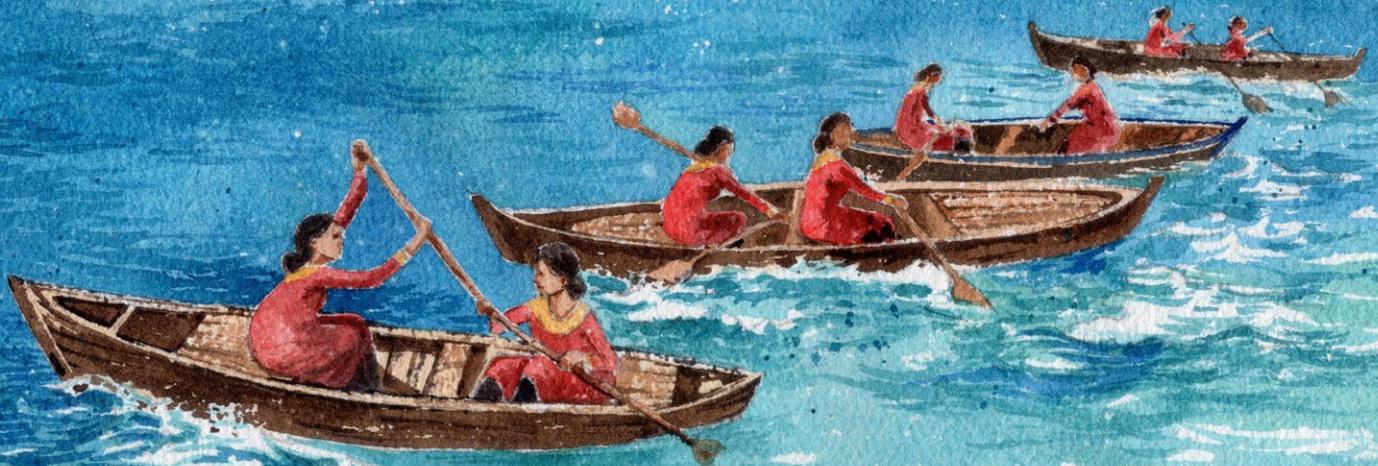


2023 ISSUE
EDITION 7
MALDIVES



ISLAND LIFE

Equitable, sustainable
development gains for
all of Maldives





PHOTOGRAPHY

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MALDIVES AT A GLANCE

- 515,132** Resident population of Maldives in 2022, 25.7% foreigners
- 27%** Increase in tourist arrivals compared to 2021
- 11,030** GDP per capita as per World Bank's Atlas method in 2022
- 0.747** Human Development Index score. Ranked 90th out of 191 countries in 2021/2022

ABOUT US

UNDP is the United Nations' leading development agency, fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

UNDP has been in the Maldives for 45 years. We work on climate and disaster resilience, democratic governance, and to drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone in the Maldives, with people and nature in balance.

Learn more at www.undp.org/maldives or follow at [@UNDPMaldives](https://twitter.com/UNDPMaldives)

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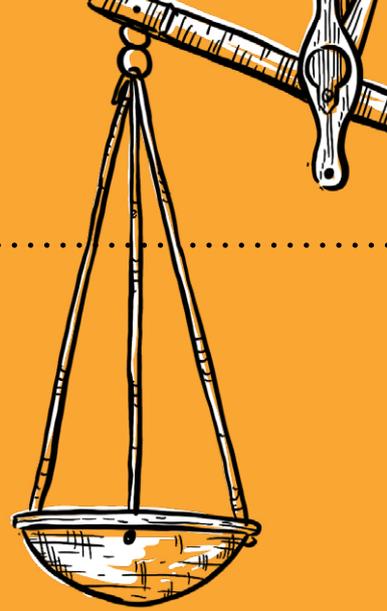
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OUR IMPACT . 2023



Democratic Governance

For the first time in the Maldives, unassisted voting

for people who are blind and with visual impairments was successfully pioneered in the Presidential Election.

190 Women and 94 Youth, including 32 Persons with Disabilities

have participated in the **Practice Parliament programme since 2021**, equipping individuals involved or interested in policy making and politics with the skills and knowledge necessary to contest elected positions.

28 participants (12 women and 16 men), aged between 16 and 25,

took part in the Civic Education Training, enhancing critical thinking and fostering values of tolerance, diversity, and respect for human rights.

106 free pro bono legal aid consultations

provided by Family Legal Clinic with UNDP's support to 67 individuals (65 women, 2 men) including those most at need, such as survivors of domestic violence and gender-based violence.

13 young people

led a community dialogue in Kulhudhuffushi utilizing the methodology of Community-based Theatre as means to foster discussion on topics of community interest.

38 young people

(20 young girls/women and 18 young boys/men) participated in the Judiciary for Juniors Programme in partnership with the Judiciary.

35 individuals (11 women, 24 men), from 12 Local Councils

equipped with social innovation skills at the first-ever Council Innovation Challenge.

66 staff from the Department of Judicial Administration and Family Court participated

in a workshop to enhance awareness and sensitivity toward the rights of Persons with Disabilities. The workshop aimed to contribute to improved policy frameworks and advocacy efforts.

73 participant (53 women, 20 men) participated in the capacity building event

on International Human Rights Standards on Elections.

Women Councilors and WDC members

representing each atoll and city of Maldives took part in the 2 day dialogue 'Women in Local Governance', co-organized by LGA, where critical discussions were facilitated on addressing challenges faced by women.

Emergency life-saving equipment

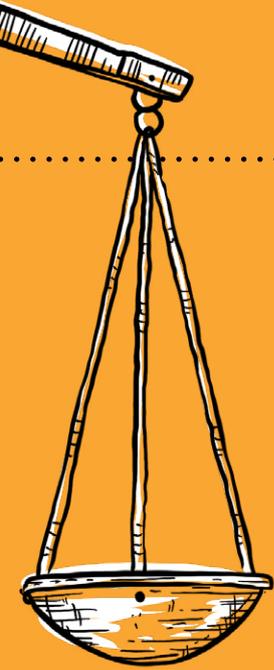
provided to hospitals and health centers including neonatal ventilators, AEDs and PPE, in line with national needs.

26 members (10 women, 16 men) from Local Government Authority (LGA)

actively engaged in a co-creation workshop, to assist the LGA in conducting a comprehensive Performance Index Review.

21 Human Rights Defenders (18 women, 3 men, 1 Person with Disabilities)

participated in the Human Rights Defender Training Programme.



Sustainable and Inclusive Growth

Maldives becomes the first SIDS country

to develop and formally endorse a financing strategy using an INFF approach inclusive of a Gender Strategy.

\$2.5 million secured in financing agreements

towards health systems strengthening, insurance development, SDG financing, and corporate sustainability.

Commenced SDG budget tagging to assist the Government of Maldives

to assess resources for sustainable development and identify areas for additional prioritization of the SDGs.

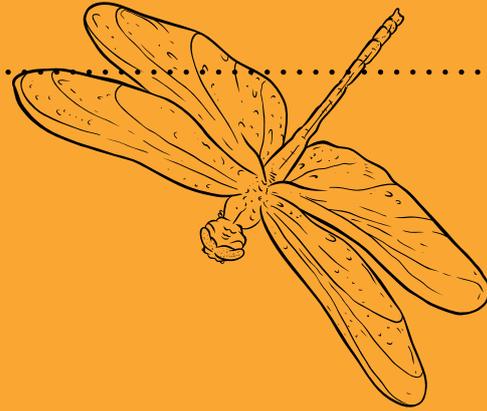
\$10 million in a blended finance model secured

through the Global Fund for Coral Reefs environmental conservation initiative.

Designing the country's first ESG reporting framework

for the private sector.





Natural Resources, Resilience and Climate Action

Solar-backed cold storage units for agricultural produce built

in Laamu Atoll and air quality monitoring systems installed in Malé

54 participants who are auditors for farm inspection (27 women and 27 men)

participated in the Training of Trainers on farm inspection auditing

Safe and secure freshwater provided to 19,871 residents across 29 islands,

in response to climate change-induced water shortages

25 Council members from Faafu Atoll trained

in sustainable, nature-based local development planning

1 Interim storage facility

for hazardous waste commissioned in Addu City

5 solar backed charging stations

for Malé Electric Bus Route

7 small grants issued to community-based NGOs

to undertake local solutions to environmental and climate challenges

Successfully commissioned and handed over 25 rainwater harvesting systems and 4 integrated water resource management systems

on 29 islands

Innovation

Localized Liveability Index for Hulhumalé launched,

as a tool to empower city planners and policymakers with data-driven insights

25 participants in 2 islands trained in participatory mapping

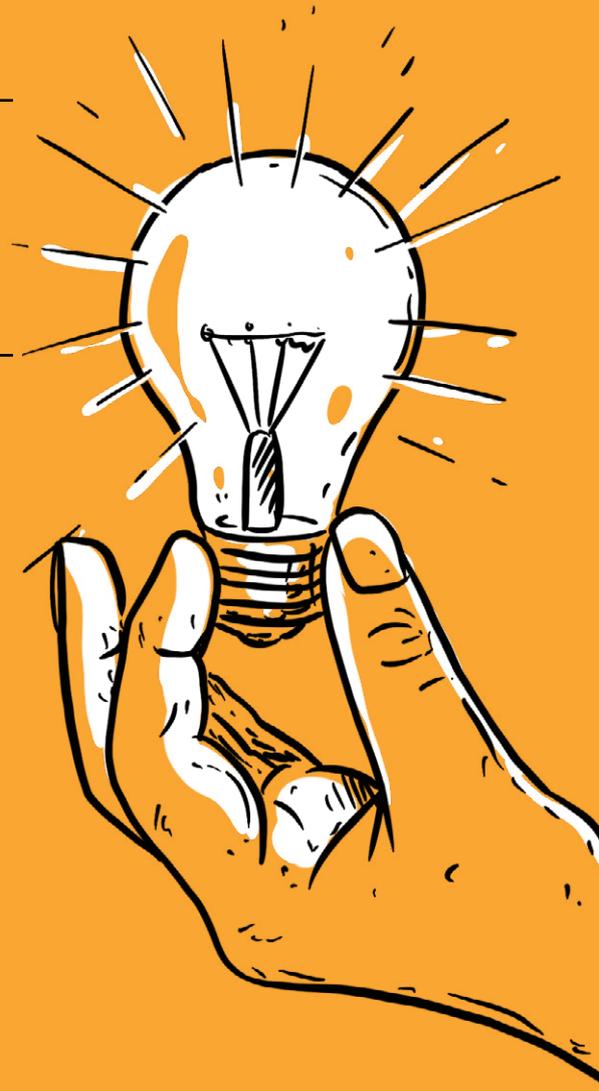
to gather citizen-generated data used for disaster risk management and climate adaptation

20 participants from 4 City Councils

and other government entities engaged on data for policy capacity building

16 people (4 women, 12 men, 2 Persons with Disabilities) from 8 CSOs

from 6 islands equipped to develop crowdfunding campaigns, facilitating knowledge-sharing between the CSOs



Gender Equality

UNDP Maldives Attains Silver Level Gender Equality Seal Certification -

a significant leap in our commitment to gender equality in and across all our work

DISLODGING HUMANKIND FROM ITS SELFIE

Enrico Gaveglia,
UNDP Resident
Representative in
the Maldives



If the ocean suddenly disappeared from before our eyes, what would we miss?

