

## Maldives

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### Part 1: Situation update in the country

The overall situation of children in Maldives remained relatively stable during 2018. With a net primary school enrolment rate of 95.9 per cent; infant mortality and under-five mortality rates of 8 and 9, respectively, per 1,000 live births; immunization rates of 99 per cent and no major emergencies during the year, the overall situation is not likely to change significantly from one year to the next.

Although new data are lacking, the nutrition double burden, high (40 per cent) unemployment among youth; their widespread use of drugs and the absence of drug rehabilitation services for adolescents; and persistent street violence made engaging young people a key UNICEF concern in 2018. The 2016 household income and expenditure survey report, published in 2018, confirmed the existence of disparities in income and quality of life between the capital city of Male' and remote atolls.

The human rights and political situation took an unexpected turn in February 2018 when the president declared a state of emergency. The declaration suspended several rights guaranteed by the constitution and simultaneously suspended the powers granted to the Supreme Court and the Parliament on some matters, leaving the judicial and legislative branches unable to function normally. This resulted in stalling key legislative initiatives, including the Bill on the Rights of Children. The arrest of the chief justice and supreme court judges, along with the administrator of the Department of Judicial Administration in February heavily impacted discussions UNICEF had initiated with the judiciary in late 2017 to strengthen justice for children. Also impeded was implementation of interventions previously agreed with the Department.

During this period gang violence increased, involving young people as perpetrators, victims and witnesses. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests an increase in recruitment of adolescent boys into gangs during this time.

Despite the political upheaval, the situation of children in the Maldives was relatively unaffected. Schooling was uninterrupted and health services and other social services continued, despite delays in programme implementation.

Although the country experienced upward economic growth in 2018, public expenditure exceeded state revenue, resulting in increased foreign and local public debt. During 2018 the Government completed several mega-projects, including social housing schemes and the construction of harbours, roads and airports, which increased movement between islands and the accessibility to services. The Government invested heavily in the development of specialized medical services at the main tertiary care hospital, ensuring the domestic availability of types of medical care previously sought abroad.

The Government's population consolidation policy sought to move a large percentage of the population to the greater Male' area. Until the election of a new president in September, Government policies favoured a centralized administration model at the expense of the local council system. The weakening and disenfranchisement of local councils and communities initially impacted UNICEF-supported community-based interventions on the islands, especially those seeking to reach the most vulnerable. For instance, full functioning of community social groups (CSGs) was constrained by the diminishing role of local councils on the islands.

The presidential election in September resulted in an unexpected victory for the opposition coalition, after a peaceful election and unprecedentedly high voter turnout. The result led to a sweeping overturn of disputed judicial and other decisions. The new president was sworn in on 17 November 2018, ushering in a renewed promise and commitment to restore justice, social harmony, human rights, community empowerment and nation-building. The new Government implemented a '100 Days plan' that stipulates key development priorities, including the creation of a long-term national development plan.

UNICEF's advocacy with the '100 Days' planning committee provided an opportunity to engage with the incoming Government and discuss priority issues for children and young people. This engagement resulted in the incorporation of several strategic interventions for improving the status of children and young people in the new plan and beyond.

The new Government reinstated the moratorium on the death penalty, re-joined the Commonwealth, established commissions to investigate unsolved murder cases and forced disappearances and halted alleged state corruption and embezzlement. It also restored powers and responsibilities to local councils, as per the Decentralization Act, and established a new Ministry of National Planning.

By late 2018 UNICEF was engaged with the new Government to ensure and support the inclusion of issues affecting children and young people in the evolving political agenda and national priorities for 2019 and beyond.

