



INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION MALDIVES



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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Independent Country Programme Evaluation (ICPE) of UNDP's work in Maldives over the period 2016 to 2020.

As a small-island developing state, Maldives faces significant challenges. Like many island nations, Maldives is acutely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, especially given its status as one of the most low-lying countries in the world. Along with sea level rises, Maldives will have to adapt to greater extremes of dry periods and heavy rainfall, increasing the risk of droughts and floods. The country's small, highly dispersed population limits its tax base and it faces high costs for providing services.

This evaluation found that UNDP has made some positive contributions towards meeting these challenges, but that it has struggled to gain

traction, given the political instability that has characterized the recent programming period. There is now a good opportunity to build on lessons from past and current work in support of reforms that will be resilient across political cycles. In considering the appropriate locus of this support, UNDP should take care not to stretch its limited resources too thinly, to a point where it is unable to make a tangible difference in any single area.

I would like to thank the Government of Maldives, national stakeholders, and colleagues at the UNDP Maldives country office and Bureau for their support throughout the evaluation. I hope that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will strengthen the formulation of the next country programme strategy.



Indran A. Naidoo
Director
Independent Evaluation Office

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPD	Country Programme Document
GCF	Green Climate Fund
ICPE	Independent Country Programme Evaluation
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
LECReD	Low Emission Climate Resilient Development
MPTFO	Multi-partner Trust Fund Office
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ROAR	Results-oriented Annual Report
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

Evaluation Brief: ICPE Maldives

Country context and UNDP programme

Over the last two decades, Maldives has achieved enormous improvements in per-capita gross national income, leading the World Bank to describe it as a 'development success story'. These gains are reflected in changes to Maldives' human development index ranking. In 2018 it was ranked 101 out of the 188 countries on the list, at the bottom of the 'high human development' category and above the average for South Asia. Maldives achieved five of the Millennium Development Goals before 2015 and graduated from being a least-developed country in 2011.

Notwithstanding these positive improvements, Maldives exhibits many of the common vulnerabilities of small-island developing states, including small population, geographic isolation, and limited land mass and resources. As one of the most low-lying countries in the world, Maldives is acutely vulnerable to sea level rises expected to result from climate change.

Reflecting the importance of managing the impacts of climate change for Maldives, and the availability of funds, UNDP's country programme portfolio mostly comprises energy, environment and climate projects. Official development assistance (ODA) to Maldives has declined steeply over the past 10 years. This, combined with donors' reluctance to support work in governance due to the state of crisis that has characterized Maldives' politics in recent years, has constrained UNDP's support for democratic governance, which has been almost entirely dependent on Maldives' small annual core resource allocation (US\$350,000).

Findings and conclusions

UNDP's operating environment in Maldives has been very difficult. The recent extended political crisis, which triggered strong criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human

Rights and the adoption of a framework for sanctions from the European Union, reflects serious concerns about governance trends in recent years. Declining ODA, partly in response to the improving income status of Maldives and partly reflecting donor concerns about governance standards, has limited UNDP's resources, especially for democratic governance activities. As a result, the space for UNDP to work in a meaningful way with the government in many areas outlined by the country programme document (CPD) has been constrained.

In an important litmus test of the health of the country's fledgling democratic systems, Maldives' third general elections were held in September 2018, resulting in a smooth transition of power, despite fears there would be conflict. In this context, there is currently renewed interest from some donors in supporting Maldives, and UNDP has a good opportunity to re-engage with the new government in some key policy areas. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) considers that development of proposals for future work in governance should include more explicit focus on the risks and problems that have been documented in the governance programme in the recent past.

UNDP's work in the environment area has been implemented on a scale that provides opportunities for meaningful influence on the Maldives Government. Unfortunately, the results produced in this area have been modest and below expectation, given the level of resources that have been applied. Mobilization of Green Climate Fund (GCF) resources for a major project to improve water supply and sanitation was a significant achievement and will be an important test of UNDP's capacity to deliver large and complex service delivery projects at scale in Maldives.

The lack of flexible resources within the country office means the scope for the office to achieve significant gender equality outcomes is currently limited. Most of the country programme's resources

are earmarked for environment projects that can be expected to provide general benefits for the Maldives population, but afford relatively limited scope for pursuing significant improvements in gender equality. The prevailing practice of coding programme outputs using the gender marker substantially overstates the degree to which the Maldives programme has focused on promoting gender equality.

There is a mismatch between the scope and reach of the objectives stated in the CPD and what can be realistically achieved with the limited resources UNDP provides, and the fact that those resources are a small fraction of resources available to the Maldives Government. This reflects a failure to consider UNDP's comparative advantage and how it can best position itself to assist the Maldives Government to achieve its objectives.

Recommendations

In the area of governance, the country office should work in the short term with the new government to identify and articulate its policy priorities, and work across government. In the longer term, the country office should ensure that its governance programme: focuses on working with a small number of partners to underpin the achievements of a small number of realistic objectives; is informed by a strong analysis of the Maldives' political economy and focuses on supporting sound reforms that have cross-party support and are likely to be resilient across political cycles; and is flexible enough to allow for adaptive management to respond to likely shifts in the political environment.

