



Women in Public Life in the Maldives

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

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“....If women are not present, we lack 50% of the contribution and views to govern our country..”

– Male research participant, 26-50 years, South

Foreword

Maldives has made significant progress on gender equity and equality in recent years. This has been reflected in the country's development indicators, such as high literacy rates for both men and women, and gender parity in enrolment and attainment in primary and secondary education. I believe that this has also been visible in the quality of life enjoyed by many women in the Maldives. Maldives also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1993, and has made major strides in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Nevertheless, the country still has a significant way to go in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in the areas of participation and leadership in public life.

This report on women in public life in the Maldives indicates that, while the benefits of participation of women is generally accepted, limited opportunities and information for women, and cultural barriers, restrict the choices available to them. In addition, limited resources, cultural barriers and in some cases conservative religious groups combine to restrict the participation and leadership of women in society, politics and decision making. This represents a significant loss to the country as a whole when the voice and potential contribution of half its population is not fully harnessed. With the rapid changes that Maldives has been experiencing in the past years, and the resulting implications to the economic and socio-political structures of the country, it is imperative that the participation and contribution of women is ensured and valued.

The recommendations in this report include the need to promote the contributions of women, and changing societal attitudes towards women's participation and leadership. It is my sincere hope that this report provides a useful groundwork towards this end and efforts are made to uphold national and international commitments made towards supporting and empowering women of the country.



Andrew Cox
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This research project has benefited from the generous contributions of time of many individuals. I would like in particular to thank the many women and men in the North and South Atolls who participated in the research for sharing their insights and experiences. Your input is invaluable. I would also like to thank the staff of UNDP, Maldives and the Department of Gender, Ministry of Health and Family for their valuable contributions and support throughout the process. Finally, the many female home-based workers, professionals, women's rights advocates, parliamentarians and civil servants who are passionate in the fight for gender equality. I hope this report goes some way to supporting your efforts.

Ingrid Quinn
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Executive Summary

The gender gap in public life and politics is a global challenge that the world community continues to face in the 21st century.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the current role of Maldivian women in public life, focusing on political, economic and social spheres. The findings are intended to inform and guide the development of national strategies of the Government of Maldives, and to support a stronger role for Maldivian women in leading and managing the reform process and participating, to a greater degree, in political debate.

The Maldives is committed to the principle of gender equality through numerous national and international commitments. The Constitution of the Maldives (2008) guarantees equality between men and women, and gender mainstreaming has been adopted as national policy to integrate gender perspectives in policy, planning and budgeting.

Gender roles and responsibilities are defined within a unique cultural framework. Men typically occupy the upper echelons of the social hierarchy and women face subtle and sometimes overt forms of subordination¹. In the Maldives, the combined influence of the country's South Asian heritage and Islamic traditions have played an important role in conditioning social behaviour.

Gender inequalities within political, economic and social spheres are the result of structural, functional and cultural barriers to women's participation in public life. Gender identity is mediated through social positioning along the lines of religious, socio-economic status, and the urban versus outer island divide. Women are not a homogenous group and thus do not always share the same constraints and opportunities to participate in public life.

Despite progress at the national level, women remain under-represented in the political and economic spheres. A shift towards a more conservative interpretation of Islam has resulted in women's roles in the public domain becoming increasingly restricted.

The barriers that undermine women's capacity to participate in public decision-making demand a multi-sectoral approach. Recommendations to strengthen the role of women in public life include: a) clarifying and upholding gender equality commitments in the context of legislation and policy obligations and Sharia law; b) development of national awareness raising campaigns aimed at shifting public perceptions of women; c) increased policy dialogue and support for gender sensitisation processes within government structures; d) support for the development of inclusive strategies of political party Women's Wings; e) making women's economic contributions visible; f) identification and use of positive female role models; g) networking and coalition building and importantly; h) development and implementation of mechanisms to address harassment of women in all areas of life.

Despite the challenges faced, both women and men at national and local levels remain steadfastly optimistic and committed to the increased participation, representation and influence of women in public life.

¹ UN, 2000, Gender and Development in the Maldives, A review of Twenty Years, 1979-1999, by Husna Razee.

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AP	Adhaalath Party
BTCNTC	Building Trust Confidence and National Trust Capacities Project
CEDAW	Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DGFPS	Department of Gender and Family Protection Services
DRP	Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JSC	Judicial Services Commission
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MDP	Maldivian Democratic Party
NGO	Non Government Organisation
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN	United Nations

Key Terms, Gender Concepts & Definitions

In line with National Gender Equality Policy of the Maldives, Government of the Maldives, May 2009 (Draft 1), the following gender concepts and definitions are applicable to the research;

Empowerment; A process or phenomenon that allows people to take greater control over the decisions, assets, policies, processes and institutions that affect their lives. The five main principles of empowerment are awareness, participation, mobilization, access and control.

Gender; Gender characteristics are not natural or biological, but are socially assigned roles and relations between men and women. Gender relationship relates to a range of institutional and social issues rather than a specific relationship between certain male and female individuals, and are often differentiated, leading to different outcomes for women and men. Societies create and assign gender attributes to girls and boys, men and women, and there is often considerable social pressure to conform to these ideas about behaviour.

Gender Awareness: The ability to identify problems arising from gender inequality and discrimination.²

Gender-blind policy: Recognises no distinction between the sexes. Policies incorporate biases in favour of existing gender relations and therefore tend to exclude women.

Gender Equality; Women and men's similarities and differences are recognized and equally valued. Men and women enjoy equal status, recognition and consideration. Women and men enjoy;

- Equal conditions to realize their full potential and ambitions;
- Equal opportunities and equal access
- to opportunities to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from society's resources and development;
- Equal freedoms and quality of life;
- Equal outcomes in all aspects of life.

Gender Gaps: The female-male disparities in socio-economic status, in access to resources and public services and in social and political participation at all levels.

Gender Mainstreaming: the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.³

Gender-Responsive Governance; Gender-responsive governance is an important step in achieving good governance. Gender-responsive governance seeks to ensure that institutions, policies, programs and projects; involve women and men equally in government processes; learn about, take seriously, and respond to the needs, interests and priorities of all members of society; distribute resources and benefits of development equally between women and men; ensure that men and women, girls and boys enjoy equal quality of life.

Mainstreaming Women; An approach that emphasizes the need to increase the number of women and women's active participation in mainstream activities, particularly in politics, leadership and governance; key decision- making processes at all levels, in all sectors. It is a strategy based on the

² UN, 2000, Gender and Development in the Maldives, A review of Twenty Years, 1979-1999, by Husna Razee,

³ United Nations, OSAGI, 2002, Gender Mainstreaming, An Overview, New York

recognition that men and women have different life experiences, different needs and priorities and are affected differently by policies and programs. Therefore, in addition to it being women's right to participate in decision-making – their participation makes sense from a government efficiency and effectiveness perspective – as it results in more effective government policies, programs and projects.

Public Life; For the purposes of this assessment, the UN in the Maldives has defined public life as including; participation in income generating and entrepreneurship; political leadership; and participation in the social sector.

Sex: refers to the physical and biological difference between women and men. It refers to whether people are born female or male.

Sex disaggregated data: Information collected, via questionnaires, observation or other techniques, which reveals the different roles and responsibilities of men and women.

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1 Introduction

The gender gap in public life and politics is a global challenge that the world community continues to face in the 21st century.

Over the past years the Human Development Index (HDI) of the Maldives has increased progressively. Maldives is currently classified as a lower middle income country¹. While the HDI measures average achievement in basic human development capabilities, the GDI adjusts this to reflect the inequalities between men and women. At 0.767 (2007 index) the GDI is almost equal (99.5%) to the HDI and ranks the Maldives 47th of 155 countries with both HDI and GDI values.²

In contrast, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) reflects whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It tracks the share of seats in parliament held by women; female legislators, senior officials and managers; and of female professional and technical workers- and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence. Focussing on women's opportunities rather than their capabilities, the GEM captures inequality in political and economic participation and decision-making, and in power over economic resources. With a value of 0.429 (2007 index) Maldives ranks 90th out of 109 countries in the GEM.³

Although the HDI score has increased progressively over the years with an almost equal GDI, the GEM reflects a considerable gap in women's opportunities in taking active part in economic and political life. The Global Gender Gap Index, introduced by the World Economic Forum, also reflects a considerable gap between men and women in economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment.

The Maldives is committed to the principle of gender equality through numerous national and international commitments. The Constitution of the Maldives (2008) guarantees equality between men and women and gender mainstreaming has been adopted as national policy to integrate gender perspectives in policy, planning and budgeting.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the current role of Maldivian women in public life focusing on political, economic and social spheres and encompassing both public and private sectors examples. Findings will be used to inform and guide the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the country and towards the development of the UNDP Building Trust Confidence and National Capacities (BTCNC) strategy in "supporting a stronger role for Maldivian women in leading and managing the reform process, and in participating to a greater degree in political debate."⁴

The research objectives are three-fold;

1. To provide a snapshot of the current situation in terms of women's participation, representation and leadership in public life (public and private sector), namely in the economic, social and political spheres of the country;
2. To provide information on public knowledge, attitudes and perception regarding women's participation, representation and leadership in public life in both the public and private sector; and
3. To develop case studies of women's experiences (currently active in public life) in order to document the opportunities and challenges that exist for women

¹ World Bank Index, 2008, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/maldives>

² Human Development Report, 2009, http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_MDV.html

³ Human Development Report, 2009, http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_MDV.html

⁴ UNDP, Maldives, Terms of Reference, Women in Public Life, June 2010

The research will address the following overarching questions;

- What are the current strategies in place to promote the participation of women in public life at national level?
- What are the current public views - knowledge, attitudes and perceptions - regarding women's participation, representation and leadership in public life in both public and private sectors?
- What are the current challenges and opportunities to increasing women's a) participation b) representation and c) leadership in political, economic and social spheres?
- What are the variables underlying the lack of women's a) access b) participation and c) representation and leadership women in the political, economic and social spheres?
- How can the identified variables be effectively addressed?

The research design is a cross sectional qualitative assessment with three components. In order to contextualize the current issues and priorities for women in public life in the Maldives, a systematic literature review was undertaken by the international research consultant followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussions (FDG) and case studies.

For the detailed Methodology please refer to Annex A. For the complete Terms of Reference (ToR) please see Annex B.

2 Background

Republic of The Maldives

The Republic of the Maldives is a nation of small Islands with limited cultivable land. Located in the Indian Ocean, it consists of 1,190 islands of which less than 200 islands are inhabited. Grouped into 20 natural atolls, fifteen percent of the islands have less than 500 inhabitants and fifty percent have less than 1,000 inhabitants. The capital Male' accommodates one third of the country's population (estimated at 300,000) in an area of approximately two square kilometres. This gives the Maldives a geography that is challenging, even by the standards of small archipelagic states.⁵

Many characteristics of poverty found in other parts of South Asia are not in evident in the Maldives. During the past two decades, the development of the tourism and fisheries sectors, favourable external conditions, large inflows of external aid, and generally prudent economic management contributed to a steady rise in GDP of 7% per annum. Two decades of strong growth has led to some of the best economic, social and health indicators in South Asia with the average per capita income of the Maldives approximately \$4,135⁶; the youth literacy rate (15-24) is 99%⁷; life expectancy at birth is 72 years⁸; infant mortality is 24 per 1,000 live births⁹; and maternal mortality is 120 per 100,000 live birth¹⁰. The Maldives' Human Development Index (HDI), at 0.771¹¹, ranking the Maldives 95 out of 155 countries.¹²

In 1968, three years after independence, the Maldives became a Republic. Dominating the islands' political scene for 30 years, President Gayoom was subsequently elected for six successive terms by single-party referendums. In mid 2004, following riots in the capital Male', the president and his government pledged to embark upon democratic reforms, including a more representative political system and expanded political freedoms. Political parties were legalized in 2005. In June 2008, the Special Majlis finalized a new constitution, which was ratified by the president in August 2008. The first-ever presidential elections under a multi-candidate, multi-party system were held in October 2008. President Mohamed Nasheed was elected in a runoff poll.¹³

The Maldives has been classified as a lower middle income country by the World Bank. As a tiny, open economy the country is vulnerable to events beyond its control, including geopolitics, global economic developments, and climate change. The economy depends heavily on both the tourism and fishery industries. Ninety percent of government tax revenue is derived from tourism-related taxes and import duties. Although fisheries constitute a small fraction of GDP growth, they remain vital in the economy as they are the main provider of food and employment in many of



Source: CIA The World Factbook 2009

⁵ ADB, September 2007, Maldives: Poverty Assessment, Manila, Philippines

⁶ World Bank Index, 2008, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/maldives>, accessed 27 June 2010

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ UNDP, 2010, Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific Human Development Report

¹¹ Ibid

¹² ADB, September 2007, Maldives: Poverty Assessment, Manila, Philippines

¹³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mv.html>

the atolls.¹⁴ Agriculture and manufacturing play a lesser role in the economy, constrained by the limited availability of cultivable land and the shortage of domestic labour. Most staple foods must be imported.¹⁵

Expatriate workers represent 25% of the Maldivian population and just under 80% of Maldivian employment. The labour market is characterized by the under representation of women and considerable gender imbalances.¹⁶ The labour force participation rate of women is 56% and men 78%.¹⁷ Youth unemployment remains one of the most significant social challenges with the inability of the labour market to absorb the growing number of school leavers.¹⁸

The government's economic policy agenda is centred on diversification of the economy and increasing the role of the private sector through support for entrepreneurial activities. By strengthening social service delivery, increasing economic opportunities in the atolls as well as developing human resources for the hospitality industry and promoting fishery exports, the government aims to promote regional equity.¹⁹ The Maldives has formally accepted the obligations of the ILO Constitution with Maldivian membership becoming effective on 15 May 2009.²⁰

The culture of the Maldives is, in part, related to the island geography of the country. In the Maldives, fisheries has been traditionally the most important economic activity. The relative isolation of the country has also protected the country from foreign influences. This has enabled the Maldives to preserve a unique culture, social structure of values and beliefs. The economic needs of people have provided an important basis for the roles and expectations between the genders with women generally expected to play a domestic role with men occupying the public and political domains. Religion and language are important forces that have helped shape the culture, traditions and way of life of all Maldivians. People share a system of values based on the principles of Islam and share a single language (Dhivehi).