## **Part 2: Major results, including in humanitarian action and gender, against the results in the country programme document**

### **Goal area 1: Every child survives and thrives**

The double burden of under- and over-nutrition is the current challenge facing some children and women in reproductive age in Maldives. UNICEF worked with the health sector to address the double burden among women who were pregnant, children under two years and school-age children. UNICEF supported the development of a social- and behaviour-change communication (SBCC) strategy on nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life, which addresses malnutrition among children under five years of age. A formative assessment of child nutrition and feeding practices was undertaken to inform development of the strategy. The assessment identified three key immediate causes of malnutrition: complementary food choices are age-inappropriate, parents/caregivers have limited knowledge of proper food preparation methods and nutrition-responsive feeding skills are poor. Obesity among pregnant women was also identified as an emerging issue. The assessment identified opportunities to utilize the new

strategy to improve maternal, infant and young child feeding and caring practices. The strategy and action plan were endorsed in mid-2018 and being rolled out in 12 target communities. Health workers from these islands and the capital were trained on the strategy, and baseline data on nutrition indicators for mothers and children under two years were collected in all 12 communities. Since the initiation of the community level behaviour-change strategy in November, some activities in the action plan, such as awareness sessions to parents and food demonstrations, were conducted in target islands. The nutritional and feeding messages developed under the strategy are being imparted through the anti-natal care and growth-monitoring promotion platforms. An informational package including leaflets, recipe books and videos was under development. Messages on early childhood care and stimulation are also included in the key messages.

UNICEF contributed to enhancing the institutional capacity of health centres to provide nutrition services and promote growth monitoring. Health workers from all 20 atolls were oriented on the new growth monitoring and promotion protocols, which include early childhood components. Furthermore, the capacity of 49 health workers from Male' and islands was increased on infant and young child feeding. These health workers now provide this information to caregivers, as well as improving mothers' skills in exclusive breastfeeding skills and knowledge of appropriate and responsive complementary feeding. Following the training, 400 women who were pregnant and mothers and fathers of 9,713 children under two years of age were reached with improved messages.

UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education (MoE) to design nutrition interventions to address the findings of the 2017 school health screening programme. According to this data, obesity and overweight among students aged six and seven years was 11.7 per cent and 10.4 per cent, respectively. UNICEF-supported interventions included the development of a school nutrition policy, a food-based dietary guide and a manual for school health officers enabling them to conduct nutrition sessions in schools. In partnership with the non-governmental organization, Society for Health Education UNICEF began piloting these tools in five schools in different regions during 2018. The partnership will help in demonstrating how the tools can be adapted to the context. Once adapted, the tools will lead to promotion of more nutritious meals that are available in the island and contribute to addressing nutrition issues.

UNICEF Maldives advocated with the new Government on the importance of improving child nutrition and the link between nutrition and learning. The '100 Days' plan now includes the provision of healthy breakfasts to school children as of January 2019. UNICEF also supported the design of nutritious breakfast options and recipes.

UNICEF's contribution to the child health programme focused on developing institutional capacity of front-line health staff in specialized areas identified in the child health strategy. Working with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF continued to promote simple interventions to avert preventable newborn deaths. UNICEF Maldives supported capacity building for 90 doctors and nurses working on four atolls in different regions on essential newborn care. The training helped increase their knowledge and skills for attending to newborns during delivery – stimulating breathing, delayed code clamping, preventing hypothermia and facilitating early initiation of breastfeeding.

With support from the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), a team from Maldives was trained on kangaroo mother care for pre-term babies. This increased capacity is enhancing the quality of care in the main tertiary hospital, where over 40 per cent of all deliveries in

Maldives take place. UNICEF is further supporting the provision of comfortable chairs in the newborn intensive care unit, where mothers and fathers can maintain skin-to-skin care contact with their pre-term babies, while being closely monitored. As of 2019, all pre-term babies born in the country's two tertiary hospitals, including those referred from the periphery, will benefit from this arrangement.

Corners are also being established in outpatient areas of the tertiary hospital to encourage breastfeeding. UNICEF and partners supported the implementation of other components of the new baby-friendly hospital initiative, such as training hospital staff on breastfeeding, which will continue next year.

