.A., G.Dh., Gn. and S. Atolls
6. Malé Zone – responsible for schools in Malé, Villingili and Hulhumalé

Each zone has a Superintendent of Education or a Zone Coordinator who is stationed in the ministry with a team of support staff. The zone Superintendents or Coordinators work with the assistance and advice of the minister on all matters related to the effective management of the schools in their respective zones.

2.5 Expenditure

In terms of financing, the government of Maldives takes responsibility for all the recurrent and capital costs of all the government schools as well as subsidises community and private schools. The government also undertakes the upgrading of the physical infrastructure of all the schools. The commitment of the government to financing education is expected to remain high, as it has always been in the past. The per student unit cost of providing education in the Maldives remains high due to the dispersion of the student population over 199 inhabited islands and the high reliance of expatriate teachers at the secondary and higher secondary level. However, high priority is placed on investing in education, which becomes evident when the expenditure on education is shown as a percentage of the total government expenditure. Even if the economy of the country grows, the government expenditure on education will most likely remain within 15% - 20% of the national expenditure.

Year	National Budget	MOE Expenditure	as % of National Budget
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Total Expenditure 2001 - 2005 <i>Source: Budget Planning, Financial Control</i>	2001	2,539,811,401	429,983,758	16.93%
	2002	2,614,478,672	465,486,919	17.80%
	2003	2,959,097,632	469,214,800	15.86%
	2004	3,266,658,735	556,476,196	17.04%
	2005	4,413,844,347	656,413,862	14.87%

*and Internal Audit Section
Ministry of Education*

2.6 The Impact of the 26th December 2004 Tsunami on Schools and Students

About one-third of the student population was affected one way or the other in the natural disaster of the tsunami of 26th December 2004. Students of three major islands were completely displaced. About 116 schools in the Maldives sustained 30% – 100% damage to the school and equipment. Out of the 199 schools that were unaffected, 28 schools are providing schooling to the displaced students. These host schools are suffering severe shortage of classrooms and running on three sessions with reduced contact hours. Hence, 114 schools in the country are currently operating with reduced facilities and resources.

The tsunami hit the country just a few days prior to the beginning of the academic year for 2005. As a result, students from 114 schools lost their books and school uniforms to the waves, and the families were unable to replace them as they had lost their savings, too.

The government, many local and international agencies, especially UNICEF, has promptly responded in providing assistance to the needs of the schools and students of the country. Some of the main areas of assistance are:

- Repair, renovation and reconstruction of school facilities
- Replacement of furniture, fittings, machinery and equipment
- Provision of teaching/learning materials, library resources and other student supplies
- Provision of psychosocial support and trauma counseling to the students and affected families

2.7 Teachers

The education sector has made considerable progress in training teachers. However, teacher education has not been able to keep pace with the rapid expansion of the education sector as a result of which local teachers, with lower or higher secondary level qualifications are employed in Maldivian schools due to the unavailability of trained teachers. The gravity of the situation can be seen in the fact that around 59% of the pre-primary teachers, 36% of the primary teachers and 15% of the lower secondary teachers employed in 2005 were untrained. At the end of the year, the total number of expatriate teachers stood at 2,078 (i.e. 37% of the total number of teachers).

Students and Teachers of Educational Institutions, by Locality, 2005

Localit y	No. of School s	Student Enrolme nt	Teachers			Student Teacher Ratio (trained teachers)
			Traine d	Untrain ed	Total	
Malé	22	30,036	1,015	286	1,301	29.59
Atolls	312	72,037	2,317	1,998	4,315	31.09
Republ ic	334	102,073	3,332	2,284	5,616	30.63

Source: *School Statistics 2005*
Ministry of Education

The lack of sufficient trained local teachers has also necessitated the employment of a large number of expatriate teachers, especially in lower secondary schools. In 2005, about 1% of the teachers employed in the pre-primary, 16% of the teachers employed in the primary, 72% of the teachers in the lower secondary and 77% in the higher secondary were expatriates. This is a financial burden on the country due to the drain of foreign currency resources. As such the training of secondary level teachers is a priority area for the government.

The Faculty of Education of the Maldives College of Higher Education started a secondary teacher-training programme in 1997. This consists of the Advanced National Diploma of Teaching (2 years) with specialisation in subjects such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology; the Certificate of Secondary Teaching (1 year) with specialisation in Dhivehi or Islam; Diploma in Secondary Teaching; and Degree Programmes in both Secondary and Primary Teaching. The Faculty also runs other teaching courses such as Advanced Certificate in Primary Teaching and Diploma in Primary Teaching. However, due to resource constraints, the number graduating from this programme is far too low to satisfy the demand.

In order to help in the financial difficulties faced by local teachers and school managers who work in schools in the atolls other than their own, a hardship allowance was introduced in September 2005. An amount of MRf. 1,500 is offered for this allowance. It is hoped that the introduction of hardship allowance would encourage trained local teachers and school managers to work in schools in other atolls where there are no such people working, as well as encourage the untrained local teachers and school managers, who are in service, to be trained accordingly. It is also hoped that MOE would overcome the difficulties in getting the required numbers of local teachers and school managers to work in schools where there are not enough professionals in the work field.

2.8 Educational Supervision

The Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Section (ESQIS) of MOE is responsible for improving the quality of teaching/learning process in all the schools.

Teams of internal and external supervisors are mobilised to implement their programmes of monitoring and evaluation of schools. The evaluation concentrates on five major areas; Standard of students, teaching and learning, leadership and academic management of the schools, financial management, infrastructure and the physical learning environment of the school. ESQIS provides the necessary training and guidance to school managers and strengthen the internal supervision of schools.

In addition, ESQIS conducts a programme on national assessment of learning achievement levels of students that is aimed at understanding and improving students' learning. This programme incorporates planning and developing tools for monitoring of national assessment of student achievement, and the implementation and analysis of assessment, in Grades 4 and 7.

ESQIS is also responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of the School Health Programme;

School Health Programme

The School Health Programme was established in 1986 by the Ministry of Education in order to give an additional impetus to the health issues related to school children. The programme includes health education and awareness on various health issues through core curricular and co-curricular activities and medical screening of children and also provision of health information for teachers and parents. On a school level, the programme is planned and managed by a trained School Health Assistant or a School Health Focal Point who is usually a specially trained teacher of the school.

The School Health Programme includes:

- Health Promoting School Initiative
- Nutrition
- School Health Service
- Adolescent Health
- Hygiene Education and Water & Sanitation
- Health Education
- Mental Health

2.9 Curriculum

The Ministry of Education introduced a national curriculum for primary education in 1984. Under the curriculum all primary students in the Maldives study four compulsory subjects; Islamic Studies, Dhivehi Language, English Language and Mathematics. Environmental Studies, Social Studies, General Science, Practical Arts and Physical Education are also offered at different levels. Some schools also offer Art and Music.

Around 200 textbooks, workbooks, English and Dhivehi readers, and teachers' guides have been introduced for the subjects identified in the primary curriculum. The Educational Development Centre (EDC) revises curriculum material periodically towards the improvement of the quality of education. Additionally, a major curriculum exercise was undertaken in 1999, which began with broad-based consultations with stakeholders. A comprehensive revision of the curriculum framework and content is being undertaken based on these consultations. The revised curricular will place greater emphasis on socio-economically relevant themes and issues, life skills, development of values and skill development in information technology.

EDC has brought about major revisions to some curriculum materials during the years 2004 and 2005. The English Language and Mathematics syllabuses have been revised to outcomes-based ones, and similarly, all the other subjects are in the process of revision. An outcomes-based syllabus specifies what students know and what they can do as a result of instruction. Outcomes-based syllabuses also specify clear standards which all students are expected to attain and will help students learn more effectively in all the subjects across the curriculum.

At secondary level, the curriculum comprises the syllabuses of internationally recognised secondary examinations. All students study English Language and Mathematics for these examinations and Islamic Studies and Dhivehi Language for local examinations. Furthermore, at the lower secondary level, students take up additional four subjects of their choice from an option of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Fisheries Science, Economics, Accounting, Commerce, History, Geography, Geometrical and Mechanical Drawing, Computing Studies, Art, English Literature and Travel and Tourism Studies. The most recent addition to the optional subjects taken up by the students is English as a Second Language. All these optional subjects are also examined externally by the above mentioned examination bodies Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) and Edexcel International, London Examinations.

Current thinking with regard to the secondary curriculum recognises the concerns, transmission of local culture, values and indigenous knowledge while following the syllabus of an international examination. The need to include technology literacy in the curriculum is also recognised as well as the need to raise the status of career-oriented and technological education in order to motivate young people to stay in secondary education and to allow smoother transition to work. The national work experience scheme introduced in 1988 reflects the importance placed by the government to extending the range and quality of vocational and work-related opportunities for students. Under this scheme, all lower secondary students must complete 30 days of work experience by the time they join Grade 10.

Currently, many school related programmes, mandated by EDC, are being conducted. Some of them are:

- 1. Early Childhood Development (ECD)*

ECD is about the development of a child from conception to the first 5 years of life. ECD activities began in the form of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in 1989 as a UNICEF funded project under the Education Programme. The project is focused on the preschool rather than the holistic approach. With the shift from ECCE to ECD the programme now focuses on:

- All children under 5
- All caregivers of these children
- Teachers, health workers, community workers/leaders who deal with these children.

The objectives of ECD program are:

- To establish children's full physical, cognitive and psychosocial development in a positive and interactive environment that is conducive to helping each child reach his/her full potential.
- To promote and upgrade early learning centres
- To create public awareness in the importance of the first five years of a child's life.
- To promote health related ECD activities.

2. *In-service Teacher Training*

Formal in-service teacher training was launched in 1980 to cater for the urgent training needs of the teachers as a crucial factor for improving the standard of education in Maldives.

The Professional Development Unit (PDU) of EDC strives to provide the required professional skills for teachers both trained and untrained as well as upgrading the content level of the primary teachers trained in Dhivehi medium. It also trains supervisors in primary schools so that they can contribute to improving teaching and learning and creating a conducive learning environment in schools in the Maldives.