¹⁴ ABD, 2010, Asian Development Outlook, South Asia, Maldives, Manila, Philippines, <http://www.adb.org/documents/books/ado/2010/MLD.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mv.html>

¹⁶ UNDAF, Maldives, 2011-2015, Outcome 5, Economic Sector, 2009

¹⁷ World Economic Forum, 2009, Global Gender Gap Report 2009

¹⁸ UNDAF Maldives, 2011-2015, Outcome 5, Economic Sector, 2009

¹⁹ World Bank, Maldives Economic Update, September 2009

²⁰ ILO, 2010, www.ilo.org, accessed 12 August 2010

3 Gender Frameworks

3.1 International Gender Frameworks

International Commitments to Gender Equality²¹

The Maldives became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) in 1993²² and the CEDAW Optional Protocol in 2006.²³ Reservations include Article 7 (a) and Article 16;

Article 7 (a) “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies.”

Article 16: “The Government of the Republic of Maldives reserves its right to apply article 16 of the Convention concerning the equality of men and women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations without prejudice to the provisions of the Islamic Sharia, which govern all marital and family relations of the 100 percent Muslim population of the Maldives.”

The Maldives is signatory to a number of international instruments addressing gender equality and a party to all major human rights treaties, with the exception of the Conventions on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

Civil & Political Rights

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 1966 (signatory 2006)
- ICCPR Optional Protocol 1966 (signatory 2006)

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1966) (signatory 2006)

The Maldives is also party to the Commonwealth Action Plans on Gender Equality.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)²⁴

The Maldives is committed to the achievement of the MDGs by 2015. The Second MDG Progress Report (2007) comes after the country experienced the devastation of the tsunami and it is mid-point into the global target of achieving the goals by 2015. Findings reveal that whilst the country is generally on track in achieving the MDGs, challenges remain to achieve the goals on MDG 3; Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.

²¹ UNDP, 2010, Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific Human Development Report, Indicators

²² to the extent that the provision contained in the said paragraph conflicts with the provision of article 34 of the (previous) Constitution of the Republic of Maldives.

²³ CEDAW, Reservations, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm#N35>, accessed 9 September 2010. 23 June 1999

²³ UN CEDAW, Reservations, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm#N35>, accessed 9 September 2010. 23 June 1999

²⁴ http://www.planning.gov.mv/en/images/stories/publications/mdg/mdgs_maldives_country_report_2007.pdf, accessed 29 July 2010

According to the Report, the poorer are now less poor, but income inequality is rising. Universal primary school enrolment has been met, but achievement levels fall short of expectation. While gender parity has been achieved in education and proportion of women in paying jobs is increasing, men still dominate decision-making. In the political sphere, women remain under represented at all levels.

3.2 National Gender Frameworks

The legal system of the Maldives is based on a combination of Islamic law and English common law. With relation to personal status, the basis of the law is Islamic Sharia as adapted to the Maldivian judicial system.²⁵

National Commitments to Gender Equality

Under the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives (2008) all persons are guaranteed the same rights and freedoms.

Article 17(a) stipulates non-discrimination of any kind, “including race, national origin, colour, sex, age, mental or physical disability, political or other opinion, property, birth or other status, or native island;” and Article 17(b) legitimises Temporary Special Measures or Affirmative Action to redress inequalities.

Article 18 explicitly stipulates the duty of the State to follow the constitutional provisions of fundamental rights and promote the rights and freedoms of the people.

Increased women’s participation in leadership and decision-making positions is a major priority of the government.²⁶ In January 2008, the People’s Special Majilis (Constituent Assembly) removed the gender bar on women running for President – a vital step towards upholding the Maldives international commitments under CEDAW and UN human rights conventions.²⁷

National Gender Policy

The National Gender Equality Policy (Draft 1)²⁸ is founded on the fundamental principle of Equality for All, enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of the Maldives (2008). Through the dual approach of gender mainstreaming and strategic action on Empowerment and the Advancement of Women in all areas, the policy aims to promote fundamental human rights and rewards of democracy on a basis of equality.²⁹

The National Gender Equality Policy (Draft 1)³⁰ outlines the vision, guiding principles, policy goals and strategies to attain gender equality in the Maldives.

The vision is “a just society where equality of women and men are upheld, women enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms on a basis of equality of men and women, and both women and men are able to realize their full potential and participate in and benefit from democracy and development both in public and private life”.

²⁵ Government of Maldives, 2010, Common Core Document Forming Part of the Reports of States Parties, 16 February 2010

²⁶ Government of the Maldives, 2010, Common Core Document Forming Part of the Report of State Parties, 16 February 2010

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Draft 1, Republic of Maldives, May 2009

²⁹ UNDP Maldives, United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAP) 2011-2015

³⁰ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Republic of Maldives, May 2009

There are four guiding principles and four policy goals that underlie the vision;

1. Equality of women and men
2. Recognition that traditional, customary and cultural practices that negatively affect women and girls are a violation of human rights
3. Recognition that public and private are not separable spheres of life
4. Women's entitlement to the right of integrity and security of person

With the overarching goal being “*to realise the stated vision of the National Gender Equality Policy through timely, strategic interventions at all levels, within all sectors, and through multi-sectoral collaboration to address thematic areas relevant across sectors*”, the broad policy goals are four-fold;

1. To develop and activate the necessary policy, legislative and institutional framework for gender equality, so that women and men enjoy fundamental human rights and rewards of democracy on a basis of equality of men and women
2. To empower women to facilitate their equal access to available opportunities with equal outcomes/results on a basis of equality of men and women
3. To cultivate a culture of non-discrimination and respect for women's human rights, so that women enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field on a basis of equality of men and women
4. To eliminate all forms of discrimination against women

National Gender Architecture

The new Government elected in 2008 brought changes to the gender architecture within the Government.

The President heads the National Planning Council, and acts as the Gender Focal Point for this Council.³¹ The Presidents Office has appointed a Gender and Social Development Advisor – a resource dedicated to gender leadership and the implementation of gender strategies, policies and plans. The national gender action plan based on the National Gender Policy is in the process of being formulated.³²

Gender Focal Points at Deputy Minister level have also been appointed in all line Ministries and are tasked with coordination and networking leading to a coherent approach to gender mainstreaming in their respective ministries.³³

The former Ministry of Gender and Family has been absorbed into the Ministry of Health and Family (MHF) as the Department of Gender and Family Protection Services (DGFPS).³⁴ The Ministry of Health and Family is the lead agency for gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality in national government.³⁵

³¹ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Draft 1, Republic of Maldives, May 2009, Government of the Maldives

³² Meeting with Presidential Advisors, 14 July 2010

³³ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Draft 1, Republic of Maldives, May 2009, Government of the Maldives

³⁴ Human Rights Report 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136090.htm>, accessed 25 June 2010

³⁵ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Draft 1, Republic of Maldives, May 2009, Government of the Maldives

The mission of the Ministry of Health and Family is to “Establish systems for health, well-being and social protection of its people; provision of affordable, accessible and quality healthcare services and drug rehabilitation services, and strengthen mechanisms for protecting the rights of its children, women, persons with disabilities and the elderly and sustain the quality of the healthcare and social protection services.”³⁶

In addition, the mandate of the DGFPS includes³⁷;

1. Establishing and monitoring the necessary framework/system to;
 - Increase the participation of women and people with special needs in political, economic and social development of the nation
 - Strengthen the role of women’s committees and civil society organisations (CSOs) working on women’s rights and the rights of people with special needs
 - Work towards maintaining gender equality in all areas
2. Establishing protocols/regulations on how to work towards providing equal/equitable opportunities to both sexes; organising ways in which women can participate in social, economic and political fields and encouraging women to participate.

On March 8 2009, the Government established a Rf 10 million (\$780,000) Fund for the Economic Development of Women. Provided by the Asian Development Bank as part loan and part grant, the project is designed to encourage economic independence by assisting in the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises.³⁸ Within the fund there is a 40% quota for women.

Beyond the scope of this assignment is an in-depth analysis of administering justice in the context of international and national gender frameworks and the Maldivian Judicial System.

3.3 United Nations Development Programme

Commitment to Gender Equality Programming in the Maldives

At global level, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) subscribes to a dual approach to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In the Maldives, the United Nations Development Programme is committed to supporting gender equality, specifically through support for the gender mainstreaming policy of the government. Under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2011-2015, specific thematic programme areas to improve women’s empowerment include;³⁹

- Improved individual, institutional and systemic capacities to promote gender equality and non-discrimination, and to empower women and girls to enjoy their rights in all spheres of life in line with national commitments by 2015
- Strengthen advocacy capacity of parliamentarians, religious institutions, civil society, the private sector and media to promote gender equality, women’s rights and empowerment and action, including by men and boys to prevent violence against women
- Enhanced political participation and leadership of women in decision making at the national level
- Enabling environment for increased female participation in the labour force

³⁶ Ministry of Health and Family website, <http://www.health.gov.mv/#>, accessed 2 August 2010

³⁷ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Draft 1, Republic of Maldives, May 2009, Government of the Maldives

³⁸ US State Department, 2009 Human Rights Report: Maldives, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136090.htm>

³⁹ UNDP Maldives, United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2011-2015

4 Status of Women in the Maldives

4.1 Gender Roles

Gender roles and responsibilities are defined within a particular cultural framework. The Maldives has over the centuries, evolved its distinct life style and culture, where men typically occupy the upper echelons of the social hierarchy and women face subtle and sometimes overt forms of subordination.⁴⁰ In the Maldives, the combined influence of the country's South Asian heritage and Islamic traditions have played an important role in conditioning/influencing social behaviour.

A culture of unequal gender relations influences the social behaviour of boys and girls at an early age. A culture of protectiveness is seen in early socialization when girls are encouraged to remain at home and develop characteristics such as shyness and subservience while boys are encouraged to be out-going, forward and self confident. This culture of protectiveness is carried forward and displayed by society towards women.

The minimum age of marriage for women and men is 18 years. Women are expected to take charge of the domestic front and men dominate the public and political domains. Domestic burden is high due to large extended family household particularly in rural areas. Typically, decision making is undertaken by male heads of households and/or male family members.

Although the family is the most important social unit in Maldivian society, the Maldives has one of the highest divorce rates in the world and divorce carries no stigma. Half of households in the Maldives are headed by women (42% of households⁴¹), including 40% in Male' and 44% in the Atolls.⁴²

4.2 Health

Access to basic health services is now nearly universal in the Maldives, and significant progress has been made in improving access to maternal and child health services and family planning, impacting positively on infant, child and maternal mortality statistics which have been successively reduced. In 2006, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) of the Maldives was 69/100,000.

There is, however, an unmet need for modern contraception (only 37% have access) amongst married women and an increase in unwanted pregnancies amongst unmarried youth. Malnutrition is a major contributor to complications and mortality of women during childbirth, and underweight babies. Women are also at risk during complicated pregnancies due to the lack of affordable transport to atoll referral hospitals or the capital in the case of complications experienced while giving birth.⁴³

Other challenges faced by women that affect their reproductive health include domestic violence and abuse, lower financial security due to broken marriage, lack of assistance from men during pregnancy due to men working outside their islands, and the role of women as caretakers of children and the elderly.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ UN, 2000, Gender and Development in the Maldives, A review of Twenty Years, 1979-1999, by Husna Razee.

⁴¹ Government of the Maldives, Ministry of Planning & National Development, March, 2007, Census of the Maldives, 2006

⁴² These figures include households where the male breadwinner is working and residing away from home.

