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# COVID-19 CRISIS

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*



Prepared by:  
*UNDP MALDIVES*

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# Overview

COVID-19 impacts all aspects of society and all dimensions of sustainable development including its effect on global climate action. It has exposed the systemic inter-connectedness of the modern world— sectoral, institutional or even national. Much like climate change.

In the short term, we have seen that greenhouse gas emissions are down, and air quality has gone up, as governments react to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this is merely temporary and should not be seen as a boon for the environment. Without systemic changes to socio-economic structures, we are most likely going to see a resumption of the same patterns of emissions and unsustainable extraction of natural resources as soon as the pandemic recedes.

With most of our efforts focused on how we respond, countries must keep an eye on the long-term effects of coronavirus and what it could mean for sustainable development in the future. There will undoubtedly be serious implications and countries already in crisis because of conflicts, natural disasters, and climate change are most at risk.



# Brief Country Context

Maldives has a small economy with high debt and dependence on tourism, which is hardest hit by COVID. Spatial disparity is exacerbated by gender disparity; women in the atolls outside the capital are disproportionately affected by unequal opportunities. The Maldives is a typical example of the “island paradox”. Its relative prosperity through domestically generated income coexists with increasing vulnerability to external shocks – including climate change, increases in global fuel prices or contractions of the tourism sector and high structural costs due to its particular geographical characteristics. In large part, this is driven by the limits on land space and remoteness. All of these factors are currently being experienced due to COVID.

There are also high indivisible fixed costs on small island economies including policy and legislation formulation, regulatory activities, education, social services, justice, security, and foreign affairs.

The Maldives is facing critical development challenges owing to a growing population and resource constraints. Longer-term impacts of urbanization are already happening including increasing water demand and pollution of naturally occurring, and very important, groundwater resources.

The prospect of a global economic recession means that countries will struggle to maintain their efforts to achieve global targets such as SDGs and the NDCs under the Paris Agreement. Global and national economic distress will have an impact on national spending patterns. Funds are expected to be limited and more would be funneled to health response. National spending on climate adaptation and mitigation will likely see a temporary downturn.



## Climate Change Impacts

Being a small island development nation, Maldives is one of the most climate vulnerable countries due to its geographical conditions and limited land and space. More than 80% of people live within 100m from coast lines, and 80% of lands are below 1m above sea level. Salt intrusion and coastal erosion has damaged ground water quality and quantity. Water shortage is one of the risks that can affect hygiene and health practices in communities. Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns affect communities to experience floods and drought with potential additional health damages.

More than 80 islands seek emergency water supplies during dry season on average. Heavy dependency on food and oil fuel import makes the population vulnerable at economic and natural disasters as now we experience due to COVID. Maldives rely 70% of its energy production on oil fuel. The government aims to meet 70% of daytime peak energy demands by renewables but has not achieved yet. In long term, coral bleaching and other climate impact on natural resources in addition to environmental degradation due to development projects with weak environmental monitoring will affect tourism industry and damage country's economy. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis was one of the biggest global health threats of the 21st century.



## Climate change effects on health and well-being are both direct and indirect:

- Heat-related illness such as heat stress and heat stroke;
- Impacts on crop yield, food and water security, nutrition and increased risk of vector-borne diseases (e.g. dengue, chickungunya);
- Extreme events can cause injury and increase the risk of water-borne diseases (e.g. diarrhea and cholera), infectious diseases and psychological distress;
- Air pollution leads to respiratory and non-communicable diseases;
- Climate change can trigger economic instability, migration and drive conflict, that have health impacts.



# KEY AREAS OF INTERVENTION IN THE SHORT TERM



1

Leave no one  
behind



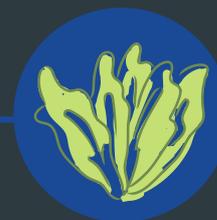
2

Continuity of  
climate  
services



3

Water security



4

Food security



5

Energy  
security



6

Emergency  
response



7

Waste services



8

Environmental  
regulatory  
service

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# Key Areas of Intervention in the Short Term

- **Leave no one behind** – Ensuring that response prioritizes those communities and individuals who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This includes those who are impacted by changes to their environment and those that depend on their environment for their livelihoods. Particular attention must be given to women and associated industries.
  - **Continuity of climate services** – Ensuring that climate services and government spending on both mitigation and adaptation are retained at scales (at minimum) equivalent to pre-COVID plans. Should there be a need to scale back, recommend that this be considered as a deferment rather than a cancellation altogether and should encompass resources to maintain minimum functional level of services.
  - **Water security** – Ensuring that the annual climate induced water shortages and government response are not hampered by lockdowns or supply chain disruptions for the fuel that is needed to produce water. Frontline water security must be ensured for most vulnerable and for the health services.
  - **Food security** – Ensuring that local production is sustained and further boosted to preempt a food shortage in the coming months due to breakdowns in supply chains from countries that Maldives depends on. Targeted interventions across the country in the next 12 – 24 months to boost the agricultural output of high yield, high caloric food varieties.
  - **Energy security** – Addressing vulnerabilities stemming from high dependence on fossil fuel for energy needs. Consolidating the fuel and energy demands of the country to ensure that fuel reserves are sustained and a general practice for energy efficiency and conservation is rolled out. Frontline energy security must be ensured for health facilities.
  - **Emergency response** – early response to reduce loss and damage for seasonal climate and extreme weather events including seasonal vector borne health emergencies. Ensuring that first responders and community preparedness is elevated to compensate for national response mechanisms that may be fully occupied in COVID response.
  - **Waste services** – Ensuring continuity of municipal services such as waste management and health care waste management to prevent the possible proliferation of improper disposal practices that could be detrimental to the environment or could become a hazard for human health.
  - **Environmental regulatory services** – Ensuring the continuity of monitoring and oversight of environmental protection measures and services by EPA to prevent opportunistic/ illegal exploitation especially in outer islands. These extend to protected areas, fishing practices and protected species both on land and in the ocean.
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# KEY AREAS OF INTERVENTION IN RECOVERY PLANNING