The PDU is responsible for:

- Identifying the individual needs of schools in terms of improving teaching and learning from a pedagogical and professional point of view
- Facilitating the implementation of formal education programmes in the school through effective supervision and school management
- Developing and implementing bridging programmes to help Dhivehi medium trained teachers improve subject content
- Developing reading materials and other resources to be utilized in the in-service teacher training programmes with a view to enhancing teaching and learning
- Training people to cater for individual differences and special educational needs
- Providing feedback to the curriculum development unit on learner needs

4. *Quality Learning Environment in Priority Schools*

The main objective of this UNICEF funded programme is to create a social and educational environment that activates, encourages and reinforces quality education through advocacy, awareness raising and capacity building with a wide cross-section of stakeholders.

The main activities undertaken by EDC include:

- Developing Child-friendly schools to facilitate active learning.
- Developing 20 Training/Resource Centres
- Developing teaching/learning materials
- Training of teachers
- Parent and community involvement

2.10 **School Completion Examinations**

The Department of Public Examinations (DPE) is the department of MOE with the mandate to administer and co-ordinate all the international and local national and general examinations. The DPE liaises with International Examination bodies, coordinates, manages, and administers all relevant examinations; and manages the documentation at all stages.

International Examinations

At secondary schools, syllabuses that are taught are locally as well as internationally recognised examinations. From 1967 until 2001, students have sat the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level, offered by the University of London (now known as the Edexcel International, London Examinations), upon completion of Grade 10. This examination was replaced by the IGCSE and GCE Ordinary Level examinations, offered by the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) of University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, in 2002. However, after completion of the higher secondary education at Grade 12, students have been sitting the GCE Advanced Level examinations, offered by the Edexcel International, London Examinations, since 1982.

The GCE Advanced Level examinations offered by the Edexcel International, London Examinations and the IGCSE and GCE Ordinary level offered by the CIE are now conducted twice a year.

Other International Examinations are also conducted upon request from various Award Bearing Institutions or from candidates.

Local National Examinations

There are two levels of examinations conducted nationally. The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination is offered to students at the end of Grade 10 and the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Examination offered at the end of Grade 12. These two examinations assess students' Dhivehi Language and Islamic Studies levels. These

two exams are of utmost importance to students as at least a C is required for job opportunities and for seeking tertiary education.

Local General Examinations

These examinations conducted by the DPE have a long history. They are now conducted twice a year. The examinations normally offered are Clerk Grades One and Two, Secretary, Leaders of Friday Prayers, Muezzin, and Funeral/Burial Obligations. These examinations are open to the general public who wish to join a particular work force or government service, and also, for those who wish to accomplish certain religious public services.

2.11 Non-formal Education

Non-formal education has played a major role in establishing the literacy rate of the country at 98.84%. Much of the tribute for this success goes to the Centre of Continuing Education (CCE), which co-ordinates and implements all non-formal education programmes in the Maldives.

The CCE Condensed Education Programmes had achieved considerable success in providing basic education for youth and adults who have missed the opportunity to complete basic education. Over the several years of operation from 1993, an average of 31.1 students participated every year. Other programmes of CCE include English Language courses, vocational and technical skills development courses, secretarial skills development courses, training in early childhood care and development, population education and community awareness through producing and publishing material. In 2005, 414 students, 78.74% of whom were women, participated in various non-formal education programmes.

Innovations in non-formal education include the re-conceptualisation of the Condensed Education Programme and the initiation of First Steps, a programme on early childhood care and development. The re-conceptualisation of the Second Chance Education Programme and the introduction of the fourth level of the programme incorporating the content of the eighth and ninth years of “school” education in a condensed form was hoped to add to the success of the programme. The same expectations are held of the innovative First Steps project.

The “CCE Cambridge Programme” was launched in March 2005 by CCE replacing the Second Chance Education Programme. Through this programme, another opportunity is given for students who wish to improve their unsatisfactory results of the Cambridge IGCSE and GCE OL examinations. This programme was conducted only for students who had appeared and got unsatisfactory results in the Cambridge IGCSE and GCE OL examinations in 2003 and 2004. The classes were held in selected schools from the atolls and the CCE campus in Malé. The duration for study was from March to end of September, and they appear in the Cambridge IGCSE and GCE OL examinations in the October/November session. Students who managed to catch-up with their study by the end of April were allowed to appear in the May/June session of the Cambridge IGCSE and GCE OL examinations, and adjourn their studies.

Compiled by: **Policy Planning and Research Section**
Ministry of Education
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Goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

A. National Policy framework and implementation arrangements

The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) as it is known in the Maldives is facilitated by the island communities. The government assists the communities in establishing the pre-schools (centres for ECCD), and supports these schools with providing learning materials and the necessary furniture and equipment. The pre-schools cater for students in Nursery, Lower Kindergarten, and Upper Kindergarten. In 2006, there were 178 pre-schools in the country. All but 12 islands have established pre-schools. In 2006, there were 54 government schools, 48 community schools and privately owned 76 schools. The majority of the schools in the country were established about 10 years ago. The average years of service in the capital Male', of a pre-school is 22 years, whereas in the atolls, it is 8 years. One of the biggest challenges facing ECCD is the lack of trained staff for these schools; in 2006, it was estimated that from a total of 545 teachers in the pre-schools, 59% was untrained.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2001 (Ministry of Health:2001), identifies the following types of ECCD facilities in the country;

- Kindergarten; is what is known as the pre-school. Here children are trained for formal schooling and are made ready to start the formal curriculum in grade 1.
- Edhuruge; is where children are taught how to read Quruan
- Home; some parents opt to teach children the basic concepts of letters and numbers at home

The policy highlighted in the 7th National Development Plan (Ministry of Planning and National Development: 2007) and the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2004-2006 (Ministry of Education: 2004) is to *expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and development in the country*.

To achieve this, the specific strategies include;

- Creating community awareness on good parenting, and appropriate maternal and childcare practices
- Promoting inclusive education, especially to include children with disabilities
- Promote equity by providing financial aid to schools in poor/rural communities
- Build capacity of the teachers and caregivers in the pre-schools

The specific tasks that have been planned/completed include;

- Formulation of a national policy on ECCD

- Creation of model integrated ECCD centres have been established and duplication is in progress
- Formulation of a child rights act
- Conduction of community mobilization programmes
- Conduction of national/regional workshops on parent Education
- Conduction of pre-service teacher training courses
- Conduction of in-service teacher training courses
- Development of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism for pre-schools
- Conduction of a mass media campaign for raising awareness among the general public on early childhood care and development
- Formulation of a procedure for financial aid to the pre-schools

Further, it has been recognised that early identification and intervention for children with disabilities need to be included in the ECCD programme. To reflect this addition to the policy, additional strategies have been put in place. They include;

- Developing an overall strategy of inclusion which will be a national initiative
- Promoting the entitlement of all learners to receive a broad and balanced curriculum
- The adaptation, to suit all learners, of the medium and method of teaching
- Adapting the physical environment to meet the physical needs of children with disabilities
- Conducting advocacy for behaviour change towards children with disabilities
- Working together with parents, guardians and other agencies to provide access to high quality education for children with special educational needs (SEN).
- Identification and intervention for pupils with SEN of school going age
- Targeted, responsive and clearly described financial arrangements for pupils with SEN including provision for such children to move within the vicinity of an appropriate school
- Regularly monitoring and reviewing intake statistics and retention at all levels of schooling especially students with SEN, particularly girls, and monitoring and reviewing other SEN provisions
- Provision of specialist teachers at one school in each atoll creating a reference school and a Teacher Resource Centre

(Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security:2007)

The government organisation responsible for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ECCD is Educational Development Centre (EDC) of the Ministry of Education. EDC, is also responsible for SEN provision, and implementation. The communities run the pre-schools on a fee basis, but there is a government forced ceiling put on the amount of money the schools can charge the students.



B. Progress in achieving the EFA goal

ECCD over the recent past has gained importance in the community and government funding has been increased considerably. 1 million rufiyaa was allocated in 2006 and a further 1 million rufiyaa was allocated in 2007 for ECCD support, in the government budget. Further, donor assistance by UNICEF amounts up to \$822,000 for the period 2003-2007 (UNICEF:2003). Additionally, a great majority of the salaries of the preschool teachers in Male' schools (67%) are paid by the government, in contrast to 5% of the preschool teachers in the atolls.

The main focus is policy for ECCD in the Maldives has been improving access and quality by empowering the community through knowledge of the importance of good ECCD programmes on the quality of life for children. In this regard, community information sessions have been a main feature of the ECCD programme in the Maldives.

First Steps...Maldives was a 52 week media campaign on radio and television that ran from 2001-2002. 'The programmes, focused on the social and emotional needs of children, especially those in the 0-3 age group, along with their physical and cognitive development' (5:2004). The programmes were based on 15 broad themes. They include;

1. Men and women are both needed to nurture children
2. Stimulating the senses
3. Children learn through play
4. Older children can play with younger children
5. Children learn through imitation
6. Each child is unique
7. Children need to be praised to improve self-esteem
8. Disabled children need to be included
9. Early detection and prevention of disabilities
10. Exclusive breastfeeding and nutrition
11. Girls need care as well: gender sensitivity
12. Importance of reading and storytelling
13. Discrimination against skin colour
14. Making the home safe for children
15. Expressing love

The 52-week media campaign, unique in the history of social marketing, upset most existing theories and was without doubt an unqualified success. Engaging communities in Male' and on the islands, urban and rural, old and young, rich and poor, regardless of gender and cultural taboos, the media campaign touched people's lives in the Maldives as nothing had done before (Unicef:71).

Further, according to the impact evaluation done by Unicef (2004) the programmes brought about increased sensitivity and awareness of child development milestones and childcare practices. It also states that the most significant changes are apparent in interaction and care for children with special needs.

Another indication of the positive influence of increased awareness is that the number of children attending a pre-school has risen from 66% to 79% from 2000 to 2005. This 13% increase has not been steady, but efforts are in place to maintain this level and ultimately achieve a 100% access.