⁴³ ADB, 2007, Maldives: Gender and Development Assessment, September 2007

⁴⁴ UNDP Maldives, 2010, Reproductive and Maternal Health, sourced from BTCNTC Project, Governance Unit

4.3 Education⁴⁵

Literacy rates for women and men are 97%.⁴⁶ Females outnumber males in primary and secondary school enrolment (Primary school: 97% female, 96% male, Secondary school: 71% female, 67% male)⁴⁷. Cultural expectations regarding young women living away from home impact upon the numbers of female students studying away from home islands and abroad and hence female attainment of tertiary qualifications. From 1995 to 2000 a total of 876 students were awarded government scholarships to study abroad, 42% of which went to girls. From 2001 to 2005, 39% of undergraduate scholarships went to girls, 38% of post-graduate scholarships and 22% of doctorate scholarships.

4.4 Women's Political Participation

Whilst the Maldives Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is 76, the under-representation of women reflected in the low proportion of seats held by women in national parliament and other decision making bodies is indicative of the challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment in the Maldives.⁴⁸

Amongst legislators, senior officials and managers only 15 percent are female. Women comprise only 6.5% of parliamentarians (5 women of a total 77 seats) and hold 14% of Ministerial positions.⁴⁹ In 2007 the first female judges were appointed and currently among magistrates, there is one female. With the reform process, the Maldives now has a female member of the Civil Service Commission and two out of three members of the National Human Rights Commission are female.⁵⁰ More recently, Women's Development Committees (WDC) in atolls and islands have been abolished as an independent entity under the (then) Ministry of Gender. Under the decentralisation process, Women's Development Committees will come under the Island, Atoll and City Councils, once they are elected.⁵¹

Women are starkly under-represented at the local level. Currently, of the fifteen Atoll Councillors, no women hold the position. Of a total 167 Island Councillors there are only two female Island Councillors.⁵²

4.5 Women's Labour Force Participation

Traditionally women played a significant role in the economy of the country. While the men were involved in fishing, women were involved in fish processing and making materials used for traditional housing such as rope and thatch weaving. The rise of tourism and industrialisation of the fishing industry depleted job opportunities from the islands to resorts and industrial islands.⁵³ Currently, women dominate the informal sector with almost 90 percent working as self-employed home-based workers.⁵⁴

The government is the largest employer in the Maldives, and employs 62% males and 38% females. Females however make up 54% of temporary government jobs and are concentrated in the

⁴⁵ ADB, September 2007, Maldives: Gender and Development Assessment, Manila, Philippines

⁴⁶ World Economic Forum. 2009. The Global Gender Gap 2009 Report: Country Profiles. http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/gggo9_maldives.pdf

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The GEM - gender empowerment measure - is a composite indicator that captures gender inequality in three key areas: Political participation and decision-making, as measured by women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats; Economic participation and decision-making power, as measured by two indicators - women's and men's percentage shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers and women's and men's percentage shares of professional and technical positions; Power over economic resources, as measured by women's and men's estimated earned income (PPP US\$).

⁴⁹ World Economic Forum. 2008. The Global Gender Gap 2008 Report: Country Profiles. http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/gggo8_maldives.pdf

⁵⁰ Government of the Maldives, 2010, Common Core Document Forming Part of the Report of State Parties, Republic of the Maldives, 16 February 2010

⁵¹ UNDP Maldives, UNDAF 2011-2015, Outcome 8 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, paragraph 46

⁵² <http://www.maldivesinfo.gov.mv/home/files/downloads.php>

⁵³ UNDP Maldives, UNDAF 2011-2015, Building Trust Confidence and National Capacities project

⁵⁴ Ibid

education, health and welfare sectors,⁵⁵ whereas males dominate in the services sector and the senior ranks of the public service.⁵⁶

The Education sector employs the second highest number of females at national level, with female teachers dominating the primary and tertiary levels.⁵⁷ The Tourism sector continues to be dominated by males (87%), with women comprising 13% of workers in this sector.

Despite the rapid growth of female labour force participation, the female unemployment rate continues to be almost three times higher than males.⁵⁸ The unemployment rate for female adults in 2009 was three times that of males (23.68% and 7.9% respectively).⁵⁹

Women, especially in the islands are primarily engaged in home-based income generating activities. Nearly half the employed females in the atolls and 40% of employed females in Male' fall into the category of home-based own-account workers or contributing family workers.

Labour force participation varies in different Atolls. In male-headed households, employment stands at 84%, contrasted with female-headed household employment levels of 47%.⁶⁰

Women who worked for wages receive pay equal to that of men in the same positions. According to the Human Rights Commission Maldives (HRCM), despite provisions in the constitution and the 2008 Employment Act, there were no policies in place that provide equal opportunities for women's employment.⁶¹ The absence of childcare facilities made it difficult for women to remain employed after they had children; it is socially unacceptable for women to stay on resort islands for extended periods, which discouraged women from working at tourist resorts. The HRCM also received reports that some employers discouraged women from marriage or pregnancy, as it could result in employment termination or demotion.⁶²

4.6 Poverty

Whilst there is no single, nationally accepted poverty line in the Maldives, a "low" poverty line of Rfio (\$0.78) per person per day, and a high poverty line of Rf15 (\$1.17) per person per day are commonly used to characterize the income poor.⁶³ According to the Maldives Poverty Assessment (2007)⁶⁴, female-headed households are likely to be poorer, with one in three female headed households falling under the poverty line of Rf15.

The poor live in larger households and are likely to have a higher proportion of people with bad health, a larger share of women, and household members are likely to have lower education. They are also far more likely to be poor if the households are female headed. Regional factors also play an important role; people are more likely to fall into poverty if they lived in the two Northern regions.⁶⁵

According to the 2006 Census, women owned less than half the amount of property compared to men with women accounting for 31.3% of housing ownership compared to 65.5% housing ownership by men.⁶⁶

⁵⁵ ADB, September 2007, Maldives: Gender and Development Assessment, Manila, Philippines

⁵⁶ International Labour Organization (ILO), Key Indicators of the Labour Market database, Catalog Sources World Development Indicators, The International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC)

Employees are people who work for a public or private employer and receive remuneration in wages, salary, commission, tips, piece rates, or pay in kind. Services correspond to divisions 6-9 (ISIC revision 2) or tabulation categories G-P (ISIC revision 3) and include wholesale and retail trade and restaurants and hotels; transport, storage, and communications; financing, insurance, real estate, and business services; and community, social, and personal services.

⁵⁷ World Economic Forum. 2009. The Global Gender Gap 2009 Report: Country Profiles. http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/gggo9_maldives.pdf

⁵⁸ UNDP Maldives, UNDAF 2011-2015, Outcome 8 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

⁵⁹ World Economic Forum. 2009. The Global Gender Gap 2009 Report: Country Profiles. http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/gggo9_maldives.pdf

⁶⁰ Government of the Maldives, Ministry of Planning & National Development, March, 2007, Census of the Maldives, 2006.

⁶¹ Human Rights Commission Maldives (HRCM), August 2009, Human Rights Report Maldives, Male', Maldives

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ ADB, Maldives: Poverty Assessment, September 2007, Manila, Philippines

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Ministry of Planning and National Development, March 2007, National Population and Housing Census, Maldives, 2006

4.7 Religion⁶⁷

The ethos of Islam is very strong in the Maldives. It is not conceivable that one could be a Maldivian and not be a Muslim.⁶⁸

According to Islamic feminist scholar Shehadeh (2003), Muslims seeking to forge a modern indigenous identity tend to fall into two groups; the liberal reformers or modernists who believe in combining Islamic traditions with Western liberalism and conservatives, who cling to tradition in the belief that any deviation would subvert all Islamic social structures and efface all barriers facing incipient Western domination.

Recent increase in conservative thought and preaching is being observed in the Maldives, which advocates for a more private role for women in society. As more radical ideologies become integrated into the mainstream this has increasing repercussions for the participation of women in the public sphere.

⁶⁷ Shehadeh, L, 2003, The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam, UPF, USA

⁶⁸ Maloney, C, 1980, People of the Maldives, Orient Longman, New Delhi

5 Research Methodology

The aim of this research was to provide a snapshot of the situation, knowledge, attitudes and perceptions regarding the representation and participation of women in public life.

5.1 Methods

A literature review was conducted to gain background and factual information for the study. In addition in depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted.

In depth interview

In order to gain an understanding of the views and perceptions of women in public life and to inform the development of the field research, key stakeholder in-depth interviews were conducted in the private and public sectors at national level. This included Ministers, Deputy Ministers, government advisors, private sector stakeholders, United Nations representatives and civil society.

In Male', fifteen stakeholders were interviewed. This included female and male politicians, line ministry personnel, NGO and private sector representatives. The following section reflects the findings. For a detailed list of participants please see Annex C.

Focus Group Discussions

At island level, focus groups discussions (FGD) were conducted with community members. Focus group discussions findings reflect the knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of women and men in three locations; Male' (Capital), Kanditheemu (North) and Feydoo (South). Case studies of women in public life illustrate the successes and challenges faced by women.

It should be noted that the Island Councillors in the North and South selected FGD participants, as did the United Nations in Male'. In some instances, groups were heterogeneous including the male 18-25 year age group in Male', who were all students at the Faculty of Sharia Law. Due to external constraints, it was not possible to conduct a focus group discussion with men over 50 years in Male'.

Table 3. Focus Group Discussions – Location, Number, Age and Sex of Participants

Location	No. of Participants	Women	Men
1. Male' (Capital)	3-6 members	18-25 years 26-50 years 50+ years	18-25 years 26-50 years
2. North Atoll	6-8 members	18-25 years 26-50 years 50+ years	18-25 years 26-50 years 50+ years
3. South Atoll	3-7 members	18-25 years 26-50 years 50+ years	18-25 years 26-50 years 50+ years

Demographic Descriptions of the Respondents

A total of 88 participants took part in the knowledge, attitudes and perception (KAP) focus group discussions. Participants included 48 women and 40 men. Ages for women ranged from 18 years to 69 years and for men 18 years to 71 years. Participants live/reside in Male' (14 women, 8 men), Kanditheemu, North Atoll (18 women, 18 men) and Feydoo, South Atoll (16 women and 14 men). Almost one-third of women mentioned they were currently unemployed (29 women). Unemployed male participants represented just over half this figure with 15 men noting they were currently unemployed. Table 4 reflects the employment status of participants by sex.

Table 4. Employment Status by Sex

Employment Status	No. of Women	No. of Men
Employed	7	16
Unemployed	29	15
Student	3	5
Retired	1	3
Did not respond	8	1

5.2 Constraints and Limitations

The following is a brief overview of the constraints and limitations of the field research;

- Political instability during the period of the research meant it was not possible to interview some key and line ministry stakeholders
- Due to logistical and time constraints, it was not possible to conduct field research in more than three atolls (Male', North and South). There are substantial arguments to assume that conclusions drawn in this study might not be applicable to other locations
- Participants were selected by UNDP in Male' and/or authorities (ie: Island Councillor) in the islands and thus may reflect research bias
- The research coordinator/consultant is a native English speaker and does not speak Dhivehi. Research documentation such as the KAP questionnaire, in-depth interview questions and focus group discussions were translated from English into Dhivehi and from Dhivehi into English. Defining contextual use and meanings is difficult and it is possible subtleties of meaning are lost in the translation process. Focus of the translation process was therefore on meaning rather than terminology
- Research support staff brought a combination of skills to the research process; however had limited experience in conducting focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

6 Women in the Economy

6.1 Focus Group Discussions

Women in the labour force are concentrated in the traditionally female dominated spheres of education, health and teaching and dominate lower level positions. Participants are aware that the government employs a high percentage of female government workers. This is largely viewed as positive and equated to equal representation. It is, however generally overlooked that women are concentrated in supporting roles and thus have little influence in decision-making, particularly in sectors traditionally dominated by males such as Finance, Tourism, Economic Development.

At island level, income generation activities for women in the North included thatch weaving and making short eats. In the South, women are primarily engaged in sales work (shops), running their own small business (cake selling, short eats) and resort work (cleaning). In Male', female participants were engaged in white collar work including government administration.

Knowledge

Family, friends and other networks were viewed as being an important mechanism through which job seekers could access information, seek advice regarding work opportunities and gain employment;

'Connections are very important, it's who you know.'

– Woman 18-25 years, Male'

Employment regulations in general are well known and issues such as working hours, holiday and leave conditions including specific regulations regarding maternity leave allowance are familiar subjects. Differences in support for working mothers in the public and private sectors are noted; the civil service offers more flexible options for women, enabling women to balance work and family life.

'The private sector is less flexible towards women than the civil service.'

– Women 26-50 years, Male'

Equal pay for equal work was a recurring theme, particularly amongst young women;

'Equal competence should equate to the same level of recognition and salary.'

– Woman 18-25 years, Male'

For young women on the islands, lack of information regarding professional options, employment opportunities and availability of vocational training are specific barriers to seeking employment.

'None of us really reflected on the option to work in other occupations beyond child rearing and taking care of the household. We don't know the options.'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

'I heard about people working at resorts but I don't know what they do.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

'It's very difficult to access training programmes here.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

Attitudes

Attitudes towards the participation of women in the labour force varied across locations, genders and age groups. Contradictions were apparent across the generations, with young people in Male' and the North more likely to hold a traditional view.

