



**Signing Ceremony**  
**Project for Developing Sustainable Agricultural Economy (PDSAE)**  
*Tuesday, October 12, 2021, 10:00am UTC+5, Hulhumalé*

**Speech by Enrico Gaveglia, UNDP Maldives Resident Representative**

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

*Minister of Economic Development, Honourable Ustaz Fayyaz Ismail,*

*Her Excellency, Keiko Yanai, Ambassador of Japan to the Maldives,*

*Managing Director of Housing Development Corporation, Mr. Suhail Ahmed,*

*Managing Director of Agro National Corporation, Mr. Haroon Rasheed,*

*Managing Director of Business Center Corporation, Ms. Fazleena Fakir,*

*Colleagues and special invitees gracing our joyous ceremony today.*

*Assalaam Alaikum. A very good morning to you all!*

It is a distinct honor for me to be here with you today, first and foremost because this is one of my first public engagements, and I am graced by your company, which has been my experience since my arrival here in the Maldives - I have been met with words of kindness and warm welcomes.

I am sure you must be as happy as I am to meet out in the wide, although we are yet not quite fully used to it. Indeed, over a year ago, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, people had to put their lives and livelihoods on hold – at significant personal and economic cost. All of us were affected, and our families too. But the burdens fell most heavily on those least able to carry them.

We are not out of the pandemic as yet, and challenges have multiplied ever since in fact, but in our profession, our passion for the work we do push us to be optimistic of the future, especially when we build coalitions and synergies like the one we are experiencing today.

Today's signing of the 'Project for Developing Sustainable Agricultural Economy (PDSAE)' aka SEEDS2 is a concrete signal our joint commitment to 'Build Forward Better'. When they ask you how this looks like, please do point in the direction of this initiative.

Before going into some depth let me thank our partners:

The Government and people of Japan represented by Her Excellency, Keiko Yanai, Ambassador of Japan to the Maldives for their generous support to this initiative. The commitment of Japan to the Maldives through multilateral channels such as the through UN/UNDP is a remarkable testimony of friendship that calls on each of us as development partners, as civil servants to offer nothing less than their very best. So thank you, Your Excellency.

I would also like to acknowledge the distinguished architects of this visionary initiative (and I do have a weak spot, you will learn moving forward, for architecture of development):

- We are extremely grateful to our partner ministries, the Ministry of Economic Development and the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture and the ministers themselves for their close support, guidance and keen interest in developing this programme.
- We acknowledge Housing Development Corporation, Business Centre Corporation and Agro National Corporation, for their drive and dedication to bring this initiative to the people.

The project we are signing today builds on the success of the *Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development for SMEs (SEEDS)* project, that was put forward as a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The SEEDS project was conceived in a time of severe challenges, opening opportunities, and with the spirit of innovation. I am proud to have been briefed by my team of some highlights and results jointly achieved by the initiative:

- We have reached out to engage more than 250 contract farmers in 5 islands of Laamu atoll, with 113 already onboard. Of these, 21% are youth;
- The Community Urban Farming Project was launched last month, providing livelihoods opportunities for 48 farmers. It has 6 dedicated plots for women benefitting 18 women in total; 5 plots for youth and persons with disabilities; and 5 general category plots;
- The AgroNat website was also launched mid-this year. Currently, a mobile app for contract farmers is being developed - An e-agricultural tool that will allow farmers access up-to-date information and resources;
- We saw the launch of SEED by BCC – A co-working space set up with a wide range of amenities and support services for use of MSME entrepreneurs and aspiring teams;
- And just last week, I was delighted to witness the launch of the Authentic Maldives website, featuring over 60 local businesses from across the Maldives. It's truly wonderful that this website will create opportunity and give recognition to the uniqueness, diversity and the hard work of people, and their brands.

Indeed, the seeds have been sown. Recovery is gaining strength. Yet, COVID-19 was not a stand-alone event, it is a protracted crisis that calls for a sustained new formula of support.

Today's project signing, is a collective pledge to further strengthen food security in the Maldives. The doors are wide open for those interested in the business to enter the agricultural sector and keep the wheels of opportunity in motion. So that more people can benefit. So that economic diversification can kick in to complement known roads for economic recovery. Like its predecessor, this current project:

The project is innovative: It is designed to promote green farming practices and build resilient food systems;

It focuses on economic diversification and promotes entrepreneurship and synergies: by building a new generation of agro-entrepreneurs to help mitigate future shocks.

It champions inclusivity: providing opportunities for young people, people with disabilities, women and men - to initiate self-owned agricultural enterprises, cultivate new ideas and actively participate in transforming the landscape.

It contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals: in particular, Goal 2 to End Hunger and Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities.

As we work to gain back the ground we lost during the pandemic, please do count on UNDP to remain committed to work with partners and the people of Maldives to enrich the ecosystem of development in a way that it is multisectoral by design and with stronger value chains with ultimate gains on the last mile. Here's to affordable and nutritious food, and a vibrant economy.

Once again, many thanks to our partners who stand by us as we continue the path towards the resilience and sustainability of the agricultural sector in the Maldives. I am looking forward to imminent and many more future conversations we will have together on these matters. I thank you personally for the warm welcome extended to me thus far.

*Shukuriyya.*