The next Maldives CPD should contain a much stronger statement of strategic intent for the programme than the current CPD. Within the framework provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the next CPD should include a much stronger articulation of the link between the analysis of context and the statement of priorities, and of causal pathways that explain how UNDP will plausibly contribute to the achievement of the stated objectives. CPD objectives, as well as targets and related indicators, should only be included if there is a realistic prospect of UNDP having a measurable influence over them.

The country office should develop a strategy for addressing gender equality that is founded on a clear-headed assessment of the scope provided by different activities to do so. Gender marker coding should be reviewed annually, with coding updated where necessary to ensure the data provides an accurate picture of the level of focus on gender equality of UNDP programmes.

UNDP should undertake an early review of the risks facing its GCF-funded water supply and sanitation project, including political and institutional risks, and those related to procurement and delivery of required infrastructure in remote locations, with any revisions submitted to the project board for consideration.



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducts Independent Country Programme Evaluations (ICPEs) to capture and demonstrate evaluative evidence of UNDP's contributions to development results at the country level, as well as the effectiveness of UNDP's strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts for achieving development results. The ICPE addresses four key evaluation questions:

- What did the UNDP country programme intend to achieve during the period under review?
- To what extent has the programme achieved (or is likely to achieve) its intended objectives?
- What factors contributed to or hindered UNDP's performance, and eventually, the sustainability of results?
- What can UNDP learn from the evaluation about how it can best position itself to support small-island states that are pushing towards graduation, or have graduated from official development assistance (ODA) eligibility?

UNDP's Maldives country programme runs from 2016 to 2020. This ICPE was conducted in 2018–2019 to feed into the development of the Maldives programme beyond the current cycle. Intended audiences for the evaluation are the UNDP Executive Board, UNDP country office, UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and the Maldives Government.

1.2 Country context

Maldives is made up of 1,190 small islands clustered in 26 ring-like atolls spread over 90,000 square kilometres, making it one of the world's most geographically dispersed countries. Its population is approximately 427,000 and includes more than 59,000 migrant workers.

With high-end tourism¹ and fishing as the main drivers, Maldives has achieved enormous improvements in per-capita gross national income over the last two decades, leading the World Bank to describe it as a 'development success story'.² Per-capita gross national income increased from under US \$2,000 in 1998, to US \$10,535 in 2017,³ a trend that will see Maldives graduate to high-income status within five years if this continues.⁴ These gains are reflected in changes to the country's human development index ranking. In 2018, it was ranked 101 out of the 188 countries on the list. This is at the bottom of the 'high human development' category and above the average for South Asia. Maldives achieved five of the Millennium Development Goals before 2015 and graduated from being a least-developed country in 2011.

Notwithstanding these positive improvements, Maldives exhibits many of the vulnerabilities typically associated with small-island developing states.

As one of the most low-lying countries in the world, Maldives is acutely vulnerable to projected sea level rises resulting from climate change. Around 80 per cent of Maldives land area is less than 1 metre above sea level, and over half of its settlements and two thirds of its critical infrastructure is located within 100 metres of its shoreline. The Asian Development

¹ The Maldives economy is highly dependent on tourism. In 2017, travel and tourism shared 76.6 percent of the country's GDP, and contributed to 37.4 percent of total employment. World Travel and Tourism Council, *Travel & Tourism. Economic Impact 2018. Maldives*, <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2018/maldives2018.pdf>

² World Bank (2013). *The Maldives: A Development Success Story*, [<http://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2013/04/10/maldives-development-success-story>.]

³ GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$).

⁴ After an economic slowdown in 2015, Maldives' GDP rebounded to a growth rate of 6.2 percent in 2016. This economic growth is projected to continue, reaching 6.7 percent in 2018, and 6.8 percent in 2019. Asian Development Bank, *Maldives: Economy*. <https://www.adb.org/countries/maldives/economy>

Bank has estimated that Maldives may face up to a 2.3 percent loss of its annual gross domestic product by 2050 due to costs related to adverse climate change effects and adaptation.⁵ Maldives' vulnerability to climate change is not limited to sea level rises. Among other things, global warming is expected to accentuate extremes of dry periods and heavy rainfall, increasing the risks of droughts and floods, especially during El Niño events.

Maldives' vulnerability to disaster risk is underlined by the impact of the 2004 tsunami, which caused damage amounting to an estimated 62 percent of gross domestic product. Projected rises in sea levels, as well as intensity of rainfall, will further increase Maldives' vulnerability to disasters.⁶ Overall, Maldives faces moderate hazard risks, except for the immediate low probability and high consequential tsunami hazard, and high probability and high consequential sea level rise hazard in the distant future.⁷

As an island state, Maldives faces big challenges in the high cost of delivering services to people in highly dispersed and remote locations. According to its 2014 census, the population is spread across 188 inhabited islands, 109 resorts and 128 industrial and other islands. Outside of the capital, Malé, where 38 percent of the population live, there is only one island that has more than 10,000 people. Most of the islands have less than 2,000 people living on them. Geographic isolation has

a major impact on inequality. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) reflects, for example, that the human development index value for atolls is markedly lower (0.627) than for Malé (0.734).