Certainly, the world's largest carbon sink; a natural coastline defence system; nutrients from the sea that also feed terrestrial ecosystems; a crucial food source for billions of people; industries such as shipping, tourism, and fisheries; a treasure trove of biodiversity - a loss inflicted upon nature and us, affecting the well-being of people and the planet.

And this is just a drop in an ocean of loss. The ocean is not just a vast expanse of water; it is the heart of our planet's ecological, biodiversity, economic and social systems. Its removal would set off a domino effect of consequences that would reverberate through every facet of our existence. If it lasts.

Yet, it is not just our water, but our air, soil, flora and fauna - everything around us carries an intrinsic value, that translates to immediate benefits, and ultimately to socio-economic gains. This is why we need the accounting of our natural capital - an asset to humankind.

Those who perceive the loss of nature at every cut we impose on it, call for justice, climate justice, and how it is closely tied to our responsibility as custodians of the environment. It is simple. When you cherish something, you want to protect it. And when all you value around you is harmed or taken from you, you rebel in the quest for justice. We do not possess nature, despite all our efforts to convince ourselves; at best, we are custodians of this Earth, and we value it deeply.

In the context of climate change, this justice is a right woven into our understanding of nature. It means holding those responsible for environmental damage accountable. Often, these perpetrators are located far away from the places they harm, as seen in the case of global warming affecting our beautiful chain of

islands, the Maldives, a nation experiencing severe climate effects. Where Maldives contributes only 0.03 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions but sea-level rise poses an existential threat to the country since four-fifths of the nation's islands are only a metre above sea level. When human-induced climate change poses a threat, there is an emergent movement requesting at least for compensation, as reintegration and regeneration efforts will have to be taken into account. Loss = damages and repair.



If the ocean suddenly disappeared from before our eyes, what would we miss?



The problem is justice systems aren't always equipped to handle these complex environmental cases. They lack the policies and a solid rule of law to make things right. But as the calls for climate justice, and loss and damage grow louder, we are beginning to realize the urgency of connecting environmental harm with accountability.

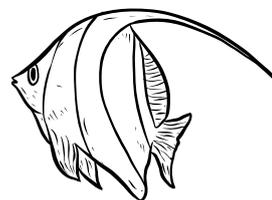
This is where we dive into climate finance. It is a lifeline for fighting climate change. When the challenges of climate pressure surpass the capabilities of public revenue, climate finance is called to step in. It provides the resources needed to prepare for and respond to severe climate events. This support is not limited

to governments - it extends to a call for action to private capital to support climate change mitigation and emergency responses too.

In countries like the Maldives, public revenue is limited, and the human dimension is uneven when compared to the natural assets at hand. Consequently, to protect a true global asset just below this part of the Indian Ocean, taxing Maldivians, half a million people, is simply not right and certainly alone cannot repay the costs associated with a climate change that has already occurred. It's akin to attempting to replenish a desiccated mangrove water body, one bucket at a time - it's just not enough, not even possible.

Adding up the value of nature and incorporating it into public and private budget records could resonate to start with. As losses are recorded annually on a crude balance sheet of accounts, both public and private capital that shares our climate goals are involved. By blending resources from both the public and private sectors, we have a shot at creating a promising approach to revisiting how they tackle climate change, treating nature as an asset.

Capital calls for capital, and it could be challenging to articulate strategic options that induce a better balance between generating profit and addressing the increasing deficit inflicted upon nature. The battle is against climate change but likely much more against the era of humans, at the center of any socio-economic design of our existence. Dislodging humankind from a picturesque ocean backdrop is not going to be easy, but if we don't act now, it will happen anyway.



Accessibility at the Polls

REALIZING THE VISION FOR Independent Voting WITH Innovative Template

September is when the Southwest monsoon sweeps strong across the Maldives, weaving a tapestry of contrasts – a fusion of life-giving rains and choppy seas, of quiet introspection and vibrant celebration.

It is election season, and the islands and cities are painted with vibrant party colours, the streets are adorned with flags of political parties, campaign music is playing, and gathering spaces are attracting people from all walks of life.

On the morning of election day, Mohamed Hamid makes his way to his polling station, guided by the

voices and directions of friendly passersby. He senses the excitement in the air, the energy of the city coming alive with civic duty. At the polling station, he is handed his ballot paper, and a plastic template – a tactile masterpiece crafted to ensure an independent voting experience for people who are blind or with visual impairments. He feels it. The stencil features small, positive marks next to each candidate number, in character and Braille, allowing him to identify his preferred candidate by touch alone.

One of the primary design principles behind the template was to seamlessly integrate it into the

voting process. Voters can place the tactile stencil on top of the official ballot paper. This simple yet effective solution ensures that people who are blind or with visual impairments can engage in the electoral process autonomously like any other voter, preserving their privacy and dignity.

With determination, Hamid places the official ballot paper under the proportional template. His fingers trace the tactile indicators, and he confidently selects his presidential candidate. The act of marking his choice is not just a vote; it's a symbol of empowerment and inclusion. He feels the weight of history on his shoulders, knowing that he is part of it.

As he casts his vote, he embodies the essence of democracy in its purest form – 'of the people, from the people and by the people' – ensuring that no procedural, physical or behavioral attitudes



hinder or narrow the rights of a community of people who are blind and with visual impairments. His unassisted vote is a testament to the progress for disability inclusion in the Maldivian electoral process, joining other countries making reasonable accommodations to ensure voting is accessible for all.

This was a transformative amendment to the Electoral Act (11/2008), implemented after a recommendation by the Blind and Visually Impaired Society of Maldives (BVISM), whose members have been actively advocating for this change. They had meetings with the Human Rights Committee and the Independent Institutions Committee of the Parliament to discuss the issue of vote secrecy for an electoral base who are blind and with visual impairments.

“Casting a secret ballot freely and of their own free will has long been a dream for people living with visual disabilities. One of the most challenging and successful achievements of our Blind Association is ensuring that people who are blind and with visual impairments, who cannot perceive the possibility of a secret ballot, obtain this right. Finding a way to vote using a template without relying on someone else, within the appropriate legal bounds, is an important opportunity that future generations can also take advantage of.”

says BVISM.

Mohamed Hamid casting his vote unassisted.

“Strengthening institutions and bridging the state with people is at the core of our governance offer. Our support extends unequivocally, and we could not possibly turn down the request for assistance from the Elections Commission, nor of those championing the rights of persons with disabilities. And we will keep being there through future cycles, shaping every facet of public administration.”

says Enrico Gaveglia, United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Resident Representative in the Maldives.



UNDP has been happy to facilitate the process, through financial support for the initiative with the generous backing of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia.



“The implementation of stencils facilitates meaningful and equitable political engagement for individuals with visual impairments. This represents a notable achievement for Maldives, and Australia takes great pride in supporting democratic participation for all.”

*relays David Jessup,
Australian High Commissioner
to the Maldives.*

The process was fully supported the Election’s Commission of Maldives (EC). On their part, the EC’s efforts to enable unassisted voting for people with visual impairments began with an understanding of the demographics. Statistics showed that the areas of Alif Dhaalu, Haa Dhaalu, Gaafu Dhaalu and Malé atolls had the highest populations of blind and visually impaired individuals. It was in these very communities that the new template would prove its worth. Across these areas, 45 voters with visual impairments exercised their democratic rights independently thanks to this novel template advocated for by the disability community and introduced by the EC with the support of UNDP Maldives and DFAT.

“The Elections Commission of Maldives is dedicated to safeguarding the rights of all voters and enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of the electoral system. The introduction of the stencil represents a significant and important advancement in the electoral process,”

*the Commission
has stated.*

Members of BVISM advocating at the Parliament for independent voting rights for persons with visual impairments.

Photo courtesy: Sun Photo/
Ibrahim Shamweel



A sample of the stencil he used for casting his vote.



As voters who are blind and with visual impairments from across the Maldives exercised their right to vote freely and independently in the first and second rounds of the Presidential Elections this year, they sent a resounding message that disabilities should never be a barrier to civic participation. A responsive and inclusive democracy can be ensured by centering people for civic engagement, especially those with barriers to participation in society. With innovative solutions like this template, Maldivian democracy has taken a significant leap towards inclusivity, ensuring that every citizen’s voice is heard, felt, and counted during elections.



The monsoon is indeed a time when the islands reveal their truest selves, when the pulse of nature resonates in every corner. In this place where land and sea converge, the monsoon is more than just a season; it is a living, breathing entity that witnesses the shaping of destinies.

