



**REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS AND REMAINING CHALLENGES
IN IMPLEMENTING
THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (BPfA)
IN THE MALDIVES**

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**Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
Male, Maldives**

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I - Introduction

Objective of the review report

The main objective of this report is to review the Maldives' commitments to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, with the objective to document achievements and progress, challenges and setbacks in the last 5-year cycle and to outline priorities for the next 5-year period.

II - Observations on progress made in the BPfA’s critical areas of concern relevant to the Maldives since 2014, and persisting challenges

1) Women and the Environment

Women and environment is a notably under-recognised thematic area, considering the climate vulnerability and elevated advocacy position of the Maldives internationally, in connection with its engagement on climate change issues historically and today. This is especially so among the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and as the last Chair of the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS). Therefore, the dearth of substantive interest and information on the role of women on issues relating to the environment is inconsistent with the country’s position in the climate vulnerability stakes. As a result, the achievements in this area for women is challenging to document in the available scope and time- frame of this review.

Stakeholders consulted for this thematic area acknowledge an absence of achievements and progress in this area for women, while also recognising the increased vulnerability of women in climate disasters. For instance, Maldives participates in negotiations at the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (CoP) on a regular basis. However, at the formulation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) at the 2017 CoP in Marrakesh, the country delegation was unable to “constructively engage or significantly contribute” to take that opportunity at international level due to capacity constraints in this area. This may be explained by the absence of women in decision-making positions in the environmental sector specifically, and the prevailing social attitudes towards the issue of gender equality and women’s empowerment generally. Moreover, stakeholder consultations suggest that the inclusion of women is low in the sector, and examples of long serving women in the sector being marginalised at lower ranks of the Civil Service can be observed. This is consistent with the evidence base available suggesting the exclusion of women in decision-making positions at the executive levels of the Civil Service discussed elsewhere in this report. One such example is the recently re-structured National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) having only one woman in the post of Director General among a 4-member senior leadership team.¹

The Maldives faces serious environmental threats due to vulnerabilities in multiple areas including,

- global heating and climate change, sea-level rise and related disaster risks including displacement and internal migration
- coral bleaching and threats to marine ecosystems and biodiversity loss
- solid waste management capacity limitations and the proliferation of plastics (including in the oceans)
- challenges to access clean water and sanitation provisions
- environmental degradation due to human activity including coastal modification and extensive reclamation of reefs, lagoons and mangrove ecosystems^{2,3}
- unsustainable developmental practices and loss of livelihood resources including agricultural land and productive vegetation⁴
- heavy dependence on imports, scarcity of agricultural land and food security concerns
- Over-dependency on single industries such as tourism and fisheries, which are vulnerable to environmental and external shocks.

Women in rural communities are particularly impacted by the effects of climate change and internal displacement to urban centres, which are concerns that are being highlighted by some civil society

¹ National Disaster Management Authority website, <https://ndmc.gov.mv/about/leaders/> (accessed : 27 May 2019)

² *Authorities urged to protect Kulhudhuffushi mangrove*, Maldives Independent, 18 September 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/environment/authorities-urged-to-protect-kulhudhuffushi-mangrove-141281> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

³ *Irreversible Damage, Destruction & Loss in Maldives* (new edition, Save Maldives (Issuu), June 2018, https://issuu.com/savemaldives/docs/save_maldives_newedition (accessed : 24 May 2019)

⁴ *The ropemakers of Kulhudhuffushi*, Maldives Independent, 8 November 2017, <https://maldivesindependent.com/business/the-ropemakers-of-kulhudhuffushi-134013> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

organisations.⁵ However, such issues are yet to be fully acknowledged and addressed at national level through appropriate gender-sensitive policies and practices, to promote women's inclusion in decision-making on environmental matters affecting them at community level. It is evident that the impact of development activity has a considerable effect on the lives of women in rural communities, exacerbated by inadequate local level consultations, which is an area that needs strengthening.

Unsustainable development practices have also made significant negative impacts on the livelihoods of rural women in particular, who depend on local resources to supplement household income in the informal sector. The decision in 2017 by the government to build an airport on the wetland and mangroves at Haa Dhaal Atoll Kulhudhuffushi, the largest population centre in the north of the country, is a case in point. The project impacted the livelihoods of over 400 rural women and families who were evicted from their livelihood resource on the wetland without any compensation or alternatives.⁶ The project also required the relocation of several households within the island who were provided some compensation by the State. However, the current government has been making efforts to work with an international organisation to conserve the remaining part of the affected wetland, in response to advocacy efforts by a group of citizen advocates.^{7,8}

2) Women in power and decision-making

The most historic achievement towards women's participation in public life in recent years was the lifting of the Constitutional bar on women to hold the position of Head of State, following the ratification of the new Constitution of 2008 and consequent removal of the reservation on Article 7(a) of CEDAW.⁹ However, this *de jure* progress over a decade ago has not manifested in a significant change to the *de facto* situation of women in public life in the Maldives.

The 18th People's Majlis (parliament) which took office in 2014 had 85 seats of which only 5 (5.9%) was occupied by women. The 19th People's Majlis which took oath of office on 28 May 2019 consists of 87 seats of which only four (4.6%) are occupied by women. This is a record low for women's representation in the Maldivian parliament since 2000 when the figure stood at 14%.¹⁰ This shows that even though more women contested they have less chances of being elected.

The first women judges were appointed to the Maldivian judiciary in 2007.¹¹ In 2014, there were 9 (4.8%) women among a total of 185 sitting judges.¹² As at May 2019, this number stands at 8 out of 195, with women's representation among judges having declined to 4% in the review period. Among the 10 members of the oversight body for judges, the Judicial Services Commission (JSC), there was only one woman, until the recent appointment on 29 May 2019, of MP Hisaan Hussain to represent the People's Majlis at the JSC.^{13,14} The situation faced by women judges can be seen in the various cases of dismissals and resignations that led to the persistently low numbers of women judges since their acceptance to the judiciary over a decade ago. In 2014, Civil Court Justice Aisha Shujune Mohammed resigned, several months after she publicly disclosed information about a substantial bribery offer.¹⁵ In 2016, High Court

⁵ *Impact of climate change on women's livelihood in Maldives*, Uthema-Voice of Women in collaboration with GGF, September 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9x45hKkQN0&t=124s> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

⁶ *Conserving Kulhudhuffushi Kulhi*, Save Maldives (Issuu), January 2019, https://issuu.com/formea/docs/kf_kulhi_issue_brief-savemaldivesca (accessed : 24 May 2019)

⁷ *International group to help restore Kulhudhuffushi mangrove*, Maldives Independent, 7 March 2019,

<https://maldivesindependent.com/environment/international-group-to-help-restore-kulhudhuffushi-mangrove-144048> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

⁸ *Conserving the remaining part of Kulhudhuffushi Kulhi*, Save Maldives Campaign, 9 May 2019, <https://savemaldives.org/conserving-remaining-kulhudhuffushi-kulhi/> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

⁹ *Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 2012*, Hope for Women NGO, Maldives, September 2012:6

¹⁰ *Rayyithunge Majlis 1932-2014*, People's Majlis, Republic of Maldives, 2014

¹¹ *Women in Public Life : Situational Analysis/Baseline Assessment*, UNDP Maldives, August 2010:10

¹² *Qualitative Assessment : Perceptions about Women's Participation in Public Life in the Maldives*, IFES, 2015:18

¹³ Judicial Services Commission website, Members, <http://jsc.gov.mv/jsc/members> (accessed : 27 May 2019)

¹⁴ *Parliament approves MP Hisaan as representative to JSC*, The Edition, 29 May 2019, <https://edition.mv/news/10792> (accessed 02 June 2019) [updated]

¹⁵ *Civil Court Judge Aisha Shujoon resigns*, Minivan News, 30 December 2014, <https://minivannewsarchive.com/news-in-brief/civil-court-judge-aisha-shujoon-resigns-91887> (accessed : 23 May 2019)

Justice Dr Azmiralda Zahir resigned following her relocation out of Malé City, citing that “Over the course of the five months of service in Hulhudhoo [island], the relevant authorities have refused to clarify the length of my transfer period, preventing me from making the necessary arrangements to take care of my young children”.¹⁶ In 2017, Civil Court Justice Mariyam Waheed was dismissed from her position by an order of the Supreme Court, following a judgement she delivered on a case. The Supreme Court dismissed her stating that she “does not have any capacity to preside over trials in any Maldivian court”, a decision that received much criticism and consternation from the legal community in the Maldives.¹⁷ These individual cases of the removal of, and exit from the judiciary by women judges help to highlight the challenges experienced by women in the justice sector.

In terms of women in decision-making positions in the State Executive, the situation has notably improved since 2007 and 2013. The current cabinet constitutes 7 (35%) women and 13 (65%) men as shown in Figure 1.¹⁸ However, this change is undermined by the fact that an additional 9 ministerial rank appointments at the President’s Office are all men, resulting in the gender distribution of 24% women and 76% men (see Figure 2).¹⁹ A traditional tendency to assign gender stereotyped sector portfolios for women in the cabinet can be observed, such as the allocation of education and gender and social services portfolios to women. While the current cabinet does show this trend, it also presents some notable departures from the stereotypes, with the appointment of Mariya Ahmed Didi as the Minister for Defence, Zaha Waheed as the Minister for Fisheries and Agriculture, Aminath Athifa as the Minister for Housing and Urban Development and Aishath Nahula as the Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation.²⁰ These developments in terms of numbers and the assignment of non-traditional cabinet portfolios to women can be interpreted as very progressive in the prevailing context, although sustaining such changes may continue to prove challenging.

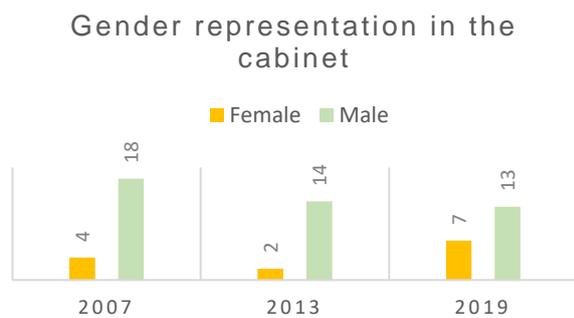


Figure 1
Gender representation in the cabinet for 2007, 2013 & 2019
Source: IFES 2015; current status data (May 2019)

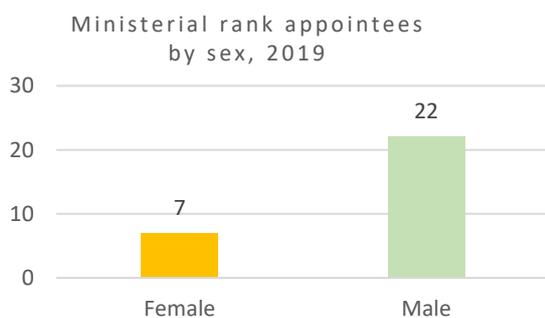


Figure 2
Ministerial rank positions by sex, 2019
Data source: President’s Office website, Government of Maldives (May 2019)

Official data shows that at state ministerial level, women’s representation currently stands at 20% (10 women 39 men), ambassadorial level at 44% (4 women 5 men) and deputy ministerial level at 30% (20 women 47 men).²¹ These figures are indicative of the present government’s pledge to address the perennial gender

¹⁶ *Maldives’ most senior female judge quits*, Maldives Independent, 12 May 2016, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-most-senior-female-judge-quits-124197> (accessed : 23 May 2019)

¹⁷ *In unprecedented move, supreme court sacks civil court judge*, Maldives Independent, 18 February 2017, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/in-unprecedented-move-supreme-court-sacks-civil-court-judge-128814> (accessed : 23 May 2019)

¹⁸ *President Solih’s cabinet to hold more women than usual*, Maldives Times, 18 November 2018, <https://maldivestimes.com/president-solih-s-cabinet-to-hold-more-women-than-usual/> (accessed : 23 May 2019)

¹⁹ Ministerial rank, President’s Office, website, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Government/Officials/145> (accessed : 28 May 2019)

²⁰ The Maldives Cabinet, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Government/Cabinet/16> (accessed : 23 May 2019)

²¹ Website of the President’s Office, multiple links under ‘Government’, <https://presidency.gov.mv/Government/Officials/145> (accessed : April 2019)

disparities in public office and indicates a positive attempt to address the existing gender gaps and utilise the available pool of competent and able women in the country.