Year	Enrolment in ECCE			Official age-group		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2000	4689	4491	9180	7060	6791	13851
2001	4653	4532	9185	6726	6484	13210
2002	4823	4635	9458	6402	6185	12587
2003	4086	3983	8069	6113	5914	12027
2004	4564	4383	8947	5885	5698	11583
2005	4650	4317	8967	5750	5561	11311

Table 1: GE for ECCE

The total percentage of male and female children attending pre-school has been the same or almost the same between 2000 and 2005. The percentage of girls and boys enrolled in ECCD programmes are almost equal without any significant disparities.

	Total	Male'	Atolls
Nursery	3,866	1,175	2,691
LKG	4,152	844	3,308
UKG	4,434	936	3,498
Total	12,513	2,955	9,558
Average no. of students/school	68	739	53
Median no. of students/school	43	870	42

Table 2: Number of students by class stratified by region¹

About 23% of the pre-schoolers are enrolled in schools in Male' and nationwide, the average number of students per school is 68, as opposed to 739 for Male'. The average for the atolls is 53.

International research indicates that children who participate in ECCD programmes do better in school, are healthier and, later as adults, are more economically productive, emotionally balanced and socially responsible (Arnold et al:2007). Hence looking at the

¹ Source: Pre-school survey report – preliminary findings, EDC:2007 (unpublished)

number of students in primary schools who has had ECCD experience would give an indication as to the ‘health’ of the education system.

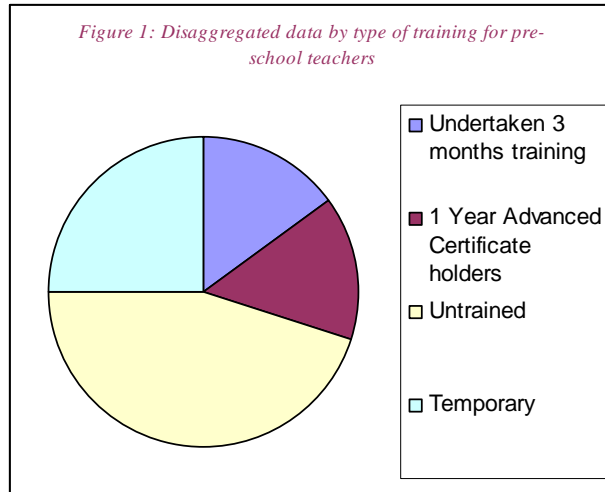
	% of New Entrant with ECCE Exp		
	Male	Female	Total
2000	57%	57%	57%
2001	62%	83%	71%
2002	67%	67%	67%
2003	68%	69%	68%
2004	63%	66%	65%
2005	75%	73%	74%

Table 3: % of new entrants to primary, with ECCE experience

Looking at the data, total number of students entering primary schools with ECCD experience rose significantly from 57% in 2000 to 74% in 2005. However, this increase has not been steady. There are no gender differences and it is to be noted that even in 2000, gender parity had been achieved.

Between 2000 and 2006, a total of 512 teachers as pre-school teachers have been trained at various levels. This figure does not indicate the actual head count, as there may be people who have had several of the trainings on offer. This is reflected in the number of trained teachers currently serving in the schools. Out of a total of 614 teachers in the schools, 54% are untrained. This figure goes up to 67% when the data is disaggregated to show the difference between Male’ and the atolls. No teacher has been trained at undergraduate level and out of the 46% who are trained, 18% have only undertaken a 3 months training.

There are various reasons for this. First of all, no training at undergraduate level is offered locally and even up until now, ECCD training is relegated to the academically not so strong people. Therefore entrance to a high qualification is difficult for the people interested in getting them because of a lack of a proper academic background.



A recent development in the teacher-training front has been the revision of the pre-service teacher training curriculum. This change has taken place to reflect the development of a pre-school curriculum, incorporating holistic child development concepts. This change, it is hoped will bring about positive changes to the quality of teaching and learning in the pre-schools.

Another indication of good ECCD practices in the country can be measured by the health of the children in the country. One aspect of this is the nutrition children get. Nutrition status of children in the Maldives is one which is in constant need of improvement. The geographical nature of Maldives and its problems with transportation mean that many communities lack access to good food and nutrition knowledge.

According to the 2001 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 33% of the Maldivian children under the age of five years were undernourished, 25% stunted and 13% wasted (Ministry of Health: 2001). The 2004 Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment showed that this figure has gone down to 27% (MPND 2005). The MICS also revealed that 5% of children between 3 and 6 years of age suffer from night blindness, indicating that Vitamin A deficiency is a public health problem. There are wide gaps between the rates of malnutrition in the rural and urban population. 'Routine data for the past three years indicate that there is a persistent under nutrition of 30% among rural children' (Department of Public Health: 2003).



C. Successes and Challenges

Development of policies on ECCD. The fact that 2 consecutive National Master Plans and the current Educational Master Plan (2007-2011/2016) have specific policies and strategies to improve access and quality of ECCD is a huge achievement. It means that the importance of good quality ECCD programmes have been recognized nationally and this is a huge step forward in terms of promoting ECCD programmes, and seeking funds for these programmes. The fact that there is a specific unit for ECCD work in the education sector is also evidence of the priority given to ECCD in the education sector.

The challenges now are implementation of the policies and strategies. Trained technical expertise is practically non-existent in ECCD and even the existing capacity in the ECCD unit is very limited.

Another challenge is consolidating the work done in the education sector on ECCD programmes with the work done in other sectors like the health sector. The health sector is responsible for maternal health care and child nutrition programmes. In effect, they complement each other, however, proper, formal collaboration is not there yet.

Community awareness and participation in ECCD activities have been remarkable over the last 5 years or so. In this regard, establishment of community-run pre-schools have increased. The evaluation done on the effectiveness of the First Step....Maldives (Unicef: 2004) reported that 'there was a positive increase in information related to child development issues after the media campaign' (pg.65). The media campaign was in most cases were followed by parent education workshops where more information about the issues discussed in the TV programmes were given to mothers and fathers.

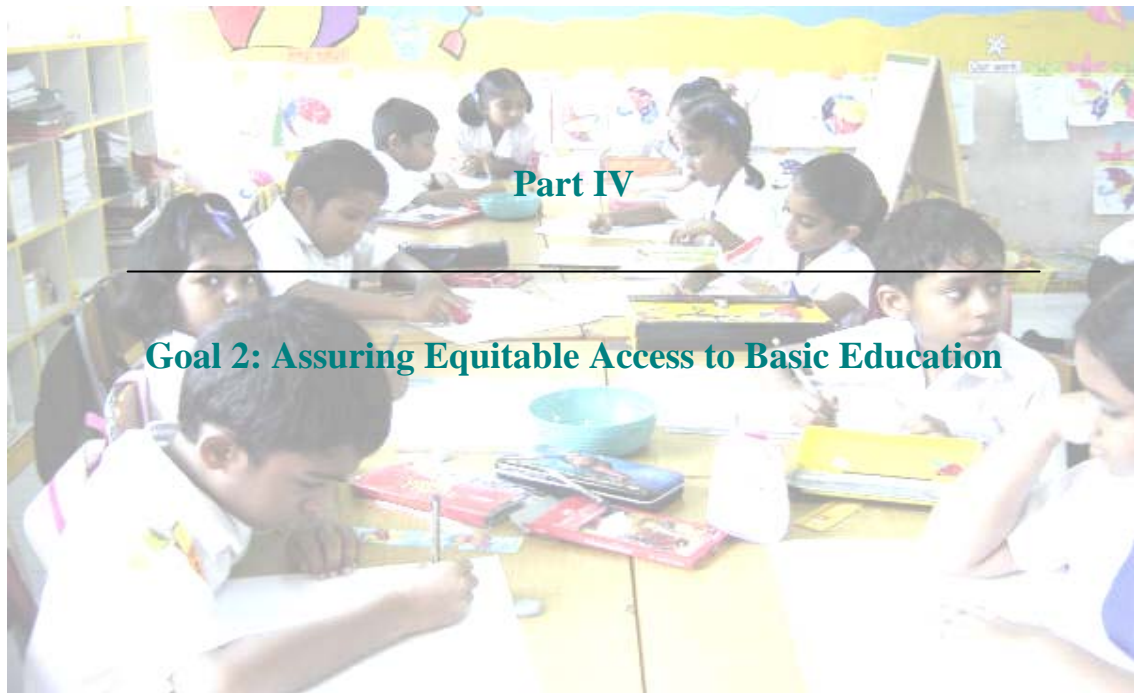


The key challenge in this area is the continuation of the programme, especially since the first series was based on the development of children between the ages of 0-3 years. It is felt that there is a need for an intense parent education programme, reaching all the parents in the country and the use of TV and radio, it has been proved, is the key to reaching the public.

In the recent year, there has been considerable expansion in the number of centres providing pre-school education in the country. This is a direct result of the community awareness programmes conducted on the importance of early childhood care and development in the country. The community at large recognises the importance of early years' education and provision is being created for this as a community initiative. This initiative is being supported and encouraged by the government in the form of financial incentives and grant assistance schemes.

The challenge here is the disparity of quality of service between the capital Male' and the outer atolls. This disparity is due to many factors. Firstly, as these schools are run by the community, the economic status of the community has an effect on the quality of the service delivered. Moreover, these communities are usually small communities and it is difficult to achieve economies of scale even with the financial assistance provided by the government. Secondly, the sheer number of untrained teachers in these facilities hinders the quality of provision. The revision of the early years curriculum and the teacher training curriculum, it is hoped would help towards alleviating this problem to some extent. The challenge of attracting teachers who have a sound general education background still remains and strategies need to be developed in order to sell early years teachers' posts as a worthy job with good career pathways.