WOMEN, JUSTICE, EQUALITY

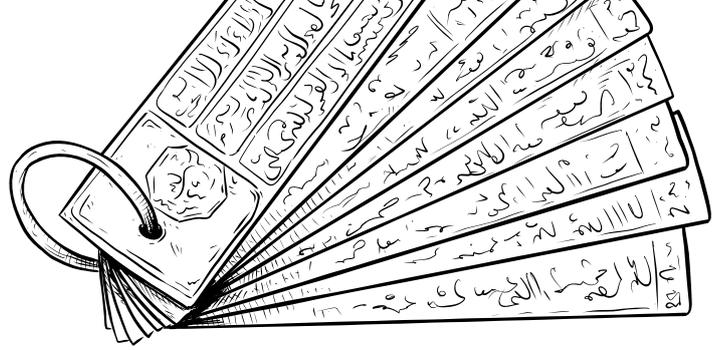


To coincide with International Women's Day and International Day of Women Judges, the first-ever Maldives Women Judges Conference was organized by the Judicial Service Commission and Department of Judicial Administration, in collaboration with the UNDP Maldives with the support of the UK Government and UK Aid from the British People.

The conference aimed to provide a platform for women judges in the Maldives to share their experiences and challenges in their work environment. 21 women judges (out of the 24 women judges in Maldives) and other renowned and highly prominent judges from the region, engaged in various discussions and sessions on topics such as gender equality in the legal and judicial profession, strategic court leadership, the importance of diversity in the judiciary, gendered threats to judicial integrity, and the role of women judges in promoting access to justice.

The dialogue was a significant step towards initiating stronger policy direction towards promoting gender equality and diversity in the judiciary, and it culminated in a set of strategic and collectively proposed recommendations to this end. The proposed recommendations seek to increase opportunities for women to serve as judges, facilitate a conducive environment for ensuring gender equality within the judiciary and to strengthen public trust and confidence in the administration of justice.





The CHANGE-MAKERS

Aishath Yumna's footsteps echo across the long hallway as she makes her way with nervous excitement to the gallery. Stepping through the imposing doors into the small room with her peers, they are enveloped by an air of solemnity and anticipation—a testament to the gravity of the decisions made within the hallowed walls down below.

The sleek glass panels of the observation gallery offer a glimpse into the democratic spirit of the Maldives. They were peering right into the chamber of the People's Majlis – the Maldivian Parliament, where a session was in progress.

Yumna takes in the scene below her with absolute wonder. It is a visual she has seen countless times on television. As the gavel echoes through the chamber, the People's Majlis comes to life. The vibrant hum of discussion reverberates, punctuated by the occasional applause or dissenting buzz. Every gesture, every word, contributes to the symphony of democracy—a symphony conducted by the representatives chosen by the people.

“Entering the Parliament, I felt a powerful mix of emotions, sensing its prestige after witnessing the significant work conducted there,”
Yumna relays.

For Yumna and her peers, as participants of the Practice Parliament sessions, this is an



“Entering the Parliament, I felt a powerful mix of emotions, sensing its prestige after witnessing the significant work conducted there,”

Yumna relays.



Yumna in green (middle) at one of the Practice Parliament sessions

especially historic and a significant moment to bear witness to. For many of the participants this is the first time they have been in the Parliament in person for a session. At the Practice Parliament's, they were in the heart of a programme offering a unique opportunity to women and young people in the Maldives to experience and learn first-hand the workings of the key legislative body in the Maldives, and to actively engage with the Parliament as is their right as a citizen.

The Practice Parliaments are a collaborative effort between the People's Majlis and UNDP. Generously backed by the support of the Government of Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, it has become a beacon for fostering inclusive political participation and empowerment for women and youth. The Practice Parliament programme has a singular mission – to empower women and youth to actively engage in the decision-making processes of the country. Through capacity development and targeted training, it equips individuals involved or interested in policy making and politics with the skills and knowledge necessary to contest elected positions. Over the years, the programme has become a catalyst for positive change, conducting a

handful of impactful programmes throughout each year.

Since its inception in 2021, the Practice Parliament programme has drawn active participation from individuals across the Maldives, providing invaluable opportunities to 190 women and 94 youth, including 32 Persons with Disabilities.

"I was amazed by new insights into the legislative process and I'm happy to participate in such an inclusive programme," says Mariyam Rizwana, Yumna's peer in the sessions. Each iteration distributed over several days covers sessions on civic education, parliamentary processes, and relevant policy issues, culminating in a Practice Parliament Sitting where participants simulate real-life parliamentary proceedings for practical experience.

The sessions, led by the People's Majlis and UNDP in the Maldives, in collaboration with government and civil society partners, delves into key topics such as gender equality with a focus on the National Gender Equality Action Plan, law-making processes, Right to Information, decentralization in the Maldives, and challenges to social cohesion with a dedicated focus on youth and women.

Participants have the unique opportunity to meet and attend learning sessions with members of the People's Majlis, including the Speaker, Deputy Speaker and several Members of Parliament. These interactions provide valuable insights into the workings of the political sphere, offering participants a glimpse into the intricacies of governance.

The initiative is built on the concept of experiential learning, providing aspiring individuals with the opportunity to learn by doing, build new networks and allies, engage in dialogue with peers, and acquire practical skills to become effective change-makers and legislators.

The Practice Parliaments leave behind a trail of empowered individuals ready to embark on a journey of leadership, shaping the destiny of the Maldives with newfound knowledge, skills, and a profound sense of purpose. In this space where the dreams of a nation find expression in the artistry of legislation, is where ideas of these aspiring leaders take flight, and, where the participants find new determination and purpose, where they start becoming.



MALDIVES' Local Councils Spark Innovation FOR Community-Driven Change



Maldives pioneered the inaugural 'Eejaadhu' Council Innovation Challenge, marking a significant milestone in empowering local councils to drive positive change in their communities.

The challenge, a collaboration between the Local Government Authority (LGA) and UNDP in the Maldives, brought together twelve

island and atoll councils from across the country, all driven by a shared commitment to bring innovative change to their communities, to participate in a four-day camp held in August 2023. The primary goal of the camp was to provide a nurturing environment for these councils to refine and strengthen their innovative ideas proposed for the challenge.

OBJECTIVES OF THE 'EEJAADHU' COUNCIL INNOVATION CHALLENGE



Enhancing Capacity:

The challenge aimed to enhance the capacity of councils in utilizing modern technology, project management, and innovative solutions to address pressing social issues within their jurisdictions.



Platform for Experimentation:

It offered a platform for councils to pilot and experiment with innovative solutions based on available resources, both within and beyond their communities, to generate sustainable revenue streams.



Inspiration and Showcase:

The challenge sought to showcase innovative products and solutions, inspiring other councils to explore innovative problem-solving approaches within their own communities.



Sustainable Solutions:

It aimed to foster the growth of innovative solutions in a sustainable manner, leading opportunities for the local councils to potentially scale up innovations which, once a council has their local authority company established, could be made more sustainable in the long run as well.

Six Key Areas of Focus

The challenge prioritized six critical areas for councils to submit innovative ideas



The creative use of public spaces.



Promoting participatory democratic processes



Increasing women's participation in various spheres



Environmental conservation through citizen science



Building additional revenue streams for the council



Engaging young people for local governance processes



Digital inclusiveness and digital self-service

The climax of the 'Eejaadhu' Council Innovation Challenge was the final pitches on the last day of the camp. Council teams passionately presented their innovative ideas to a panel of judges comprising representatives from LGA, a private sector partner, an innovation expert, an expert from the civil society, programme facilitators, and UNDP.

Recognizing Innovation and Impact:

The challenge recognized and celebrated the innovative solutions presented by local councils. Noonu Atoll Council emerged as the winner with their innovative project 'N. Atoll 'Bandaara Dhaftharu', which focuses on data-driven interventions for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and evidence-based decision-making.

The 1st prize winner, Noonu Atoll Council, receives a grant of Maldivian Rufiyaa 500,000.00 (approximately US \$ 30,000.00), along with the opportunity to collaborate with UNDP's networks and technical experts, ensuring the project's continued success.



Winner of the Council Innovation Challenge
Noonu Atoll Council receiving their certificate

A Unified Effort for Positive Change:

The 'Eejaadhu' Council Innovation Challenge was made possible through the unwavering support of partners such as LGA and the Joint SDG Fund.

The challenge also highlighted the significant role of women's participating in local governance, and in shaping innovative solutions presented for the betterment of their communities.

The 'Eejaadhu' Council Innovation Challenge sets a precedent for local councils in the Maldives, empowering them to drive innovative solutions, foster sustainable change, and make a lasting impact on their communities.



SALT OF PARADISE

By Zulfeena Ali

From my earliest days, I harboured an insatiable curiosity for nature—a fascination that only intensified growing up in the Maldives. Surrounded by the vast Indian Ocean, with a mere 1% land and an expanse of 99% ocean, I felt driven to explore innovative ways to engage with our crystal-clear

waters, transcending the typical activities of fishing and water sports. This was how the genesis of Paradise Sea Salt began, when the seed of an idea deeply rooted in me inspired by my surrounds, finally unfurled its promise.

My vision was simple, yet somehow novel at the time: to harvest sea salt from the pristine depths of our ocean - azure waters loved the world over.



innovative solutions to our local challenges and to better our communities. To my delight, Paradise Sea Salt was recognized as one of the most promising ideas, and I ended up earning seed funding to kickstart my venture.