In local governance, the representation of women at both island and city councils is consistent with that of the parliament, with persistently low figures over the last two elections, with women's representation at 5% in 2014 and 6% in 2017.^{22,23} Considering the results of the two previous election cycles and the April 2019 parliamentary elections, it is unlikely that the impending local council elections in 2020 would make a significant difference to the status quo. Nevertheless, a positive development is the submission by the government proposing an amendment to the Decentralisation Act (2010) proposing the adoption of a 33% women's quota in local government.²⁴

The 2008 Constitution reformulated and/or established a total of 7 independent institutions of the State. Among these, currently the Prosecutor General and the Human Rights Commission are headed by women, with women's representation in the rest of the Commissions being just one or none. The 5-member Civil Service Commission has one woman, as does the 10-member Judicial Service Commission and 5-member Anti-Corruption Commission. The 5-member Elections Commission is all male.²⁵

The public sector (Civil Service) is the single largest employer in the country with over 22,000 staff, among which women constitute 60%.²⁶ However, available analyses prior to 2014 suggest a trend whereby women are over-represented in the lower and middle management ranks of the civil service although their participation dramatically falls at executive level.²⁷ The situation remains unchanged today with the latest available data for 2017 showing that within the combined total of the general, managerial and support service ranks of the Civil Service, 58% are women and 42% men.²⁸ The data trend reverses at the higher executive service level, with 60% men and 40% women, indicating the stark gender disparity which keeps women excluded from decision-making positions in the public sector. Stakeholder discussions suggest that socio-cultural gender discriminatory attitudes towards women contribute to the status quo. Moreover, barriers to women's sustained retention in service due to their reproductive and unpaid care-work burden remains a compounding factor affecting women's participation in public service leadership roles. Stakeholders also informed of the multiple cases of women being dismissed or resigning from key positions during the political upheavals of the past several years in an environment of corruption from which they chose to distance themselves as they chose not to "compromise principles".²⁹

The position of women in political parties has not seen significant changes with no political party being headed by a woman to date. Available analyses also show the significant gender disparities in political party hierarchy and decision-making positions, such as the governing bodies or national councils.³⁰ This is despite the fact that most parties have a membership of over 40% women and the very visible grassroots activism by women party members.³¹ A current development is the emerging discussion among political parties led by the Elections Commission to propose an amendment to the Political Parties Act to include a 30% quota for women in leadership positions of political parties.³² This is a positive conversation which responds to

²² *Qualitative Assessment : Perceptions about Women's Participation in Public Life in the Maldives*, IFES, 2015:17

²³ *Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*, 11 April 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, Government of Maldives, pg.24

²⁴ *Parliament approves a number of key bills at Tuesday's sitting*, Raajje.mv, 24 April 2019, <https://raajje.mv/en/news/54956> (accessed : 23 May 2019)

²⁵ Status as at 27 May 2019 from the various Commissions' websites

²⁶ Raw data source : Statistical Yearbook of Maldives 2018, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure

²⁷ *Qualitative Assessment : Perceptions about Women's Participation in Public Life in the Maldives*, IFES, 2015:21

²⁸ Raw data source : Statistical Yearbook of Maldives 2018, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure

²⁹ Stakeholder interview

³⁰ *Qualitative Assessment : Perceptions about Women's Participation in Public Life in the Maldives*, IFES, 2015:14

³¹ Ibid:13,14

³² *Quota proposed for women in political party leadership*, Maldives Independent, 23 May 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/quota-proposed-for-women-in-political-party-leadership-145479> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

continuing civil society advocacy for the introduction of quotas to achieve gender parity in public life in the Maldives.^{33,34,35}

3) The girl child

Maldives ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, followed by the adoption of its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2002 and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2004. The first domestic Child Rights Protection Law was established in 1991 at accession to the CRC, which had significant limitations in the country context. A new Child Protection Bill, which will replace the 1991 law, is currently in its draft stages.³⁶

On the fundamental position on the definition of a child, inconsistencies remain in various legislations. The Child Rights Protection Law of 1991 defines a child (minor) as someone under the age of eighteen. The Employment Act 2008 sets the minimum age of employment at sixteen years, while the Penal Code (2014) sets the age of criminal responsibility at fifteen years.³⁷ The Family Law (2000) asserts the legal age of marriage to be eighteen, with special provision allowing the marriage of children at sixteen years at the discretion of the Registrar of Marriages at the Family Court.³⁸

However, the provision in Family Law enabling the marriage of children has been somewhat weakened by an amendment to the Regulation on Family Matters by the Supreme Court in 2016, which required referral to the apex court on marriages of children under eighteen, including an assessment by the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (MoGFSS).³⁹ In July 2018, the then Ministry of Gender and Family, established a multi-sectoral Child Marriage Assessment Panel which added an additional procedural layer to vet marriages involving minors. To date, the MoGFSS has received 33 cases of proposed marriage involving minors for assessment from the Family Court of which one had been assessed and sent back. Of the 33 cases submitted, 32 involved the marriage of girls and 01 boy and no case of child marriage has yet been approved by the MoGFSS following these changes.⁴⁰

While the definition of a child remains inconsistent and unresolved across laws and the meaningful alignment of domestic laws to international standards as per the CRC remain yet to be achieved, the issue of marriage of minors are currently procedurally addressed and strengthened to overcome gaps in the Family Law. Nevertheless, the prevailing context of conservatism and extreme religious views endorsing the marriage of girl children at puberty is a challenge to the protection of the girl child. Recent findings indicate a comparative significant rise in marriages of children between the ages 15-17 years between Census 2006 and Census 2014 for both boys and girls, as shown in Figure 3 below. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the phenomenon of unregistered marriages of children is an emerging challenge increasing the girl child's vulnerability in the prevailing socio-religious context. Stakeholders emphasise an acute need to recognise the multiple and increased vulnerabilities of the girl child - based on the simple fact of her sex which becomes compounded by other factors including disability, being in conflict with the law as well as being in a rural context. Poverty, regardless of location, exacerbates the issues manifold.

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ *Policy recommendations to the new government by Uthema and Voice of Women NGOs*, 16 November 2018, <https://uthema.org/noosbayaan-gepolicyrec-16-11-2018/> [Dhivehi] (accessed : 24 May 2019)

³⁵ *Bridge The Gap* - advocacy video produced by Uthema-EU collaboration, April 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETKm6_5zVZ8&t=6s (accessed : 24 May 2019)

³⁶ *Alternative Report : A submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC), February 2015

³⁷ *ibid*:15

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ *Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*, 11 April 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, Government of Maldives

⁴⁰ Direct communication with the MoGFSS (23 May 2019)

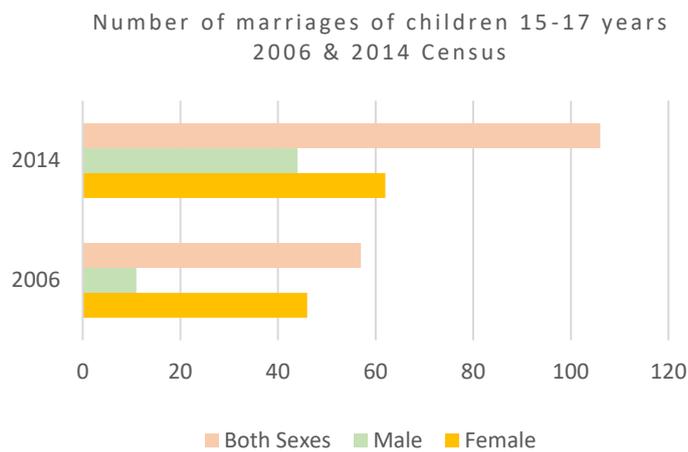


Figure 3
Number of marriages of children 15-17 years, 2006 & 2014 Census
Source : Children of Maldives 2014 Census, NBS/UNICEF

The government is yet to achieve the passage of the Juvenile Justice Bill, which has seen a prolonged draft stage. However, it is anticipated that the 19th People’s Majlis, which convened at the end of May 2019 will achieve its passage. The ratification of the Gender Equality Law in 2016 is a significant achievement and progress towards attaining the rights of the girl child. However, the meaningful implementation of the law remains a challenge in the current context.

The situation of the girl child will see progress due to the recent positive development in government policy providing six months paid maternity and one month paid paternity leave for civil service employees.⁴¹ Notably, this decision of the government resulted in the adoption of the same by other employers, including the Maldives National University and some State owned enterprises.^{42,43}

Violence against children (VAC) remains a serious concern with its detrimental impact affecting the girl child in its multiplicity of dimensions along the life-cycle. The Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders 12/2009 was ratified in 2009, following which a national sex offenders registry was published.⁴⁴ Reports of VAC data from 2013 and 2014 suggest significant data inconsistencies and the critical need to improve data collection protocols and coherence between agencies to improve services.⁴⁵ Over the past five years, VAC reporting has increased notably and the publication of such data by the Ministry of Gender and Family provide the opportunity to raise public awareness about the issue and the extent of the problem.^{46,47} However, critical challenges exist including media capacity to ethically report on VAC issues, as well as the implementation of laws to address the issue effectively. These include significant capacity limitations in human and financial resource allocation to the social protection services, as well as grave weaknesses in the law enforcement and justice sector.^{48,49,50} The acquittal of people accused of serious

⁴¹ *President announces six months maternity leave*, Maldives Independent, 7 March 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/president-announces-six-months-maternity-leave-144081> (accessed : 21 May 2019)

⁴² *MNU adopts new paid maternity, paternity leave policy*, Maldives Times, 11 April 2019, <https://maldivestimes.com/mnu-adopts-new-paid-maternity-paternity-leave-policy/> (accessed : 21 May 2019)

⁴³ *Maternity and Paternity Leaves Extended by MMPRC*, Corporate Maldives, 23 March 2019, <https://corporatemaldives.com/maternity-and-paternity-leaves-extended-by-mmprc/> (accessed : 21 May 2019)

⁴⁴ *Maldives publishes child sex offenders registry*, Maldives Independent, 16 November 2015, <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/maldives-publishes-child-sex-offenders-registry-119870> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

⁴⁵ *Alternative Report : A submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Advocating the Rights of Children (ARC), February 2015, pg.25, para.90

⁴⁶ *Rise in cases of child sex abuse*, Maldives Independent, 23 January 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/rise-in-cases-of-child-sex-abuse-135312> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

⁴⁷ *More than 100 cases of violence against children in February*, Maldives Independent, 20 March 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/more-than-100-cases-of-violence-against-children-in-february-144407> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

⁴⁸ *‘First he raped me. Then he came for my sisters’*, Maldives Independent, 2 May 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/feature-comment/first-he-raped-me-then-he-came-for-my-sisters-137871> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

⁴⁹ *Early release of child sex offender sparks outrage*, Maldives Independent, 5 December 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/early-release-of-child-sex-offender-sparks-outrage-143059> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

⁵⁰ *Maldives court drops sex abuse charges against 75-year-old*, Maldives Independent, 7 August 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/maldives-court-drops-sex-abuse-charges-against-75-year-old-139928> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

crimes against children by the courts is a persistent concern as evident from media reports, which stated in one serial abuse case that the “court did not give a reason for throwing out the charges.”^{51,52}

4) Women and economy

The Maldives made progress to accelerate women’s role in the economy and contribute to the country’s economic growth. One such progressive step is the enactment of the Gender Equality Law. Article 25 of the Gender Equality Act (2016) states that Women shall be granted equal opportunities as men, in access to and use of economic resources. At the same time government to formulate and implement policies to increase women economic empowerment⁵³. Furthermore, the draft Gender Equality Policy and Gender Equality Action Plan, which is in the process of endorsement from the President’s Office, reinforces the areas where government commitment is required in terms of advancing economic rights of women in the Maldives. Act no. 8/2008 (Employment Act) prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, provides for equal pay for equal work, maximum hours of work, overtime, annual and sick leave, guidelines for workplace safety, maternity and additional parental leave.

The new government in its 100-day pledges increased paid maternity leave policy from four months to six months; and introduced paid paternity leave from three days to one month is considered a huge step forward in acknowledgment of barriers facing women to access employment and addresses women’s double burden on unpaid care work⁵⁴. Currently the policy is applied government wide for the civil service and some Stated Owned Enterprises (SoEs).

The current labour force participation rate (LFPR) in the Maldives stands at 58%, LFPR for women aged 15-64, is 42 percent compared to 75 percent of Maldivian men as per 2016 HIES.⁵⁵ Women LFPR had taken downward trend in comparison 2010, 54% for females while for males LFPR stayed pretty much the same 75%⁵⁶. The reason for this downward trend could be that, due to the modernization of fishing and agricultural sector women’s roles in these sectors had gone down considerably. Despite the guarantees and equal rights ensured legally and positive educational attainment of women and girls, which is higher than their male counterparts, these positive trends are not proportionately reflected in the national labour force participation⁵⁷.

The gender pay gap for the resident population at national level is 20% and if only Maldivians are considered (excluding foreign migrant population), the gender pay gap at national level is 26%. This means that on average Maldivian women earn MVR 22.51 per hour less than men. Women’s overall monthly earnings are MVR 7,510 (approximately USD\$487) as compared to MVR 11,977 (approximately USD\$776) for men⁵⁸. This effectively means that women will receive less pension than men which in turn impacts their financial independence at old age.

While majority of women are engaged in home-based income earning activities, access to finance is still one of the key challenges for women who want to thrive in business sector. It is noteworthy to recognize progress in terms of introducing financial schemes the last 5-10 years such as Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) loans targeted to women and youth to develop MSME sectors. According to 6th CEDAW State Report a target of the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) is to see a 20% increase in number of women and youth-owned and engaged businesses. In this regard, the Ministry has supported 138 women owned MSME Registered businesses to date. The Ministry also has set a target of a 15% increase in the

⁵¹ ibid

⁵² *Criminal Court acquits six men accused of raping 14 year old girl in Vilimale*, Sun.mv, 23 June 2013, <https://en.sun.mv/13696> (accessed : 22 May 2019)

⁵³ Gender Equality Act 2016, Article 25 (a), (b)

⁵⁴ *Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, pg. 29

⁵⁵ Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure, Maldives page 21

⁵⁶ Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2012, Hope For Women pg 54

⁵⁷ *Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 31

⁵⁸ Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure, Maldives page 21

number of women accessing loans. To date, 119 applications have been received and processed, representing 12 women (5 youth, 7 non-youth) and 74 youth. From this, 31% (5 female and 19 youth) of loan applications have been approved⁵⁹. The continuity of this progress needs to be studied and expanded and in-depth assessment needs to be carried out to check whether these loans were utilized and the intended benefits reaped to women. At the same time, under the current government manifesto's 100 day pledges, on 18th March 2019, a new SME Bank (SDFC) was inaugurated to promote SME financing. At the inauguration address, the President stated that 6 special centres will be established to assist and cater small and medium businesses to develop proposals⁶⁰.