Part IV

Goal 2: Assuring Equitable Access to Basic Education

Goal 2: Ensuring that all children, irrespective of gender, ability and location have access to basic education

Policy framework and national commitment

By 2000 itself Maldives had achieved the EFA goal of universal primary enrolment. Given this basic foundation, Maldives has moved ahead of the other countries in the region by extending the notion of basic education beyond the elementary level to 10 years of schooling thereby making a national commitment to ensuring that every child would have this opportunity. Raising the bar of educational access to 10 years of schooling creates challenges of teacher availability and competence, of provision of quality education and above all of learning achievements, all of which are the key thrust areas in the Maldives currently. The past two decades witnessed considerable progress in creating access to educational opportunities at all levels.

Current status and progress in achieving the goal

School Access

Since 2000, all children in the Maldives have had access to the first 7 years of formal schooling—a major achievement for a country whose students are scattered over 198 inhabited islands. By 2007 Secondary schools are available in atoll capitals and on the islands with larger populations. Only 29 islands do not have access to secondary schooling. As part of strengthening and improving educational quality, in 2005 135 community schools were converted into government schools. The implications of this are significant in that the effort now would be to ensure that certified and trained teachers are available. By 2004, the country had 225 schools with primary classes, 117 schools with lower secondary classes, and 15 schools with higher secondary classes.

Enrolment

Enrolment of both sexes at the primary level is not an issue in Maldives as evidenced by the NER and GER ratios except in the case of special needs children. See **Table b** below for details. The high NER and GER ratios at the primary level have also meant a steady increase at the lower secondary level as well. During the period 1997 to 2005, net enrolment at the lower secondary level saw a substantial increase from 18.9% to 64.6%.

The ratios at the lower secondary level indicate that both GER and NER for girls is higher than for boys.

See table below for details

Gross enrolment ratio by level									
Level	1997			2000			2005		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Primary	127.5	125.5	129.6	116.2	112.9	119.5	123.0	119.8	126.0
Lower secondary	46.2	47.3	45	79.4	84.0	74.9	118.0	126.1	110.4
Higher secondary	3.3	na	na	4.5	na	na	11.5	11.1	11.9

Source: Republic of Maldives, School Statistics, 2005, Ministry of Education

Net enrolment ratio by level									
Level	1997			2000			2005		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Primary	99.5	99.5	99.5	98.0	97.1	98.8	100	100	100
Lower secondary	18.9	21.0	16.8	36.6	39.7	33.7	64.6	70.7	58.8
Higher secondary	1.1	na	na	1.3	na	na	7.2	7.8	6.7

Source: Republic of Maldives, School Statistics, 2005, Ministry of Education

Gender parity in school education

During 1997-2005, Maldives has maintained and sustained its gender parity at primary level, a result of an overall robust school education participation rates. The net female enrolment ratio at the primary level that was 99.5 in 1997 dipped slightly in 2000(97.1) and 2001 (97.4) and by 2000 stood at 100%. At the lower secondary level there has been a steady rise in net enrolment ratios from 21 in 1997, to 39.7 in 2000 to an impressive 70.7 in 2005. In 2005 for instance female net enrolment at 70 was significantly higher than for males which stood at 58.8.

The disparity in favour of females continues into the higher secondary though the overall higher secondary net enrolment is lower. These gains, however, reduce significantly at the higher secondary level though female ratios continue to be better than males. Female net enrolment was 1.4 in 2001 which increased to 4.3 by 2004 and in 2005 stood at 7.8. See Table below for details

Table Net and Gross enrolment ratio by level 2005

Level/ age group	Gross enrolment ratio			Net enrolment ratio		
	Female	Male	Both sexes	Female	Male	Both sexes
Primary level (Gr 1-7) Age 6-12	119.8	126.0	123	102.9	105.3	104.1
Lower secondary level (Gr 8-10) Age 13.15	126.1	110.4	118	70.7	58.8	64.6
Upper secondary level (Gr 11-12) Age 16-17	11.1	11.9	11.5	7.8	6.7	7.2
Primary and lower secondary level	121.9	120.7	121.3	92	89.5	90.7
Source: Republic of Maldives, School Statistics, 2005, Ministry of Education						

The robustness of the system is also evident through the age appropriate grade participation. In classes 1- 5 for instance the % of enrolment of girls as per the appropriate age ranges from 81% in grade 1 to around 76% in class five. The percentage of average children increases significantly at the lower secondary level and reduces at the higher secondary level. What needs attention is the lower secondary level where perhaps despite the automatic progression from grade to grade, policy the numbers of students taking the A levels is lower. This is an area that needs more analysis to identify the reasons for the presence of a greater number of older children to be able to develop appropriate strategies. See Annexure below for details.

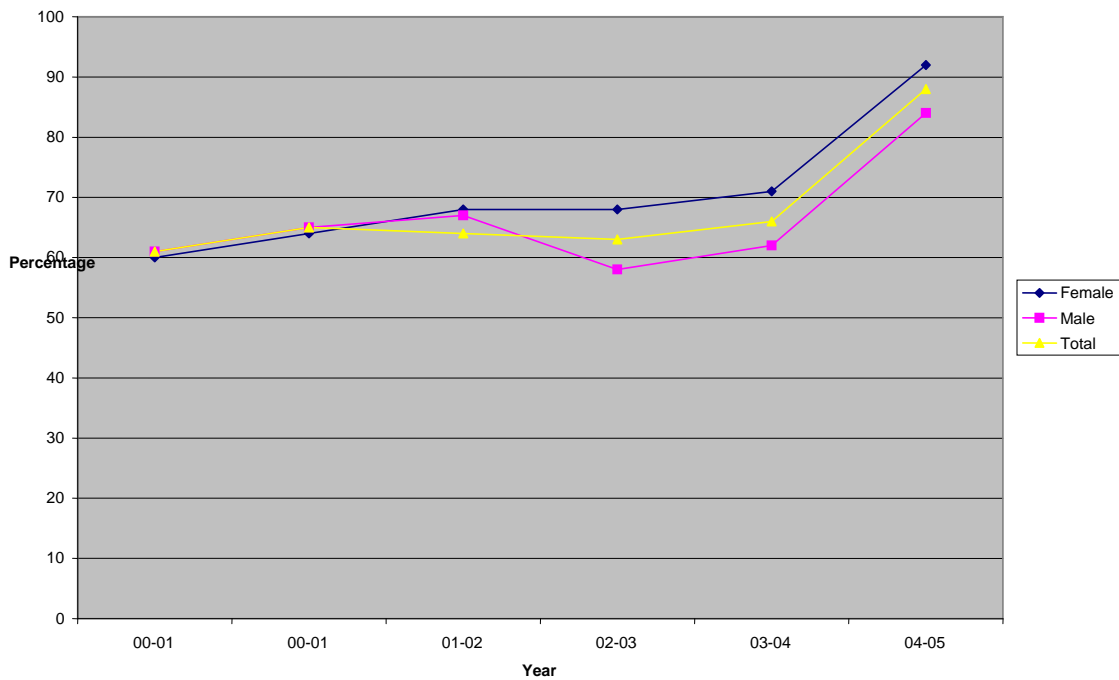
As far as schooling in concerned, in the Maldives the major issue is of quality of education and learning achievement levels. With a no detention policy in place, it is only at grade 10 that the first real assessment of learning levels takes place through the Cambridge Ordinary level exams that students have to take. The challenge is putting in place a continuous assessment system that would inform the strategies to strengthen teacher capacity and the teaching learning process. Work is in progress to establish a national assessment mechanism

Transition from primary to secondary level

As figure below shows there has been an overall improvement of 27 % in transition rates from primary to secondary levels between 1999-2005. The gains made by girls in particular are noteworthy, where there has been a 31% improvement in girls transition rates between 1999 to 2005 as against 23% for

boys during this same period. (see Annexure for details of transition rates). What this indicates is that if girls are retained within the system then transition rates are much more significant than in the case of boys, a phenomenon that obtains in other parts of the region as well. The lower transition rates for boys is part of the general trend of boys dropping out in search of livelihoods at a much earlier age or as result of apathy stemming from poor performance as well as an uncertainty as to the relevance of formal education.

Figure Transition Rates 1999 to 2005 (%)



Reaching the marginalized-Special Needs Children

Policy framework and Implementation of EFA goal

Maldives is committed to inclusive education and the last gatepost of inclusion, special needs children have been brought to the forefront through the formulation of a national policy on disability which is currently in a draft stage. A road map has been formulated to achieve the National policy on “Increase and expand opportunities for special education”. The plan is to set up four special education classes or special units in four regions of the Maldives by the end of 2007. The work to set up these units will commence in March 2007 and also teachers are being trained to work in these units.

Current status and Progress in Achieving EFA goal

Addressing the educational needs of children with special needs is a new thrust area and is part of the overall focus on addressing disability. The translation of the national policy into measurable action is yet to happen. In the interim the spadework required to introduce and sustain a well developed strategy has been completed.

As disability is a sensitive area with parents and communities often unwilling to publicly acknowledge that the problems exist that require special interventions, workshops have been conducted for parents and other community members to increase their awareness on dealing children with a disability. The First Steps programme on ECCD that had been launched with UNICEF support as already mentioned also brought in specific focus on early identification of special needs children

A beginning has been made to map the number of special needs children by type of disability. All children, under 5 years (inclusive) have been screened for early detection of any type of disability in five atolls of Maldives. This would enable for early intervention of children with disability. There is, however, a need to develop a countrywide tracking system to get a realistic picture of the total number of special needs children who would require special interventions.

Establishing the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives will create a formal and independent pathway to see into the practices for the rights of people with disability. However, the present legal frame work of the Maldives limits to claim the rights of people with disability.

There is a system established to coordinate among the authorities involved to monitor the implementation of activities outlined in the road map for children with disability. At each step of implementation the quality of service is assured through feedback from the people who are involved and adjustments are made to accordingly.

As per the road map of special education needs, the performance indicators mentioned are being achieved according to plan and it is with this hope we are planning new activities for the current year that will be carried out when the present activities are finished. There is a growing awareness and support for inclusion in Male' and in the Atolls at large. These changes are due to effective programs implemented to minimise the social barrier for inclusion.