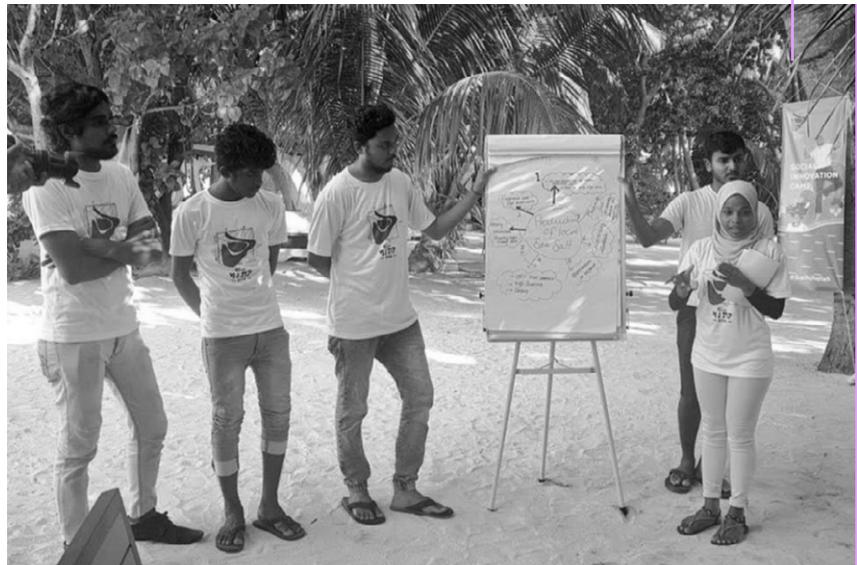
This was just the beginning—a prelude to the prospects that awaited. The thrill surged as my idea and product took center stage on both national and international platforms, weaving into the narrative at the prestigious National Youth Dialogue and the

Zulfeena and her team at Miyaheli social innovation camp

I believe the Maldives still falls short on fully utilizing its natural wealth and resources. With an economy heavily reliant on tourism (about 90%) and a dependency on imported goods across sectors, the need to become a producer and net exporter of unique Maldivian brands became apparent. This is especially vital given the limited job opportunities for local youth in our dispersed islands, leading to economic and social disparities.

To counter these issues, and expanding on my idea, my research and aspirations led me to a try out a solution. I discovered that numerous countries worldwide, particularly in Asia, have thrived by harvesting and selling sea salt, especially in rural areas. Taking inspiration from this, I aimed to leverage the Maldives' well-deserved moniker as a "Paradise on Earth," using our breathtaking, crystal-clear blue ocean to harvest sea salt.

Yet, transforming this dream into reality required the alchemy of opportunity, the discovery of the right pathways, and guidance and support. In 2018, I seized the opportunity at Miyaheli, a social innovation camp hosted by UNDP, and Ooredoo Maldives with the generous support of the Government of Australia. This three-day camp provided young people from the Maldives a platform to present





Photos: Ashwa Faheem/UNDP Maldives

My plan is to harvest sea salt on our smaller islands, engaging communities, particularly young people to partake in this endeavor. The idea is to transform the pristine salt harvested from the Maldivian ocean into luxury beauty, gourmet, and wellness products, catering to both local resorts and international markets. Ultimately, my ambition is to emerge as a leading exporter of sea salt in the Asian region.

Despite the promising trajectory, challenges abound. The logistical hurdles of finding suitable spaces for salt harvesting, especially during the rainy season, present a significant obstacle. As I, managing my full-time job and studies, strive to perfect my prototype, I am determined to overcome these obstacles.

As Paradise Sea Salt aspires to redefine our nation's potential, my aspiration isn't just to produce premium sea salt but to ignite a spirit of entrepreneurship and growth across the archipelago, while paying tribute to the beautiful natural world we have been blessed with.



Youth Co: Lab Summit in Vietnam in 2019. Next was the Asia-Pacific Forum on Youth Leadership, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship in Guangzhou, China, a collaboration orchestrated by UNDP and the All-China Youth Federation in 2020. Here, my quest expanded, acquiring new networks and potential collaborations.

The journey continued into 2023, where the spotlight found Paradise Sea Salt at the heart of the Start-Up Summit in Bali, Indonesia, supported by UNDP. Orchestrated by the Archipelagic Island State (AIS), this summit wasn't just a showcase; it was a vibrant confluence of like minds. Collaborating with 30 selected AIS country participants, the summit became a nexus, a rendezvous with potential investors crucial for the flourishing of our startups. Each event, a chapter; each collaboration, was for me a note in an evolving melody of progress.

FUTURE-FORWARD FINANCING



By Enrico Gaveglia

Alternatives to Grant Consumables

Deep into the second year of our most recent commitment to the Maldives, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) continues to adapt its country programme offer and provide complementarity with our development partners. This includes helping protect the resilience of state financing through the promotion of strategic revolving investment instruments that harness private resources for public purposes and help make investing in development become more affordable.

Ultimately, the relevance of the United Nations (UN) system when

operating within the economic framework of Agenda 2030 in Upper-Middle-Income Countries and Small Island Developing States, such as the Maldives, requires answers. We need effective solutions transmitted throughout our entire decentralized presence. This requires us to regularly review our programme offerings. A reflection that has led us to reconfigure approaches both within and outside UN-wide efforts.

We have started by classifying projects and pipelines both spatially, considering various categories of sustainable development financing; as well

as in time, to extend and deepen content of dialogues with policy makers at all levels of the Maldivian public administration. This helps us to deliver through updated policy support and tangible project results.

Furthermore, UNDP flexibility has ensured we align our support portfolio with the Maldives' most recent public finance budget formula. Like in many other countries from the region, challenges exist to balance public expenditure with public revenue. This is exacerbated by the high vulnerability to natural calamities and the cost of annual adaptation measures.

FINANCING SOLUTIONS

UNDP in the Maldives has been primarily focused on supporting national Strategic Plans, guided by a governance and climate action agenda influenced by voluntary financing and Official Development Assistance (ODA). Historically, the Maldivian government has primarily engaged with donors and multilateral organizations to help secure additional resources. This led to demands on development partners to seek new grant awards that could help fill gaps in government financing for under-funded priorities.

Competition for such development finance remains high and increases as the number of global crises intensifies. We therefore made the decision to explore alternatives that could bolster traditional grant-based funding to development finance. Our UNDP SDG Finance Hub proved pivotal in helping us to reinforce three distinctive intervention pathways:

Proactive policy engagement, Updated UN partnership architecture, and Innovative

financial instruments. We initiated this transformation by prioritizing public revenue-enhancing measures and aligning Government of Maldives budgetary practices with the SDGs. Simultaneously, we are extending our support to the government in crafting policies to combat tax evasion and strengthen tax compliance. Our objective is to refine mechanisms that can help us benefit from new domestic and foreign revenue.

This includes taking advantage of opportunities to blend and combine grants with repayable capital. A good example of this approach is the recently signed Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR) which uses US\$10 million to unlock \$40 million of additional private equity. This environmental conservation programme centres on the viability of financial security instruments such as guarantees, loans, and bio-credits. It also aids carbon market entry at fair prices.

The GFCR represents a beacon for new approaches to attract private investors and complement public finance. A blended finance approach can promote the use of central government grants to local authorities to be used for strategic uses, such as catalytic funding to attract private capital. Classic UN partnership architecture can be strengthened to embrace new stakeholders from the private finance sector. We see the possibilities available here from applying new portfolio approaches to packaging development investment as key levers of transformational change.

The UNDP Insurance and Risk Finance Facility (IRFF) is another proven and valuable development asset in this realm. It allows us to

establish a strong presence in policy development while also supporting our top-tier technical assistance activities in diagnostic work.

The ultimate goal is to grow and nurture a sector that engages with the global insurance market effectively. In this regard, our most recent efforts include welcoming a renowned worldwide provider of actuarial and related products and services. This collaboration can further bolster our efforts and increased interest in partnering with private investors to help us deliver SDG contributions.

Our SDG Investor Mapping is in its final stages. It will help us target ourselves towards new architectural partnership approaches that can help us underwrite risk for larger-scale investment sources. This would subsequently lever and release a much larger range of SDG results and national benefits than could be possible from the value of the de-risking capital acting alone.

These next generation of development financing instruments can help tackle national budget challenges while aligning government and SDG finance with public finance goals and standards. For example, we are exploring possibilities with the Central Bank, SME Development Finance Corporation, the Ministries of Environment and Finance, to better advocate for improved access to Climate Finance, focusing on Climate Justice in the context of a forthcoming paper which places great emphasis on Loss and Damage.

Financial instruments work well in situations where profits and/or savings are generated to repay investors. With our extended support to the health sector, we aim

to yield saving to public finance, building on our international position, critical mass, and quality assurance reputation in the nation's health supply market.

Reviewing debt arrangements, for both the public and private sectors, presents even more significant opportunities for a renewed set of joint public financing ventures between the government and UNDP. We can focus on constructing a sustainable framework model that both appeals to investors and ensures compliance with internal or state policy. We are supporting the Capital Development Authority to design the country's first ESG reporting framework for the private sector, while also preparing the ground for issuing future securities by building the capacities of auxiliary market institutions.

One key takeaway from the above experiences is that, although it may resemble high stakes, it is about playing better hands with the stack accredited to the government with the acclaimed release of the first SIDS Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). This SDG tool provides a development finance strategy for supporting the government in creating a new zone of engagement (reliant on interconnected governance, climate action and finance).

To sum up, we are advancing with our transitional goals for public financing in ways which reduce dependence on the limitations associated with grant-based development. UNDP expertise and resources remain ready to continue supporting the government and people by helping highlight new opportunities for reinforcing the long-term resilience of state financing.

* This opinion editorial originally appeared in *Atoll Times* on 16 November 2023.

AN ODE TO LIFE



1
Millennia ago, your ancestors sailed to my islands in search of a new home. My islands are sanctuaries scattered like pearls across the vast ocean.



2
In my islands, your ancestors found shade from the glistening sun. My humble forest provided sustenance, medicine, and a land to call home.



3
In the turquoise lagoons, your ancestors found me, coral. I am a garden, an underwater forest, An oasis of life and colour. My kingdom is vast. I am the home of billions of lives; big, small and everything in between.



4
Our lives intertwined. You became people of coral. I housed you, and in return, you adorned me with beautiful intricate carvings. Your tales spoke of the ebb and flow of our shared home, the ocean, and together, we flourished.



5
But the tides are shifting. The sun shines brighter, the water is warmer. I am not ready for this change, none of us are.