As per the stakeholder consultations carried for the purpose of this review, it was highlighted that the MSME loans and other loan schemes introduced by the local banks, the amount given were not sufficient to cover the capital costs due to the huge overhead costs in setting up a small business in Maldives. Moreover these schemes should be introduced with holistic business incubator services to provide continuous support to women businesses. The stakeholders are of the view that before MSME loan schemes the government need to assess the type of businesses which will work based on the current economic and environmental trends, technology as women still needs extensive support on the start-up and maintenance of the businesses such as book-keeping and assistance on doing cost benefit analysis. Further challenges are highlighted in accessing adequate finances from local banks due to other pushback factors, such as lack of ownership of assets and collateral, and the increased perception that women can only manage homebased businesses.

However, extending maternity leave to 6 months and paternity leave to 1 month and the flexible working arrangement introduced by CSC for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are positive trends in terms of policy shifts to increase women LFPR. Nonetheless, unpaid care work at home and lack of child-care options and facilities remains the key challenge to women's full and robust labour force participation. On average, women spent 6 hours per day in the household work while men spent 3 hours in household.⁶¹ To change the status quo, policies need to be in place to address this unbalance where women's productive work time is used to contribute to care economy which is not reflected in national accounts and social protection schemes.

Women are marginalized by the biggest employer other than government. While tourism accounts for 40.9% of the GDP (2017), Maldivians typically occupy lower-paying jobs in the sector which is dominated by foreign workers and women continue to be side-lined from the biggest employment sector other than the government.⁶² It is evident that there are data gaps to give a clear picture of women representation in tourism sector as these data are not captured in HIES. However, as per the NGO Shadow CEDAW report of 2012, local female participation in the tourism sector is 2% and local male participation is 47%. The expatriate labour force in the sector is significant at 5% foreign females and 46% foreign males⁶³. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the above figure may have increased slightly as there are more female staff joining tourism sector and there are few resorts, which runs programs to attract females to join the team. At the same time, among the few females who joined the tourism sector some have made it to senior management positions in the resort. In 2016 the first Maldivian female resort manager was appointed⁶⁴. The main reason women don't seek resort employment is the negative perceptions of resort life where parents and community associate resorts with impermissible behaviours that conflict with Islamic values, and both parents and young women perceive resorts as being unsafe⁶⁵. With the growing guest house tourism in inhabited islands it is unclear how many women benefit from this new sector which was started during the last 10 years. This is a potential employment sector where the women residing in the islands could tap into with adequate policies and interventions.

⁵⁹ *Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 39

⁶⁰ Maldives Independent, "president inaugurates first SME Bank in the Maldives, 2019 <https://maldivesindependent.com/business/first-sme-bank-opens-in-maldives-144338>, accessed 20th May 2019

⁶¹ Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure, Maldives page 21

⁶² *Ibid*, page 31

⁶³ Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2012, Hope For Women pg. 53

⁶⁴ Hotelier Maldives, women in hospitality 2016 <https://www.hoteliermaldives.com/women-hospitality-resort-manager-summer-island-maldives/> accessed on 21 May 2019

⁶⁵ Gender Analysis of Mangrove For Future Program in Seenu Hithadhoo 2017, UNDP Mangrove For Future Program, pg. 14

Fishing and agriculture used to be one of the main sources of traditional livelihoods of rural women outside the public sector. However, this has faded away overtime due to modernization of these sectors. The current government has pledged special loan schemes to develop agricultural sector businesses and states that a specific portion of the loan scheme will be allocated to women. Similarly the government stated that measures will be introduced to increase women role in the fishing industry⁶⁶.

Due to the reproductive and care work roles assigned to women, a significant number of employed women are engaged in informal sector and home-based income generating activities which still is significant in terms of contribution to household incomes. Women in informal sector consist of 40% (HIES 2016⁶⁷) and they are not able to access the social protection system such as participation in the national pension scheme or does not have job security and guaranteed income flow. A potential MSME sector is emerging with the new technological advances and introduction of social media platforms, women are increasingly capitalizing these platforms to do home-based businesses such as craft making, retail and other types of home businesses. As per the stakeholder consultations, some of these retail home based businesses are taking off customer bases from established retail setups due to reduced overhead costs. These of course need to be taken into the national accounts and also create a system to assess the impact of such small businesses towards women financial independence and to the economy. These pro-active assessment and research needs to be conducted before any policy interventions are carried out in order to bring any transformative development.

It's imperative that to bring any transformative changes to the existing realities of women's economic empowerment it is crucial to recognize and reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care work. The main reason why women do not engage in productive work is the fact that unpaid care work at home that limits women's full and robust labour force participation. It is equally important to recognize the care economy contribution to national accounts which is major contribution is from women. Women with care responsibilities are more likely to be self-employed, to work in the informal economy and less likely to contribute to social security which is the case in Maldives as well.

5) Women and poverty

Maldives entered middle-income country (MIC) status less than a decade ago, having been described as a "development success story" which in "2012, with a population of more than 300,000, is a middle-income country with a per capita income of over \$6,300."⁶⁸ The country achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.⁶⁹ The Social Protection Act 2/2014 was passed in 2014 with the intention to provide social protection for the poor, reduce wealth inequality and facilitate equitable national wealth distribution.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, despite being the richest country by GDP (see Figure 4) in the South Asia region, wealth inequality is the defining trend that persists, based on the latest available data. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016 reported 8.2% of the population to be at the low poverty line of MVR74 (USD4.8) per day and 46.5% of the population at the high poverty line of MVR148 (USD9.5).⁷¹ The largest employer, the Civil Service, provides a salary of less than MVR5000 (USD324) per month to the majority of civil servants, with just 5% in that sector receiving wages above MVR10,000 (USD648) and 2% earning over MVR15,000 (USD972).⁷² According to HIES 2016, approximately "60% of population gets less than MVR 5,000 [USD324] per person per month and less than 1% of population gets MVR 20,000 [USD1,297] and above per person per month."⁷³ The country situation

⁶⁶ Core Principles, Characteristics and Policies of the "Unity Government" by Political Parties' Coalition 2018, unofficial translation, UNDP Maldives

⁶⁷ *Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, Employment Leaflet*, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

⁶⁸ *The Maldives: A Development Success Story*, The World Bank, 10 April 2013, <http://projects-beta.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/04/10/maldives-development-success-story> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

⁶⁹ *Millennium Development Goals : Maldives Country Report 2010*, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

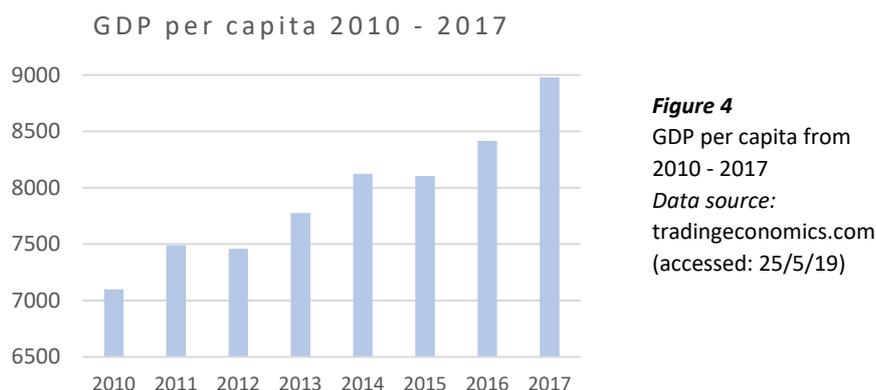
⁷⁰ Article 2, Social Protection Act 2/2014, Maldives

⁷¹ *Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, Selected poverty related indicators*, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

⁷² Data cited by Chief Statistician Aishath Shahuda via Twitter @AishathShahuda (03 May 2019)

⁷³ *Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, Analytical Report : Household Income*, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

points to the importance of working towards the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with specific emphasis on goal 5 on gender equality and the overall ethos of inclusivity to ‘leave no one behind’.



Although the last 5 years has seen growth in economic terms, this wealth has evidently not reached a large number of the population. Amongst these, women are among the most vulnerable in the prevailing context where the divorce rates are high and the social security net is inadequate to support families in the lowest wealth quintile. According to an analysis of the 2014 Census statistics, 73% of children in Maldives live with both biological parents nationally, 20% live with only mother as opposed to 1% living with only father.⁷⁴ The single parent allowance is capped up to 3 children, and in 2015, there were “some 3000 single parents registered with the state” receiving “MVR1000 [USD65] per child under 18 years of age, up to a maximum of MVR3000 (US\$195) per family.”⁷⁵ Data over the past 5 years show that the single parent allowance is obtained by 98% women and 2% men.⁷⁶ Women in such a position struggle to obtain child maintenance from the separated/divorced ex-husband, often having to resort to the courts to secure such funds. However, access to justice is found to be a significant barrier for women due to the absence of legal support services as well as multiple shortcomings in the justice sector.⁷⁷ A compounding factor is the discriminatory legal limitations on women to initiate and obtain divorce without resorting to a lengthy and complex court process. A structural policy-level setback for the benefits system in the last 5 years was the observed regression in the political arena to turn back the social security benefits system towards the historical political patronage model, which was not well-received by the Maldivian public.⁷⁸

Consulted stakeholders observe there have been no notable achievements in the last 5 years towards empowering women to lift themselves out of poverty. However, the government had increased the Senior Citizens Allowance benefit for the over 65-year age group to receive not less than MVR5000 (USD324) per month, which will be a source of support to elderly women.⁷⁹ A notable setback in the last 5 years for income poor and income insecure women in the informal sector in particular, was the impact of the changes to school-based activities for children, which were inflexible. In the Maldives, women are the primary caregivers for children, with the socio-cultural expectation for mothers to chaperone children to school. In the absence of public transport services such as buses to take children to school, increased extra-curricular activities meant spending a great deal of time taking children back and forth to school, which had a direct impact on the lives of the income poor. According to one stakeholder, the social expectation for women to accompany children to school will have “a direct impact on the economy” of the country in lost productivity, which has a much more detrimental impact on income poor women.

Stakeholders highlighted the absence of policies, programmes and services to facilitate access to financial capital and loans for women in the lowest income category to start a business, or access gainful employment. Women who do not have access to land have no means for collateral to get financing and no services are

⁷⁴ *Analysis of Children in Maldives from Census 2014*, National Bureau of Statistic, Ministry of Finance & Treasury/UNICEF Maldives, pg.15

⁷⁵ *First couple’s cash handouts to single parents spark concern*, Maldives Independent, 8 December 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/y2zi633m> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

⁷⁶ Data obtained from Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, 29 May 2019

⁷⁷ *Maldivian Women’s Vision Document*, UNDP Maldives, 2014

⁷⁸ *First couple’s cash handouts to single parents spark concern*, Maldives Independent, 8 December 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/y2zi633m> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

⁷⁹ Senior Citizens Allowance, Pensions Office website, <https://pension.gov.mv/en/media/scheme/sca> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

available for start-ups. Women in caregiving roles for children or other family members are constrained in their responsibilities to enter formal work and in urban Malé City with congested living conditions and absence of space, home-based work may not be an option. This puts women in a poverty trap from which they have no avenues to remove themselves. The upshot of this is the further breakdown of families, associated social dysfunction and desperate, high risk income seeking behaviours, which anecdotal evidence in the urban context of Malé City shows, includes prostitution.