'It's preferable for a woman to rear children and take care of the house, rather than to join the workforce.'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

'If women leave children to be looked after by someone else it has a negative effect...a mother is the best person to educate and care for her child.'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

'If a husband earns enough, a woman should be at home.'

– Woman 26-50 year, South

'I think the absence of women at home is detrimental to the next generation. Being in public life brings so much chaos.'

– Man 26-50 years, North

'I don't think it's a good idea for more women to join the workforce...'

– Woman 26-50 year, North

In contrast,

'Women should have equal opportunity to work in any field or profession they choose.'

– Woman, 50+ years, North

Perceptions

Opportunities for women to join the workforce were perceived as limited and in part related to the lack of educational opportunities for girls;

'There is not much opportunity for women, we need to invest in education for women and this takes time and money.'

– Man 26-50 years, South

'On this island, we have had only two girls in two years who completed O levels. This restricts their future work opportunities.'

– Man 50+, North

'In the Maldives there is limited opportunity for women in all sectors.'

– Women 50+ years, North

'There should be more choices, other options apart from nursing and teaching.'

– Man 26-50 years, North

Specific obstacles facing women in different locations included mobility and safety issues and geographic isolation that further restrict access to work and training opportunities in the formal labour sector (ie: tourism).

'More certainty regarding employment conditions and proper regulations for women to work safely is needed.'

– Man 26-50 years, North

In one group, it was suggested that women getting married and having children presents an obstacle to gainful employment;

'...getting married and having children is a huge disadvantage for women because employers [discriminate] and would rather employ a man'.

– Man, 50+ years, South

Interestingly, home based work is perceived as equally valuable to work in the formal labour force;

'Females can work from home and earn an income. You don't necessarily have to go to an office to earn an income and it should still be considered as participating in the economy.'

– Man 26-50 years, North

Others highlighted the reluctance of Maldivians to take on work perceived as below one's capacity as an obstacle to employment;

'If you want an income, jobs are available although it might not be the job you dream about'.

– Man 26-50 years, South

'We have become lazy, that's why foreigner workers are here.'

– Woman, 50+ years, Male

'Maldivians have too much pride to do some [low] paid jobs.'

– Woman, 50+ years, Male

The 26-50 year age groups more commonly held the view that foreign workers play a role in the lack of opportunities available to Maldivian workers. In the South, the recent case of middle-aged female workers reportedly being made redundant from their jobs as cleaners at a nearby tourist resort, to be replaced by migrant workers, highlights this issue.

'Female workers from this island used to work in the resort and now they have brought in foreigners to do the job.'

– Man, 50+ years, South

The benefits of women's participation in the workforce were clearly articulated by older female and male participants as follows;

'Women contribute positively to the development of the country and not just at community and household level.'

– Woman, 50+ years, South

'The community definitely benefits from having women in the workforce...the majority of jobs here are undertaken by women.'

– Man, 50+ years, South

'The roles of men and women are mutually supportive, for example in the fishing industry.'

– Woman, 50+ years, North

'Public views have shifted, we now have a female Island Chief, for example.'

– Man, 50+ years, South

Freedom to choose the type and level of work is an important aspect of gaining employment. It was, however, evident that the choice of work is heavily influenced by male members of household, particularly husbands and fathers. The following quotes reflect the tension between individual empowerment and accepted social norms;

'Women should have equal opportunity to work in any field or profession they choose.'

– Woman, 50+ years, North

'Women have every right to be in top level positions.'

– Man, 26-50 years, North

'I can't imagine giving up work [when I marry], I hope I don't have too'.

– Woman, 26-50 years, Male'

'I want to work after I get married – for my family and for myself.'

– Woman, 18-25 years, South

'I used to teach before I got married but my husband asked me to stay at home. Now that I have children, I don't want to go back to work.'

– Woman 18-25 years, North

6.2 In depth Interviews

Challenges to women entering the economy fall into two broad categories; structural/institutional challenges and practical constraints.

A number of stakeholders, both female and male made reference to recent changes to civil service work policy. Some 39% of government employees are women, mostly engaged in lower level positions. Changes to official working hours for government employees have resulted in significant challenges for working mothers, particularly those with school-aged children. Whilst the Employment Act allows for 60 days maternity leave and other provisions for new mothers including feeding breaks, in practice these provisions were cited as possible obstacles to women in being selected for senior positions as the following comment reflects;

'Can you imagine if we enabled child bearing women to hold decision making positions in parliament and then they all got pregnant? The country would collapse!'

– Government stakeholder, Male'

Stakeholders recognized the contributions of women to raising the economy of the islands, particularly in fishing and agricultural sectors. However, traditional roles have shifted. The mutually supporting systems developed at community level are slowly being eroded, and the role and influence of women is slowly diminishing;

'The communities no longer have women leaders which makes it difficult for women's voices to be heard'

– Private Sector Stakeholder, Male'

Self-employed home-based income generation activities comprise the bulk of women's labour on the islands. Formal employment opportunities for women at island level are limited. This is perceived as being one of the biggest obstacles to increasing women's presence and influence in the economy.

At island level, restrictions on women's mobility were cited as another key obstacle to women's employment. The consensus amongst national level stakeholders is that family members are often reluctant to allow women to travel alone to other islands for work.

'Five years ago the industry had a negative reputation, but this has since shifted.'

– Private Sector stakeholder, Male'

'There is no problem of women working in the tourism sector.'

– Government Stakeholder, Male'

Stakeholders highlighted that women contribute to the economy in ways that are not always visible;

‘Women are engaged in the economy, it’s just not visible.’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

‘Almost every company in the Maldives has women as shareholders.’

– Private Sector stakeholder, Male’

Stakeholders generally supported the increased visibility of women in the labour force and recognition of women having the right to work was agreed; however, the challenge of balancing domestic responsibilities with work commitments clearly rests with women;

“In the Maldives, a woman’s place is still in the home”

– Member of Parliament, Male’

‘Women’s needs should be addressed, at the same time this should not disturb the family’ unit – this needs to be strengthened and protected.

– Government stakeholder, Male’

A number of ministries cited the high percentage of women working in government as evidence of their commitment to women’s participation, incorrectly implying that large numbers of women equates to equal influence in decision making and failing to recognize that the majority of women are employed in support functions.

‘Most employees in my ministry are women’

– Government Stakeholder, Male’

Private sector stakeholders suggested opportunities for collaboration between the private and public sector exist and should be used to support an increased role for women in the workforce. Currently, dialogue between these stakeholders is limited;

‘We don’t understand what the government is doing.’

– Private Sector stakeholder, Male’

‘Decisions have been made by the Ministry without consultation.’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

A number of employers raised the absence of life skills and a mismatch in skills to the needs of the employment market as a key obstacle to young women and men gaining employment. It was suggested that school leavers entering the workforce are;

‘...ill equipped with basic life skills..’

– Private Sector stakeholder, Male’

and that this has a detrimental effect on both the working experiences of young people, as well as the organisations that employ them.

Stakeholders predicting growth in the education, banking and communication sectors over the next 10 years highlighted the urgent need for awareness raising programmes for job seekers and school leavers.

Interestingly, one government stakeholder suggested that the focus of gender balanced representation should be towards encouraging men into domains traditionally associated with women, such as the health sector;

‘In Cabinet, I have encouraged the idea of more men training as nurses.’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

Perceptions of women’s willingness and commitment to work were also highlighted as a possible obstacle to women’s employment;

‘Staff, particularly women are not willing to go the extra mile – this prevents women from rising up the ranks’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

7 Women in Politics

7.1 Focus Group Discussions

Political parties were legalized in 2005. The first-ever presidential elections under a multi-candidate, multi-party system were held in October 2008. All participants have access to one or more sources of media (TV, internet, newspaper) and are engaged in current politics. Although in its infancy, high public expectations to see tangible benefits from the democratic political transition, was evident.

Knowledge

There is a lack of knowledge and a clear understanding of democracy, the current multi-party system, political processes and structures. Participants were forthcoming in articulating a lack of clarity on what democracy means and what the implications of political change is at the national and local levels;

‘None of us know what democracy means.’

– Woman 50+, North

‘I don’t understand what democracy means. I am not sure what it will bring or how it works.’

– Woman 26-50 years, North

‘Democracy? No-one really knows what it means...everyone has their own version..’

– Woman 26-50 years South

‘Party politics has only been introduced in the political sphere and not to the people. We men can hardly understand it, and women understand it less than us..’

– Man 26-50 years, North

‘People don’t know what a party system is.’

– Man 26-50 years, North

Participants expressed frustration and disempowered caused by the lack of transparency regarding political process and expressed the need for civic education;

‘We need education...sensitization and a gradual shift. Not the way democracy has happened here.’

– Man 50+ years, South

The transition to a multi-party democracy has resulted in institutional changes, including abolishing the Women’s Development Committees (WDC) in their current form and the withdrawal of WDC national budget allocation.

Throughout the research locations, the Women's Development Committees (WDC) have a strong reputation for supporting the community, and specifically for providing a solid platform and framework for women to network, plan, implement and action initiatives that support community needs. The WDC contributions at the island level are well known and both WDC and the broader community are aware that WDC funding has ceased. The underlying decision making process, however is not understood. Women in the North and South expressed regret that the Women's Development Committee has lost their influence in the community because of political differences at national level.

'Before the political change, the whole community used to participate in doing communal work on the island. Now that has all changed.'

– Woman 18-25 years, North

In discussions regarding initiatives to support increased women's participation in politics, small numbers of participants in each location articulated government initiatives to increase women's participation, including the removal of the Constitutional ban on women becoming President, international commitments to gender equality and the proposed introduction of the quota system;

'The new Constitution allows females to become President.'

– Man 18-25 years, North

'The Maldives has signed international treaties on equality (CEDAW).'

– Man 50+, South

'A quota system was proposed but removed at the last phase.'

– Woman 26-50 years, Male

Further, participants acknowledge that if the government is to achieve gender equality and fulfil its obligations to increase women's representation, then proactive policies, plans and programmes need to be in place;

'There is not enough awareness amongst women of the options to join politics'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

'We need to ensure more women can participate'

– Man, 50+ years, South

Attitudes

The impact of national level political change has resulted in people at local level becoming highly politicized. For many participants, democracy equates to instability at island level. Current political changes have polarized the communities along party lines. As a result communities and families are divided along political viewpoints. A number of participants both male and female in the North and South expressed the challenge of separating political views from personal views. At the extreme, participants in the North and South noted that businesses have been detrimentally affected due to differing political alliances.

'The change has disrupted the unity that existed before. People have taken politics to a personal level and division exists on the island due to politics.'

– Man 26-50 years, North

'This used to be a strong united community and now it is totally fragmented along party lines.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

'Families are divided due to politics. Friends have separated.'

– Man, 18-25 years North

'Business has been negatively affected by political alliances.

Social and political life needs to be separated.'

– Man, 18-25 years , North

People are aware that although there are currently five women MPs in Parliament, under the current government women are proportionately less represented. Participants are attuned to the fact that each of the female MPs come from families with a long history in the political sphere. Hence, the opinion is that holding political office, particularly as a woman is only attainable for the political elite. It was also recognized that women holding political office does not necessarily translate into women's needs being addressed at nation policy or local levels.

Views regarding women's participation in politics differed from staunch opposition to full support. Strongest advocates of support were among men 50+ age group in the South. They expressed strong support for the presence and representation of women. Asked whether they would support female family members to enter the political arena, a number responded in the affirmative.

'Women should have a say in governing the country. If women are not present we are lacking 50% of the contribution and views governing the country.'

– Man 26-50 years, South

'I would support my sister if she wanted to be represented at national level....'

– Man 26-50 years, North

'I like strong women and yes, I would like my daughter to go into politics'

– Man, 50+ years, South

In stark contrast, the views of urban men suggest more conservative views and that they are unlikely to support women in the family entering politics;

'Our religious beliefs say women are supposed to stay at home.'

– Man, 18-25 years, Male'

'A female cannot be President because religion doesn't allow women to be in that position.'

– Man 26-50 years, Male'

'The Constitution might say everyone is equal, but religion trumps the Constitution.'

– Man 26-50 years, Male'

Interestingly, some women also seem to hold rather conservative views about women's participation in politics.

'Women need time to rear children so they cannot set aside time for such a demanding position'

– Woman, 26-50 years, North

'I would feel very nervous if my daughter wanted to enter into politics...political instability is difficult.'

– Woman 50+ years, South

However a sense of hopefulness was also articulated that in the future there would be an increased presence of women in politics.

'We are very new to democracy, five women in the Majlis is a very good start.'

– Woman 26-50 years, Male'

'We are in an infant stage of democracy...every five years you'll see more and more women in politics.'

– Woman 26-50 years, South

'Things are different now compared to when I was growing up...for the younger generation, seeing women in Parliament will be completely normal.'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

The contribution of women in politics was also acknowledged as not always being public but rather 'behind the scenes';

'Women are working behind the scenes but are not really visible.'

