

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme



Beyond Tsunami - Working together to regain Maldives' development momentum

Before December 2004 the Maldives was well on the way to tackling poverty. Since the early 1990's literacy has been close to 100 percent, under-five mortality has fallen from 11.5 percent to just over seven percent and safe water has been available to almost everyone, to name a few development achievements. Tourism, fisheries and other industries have boosted the economy and provided significant growth.

But the Boxing Day tsunami, which devastated many countries in the region, has placed these achievements at risk.

The Maldives was one of the worst affected countries hit by the tsunami. While only about 100 people died (a small figure compared to the more than 260,000 killed by the tsunami worldwide), the country and economy lay in ruins.

Infrastructure was smashed by the incoming waves. Total damage to this small-island nation of just over 250,000 people is estimated to be in the region of US\$ 470 million – just over 62 percent of GDP. Agriculture, fisheries, and basic livelihoods were washed away. Vital infrastructure such as wharves, fish processing facilities, hospitals and schools disappeared. The most vulnerable and poorest groups in society now face the spectre of an even more precarious future.

As the television cameras shift their focus and the emergency teams leave, the Maldives is left with the task of rebuilding itself. Island communities are beginning to realize that it may take years before they can reach the levels of prosperity they enjoyed before disaster struck.

This has made UNDP's mandate of helping the government to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and reducing poverty even more urgent. The tsunami has also proven once again the vulnerability of small island states to environmental disaster. The country's long-standing concerns about global warming and rising sea levels have been all too clearly illustrated.

Besides supporting the Government of the Maldives in the areas of democratic governance, pro-poor policies and environmental protection, UNDP has now embarked on a comprehensive programme of post-tsunami recovery. Called the Adopt-an-island programme, it will focus on shelter, infrastructure, livelihoods, disaster risk-management and aid co-ordination.

But recovery means not just bringing the Maldives back to pre-tsunami development levels. More importantly it means taking it forward to face the challenges faced by the Millennium Development Goals and improving the lives of ordinary Maldivians. UNDP will be there to support the government as it embarks on this process.