According to HIES 2016, 40% of women work in the informal sector.⁸⁰ There are no support systems for women in the informal sector and the non-recognition of the work they do to supplement household income is a continuing policy gap which needs to be addressed. Around the country, women supplement their income in the informal sector using natural resources available in the island environment. Recent developments involving the mass removal of mature palm trees and other vegetation from communities, to landscape reclaimed reefs and lagoons to build tourist resorts, poses a direct threat to women's informal work.⁸¹ This practice will have a significant impact on the ability of women to access livelihood resources in the near future, to continue their income generating informal work.⁸²

6) Violence against women

The first and only national level, issue-focussed study to assess violence against women in the Maldives dates back to 2007.⁸³ Since then, there has been significant developments to address the issue. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA 2012) ratified in April 2012 criminalising domestic violence was a significant milestone to curb violence against women and girls (VAW/G) and gender based violence (GBV) in the Maldives. According to a stock-take of the implementation of the DVPA in 2014, "The DVPA clearly mandates several institutions, professional service providers and other relevant stakeholders to implement the law to address domestic violence, as it manifests in the Maldives. The law is focussed on prevention, protection and rehabilitation of both victims of violence and perpetrators."⁸⁴

Subsequent developments such as the establishment of the Family Protection Authority (FPA) under the DVPA 2012 to oversee the implementation of the law while slow, has resulted in progress in this area. The DVPA 2012 clarifies and mandates various State institutions to act on domestic violence issues using an integrated approach and the requisite regulations to implement the law has been produced by stakeholders including the FPA and the Maldives Police Service (MPS) although the Family Court is yet to initiate theirs. As Figure 5 below shows, available data on domestic violence reporting since 2014 indicates a steady upward trend, although the case total dropped in 2018 for reasons that are yet to be established. Notably, 2018 was a presidential election year with an environment of social and political challenges. The gender disaggregated data on perpetrators of reported cases of domestic violence in 2018 shows 80% men and 20% women, while the data on survivors of domestic violence shows 77% women and 23% men.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ *Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, Employment Leaflet*, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

⁸¹ *#MvTreeGrab: Removal of trees continues for landscaping of resorts*, Maldives Independent, 22 November 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/environment/mvtreegrab-removal-of-trees-continues-for-landscaping-of-resorts-142867> (accessed : 26 May 2019)

⁸² *#MvTreeGrab: Removal of trees continues for landscaping of resorts*, Maldives Independent, 22 November 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/environment/mvtreegrab-removal-of-trees-continues-for-landscaping-of-resorts-142867> (accessed : 26 May 2019)

⁸³ *The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences*, Ministry of Gender and Family, Government of Maldives with UNFPA/UNICEF/WHO, November 2007

⁸⁴ Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2/2012 : Two Years On, Gender Advocacy Working Group/Hope for Women NGO, November 2014:8

⁸⁵ Annual Report 2018, Family Protection Authority

Number of domestic violence cases reported to the FPA, 2014-2018

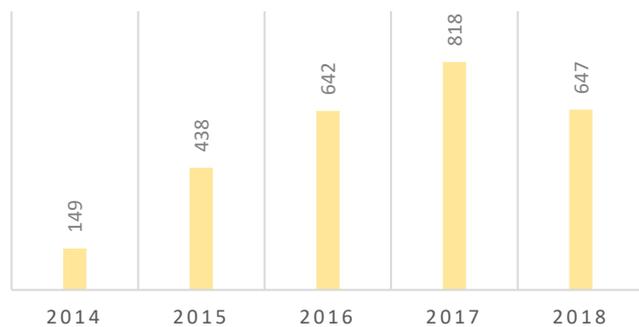


Figure 5
Number of domestic violence cases reported to the FPA from 2014 - 2018
Data source:
Annual Report 2018, Family Protection Authority

The Public Health Protection Act 7/2012 galvanised the production of the Health Sector Response to GBV, a National Guideline on Care and Prevention for Healthcare Providers in 2013, which was rolled out in 2016 establishing “protocols for assessment and treatment of cases” of GBV.⁸⁶ The Anti-Human Trafficking Act 12/2013 had achieved some gains, although meaningful practical progress had not been achieved resulting in the downgrading of Maldives to the Tier 2 Watch List citing the lack of full achievement of the minimum standards to eliminate trafficking.⁸⁷ The Sexual Harassment Prevention Act 16/2014 was also added to the legal framework in the past 5 years to address VAW/G as was the Sexual Offences Act 17/2014 and the Gender Equality Act 18/2016. Nevertheless, these gains in law are yet to manifest in practice to change the *de facto* situation of women and their experience of violence in both the private and public spheres. Implementation of laws in this area remain extremely challenging, with significant limitations in human resource capacity development and financial resource allocation to provide the necessary services and protections provided in law. Political will is especially required in this regard to ensure the meaningful implementation of laws to protect, prevent and provide necessary services to address VAW/G and GBV.

Nevertheless, the level of public awareness about VAW/G has increased significantly in the past 5 years with consistent advocacy efforts by the FPA to familiarise a variety of stakeholders on the provisions and intent of the DVPA 2012. The authority has established inter-agency referral pathways for case management engaging State authorities such as the MoGFSS, MPS and civil society actors, although the FPAs scope and mandate is primarily confined to the area of domestic violence. The implementation of other complementary laws in the social sector remain yet to be achieved due to structural and service delivery limitations compounded by persistent patriarchal social norms and attitudes of decision-makers.

Stakeholders identify religious conservative views as one of the biggest barriers and setbacks to address VAW/G in a context where religious patriarchal views sit uncomfortably with calls for gender equality and women’s empowerment. The rise of conservative religious beliefs in the Maldives and the proliferation of such beliefs among duty bearers, especially those mandated with providing services to victims of violence, is reported by some stakeholders as a significant setback. Data produced by State institutions such as the Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM, 2012) and more recently the DHS, indicates the acceptance of partner violence by women, with the DHS reporting “Overall, 26% of Maldivian women age 15-49 believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife in at least one of the six specified circumstances, compared with 21% of men.”⁸⁸

An unprecedented setback in the past 5 years in this regard is the sentencing of women to stoning to death for alleged adultery in two instances by island magistrates courts in 2015 and 2019, which has never been

⁸⁶ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 11 April 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, Government of Maldives, pg.7

⁸⁷ 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report - Maldives, US Department of State, 28 June 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e0adfa.html> (accessed : 26 May 2019)

⁸⁸ Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2016-2017, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives / WHO / UNICEF / UNFPA / ICF, December 2018:202 (also see : Rights Side of Life, Human Rights Commission of Maldives, 2012)

used as a judicial punishment in the Maldives before.⁸⁹ On both occasions, the Supreme Court intervened and annulled the sentences.⁹⁰ The situation requires intensive professional development and capacity building initiatives and programmes for judges, to improve service delivery and attitudinal changes among duty bearers and law enforcement officials to align with human rights principles and laws. The present government came to office with a manifesto pledge for judicial reform, towards which certain activities have been conducted during the first 100 days of assuming office.⁹¹

The issue of female circumcision became a public concern about a decade ago, when the then Attorney General raised concerns about the occurrence of the practice in the south of the country in Addu Atoll.⁹² It should be considered progress that the DHS 2016-2017 probed this issue in its survey, for the first time obtaining an official record, with the finding that 13% of women aged 15-49 are circumcised in the Maldives with prevalence increasing with age.⁹³ The survey reported that of these, 83% were circumcised before the age of 5 years, with 1% of the mothers of girls between 0-14 years reporting their children were circumcised.⁹⁴ A limitation of the survey was that it did not include questions to obtain the type or severity of female genital cutting being practiced, stating that the anecdotal evidence was this constituted Type 4 of the WHO description, involving “pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterising the genital area.”⁹⁵ The DHS also found that among women who had heard of female circumcision, 10% believed it was a religious requirement while 8% believed the practice should continue. As noted in thematic area 3 on the girl child, extreme religious views and practices increase the vulnerabilities of the girl child in the Maldives. Notably, the situation of women and girls involved in ‘jihad’ in Syria raises major concerns and challenges for the State to address their return, rehabilitation and reintegration to society.⁹⁶

There are notable and consistent efforts by various civil society organisations working towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Maldives that address violence against women issues specifically, although such efforts are concentrated in the capital Malé City. The establishment of the NGO Family Legal Clinic and its pro-bono legal services is a sign of progress addressing an area where an acute need exists for women in vulnerable situations involving family violence.⁹⁷ In addition, the conversations on the legislative gains as well as the detrimental effects of VAW/G are igniting social media activism and women’s voices are being raised, especially in the digital spaces to advocate for change and to implement existing laws. As increased numbers of civil society organisations engage on efforts to raise and address the root causes of gender-based discrimination and violence against women in all its forms, the potential for social change exists.⁹⁸ Efforts by youth groups running campaigns such as Nufoshey⁹⁹ (do not harass) and Occupy Reygandu¹⁰⁰ (occupy the night) using global advocacy moments such as #MeToo are all indicators of social change. These developments promises to have a transformative impact on the narrative for gender equality and women’s empowerment in the Maldives and consequent positive impacts on the de facto situation of women.

As internet accessibility and mobile connectivity increases with a high percentage of the population using new technologies in the digital space, the consequent risks associated with these activities are emerging in

⁸⁹ *Maldives woman sentenced to death by stoning wins reprieve*, The Telegraph-UK, 19 October 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/y4djr235> (accessed : 28 May 2019)

⁹⁰ *Maldives top court quashes death by stoning verdict for adultery*, Maldives Independent, 7 January 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y3m5auel> (accessed : 28 May 2019)

⁹¹ *100 Day Pledges - Justice*, President's Office website, Government of Maldives, <https://presidency.gov.mv/HundredDays/Pledges/10?lang=EN> (accessed : 28 May 2019)

⁹² *Female circumcision occurring in Addu atoll, reveals AG*, Minivan News, 10 December 2009, <https://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/female-circumcision-occurring-in-addu-atoll-reveals-ag-1101> (accessed : 29 May 2019)

⁹³ Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2016-2017, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives / WHO / UNICEF / UNFPA / ICF, December 2018:265

⁹⁴ *ibid*

⁹⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁶ *Widows of Maldivian fighters in Syria want to return*, Maldives Independent, 21 February 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y42smmcf> (30 May 2019)

⁹⁷ Family Legal Clinic website, <https://www.familylegalclinic.org.mv/> (accessed : 26 May 2019)

⁹⁸ Hope for Women NGO, established 2010, <http://hopeforwomen.org.mv/about/> / Uthema NGO, established 2016, <https://uthema.org/>

⁹⁹ *Maldivian Women say #MeToo*, UNFPA, 18 February 2018, <https://maldives.unfpa.org/en/news/maldivian-women-say-metoo> (accessed : 26 May 2019)

¹⁰⁰ *Maldivians urged to ‘call out’ street harassment*, 15 April 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/maldivians-urged-to-call-out-street-harassment-137472> (accessed : 26 May 2019)

different ways. Between 2016-2018, the MPS documented 251 reported cases of cybercrime and 258 cases of blackmail.¹⁰¹ FPA observes the rising trend to use blackmail as a tool by perpetrators of domestic violence as evident from the data shown in Image 1 below, which had risen exponentially with 98% of reported cases involving women victims while among men, this is 2%.¹⁰² As cybercrime and associated criminal acts such as blackmail increase, a need exists to strengthen the legal framework in these areas as well as building capacity of service providers to deal with such issues.

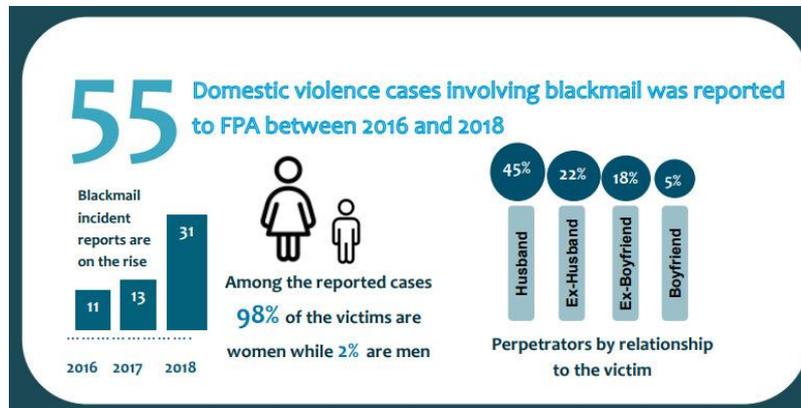


Image 1

Domestic violence cases involving blackmail between 2016-2018

Data source: Screenshot from Rivili, Vol.4, pg.4

April 2019, FPA

http://www.fpa.gov.mv/uploads/publications/rivili/Rivili_Volume_4.pdf (accessed : 26 May 2019)

7) Human rights of women

Maldives is a signatory to UN core conventions to uphold human rights of women and citizens.

- i) Maldives ratified Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which was ratified in 1993, and has also ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2006.
- ii) Maldives ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, followed by the adoption of its Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in 2002 and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2004
- iii) The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), on 19 September 2006;
- iv) The Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on 19 September 2006;
- v) The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment (CAT), on 20 April 2004;
- vi) The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), on 15 February 2006;
- vii) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), on 5 April 2010¹⁰³.

Maldives removed its reservation to the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, facilitating eligibility for Maldivian women to be elected to all public related bodies after the 2008 constitution. With regard to reservation to CEDAW article 16 a Cabinet paper prepared by the “MOGFSS in 2015, the Government has laid out, for approval of the Parliament, the aspects of CEDAW Article 16 which are in conformity with the Constitution, specifically Article 16 (1) paragraphs (b), (e), (f), (g) and (h), and full removal of reservations against Article 16 (2) (Child Marriage and Unions)¹⁰⁴.” It is assumed that with the new government elected in November 2018, the above proposal is being reviewed by the President’s Office and will submit it to the Parliament for approval, in accordance with Article 93 (b) of the Constitution.

The Law Number 8/2008 (Employment Act) prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, provides for equal pay for equal work, maximum hours of work, overtime, annual and sick leave, guidelines for workplace

¹⁰¹ Rivili, Vol.4, April 2019, FPA, http://www.fpa.gov.mv/uploads/publications/rivili/Rivili_Volume_4.pdf (accessed : 26 May 2019)

¹⁰² ibid

¹⁰³ Concluding observations adopted by the Human Rights Committee at its 105th session, 9-27 July 2012

¹⁰⁴ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 49

safety, maternity and additional parental leave. In 2018, the newly elected Administration of His Excellency President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, under the Government “One Hundred Day Pledge” extended paid maternity leave from four months to six months; and paid paternity leave from three days to one month. This has been achieved as of 7th March 2019. Furthermore, with the Employment Act, Employment Tribunal has been established to hear disputes and worker grievances. The Law further establishes the Labour Relations Authority, which too serves as an avenue to settle employment disputes¹⁰⁵.