– Woman 26-50 years, Male'

Perceptions

Democracy is perceived with a degree of sceptism even fear.

'I have seen no benefit of democracy on this Island.'

– Man 50+ years, South

'Democracy came in the hope things would be better, but this two party democracy has just brought trouble.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

'Everyone has been affected by the political change. There has been a big change with a negative impact.'

– Woman 50+ years, North

'Democracy has created a scary situation. Life is more expensive and people you don't know, call you at night to tell you about political demonstrations.'

– Woman 50+ years, Male'

'The reason for two political parties? So one can critique the other!'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

It is perceived that religious and cultural beliefs and socialization processes that dictate appropriate behaviour for women, are incompatible with a role in political life;

'Religion and culture are the reasons women are not more represented in national level politics.'

– Woman 26-50 years, Male'

'People loose respect for you if you are [a woman] involved in politics.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

Female participants also suggested that women are not often publicly supportive of other women in public roles and that this presents an additional barrier to women's participation;

'Women are not really open to accepting women in public life.'

– Women 26-50 years, North

These views were countered by women in the South who were enthusiastic and supportive of the idea of a female holding the highest office of President, as were a number of young women regarding the role they can play in the political sphere;

'It would be an honour to have a female president'

– Woman 50+ South

'I would definitely like to represent my community in a political role.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

'I would like a political position and would like to stand for election in my Ward...'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

Female participants perceived courage and a willingness to carry responsibility as key qualities of a successful politician. It was perceived by some that these might be qualities that women do not possess;

'A woman wouldn't have the courage.'

– Woman 50+ years, Male'

'Women don't have the courage to carry such responsibility.'

– Woman 50+ years, Male'

'Females are more shy and hesitant.....'

– Woman 50+ years, North

7.2 In depth Interviews

Increased women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions is a major priority of the government.⁶⁹ The new Government 2008 elections brought changes to the existing government gender architecture. The Constituent Assembly removed the gender bar on women running for President. The National Gender Equality Policy (Draft 1)⁷⁰ has been formulated and outlines the vision, guiding principles, policy goals and strategies to attain gender equality in the Maldives.

The Ministry of Health and Family (MHF) is the lead agency for gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality in national government⁷¹, The Presidential Social Development and Gender Advisor has been tasked with advising and supporting the gender mainstreaming process and promoting strategic action to empowerment women. Gender Focal Points (GFP) at Deputy Minister or higher level have been appointed in all line Ministries and are tasked with coordination and networking leading to a coherent approach to gender mainstreaming in their respective ministries.⁷²

It was acknowledged by a number of government stakeholders that women were proportionally better represented under the previous regime. Currently, there are five female Members of Parliament of a total 77 (representing 6.5%), and the Cabinet has only one female representative. It was noted that the current female MPs are those from families with a long tradition of political involvement.

National level initiatives to support the increased representation of women at national level include a recent proposal within the Decentralisation Bill to include a 30% quota for women. This was unsuccessful, however serves to highlight the need for affirmative action in order to achieve gender-balanced representation. Its failure to pass was cited by a number of stakeholders as reflective of the attitudes of men in decision making positions and the threat that women in decision making positions are thought to present to men in influential roles.

At the local level, women's empowerment is systematically supported in the form of island Women's Development Committees. Traditionally, women's mosques have also played a significant role in the collective action of women on the outer islands.

Feedback from line ministry stakeholders suggests that at local level, women's architecture is undergoing a systemic dissolution. The WDC mandate was to 'develop women at island level' and comprised of locally elected members, has had national government funding withdrawn. The DGFPs is currently assessing funding mechanisms in support of the WDCs.

The process of reform/decentralisation further opens opportunities to increase the participation

⁶⁹ Government of the Maldives, 2010, Common Core Document Forming Part of the Report of State Parties, Republic of the Maldives, 16 February 2010

⁷⁰ National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Operationalisation, Republic of Maldives, May 2009

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid

and representation of women at the local level. Political party women's wing leaders were asked about the party strategies in place to support the inclusion of women in local governance. Responses indicate that although some ad hoc activities have taken place to raise funds at national level, specific policies, strategies and action plans to support women's involvement in the reform process are yet to be formulated.

Stakeholders cited the treatment of women; specifically harassment and political violence (ie: arbitrary arrests and detention, political demonstrations resulting in violence) as one reason for the lack of female representatives in the political sphere.

'Women don't go for political posts in general, because those in political positions get harassed'

– Government stakeholder, Male'

'A [negative] comment a day has a significant impact'

– Member of Parliament, Male'

Participants were keen to explain the challenges faced in attracting more women into the political realm. The absence of family support, a lack of experience in the political sphere and not having access to sufficient financial resources to stand for office were noted as the main constraints.

Whilst the appointment of Gender Focal Points (GFP) at Deputy Minister level is viewed as a positive step forward in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, stakeholders also noted that women GFPs may serve to reinforce the stereotype that gender work is 'women's work'.

8 Women in Social Life

8.1 Focus Group Discussions

Knowledge

According to participants, traditionally, women are socialized to play a role in the private, rather than the public sphere. In all locations, women reported a deeply ingrained sense of a woman's role grounded in the beliefs of Islam. A typical day for many women in the North centred on domestic chores including cooking, cleaning, child care and managing the household budget in addition to income generating activities (cake making, thatch weaving, agricultural activities). In the South, home-based income generating activities are common and women are also more likely to be engaged in private and/or public sector work including civil service, teaching, tourism (resort work, customs, airport) and in sales. In urban areas, women were more likely to be working in the professions in civil service, private companies or the United Nations. Few women reported having outside help in the home, even in urban areas and the support of family plays a key role in managing work/family responsibilities. In non urban areas, participants noted that women's mosques traditionally played an important role in the community, functioning as both a place of worship and a woman-only space where women gather and organize as a collective.

Whilst there was little evidence to suggest the existence of a formal women's movement, this did not detract from women articulating a history of organizing at the local level. Women expressed a strong commitment to working collectively and this was clearly a source of pride and achievement. In the North this included fund-raising, building women's mosques, management of child-care facilities/pre school, agricultural activities, island maintenance and preparing and organising for religious festivals. In the South, women have maintained Women's Development Committees activities including running computer and English courses, cake making and tailoring and tutoring children who are behind in school.

In the South young women were also involved in volunteer activities such as drug prevention and education.

'I'm a volunteer with the Crime Prevention network'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

Women activists play a role at national level and are outspoken on issues relating to women, particularly in the legal arena, for example the Domestic Violence Bill. Although participants were not aware of national level advocacy strategies for women's rights, they did equate an increase in women's representation at national level with the view that women's needs would be better integrated into national policies and plans;

'Women work for a collective vision and women's needs would be catered for...'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

'More women lobbying would pave the way for more women Members of Parliament.'

– Woman 18-25 years, South

Attitudes

Religion plays a significant role in the construct of women's participation in social life, both in the role women play and in the activities they undertake;

'Obviously religion is important, we believe in the quran and there are certain rules and conventions to follow.'

– Woman 18-25 year, North

Participants viewed budgets cuts to women centred initiatives such as the WDC and women's mosques, coupled with the contracting out of labour on the islands as changes that have been detrimental to women's role in social life.

'Traditionally woman played a big role in creating community and contributed a lot to the community such as building the women's mosque, agricultural activities and maintaining the island'

– Woman 50+ years, North

'The sense of community has changed and we're not doing anything as a community.'

– Woman 50+ years, North

'Approximately three years ago the government started contracting out labour, such as cleaning the island. This changed everything...the community spirit was lost.'

– Woman 50+ years, North

However, the majority of participants recognized that the roles of women and men in social life are mutually supportive.

Perceptions

Female public role models are not concepts familiar to the Maldives. Women are socialized for roles in the private sphere and not public life. Women who are active and outspoken are often viewed as social outliers, a threat to carefully constructed social order.

In contrast to these stereotypes, at local level, current and former Women's Development Committee leaders and female Imam's play a respected and important role in the life of the community. Participants were quick to attribute credit for the contributions of women and expressed regret that the sense of community spirit has changed over time;

'In general, people including women now only work for a salary and no longer volunteer'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

'Perceptions have changed, volunteerism is no longer acceptable.'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

'Today, people work for individual benefits.'

– Woman 26-50 years, North

8.2 In depth Interviews

Stakeholders described that historically volunteerism played an important role in the Maldives particularly on the outer islands. Rapid modernisation and recent political change has emphasized a shift in values and it was widely perceived that;

‘Nobody wants to volunteer for anything, anymore’

– Private Sector stakeholder, Male’

Stakeholders suggested that political instability, merging of modernization with a traditional way of life and the absence of tools and skills to manage the transition has a negative impact on society as a whole.

According to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, there are some 700 mosques in the Maldives, (500 men’s, 200 women’s). These receive funding from the civil service budget. Under proposed government civil service budget cuts, 200 women’s mosques have recently been slated for closure;

‘The structures of women’s mosques are a waste of time and money because they are old and would need to be restored’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

Space for women has been re-assigned in men’s mosques, which serves to reinforce the perception that men have a right to public space, whilst simultaneously reducing public space for women. This conveys a very public message that women have no right (or need) for public space and fails to recognize women as a specific group of individuals with different needs. It suggests institutional decision making processes that discriminate against women;

‘Public space is viewed as being a man’s space.’

– Member of Parliament, Male’

Religion is playing an increasingly influential role in the State and there is an ongoing trend towards a more conservative interpretation of Islam. Religion was noted by all stakeholders being strongly influential in determining the role, position and status of women in society. As one stakeholder highlighted;

‘Islam can’t be extracted from the Maldivian way of life.’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

Others were of the opinion that the government is responsible for the regulation of media and other forms of social control and is not;

‘...creating space for alternative views, but rather religious leaders are taking space to espouse their views...’

– Private Sector stakeholder, Male’

‘Against the current backdrop of the current political crisis, it’s very easy to sell the ‘Islamic Ideal.’

– Civil Society stakeholder, Male’

A number of stakeholders attributed the creation of this recent shift in public opinion to the influential role of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Whilst understanding that freedom of speech is central to democratic process, stakeholders also noted that the increase in religious fervor is detrimental, particularly to the role of women;

‘Women traditionally had a lot of freedom in the Maldives....however the next generation will go into a more conservative environment’

– Civil Society stakeholder, Male’

‘People are very reluctant to question the role of religion as it relates to women’s participation, they would rather accept Islam blindly. Questioning Islam is not accepted.’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

‘Scholars are using a literal interpretation of Islam and not adapting to our times.’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

Stakeholders also highlighted the role that the education system has to play in encouraging a moderate interpretation of Islam against a backdrop whereby;

‘The education system is not providing enough information regarding Islam...’

– Government stakeholder, Male’

9 Case Studies

To gain an understanding of the experiences of women in public life, in-depth case study interviews were conducted with women current active in national government, the private sector and civil society. Interviews addressed topics such as family background, education, work experience, family life, role models and influences, obstacles and challenges, and perceptions on the future for women in the Maldives. In their own words, the following case studies serve to illustrate the experiences of three prominent women in public life.

9.1 Case Study One: Writer/Women's Advocate/Member of JSC

Background

Who/Writer/Women's Advocate/Member of JSC

Single. One child.

40+ years

Education

I studied governance and women's studies in Australia, graduating in 2000. Five years later I obtained a scholarship to study in the Netherlands where I completed a Masters of Development Studies. My thesis considered Islamic Family Law in the context of Human Rights.

Family Influence

I grew up in a big family – five sisters and two brothers. My father was a strong personality, but he always treated his children as equals and we grew up learning to consider others. My family have always been incredibly supportive of me. From my early years, I understood what it was to have the freedom and confidence to speak out. This was something that was very much encouraged our household. I never really understood that my ability to be outspoken made me different. We grew up in a household where there was no concept of 'big' and 'small' people. The idea that anyone one person was more important or better than anyone else simply because of their socio-economic status, position title and connections. This concept was completely alien to me, and remains so, even today.

Work/Occupation

As a journalist, civil servant, activist, I don't see women's rights as a 'women's issue'. It is an issue of justice. A human rights issue whereby women are deprived of their human rights because they are women. From a personal viewpoint I have never strayed from the idea that I have the absolute right to justice as a human being and this has driven all my work.

I was placed under 45 days house arrest, under the former regime, although never formally charged. At the time there was no prison for women, so I was placed under house arrest. Every few days, we – all the women placed under house arrest - would be collected, put on a bus and paraded through the streets of Male'. A notice was placed outside our house to signify that I was under house arrest, our phone lines were disconnected and no visitors were permitted. It was a very difficult time. My family have never been involved in politics, but because we all lived as an extended family, they were affected. Through all of it, my family continued to support me.

Role Models

Influences I don't recall having female role models as I was growing up but I know I have always felt driven by theme of justice. I believe women's issues are human rights issues simply because women are also human beings.

Overcoming Obstacles

I think the biggest obstacle for women is that men find women a threat. Over the last fifteen years, the minority has become the majority. By that I mean the collective mentality has shifted from what was a conservative minority to a conservative majority.