Maldives' size creates labour market and capacity constraints and a constrained tax base from which to cover the costs of government.

The country's systems of democratic governance are in their formative stages. The constitution it established in 2008 reflected democratic norms, such as the separation of powers, multi-party elections and independent institutions, including a human rights commission, anti-corruption commission and a prosecutor general. The fragility of these systems is underlined by the extended political crisis, which has existed since this time.⁸ In an important litmus test of the health of Maldives' fledgling democratic systems, the country's third general elections were held successfully in September 2018, resulting in a smooth transition of power despite fears there would be conflict. Parliamentary elections in April 2019 further confirmed changes in the political landscape foreshadowed by the 2018 elections.⁹

Located in the Indian Ocean south-west of India, Maldives is a site of strategic interest for regional powers including China, India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. While Maldivian society has traditionally embraced liberal interpretations

⁵ Asian Development Bank (2014). *Assessing the Costs of Climate and Adaptation in South Asia*.

⁶ A climate risk assessment completed for the Maldives Government estimated, for example, that for Hulhulé the incidence of an hourly sea level of 70 cm above mean sea level is likely to increase from the current once-in-100-year frequency to at least an annual event by 2050. While projections for intensity of rainfall are less certain, the report suggested that extreme rainfall events were likely to occur twice as often, on average, by 2050. Consequences for coastal and inland flooding and secondary impacts on groundwater resources will be significant. Republic of the Maldives (2006). *Climate Risk Profile for the Maldives Report*.

⁷ As one of the most low-lying nations on the planet, Maldives experiences high frequency, low impact, hydrometeorological disasters causing storm surges and often coastal flooding. Since 2007, more than 90 inhabited islands have been flooded at least once and 37 islands have been flooded regularly, or at least once per year. More than 97 percent of inhabited islands reported beach erosion in 2004, of which 64 percent reported severe beach erosion.

⁸ This state of crisis escalated in 2015, when nine opposition party members (including former President Mohamed Nasheed) were arrested and incarcerated on various charges, including terrorism, weapons smuggling, attempted assassination of the president, bribery, theft and money laundering. In early 2018, the Maldives Supreme Court quashed the convictions, ruling that the trials had violated the constitution and international law, and ordering the release of the prisoners. President Yameen responded to this ruling by imposing a state of emergency, a decree that suspended several constitutional protections, banned public assemblies, and granted security forces sweeping powers to arrest and detain. Supreme Court Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Justice Ali Hameed were arrested the next day. The remaining three Supreme Court justices then reversed the ruling on the opposition party members.

⁹ Maldives Independent (2019). *Yellow wave sweeps MDP to historic 65-seat haul*. <https://maldivesindependent.com/politics/yellow-wave-sweeps-mdp-to-historic-65-seat-haul-144790>

of Islam, many external commentators identify Maldives' important and growing Saudi links as factors in a trend towards increasing religious conservatism in the private sphere, which is threatening this tradition. Contravening Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which it is a party, the Maldives 2008 Constitution excludes non-Muslims from citizenship rights, and enables limitations on rights and freedoms to protect and maintain the tenets of Islam.¹⁰

The trend towards greater religious conservatism has important implications for gender equality. Gender equality as measured by basic well-being in Maldives is reasonably healthy, reflecting its high human development. However, there is a risk that the trend of growing social and religious conservatism in the private sphere may reverse these gains. This prompted the World Bank to observe in a recent report: "Public support for gender equality and women's rights on various aspects of life appears to be declining, particularly as regards work and family interactions."¹¹ A more detailed analysis of gender dynamics in Maldives is included in the annexes to this report.

The trend toward greater religious conservatism has also been implicated in challenges Maldives faces in countering religious extremism and terrorism. Maldives is estimated to be one of the world's highest per-capita contributors of foreign fighters to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.¹² There have also been several high-profile attacks over the last 10 years that highlight the risks of increased radicalism and violence. This has so far had no effect, but the threat of terrorism could affect the country's tourism industry, which would be disastrous for the economy.

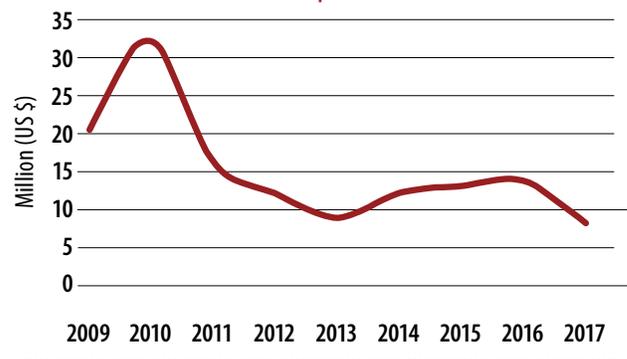
1.3 UNDP programme under review

Reflecting the importance of managing the impacts of climate change for Maldives, and the availability of funds, UNDP's portfolio mostly comprises energy, environment and climate projects.

Governance is a focus for the Maldives country programme document (CPD) but represents less than 25 percent of the spending over the CPD period. Programme spending in recent years has been around \$5.5 million per annum.