Maldives enacted Human Trafficking Act in 2013 (Law Number 12/2013), to combat all forms of human trafficking in the Maldives and the Anti- Human Trafficking Act 12/2013 marks as a milestone in the government’s efforts human trafficking¹⁰⁶. The government also formulated National Anti-Trafficking Action Plan 2015-2019 during this reporting period. Since the Act has come into place PGO has been prosecuting cases, in collaboration with the Police. The Government also adopted an on-line case management system and gave prominence to the Anti-Trafficking Department under the authority of Police in order to increase the resources and expertise to roll out the Act. However, despite these advances Maldives has been downgraded to the Tier Two Watch list in 2018 U.S Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, citing its failure to take steps to effectively investigate and combat trafficking¹⁰⁷. The 6th Cycle State CEDAW Report 2018 highlights that it has been observed that majority of human trafficking victim having been brought in for sex work, and a smaller number for forced labour.¹⁰⁸

The National Human Rights Commission (NHI) was first established with a Presidential Decree on December 10, 2003. In 2006, Human Rights Commission Act, Law Number 6/2006 was adopted, making the HRCM the first independent and autonomous statutory body in the Maldives responsible to oversee human rights breaches. Subsequently the 2014 amendments brought to the Human Rights Commission Act in 2014 broadened the mandate and powers of HRCM, making it compliant with the Paris Principles.

The Attorney General’s Office (AGO) is in the process of re-aligning the National Human Rights Action Plan formulated in 2018 with the current government’s Manifesto¹⁰⁹. However, stakeholders stated that despite having a NHI and HR Act and so many other laws, the rights specially women are not upheld and is regressing in so many areas as highlighted below and sections of this report.

The passage of Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2012, Sexual Harassment Prevention Act 2014 Sexual Offense Act 2014 and Gender Equality Act 2016 are notable advancement with regard to recognizing women human rights in the Maldives. However, lack of institutionalization of these laws hinders the full realization of human rights of women in the Maldives. Although laws are enacted, the budgetary and technical resources are lacking in the implementation process and the change in mindset of those working in authoritative positions towards accepting these laws are not prevalent yet.

As per the stakeholders consulted, in some areas women’s human rights are regressing due to the growing conservative religious narratives. This further validates from the findings of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives study in 2012, “The right side of life”, where there is a significant drop in support for women’s rights was evident compared to the same survey done in 2005. In all seven areas surveyed (inheritance, divorces, work, politics) fewer respondents than in 2005 considered women should have equal rights with men. Subsequently the survey highlights that mostly it is the change in men’s attitudes, which attributed to this result. In 2005, about 85% men agreed that men and women should have equal rights in family matters. However, this figure has fallen to 63.73 percent in 2011, which according to the survey growing religious conservatism may have played huge part¹¹⁰. Furthermore, greater concern is the conservative religious influence on the duty bearers and service providers mentioned in the violence against section in the report. One such cases is stoning sentence verdict issued by magistrate courts in 2015 and more

¹⁰⁵ Ibid page 29

¹⁰⁶ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 22

¹⁰⁷ Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons 2015 Report https://mv.usmission.gov/wpcontent/uploads/sites/212/2016/11/TIP_Report_2015_Maldives.pdf

¹⁰⁸ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 22

¹⁰⁹ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 47

¹¹⁰ *The Right Side of Life 2011* Survey report ,Human Rights Commission of the Maldives

recently January 2019¹¹¹. Although the Maldives Supreme Court annulled these two sentences, this is alarming developments, which the Maldives has never witnessed for a long time. As per the Amendment brought to Penal Code in 2015, all appeal processes must be exhausted before any Hadd punishment based on Islamic Sharia can be carried out¹¹².

As per the 6th cycle of CEDAW state report, Maldives has put an additional layer to flogging sentences such as *hadd* offenses since 2015, such that even if a flogging sentence was passed by the lower courts, the higher courts annulled these cases¹¹³.

The last 5 years has seen a chilling effect on human rights defenders to publicly express dissent due to threats to their lives from conservative elements, where independent institutions such as HRCM and security forces were paralyzed to provide safe and secure environment for voicing out on women rights and other rights-based issues. During this period of time many who advocate on women rights issues were character assassinated and harassed for their activism¹¹⁴. In this period a rights-based blogger, satirist and journalist was brutally murdered by people believed to have links with religious extremists. A journalist was abducted in 2014, prior to which in 2012, a progressive Islamic scholar and MP was brutally murdered by people with links to extremists as well. To this date none of these murders have been solved which in turn doesn't give much confidence to advocates of their safety and security. While the rights advocates are threatened, the State has failed to take a stand on extremist scholars who propagate conservative narratives which has potential to reverse the gains made on women rights in the Maldives.

Maldivian women continue to lag in national governing structures whereby their lived realities are lacking in implementation of the laws and policies which affects them. Women representation in the current government cabinet is at 35%, by far the highest in recent years. In the parliament out of 87 members there's only 4 female MPs which is a record low in the last 19 years, dropping women representation at just 4.6% women, 95.4% men. Just 8 out of 195 currently sitting judges/magistrates are women, with gender representation at 4% women and 96% men. Women representation at local council stands the same as justice sector 96% and 4% of women. While Civil Service is the biggest government employer and women consists to be employed at lower echelon earning the lower wage category, consisting of 55.6% women.¹¹⁵ In public sector 19.5 % of women are in managerial positions as of 2016. At present, 40.16% of employees working in the judiciary, and 40.67% of court officers are women. Over 55% of the technical staff in the PGO and 56% of all lawyers nation-wide are women. Furthermore, 66.67% of Attorneys at AGO are also female.¹¹⁶

Gender justice a critical concern during this reporting period as its been observed that there is limited public confidence in the transparency and independence of the Judiciary, due to the lengthy periods for cases to be processed, and a perception of limited fairness. As of 2014, there is consensus amongst the state actors/stakeholders that much needs to be done to instill public confidence in the judicial process, to the effect that justice is served independently and impartially. To that end, an extensive reform is required in terms of infrastructural, law reform, training and capacity building within the judiciary. Such training shall specifically focus on sensitization to rights, gender disparity issues and international norms. Stakeholders have highlighted on the impunities DV perpetrators receive in the justice system referring to recent case of freeing deceased Ziyadha Naeem husband.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Maldives Independent,2019 <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/maldives-top-court-quashes-death-by-stoning-verdict-for-adultery-143374> accessed on 26th May 2019

¹¹² Maldives Independent,2019 <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/two-men-sentenced-to-40-lashes-for-drinking-alcohol-135349> accessed on 26th May 2019

¹¹³ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 31

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, Maldives Events 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/maldives>, accessed on 28th May 2019

¹¹⁵ Position Paper on women participation in public life in the Maldives 2019, Uthema Maldives and Delegation of European Union to Maldives and Sri Lanka [unpublished]

¹¹⁶ Sixth Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, 2019, Ministry of Gender, Family & Social Services, Government of Maldives, page 31

¹¹⁷ Maldives Independent 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/husband-acquitted-over-death-of-rape-victim-144494> accessed 29th May 2019

It is evident from the reports reviewed for the purpose of this report, there exists limited understanding of legal literacy of the core human rights conventions specially affecting women. The reason could be that although awareness sessions carried out by the NHI HRCM and MoGFSS, consistency and continuity is lacking and factors in challenges in institutional capacities. Stakeholders consulted for this review also highlighted without broader social change campaigns and attitude change human rights of women will not be taken seriously by the people and concerned government institutions.

8) Education and training of women

The Maldives achieved MDG 2 on universal primary education a decade ago.¹¹⁸ Public school education is free and is a Constitutional provision until middle-school although all children are provided access to free education until the completion of lower secondary level. Data published by the Ministry of Education shows that student enrolment figures have been maintained over the past 5 years (see Figures 6 & 7 below). Sustained at near parity, girls' enrolment in higher secondary education surpassed boys by 11% in 2018, which is a slight improvement towards balancing the same disparity from 2014, to achieve parity for boys. Notably, the area of special education needs (SEN) is especially weak in the country context, which is clearly evident in the referenced data showing the existing gender gap in school enrolment of girls with SEN. Compared to 2014, the data also shows a significantly widening gap in girls' enrolment in SEN by 2018, indicating a setback in this area. This evidence supports the increased vulnerabilities of the girl child and compounding factors as discussed in thematic area 3 on the girl child in this review.

Student enrolment by level & sex - 2014

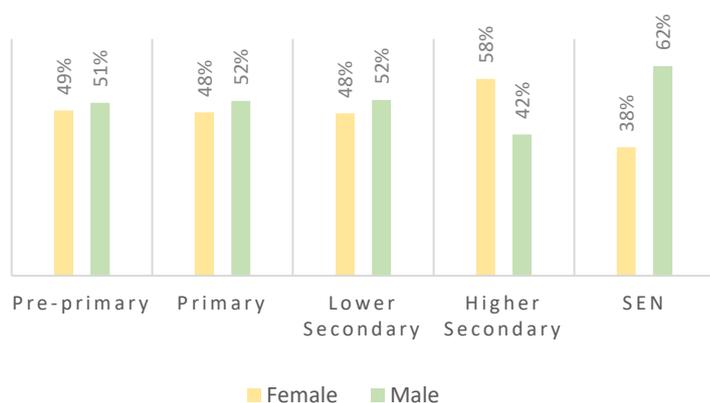


Figure 6

Student enrolment level and sex (March 2014)

Data source:

Ministry of Education, School Statistics 2014:47

Student enrolment by level & sex - 2018

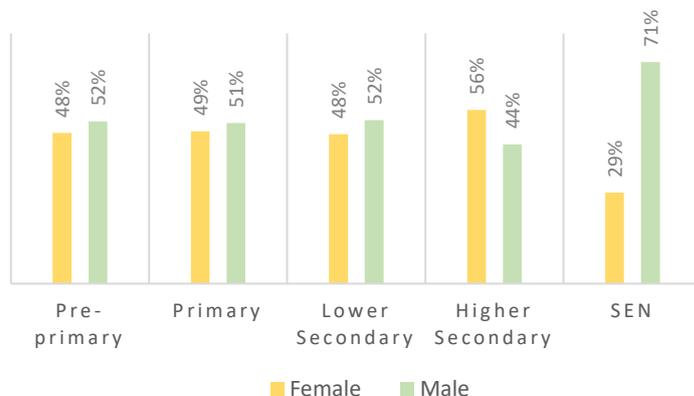


Figure 7

Student enrolment by level and sex (March 2018)

Data source:

Ministry of Education, School Statistics 2018:47

¹¹⁸ Millennium Development Goals : Maldives Country Report 2010, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

While student enrolment figures are excellent, stakeholders inform that an emerging issue is school non-attendance, which is a serious setback in a social context where education has always been valued and prioritised by parents and families. Anecdotal evidence from lead stakeholders which suggest increased levels of school non-attendance is indicative of a societal shift to under-value education, as family instability lead boys towards crime and deviancy, and family violence and abuse make girls feel less secure and disengaged from studies. This situation will have linkages to the issue of women and poverty discussed in thematic area 5 in this review. These societal factors are perceived to be having a significant impact on vulnerable students and girls in particular, which the school system do not have the resources and capacities to address.