UNICEF supported the training of health professionals on disease surveillance, strengthening the immunization programme, introduction of the diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus booster dose and of the human papilloma virus vaccine. Training increased the capacity of immunization focal points at the national and sub-national levels (atolls and districts). Trained staff are playing an instrumental role in orienting immunization focal points on the ground, in time for the introduction of DPT booster and HPV vaccine.

In 2018 Maldives applied for certification of its success in eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. UNICEF Maldives, UNICEF ROSA and another UNICEF regional office were members of the national verification committee. As of end-2018 the country verification process was complete, and the Government was awaiting a global-level decision on certification.

## **Goal area 2: Every child learns**

UNICEF supported the National Institute of Education (NIE) to strengthen monitoring of implementation of the new national curriculum. Data was collected from all 212 government schools across the country. It showed that there were no major bottlenecks on the supply side and that all schools had access to the new curriculum framework, resource guides and teaching/learning materials. The data also showed a high level of readiness by teachers and parents to embrace the shift towards a learner-centred approach. However, the findings revealed a major capacity issue among teachers that is preventing this shift from taking place. For instance, of the total 2,324 teachers observed as part of classroom monitoring exercises, only about half were able to use diverse instructional strategies to deliver lessons, while only 23 percent demonstrated the integration of competencies and content. Moreover, close to 50 per cent of teachers required additional support to conduct classroom assessments.

UNICEF convened a forum on teacher training institutes and the NIE to share this data and discussed ways of addressing the capacity issues. This forum enabled stakeholders to reach consensus on improving the quality of teacher training.

Findings from the curriculum monitoring data will also be presented at a national symposium on the national curriculum— part of the new Government's '100 Days' plan. UNICEF also supported the MoE to enhancing the enabling environment for improved learning assessment, in part through a review of the national assessment system. The review showed that the system has several strengths (e.g., committed leadership and a defined policy framework) and has held national assessments for the last three years, demonstrating its ability to handle large-scale assessments. The limitations appeared to be in test design and development and data analysis, which are limited in method and scope. Other weak points identified were limited

dissemination and use of assessment findings, coupled with limited in-house capacity within the quality assurance department to conduct large-scale national assessments. Overall, the system was found to be at the 'emerging' stage, requiring stability and strengthening of its quality and impact. Based on the recommendations of the review, the MoE began to work on identifying priorities for policy reforms. In addition, the review informed a working paper for the MoE on the Maldives' readiness to participate in international large-scale assessments.

UNICEF supported revisions to the national assessment policy and framework. Gaps and weaknesses in the policy and framework were addressed to make them more comprehensive. The revised policy and framework will be implemented in 2019.

UNICEF contributed to enhancing the capacity of the MoE and schools to implement the Maldives education management information system (MEMIS) in schools. A core team of 10 MoE super-users were trained to rollout the system and build the capacity of schools for its use. These super-users trained focal points at all 212 Government schools, enabling them to issue report cards and student vouchers through MEMIS for the 2018 academic year. Thus data on student learning are now available through the new system, along with data on student attendance and enrolment.

UNICEF supported the development of a policy on MEMIS, which further enhanced its implementation at school level. The policy provides schools with clarity on data requirements and use, accountabilities and frequency of reporting. Schools reported that the new system increased the efficiency of data management and provided a one-stop shop for accessing all data, which was previously collected manually and left uncollated.

UNICEF provided significant support to building the institutional capacity of the NIE to implement the national strategy on literacy and mathematics. The core team at NIE was trained on emergent literacy through a regional training organized by ROSA. This training enabled the core team to improve the guidance documents developed for literacy and mathematics interventions. End-of-grade standards for English, Dhivehi literacy and mathematics were finalized following this training. Additionally, a leadership guide for schools and a parental engagement strategy on strengthening English, Dhivehi literacy and mathematics was developed. These documents are expected to be endorsed and implemented in 2019 in all schools across the country.