The published School Statistics of 2005 indicate that from 1999 a small number of children with disability began to be enrolled in schools where special classes were held for them. Starting with 6 boys and 6 girls in 1999, this figure has gone up to 107 enrolled (54 girls and 53 boys) by 2005. See **Table** below for details.

Table Enrolment of children with disabilities 1999-2005

Year	Female	Male	Total
1999	6	6	12
2000	21	27	48
2001	31	29	60
2002	24	34	58
2003	29	37	66
2004	31	45	76
2005	54	53	107
Total	196	231	427
Source: Republic of Maldives, School Statistics, 2005, Ministry of Education			

During 2001 to 2005, out of the 310 children with disabilities who had enrolled for special classes, , only 6 children in 2005 were enrolled in the Atolls. Quite clearly children in the Atolls have almost no access to any kind of special classes and this is an area that needs attention in the future. Creating access to children in Atolls will be the major challenge as provision of trained teachers and support systems would not only be expensive but uneconomical as well. What perhaps needs to be explored is the possibilities of home based/ community level care and teaching which in turn poses the challenge of equipping community embers to provide this kind of service.

Implementation Gaps and disparities

As the interventions in the area of inclusive education are at a nascent stage, no major gaps in implementation have been noticed. Communities have been sensitized on issues of disability and inclusion education. However, the activities and programs have limitations in reaching the individual needs of children with disability. There was no gender or social disparity noticed and at each stage the fairness, equality and equity of diverse communities of the Maldives were taken into consideration.

The major gap is the lack of human resource capacity that was obvious at all stages of implementation even though the planned activities of advocacy and sensitization were implemented with what is available

One of the most important successes has been the large number of trained community members to deal with people with disability at community level through the awareness programs conducted. This will be the foundation stone to reach the bigger picture of inclusive practices in the Maldives. There is need, however, to keep a database on the trained community members so that this resource pool can support the special education interventions in the future. The four special education units would allow in bringing the children with special needs into formal schooling. The early detection of children under 5 years would allow to plan early intervention programs to cater the needs of these children.

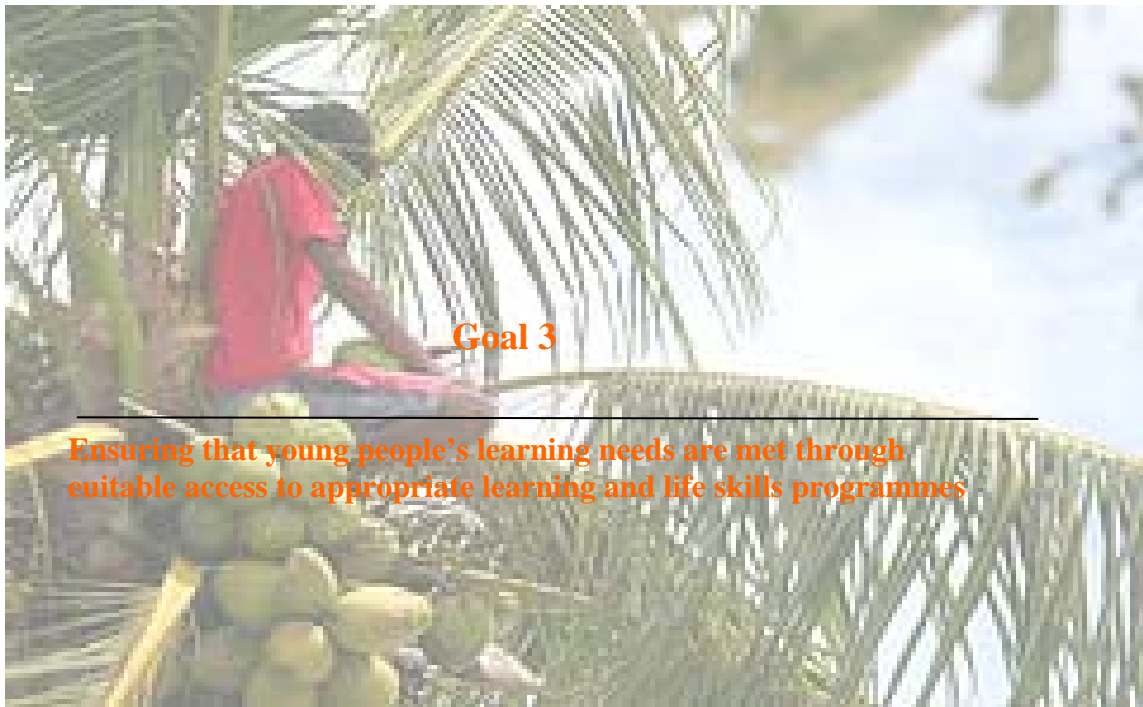
However, there are some challenges that the education system needs to meet. Some of these include establishing a sustainable system to monitor the ongoing activities of special education needs in the future; strengthening the school management (especially of the 4 schools where the special units will be) to monitor the special classes, and create a mechanism, centrally (at EDC) to monitor the over all activities.

Emerging challenges

The major challenge is ensuring access and enhancing transition to the higher secondary level. The concern is how to create such access on islands that are sparsely populated and the economies of scale cannot support an extension of the secondary school to all populated islands. Several alternatives are under consideration such as the provision of residential schooling facilities at the Atoll capitals, and the provision of incentives to encourage parents to send their children to such residential facilities. This is a slow process as parents and communities have to be convinced that indeed this is a viable and desirable alternative.

Strengthening the interventions for special education ensuring equitable access to children especially in the Atolls and in small habitations will be a major challenge that may require different approaches, moving away from centre based education to more community and family based education. A careful mapping of different types of disability would be required to plan for the kinds of special educators required, so that training and

special education component can be strengthened. At the same time to consolidate the beginning made in setting up 4 special units requires sustained teacher training and inputs for special educators as well developing the sensitivity of the larger educational system as a whole to respond in a manner that respects and protects the rights of special needs children.



Goal 3

Ensuring that young people's learning needs are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes

Goal 3	Ensuring that young people's learning needs are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes
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National Policy

An educated youth population will prove to be the most valuable economic and social asset of the Maldives. Indeed it is the ability of the youth population of the country that determines whether the Maldives will be pushed forward or back by the competitive knowledge-based economy of the world. At a more personal level, a young person's quality of life will increasingly depend on his or her educational attainment and life-skills development. Therefore, improving the educational attainment of young people is critical for both national and individual reasons.

In this regard, increasing access to ten years of formal schooling for young people is seen as a strategic step in meeting learning needs of the young people. Ten years of schooling is necessary to develop the technological literacy and know-how and personal attributes to thrive in an age of knowledge and technology.

The Vision 2020 captured this important need by stating the ten years of schooling would have to be universalized by 2020.

EFA Strategies include

- Over the next 10 years the thrust would be to provide necessary infrastructure to raise NER in secondary (Grades 8 – 10) schooling from 36 to 80 by 2010. The time frame for achieving this goal has been set for 2002-2010
- To achieve this objective, it is estimated that 800 additional classrooms would need to be incorporated with relevant educational facilities over this period. Furthermore, close to a thousand secondary teachers would have to be trained over the next 10 years to meet the local teacher shortage.

- A very critical strategy to achieve the goal is to provide a ‘diversified’ secondary curriculum that is student-centred, culturally relevant and one that provides diverse learning opportunities, particularly for less academically inclined students. Such a curriculum should include vocational and technical training and employment-based training. An integral and important element in such a curriculum is providing meaningful life skills education as well.
- Encourage the private sector to offer college level (diploma and certificate level) training programmes to meet the learning needs of the young people. MOE, through the Maldives Accreditation Board, would assist such private sector institutions in developing quality assurance mechanisms.
- Complete the ongoing survey in the remaining 15 atolls to identify children and youth above age ten who are not attending school, and assist them to complete the basic education cycle.

Current Situation and progress towards goal

Education

There seems to be every possibility of meeting the NER target by 2010 as NER for the lower secondary i.e. grades 8-10 have been steadily rising from 36.6 in 2000 to 64.6 in 2005. There is steady improvement in NERs for girls which is as high as 70.7 in 2005. NER for boys is lower and stands at 58.8 in 2005. Quite possibly the proposed enriching of the curriculum through vocational skills and education may push up NERs in general and NERs for boys in particular. At the higher secondary level NERs are significantly lower. Better NERs and completion rates at the lower secondary level would have a positive impact on higher secondary level participation and completion rates as well. See **Annexure** for details of GERs and NERs for the lower secondary and higher secondary level.

Secondary teacher training has become a national priority to reduce the dependence on expatriate teachers at the secondary level. Currently around 73% of the secondary school teachers (72% at the lower secondary level alone) are expatriates, placing a heavy economic and quality impediment on the education system.

Addressing Life skills education

Life Skills is becoming a demanding program in the schools and for the youth and young people working in different sectors and more awareness is being created in the wider community. Started as a project with UNFPA support, it is becoming a popular course. Integrated Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Life Skills Project is being implemented in Maldives for the past three years. The project is designed and executed by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and implemented by Ministry of Educational and Ministry of Youth and Sports. The project targets adolescents in Male' and H Dh Kulhudhu'fushi in concurrence with national regional development plans and UNFPA's focus on Male' and the northern regions in the Third Country Programme. However, after the Tsunami disaster, the need to provide Life Skills Education to the affected population, especially the adolescents have been recognised. This resulted in expanding the reach to include up to 5 atolls affected by the disaster.

Currently Maldives is experiencing a period of rapid socio-economic and cultural change. Factors such as growing drug use, limited employment opportunities, urbanisation, high divorce rates, pressures of consumerism contribute to considerable stress experienced by the young people of Maldives. In such a context the life skills programme aims to empower young people to make informed and healthy decisions in the face of often confusing and conflicting information and lifestyles, encourage the development of the skills and attitudes to cope with various aspects of one's life in the family, the school and the community in general.