There is a significant gender imbalance among the teachers in the school system in the country, given the traditional bias for women to enter the teaching profession. Data for 2014 and 2018 shows a persistent gender gap among the permanent teaching staff, whether they are trained or untrained (see Figures 8 & 9 below). In 2014, among local graduate teachers 77% were women and 23% men, while this disparity had increased by 2018 in this group, with 80% women and 20% men.¹¹⁹ The Maldives school system is also served by a significant number of expatriate teachers, among whom the gender distribution involves a higher percentage of men than women.¹²⁰

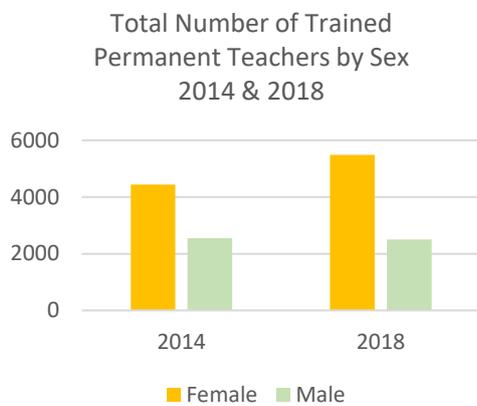


Figure 8
Total number of trained permanent teachers by sex, 2014 & 2018
Data Source :
Data source School Statistics 2014 & 2018, Ministry of Education

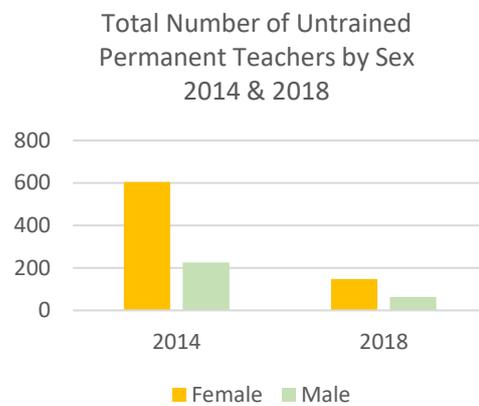


Figure 9
Total number of untrained permanent teachers by sex, 2014 & 2018
Data source : School Statistics 2014 & 2018, Ministry of Education

Stakeholders consulted for this review inform that the school performance of girls is notable including among those receiving high achievement awards. In 2014, among 126 national top 10 students, 57% were girls.¹²¹ In 2017, 45 Maldivian students were listed for the international top achievers' award for GCE A'level exam results with several girls among the high performers.¹²²

Available national level data for both public and private higher educational institutions (full and part-time) excluding the Maldives National University (MNU), shows that enrolment in higher education was near parity in 2016 with 52% male and 48% female.¹²³ In 2017 the same figures including the national university data shows the reversal of these figures with 53% women and 47% men.¹²⁴ However, it is notable that the graduate output does not reflect the higher women's participation enrolment figures. In 2016, the gender

¹¹⁹ School Statistics 2014 ; School Statistics 2018, Ministry of Education, Government of Maldives

¹²⁰ *ibid*

¹²¹ 10 Maldivian students win first place globally in A Level exams, VNews, 28 February 2014, <http://vnews.mv/16824> (accessed : 28 May 2019)

¹²² Most number of Maldives students in int'l top achievers so far, Avas.mv, 10 July 2018, <https://avas.mv/en/51290> (accessed : 28 May 2019) ; (no gender disaggregated data provided)

¹²³ Statistical Yearbook 2017, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance & Treasury, Maldives

¹²⁴ Statistical Yearbook 2018, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Finance & Treasury, Maldives

disaggregated data for graduates show 45% female and 55% male while in 2017, the gap widened to 43% female and 57% male.¹²⁵

Data published by the MNU shows a significant and persistent gender gap in graduate numbers with a clear downward trend for women graduates, which is inconsistent with the previously cited enrolment figures (see Figure 10 below). This data clearly indicates a serious problem affecting women students, which needs to be understood and addressed at an institutional and government policy level. Consulted stakeholders cite a series of challenges to women students to continue their studies, with the triple burden of paid work, unpaid care-work and study being unfeasibly challenging to many students. In February 2019, the government introduced a scheme making undergraduate education at public and private institutions tuition-free, which may improve opportunities for women to remain in higher education to complete their studies.¹²⁶

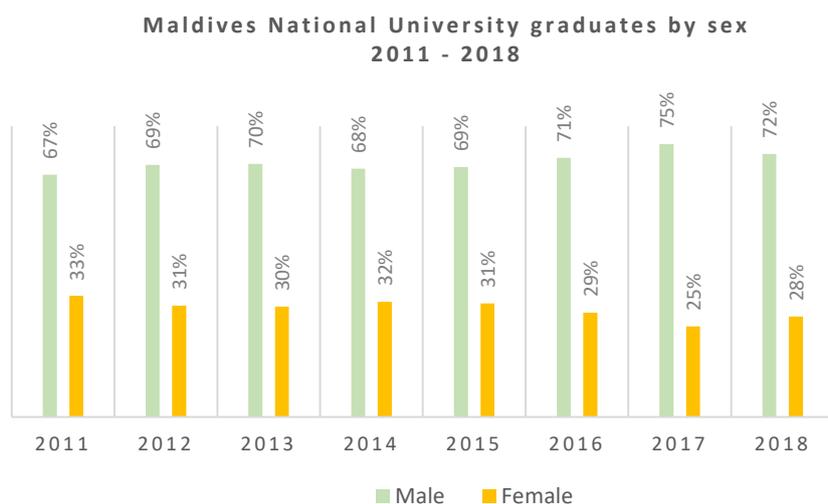


Figure 10
MNU graduate numbers by sex 2011-2018

Data source
Graduate Handbook,
MNU, 11 April 2019

Overall, social attitudes and gender stereotyping affect the higher education and employment prospects for women who are disproportionately represented in the insecure informal sector, in lower paid jobs, in both public and private sectors, regardless of educational achievements. Persisting societal norms inhibit women’s access to key industries like tourism, which is perceived as a sector unfit for a woman.¹²⁷ Consulted stakeholders inform that girls participation and uptake in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects is problematic and this is a challenge that should be addressed. In the prevailing situation, stakeholders consider a key priority to facilitate graduate women to enter the job market by providing child-care facilities to sustain formal and stable employment. Furthermore, professional women who have managed to continue contributing economically must be retained in productive work, to ensure they may move up the ranks to decision-making positions without interruptions to their career due to reproductive responsibilities. Stakeholders observe the loss in women’s productive work to the country when educated graduates are unable to enter the formal employment market and contribute, due to the lack of an enabling environment to do so for women.

9) Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women

The National Women’s Machinery (NWM) has changed three times in the last five years subjecting to restructuring and re-alignment of resources as when the change came into effect.¹²⁸ In 2014 it was changed to Ministry of Law and Gender and mid 2016 it became Ministry of Gender and Family. The current Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services was formed by the current government, which came into effect November 2018 with a huge mandate under its umbrella where all the social protection and services are housed together. It is still in its very nascent stage where the ministry is re-establishing its mandate and

¹²⁵ ibid

¹²⁶ *First degrees in Maldives made tuition-free*, Maldives Independent, 14 February 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/first-degrees-in-maldives-made-tuition-free-143760> (accessed : 28 May 2019)

¹²⁷ *Qualitative Assessment : Perceptions about Women’s Participation in Public Life in the Maldives*, IFES, 2015

¹²⁸ *Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2012*, Hope For Women NGO, pg.99

structure to establish all the social protection services such as pension, health insurance, drug rehabilitation, and above all gender mainstreaming. Maldives gender machinery is one of the institutions, which is subjected to frequent changes as when the government changes and also due to government policy changes. It is also one of the Ministries which is under-resourced (challenged with financial and human resources) to attend to the whole social development sector. At the same time the Ministry is one of the institutions, which has one of the highest staff turnovers whereby staffs leaving due to frustrations, lack of budget and due to the frequent structural changes subjected to the Ministry.¹²⁹

Under this reporting period the progress worthwhile to note is the enactment of Gender Equality Law 2016, which legally binds the government to carry out the gender mainstreaming across the government institutions. The implementation direction is housed at NWM machinery to ensure gender mainstreaming is carried under GEL. Lack of institutionalization of gender related laws such as GEL, regulations and policies is one of the biggest challenges in mainstreaming gender and improving the existing unequal gender relations in the Maldives. Although the GEL came into effect in 2016 to date, budgetary and human resource, technical requirement to roll out GEL effectively is yet to be established and strengthened. As of now, the NWM had conducted basic awareness programmes on GEL targeted to major government Ministries. The awareness programmes lack implementation guidelines with potential financial and human resources required which Ministries can adopt. It seems that a few Ministries have attempted to establish the complaint mechanism mandated by GEL but how well these complaint mechanisms are functioning is unclear. Stakeholders consulted stated that apart from the structural challenges mentioned above, gender mainstreaming is further challenged by the changing mindset of the society internalizing religious conservative narratives on women. An increasingly conservative form of Islam in Maldives is further influencing the changes in gender roles and expectations in ways that disadvantage women in both private and public spheres.

The existing Gender Equality Policy (GEP) with its revisions brought in after 2016 GEL is at the President's Office for endorsement and as well as the same applies to the Gender Equality Action Plan. It is unclear when these two policies will be endorsed. However, it is expected to be endorsed once the policy and action plan is realigned with the current government manifesto. Although the GEP is in the process of endorsement, GEL is a policy document mandated by law which government need to full

One of the key notable policy changes which came in effect in March 2019 was the extension of maternity leave to 6 months and 1 month paternity leave to all the government institutions and SOE's. Previously mothers get only 3 months as maternity leave and fathers get only 3 days of leave to be with the baby. This is seen as a huge step forward in acknowledgment of barriers facing women to access employment and addresses women's double burden on unpaid care workload women shoulder in and encourage fathers to engage and contribute to childcare process.¹³⁰ At the same time Civil Service and State Owned Enterprises (SOE's) have introduced flexible working hours to pregnant and breast feeding mothers in 2014 but this option is not available to fathers who wants to engage in primary child-care¹³¹. These policies address only one segment of the unpaid care burden by women as there are no affordable state funded day care to this date for women to remain in the labour force as significant women opt out to leave workforce after starting a family. As per the Stakeholder consultations this leaves a huge deficit of educated women out of labour force as there is little gaps in tertiary education of women and men in the Maldives.

The current government is in the process of proposing an amendment to the current Decentralization Act 2010 where ruling party has proposed to include 33% quota's in the Decentralization Act. This is an unprecedented development in the Maldives where, to date, the allocation of gender quota as a temporary special measure has been rejected by the People's Majlis even the time of passing Gender Equality Act. The

¹²⁹ *ibid*:4

¹³⁰ Maldives Independent, president announces six month maternity leave and one month paternity leave, <https://maldivesindependent.com/society/president-announces-six-months-maternity-leave-144081> accessed on 25th May 2019

¹³¹ <https://minivanewsarchive.com/news-in-brief/flexible-working-arrangements-introduced-for-mothers-in-the-civil-service-76866> accessed on 25th May 2019

proposed amendment will be discussed when the 19th People's Majlis commences on 28 May 2019.¹³² The amendment also proposes to have a WDC member at the council. For years, Women's Development Communities (WDCs) are the only formal set-up at island level to promote women's development and island development. These WDCs used to work along with then Island Office and have done remarkable developmental activities such as running preschools, pharmacies, power houses, women's mosques etc. The current Decentralization Act (2010) re-established WDCs as a legal entity elected with a huge mandate to promote women's local participation in the islands and to advise on the incorporation of women's interests and needs in local development planning and initiatives. With the existing Decentralization Act the previous WDCs were disbanded and new committees were elected. The money in the previous WDCs were taken to the State and many new formed WDCs complained that they didn't receive the previous money. Although the new WDCs were given legal status under the Decentralization Act many see this as a step back considering how it was operated before. The current WDCs are completely under resourced, with no administrative set-up and no operational budget. Furthermore, the lack of clear guidelines on role and functions means that they lack opportunities to be a part of local decision-making process which are in most cases led by all-male dominated Island and or Atoll and City Councils.

10) Women and health

Although significant challenges remain in the provision of universal access to reproductive health in the country's socio-cultural context,¹³³ Maldives had historically made excellent gains in the area of women's health, achieving MDG 5. The Maldives' difficult democratic transition since its new Constitution in 2008 and the challenges to restructuring the governance system from a centralised to a decentralised framework has resulted in several setbacks in the public health sector which experienced significant institutional changes. However, gains have been achieved in terms of the legal framework on health, with a series of laws coming into force over the last decade. Among these are the Tobacco Control Act 15/2010; the National Health Insurance Framework Act 15/2011; the Public Health Protection Act 7/2012 establishing the Health Protection Agency; the Health Services Act 7/2012; the Thalassaemia Control Act 4/2012 as well as a host of social protection and VAW/G prevention legislation affecting women's health.¹³⁴ In February 2017, a National Mental Health Policy for 2015-2025 was formulated and published, which is an important milestone in the country's health sector.¹³⁵ As in other sectors, implementation of laws remain a significant barrier to progress.

In terms of maternal health, the 2016-2017 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reported that "99% of women who had a live birth in the 5 years before the survey received ANC [ante-natal care] from a skilled provider at least once for their last birth."¹³⁶ Nationally, 95% of all births take place at a health facility in the presence of a skilled birth attendant which is a key health indicator sustained since 2009; with 80% of women and 82% of new borns receiving "a post-natal check within the first 2 days of birth".¹³⁷ A notable increase was observed in caesarean sections from 32% in 2009 to the most recent DHS findings of an increase to 40% in 2016-2017.¹³⁸ This is a significant challenge as the World Health Organisation considers the "ideal rate" of caesarean sections not to exceed 10%, after which no further improvements are observed to sustain low mortality rates.¹³⁹

Persistent challenges and setbacks in the health sector involve access to health services for women in terms of geography and mobility, as well as socio-cultural attitudes and practices which act as barriers to healthcare

¹³² Position Paper on women participation in public life in the Maldives 2019, Uthema Maldives and Delegation of European Union to Maldives and Sri Lanka [unpublished]

¹³³ *Millennium Development Goals : Maldives Country Report 2010*, Department of National Planning, Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Government of Maldives

¹³⁴ Also see legislations in place documented in other thematic areas including on poverty and VAW/G

¹³⁵ National Mental Health Policy 2015-2025, Policy/23-MoH/2017/01, 05 February 2017, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives / WHO

¹³⁶ Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2016-2017, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives / WHO / UNICEF / UNFPA / ICF, December 2018:116

¹³⁷ *ibid*:115

¹³⁸ *ibid*

¹³⁹ *Caesarean sections should only be performed when medically necessary*, World Health Organisation, News Release, 10 April 2015, <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/caesarean-sections/en/> (29 May 2019)

in maternal health, family planning services and reproductive rights. Access to emergency healthcare is a persistent structural gap in the country's healthcare services. Despite the significant gains as evident in key maternal health indicators, emergency life-saving care facilities are not available especially outside the greater Malé area, resulting in loss of lives.¹⁴⁰ The government has recently initiated a medical evacuation agreement using naval helicopters, which has seen a number of medical evacuations happening in different parts of the country.¹⁴¹ However, this kind of service has yet to be established in a sustainable way, to provide adequate health sector responses to address emergency healthcare needs across the country. The centralisation of tertiary healthcare facilities in the greater Malé area and the barriers to provide primary healthcare facilities in the atolls including at the secondary regional hospitals, remain a pressing public health service provision issue nationally.