With an allocation of just \$350,000 annually, reflecting its income status, Maldives' Target for Resource Assignment from Core (TRAC) resources is very limited, which means there is little scope for programming outside of the environment area. Opportunities to mobilize resources from other donors have become scarce, at least when it comes to traditional donors. Grant ODA from OECD countries to Maldives has fallen significantly over the last decade (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. OECD Grant ODA to Maldives, 2009–2017, Constant (2017) prices



¹⁰ Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, twenty-second session 4–15 May 2015. Compilation prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (b) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1 and paragraph 5 of the annex to Council resolution 16/21: Maldives. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/039/32/PDF/G1503932.pdf?OpenElement>

¹¹ El-Horr, Jana and Rohini Prabha Pande (2016). *Understanding Gender in Maldives: Towards Inclusive Development*. Directions in Development. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-0868-5. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO.

¹² The US-based security intelligence consultancy company, Soufan Group, published a report in 2015 estimating that the number of fighters from Maldives to ISIS was 200 (source: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf). As per this report, this was more than India and Pakistan combined. This report suggested that Maldives has the highest per-capita number of foreign fighters in Syria/Iraq of all countries. (The equivalent number for Maldives was not identified in the first report published in 2014). The Maldives Government puts this figure at between 20 and 100 fighters.

In part, this downward trend in ODA from OECD donors reflects a response to concerns by traditional donors about breaches of principles of democratic rule and separation of powers under the previous Maldives presidency. This prompted the European Union to adopt a framework for targeted sanctions against Maldives in mid-2018.¹³ With the recent change of government there has been a thaw in diplomatic relations, and some prospect of a correction to this trend. However, given Maldives' upper-middle-income status and growth trajectory, funding from traditional donors is likely to remain lower than it has been historically.

While traditional donor funding has fallen, OECD data does not capture an important trend in external financing in the form of large increases in ODA or ODA-like flows from China and Saudi Arabia, both of which are significant donors to Maldives. Data compiled by US-based think tank AidData suggests Chinese ODA-like flows to Maldives may be as high as or higher than \$12 million annually,¹⁴ and that China also provides much larger amounts (more than \$750 million between 2010 and 2014) as 'official finance', the specific terms of which are not known. There is no publicly available data on ODA or other investment in Maldives by Saudi Arabia, but it is known to be large. For example, in early 2018, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates announced a \$160 million grant to Maldives for development projects, including airport development and the

fisheries sector. To date, the United Arab Emirates reported ODA to Maldives has been small, but the 2018 announcement suggests that this is no longer the case.¹⁵ Given these trends, UNDP has been trying to diversify its financing sources to build its programme, focusing on the private sector and government cost sharing.

Currently, there are four resident agencies in Maldives: UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNFPA. All the other members of the UN country team are non-resident agencies, including the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UN Women, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UNESCO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These are based primarily in Colombo, New Delhi and Bangkok. UN Women, UNOPS, IOM and the World Bank have staff working in Maldives.

The Maldives CPD identifies two outcomes reflecting its work in areas of governance and sustainable development (Table 1). The two CPD outcomes are part of the UNDAF (2016–2020) and are also supported by other UN agencies, including UNICEF, WHO and UNEP.

¹³ The framework enables the imposition of travel bans or asset freezes on relevant individuals and entities regarded to be "responsible for undermining the rule of law or obstructing an inclusive political solution in Maldives, as well as persons and entities responsible for serious human rights violations".

¹⁴ The average level of Chinese ODA-like flows to Maldives from 2012 to 2014.

¹⁵ China is also making very large investments in Maldives, including an \$830 million upgrade of the Malé international airport. Research by Gateway House estimates the value of the three largest Chinese projects to be more than 40 percent of GDP, raising concerns about potential downstream debt distress. Maldives and China signed a free trade agreement in late 2017.

TABLE 1: Country programme outcomes and indicative resources (2016–2020)

Country programme outcome	Indicative resources (US\$ million)	Expenditure as at end 2018 (US\$ million)
By 2020, citizen expectations for voice, sustainable development, the rule of law and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance	Regular: 1.15 Other: 6.05	2.9
By 2020, growth and development are inclusive, sustainable, increase resilience to climate change and disasters, and contribute to enhanced food, energy and water security and natural resource management	Regular: 0.6 Other: None specified, but UNDAF includes an estimate of around 18	9.6
Total	7.8	12.5

Source: UNDP Maldives Country Programme Document 2016–2020 (DP/DCP/MDV/3)

While the CPD suggests governance would be a major focus for the programme, the focus on governance is considerably lower than originally planned, as a result of political constraints outlined in the next chapter. The governance portfolio is small and is constrained by a lack of resources. Well past the mid-point of the CPD, it is likely that resources mobilized for governance will be less than half of what was expected at the time the CPD was completed.

By contrast, resources for the environment and natural resource management side of the portfolio are much greater than what was indicated would be available in the CPD. This includes the large Green Climate Fund (GCF) project, 'Support of Vulnerable Communities in Maldives to Manage Climate Change-Induced Water Shortages' (\$28.2m [\$23.6m from the GCF, \$4.5m from the Maldives Government and \$0.1m from UNDP]).

