

## Remarks at Laamu farming launch for Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development for SMEs (SEEDS) project

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Minister of Economic Development Mr. Fayyaz Ismail

Minister of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources, Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan

Managing Director - Haroon Rasheed - Agro National Corporation

Charge' d' Affaires, Mr. Koji Kaneko – Embassy of Japan

Board of Directors, Island Council Members and Farmers.

Good morning. I am delighted to address the official launch of the contract farming programme in Laamu, supported by UNDP - GoM Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development for SMEs (SEEDS) project.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, we all recognized the existing vulnerabilities of this small island state, arising from its narrow economic base. Many people lost incomes due to the sharp decline in the tourism sector, while we were also exposed to the risk of food insecurity, due to our heavy reliance on food and oil imports.

It is my great pleasure to observe today an important milestone of the SEEDS project, where we see over 100 farmers across 7 islands who have already joined in the new contracting farming model led by the AgroNat.

The project is innovative, in the sense that the support to farmers will ultimately be sustainable by linking it to the supply chains of nearby resorts and markets. The project is visionary, because it targets young people and women in the atoll islands, thereby providing opportunities for them to stay in the islands and continue to develop the future of those islands.

Local government has been revitalized through increased women's participation both with the newly elected local councils, with their one-third seats reserved for women, and through the contribution of Women's Development Committees. UNDP is very hopeful that this project will not only make a meaningful contribution to the islands' sustainable economic development, but will also accelerate social and economic gender equality.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the AgroNat, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources, Island council members, and the Government of Japan for the excellent partnerships that we have enjoyed in this project.

However, the project cannot achieve its goal without the farmers' participation. Your active participation is needed to make the initiative sustainable and meaningful. By participating in this programme, you have chosen to become an agent of change for the sustainable future of the Maldives.

On this positive note, I would like once again to thank you for this partnership, and I look forward to its successful implementation.

Thank you.