6
My gardens are less hospitable. The billions of lives I house are leaving. The life you depend on. The life that sustains you.



7
I am losing my colour, my vibrancy, and my spirit. I do not know how much longer I can hold on for.



8
I need your love, respect, and care. I need your connection. Without love, how can we find our way?



9
When the tide is low, I visit your shores. Take your children to meet me and find the gifts I leave for you. Look at my gardens, my ineffable beauty, and remember that we are both of the ocean.



10
The crabs, mangroves, white terns, bats and sharks. You and I. We are all interconnected in this beautiful web of life. Life is diverse, it comes in many shapes colours, and sizes. Some swim and some fly. Yet, we are one.

Story by Ijunad Junaid

Illustrations by
Ijunad Junaid & Naza Shaukath

A FINITE RESOURCE

How the Maldives is restoring water security, with the support of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and UNDP.

1 Safe water for households most at need:



Access to Safe Drinking Water:

- Benefiting 19,871 residents across 29 islands (9,432 females, 10,439 males).



Continuous Water Service:

- Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) systems in 4 islands providing 24-hour water service.
- Stimulating livelihoods and economic activity, including tourism development.



Renewable Energy Impact:

- IWRM systems incorporating solar PV, resulting in an estimated 30% reduction in water production costs.



Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) Systems:

- Providing 3,780 m³ of additional water storage in 25 islands.
- Annual cost reduction in dry period water provision totaling MVR 1.5 million (based on historical data on water provision cost to project islands).
- Ensuring year-round water security for communities.



Occupational Standards Development:

- Standards created for critical areas in the water sector, including Water Operation, Sewerage Operation, Laboratory Operation, and Plumbing.



Certifications and Training:

- 42 participants from utility companies, government authorities, and other institutions certified on Laboratory Operation and Water System Operation for 42 participants from utility companies, government authorities, and other institutions.
- 136 participants (87 males, 49 females) given technical training in various programmes.



Online Learning Management System (LMS):

- LMS system established within the Ministry of Environment to host all capacity development trainings and modules for current and future use



Sector Guidelines and Tariff Model:

- Guidelines for sector Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and a Tariff Model developed to support the Utility Regulatory Authority (URA) in water sector regulation.

3

Securing freshwater reserves:



Improved Groundwater Quality:

- To secure freshwater reserves for long term resilience on 49 islands



Comprehensive Groundwater Baseline Study:

- Successfully conducted for 37 islands.

2

Constant water supply:



Potable Water Security Operation Plan:

- Developed to assess water provision mechanisms.
- Recommending improvements to the overall mechanism.



Legislative Support:

- Supported the development of the Water and Sanitation Act.
- Contributed to the subsequent regulations for enhanced governance.



Manage Aquifer Recharge (MAR) Systems:

- Designed based on island-specific data from 37 islands from the baseline study.
- Developed following comprehensive technical and financial assessments for practical solutions for each island's unique needs.



Monitoring Portal for Water and Sanitation:

- Developed for the Water and Sanitation Department.
- Facilitating monitoring and support for water management at the community level.



Legislation and Regulation Impact:

- Utilized data and expertise from groundwater studies.
- Supported the formulation of legislation and regulations, including the Water and Sanitation Act, Dewatering Regulation, and Water Resource Protection Regulation.



Enhanced Rain Forecasting:

- Investments made to expand the Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) network = enhancing the rain forecasting capabilities of the Maldives Meteorology Service (MMS).
- Provided 6 AWSs to the MMS.
- Developed an alert system for the *Moosun* Application, notifying users of potential rain for harvesting.



Protected Resource Status:

- Resulted in giving groundwater in the Maldives the status of a protected resource.
- Shifted water production away from groundwater extraction for long-term sustainability.



Cost Reduction Impact:

- Project potentially reducing up to \$100,000 per year in water provision costs across 29 islands.

A TALE OF CONSERVATION & TECHNOLOGY

MEET FARA -

Wetland and Blue Carbon Researcher, Ecologist, Ornithologist, Writer, & Proud Mother

On Feydhoo Island in the southern tip of the Maldives, is where a young Aishath Farhath's (Fara) meaningful connection with nature took root. Walking through the nearby wetlands with her grandmother as they went harvesting taro, they observed the innate ebb and flow of life. From herons to lemon shark pups, the wetlands served as a backdrop for the everyday interactions of the island's wildlife.

These experiences weren't confined to the wetlands alone. Fara found solace under a mango tree at her home, where a colony of dhondheenas, white terns, had made their home. These unassuming moments became

the building blocks of Fara's appreciation for nature and her understanding of the importance of conservation.

The connection between a young girl and the natural world became the starting point for Fara's remarkable journey towards preservation. It was a simple, yet impactful, beginning that would shape her life-long commitment to maintaining the delicate balance between human life and the environment.

Years later, Fara's career as an environmentalist working in the former Environment Research Centre of Maldives led her to work directly with island communities

residing near those very wetlands and mangroves. Her mission was to research and protect the diverse bird species of the Maldives. She aspired to deepen her knowledge in ecological surveying, biodiversity assessment, and ornithological research.

After completing her studies at the University of East Anglia, Fara led a dedicated team. Together, they transformed "paper parks" into managed nature reserves, complete with trained park rangers and managers. This initiative safeguarded endangered species and combated the threat of poaching, all within the expanding network of protected areas in the Maldives.





A significant milestone in her conservation career was her role as the Wetland Coordinator for a European Union-funded project. Under her guidance, the Addu Nature Park and Fuvahmulah Nature Park, the first wetland nature parks in the Maldives were established, introducing a new era in wetland conservation. These parks not only preserved the natural beauty but also enabled local communities to benefit from eco-tourism, changing the perception of wetlands from wastelands to potential economic assets.

Beyond her professional career, Fara's dedication to biodiversity and ecological research prompted her to co-find the Maldives Wetland Foundation. Her NGO empowers communities to engage in wetland conservation and influence socio-economic development decisions affecting their wetlands.

Today, as a Director at the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, and Technology, and a PhD candidate researching mangrove structural diversity, Fara emphasizes the transformative role of technology in environmental research and conservation. As an ecologist and ornithologist, she leverages technology like satellite transmitters, camera traps, and acoustic monitoring devices for on-ground observations and data collection. For seabird research, innovative techniques like bird ringing and tagging provide valuable migratory path data crucial for species conservation. She also employs DNA barcoding to identify and study mangrove species. Her molecular research on mangrove species kandoo, *Bruguira cylindrica*, includes studying the genetic variation of kandoo along the islands of Bodu Thiladhunmathi Atoll. This provides valuable genetic information for this species and would aid in their management and conservation.

Fara's current role as Project Manager for NGO FC Frigator, in collaboration with the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the Maldives and the British Antarctic Survey, involves the use of satellite transmitters to track seabirds, specifically kurangi, or lesser

noddies found in Ihavandhippolhu Atoll. This groundbreaking research will raise awareness about the ecological importance of seabirds in the Maldives and develop conservation measures to protect these vital species.

With 18 years of dedication and hard work, Fara has emerged as a leading voice in conservation, particularly for the protection of mangroves and wetlands in the Maldives. Her proudest role, however, is being a mother to three wonderful children. She credits her parents for their unwavering support, which allowed her to balance her demanding fieldwork and travel as a single parent.

Fara believes in gender equality and encourages women to pursue careers in tech, data, innovation, and science fields. She envisions a world where women are self-sufficient and contribute to their nations' growth. Her message to aspiring girls is clear: "Conserving and managing the most threatened, yet most beautiful ecosystems and species the Maldives has to offer for now and for future generations is very worthwhile." Fara serves as an inspiring example, breaking through and challenging gender disparities to make a meaningful impact on the environment and society.



Fara's work includes tagging lesser noddies to raise awareness about their ecological importance and develop their conservation measures.



DRIVING FOR CHANGE

Nestled within the Greater Malé Region is capital city Malé, one of the smallest and densest capital cities in the world. One third of Maldives' population resides here, on an island of only 8.3 square kilometres, and it is here the challenges of rapid urbanization and transportation casts a looming shadow.

The narrow lanes of Malé is a labyrinth of movement—cars, motorcycles, lorries, pickups, and buses weave through the tight web of streets in a perpetual dance. The city's pulse is driven by the symphony of engines, horns, and the chatter of people navigating through the crowded thoroughfares. The roads and snug alleyways, originally designed for a simpler time, now strain under the weight of the bustling city's relentless growth. The constant movement comes at a cost. The air, once crisp and invigorated by the sea breeze, now bears the heavy mantle of increased carbon emissions. This is a story of an urban region caught between the wheels of progress and the urgent need for sustainability, and it is right here in the Greater Malé Region that a vital concept for a greener transportation system is taking shape.



The catalyst for change is UNDP's Climate Promise, a beacon of hope generously funded by the People and Government of Japan. This initiative is crafting a path toward a sustainable transport future, one charging station at a time. The mission: to tackle the climate crisis and assist in achieving the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), transforming transportation, and empowering the community to embrace renewable energy.

This visionary project aims to bolster the Government's efforts by establishing a renewable energy-powered public bus system in the largest urban area of the country. Five electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, the lifeblood of this transformation, are set to power the EV buses operated by the Maldives Transport and Contracting Company (MTCC). This endeavour not only streamlines commuting but also nurtures energy-conscious methods of transportation for the densely populated urban centre—a step towards a mindful future.

Just a short ferry ride away from the capital lies Villingili island, the green lungs of the Greater Malé Region - an oasis nestled minutes from the mainland.

Abdullah Hameed Mohamed Fulhu, affectionately known as Hamitte, a dedicated bus driver at MTCC, steers the EV buses in Villingili. With a sincere smile mirroring the gleam in his eyes, he recounts, "I've driven every vehicle in the MTCC fleet, and I can tell you, the EV system is the most convenient. The charging station works like magic, powering the bus for a full 24 hours. Back when I was driving fuel buses, I had to refill the tank every 8 hours as it guzzled through petrol." Hamitte takes pride in contributing to carbon emission reduction, driving (quite literally) towards a safer and more sustainable future.