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health is a particularly challenging area in the Maldives context, where social attitudes affect SRH (Sexual Reproductive Health) education for young people in the school system. A joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2015 by civil society actors observed the need for SRHR services in the country. Society for Health Education (SHE) is an important SRH service provider with a long service history in the NGO sector which works with the authorities to address gaps. The SHE submission reported that, "As a limited service provider in Male', SHE has attended to 1717 telephone queries from January-September 2014, providing confidential family planning counselling remotely. A significant number of these calls are from the atolls, indicating the need for this service."¹⁴² According to a 2016 study conducted by the Human Rights Commission of Maldives, "The Education Ministry highlights the challenges they face in getting parents on-board when it comes to including SRH related information in the school curriculum. The main challenge stated is the lack of parental awareness when it comes to SRH."¹⁴³ Significant structural gaps are observed in SRH service provision for women, a case in point being the mandatory requirement for a woman to obtain spousal written consent to obtain permanent methods of contraception.¹⁴⁴ The extent of the existing SRHR education, information and service delivery gaps manifest in serious negative impacts on the lives of young women, the impacts of which are significantly magnified in the Maldives socio-cultural, religious and legal context.¹⁴⁵

The latest DHS informs that marriage is near universal in the Maldives, with the median age at first marriage for women at 20.9 years and for men at 24.7 years.¹⁴⁶ With regards to family planning, the DHS found that the contraceptive prevalence rate had "declined sharply" from 35% in 2009 to 19% in the 2016-2017 survey, while data also showed the unmet need for family planning among currently married women stood at 31%.¹⁴⁷ The total fertility rate (TFR) has also declined from 2.5 in 2009 to 2.1 children per woman in the latest DHS, while the median age at first birth for women in the 25-49 year cohort stands at 23.2 years.¹⁴⁸

In terms of nutritional deficiencies, a persistent historical challenge is the prevalence of child malnutrition with both stunting and wasting, which has seen a slight decline since the DHS findings of 2009.¹⁴⁹ The prevalence of anaemia among women is 63% according to the DHS 2016-2017 and, data shows the concerning trend among women with 49% either overweight or obese, while this figure for men is 35%.¹⁵⁰ A further health concern for women is the lack of mental health services in the country and the resource limitations within the public health sector to provide mental health services for those in need, regardless of gender. While private services exist, costs are prohibitive for many. Recognising the gaps, the government

¹⁴⁰ *Probe under way into death of mother and twins*, Maldives Independent, 30 December 2018,

<https://maldivesindependent.com/society/probe-under-way-into-death-of-mother-and-twins-143305> (accessed : 29 May 2019)

¹⁴¹ *MINDF transports elderly woman from Muli to Male' via chopper*, Sun.mv, 05 January 2019, <https://en.sun.mv/51635> (accessed : 29 May 2019)

¹⁴² *Universal Period Review of Maldives*, 22nd Session - May 2015, Society for Health Education (SHE) and Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), <https://tinyurl.com/yxz5laro> (accessed : 29 May 2019)

¹⁴³ *Rights to Sexual and Reproductive Health Education 2016*, Human Rights Commission of Maldives, 2016:44

¹⁴⁴ *National Standards For Family Planning Services*, Maldives, 2017:31

¹⁴⁵ *Police investigating case of dead baby in Thulhadhoo*, Maldives Independent, 30 July 2015, <https://maldivesindependent.com/crime-2/police-investigating-case-of-dead-baby-in-thulhadhoo-115966> (accessed : 29 May 2019)

¹⁴⁶ *Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2016-2017*, Ministry of Health, Government of Maldives / WHO / UNICEF / UNFPA / ICF, December 2018:57

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*:89

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*:67

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*:155

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*:162

established the first Mental Health Centre in the country in March 2019, at the Indhira Gandhi Memorial Hospital in Malé City.¹⁵¹

Many of the above discussed health indicator dynamics and existing challenges are shaped by socio-cultural factors prevalent at a whole-society level, which require robust interventions across sectors with the participation of State institutions and civil society organisations. To achieve substantive progress in women's health, comprehensive policy level changes, education and service improvements are needed as the country works towards the global sustainable development goals.

11) Women and media

Over the last five years, the Maldivian media had experienced unprecedented challenges, with threats to the lives of journalists, and media freedom undermined with the ratification of an Anti-defamation Act in 2016 which limited freedom of expression, stifling media freedom across the board.¹⁵² In August 2014, journalist Ahmed Rilwan was abducted (in what is believed to be an 'enforced disappearance'), and in April 2017, popular blogger Yameen Rasheed was murdered.^{153,154} The threat levels increased to the point where media outlets were intimidated, vandalised, and set on fire.^{155,156} According to Reporters without Borders, "Maldives fell steadily in the World Press Freedom Index from 103rd in 2013 to 120th in 2018."¹⁵⁷ However, since the change of government in November 2018, the press freedom situation in the country had undergone a significant transformation with the repeal of the Anti-defamation Act in November 2018 and subsequent notable improvements in the press freedom index.^{158,159} The media environment in the Maldives consists of broadcast and print media which has now transitioned to online media, with a vibrant social media given the significant uptake of mobile technologies and internet accessibility.

However, women and the media is another area where research and documentation is not available in terms of formal studies and data collection, although news of a study was recently announced by a regional initiative on women and media which is yet to be published.^{160,161} Stakeholder discussions provided insights about the male-dominated nature of the editorial layers in the country's media landscape, which is reflected in the membership of the media self-regulatory body, the Maldives Media Council (MMC). From a total of 15 members in the MMC, only 4 are women.¹⁶² However, the 7 member broadcasting regulator Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC) appointed by the President, has a fairer gender balance with 3 women Commissioners.¹⁶³ Journalism in the Maldives has traditionally been a very male-dominated profession which, combined with other societal gender stereotypes and norms, explain the predominance of men in editorial teams. What this means is that currently, experienced journalists are disproportionately men. However, this situation is changing with increasing numbers of trained women journalists and significant improvements in women's participation in all areas of media, including a few at editorial levels. Stakeholders highlight that stereotyping has led to the superficial inclusion of women as news anchors and presenters in the broadcast media, which does affect the substantive participation and contribution of women in the sector.

¹⁵¹ *President opens first centre for mental health in Maldives*, Maldives Independent, 25 March 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y3hwd8ez> (accessed : 29 May 2019)

¹⁵² *An All-Out Assault on Democracy : crushing dissent in the Maldives*, Human Rights Watch, August 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/16/all-out-assault-democracy/crushing-dissent-maldives> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁵³ #FindMoyameehaa campaign website, <https://findmoyameehaa.com/> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁵⁴ #WeAreYaamyn campaign website, <https://weareyaamyn.com/> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁵⁵ *Minivan News office vandalized*, VNews, 25 September 2014, <http://vnews.mv/25978> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁵⁶ *Raajje TV destroyed in arson attack*, Minivan News, 7 October 2013, <https://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/raajje-tv-destroyed-in-arson-attack-67833> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁵⁷ *Encouraging results, promises to keep*, Reporters Without Borders, <https://rsf.org/en/maldives> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

¹⁵⁸ *Maldives improves on press freedom index*, Maldives Independent, 18 April 2019, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/maldives-improves-on-press-freedom-index-144928> (accessed : 24 May 2019)

¹⁵⁹ *Anti-defamation law repealed*, Maldives Independent, 14 November 2018, <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/anti-defamation-law-repealed-142649> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁶⁰ Announcement of women and media study at the Press Freedom Day event in Malé City, Dr Mariyam Shakeela, Addu Women's Association, 02 May 2019, Hotel Jen

¹⁶¹ *World Press Freedom Day 2019 Celebrations at Maldives*, Corporate Maldives, 5 May 2019, <https://corporatemaldives.com/world-press-freedom-day-2019-celebrations-at-maldives/> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁶² Maldives Media Council website, <http://www.mmc.org.mv/members> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

¹⁶³ Maldives Broadcasting Commission website, <http://broadcom.org.mv/v2/about/commissioners/> (accessed : 25 May 2019)

While progress has been made in women's participation in media, challenges remain for women to reach decision-making levels. There are notable exceptions such as the English language online paper Minivan News (now Maldives Independent) editor Zaheena Rasheed, who was forced into exile due to the serious security situation, whose efforts were recognised with the 2017 Freedom of Expression Journalism Award.¹⁶⁴ Currently, the English language online paper The Edition is headed by a young woman, Rae Munavvar, whose young team of reporters are also predominantly women. While State media has traditionally employed women presenters in radio, the small private radio station 97 Minivan headed by political activist and social commentator Aishath Aniya, is a notable alternative voice in the media space. The station also commands a significant listenership given its scope, which sustained itself during challenging, insecure and politically volatile times in the past 5 years.

According to one consulted stakeholder, women participate at higher levels in the secondary aspects of running a media outlet, such as in administrative management and marketing. However, when it comes to the production and influence over content, significant challenges remain which exclude women's contribution towards gender-sensitive and balanced reporting. A further challenge highlighted by stakeholders is the continuing professional capacity limitations and access to opportunities for professional development in journalism. In the Maldives context, most journalists and reporters are on-the-job trained and self-taught with minimal opportunities for training. The prevailing general media preoccupation with fast turnover of news, prioritising 'breaking news' also undermines substantive and thoughtful journalistic contributions across the media landscape. The financial challenges faced by media outlets and the dependency on advertising which creates client-loyalties also has a negative impact on the inclusion of important issues and reporting approach to certain issues.

Other challenges experienced by women in media are the cross-cutting issues rooted in the patriarchal norms and attitudes prevalent in the country. There has been achievements in law to address the issues of discrimination against women and gender-based violence in all its forms. Nevertheless, sexual harassment in the workplace, gender pay gap and discrimination against women in recruitment citing mobility, reproductive responsibilities, and household care work as limiting factors are prevalent. Acute weaknesses in the implementation of laws remain one of the biggest barriers to fair and equal treatment of women in the media.

In terms of priorities in the next 5 years, stakeholders propose the strengthening of implementation of existing laws to achieve gender equality. Additionally, they highlight the need to produce media guidelines on gender-sensitive reporting, which is required to improve the quality of reporting on issues affecting gender equality and women's empowerment.

¹⁶⁴ Zaheena Rasheed, *Maldives Independent*: "This award feels like a lifeline", Index on Censorship - YouTube, 21 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPhf_u479ml (accessed : 25 May 2019)

III – Outline of thematic areas for continued efforts and national level prioritisation to achieve the objectives of the BpFA in the next 5 years

	Thematic area of critical concern	Achievement/Progress	Challenges/Setbacks	Priorities
1	Women and the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were no notable achievements in this area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of women in decision-making in the sector eg. no women's representation at the executive level at the Ministry of Environment Persisting barriers to access higher positions for women + perception gender-based discrimination is a non-issue Climate-change impact on women & rural livelihoods Lack of inclusion & consultation with women on environmental issues Environmental threats / loss and damage to natural livelihood resources due to unsustainable development practices Women's increased vulnerability in disaster not addressed Multiple environmental issues affecting women differently – eg. water/sanitation/solid waste/livelihoods/climate change/displacement/migration/food security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase profile on issues relating to gender & climate change Prioritise sustainable development as cross-cutting areas in national planning and development, in laws/policies/plans programmes recognising the critical role of women as stakeholders in environmental issues Flexible working hours to increase inclusivity of women across public and private sectors Flexible options to make mobility viable (eg. on the job travel) Temporary special measures/quota to improve women's representation in the sector
2	Women in Power & Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased participation of women in the cabinet Signs of breaking stereotypes by appointment of women to male-dominated sectors such as MNDP/Fisheries/Transport/Planning Efforts to increase women on boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No women in decision-making positions in two sectors – MoIA & Ministry of Youth, Sports & Community Empowerment 5 member CSC has 1 woman Decreased representation of women in the Majlis Decreased representation of women in the judiciary + gender imbalance in the JSC Gender imbalance at the executive levels in the civil service Removal / resignation of a number of leading women in decision-making posts eg. High Court/Civil Court + government policy + technical levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary special measures (TSM)/quota in the People's Majlis TSM for 50% women on boards TSM to increase women's leadership in political parties
3	The Girl Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised Child Rights Act drafted Juvenile Justice Bill in parliament VAC reporting and awareness increased Amendment to Family Law regulation on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of the child inconsistent within legal framework Child marriage as a persistent issue, seen increase Anecdotal evidence on unregistered marriages of children/minors + associated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social attitude change towards gender equality and women's empowerment Economic empowerment of women – financial independence and re-