Relative to the size of the country's economy, UNDP's contribution is small, representing less than half of 1 percent of general government expenditure.¹⁶ This means that UNDP's ability to directly generate benefits is limited by either the small scale of its interventions, or by its ability to use

resources to generate larger impacts by prompting systemic changes in government policy or practice in focus areas.

1.4 Methodology

The United Nations Evaluation Group Norms and Standards and Ethical Code of Conduct guided this evaluation.¹⁷

The evaluation approach involved a one-week fieldwork mission, 20 days of support from a national consultant, and approximately 30 days of work from the lead evaluator. The method included interviews with representatives of 21 partner organizations, along with examinations of government data and documentation, project documentation reporting, media reporting, and previously completed independent reviews and evaluations.

The limited time available for fieldwork meant that systematic collection and analysis of beneficiary views on project implementation and outcomes could not be gathered, nor could extensive outcome mapping be done to examine unintended consequences of projects on non-target beneficiaries. With the exception of data collected from

¹⁶ Based on estimated general government expenditure of around \$1.4 billion for 2015.

¹⁷ www.uneval.org

stakeholder interviews and field observations, the evaluation did not involve primary data collection. Given these constraints, the rigor of the evaluation's outcome assessments depends on the quality of the available documentation about the objectives and outcomes of UNDP's work. To offset this limitation, the evaluation sought to tap into a diversity of data sources, including government data and documentation, project documentation reporting, media reporting and independent reviews and evaluations.

The projects selected for examination are identified in the annexes to this report. These accounted for 88 percent of 2017 and 2018 programme expenditure. Selection was based on the following three criteria:

- The project is currently (or was) active in the current CPD period, or was a precursor to an ongoing project
- The project is evaluable in the sense that it is mature enough (has been a focus for UNDP over a long enough period) to be able to say something meaningful about its progress and outcomes
- The project is large enough in terms of scope, breadth of audience and investment to warrant specific attention.

To the extent allowed by existing data, actual or likely gender equality outcomes were assessed for each project included in the scope of the evaluation. The extent to which the evaluation was able to assess outcomes from different aspects of UNDP's work depended on the stage of completion of different components of the work. Where projects were in their early stages, the focus of the evaluation was on whether there was evidence that their design reflected learning or built on outcomes achieved from previous projects.

The evaluation methodology included an attempt to assess the significance of UNDP reported results against objective and outcome statements included in the CPD.

The draft ICPE report was quality assured by two IEO internal reviewers, as well as an external expert (member of the IEO Evaluation Advisory Panel), then submitted to the country office and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific to check for factual errors, and finally to the government and other national partners for comments.



CHAPTER 2

FINDINGS

DEVELOPMENT effectiveness COORDINATION efficiency PARTNERSHIP sustainability NATIONAL OWNERSHIP
sustainability MANAGING FOR RESULTS responsiveness COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT responsiveness
COORDINATION HUMAN effectiveness COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP sustainability
RELEVANCE relevance sustainability MANAGING FOR RESULTS responsiveness HUMAN DEVELOPMENT effectiveness
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COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT responsiveness NATIONAL OWNERSHIP sustainability PARTNERSHIP

This chapter outlines the findings of the evaluation about UNDP’s effectiveness in achieving its objectives in the CPD for each programme outcome and cross-cutting area. It also describes the main factors that influenced UNDP’s performance and contributions to results. The assessment, which is qualitative in nature, was based on an analysis of the correlation between reported project achievements, their contribution to expected outputs under each outcome, and consequently the overall outcome objectives.

●● RELATED CPD OUTPUTS

Output 1: Parliaments, constitution-making bodies and electoral institutions enabled to perform core functions for improved accountability, participation and representation, including for peaceful transitions

Output 2: Capacities of human rights institutions strengthened

Output 3: Frameworks and dialogue processes effectively and transparently engage civil society in national development

Output 4: Legal reform enabled to fight discrimination and address emerging issues, such as environmental and electoral justice

Output 5: Measures in place and implemented across sectors to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence

Output 6: Extent to which operational institutions have the capacity to support fulfilment of the concluding observations from the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Output 7: National and subnational systems and institutions enabled to achieve structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment- and livelihoods-intensive

2.1 Stronger systems of democratic governance

The Maldives programme stated its governance objective as: *“Citizen expectations for voice, sustainable development, the rule of law, and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance.”* To achieve this objective, the Maldives programme expressed an intention to *“promote inclusiveness in policy and decision-making”* and *“deepen engagement with key governance institutions at the national level and atoll/island level, civil society organizations, community-based groups and media”*.

The democratic governance portfolio consists of two projects. The first, Sustaining Inclusive and Sustainable Growth, is a small TRAC-funded project (<\$1 million from 2014 to 2018) to strengthen national and subnational systems and institutions through evidence-based policy services and “structural transformation of productive capacities to create greater opportunities for youth employment”. The second, the Integrated Governance Programme, is currently in its second phase and aims to build a resilient and peaceful democratic society through effective and accountable governance institutions, improved social cohesion and strengthened capacity of civil society to meaningfully participate in public life. In addition to a small amount of UNDP resources, this project also receives a small amount of cost sharing from other donors (Australia, The Netherlands and Japan). Delivering roughly \$0.7 million annually over the last three years, this project is about half the size it was in its first phase, because of significantly reduced UNDP and donor contributions.