Once Hamitte charges the bus and embarks on his route through the quaint streets of Villingili, the positive ripple effects of the EV bus become evident—the air is cleaner, noise reduced, and Villingili retains the status of the green island it is, one with nature.

As the bus stops at the ferry terminal to pick up passengers, we encounter 13-year-old Naina Mohamed Shafiu, who hops on the EV bus every day as part of her commute to the mainland and back for her extracurricular school activities. Being a 13-year-old student who studies the impacts of climate change and non-renewables in school, Naina is pleased she gets to use the free and eco-friendly public bus system. Naina shares, "We've got a duty to look after our environment and lead the way. Taking the bus for me isn't just about convenience; it's a conscious decision to reduce my carbon footprint." Naina proudly recounts "In our family, we're all about caring for the environment. We've planted a bunch of trees at home—our way of doing our bit for a greener planet."

The synergy of Hamitte's dedication and Naina's passion sparks hope for brighter, cleaner days. The EV charging stations, a result of the Climate Promise project, power the change taking root in the Greater Malé region.

The project doesn't halt here; it is ushering in solar-powered charging stations to support the Maldivian Government and partners, such as MTCC, in operationalizing EV buses in mainland Male'. This includes an "EV route" within the city routes, marking a significant step in proving the viability of EVs in the country's most densely populated and urban region.

This initiative doesn't merely serve the nation's NDC targets; it aspires to inspire global players to embrace sustainable practices and join hands with the Maldives in achieving their targets. In the face of climate adversities, the Maldives stands proud, proving that even a small island nation can ignite change, and lead the charge towards sustainability. An invitation echoes from these azure shores to the world—join us as we redefine what is possible now to power the future.



Transforming HEALTHCARE WASTE Management in the Maldives

A new initiative is taking shape in the Maldives. It is an initiative born out of necessity, one that aims to address the pressing issue of health care waste management in this island nation.

Safe and secure healthcare waste management is not just a matter of convenience; it is a critical component in safeguarding the health and well-being of healthcare workers and everyone involved in the healthcare waste management cycle in the country. Moreover, it is essential in preventing infections, accidental injuries, and harm to the environment.

The challenge is immense. In the Maldives, waste management, in general, is a daunting task. However, healthcare waste posed a unique set of challenges that did not align with the conventional 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) approach. In order for the nation to make great strides on this front, it needed to transform its healthcare waste practices.

In the healthcare facilities, waste disposal is haphazard, with equipment used for treating patients, including general and

infectious waste, segregated by nurses. Patients' waste is disposed of separately, general waste in one container, and needles in another. The prevailing practice is to openly incinerate all of it together, an unsustainable and hazardous approach.

Recognizing the urgency for change, a dedicated group of professionals has embarked on a mission to transform healthcare waste management in the Maldives. Their vision is to build and support the development of state-of-the-art healthcare waste management facilities at healthcare centers across the nation.

Their primary objective is to establish robust healthcare waste





management systems that would ensure safe and efficient waste disposal. With the support of UNDP, backed by the generous support of the Government and People of Japan, officials at the Ministry of Health has set out to construct the necessary facilities, provide machinery and equipment, offer training for staff, and ensure the project's success.

These pioneering healthcare waste management facilities are expected to mark a significant milestone for health centers of the islands. The facilities will not only be a leap forward in waste management but also contribute to the overall health improvement of communities.

The new healthcare waste management systems are designed to eliminate infections, injuries, and environmental hazards. It involves autoclaving and shredding the waste, rendering it safe for collection as general waste by local councils. This marks a crucial step in segregating and disposing of general and clinical waste more effectively.

The healthcare waste management project is not just a practical solution to a pressing problem; it is a testament to the power of collaboration and shared commitment to improving the health and well-being of communities in the Maldives and beyond. With each step, we are moving closer to a healthier, safer, and more sustainable future for the island nation.



THE WONDER WOMEN & THEIR WONDER PALM

THE TREE OF LIFE

For the Maldives, coconut trees are not just ornamental signs of an island paradise. It is of historical and cultural significance and is the country's national tree as well as one of the symbols of the Maldivian emblem. For Maldivians, it is also the 'tree of life': from its woody trunk all the way up to the swaying fronds, the coconut palm has been providing a bounty of natural resources for the Maldivian people for generations.

It is under the shade of this wonder palm that Shaffaf Rilwan and her all-woman team of mighty crusaders gather to tell their story of the coconut tree. They are Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu – an NGO from Hulhumeedhoo Island in Addu Atoll, in the Southernmost tip of the Maldivian archipelago.

"We've fought all sorts of spirits to get where we are," Shaffaf, the Founder of the NGO tells us. "The patriarchy, the system, evil eye, the crows – you name it." She is standing amidst the plot of land that hosts the NGO's coconut plantation, located adjacent to the island's waste disposal plant.



A SAPLING FOR A DREAM

In defiance of the gloomy landscape, hundreds of budding coconut saplings grow, their fronds stretching out like vibrant green fans, adding a splash of colour to the surrounding coarse earth.

Members of Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu tending to their coconut plantation



Despite an unseemly setting, for the women of Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu, it was a moment of triumph when the S. Meedhoo Island Council provided them the land intended to revive the island's coconut plant population, which had degraded and seen a steady decline over the years.

The people of Hulhumeedhoo have long relied on cultivating coconut and other tropical produce that can be sold outside of their shores. One such produce that comes

from Hulhumeedhoo island and predominantly Addu region is the 'Addu Bondi': a traditional Maldivian sweet delicacy.

This once staple of South Maldivian culture, authentic Bondi production is now at risk of disappearing. The younger generation lacks the skills for its creation, resulting in imitations using refined sugar instead of the traditional locally produced palm sugar. Skilled toddy tappers are scarce, and the depletion of young, healthy coconut

palms adds to the challenge, making palm sugar both expensive and difficult to obtain.

As a result, Bondi makers have been forced to explore cheaper alternatives, which have ultimately threatened the culinary art of making Addu Bondi. This shift away from tradition is jilting an important facet of South Maldivian culture, leaving many to wonder whether the art of making authentic Bondi will survive for future generations to enjoy.



Shaffaf Rilwan of Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu



Suha, a member of NGO Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu, learning the art of bondi making from her grandmother



THE ROAD TO REJUVENATION

Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu stepped in and are in the works to create 'Meedhoo Bendi' – their name for the Addu Bondi being produced using their coconut trees. They are kick-starting their project assisted by the Global Environment Facility (GCF) Small Grants Programme (SGP), implemented by UNDP in the Maldives.

The NGO's project is expected to generate multiple benefits from its multifaceted focus on the process of making Addu Bondi:- including preserving the island's culture, providing a boost in income for community members, particularly women - opening diverse livelihood opportunities such as making palm sugar, a coveted product in the local market.

In doing so, the project will introduce the younger generation to professions not only limited to just cultivating coconut palms and crafting Bondi in its most authentic form but introduce a métier that was once on par with fishing in the Maldives: toddy tapping.

Toddy, used in many cultural food and medicine; is in fact what palm sugar is made from. However, the profession became scarce over time with only a few known practitioners scattered around the country. This is one facet, amongst many, of Maldivian culture that Meedhoo

Ekuveringe Cheynu hopes to remedy with their project - Revival of Coconut Palms and Culture.

In addition to producing and marketing Meedhoo Bendi, the project will also open easy access to coconut palm products such as coconut frond for thatch weaving - another high value product in the tourism industry. By rehabilitating the coconut palm groves, the project will rejuvenate the declining coconut palm population of the island and secure biodiversity and the integrity of the island's ecosystem.

"It's a scary world out there when you are a woman on a mission, but it isn't hopeless," Shaffaf smiles through a firm nod.



The women of NGO Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu faced numerous obstacles in trying to make their project a reality. "Being an all-women team trying actually grow and produce something sustainably, and market that product and make a profit has been a major challenge, but we will not give up," Shaffaf says.

The revival of the coconut palms and Addu Bondi is more than just a business venture for the women of Meedhoo Ekuveringe Cheynu.

PRESERVING HERITAGE AND ECOSYSTEMS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

It is a symbol of their love for their island and their determination to preserve its heritage and ecosystem for future generations. The story of these wonder women is a testament to the power of community, hard work, and passion in making a difference.



LIFE IS PLASTIC!

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE!



Plastic pollution contributes to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The adverse effects on human health, the economy, and the environment are increasingly evident. Shockingly, every minute, the equivalent of one truckload of plastic enters the sea, resulting in devastating consequences for marine life and ecosystems and requires immediate action and collective responsibility.

Every year, 11 million tonnes

of plastic find their way into our oceans. Current predictions indicate that by 2040, this figure will triple if we do not take action.

To put that in perspective, blue whales, the largest animals on Earth, can weigh up to 200 tonnes.

11 million tonnes of plastic would be equivalent to approximately 55,000 blue whales.

Sadly, there are only about 10,000 to 25,000 blue whales left in the world today. So currently, there is more plastic in the ocean than blue whales.

It has become more crucial than ever for us to collaborate and unite our efforts to overcome this challenge.

On World Environment Day 2023, UNDP, together with the Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme (GEF-SGP) in the Maldives, granted a total of USD 200,000 to four local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as part of the Plastic Innovation Grant.

These grants are contributing positively to the circular economy vision of Fuvahmulah City Council. They support sustainable initiatives proposed by the NGOs to take action against plastic pollution in Fuvahmulah City, an island-atoll with over 13,000 residents that generates 7 to 10 tonnes of waste daily.

The recipients of these grants are Zero Waste Maldives, Women In Fuvahmulah, Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society (MACCS) and No Plastic Maldives.

Currently there is more plastic in the ocean than blue whales...



ZERO WASTE MALDIVES

Zero Waste Maldives is actively addressing the challenges of waste segregation in Fuvahmulah City. Through comprehensive trainings, waste audits, system assessments, and workshops, they are promoting effective waste management practices and fostering waste-to-wealth activities.