1

Risk sharing



2

Energy  
security and  
low carbon  
footprint



3

Food security  
and  
livelihoods in  
rural and  
urban  
communities



4

Blue Economy

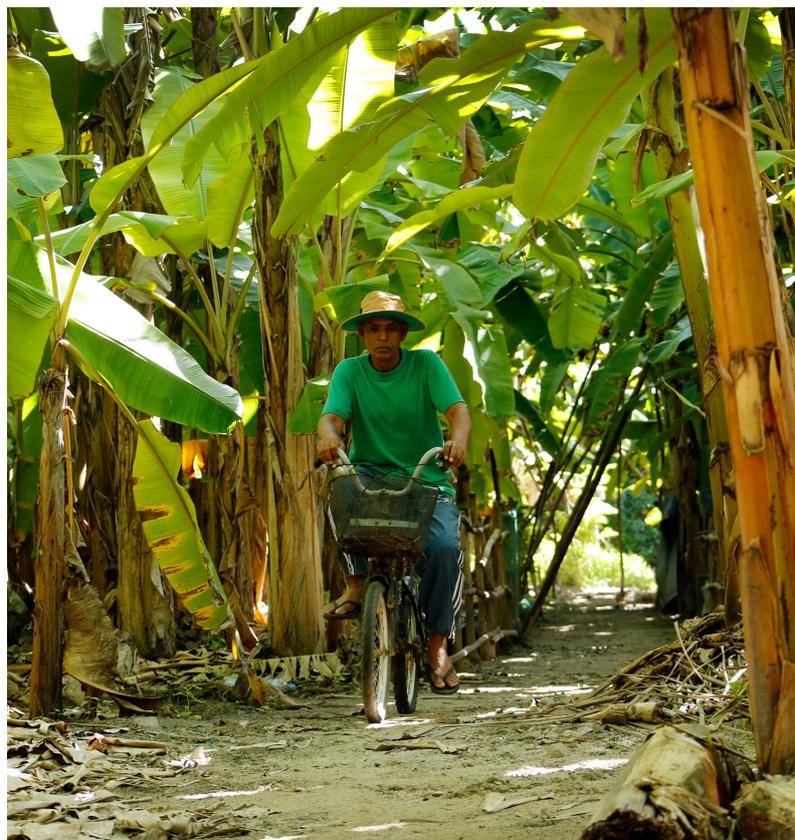
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# Key Areas of Intervention in Recovery Planning

- **Risk sharing** – Strengthening of decentralized services would reduce dependency on one national system and create several hubs that can work together as one system but also function independently. Waste management, integrated water management being some of the priorities, as well as environmental protection/natural resources management and energy management.
  - **Energy security and low carbon footprint** – Ramping up transition to renewable energy alternatives and reducing dependency on fossil fuels. Transitioning to a renewable energy economy would give energy independence to communities while also contributing to accelerated action on Maldives' NDC commitments.
  - **Food security and livelihoods in rural and urban communities** – long term plans on food security that are climate resilient and employ innovative technologies such as vertical farming that produce high yields at a fraction of the resource demands (land, water, nutrients, waste). These plans are linked up with national systems for supply chain management across individual and farmers collectives to ensure their produce will find market links.
  - **Blue Economy** – In line with the policies outlined in the governments Strategic Action Plan, reviving the economy and socio-economic activities through policies and plans that re-imagine the current economic profile into a new and diversified economic track that is closely linked with the sustainable use and management of natural resources.
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# UNDP Support

- **Climate Change and energy: UNDP Climate Promise initiative** – Work is ongoing to help government to work with all contributing sectors to develop long term strategies for transitioning to a low carbon economy.
- **Water:** Green Climate Fund (GCF) funded climate resilient water security project is working to develop emergency water distribution strategies. Work is ongoing to include the dimension of pandemics and other socio-economic challenges into the decentralized emergency water distribution plans.
- **DRR:** UNDP work with National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to boost operations at national and sub-national level, particularly on decentralized response and management of crisis. Drone technology application for community disaster risk management initiative is ongoing.
- **Food, Livelihoods and Blue Economy:** Rapid livelihoods assessment, Blue Economy policy support ongoing. UNDP/Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme 16 grants which are focused on agriculture are working to increase their scale and boost production as a contribution to the national food security initiative. UNDP Smart City portfolio work with cities and relevant national partners to strengthen urban food security and livelihoods under same business model.
- **Waste:** UNDP's work in the area of waste management work with national and sub-national counterparts to ensure continuity of municipal services to manage domestic and medical waste.





As the Government of Maldives starts designing relief funds and other responses, this presents an unprecedented opportunity for transforming the economic structure to be low-carbon, climate-resilient and inclusive. UNDP is pleased to be part of the process.

- *UNDP Maldives Resident Representative, Akiko Fujii*



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Resilient nations.*

FOR MORE INFO: [WWW.MV.UNDP.ORG](http://WWW.MV.UNDP.ORG) / [REGISTRY.MV@UNDP.ORG](mailto:REGISTRY.MV@UNDP.ORG)

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