Under the ASRH (adolescents sexual reproductive health) Project, 4 Life Skills Education Packages were developed targeting adolescents, young people and adults at 4 stages. Package one is targeted at Grade 6 and 7 level adolescents aged 11 – 12 years, Package two is targeted

at Grade 8 and 9 level adolescents aged 13 – 14 years, Package three is targeted at adolescents and youth among school leavers and those over 15 years and Package four is targeted to young parents and adults in the community. In order to improve the quality of Life Skills Education being conducted, three of the four life skills packages were translated to Dhivehi Language. The purpose of this was to make the facilitation of LSE more appropriate to the teacher-led classroom situation, especially in atoll communities. The main output to which this project will primarily contribute to is strengthened Life Skills development program for the promotion of adolescents sexual reproductive health.

The major project activities included life skills facilitator's trainings and production of handbooks, peer educators training, outreach sessions, website development and production of IEC material such as video programs, leaflets and brochures for adolescents. Skill development courses were conducted by Youth Ministry, Centre for Continuing Education and College of Higher Education. Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYDS), Girl Guides Association, Scout Association, Society of Health Education (SHE) and FASHAN.

Workshops on training Peer Educators were held to motivate young people to undertake informal/organized educational activities with their peers. Since 2003 when the project was being implemented, a large number of people have been oriented and trained. For instance, orientation sessions were held for 566 teachers, 150 school heads and 80 senior officials of Ministry of Education. Life skills training was imparted to 1270 primary students, 624 secondary students, 656 students from Atoll schools and 177 teachers. 96 LSE Facilitators from Male and atolls were trained. A total of 28 radio programs were broadcasted and each program had a duration of 45 minutes and based on life skills. A total of 120 programs with the 15 minute segment on life skills were telecasted by Television Maldives.

Challenges in Life skills education:

There is a dearth of expertise in provision of life skills education. The orientation and training of facilitators needs strengthening and inputs provided on a sustained basis to develop a strong resource pool of trainers in the country.

Regardless of the fact that the project is being implemented since 2003, the strengths of life skills as a subject still remains misunderstood largely by different stakeholders and the public and requires considerable advocacy and public education.

With the school time table overloaded with academic subjects and two external examinations, emphasis is given to subjects and training adolescents and youth for examinations rather than practical subjects such as life skills. Therefore, the commitment to life skills education is still very minimal at school managerial level as well as policy level.

As life skills sessions are held outside the normal timetable hours of the students, the LSE facilitators find it hard to complete the intended hours of life skills for the selected groups of students among the target audience.

Incorporating life skills as an integral part of teacher training (both pre and in service training) remains a challenge. This is a critical element as the teacher plays a key role in not only being an academic but also a social mentor for students.

With the project coming to an end in 2007, the major challenge is taking forward the experience and learnings from the project to design a long term life skills programme in the Maldives.





Goal IV

Improving Adult Literacy and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults

Goal 4: Achieving a 50% percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults

A Strong base for literacy

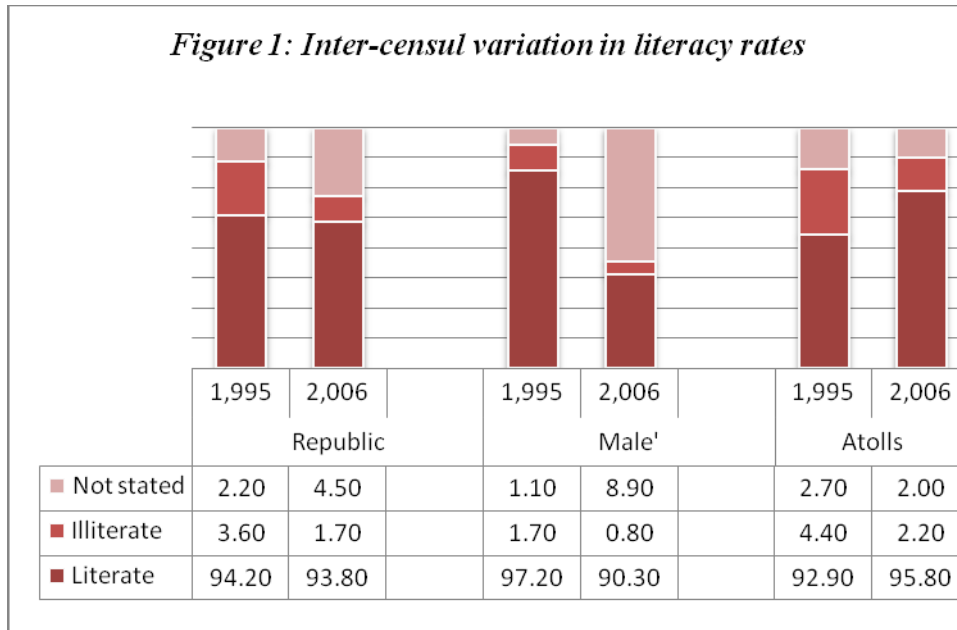
In 1990 Maldives had adult literacy rates (for both the 15 + age group as well as for the 15-24 years age group) that were way ahead of the 2005 regional averages. A nationwide programme called *Asaasee Thauleem* (Basic Education) to eradicate literacy from the country was first launched in 1980. The 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 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 achieved a successful literacy rate of 98.6% with a very small number of illiterates (2,014 illiterates of which 660 were female and 1,354 male) to be reached.

Current status

The United Nations (UN) defines a literate person as someone who can both read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement (in any language) on his/her everyday life. A person who cannot read or write is illiterate. The literacy rate is a useful tool to determine the extent of interventions needed in the education sector in terms of literacy programs and quality education at the lower levels. A literate person can harness his or her potential for intellectual growth and thus contribute positively to the economic, social and cultural development of society. Thus, data on literacy provides a meaningful indicator for measuring the progress in the achievement of the goal towards education for all.

To determine literacy, the question asked in the 2006 Census, probed for the person's ability to read and write, with understanding, the local language Dhivehi. Figure 1 shows the result.

Figure 1: Inter-censal variation in literacy rates



The overall literacy rate for the country is 93.8% while for the atolls the rate is 95.8% and for Male', the rate is 90.3%. The lower rate in Male' can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the percentage who did not state whether they were literate or not, is very high (8.9%) in Male'. These may be people who were not directly questioned during the enumeration process.

Secondly, in Male' enumerators were more educated and it can be assumed that they would have tried to find out if the respondents were in fact literate if there were any suspicions on their part. On the other hand, in the islands, it is a matter of pride for each individual to say that the whole island is literate, thus in fact some enumerators might have just marked the person literate without even asking

In the 1995 Census, the literacy question, whether the individual can read and write, with understanding, was asked of everyone who had not completed grade 5, while in the 2006 Census, the question was asked of everyone who had not completed grade 7. This is because since primary education is universalised, almost all children complete primary education (7 years of basic education), and it is universally assumed that any person complete grade 7 will be literate.

From 1995, to 2006, the overall literacy rate for the country has gone down by 0.4 percentage points. However, the percentage of people who reported that they were illiterate has gone down too indicating that, in fact, relatively speaking more people are literate in 2006 than in 1995. This trend is true when the figure for atolls and Male' are considered as well. The decrease in literacy rates for Male' is 8.8% from 1995 to 2006. After the Tsunami many vulnerable rural groups migrated to Male' which may account for the higher differences in literacy between the two years in Male'.

For the Maldives, focus on adult literacy is no longer necessary as the EFA goal of universal adult literacy has almost completely been realized as early as 1990.

Consequently there has not been the need to have a separate policy framework for adult literacy. What is of relevance, however, is ensuring a more holistic education and long term learning opportunities for the adult population, and the implications this has for continuing education programmes.

Building English language skills

Literacy in the Maldives, of course, is defined in terms of the national language, Dhivehi, using the Thaana script. Considering the small size of the population and the fact that scarcely anyone outside the country speaks Dhivehi, it is remarkable that the language has flourished.

As the Dakar goal related to adult literacy and eliminating gender disparities had been achieved in the Maldives, the Maldives EFA Plan post Dakar did not specifically plan to address literacy and gender goals separately but viewed them as embedded and cross

cutting all the other 4 EFA goals. However, it has been decided to focus on this goal as well to enhance the sustainability and development of earlier achievements.

The uniqueness of the national language means that Maldivians also need to learn foreign languages – whether to communicate with the outside world, obtain higher education, or to support the tourism industry. The most useful language for this purpose is English.

Progress in English-language knowledge especially among young adults has moved at a rapid pace. The atoll population in particular has made rapid progress. In 1997 English was spoken only by around half young adults of the island population but by 2004 by more than three quarters of them. Among older people, however, the rise has been slower, from 10 to 20 percent. People in Male’, have also made progress. In 1997 almost all young adults spoke English but only 55 percent of older adults did so; by 2004 that proportion had risen to around 70 percent.

Table illustrates the progress in English by different adult population groups. This shows, for example, that among young adults males the differences in levels of skills between the sexes have disappeared. For the older age groups, although both sexes have improved, the percentage-point gap between them in persists.

Table: Percentage of population with English language skills, 1997,2004

	1997				2004			
	Young adults 15-24 years		Other adults 25 years and above		Young adults 15-24 years		Other adults 25 years and above	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Maldives	63	72	17	27	84	84	33	43
Male	92	92	47	63	93	92	66	76
Atoll Average	51	57	7	13	77	79	14	22

Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment-II, 2004

Institutional arrangements for literacy and continuing education

Centre for Continuing Education (CCE)

Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) came into being in 1976 as a component of community education of Educational Development Project Office (EPO). The EPO expanded and was renamed the Educational Development Centre (EDC) in 1979. Community education was included in its mandate. The EDC expanded, and the community education component was reformulated into the Non-Formal Education Unit in 1986. It was renamed as Non-Formal Education Centre in 1992, and as Centre for Continuing Education in 2003.

Vision, Mission and activities of CCE

The CEC aims to establish community education in each island using informal education strategies to target the people devoid of the chance to study in the formal education system; empower each person with the educational level and skills necessary to develop their lives, inculcate the desire to obtain and develop further education and skills; and facilitate the opportunity to acquire more education and skills through personal efforts.