UNICEF further supported the development of literacy materials in the Dhivehi language (mother-tongue) for the foundation stage and key stage 2 of the national curriculum. Lack of quality literacy materials in Dhivehi has posed a major challenge for teachers in teaching language and literacy in these two stages. To address the issue, a reading scheme for early grade Dhivehi language was developed and 30 teachers were trained to develop reading material in accordance with the reading scheme. Subsequently, approximately 100 literacy products were produced by these teachers and were being reviewed in late 2018. The best of these materials will be approved for use in classrooms in 2019. The availability and use of well-designed literacy resources in schools will significantly improve Dhivehi literacy among students in early grades.

An education sector analysis for Maldives was developed in 2018 by the MoE; the last such exercise was conducted 25 years ago. The 2018 analysis was supported by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). UNICEF provided key support as the coordinating and grant agency for the development of the sector analysis. The analysis identified successes,

achievements and key areas of weakness and gaps in the sector, and identified inequities in access to education for children with disabilities, regardless of gender. While no major gender disparities were found, secondary school drop-out among boys and lack of non-formal education and skills development for girls and boys whose needs cannot be met through formal schooling were highlighted as concerns that need to be addressed. The sector analysis informed and guided the development of a new education sector plan. The draft identified four goal areas; (1) improving learning for all through equitable access to quality education; (2) skills for youth and adults; (3) equitable access to life-long affordable quality education; and (4) system-strengthening for efficient, quality schools. The plan was complemented by a comprehensive results framework and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The education sector plan was positively appraised, has completed the GPE's quality assurance process and was awaiting final approval by the newly elected Government at end-2018.

UNICEF Maldives appreciates the technical support provided by UNICEF ROSA to finalize the plan, which will assist with resource mobilization and improve efficiency in aid coordination for the education sector. Additionally, it will provide clear goals and targets for the realization of the right to education for all children, especially the most disadvantaged.

UNICEF supported monitoring of the implementation of life skills education in schools following the training of school principals in 2017. UNICEF had supported training of 137 school heads of the total 141. Monitoring conducted with the MoE and the schools found that life skills programmes were not being held as planned. Of the 212 government schools in the country, 154 conducted the minimum six life skills sessions of life skills following the principals' training. Schools reported numerous challenges in implementing life skills, such as unavailability of designated facilitators, lack of space and resources to conduct the classes and lack of time in the school day to slot in life skills sessions. After-school life skills classes were found to be ineffective. Monitoring also revealed that some facilitators were omitting sessions on puberty, sexual and reproductive health and drugs – topics they were not comfortable discussing with students –and that life skills sessions were not always provided to the most vulnerable students.

With this information, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) – which also supports the MoE to incorporate life skills into the new national curriculum– engaged in close collaboration to address gaps and a wide range of other issues pertaining to young people. Following a two-day joint consultation between UNICEF and UNFPA country and regional teams (including advisors from ROSA), a joint desk review of available information on young people was completed and gaps were identified. The desk review report was shared with national stakeholders for feedback. UNICEF advocated with the new Government about the importance of institutionalizing life skills in schools and for vulnerable children not in school. Interventions to strengthen life skills implementation were being planned with the MoE at end-year.

### **Goal area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation**

UNICEF continued to strengthen community social groups (CSGs) as the key community-based component of the national child protection system. These groups work with vulnerable families to prevent and respond to violence against children and gender-based violence. By the end of 2018, a total of 39 community social groups had been launched, of which 19 updated their data on vulnerable families and three worked closely with identified vulnerable families. A positive change in attitudes toward abuse victims was observed in most communities where

community social groups are active, helping to protect children from violence. The Government has recognized these groups as an instrumental mechanism to address violence against children and gender-based violence, as seen in the decision to expand them nationwide.

UNICEF continued its community-level engagement on the island of Fuvahmulah, where the community social group was particularly active. In collaboration with the group, UNICEF supported interventions to raise awareness about violence against children, with a special emphasis on including fathers in the programme, which reached 340 fathers, 1,613 students and 70 pre-school teachers.