		<p>marriage of minors (more stringent to address gaps in law)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New positive change, 6 month maternity 1 month paternity leave policy 	<p>challenges [lack of adequate research]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaknesses and/or absence of support services for children affected by family violence • Negative impacts of conservative religious views on the girl child = major setback • Female circumcision prevalence (see VAW) 	<p>entry to job market after family leave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of VAW/G prevention laws + family law review • Increase inclusive public discussion/ dialogue on issues with men & boys addressing power relations in the family
4	Women and Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional guarantees for equality • Employment Act 2008 • Gender Equality Act 2016 • Improved access to tertiary education for women increasing employability • New positive change, 6 month maternity 1 month paternity leave policy • Improved access to finance but inadequate amounts (targeted MSME loans to women and youth / agri-fish loans / SME bank) • Emerging home-based work using new technologies in the digital space (eg. social media platforms) • Social media citizen activism to raise issues affecting women's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downward trend for female labour force participation rate (LFPR), 54% in 2010 down to 42% in 2016 (HIES) while men's LFPR remain unchanged from 2010, at 75% • Improved access to tertiary education for women not reflected in the LFPR, due to unpaid care-work and household work responsibilities • National gender wage gap exists – with Maldivian women earning on average, 20% or MVR 22.51 per hour less than men (HIES 2016) • Women's access to the largest industry tourism is negligible (2% according to available data from a 2012 study) • 40% of women engaged in informal sector with no paid leave / benefits / pension etc • Women do 6 hours household work while men do 3 hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise women graduates in the economy / workforce by increasing women's access to employment opportunities • Recognise, reduce and distribute women's unpaid care-work to limit burden on women • Revise loan schemes to ensure access to loans taking into account the needs of SMEs
5	Women and Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIC status – high GDP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wealth inequality gap very high with 8.2% population on low poverty line and 46.5% on high poverty line • 60% earn below MVR5000/- per month, while 1% earn above MVR20,000/- per month • 20% children living with single mother, 1% with single father – access to child maintenance issues • Women vulnerable to poverty trap – lack of access to land/capital + financial facilities to achieve economic independence & participate in economic + public life • Overburdened with reproductive & household work – e.g. taking children to school limits productive time – loss to national economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate access to work to gain financial independence • Facilitate public transport for school children to go to school to reduce burden on working mothers • Create enabling environment socially + economically for women to access and remain in employment / work • Increase women's access to key industries like tourism • Strengthen institutions supporting women such as the WDCs

6	Violence against Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2012) • Establishment of FPA and improving resource allocation and functionality (though capacity constraints exist) • Anti-human Trafficking Act (2013) • Sexual Harassment Prevention Act (2014) • Sexual Offences Act (2014) • Gender Equality Act (2016) • Increased issue awareness & reporting • Civil society activities to end VAW/G & citizen activism on social media e.g. Nufoshey/ Occupy Reygandu/MeToo /MiverinKobaa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of implementation of laws • Social attitudes towards women & VAW/G • Lack of necessary social protection services including law enforcement and access to justice • Conservative beliefs justifying VAW/G • Prevalence of female circumcision and belief it is required by religion • Radical extremism and the issue of taking wives & children to ‘jihad’ in Syria • impunity among relevant authorities and the public • low legal literacy on national laws promoting women's rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human resource development in the social service sector + professional evaluation and accountability mechanisms for service providers • Increase access to participation in public life • Create enabling environment socially + economically for women to access and remain in employment / work (e.g. childcare facilities) • Recognise women’s unpaid care-work • Need to facilitate finance beyond SME loans • Rehabilitation of returnees from foreign war zones (women/children)
7	Human Rights of Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratified all UN core human rights conventions (except on Migrant Workers) including on women – CEDAW and girls – CRC • Bill of Rights in Constitution – non-discrimination based on sex/gender • National laws to address women’s human rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2012) - Anti-human Trafficking Act (2013) - Sexual Harassment Prevention Act (2014) - Sexual Offences Act (2014) - Gender Equality Act (2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chilling effect on human rights defenders to publicly express dissent due to threats to their lives from conservative elements • Low legal literacy on international treaty obligations – primary focus on reporting • Lack of implementation of laws to achieve gender equality • Institutional weakness including the HRCM to prevent rights violations and uphold mandate • Limitations to provide services to protect women’s human rights due to human, financial and technical resource limitations • Access to justice issues and lack of confidence in the justice sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise the implementation of laws intended to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment • Invest in progressive efforts to achieve gender justice • Strengthen institutional mechanisms and resources towards achieving women’s human rights in its broadest and most inclusive sense in line with SDGs
8	Education and Training of Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls out-perform boys from primary to A’level achieving better learning outcomes • Student enrolment parity/balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent social norm gender stereotyping jobs/work – gender-imbalance in health & education sectors • Paradox of girls outperforming boys at A-levels, high women’s enrolment at university, yet less 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address gender-stereotyping to change social attitudes to achieve meaningful progress towards gender

			<p>than 50% women graduate output a concerning trend evident at the MNU, indicating acute limitations for women to complete tertiary education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low participation of women in STEM • Impact of family violence on girls' education – disengagement from studies and school • Observed cultural shift de-valuing education impacting school attendance 	<p>equality & women's empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of women in the workplace to ensure balanced representation at decision-making levels • Childcare facilities to create enabling environment for women to remain in work • Make tertiary / HE accessible across the country • prioritise retention of women in higher education to achieve gender parity in graduate output
9	Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Equality Act • Gender Policy aligned with manifesto • Gender Action Plan • Proposed amendment to Decentralisation Act to adopt quota of 33% in local councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad mandate with limited human, financial and technical resources • Frequent restructuring of the gender ministry (3 times in the last 5 years) with negative impact to functionality and service provision • Increasing conservative religious beliefs undermining gender equality and women's empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure structural stability and sustainability of the institutions established to address long-standing societal beliefs and practices that discriminate against women • Ensure implementation of laws to achieve gender equality & women's empowerment • Provide human, financial & technical resources to establish & improve services
10	Women and health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened legal framework, including health plus gender equality (require implementation) • National Mental Health Policy formulated • National mental health centre established at IGMH • Sustained maternal and newborn health indicators (but acute service provision challenges nationwide) • Introduction of medical evacuation (but availability and sustainability issues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weaknesses in the implementation of laws • Resource limitations and serious access to health service limitations outside greater Malé • Concerning levels of caesarean sections – 32% in 2009 risen to 40% in 2016-2017 • Absence of emergency and life-saving care services to all including pregnant women • Persistent challenges accessing family planning/SRHR including education, services and commodities • Spousal consent required in family planning guidelines for women to access sterilisation a key structural barrier to women's SRH and rights to bodily autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise implementation of sector laws and complementary laws in other areas impacting women's health, to achieve SDG3,4,5 • Improve resource allocation, capacity building and systemic clarity to strengthen & improve service delivery for women • Prioritise policy level initiatives to increase awareness of C-sections with a view to reducing to WHO recommended levels of 10% • Prioritise policy changes to facilitate

				<p>women's access to SRHR + education in schools to prevent life-cycle negative health impacts due to absence of SRHR information & services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise access to mental health services
11	Women and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019, Maldives has improved in the Press Freedom Index by 22 points • Women's representation in the Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC) is 3 out of 7 • Increased participation of women in the media, particularly 'visible' media (but this has a superficial/ stereotyping element) • Increased numbers of trained women journalists • Notable women editors who are exception to the rule, eg. Zaheena Rasheed, (Minivan News), Aishath Aniya (97 Minivan) and Rae Munavvar (The Edition) 	<p>The media situation is completely different to all other sectors in the sense that the situation deteriorated dramatically since 2014, until the change of government in November 2018.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2014 – abduction of journalist Ahmed Rilwan • 2016 - Anti-defamation Act undermining freedom of expression and the media • 2017 – murder of blogger Yameen Rasheed • Attacks on media personnel and media outlets creating fear and insecurity for journalists, eg: Minivan News office, VTV station vandalised & arson attack on RaajjeTV • Press Freedom Index fell from 103rd in 2013 to 120th in 2018 • The 15 member MMC consists of just 4 women • Journalism traditionally male-dominated means experienced journalists are mostly men • Sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious insecurity and barrier to women in the media • Stereotyping and discrimination against women in recruitment is a persistent problem for women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise the implementation of laws intended to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment • Prioritise the production of media guidelines to report on gender issues to strengthen capacity of journalists to report on gender issues • Increase gender sensitisation initiatives for media editors/personnel to improve media portrayal of women as well as reduce barriers to women's full participation in all areas of the media landscape

Annex 1

List of consulted stakeholders as key informants

#	Thematic areas of critical concern	Consulted key stakeholders	Date of consultation
1	Women and the environment	1) Thilmeeza Hussain Ambassador to the UN and the USA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maldives	16 May 2019
		2) Aisha Niyaz Environmental Consultant	23 May 2019
2	Women in power and decision-making	3) Aminath Athifa Minister for Housing and Urban Planning, Government of Maldives	21 May 2019
3	The girl child	4) Muruthala Moosa Advocacy Manager Advocating Rights of Children (ARC) NGO	19 May 2019
		5) Mohamed Naeem, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Maldives	18 May 2019
4	Women and economy	6) Raniya Sobir, Board Member, Uthema NGO	16 May 2019
		7) Anna Hamdy Economic Analyst	18 May 2019
		8) Shifana Wajeed, Entrepreneur	20 May 2019
5	Women and poverty	9) Shifa Mohamed, Mayor, Malé City Council	25 May 2019
		10) Azha Zameer, Member Women's Development Committee, Malé City Council	22 May 2019
6	Violence against women	11) Aminath Leena Ali, CEO, Family Protection Authority	20 May 2019
		12) Zeenath Shakir, Director, Programmes, Research & Advocacy, Family Protection Authority	20 May 2019
		13) Aminath Shirani Naeem Deputy Director General, Social Services Department, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services	19 May 2019
7	Human rights of women	14) Aneesa Ahmed, former Chairperson Hope for Women NGO	23 May 2019
		15) Fareesha Abdulla, Human Rights Lawyer	22 May 2019
8	Education and training of women	16) Fathimath Azza, Director General, Ministry of Education	27 May 2019
		17) Zeenaaz Fahmy Quality Assurance Controller, Maldives National University	20 May 2019
9	Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women	18) Shadiya Ibrahim, Assistant Representative, UNFPA Maldives	15 May 2019
		19) Aneesa Ahmed, former Chairperson Hope for Women NGO	23 May 2019
10	Women and health	20) Aishath Shaheen Ismail former Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, Maldives National University	Responses to questions received by email.
11	Women and media	21) Rae Munavvar, Editor, The Edition online English newspaper	22 May 2019
		22) Asiyath Mohamed Saeed, Journalist, Mihaaru News	22 May 2019

Annex 2

BPFA Review attendees for validation

Date: 27 May 2019

Venue: Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services

#	Name	Organization
1	Fathimath Yumna	Deputy Minister, Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
2	Zeenaz Fahmy	Maldives National University
3	Aishath Niyaz	Self-employed/Sustainable development consultant
4	Aishath Shirani Naeem	Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
5	Aneesa Ahmed	Hope for Women NGO
6	Mariyam Alaniya	Youth
7	Ainy Shiyam	Youth
8	Mauroof Nahid	Youth
9	Haleemath Nahula	Youth
10	Rashdhan Riyaz	Youth
11	Ahmed Ahlam Niyaz	Youth
12	Ibrahim Hamdhan Abdulla	Youth
13	Mibsam Hassan Zareer	Youth
14	Lyaanie Fathih	Youth
15	Murthala Moosa	Advocating Rights of Children NGO
16	Aminath Jala Zuhury	Advocating Rights of Children NGO
17	Aishath Iyad	PILCMV

Annex 3

Changes to the national women's machinery – 1979 to 2019

Title of National Machinery	Period
Preparatory Committee for the UN Decade for Women (under National Planning Agency)	1979 – 1981
Office for Women's Affairs National Women's Council (under President's Office)	1981 – 1989
Department of Women's Affairs National Women's Council (under Department)	1989 – 1993
Ministry of Youth, Women's Affairs and Sports National Women's Council (under Ministry)	1993 – 1996
Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare National Women's Council (under Ministry)	1996 – 1998
Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security National Women's Council (under Ministry)	1998 – 2003
National Women's Council dissolved. Replaced with the : Gender Equality Council, headed by President Gayyoom	2000
Ministry of Gender, Family Development and Social Security Gender Equality Council [Defunct*]	2003 – 2005
Gender Focal Points in all line Ministries [Inactive] Gender Equality Council ["paper entity – defunct"*]	2005 – 2008
Department of Gender and Family Protection Services (DGFPS) under the new Ministry of Health and Family Gender Focal Point – President Nasheed at the National Planning Council Gender Focal Points in all line Ministries – Deputy Minister level [no longer in effect due to change of government on 07 Feb 2012]	Nov 2008 – 07 Feb 2012
Department of Gender and Family Protection Services (DGFPS) under the new Ministry of Gender, Family and Human Rights	07 May 2012 to July 2013
Ministry of Health and Gender	November 2013 to July 2014
Ministry of Law and Gender	July 2014 June 2016
Ministry of Gender and Family	June 2016 to November 2018
Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Service	November 2018 to date

Note:

- Reference source for information from 1979 - 2013 :
Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women 2012, Hope for Women NGO, 2012:99,
- Additional information updated from 2014 to date from Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Service website.