The stated mission of CEC is to work with children devoid of the opportunity to study under the formal stream; school drop outs, and targets youth and adults in general utilizing non-formal education mechanisms to improve their general knowledge and general awareness and to further opportunities for self development through personal efforts.

Functions and activities of CCE have included developing and facilitating courses for the out of school population; developing, managing and producing of awareness materials; coordinating and implementing community related educational activities including the national literacy programme; coordinating and implementing Second Chance classes; conducting English language courses; provides assistance to NGOs and Atoll Education centres in the provision of community skill building courses, dissemination of relevant and important information to the Atoll

community by publishing magazines such as Jamaathuge Khabary and Holhuashi; coordinating and implementing the UN Literacy Decade activities and data collecting and research.

Current focus of CCE vocational education and continuing education opportunities for young adult

The CEC thrust in recent years has been on provision of vocational courses in particular. The major activities under these have been

- CEC also offers courses for advanced certificate in ECCD, foundation and certificate courses in English language, distance education in English language, certificate courses in secretarial and text production skills, and condensed technical and vocational courses in electrical wiring, computer hardware and dress making and design.
- Starting in 2000, CEC started an initiative called Second Chance. The objective of this intervention was to conduct and coordinate Second Chance classes in Male' and in the atolls, provide counseling for students, develop teaching learning materials for Second Chance students and teachers, provide career development opportunities for students. Around 1500 students have benefited from these various courses offered.

Issues in Adult literacy and learning

- 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. Currently there are no mechanisms/ systems in place for an assessment of the status of literacy skills and information and knowledge levels. This would need to be done to inform any post literacy and continuing education programme. One of the areas that needs to be systematized and developed is a good tracking and data base system to monitor illiterate out of school youth, status of neo literate skills, and the extent to which vocational skills have been useful in ensuring some form of livelihood.



Goal V Eliminating **gender** disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Vision

Every Maldivian family to be living independently and pleasantly, every Maldivian citizen to be treated without discrimination, with love, care and respect in their families and Maldivian community to be a community in which women, children, the disabled and the old age is given their rights, respect and protection.

Mission

To protect the rights of children and women, to overcome the obstacles that are present in all fields which hold back gender equality, to provide help for women and children who are abused by another citizen or party, to protect the rights of the disabled plus the old age and to strengthen family relations.

Source: Ministry of Gender and Family

Introduction

Often in the case of Maldives apparent gender disparities are not evident as in other parts of the region suggesting that analysis using a gender lens may not be all that relevant. **Maldives has the second-highest rank (behind Sri Lanka) on the United Nations Gender-related Development Index (GDI) in the South Asia region.** As per the 2000 census women constitute 49.2% of the population. The sharp differentials in sex ratios evident in other parts of the region do not obtain in the Maldives. Existing laws and policies do not discriminate against women in the areas of access to health services, education and employment, but socio-cultural factors restrict women's de facto enjoyment of rights in these areas.

While there is no doubt that the gross gender disparities do not obtain in the Maldives as the threshold for gender equity and equality is high, second generation issues of women's empowerment and the qualitative realization of gender equality remain as much a concern for Maldives as for other parts of the region.

As far as the EFA gender goals are concerned Maldives is well on course to full realization of the primary education goals. At the secondary school level, there is a high probability of realizing of EFA gender goals. A strong enabling environment is in place through the national commitment to gender equality and mainstreaming borne out by strong policy commitments and the institutional mechanisms to achieve the national goals.

National Policy and gender mainstreaming

Over the past two decades, the Government's approach to gender development has changed from a focus on empowerment and integration to one of gender equality and mainstreaming. The Ministry of Gender and Family (MoGF) was restructured following the Cabinet reshuffle of July 2005 to focus on gender, child protection and family. Its mandate is to formulate policy guidelines, establish standards, undertake monitoring and evaluation and encourage NGOs, CBOs and the private sector to deliver services to women, children and families, while measures to close identified gender gaps are mainstreamed through the line ministries.

Policies and strategies regarding gender, child protection and family services in the 7th National Development Plan (7NDP) reflect a results-based approach to closing gender gaps. For the MoGF, the key 7NDP goals include: (i) develop institutional frameworks and establish a multi-disciplinary protection system for children and vulnerable women; (ii) develop institutional framework and establish support services for children and families in particularly difficult circumstances; (iii) support the strengthening of the justice and legal system to protect the rights of children and women; (iv) promote the health and well being of families; (iv) promote policies for the social inclusion of the elderly and people with special needs and safeguard their well-being within the community; (v) develop mechanisms to increase economic and socio-political participation of women; and (vi) mainstream gender and child rights concerns.

Gender mainstreaming is a priority of the Government of Maldives. Successive development plans have reaffirmed gender mainstreaming as a priority and have incorporated gender as a cross-cutting issue. From the Sixth National development plan a separate section on gender as a cross cutting policy issue has been incorporated and efforts have been made to incorporate gender concerns in all development planning.

A Gender Management System based on the Commonwealth model was put in place in 2001 under the Government policy of gender mainstreaming. The basic structures for this system are in place, with the establishment of a Gender Equality Council in December 2001 and the appointment of focal points in all sectors. Work continues in strengthening the system through capacity building and advocacy.

Work on the National Policy on Gender began in 2004 and the policy has been formulated and has come into effect on 5th April 2006. The Seventh development Plan 2006-210 has incorporated all aspects of the policy.

The main aspects of the Seventh Development plan as far as gender is concerned are as follows:

- Eliminate gender disparity in tertiary education
- Increase female Labour Force Participation Rate from 52 percent to 60 percent
- Reduce gender based violence through advocacy and sensitisation programs
- Provide access to social protection services for children, women and family through
- establishment of Social Protection Centres in all Atolls
- Ensure 100 percent participation in the Defined Contribution (DC) pension scheme of employees in the formal sector by 2010
- Achieve universal health insurance coverage by 2010
- Ensure that social assistance schemes for vulnerable groups are developed by 2010
- Ensure the availability of legal and regulatory tools to protect the rights of people with disabilities by 2010
- Ensure the availability of home and community based care programs for the aged by 2010

International Commitments

The national commitment to ensuring gender equality has been demonstrated by Maldives being a signatory to several International policies and instruments for achieving gender equality. The Maldives ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in July 1993 and is a party to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, as well as ⁱ the SAARC Plan of Action on the Girl Child, and the SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution.

The Maldives is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) in 1993. The UN CEDAW Committee, in its response to the Maldives' initial (1998) report in 2001, commended the Maldives' political will to work towards women's human rights as an integral dimension of national development, as encompassed in the Vision 2020 document, the gender national plan of action and the national development plan. Indeed, a separate section on gender was incorporated for the first time in the Fifth National Development Plan (1997–1999), and gender has been effectively mainstreamed in the National Development Plans since then. A National Policy on Gender Equality was passed in April 2006 and consideration is being given to adopting the Optional CEDAW Protocol. Gender Equality is one of the eleven guiding principles of the 7NDP.

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

At the national level an institutional mechanism for the advancement of women was set up for the first time at the National Planning Agency in 1979, with the establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the International Decade for Women. This Preparatory Committee was renamed National Women's Committee in 1981 and moved from the National Planning Agency to the President's Office. The Office for Women's Affairs was established in 1986 and the National Women's Committee was renamed National Women's Council. The Office for Women's Affairs was upgraded to Department of Women's Affairs in 1989. A cabinet-level appointment in 1993 established the Ministry of Youth, Women's Affairs and Sports, which was renamed the Ministry of Women's

Affairs and Social Welfare in 1996, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security in 1998.

Efforts have also been to set a complementary structure at the island level to further women's empowerment and development through a mobilization of women in general. Women's committees in all the inhabited islands were set up in 1983. Till 1st April 1993 women's committees were appointed by the Department of Women's affairs. And some members were elected to these committees; among the elected members were health workers, mid wives and teachers. During the time when committees were appointed, in some islands committees were also elected by women voting. From 1993, committees were to be elected instead of appointing, and the rules of the committee were reviewed and enforced in 1995. In July 2000 rules of the committee were again reviewed and the name of the committee was changed to Island Women's Development committee (IWDC). The objective of the IWDC is to work and carry out activities for girls and women's development and to focus on women's rights, encourage and foster women's empowerment and political participation, collect data relevant to women, increase the number of women in higher education, improve women's health and in general ensure an active role of women in the public domain.

Strategies and activities

The policy commitments have been translated into action since 2002 through a wide range of interventions and activities. The more prominent of these include¹:

- The first-ever codified Family Law came into effect on 1 July 2001. Minimum legal age of marriage under the new law is 18, and marriages of underage girls or boys are not allowed under any circumstances. This new law also specifies the many rights available to women in the Shari'a, such as pre-nuptial agreements to ensure the rights of both parties within the marriage. Pre-nuptial agreements can also lay the foundation for protection of the rights of women in case of unwarranted divorce and polygamy. The problem of high divorce that had existed in the Maldives is addressed by the Family Law by criminalising spontaneous and unilateral divorce by husbands. Divorce is possible only through the Court system, and is allowed after exhaustive efforts to reconcile the marriage has been undertaken by arbitrators. Both husbands and wives are allowed to initiate divorce within the existing system and may go through this procedure to effect a divorce.

¹ Commemorating Beijing IV, 2003, *Maldives commitments, Action Plans and Challenges*

- A campaign to problematise the issues of domestic violence and violence against women was started on 8 March 2002 and culminated in creating public interest and discourse on the issue; as well as encouraging women to take the initiative to break the cycle of violence and in greater support from partner agencies such as the police and health officials.

Under the public awareness campaign, documentaries were produced and posters were published and widely distributed to make the public understand Domestic Violence and/or Violence Against Women (DV/VAW) as an issue not to be tolerated.

An initial training on DV/VAW aimed at setting up a multi-sectoral support system for victims of DV/VAW was organized by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security.