WOMEN IN FUVAHMULAH

'Ekal Kuni-Mikal Kaadhu' Project by Women In Fuvahmulah focuses on organic waste management and aims to turn waste into wealth while protecting the island's ecosystem through sustainable practices and community engagement. Women In Fuvahmulah is making a significant impact on reducing the waste entering the waste management sites in Fuvahmulah.

NO PLASTIC MALDIVES

Accurate data is essential for effective waste management, yet it often gets overlooked. In Fuvahmulah, No Plastic Maldives is introducing an Open Data Management System. This data-driven solution provides crucial insights for informed decision-making, enabling policymakers and stakeholders to devise effective strategies in the fight against plastic pollution.



MACCS

'Ekal Kuni-Mikal Kaadhu' Project by Women In Fuvahmulah focuses on organic waste management and aims to turn waste into wealth while protecting the island's ecosystem through sustainable practices and community engagement. Women In Fuvahmulah is making a significant impact on reducing the waste entering the waste management sites in Fuvahmulah.

Together with the Fuvahmulah City Council, tote bags made from upcycled materials were distributed at the event. The bags were locally sewn by women from Fuvahmulah. This initiative was led by MACCS and aims to reduce the use of single use plastic bags to beat plastic pollution and promotes livelihoods and women empowerment.

By fostering community engagement, implementing innovative solutions, and supporting transformative initiatives, we can beat plastic pollution and secure a brighter, cleaner future for all.

The Hidden Dangers of

POPS & U-POPS to our Homes

The Maldives, an archipelago nation famed for its stunning beaches and abundant underwater life, like many SIDS, face an unseen challenge within its homes: Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and unintentional POPs (u-POPs). These toxic substances, a legacy of older industrial and agricultural practices, insidiously find their way into our daily lives and often go unnoticed. POPs, including certain pesticides and industrial chemicals, can persist in the environment for years, accumulating in the food chain and posing

health risks. Meanwhile, u-POPs are inadvertently produced through everyday activities like burning waste or using inefficient cooking stoves, releasing harmful pollutants into our air and soil. While national projects and international commitments play a crucial role in addressing this issue, there's much that can be done within our households to mitigate their impact. This guide explores practical steps every household can take to protect their family and environment from the effects of POPs and u-POPs.



Understanding POPs in the Maldivian Household

In the domestic setting of the Maldives, the impact of POPs and u-POPs can be more direct and personal. These chemicals can enter homes through various channels – from the food we eat, the waste we dispose of, and even the dust that settles on our furniture.

Awareness is the first step in combating their presence. POPs can linger in the environment for years, and understanding their sources is crucial for their effective management.

Reducing POPs at Home: Practical Measures



Mindful Waste Disposal: One of the primary ways u-POPs enter our environment is through the improper burning of waste, especially plastics. Given the geographic setup of our islands and limited land resources, the practice of open burning of waste is common. We should instead choose eco-friendly waste disposal methods and participate in community recycling programmes. Reducing, reusing, and recycling can significantly lower the release of u-POPs.



Conscious Consumer Choices: We should all strive to make informed choices about the products we bring into our homes. This includes being cautious with pesticides and insecticides used in gardening, and opting for non-toxic, environmentally friendly alternatives.



Safe Food Practices: Given our reliance on seafood (e.g., tuna and reef fish), understanding which species are less likely to be contaminated with POPs is crucial. We can choose smaller, less predatory fish (e.g., big-eye scad), which are lower in the food chain and less likely to accumulate high levels of POPs and other contaminants.



Home Hygiene: Regular cleaning can reduce the accumulation of dust that might contain POPs, particularly in older buildings or near contaminated sites. Ensuring good ventilation and using HEPA filters can also help in minimizing indoor pollution.

The battle against POPs and u-POPs in Maldivian homes and the greater encompassing community is an ongoing one, requiring continuous effort and vigilance. By adopting these practical steps, our households can play a vital role in mitigating the impact of these pollutants. It's about making informed choices – for our health, our environment, and our future. Together, we can preserve the natural beauty and health of our Maldivian paradise for generations to come.

Leveraging Community and Policy Efforts



Community Engagement: We should strive to participate in local environmental initiatives such as beach clean-ups or community awareness programmes. These activities not only contribute to a cleaner environment but also foster a community spirit geared towards sustainability.



Policy Awareness and Advocacy: We must stay informed about the Maldives' environmental policies, especially those concerning hazardous waste management and POPs reduction. One such effort is the project titled Eliminating POPs through Safe Management of Chemicals implemented in partnership with UNDP, the Ministry of Environment and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). We should support and advocate for policies that protect our environment and public health.

Embracing Sustainable Living

Adopting a sustainable lifestyle can have a profound impact on reducing the presence of POPs in our homes. This includes:



Supporting Organic Agriculture: We should encourage and support local, organic agricultural practices. Organic products are less likely to contain harmful chemicals that contribute to the POPs burden.



Energy Conservation: Adopting energy-efficient practices and appliances will reduce the demand for electricity, which in turn decreases the potential for u-POP generation from power plants.



Educating and Raising Awareness: It is vital to share knowledge about POPs with friends and family. Educated communities are better equipped to make choices that reduce the impact of these pollutants.

PARTICIPATORY MAPPING: CITIZEN-GENERATED DATA FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



With more than 80% of islands lying lower than one metre above the mean sea level, Maldives is extremely vulnerable to the compound and cascading effects of climate change and sea level rise. The risk of disasters and extreme events haunts the low-lying atolls, prompting a novel initiative by the Maldives Accelerator Lab. This learning journey spans the archipelago,

from Hulhumalé to Ihavandhoo, Maafaru to Fuvahmulah, unraveling the complex tapestry of climate change impacts in these small island communities.

In Fuvahmulah, a city prone to seasonal flooding due to heavy rains, and Maafaru, an island grappling with recurrent sea swells, the human toll of climate change is palpable, as it is in

almost all the islands of the Maldives.

Widowed with eight children, Hawwa Ahmed Didi from Fuvahmulah City recalls frequent episodes of flooding and the struggle she and her family have to go through every year.



Hawwa Ahmed Didi from Fuvahmulah

“Fuvahmulah slopes down toward the centre, and my house is in a low area next to a wetland. This makes it flood easily when it rains heavily, with as many as four floods in a year. In addition to damages to my house, severe flooding also destroys my yam plantation completely and I’ve to replant them from scratch.”

The youth of Fuvahmulah echo concerns about the degradation of the wetland ecosystem, emphasizing the link between climate change and human actions.

Meanwhile, Ihavandhoo island grapples with the aftermath of a swell wave, a stark reminder of the urgency for disaster preparedness.

“The incident caused great fear in the community because it’s the worst such incident in recent memory and we fear it might become more common. And we realized the importance of having a disaster preparedness and response plan at the island level, which we don’t,” a member of Ihavandhoo Women’s Development Committee shared.

“It’s true that island councils should take the lead in dealing with disaster risks, but for a well-organized system to work, everyone in the island community needs to be motivated to work together with local authorities to tackle disasters and other climate risks,”

emphasizes an employee of the Noonu Maafaru Council.

Mapillary and OpenStreetMap. Over two days, they enthusiastically mapped the island’s infrastructure, creating a detailed basemap that included the road network, building footprints, and essential infrastructure.

The mapping activity wasn’t limited to tech-savvy individuals; it embraced both tech and non-tech tools, ensuring the engagement of every participant. Young participants like Maasha discovered the joy of using mapping tools for the first time, finding it both easy and interesting.



Maasha using mapping apps for the first time

Despite the imminent threats, the lack of localized data, institutional gaps, and challenges in community mobilization hinder the formulation of effective gender-responsive disaster management plans. Recognizing this, the UNDP Accelerator Labs sought to bridge the data gap using Collective Intelligence methods, tapping into community knowledge (especially those who have been left behind / left out) and motivation for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Enter Participatory Mapping, a method to gather geotagged data while engaging communities in disaster risk reduction efforts. In Maafaru, Noonu Atoll, volunteers embraced digital tools like

“We learned how to use mapping apps – it was our first time using such an app. It was easy to use and interesting, and a fun new activity to do – like updating the map when something new pops up. We drew outlines of buildings and mapped some points/ key locations on OpenStreetMap too. We are definitely interested to learn how to use more advanced tools,” Maasha, resident of Noonu Maafaru island said.

The basemap served as a foundation for the creation of a Hazard, Vulnerabilities, and Capacities (HVCA) map. The blending of local knowledge with emerging insights revealed the persistence or worsening of age-old vulnerabilities and hazards.



Women from Maafaru Island during their crowdmapping activity



Creating basemaps



Aisha and Leela of Maafaru Women’s Development Committee emphasized that, collectively, the community possessed a comprehensive understanding of the island.

The engagement in mapping activities became a catalyst for community participation in disaster management planning workshops. Despite time constraints, participants eagerly contributed to the development of island disaster management plan, showcasing the power of collective intelligence.

Fathimath Lahfa, Head of Exploration at UNDP Maldives Accelerator Labs, stressed the significance of collective intelligence for community empowerment and collective action. The success of this initiative hinges on fostering a community of crowd mappers, so that the motivation to take action emanate from and within the people.

The pilot’s success in Maafaru prompted another cycle in Fuvahmulah City, refining the process based on prior learnings. As

the initiative moves forward, the lab seeks to share insights and learnings from its innovative approach with other councils, and work with stakeholders to ensure citizen generated data can be integrated to national data systems; And they must, as these maps not only aggregate the hazards and vulnerabilities, but weave a narrative of hope and resilience in the face of climate change.





In Conversation with:

PEK CHUAN GAN,

UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in the Maldives

Pek Chuan GAN is a sustainable development practitioner with over 20 years of working experience in sustainability, environmental policy and governance in United Nations/UNDP, public and private sector.

1

Having recently arrived, what aspects of the Maldives, have personally intrigued or fascinated you since your arrival?