Drawing resources from these sources, the CPD indicates an intention to support progress in very diverse areas related to accountability and democratic governance. Among other things, the CPD outlines an intention to: support parliaments, constitution-making bodies and electoral institutions; strengthen the capacities of human rights institutions; improve governmental engagement with civil society; support legal reforms against discrimination; support prevention of and response to gender-based violence; support a cross-institutional response to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and support structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment- and livelihoods-intensive.

Finding 1. While UNDP’s stated objectives in the governance area are ambitious, its resources are modest. Resources for this outcome over the period covered by the CPD were anticipated to come to \$7.2 million (\$1.15 million core, \$6.05 million other). Even with this level of resources it would have been challenging to mount a substantive programme of work in the areas set out in the CPD. Trends to date over the CPD period suggest actual resources will come to less than half of what was anticipated in the project design, further constraining the scope for UNDP to have an influence on Maldives systems of democratic governance.

Finding 2. Overall, the outcomes from UNDP’s work have been modest, reflecting the lack of resources, but also the broad spread of those resources across different activities and partners. While the activities themselves are well-intentioned, and play a useful role as a vehicle for advocacy on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the activities UNDP has funded in its governance programme are so small that it would be very difficult, even with highly sophisticated evaluation methods, to detect their impact. This is borne

out by an IEO assessment of the significance of the results claims made in the Maldives results-oriented annual reports (ROARs) for 2016 and 2017 in the governance portfolio (see annexes). This view is supported by the findings of a recent evaluation of UNDP’s Maldives governance programme,¹⁸ which confirms the view of this evaluation that resources were too limited and spread too widely to have a discernible influence over Maldives’ standards of democratic governance.

Finding 3. A mitigating circumstance is that the extended political crisis has meant the space for UNDP to work in a meaningful way with the government in many areas outlined by the CPD has been constrained. In adapting to this, the country office was smart in switching the focus to working with civil society and the private sector. This ensured continuity of focus, and its contributions in different areas have been positive, albeit limited in scale. Civil society partners consulted by the evaluation were very positive about the role UNDP had played in promoting good governance during this period, and in acting as a channel for them to communicate some of their concerns to government. The partnerships that have been established with the private sector have also provided useful vehicles for positive engagement and promotion of important social issues. However, the transaction costs of this engagement are high given the level of resources that have been and can realistically be mobilized from private sector actors.

The political crisis that has existed in recent times—triggering strong criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and a framework for sanctions from the European Union—reflects a negative trend in standards of governance in Maldives. The successful conduct of the third national election in September 2018, and the peaceful transition of power are cause for optimism about the resilience of the country’s fledgling

¹⁸ The draft evaluation observes: “The programme covers more ground than it can sustain. Therefore, it is unlikely that continuing in the same track will yield the expected results and attain the programme objectives.” *Mid-term evaluation of the Integrated Governance Programme 2016–2020*, DRAFT VERSION 1.1, 8 December 2018.

democratic systems. At the time of the evaluation, indications were that the change of government has opened opportunities for a modest expansion of the country office’s work in the governance area.

Moving forward, and into the next CPD, the evaluation considers the country office would be better placed focusing available resources on fewer objectives, working with fewer stakeholders, and developing platforms that enable the focus on these objectives to be sustained over the long term. This would provide a basis for more meaningful impact, and for more measurement and accounting of this impact than is possible in the current circumstances.

The country office advised the evaluation team that in a multi-donor environment where division of labour would be an option, it could be appropriate for UNDP to focus on just one or two institutions, but that is not the reality in Maldives, and systemic change requires a system-wide approach. The evaluation considers that systemic change is more likely to be achievable by concentrating resources on working with fewer partners towards fewer objectives, rather than the current approach of spreading limited resources across multiple objectives and partners.

2.2 Inclusive and sustainable growth and development

The Maldives programme expressed its objectives in the sustainable development area as:

Growth and development are inclusive, sustainable, increase resilience to climate change and disasters, and contribute to enhanced food, energy and water security and natural resource management.

The scope of the work UNDP intended to pursue in the sustainable development area, as indicated by the CPD, was extremely ambitious, covering almost every conceivable aspect of environmental and natural resource management.¹⁹

UNDP’s actual programme of work is more limited in scope, focusing on support for:

- Improved water supply and sanitation
- Better environmental management by local governments
- Disaster risk reduction
- The management of environmental pollutants

Support for improved water supply and sanitation

RELATED CPD OUTPUTS

Output 2.4: Scaled-up action on climate change adaptation and mitigation across sectors funded and implemented

Finding 4. UNDP’s biggest project in Maldives is the large GCF project, ‘Support of Vulnerable Communities in Maldives to Manage Climate Change-Induced Water Shortages’ (\$28.2 million [\$23.6 million from GCF, \$4.5 million from the Maldives Government, and \$0.1 million from UNDP]) (See Box 1). The GCF project represents a continuation and scaling up of UNDP’s focus on water resources management and will be a test of UNDP’s ability to support adaptation at scale.