It is important to understand that we are not changing the government, but rather changing the system of governance. It is not change that comes as a result of a Presidential or Parliamentary election. In my view, all the institutions are failing because we – the people – don't have an understanding of the concept of democracy. We're not ready to practice adherence to the Constitution and so we fail, and then everyone complains.

Others – they do not see anything wrong in not following the Constitution. Similarly, they do not see anything wrong with not following the law. If leaders are not adhering and setting an example, who will?

Women's Experience

To be honest, I feel that I'm harassed every single day. I'm the only woman working with nine men and six of them continuously refer to me as 'the idiot'. It's affected me, it's affected my self-confidence to the point where I have wondered whether my reaction was in fact an over reaction - disproportionate. On the other hand, I know it's a character assassination, a tactic used to deflect from the real issues and a way of avoiding having to deal with substantive issues.

In private life, I think women are also restricted. For example; there are places that are inaccessible to a single woman, and this applies to most public spaces. Tea shops, walking along the water front – as a woman alone it is impossible to do simple things like these without attracting attention or being harassed. It's just another form of social control.

The Future for Women

The idea of women being subordinate is very new and I see the shift very clearly with my daughter's generation. Things I never had to think of at her age are now things she is very conscious of. I'm not referring to big decisions. Small things such as wearing a skirt, it's no longer a real choice but a political issue, a social statement and something to be conscious and concerned about. It was not like this when I was growing up.

9.2 Case Study Two, Female Entrepreneur

Background

Who/Business Entrepreneur/Gym Owner

Mother of two

30+ years

Education

Beyond high school, I never had the opportunity to gain an education in the formal sense.

Family Influence

My parents separated when I was 15 years old, which was a very traumatic period. I went to Sri Lanka to complete my A levels. I met my husband during this time and when we returned to the Maldives, we got married. I was really very young.

I'm a very social person, I need to be around other people so I thought about ways I could engage with the world. I enrolled in a number of short courses - fabric painting and cake decorating - and later ran a cake decorating and fabric design small business from home.

I started my current business only after having my first child. My family and my best friend have been hugely supportive. My parents; my mother is a very strong woman who came from a long history of strong women. She supported three children through years of my father being absent. My father was a naval architect, a measured man who was a liberal thinker. I never felt, with him, that being a girl was any kind of obstacle. My parents were very supportive of me as a female entrepreneur and although not wealthy, provided a lot of support in order for me to start my business.

Work

Occupation/My mother and I are very close. It was actually my mother who suggested that I start exercising after the birth of my child. I had put on a lot of weight and she and I started to go to the gym together. I loved it and shortly after starting, because there was a shortage of instructors, the fitness instructor suggested I undertake training to become an instructor myself.

In 1999 I went to Singapore for a six-month training programme and that was the beginning of everything. I came home and thought 'if I can transfer this to the Maldives, it would be great, both for me and for the public'. I started negotiations with an international fitness chain, and quickly faced a number of obstacles; including having them reject my proposal to be established in the Maldives. But I was very determined and together with my husband, we agreed that he would help me build the business. We launched in 2002, with the business registered under my husband's name because it wasn't possible for me to register it in my own name.

I started the business with five staff. Today, we have 25 staff and have just opened our second location.

Role Models

Influences/My biggest inspiration was my grandmother on my father's side. She lived with me as a child for five years. A strong and dynamic woman, she also had very strong daughters - my aunts, both of whom went on to have roles in business and public life. One was the first female travel agent in the Maldives and the other was a very well known radio presenter. My grandmother remains my greatest inspiration and I often find myself thinking about what she would do when I encounter difficulties.

Overcoming Obstacles:

I grew up with the idea that my gender was not an obstacle to my achieving my goals. It wasn't until I reached adulthood that I understood obstacles and gender bias are not overt but rather, subtle and covert. In starting my business, I encountered numerous obstacles, for example it was very difficult to obtain finance from lending institutions and there was no support from the government for female entrepreneurs. I didn't have the opportunity to gain a business education – I only knew how to exercise! (laughs) I think if I'd had support and the opportunity to gain knowledge, I would have been able to build my business more rapidly and to attain success more quickly.

On reflection, although it wasn't clear at the time, I see that the obstacles were in part the result of me being a woman with a clear business plan that I passionately believed in. I've recently been elected to the Board of the Chamber of Commerce and my first priority is to focus on creating more opportunities for women and to prioritise support for female entrepreneurs. There should be an institute or a government group that is able to provide technical support and training to women wanting to enter into the business sector.

More broadly, I think there is still very little opportunity for small business people here in the Maldives. I approached all the financial institutions for a loan but was unsuccessful. Even now, 13 years later with a history of business success, I'm unable to gain support from major institutions. The culture here is still very much based on having the right connections. If you want to go through the right channels, it's not going to happen. You need connections and you need to ask them for what you need.

The Future for Women/I think young women today are much more confident to speak out and more confident that opportunities exist for them. In part, I think that this is attributable to the change in government. Because of the change, there is a sense of hope.

9.3 Case Study Three, Executive Director, International Non-Government Organisation/Civil Society Activist

Background

Who/Executive Director, International Non-Government Organisation/Civil Society Activist
Woman, Single
Late 20s

Education

I was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Toronto, Canada where I completed my Bachelor of Arts in economics, with minors in sociology and politics. I was 19 at the time and travelled alone. I recall there were only five Maldivians in Canada at the time. My parents made me email them everyday, so even when I had nothing to say, I emailed them. Back then we didn't have Skype or smart phones.

I took pay leave from my job in the government, and therefore I had to come back and serve three years with the government. In 2004, I returned to the Maldives and started again working with the Ministry of Finance.

Canada taught me how important good governance is for us to develop into a mature democracy. I started to notice things that I hadn't notice before about gender issues and social circumstances. In 2006, I decided it was time to leave again - I was quite frustrated about the political situation and so when I was planning to go abroad to do postgraduate studies, I thought a lot about what I wanted to study and the issues that interested me. Everybody advised me to do an MBA, I think because I have an economics background. But I wanted to do something different. I applied for a Masters in Gender and Development studies in the UK. I didn't actually think I would get accepted! But I did, so I decided to do it. I left the Maldives again in September 2007.

After a year, I decided I was going to stay in the UK - I was so fed up with everything at home. But I had run out of money. I had been self-funded and I literally had no way to stay there. I was too proud to ask my parents for money.

I arrived back in Male' on the day the second runoff election results were announced. They were looking for volunteers, so I volunteered. At the time I had also applied for my current position in the NGO sector and so was awaiting a response. Shortly thereafter, I heard I got the job.

Family Influence

I grew up in an extended family with three generations of women. My mother was 18 when I was born so, I was more or less brought up by a group of grandmothers.

My father was a man who left his island in the South and didn't go back for many, many years. My mother is from a middle class Male' family, with all the privileges and prejudices that come with it. I live between two worlds – that of my father and that of my mother. Growing up, I saw very clearly the prejudices that existed in the way people not from the Male' elite were treated. It made me very conscious of class and social differences. I remember, even in the 1980s when nobody talked about democracy, my father would talk to me about social issues and politics – he taught me a lot. When I was eleven my father gave me the book 'To Kill a Mockingbird'.

Although my family wouldn't agree with a lot of decisions I've made, they have supported me. Most of the things I fight for and the work that I do is heavily influenced by my mother and my father and in a way, I'm very glad.

My grandmother is more like a mother to me than my own mother. She is extremely conservative. For example; she would expect that you obey your husband. But she is also a lot of fun. My grandmother's grandmother was very ladylike – she died when I was in Grade 11 but she was very influential. She was a very solid person, very resilient. Neither of them were formally educated, but they could read and write.

My great grandmother was extremely fun – she loved to travel, see friends, enjoy food – she was never a housewife. She was the third wife of my grandfather and had her own money. My mother is more fun – she is extremely democratic in the sense that she doesn't like hierarchy and I have learnt this from her.

They have all had a huge influence on the way I think and the values I hold.

Work

Occupation/In 2004, having completed my degree, I returned home and joined the Ministry of Finance. In December 2004, the tsunami happened and this changed everything. The budget doubled or tripled almost overnight so the government had to restructure and people were working around the clock. I worked in the National Budget Section and after one year, was transferred back to the National Debt Section.

I think the reason I stayed in the government – aside from my bond – was to learn how the government worked. I had some very good mentors at the time, including the female head of my department who was very generous. She really gave me a lot of opportunities and responsibility and allowed me to learn and grow. I wouldn't be the person I am today if I hadn't had that experience. She taught me how to maintain an emotional distance from my work, from things that upset me.

It was the beginning of the Reform Movement and there was a lot of pressure to take sides. I learnt a lot from her; that you can make a real difference by trying to change a system from within a system. The whole experience taught me that it's not so much about individuals, as it is about the system itself. It is very difficult to change if you're working in your daily job within the government, but within the NGO sector you don't have to deal with the internal politics – you can deal with and lobby for the substantive issues.

Role Models/Influences

The heads of my household were women. This was attributed to the fact my father and the men in the family were often away for extended periods due to work.

Overcoming obstacles

I don't think I've yet faced any obstacles – at least yet. In part, I think this is because I have a very supportive family and I'm currently single. I think I will face difficulties when I get married and have children. Women are often forced to make a choice; have children and remain at home, or have children and work. It's a huge responsibility and even today women are expected to carry the load of family and work on their own. I know this is certainly a reality for many of my friends.

Women's Experience

In Grade 6, I went to an all-girls school. In many ways I think as a girl, this is better than a mixed school because boys are not there to influence your everyday decisions. I started realising gender differences in adolescence because my parents became more protective of me. However, it wasn't until I went to a mixed school in Grade 11 and 12 that I really started to notice the difference; the ways girls act and behave in public. Everyone started behaving differently, for example; girls shied away from leadership positions. I remember in the student elections there was only one girl who ran, and she got two votes. In reality, she wasn't any competition for the three boys standing. I also recall the Islamic teacher telling us that women had only half the brains of men – I think that was the tipping point!

When I was very young, I didn't really understand that there is such a difference between women and men. In part, I think this is because I grew up with my father being away a lot of the time so there was no opportunity to observe the differences. I was not really conscious of my gender, although I knew I was a girl. I'm glad that I grew up before the exposure to western culture as it is now – the 'Barbie' culture. I never owned a Barbie and when I asked for one, my mother just told me to buy a regular doll (laughs).

I think generally in the world there are advantages to being a woman. I know it sounds overly optimistic, but I think for boys growing up in a patriarchal society, they are at a disadvantage. They're not socialised to develop emotional intelligence; empathy for example. Women are socialised to emotionally develop, whereas for young boys, emotional development tends to be neglected. I think a lot of problems in society can be attributed to behaviours that are negative, such as aggression. The socialisation processes for women and men are so different and I think contribute both positively and negatively to social problems.

Religion

I draw strength from religion. Religion is a huge part of people's lives here, including mine. I grew up in a religious conservative environment. I had to pray and read the Quran and actually, I liked it. Religion anchors me. I think the trick is not to institutionalise it – not to be caught up in the political aspects but to use it at an individual level. I think my children will also grow up in a similar environment because I can see a lot of positive things that religion has brought into my life – stability, inner peace and spirituality. In the current climate, it's not beliefs that are being challenged, but rather it's the politicisation of religion.

The Future for Women

I think young girls growing up today will have a more difficult time than we had. Today, there is so much negativity around being a woman. It's a trend whereby what it is to be a woman is being defined by institutions and by men at the top. It's no longer women defining themselves or being recognised as individuals, as it was when I was growing up. I see that in the current climate, it can go either way – young women can react to it, or adhere to it. It will be their choice.

10 Conclusion

Gender inequalities within political, economic and social spheres are the result of structural, functional and cultural barriers to women's participation in public life. Gender identity is mediated through social positioning along the lines of religion, socio-economic status and the urban versus outer island divide. Women are not a homogenous group and thus do not always share the same constraints and opportunities to participate in public life.

The Maldivian government has committed to achieving gender equality and is signatory to CEDAW and the CEDAW Optional Protocol, the international commitment to addressing all forms of discrimination against women.

The Constitution of the Maldives guarantees all people the same rights and freedoms, stipulates non-discrimination, including on the basis of sex and legitimises affirmative action to redress inequalities. With relation to personal status (ie: inheritance law and marital property rights), the basis of the law is Sharia as adapted to the modern Maldivian judicial system.⁷³

The National Gender Policy has been drafted outlining the vision, guiding principles, policy goals and strategies of the government to attaining gender equality in the Maldives.

The Department of Gender and Family Protection Services (DGFPS) under the Ministry of Health and Family is the assigned National Women's Machinery (NWM) and lead agency for gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality in national government.⁷⁴ A Presidentially appointed Social Development and Gender Advisor further supports the gender mainstreaming process alongside Gender Focal Points appointed at Deputy Ministerial level in each line ministry.

Despite these progressive steps, women remain under-represented in the political and economic spheres, particularly at local level.