UNICEF Maldives continued to enhance the capacity of social workers, focusing on further improving their supervision of case management processes and procedures. Ten of the 19 family and children service centres in the atolls were monitored, involving a review of the quality of risk assessments and individual intervention plans and application of the processes described in the procedure manual. Issues identified as a result were addressed through refresher training for 22 social workers from across the country. Furthermore, UNICEF supported the establishment of child-friendly interview and counselling rooms in selected centres, enhancing children's safety and security while being interviewed.

To strengthen justice for children, UNICEF supported the prosecutor general's office to develop an in-service training module on treatment of child victims and witnesses and juvenile offenders for use by prosecutors. The training provided an opportunity to look at current practices in cases where children are involved as victims, witnesses or offenders. The training provided critical skills and knowledge to build stronger cases for prosecution. A total of 94 prosecutors and eight investigators, covering regional branches and the central prosecutor's office were trained. To institutionalize training capacity and increase sustainability, 19 prosecutors underwent a training-of-trainers programme. Those who completed this programme conducted numerous training sessions that scaled up training of prosecutors across the country. As a result, increased cooperation and collaboration was established between prosecutors and investigators working on child-related cases.

UNICEF supported the Maldives Judicial Academy to orient magistrates and other stakeholders on new approaches to juvenile justice practices such as diversion and alternative sentencing. Some 53 stakeholders from different agencies – including 27 magistrates, 13 law enforcement officers, three social workers and 10 school management staff – were oriented, resulting in wider agreement among stakeholders on the importance of continued school enrolment and the application of diversion and restorative justice for children who commit minor offenses.

Discussions with the magistrates and other stakeholders identified the need for developing a specific in-service module on child rights, violence against children, juvenile crimes and restorative justice for practicing magistrates, which will receive UNICEF Maldives support in 2019.

UNICEF continued its contribution to strengthening the capacity of Maldives' Police Service to investigate violence against children, juvenile crimes and to prevent violence against children. Twenty investigative officers now have increased skills for carrying out child-focused interviews of suspects; an additional 68 officers were trained on child-sensitive interviewing techniques with a focus on children as victims of abuse.

The various capacity-building opportunities UNICEF supported for prosecutors, police and

social workers, both collectively and separately, resulted in increased multisectoral discussion of the need for more holistic interventions to address cases of children as victims, offenders and witnesses. The training sessions also explored the specific vulnerabilities, risks and challenges faced by children, both as victims and offenders.

In partnership with the MPS, Ministry of Tourism, Guest House Association of Maldives and Live Abroad Association, UNICEF continued to provide guidance on combating sexual exploitation in travel and tourism and promoting child-safe tourism. This orientation reached 36 local guest houses and safari boat operators. Thirty officers from the Department of Immigration were also trained on their role in ensuring child-safe tourism. These interventions will minimize the potential risks of child exploitation created by the Maldives' rapidly expanding tourism sector.

UNICEF facilitated consultations on the draft Child Rights Bill, including with adolescent girls and boys and young people, as well as NGOs. In addition, UNICEF actively contributed to the bill through participation in consultation with government agencies led by the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives.

Overall, these initiatives further strengthened the child protection system to prevent, protect and respond to violence against children.

#### **Goal area 4: Every child lives in a safe and clean environment**

UNICEF's long-term support to the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) was instrumental in establishing eight new community emergency response teams on selected islands in 2018: four islands from the North Region and an additional four from the South Region. The islands were selected for their vulnerability to climate hazards such as seasonal sea-surge flooding. With the addition of these eight islands, the total number of community response teams on islands reached 14. Working through the NDMC, UNICEF provided eight de-watering pumps and accessories for the islands in the North Region. With these critical interventions, local teams are now able to respond quickly and effectively to local emergency situations, ensuring that basic services such as school, health care and markets continue to function without disruption.

UNICEF Maldives has a small WASH program that focuses on strengthening the enabling environment for provision of quality WASH services. It supported the Maldives attendance at the Mahatma Gandhi international sanitation conference held in New Delhi from 29 September to 2 October 2018, and the seventh South Asian conference on sanitation conference held in Islamabad, Pakistan, in April 2018. The outcome statement of the latter, the Islamabad declaration, reflects most of the targets included in the Maldives water and sewerage policy. Hence, participation at the conference enabled the Maldives delegation to recommit to implement this policy.