Police Officers, Medical Personnel, officials from the Family Court and Ministry of Justice, NGOs, community activists and staff from the Gender and Development section of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security participated in the training, which focused on creating an understanding of DV/VAW in general, and more specifically in the local context. The outcome of the training is an Action Plan for a multi-sectoral support system to assist victims of DV/VAW, and ongoing work on the issue is based on this Action Plan. The focus now is on developing the required human resources, and on strengthening the necessary institutional mechanisms for a multi-sectoral support system.

- Discussions are underway to draw up legislation on violence against women, and with the support of the Attorney General's Office and the Law Commission of Maldives, and the technical assistance of ICJ, it is expected that the draft of a Law on Domestic Violence will be ready by the end of 2004.
- The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security and the Ministry of Planning and National Development are closely working together to engender the census process. Workshops to encourage women into politics and to create legal literacy among women have been held for all the Atolls of the Maldives as well as the five wards of Male' by the end of the year 2001. New developments since the year 2000 include the first-time ever appointments of women to two senior posts; that of Atoll Chief and High Commissioner.

Overall situation of women and girls in the Maldives: Status, trends and challenges

The Maldives, due in large part to its scattered and isolated population, has enjoyed a history of close-knit kinship ties, united by a common language, Dhivehi, religion and a self sufficient way of life. Women in the Maldives operate without the secondary burdens of class, caste, race or *purdah* faced by their sisters in nearby countries. Men and women socialize freely; can expect equal pay, equal access to education and to live to about the same age. There is no detectable gender preference for male children or parental bias in the nutrition or education of children. The Maldives also does not experience the levels of absolute poverty which drive women in other South Asian countries into risky occupations or increase their risk of becoming the victims of human trafficking.

Women traditionally have played a subordinate role in society, although they now participate in public life in growing numbers and gradually are participating at higher levels. Women constitute 38 percent of government employees, and about 10 percent of uniformed NSS personnel and women enjoy a higher literacy rate (98 percent) than men (96 percent).

Labour Force Participation

Between 1990 and 2004, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) of women (ages 15-64) in the Maldives increased by 23 percentage points from 20 per cent to 43 per cent. The LFPR for women in Male' increased from 19 per cent to 38 per cent and in the Atolls from 21 per cent to 45 per cent. While the share of women in the labour force has increased, men still continue to dominate with almost twice as much presence in the

labour force relative to women. The labour force participation rate of women has increased from 34 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2006. Although access to paid employment is lower for women than that of men, the proportion of women in paying jobs is increasing steadily.

The women's participation in labour force is highest in education (72 percent), health (68 percent), manufacturing (65 percent) and agriculture (64 percent) sectors. The share of women in paying jobs is lowest in the tourism sector. While the statistics show positive trends, cultural and societal restrictions on mobility of women combined with limited child care facilities and support from the spouses for working mothers make it difficult to increase participation of women in economic activities. Therefore, subtle inequalities exist in terms of women's ability to utilise the available opportunities.

Women's political participation

In 1990, out of a total of 48 seats in the national parliament, two seats were held by women. Out of these two seats, one was held by a parliamentarian elected by the people of the respective atoll and the other by a parliamentarian appointed by the President. In 2005, out of a total of 50 seats, six seats were held by women. Although the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament increased from four per cent in 1990 to 12 per cent in 2005, it is worthwhile noting that in 2005 four out of the six parliamentarians were appointed by the President.

Education

See [chapter on Goal 2](#) for details of girls education status at primary and secondary level. While there is no gender inequality at the primary level and at the secondary level girls are making steady progress, there is gender disparity in technical and tertiary education, more so in the latter area, though steady improvements is evident. That the gap in tertiary education for men and women are narrowing is encouraging. The ratio of women to men with tertiary qualification in 2000 was 38% which increased to 45% in 2004 and has shown a substantial improvement by 2006 when it stood at 58%.

Female teachers

Table below gives details of female teachers at different levels. The percentages of females at pre primary and primary levels are high, a trend that is fairly common. Again not surprisingly the number of women at the secondary level decreases at the higher levels and is indicative of smaller numbers of women gaining the certification required to join the teaching profession at the higher levels. This is an area that needs attention as increased female representation can serve as role models for the younger generation.

Table Distribution of Female Teachers, March 2005					
	% Female Teachers	Total	Female Total	Female	
				Local	Expat
Pre Primary	95.0	516	490	485	5
Primary (Gr 1 to 7)	66.2	2882	1909	1665	244
Lower Secondary (Gr 8 to 10)	36.2	2067	748	269	479
Higher Secondary (Gr 11 to 12)	27.2	151	41	10	31
Total Teachers	56.8	5616	3188	2429	759

Source: Republic of Maldives, School Statistics, 2005, Ministry of Education

Some recent positive developments

While overt and deliberate sex-based discrimination is totally absent in the Maldivian psyche, it is being recognized that gender- and poverty-related disparities and concerns are surfacing as a consequence of rapid economic development and breakdown of the traditional systems of familial and social relations. Encouragingly, the Government is open-minded about the need to improve on gender-related issues. Acceptance of the problem is a first positive step. Several initiatives have been taken in the recent past to understand the conceptual basis and methods to mainstream gender and initiate affirmative action to remove structural barriers to women's participation in government administration. As an example, recently, the Government separated the administrative and religious functions of island chiefs, opening the doors for women to participate in island development to understand the conceptual basis and methods to mainstream gender and initiate affirmative action to remove structural barriers to women's participation in government administration. As an example, recently, the Government separated the administrative and religious functions of island chiefs, opening the doors

for women to participate in island development more actively, a role that hitherto was not possible as they are not entitled to perform the religious duties of a kateeb/island chief.

Some key issues and challenges

Despite these commendable features, there are concerns related to the fact that few women actually participate in the labor market, that the share of female-headed households is amongst the highest worldwide, and that female-headed households are especially vulnerable to poverty.

Isolation and a lack of access to resources continue to frustrate women's participation in the economy. In addition to a simple lack of gainful employment opportunities for women in the atolls, there are areas where women face legal obstacles to their participation in development, including with respect to property rights, inheritance and provision of legal evidence. Challenges also exist in women's participation in decision-making, with women under-represented in local and national government, and particularly so in policy making positions.

Gender gaps persist in various aspects of social development due to stereotypes and limited opportunities for women to work outside the home. The family is the most important social unit in Maldivian society and household management, home and child care is seen as the domain of women, while men are generally considered the household head. Women's domestic work burden is high, especially since the average household size is large (6.6 nationally, but 8 in Malé) with on average 3 children to care for. It is estimated that less than 4% of men contribute to the household tasks of cooking, childcare, cleaning, washing or ironing.¹ In addition, almost half of households in the Maldives are headed by women, about half of these because the husband was away working in Malé, at a resort or at sea, and one sixth as a result of being widowed or divorced.

The female employment participation rate has declined from 60% in 1978 to 21% in 1995—from one of the highest in the region to one of the lowest in the world. Prior to the 1970s, men were responsible for going out on boats and catching fish, and women for

drying, processing and marketing excess fish and fish products. The rapid economic development from the 1970s onwards was largely captured by men—in terms of the mechanization of the fishing industry and sale of fish directly by fishermen to factory ships and centralized industries. Due to cultural mores, women make up just 5% of the labor force in tourism, since it is the men who are primarily employed on the many resort islands. Rising prosperity not only served to decrease the need for women's incomes, but also to reinforce their traditional gender role as home manager and child care provider, since men were away more often and for longer periods.

Between 1995 and 2005, the female participation rate increased to 37%, as more women found jobs in the service sector in Malé, and while this does represent progress, the low participation rate is still cause for concern. The Maldives economy is hampered by skill shortages and human resource development constraints, resulting in part from women's exclusion from the labor force.

Divorce is very common in the Maldives and the divorce rate remains high despite the introduction of the codified Family Law in 2001. Divorced women and their children are particularly economically vulnerable and divorced women have limited choices to improve their situation apart from remarrying. The Maldives has one of the highest rates of female-headed households in the world, at 47%. Almost a quarter of these had no income-earning member, with only 21% economically active in the week preceding the census. Many female-headed households receive remittance income from absent partners working in Malé or on resorts, however the 2005 VPA did identify that female headed households are more likely to be living in poverty than male headed households.

Access to basic health services is now nearly universal in the Maldives, and significant progress has been made in improving access to maternal and child health services and family planning, impacting positively on infant, child and maternal mortality statistics. Malnutrition is a major contributor to complications and mortality of women during childbirth, and underweight babies. Women are also at risk during complicated pregnancies due to the lack of affordable transport to atoll referral hospitals or the capital

in the case of complications experienced while giving birth. Another area of concern is the widespread levels of anemia already referred to under Goal I.

As per the 2000 census, females and males both attained 99% literacy. Cultural expectations regarding young women living away from home impact upon the numbers of female students studying abroad and hence female attainment of tertiary qualifications. From 1995 to 2000 a total of 876 students were awarded government scholarships to study abroad, 42% of which went to girls. From 2001 to 2005, 39% of undergraduate scholarships went to girls, 38% of post-graduate scholarships and 22% of doctorate scholarships.

The Maldives has a legal system that is a combination of common law and *Shariah* provisions. The main areas where women face legal obstacles to their participation in development are property rights, inheritance and provision of legal evidence. The rules of inheritance favour men, as they are defined in terms of the person's relationship to the deceased, and assume that men will provide maintenance for women automatically.

The Family Law Act (2001) was the first law enacted which specifically relates to gender relations, marriage and family life. It sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both men and women and strengthens the rules on polygamous marriages. In addition, men's right to divorce based on reciting a verbal formula was rescinded, a major step in assuring women's rights

Gender disparities also exist in the realm of public service and politics. Only 15% of the legislators and senior officials in the Maldives are women. The Government is the largest employer in the Maldives, and employs 62% males and 38% females. Females however make up 54% of temporary government jobs and are concentrated in the education, health and welfare sectors, whereas males dominate in the services sector and the senior ranks of the public service. Women are also under-represented in positions of political leadership. There are four women in the cabinet of 22 (13.6%), 6 women in the Majlis out of 50 (12%) and 11 women in the Special Majlis out of 113 (9%).