Public, political and economic institutions are not gender neutral. Respondents attributed the maintenance of create gender inequalities in public life (through policies, budget allocation, rules and procedures) to male domination. Approaches to women's empowerment at all levels need to be both rights-based and institutionalised.

Creating awareness is the first stage in facilitating a change in public perceptions and attitudes towards women's roles in the public arena. Findings revealed an insufficient understanding of democracy and political systems and processes, particularly at the local level. Public consciousness is shaped by patriarchal norms and traditions and typically, does not ascribe political roles to women. Further, women often internalise the gender role ideology and thus subscribe to carefully constructed gender roles and stereotypes.

The reduction of important public entities for women such as the withdrawal of funding for Women's Development Committees at island level and the closure of women's mosques reflects a withdrawal of support for women's rights and influence in the public sphere. It is both a reflection of the importance placed on women's spaces and an overt example of the power and control of women by men in decision-making positions at national level.

A climate of uncertainty in the Maldives, in part attributable to recent political change, has manifested itself through an increasing debate between moderate and conservative voices on religion, politics and the future of the country. Respondents spoke of the central, constructive role of religion, while others referred to the pressure to conform to social and religious ideals.

A shift towards a more conservative interpretation of Islam as a counter to political and social

⁷³ Government of Maldives, 2010, Common Core Document Forming Part of the Reports of States Parties, 16 February 2010

⁷⁴ Ibid

upheaval has resulted in women's role in the public domain becoming increasingly restricted. The culture of protectiveness towards women and pressure to conform to social and religious ideals has reportedly increased. Personal decisions, such as wearing of the hijab, have become political and religious statements. Respondents suggested in some cases that women are no longer seen as individuals in their own right, but rather objectified representations of social and cultural expectations.

Women in public life outside conventionally accepted gender constructs, challenge cultural/religious norms including a culture of masculinity underpinned by selective interpretations of Islam. Equal representation and influence of women in the public sphere often presents a challenge to men in power. Socialisation processes define gender roles in society. A lack of positive female role models presents a challenge to encouraging women to enter public life.

The process of decentralisation opens opportunities to increase the number of women in local governance through increased representation.

Structural barriers impacting on the participation of women in political, economic and social life include; an underlying patriarchal system in both the public and private spheres placing increased restrictions on the role and influence of women; the demarcation of the private sphere as 'a woman's place'; social and cultural attitudes of men towards women in public life, and male dominated political agendas.

A lack of opportunity to gain knowledge and a clear understanding of democracy, the current multi-party system, political processes and structures further negatively impacts women's participation. These limitations cause frustration and a sense of disempowerment at the local level, further impacting already divided communities.

Women are not a homogenous group and do not always share the same constraints and opportunities to participate in public life. Their position is also mediated through their social positioning along the lines of socio-economic status and the urban/outer island divide. The majority of research participants recognise that women currently represented in public life are from established families and/or the political elite. This re-emphasises the privileged position of those in power and diminishes the hopes of women at island level to engage in the public sphere.

Findings revealed that whilst women significantly contribute to the growth of the economy, their contributions are not always recognised or visible. Women comprise the majority of home-based workers, particularly on the outer islands. The lack of awareness regarding professional and employment opportunities coupled with a lack of training and tertiary education opportunities means women are under-represented in the formal labour force. The near absence of women in executive and senior management positions in public administration calls for a corrective action in the recruitment and promotion of civil service.

In the economic sphere, addressing the absence of professional work opportunities for those in Male', and work opportunities per se for those in outer islands, a lack of desirable/flexible work options, the need for strong familial support mechanisms (extended family/external support) and mobility issues are central to increasing the participation of women in the formal economy. Home-based work, whilst an effective option for many women, also yields the risk of further restricting women's role in the community and public sphere.

In addition, social and cultural expectations placed on women that result in women carrying a double burden – responsibility for both paid work/income generating activities and domestic labour further discourages women to take active part in public life.

Despite these challenges, both women and men at island and national level remain steadfastly optimistic and committed to the increased participation, representation and influence of women in public life.

11 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on an understanding of women's under-representation in leadership roles within the political, economic and social spheres in the Maldives. They intend to provide a basis for the development of strategic actions that highlight and promote the role, participation, representation and influence of women in public life, and entry points for advocacy.

The myriad of factors that undermine women's capacity to participate in public decision-making demand a multi-sectoral approach. These recommendations are made in recognition of the constitutional, political, economic, civil service and reform processes that aim to impact the larger context of democracy and government in the Maldives.

11.1 Clarifying and upholding gender equality commitments

Upholding international, constitutional and national gender policy commitments may prove challenging in light of varying interpretation of Islamic Sharia and of Article 16 (a) of the Constitution 2008. Agreement amongst national level stakeholders is critical if gender equality commitments, including equal representation of women in public life in the Maldives are to be realised. It is recommended that clarity is sought on the legal and policy implications of these potentially conflicting commitments. A high level expert consultative forum on the legal and policy implications for women at all levels is one mechanism through which these issues could be publicly addressed.

11.2 Shifting public perceptions

Changes in public perception will encourage women to enter into the political process - as voters, members of political parties, candidates and as elected representatives. Public interest and a willingness to accept women in political roles will put pressure on the male leadership of political parties to accommodate more women in to the party's hierarchy and candidacy. In order to facilitate a shift in traditional mindsets, a well-designed national public awareness campaign on gender issues, good democratic practices, gender justice, voter responsibilities, and favorable attitudes towards women's political participation and representation is warranted. Consultation and engagement of mass media representatives and key stakeholders including; Presidential Advisors, Ministry of Health and Family, Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Ministry of Economic Development as well as civil society organisations and the engagement of a triangulated approach, will facilitate a coherent approach to countering stereotypes of women. It is recommended the campaign seeks to highlight the contributions and importance of women in public life, particularly female candidates in the run up to local elections.

11.3 Increasing policy dialogue and supporting gender sensitisation processes

In an effort to strengthen understanding of the importance of women in public life, dialogue between National Women's Machinery (NWM), policy makers and religious leaders is imperative.

Whilst concerted efforts have been made to gender sensitise line ministries, gaps exist in knowledge, understanding and implementation of gender sensitive initiatives. It is recommended that technical support and capacity building of national and local level line ministry and civil service personnel is undertaken in order to strengthen the state machinery in their efforts to implement gender inclusive responses.

The formulation of the national gender action plan based on the National Gender Policy, presents

an excellent opportunity to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment sensitisation programmes for key stakeholders. Support for the development of the national gender action plan should include immediate, medium and long term strategies, goals, actions and outcomes at multiple levels (micro, meso and macro) to educate, support and monitor gender equality initiatives both within the public and private sectors.

11.4 Political Party Women's Wings - support for the development of strategic action

Democracy and the reform process mark a significant shift in the political landscape of the Maldives. There is a need for effective advocacy and lobbying with the government to provide state funding or to establish a quota for political party funds distributed by the Elections Commission and support women candidates in particular. In view of the diversity in women's status and domination of the elite in political parties, it is recommended that criteria should be specified for women candidates. Further, advocacy efforts for the establishment of a gender quota through legal provision should also be (re) introduced. It is recommended that strategic support to the National Women's Machinery, Members of Parliament and political party women's wings in their advocacy efforts is strengthened.

Transformative gender training should be organised with political leaders and key government stakeholders. Technical and strategic support to Women's Wings of political parties in the formulation of specific policies, strategies and action plans to support women's involvement in the reform process at the local level is central to supporting the increased participation, representation and influence of women. At Atoll and island levels, support to engage female (ie: current and former WDC leaders) and male community leaders (ie: Island Councillors) is integral to this process and should be supported in the form of national and local level consultative forums, conferences and workshops.

11.5 Making women's contributions visible and highlighting women working in non-traditional roles ('Jobs for Girls')

The Department of Gender and Family Protection Services are currently administering the SME Women's Economic Empowerment initiative. It is recommended that widespread dissemination of information at island level on this and other economic empowerment initiatives is undertaken to encourage female entrepreneurs and women entering the small and medium enterprise sector. Further, support to the Maldives Chamber of Commerce in the development of initiatives to support women in business and female entrepreneurs would go some way to addressing gaps in the availability of information and support for women in the formal sector labour force (ie: internet-based educational materials, internet-based short courses for women in business, seminars, study tours). At island level, facilitating the establishment of female collective enterprises would go some way to creating structures and support networks for female entrepreneurs and home based workers at Atoll, island and community level. A series of consultations at the local (Island) level on the central theme of women in the workforce is recommended.

11.6 Role models - Identification and use of positive female role models

Findings suggest that the use and engagement of positive role models is a concept unfamiliar to the Maldives. In the absence of positive female role models it is difficult for potential leaders - women and men - to conceptualise a role for women in the public sphere. The identification of 'successful female leaders' in the political, economic and social spheres and in promoting positive female role models from all strata of society through public awareness campaigns could be conducted in conjunction with National Women's Machinery and civil society.

11.7 Networking and coalition building

Networking and coalition building is central to addressing contexts where the patriarchal institutional structures of power have been pushed to become more responsive to women's interests. Without an organised collective voice of marginalised groups of women, there is no accountability of political parties and public and/or private sector institutions to gender responsiveness. Interest groups and civil society organisations need to be mobilised and organised into broad based coalitions and networks for collective voice and action. By doing this, the challenge to public patriarchy, male domination and gender based discrimination in public life can be met collectively. It is recommended that existing networks of women representatives be supported and strengthened and where appropriate, new networks formed and supported. When women identify and mobilise around a common concern, they are in a better position to achieve their goals.

11.8 Addressing harassment of Women in Public Life

Creating an enabling and supportive safe work environment for women is central to attracting more women into the public sphere. The adoption of anti-sexual harassment policies, institutionalisation of complaint and redress mechanisms for intimidation and sexual harassment in the work place would create an enabling environment and reinforce a positive institutional culture with a genuine commitment to gender equality and inclusive approaches. Support for NWM in countering the issue of harassment of women is critical, as is the facilitation of dialogue on the legal, policy and social implications of harassment.

Annex A: Methodology

1. Research Title

Baseline Assessment (Situational Analysis) on Women in Public Life in the Maldives.

2. Researchers

The research team comprises;

- International Research Consultant, Ingrid Quinn
- Assistant National Researcher, Shamha Adam Naseer

3. Study Locations

In close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Family, Department of Gender and Family Protection Service (DGFPS), Department of Planning and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and based on the following selection criteria, locations will be selected for inclusion in the research;

- Capital Male', Maldives (Seat of Government)
- Inhabited by Maldivians Nationals (exclusion of tourist islands)
- Locations selected for a) high representation of female-headed households and b) low representation of female-headed households

* Please note, specific selection criteria to be agreed with UNCT, DGFPS and Department of Planning

4. Study Design

The design of this study is a cross sectional qualitative assessment. A cross-sectional design entails the collection of data on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of data in connection with two or more variables. These are then examined to detect patterns of association.

Qualitative research explores experiences, attitudes, values and practices and locates these within their social context. Typically, qualitative approaches aim to provide in depth insight. A cross-sectional study is one that takes place at a single point in time.

5. Research Themes

Broadly, the research will include the following themes;

- Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment in the Maldives
- Cultural, religious & gender norms, practices and stereotypes
- Women's political participation & representation at national and local level
- Women's economic empowerment & labour force participation
- Women's participation & representation in social development initiatives at national and local level

6. Study Methods

The study will encompass three methods;

1. Semi- structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders
2. Focus Group Discussions
3. Case Studies

1) Semi-structured interviews

Semi structured interviews allow researchers to glean an understanding of the ways research participants view their social world and to gain an appreciation for what participants view as significant and important in relation to the topic areas under study.

Face to face semi structured in depth interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders. A semi structured in depth interview guide will be developed for each stakeholder group and adapted and translated where necessary for each country context.

2) Focus Group Discussions

The focus group method is an interview with several people on a specific topic or issue.⁷⁵ Focus group discussions (FGD) typically emphasize a specific theme or topic that is explored in depth with the emphasis on the joint construction of meaning. The technique allows for the development of an understanding about why people feel the way they do about a specific issue.

To gain insight into public knowledge, attitudes and perceptions (KAP) regarding women's participation, representation and leadership in the public and private sector, focus group discussions will be conducted.

Focus group discussions (FGD) on issues will be held at community level with women and men. Focus group discussion questions will be developed for this purpose.

3) Case studies

Case study design entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case.⁷⁶ In order to identify and document the experiences of women currently active in public life (public and private sector) and to gain an understanding of opportunities and challenges faced in political, economic and social spheres, the unique case study method will be used.

For this purpose, in depth interviews will be conducted with case study participants. A in- depth interview guide will be developed and (where necessary), translated for this purpose.

⁷⁵ Bryman, A, 2008, Social Research Methods, Oxford, UK

⁷⁶ Ibid

7. Study Population

The following groups of stakeholders have been identified as a source population for in-depth interviews. Based on convenience sampling and in close collaboration with UNDP-BTCNC, representatives from each group will be selected for interview. To the extent possible, there will be a gender-balanced representation of stakeholders at all levels (national, provincial, community) included the research.