UNICEF Maldives provided support for updating data reflected in the WHO/UNICEF joint monitoring programme for water supply, sanitation and hygiene. In 2018, programme estimates for Maldives in the areas of WASH in health care facilities and WASH in schools was provided in collaboration with WHO. Moreover, UNICEF also collaborated with the MoE to develop country snapshots on menstrual hygiene management.

#### **Goal area 5: Every child has an equitable chance in life**

UNICEF supported the further development of a national data system and three sectoral data management systems. The MaldivInfo database was upgraded to align with the 'data-for-all' version, and was updated with additional information from administrative sources and newly released survey data. Maldives' child protection database was expanded to cover all atolls and FCSCs for better management of reported cases of violence against children. In partnership with the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, UNICEF developed the first country estimates for a multidimensional poverty index (MPI) for Maldives. The disaggregated data from these three databases assisted with the identification of vulnerable children, facilitating targeted interventions to ensure that no child is left behind.

UNICEF also collaborated with the NBS to develop institutional capacity for establishing a national child-focused MPI, with technical support from UNICEF ROSA. The MPI investigates poverty beyond income and builds understanding of how people experience poverty in multiple and simultaneous ways. It identifies how children and people are left behind in education, health and standards of living using 11 key indicators. A joint stakeholders exercise furnished consensus on the indicators most relevant to Maldives, with links to the SDGs and national priorities. The process led to building capacity among key stakeholders for calculating a national MPI. The index will be finalized using data from the soon-to-be-released demographic and health survey covering 2016–2017.

In 2018 UNICEF embarked on two studies: on child marriage and on adolescent issues. The desk review of adolescent issues identified areas for further interventions and programmatic actions. Data collection for the child marriage study was expected to be available by end-January 2019 and should provide much-needed updated data on child marriage in the country.

The assessment of practices in infant and young child feeding indicated that fathers need to be more engaged on this matter, but that it is customarily left solely to mothers. The design of the social- and behaviour-change communication strategy for the first 1,000 days of life pointed to specific roles for fathers and mothers and highlighted aspects that minimized stereotypical roles. For instance, fathers were identified as a key target group, so the strategy included messages to fathers about their role in enabling mothers to breast feed. The strategy also included nutrition counselling information and messages for working mothers on continuing breastfeeding upon their return to work. Furthermore, UNICEF disseminated early childhood care and messages used in the global #earlymomentsmattermovement, which include messages for both fathers and mothers.

### **Part 3: Lessons learned and constraints**

Programme implementation experienced two periods of slowdown in 2018. The unexpected state of emergency declared in early February impeded the implementation of activities, especially with the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. The second slowdown occurred during the run-up to the September presidential election and the following weeks, until the new Government took office in mid-November. There was heightened sensitivity during the run-up to the presidential elections. Some partners became extra cautious about sharing information, such as research findings and reports, as the information could be interpreted in different ways, impact some UNICEF activities. For example, the household income and expenditure survey report was published without the chapter on poverty and data on juvenile crimes were not

available for public use.

At a time of political tension between local councils and central authorities, UNICEF Maldives was able to influence and coordinate some of its multisectoral initiatives, such as the activation of the community social groups, alternative learning programmes for children in conflict with the law and multisectoral training for stakeholders. The lesson learned is that UNICEF must maintain impartiality, remain a trusted interlocutor, and continue to focus on results for children, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

To minimize the impact of the slowdown in programme implementation, UNICEF worked directly with service provision agencies. For example, with the main tertiary hospital in Male' to deliver interventions on child health. In addition, UNICEF opted for direct payment and reimbursement modalities when implementation and reporting-back on cash advances to official bodies was slowed. For some government partners, who were unable to recruit personnel for critical vacant positions, UNICEF assisted through the placement of short-term consultants.

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