¹⁹ The CPD includes eight indicative outputs: “Effective institutional, legislative and policy frameworks in place to enhance the implementation of disaster and climate risk management measures at national and subnational levels”; “Mechanisms in place to assess natural and man-made risks at national and subnational levels”; “Gender-responsive disaster and climate risk management is integrated into development planning and budgetary frameworks of key sectors (e.g., water, agriculture, health and education)”; “Scaled-up action on climate change adaptation and mitigation across sectors funded and implemented”; “Preparedness systems in place to effectively address the consequences of and response to natural hazards (geophysical and climate related) and man-made crises at all levels of government and community”; “Inclusive, sustainable solutions adopted to achieve increased energy efficiency and universal modern energy access (especially off-grid renewable energy sources)”; “Legal and regulatory frameworks, policies and institutions enabled to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, access and benefit-sharing of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, in line with international conventions and national legislation”; and “Solutions developed at national and subnational levels for sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystem services, chemicals and waste”.

BOX 1. Supporting adaptation through measures to secure freshwater resources for vulnerable communities

The Support of Vulnerable Communities in Maldives to Manage Climate Change-Induced Water Shortages project aims to deliver safe and secure freshwater to 105,000 people in the islands of Maldives. This addresses the increasing incidence of drinking water shortages during the dry season resulting from increasingly variable rainfall patterns, and sea-level-rise induced salinity of groundwater.

The 2004 tsunami experience showed how extreme weather events, such as cyclones and storm surge flooding can cause saline intrusion and overflow of septic tanks into freshwater lenses.²⁰ The incidence of climate-sensitive illnesses, such as diarrhoea and vector-borne diseases has increased in recent years and there are marked seasonal patterns, with peaks in diarrhoeal diseases in the wet season. This is consistent with polluted ground water, especially following heavy rainfall events. National average rainfall, lagged by one month, is a significant predictor of the illness.

These challenges have been and will continue to be amplified by the effects of global warming. Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System predict sea level rises of 3.1 mm/year, which will have a profound impact on saltwater intrusion into the groundwater lenses, jeopardizing the main freshwater source for the country. Greater extremes of dry periods and heavy rainfall are expected, increasing the risk of droughts and floods, especially during El Niño events. This will increase challenges with groundwater recharge and rainfall collection.

Approved at the end of 2015, the project faced a series of delays due to issues at the corporate level and politicization of decision-making processes at the national level, both of which were beyond the country office's control. The project is now in its establishment phase. It builds on previous efforts in the same area, funded through a \$9 million Adaptation Fund grant. The UNDP/Adaptation Fund project, 'Increasing Climate Resilience through an Integrated Water Resources Management Programme (2012–2016)' had essentially the same design and objectives as the current GCF project, although it was smaller in scale.

Finding 5. The GCF project design does not address key risks encountered by UNDP's previous work in water resource management, which had an unsatisfactory outcome.²¹ The current GCF identified 11 risks to implementation and success—none rated low risk, while two rated medium risk. None reflected the political and institutional risks encountered by the previous GCF project. The project document did not consider risks associated with procurement and delivery of required infrastructure in remote locations, which created significant challenges in the previous project, and have presented problems for the current one.²² In addition, the headline objectives of the GCF project appear ambitious considering prior experience.²³

²⁰ A convex-shaped layer of fresh groundwater that floats above the denser saltwater, usually found on small coral or limestone islands and atolls.

²¹ Increasing Climate Resilience through an Integrated Water Resources Management Programme, Final Evaluation, February 2016.

²² As acknowledged in the 2018 ROAR, progress in the initial phase of the current project was delayed significantly due to procurement challenges that prevented key contracts from being mobilized on time. As a result, the annual targets for the project were only partially achieved closer to the end of the year.

²³ The headline results to be pursued by the project are:

- Scaling up integrated water supply systems to provide safe water to vulnerable households (at least 32,000 people, including 15,000 women)
- Decentralized and cost-effective dry season water supply system introduced, benefiting 73,000 people across seven Northern Atolls
- Groundwater quality improved to secure freshwater reserves for long-term resilience on 49 islands.

While the GCF project has three times the budget of the Integrated Water Resource Management project, it is aiming to deliver freshwater to 15 times the number of beneficiaries (6,701) as that project, with uncertain success. The GCF project aims to secure reliable groundwater supplies on 49 islands, a target the Integrated Water Resource Management project was forced to drop to just three due to resource constraints.

The evaluation team raised these concerns with the country office and the Maldives Ministry of Environment and was assured that the experience from the previous work on water resource management had been an important source of learning for the GCF project, even though there is no explicit attention to this learning in the design. While the IEO was reassured by these conversations, the evaluation team believes there is merit in early and explicit review of risks included in the design, considering the experience of the previous project.

Support for better environmental management to local governments

 **RELATED CPD OUTPUTS**

Output 2.4: Scaled-up action on climate change adaptation and mitigation across sectors funded and implemented

Output 2.6: Inclusive, sustainable solutions adopted to achieve increased energy efficiency and universal modern energy access (especially off-grid renewable energy sources)

Output 2.7: Legal and regulatory frameworks, policies and institutions enabled to ensure the conservation, sustainable use, access and benefit-sharing of natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, in line with international conventions and national legislation

Output 2.8: Solutions developed at national and subnational levels for sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystem services, chemicals and waste

The other major activity in the sustainable development area was a substantial effort at joint United Nations programming in environmental management funded through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO) Maldives One UN fund.