Before I arrived, I always hear about Maldives being the world's top tourist destination – a tropical paradise. A place we have to visit at least once in a lifetime before the adverse impact of the sea level rise. Truly enough, I was impressed by the magnificent scenery of the islands, vastness of ocean, and friendliness and warmth of the Maldivians. It is pleasantly surprising to find almost everywhere is within walking distance when you're on the island and we don't have to travel far to see sunrise and sunset on the same day.

2

As you embark on your journey in the Maldives, what are some goals or aspirations you have for your new tenure as UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in the Maldives?

This assignment presents an opportunity for me to contribute to the development journey of the Maldives towards achieving its development aspirations and the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. I'm particularly motivated to collaborate and work side by side with colleagues, partners and stakeholders of UNDP and UN in the Maldives on building and enhancing the resilience of people and institutions against economic, social, environmental and other shocks with integrated and customized local solutions through innovation, exchange of knowledge and best practices from the global and across regions, and partnership. Co-creating and sustaining a positive workplace environment with colleagues in UNDP Maldives that promotes wellbeing, growth and productivity is in the list too.

3

As a sustainable development practitioner with decades of experience, what lessons would you draw on to contribute to sustainable development and resilience-building initiatives in the Maldives?

It's always important to innovate and localize the global and regional approaches / solutions / best practices relevant to the context of the country's policy, legal and institutional framework, as well as cultural and social norms. Strong commitment and ownership from the government and non-government partners / stakeholders and communities are also key to successful implementation of sustainable development and resilience-building initiatives. There's also a strong need at the global level to provide technical assistance and Official Development Assistance (ODA) based on the unique Small Island Developing States (SIDS) development challenges, instead of the usual measures of a country's development status such as GNI / GDP per capita, etc.

4

How do you plan to promote inclusivity and gender equality in the initiatives undertaken by UNDP, ensuring that the benefits of development are shared equitably among different segments of the population, and no one is left out of the conversation?

Internally within UNDP Maldives and across UN Country Team, I will ensure the Gender Equality Act is implemented in line with UN Maldives Gender Equality Strategy, 2023 - 2027 for UNDP-supported projects in the Maldives. This includes exchange of hands-on experience and best practices on how to integrate gender equality and inclusivity among the practitioners and experts at global, regional and local level. The path towards gender equality is a journey of mindset and behavioural changes. Therefore, applying an inclusive and participatory approach across our initiatives and projects is crucial in engaging the stakeholders and targeting the right beneficiaries.

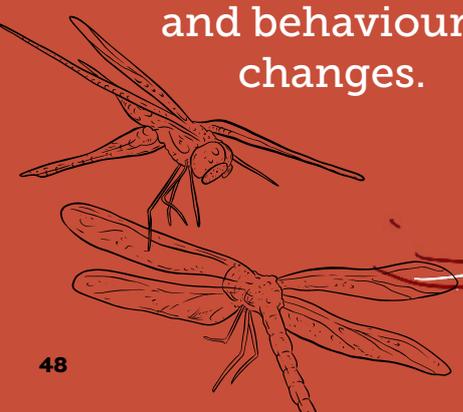
5

What is the one skill that you would like to acquire while you are in the Maldives?

I would love to learn how to swim, to be able to enjoy the beauty of the marine life in Maldives. If there's an opportunity, I may even consider taking up speed boat driving since it's one of the most popular and coolest transports you can find in Maldives.



The path towards gender equality is a journey of mindset and behavioural changes.



MEET



the
maldives

TEAM



Resident Representative and Deputy Resident Representative

*THE (IR)RESPONSIBLE AND
THE RIGHT-HAND DYNAMO*

Enrico & Pek Chuan



Operations Team

*TURNS CHAOS INTO ORDER, KEEPS THE WHEELS
TURNING, AND MAKES EVERYTHING LOOK
EFFORTLESS (EVEN WHEN WE KNOW IT'S NOT)*

Shafag, Sunee, Usaid, Naza, Abror, Riyaz,
Nish, Munthi, Charles & Loona



Resilience and Climate Change Team

*THE AVENGERS OF SAVING OUR ISLANDS,
BATTLING RISING TEMPERATURES AND
OTHER ASSORTED ENVIRONMENTAL
CHALLENGES WITH THEIR ECO-WARRIOR CAPES*

Shifaz, Aysha, Fathun, Anee, Naufal,
Shadhu, Adam, Fizan, Thoopi, Rizu & Aish



Governance Team

*THE CHAMPIONS OF DEMOCRACY, THE
DEFENDERS OF FAIR PLAY AND INCLUSIVITY,
THE MAESTROS OF MAKING SURE EVERYONE'S
VOICE IS HEARD AND COUNTED*

Yaas, Amani, Shifu, Hamna, Yasaa, Umar,
Nabee, Jin, Rai & Shiba



Economist Team

*CRUNCHING THE FIGURES TO ENSURE OUR
GRAPHS ARE EVER UPWARD-TRENDING, AND
OUR ECONOMIC OUTLOOK ALWAYS SUNNY*

Shahud, Mifrah & Zul

Accelerator Lab

*TAKING US TO NEW FRONTIERS OF
INNOVATION, EXPERIMENTATION AND
GROUNDBREAKING POSSIBILITIES*

Lalla, Naya & Hussain



Planning & Monitoring Analyst

*INSIGHT ARCHITECT, CONDUCTOR
OF PLANS AND VIRTUOSO OF
MONITORING - ENSURING A
BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS*

Vathanya



Gender Specialist

*NOT JUST BREAKING GLASS
CEILINGS; BUT TURNING
IT INTO CONFETTI IN THE
PROCESS - ORCHESTRATING
INCLUSIVITY AND GENDER-
EQUALITY IN ALL WE DO*

Bimali

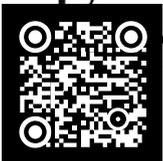
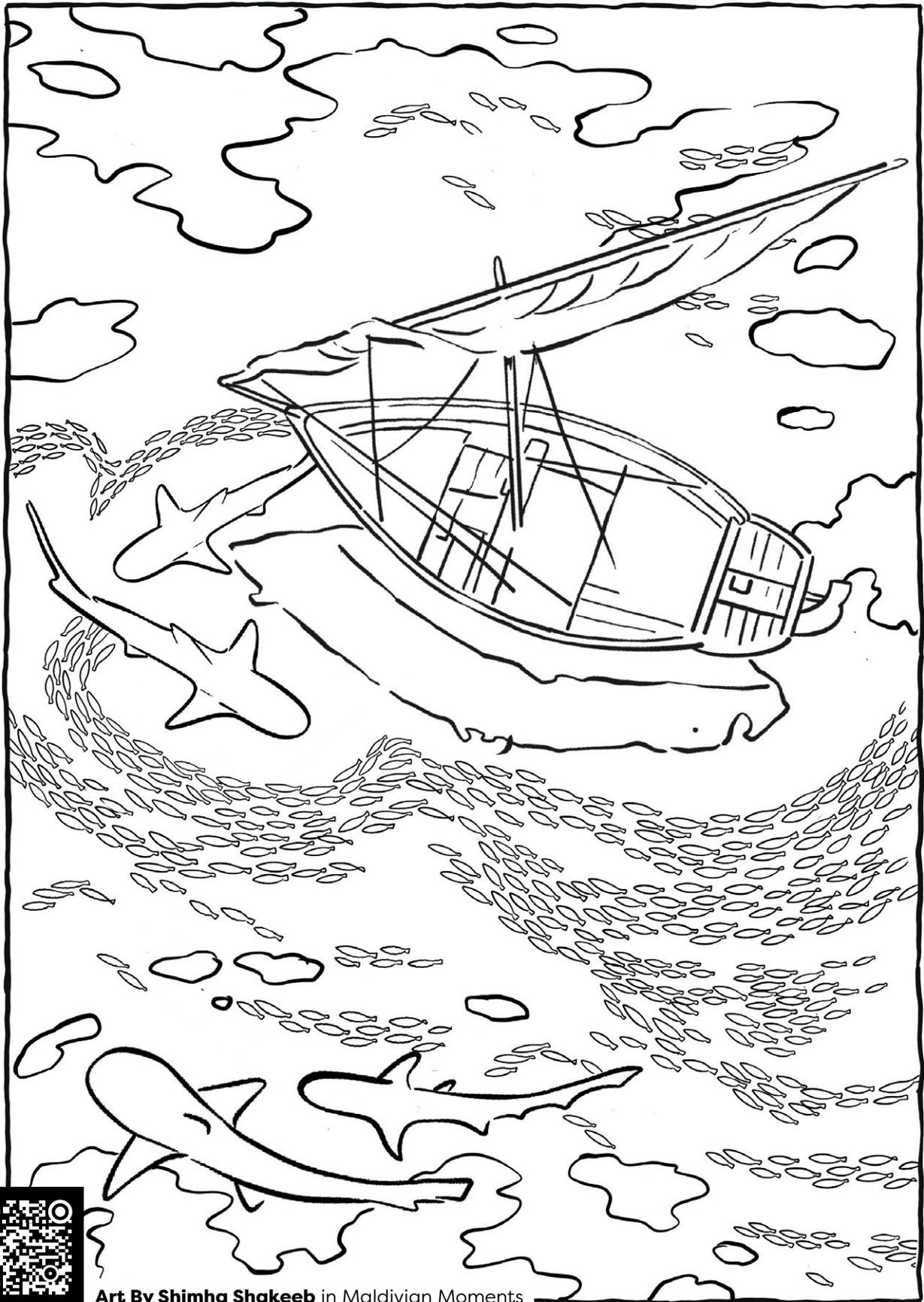


Communications Team

*THE PEOPLE WHO PRODUCED THIS
FABULOUS MAGAZINE*

Sanu, Azu & Munsh





Art By Shimha Shakeeb in Maldivian Moments



Artwork:

Art by Shimha Shakeeb, Art by Shimha





ISLAND LIFE



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