

UNICEF Executive Board - 2022 First Regular Session

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Statement by Adam Navee Mohamed, Republic of Maldives.

What does it mean to be poor for a young person? While that may sound like a simple question to some, it's not always one's financial situation that determines whether a person is rich or poor. From health, to education, and even living standard, there are many ways in which people may suffer from hardships or deprivation in their lives. And our country, the Maldives is no such exception. In the Maldives, about 34% of children and young people are poor.

The driving factors of poverty in the Maldives are: number of years of schooling and access to health care. Climate change is exacerbating this. There are stark differences in both the severity and types of poverty between the Capital Male' and the rest of the country.

What does this really mean for a young person such as me? While some of us are able to complete a full cycle of 10+ years of school education, many young people do not have access to upper secondary education and skills development in the remote islands. This is a gap that must be bridged to ensure that we produce a generation of educated and skilled young people who can meaningfully engage in addressing issues that affect them, including the impacts of climate change, which threatens their future.

Looking forward, I see hope. There are concerted efforts by the Government and development partners such as UNICEF that is paving the way for positive results for children and young people. For instance, Community social groups established at the island level is a key mechanism to ensure that the most vulnerable are identified, helped and referred to services such as social protection, education, health, child protection and mental health. The virtual learning set-up introduced during the lock-down created the basis for the provision of education through hybrid platforms, which in turn can improve access to education in remote islands. There is also joint efforts planned towards climate adaptation with young people participation.

As a young person I urge all those who are responsible for making decisions to incorporate data and evidence of poverty into budget allocations, so that resources can be shared and distributed rationally and efficiently. I also appeal to empower young people to take measures to address poverty in the form of advocacy and using every opportunity to gain skills and increase our chances of employability – to be part of the solution.

I want this to be said out loud, as I believe we must strive for a future where all Maldivian children and young people are free from the shackles of poverty. A future where we have equal access to all our rights and be able to reach our full potential. It should not just be a dream, but a reality.

Thank you.