- *Government/National level stakeholders:* including but not limited to the following; *Line Ministries*

- Ministry of Health & Family (Dept of Gender & Family Protection Services (DGFPS) and Lead Agency for Gender Management System)
- Ministry of Economic Development
- Ministry of Tourism
- Ministry of Islamic Affairs

National Gender Machinery

- Gender Equality & Social Development Advisor to the President
- National Women's Architecture (NWM) Gender Focal Points (GFP) at Deputy Minister Level
- Members of Parliament

Other National/Atoll Stakeholders

- Members of Parliament (MPs) male and female
- Attorney General's Office (National Law Reform Commission)
- Women's Development Committee members ⁷⁷

- *Private Sector Stakeholders:* Maldives National Chamber of Commerce & Industries, SME, privately owned Maldivian companies (Tourism, Fisheries/Agriculture, Manufacturing), women entrepreneurs, women business networks
- *UN actors;* UN Resident Coordinator, UNCT/HoA; UN Gender & Development Advisor/s, UN Advisor for Social Cohesion and Governance, UN agency gender focal points (GFP) and/or Gender Theme Group members.
- *Civil society actors;* local NGOs with women's empowerment and gender equality, governance & democracy and social & economic development/economic empowerment of women as projects/project goals at field level (ie: Hope for Women (NGO)) community based organisations, women's empowerment collectives, women activists, gender equality activists, progressive and conservative Islamic /religious experts and/or scholars
- *Community Leaders;* Religious Leaders, Women's Committee/Women's Cooperative leaders at island/Atoll level, Youth Leaders, Women's Network/Community Leaders
- *Communities/Local population;* female headed households, single mothers, community members (gender balanced representation of women and men), female and male youth

⁷⁷ Understanding that Women's Development Councils (WDC) in atolls and islands have been abolished and that it has been proposed that legal status be granted to WDC's in the Decentralization Bill (UNDAF 2011-2015, Outcome 8: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, p. 22)

8. Sampling Design

1) Stakeholder semi-structured in-depth interviews

A combination of two qualitative sampling methods will be adopted; criterion and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases that are information-rich. Criterion sampling encompasses all cases that meet some specified criterion; useful for comparison and quality assurance. ⁷⁸

Table 1. Stakeholder Sampling Criterion

Stakeholder Groups	Criterion sampling	Snowball sampling
Government & national level stakeholders	X	
Private Sector Stakeholders	X	X
Donors	X	
UN actors	X	
International NGOs	X	
Civil society actors (LNGOs)	X	X
Community Leaders	X	X
Community members (women & men)	X	

2) Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Sampling Design

Participant selection: Convenience and snowball sampling will be used to select participants for the focus group discussions. Stratifying criteria such as age, gender and education level will be used to organize participants into separate groups.

Focus group discussions will be recorded and subsequently transcribed by the research assistant.

3) Case Studies Sampling Design

Case study design entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. It is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question.⁷⁹ In order to identify and document the experiences of women currently active in public life (public and private sector) and to gain an understanding of opportunities and challenges faced in political, economic and social spheres, the unique case study method will be used.

Criterion and snowball sampling will be used to select three cases within three groups of study participants;

a) Female Politicians at National level (2 participants)

- Women Members of Parliament
- National level role in Politics
- Ruling & Opposition party representation (Liberal/Conservative constituencies)

b) Female/Women entrepreneurs (2 participants)

One each from either the Tourism, Fisheries, Manufacturing industries

- Company turnover minimum (TBA)

⁷⁸ Adapted from Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design; Choosing Among Five Traditions*. London, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

⁷⁹ Bryman, A, 2008, *Social Research Methods*, Oxford, UK

- Board Members/Executive role
- Tertiary level education
- Employs &/or subcontracts minimum no. of women/men (TBA)

c) Women in the Social Sphere (Social Influencers/Development) (2 participants)

Two participants selected from the following groups;

- Maldivian Women Activists
- Maldivian Religious leaders
- Maldivian Scholar/Academic

9. Data management and analysis plans

In order to contextualize the current issues and priorities for women in public life in the Maldives, a systematic literature review will be undertaken by the international research consultant. This includes country specific reports on women's representation in politics & leadership, and in economic and social development. International instruments and government related legislation, policies and plans will be reviewed in detail, including the National Gender Equality Policy and National Strategic Action Plan (2009-2013), in addition to (as applicable) line ministry action plan/s (ie: Ministry of Health & Family, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture). In addition, donor, United Nations, international non-government organization (NGO) and Chamber of Commerce documents relating to women's empowerment/involvement in political, economic and social spheres will be reviewed. This will include but not be limited to;

International/Global Instruments

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) 1979
- Beijing Platform for Action 1995
- Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Status Reports

Regional level

- Commonwealth Gender Equality Plan of Action 2005-2015
- SAARC Gender Equality Instruments
- Asia-Pacific Human Development Reports

National level

- The Constitution of the Republic of the Maldives (2008)
- National Strategic Action Plan: Framework for Development 2009-2013, Maldives (December 2009)
- National Gender Equality Policy and Framework for Action Draft 1 (May 2009), Maldives
- CEDAW 2nd and 3rd periodic reports, Maldives
- MDG Status Report, Maldives
- Maldives Population and Housing Census 2006
- The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences, Initial report on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses to violence, November 2007

The international research consultant and research assistant are responsible for documentation, data collection and collation at the field level. Semi structured interviews, focus group discussion and case study findings will be recorded, transcribed and documented.

Data analysis will be conducted in two parts. The international research consultant and research assistant will conduct preliminary data analysis in the field. Secondly, qualitative data will be collated, reviewed and analysed by the international research consultant according to the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework.⁸⁰

10. Quality control

Standard quality control measures; During field implementation, standard quality control measures will be implemented by the field researchers including; double translation where necessary (English- Dhivehi -English), questionnaire checking and response verification, and data collation.

Translation: The working language for the development of the questionnaire is English. The questionnaire will be professionally translated into Dhivehi as required.

11. Ethical considerations

At field level, the international research consultant will be responsible for ensuring ethical research guidelines are upheld including; obtaining and recording participant consent and confidentiality.

⁸⁰ Miles, B. & Huberman, A. 1994, Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Source, Sage, London

Annex B: Terms of Reference

Project Title:	Building, Trust Confidence and National Capacities
Project Number:	00069527
Duty Station:	Male', Maldives, with travel to the atolls as required
Duration:	3 weeks distance and 3 weeks in country

Background:

Traditionally, women have had greater space in the public and political life in Maldives. However, the political and economic empowerment of women still faces significant obstacles. While women constitute roughly half of the population, there is a gap between the numbers of women in the population, and those that are productively employed or politically active.

Societal norms, lack of supportive and flexible employment practices and limited childcare facilities hinder the ability of women to lead a productive public life. Following trends in other societies undergoing rapid modernization and change, the greater participation and leadership of women in the economic and public life of the country is likely to lead to a stronger civic culture, and greater social cohesion. This is especially important in the context of upcoming decentralisation policy of the government and the resulting establishment of elected local government bodies.

One of the broad strategies of the BTCNC project includes “supporting a stronger role for Maldivian women in leading and managing the reform process, and in participating to a greater degree in political debate”. There is also a need to counter negative trends that see the promotion of a more restrictive role for women in the society. Hence, a broad based strategy to work towards raising the profile and contributions of women is required in order for all stakeholders, both governmental and non governmental as well as agencies within the UN, to highlight and promote the importance of women in public life. The Baseline Assessment on Women in Public Life, while using both secondary and primary data, is intended to inform and guide the strategy.

Objectives and Scope

The objective of the baseline assessment is to:

- provide a snapshot of the current situation in terms of women's participation, representation and leadership in public life (public and private sector), namely in the economic, social and political spheres of the country;
- provide information on public knowledge, attitudes and perception regarding women's participation, representation and leadership in public life in both the public and private sector; and
- analyse case studies of women's experiences (currently active in public life (public and private sector) and those with economic/political aspirations) in order to gauge the opportunities and challenges and that exist for women

Description of work responsibilities:

In close collaboration with the Department of Gender and Family Protection Service (DGFPS) and UNCT, the consultant is expected to conduct a baseline assessment of women in public life in the Maldives. The consultant is to as much as possible review and analyse data from assessments and research such that has already been conducted, such as the Census, Women's Health and Life Experiences Survey, and Census analytical reports in order to avoid duplication.

This assessment is to be conducted through:

- A 1 week distance consultancy in which the consultant would be:
 - Review secondary and supporting literature on women's participation in social, economic and political sectors in the Maldives,
 - Develop and present a preliminary research design and methodology, for approval
- A 3 week in house consultancy in which the consultant would:
 - Review supporting literature, available data and conduct consultations with stakeholders
 - Revising the methodology with feedback from stakeholders
 - Develop questionnaires/interview plans
 - Train enumerators (if required) or train the Research Assistant for the field work
 - Select survey islands in consultation with DGFPS, Department of Planning, and UNCT.
 - Conduct all the meetings, interviews and field trips required for the assessment
 - Analyse data and structure the outline of the assessment report
 - Present preliminary results and recommendations for feedback from stakeholders

A 2 week distance consultancy in which the consultant would be:

- Reviewing additional information and incorporating comments
- Submitting the final report

The International Consultant will be assisted by a local Research Assistant recruited for the assessment. All required administrative and logistical assistance will be provided by UNDP.

Expected Output:

- The output of the assessment would be a Baseline Report on Women in Public Life, providing
- Facts and a qualitative analysis of the current situation with regards to the participation, representation and leadership of women in economic, social and political spheres. This includes providing a snapshot of participation of women in decision making, politics, volunteer sector, environment, arts, sports and those who are economically active, including profiles and case studies of women
- An analysis of constraints, impediments and opportunities faced by women, with regards to access, opportunity, agency, enabling environment etc, taking into account changes in the socio-political situation of the country, as well as touching upon emerging challenges such as increase in radicalisation of certain pockets in society
- Recommendations for strategic actions that highlight and promote the role, participation, representation and leadership of women in the public life in the public and private sector, also outlining entry points for advocacy.

Required Qualifications and Experience:

- Postgraduate degree in Gender studies, Social Research, Development Studies or related Social Sciences field
- Extensive experience in assisting/conducting research, particularly qualitative research
- Experience in working in the field of gender and development
- Demonstrated capacity to develop and communicate practical, innovative solutions to complex and multifaceted problems that achieve practical outcomes.
- Knowledge and understanding of the Maldivian cultural, social, political and economic context would be advantageous.

Annex C: List of Interviewees

Government / Policy Stakeholders

Ministry of Health & Family

Mariya Ali	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Health & Family
Mamdhootha Ali	Senior Social Development Officer	Department of Gender
Aneesa Yousuf	Senior Social Development Officer	Department of Gender

Ministry of Economic Development

Ahmed Inaz	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Economic Development
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Ministry of Islamic Affairs

Abdul Majeed Abdul Bari	Minister	Ministry of Islamic Affairs
Mohamed Dhidhi	Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Islamic Affairs

The President's Office

Shehenaz Abdulla	Social Development & Development Advisor	Presidential Advisor
Aminath Shauna	Deputy Under Secretary	The President's Office
Aishath Shuweikar	Deputy Under Secretary	The President's Office

Members of Parliament

Eva Abdulla	Member of Parliament	Member of Parliament
Rozaina Adam	Member of Parliament	Member of Parliament
Dunya Maumoon	President of the Women's Wing, DRP	Women's Wing, DRP

Judicial Service Commission

Aishath Velezinee	Member of Judicial Service Commission	Member
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Maldives Tourism Promotion Board

Mohamed Adam	Deputy Director	Maldives Tourism Promotion Board
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Private Sector

Aishath Shifana Wajeeth	Owner/ Female Entrepreneur	Heat Fitness Centre
Ahmed Adeeb Abdul Gafoor	Treasurer	Maldives National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Ismail Asif	Vice President	Maldives National Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Fathmath Suad	Executive Board Member	Maldives National Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Civil Society

Ilham Mohamed	Executive Director	Transparency Maldives
Aishath Aniya	Chairperson	Thirty Nine (NGO)
Aneesa Ahmed	Member/UN Consultant	Hope for Women

United Nations		
Ferdinand von Habsburg-Lothringen	Advisor - Social Cohesion and Governance	UN Resident Co-ordinator's Office, Maldives
Zindu Salih	Assistant Residence Rep- Governance	UNDP, Maldives
Raniya Sobir	Assistant Residence Rep- Poverty	UNDP, Maldives
Naima Mohamed	Programme Associate	UNDP , Maldives
Shaliny Jaufar	Programme Analyst	UNDP, Maldives
Kumiko Yoshida	International Programme Co-ordinator	UNFPA, Maldives
Shadiya Ibrahim	Assistant Representative, UNFPA	UNFPA, Maldives

Other		
Dr Ezmerelda Zahir	Dean of Shariah Law Faculty, Maldives	Faculty of Law
Ms. Aisha Shujune Muhammed	Judge	Civil Court

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UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.



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