The Low Emission Climate Resilient Development (LECReD) project was funded through the MPTFO, a vehicle designed to promote UN coherence through pooled financing instruments and to support the 'Delivering as one' approach, with UNDP executing the majority of the project's activities. The objective of the project was to assist the Laamu Atoll and its islands to realize low emissions and climate-resilient development by supporting local decision makers and planners to integrate climate change and disaster risk management considerations into local planning. The project commenced in 2013 and was completed in 2018.

Finding 6. UNDP's support for low-emission and climate-resilient development through LECReD faced some fundamental challenges, which limited its effectiveness. The core challenge was that the effectiveness and sustainability of the project depended on the national government increasing local councils' fiscal autonomy to enable them to execute plans that UNDP would help them develop. Instead, the reverse happened, with island councils having less control over their resources and services than they had immediately after the Decentralization Act was passed in 2010 (see Box 2).²⁴ Ownership was strong by local councils, as a result of UNDP support, but given the project's decentralization objectives, this ran counter to the objectives of the national government. There was limited ownership and support for the project by key national authorities.

²⁴ This reflects a lack of political support from the then president, Abdulla Yameen, who was strongly opposed to decentralization, arguing that Maldives is a unitary state. See: 'Decentralization of power is not the most appropriate process for Maldives: President', <https://raajje.mv/en/news/40792>

BOX 2. Maldives' road to political decentralization anything but smooth

Prior to political decentralization, the Maldives central government controlled the administration of islands through officials known as atoll chiefs or *atholhuverin*. These were appointed and removed at the discretion of the president and were effectively the most senior government representatives in each atoll. The most senior officials at the island level, island chiefs or *katheeb*s, were also appointed by and reported directly to the president, via atoll chiefs. Island chiefs had supreme oversight over land use, business permits, and even schools. Atoll and island chiefs were generally considered to be representatives of the central government rather than of communities.

Political decentralization commenced with the ratification of the Decentralization Act in 2010 and the first-ever election of full-time councillors for each of the 20 atolls and nearly 190 islands in 2011. The Act set out a framework where councils would be allocated enough funding to carry out all municipal services and implement development projects designed in consultation with communities.

The Decentralization Law has been highly contested from the outset. In its development it was rejected once and underwent substantial amendments compared to the two drafts that were first submitted by the then government. Following the passage of the Decentralization Act, a president who strongly opposed decentralization was elected and several amendments were passed that reduced, rather than expanded, local authorities' mandates. The outcome of this is that council funding has only covered administrative expenses and councils have been unable to raise significant revenue on their own, due to limitations in accessing land or other assets.

The election of a pro-decentralization government in September 2018 improved prospects of implementing the intent of the 2010 Act. The manifesto of the new government pledged to strengthen the role and autonomy of councils. The manifesto states that more current ministerial responsibilities will be devolved to councils. The new government has also pledged to make councils more financially independent. Strategies for this objective include enabling councils to retain all rent generated from land, reefs, lagoons and seas that are within the jurisdiction of the council. Another policy change will be to enable councils to take out loans and to retain fees for public services collected within the constituency of the council.

Financial decentralization and empowerment of councils is a work in progress and will require more thought and debate. Councils currently lack competent technical staff, and there are some key unresolved questions, such as how the geographical jurisdictions of islands will be determined and how atoll councils and island councils will share revenue.

While this fundamental issue hindered the project's outcomes, there were a number of other factors that also contributed.

First, the decision to focus on emissions reduction is hard to understand. Given the aforementioned limitations in autonomy and capacity, and mandate of local governments in sectors responsible for Maldives emissions, this was not a strategic entry point for working to achieve a low carbon outcome. Overall, it should be recognized that Maldives is a net carbon sink and thus UNDP should focus on energy efficiency and climate change

adaptation rather than emissions reduction. There was no reporting of emissions savings produced by the project.

Second, while the island and atoll councils that were the focus of the project appreciated the delivery of plans, training and technical assistance, the returns on this investment were modest. High turnover in the recent council elections meant much of the knowledge gained through training activities has exited the system. While plans and guidelines can be useful, this is only true when there are resources available for implementation. Unfortunately,

resources at the island and atoll council level were lacking, limiting the potential to benefit from this work.

Third, the investment component of the project, which was designed to provide concrete benefits to local communities and for the small grant component to support communities to learn by doing, was not well thought through. Solar systems were installed in 11 schools but could not be connected to the grid, and were still not operational more than 18 months after installation. Waste management plants, while desperately needed, were established without a disposal arrangement in place, meaning that again, the expected benefits are at risk. The other major investment component, which funded rainwater harvesting systems, was appreciated by the local authorities. However, it is not clear how these systems will be managed in the long term, and there is a risk they will undercut current efforts to establish a sustainable water supply system, based on getting more people to pay for water.²⁵ There may have been some learning benefits for local communities involved in the grant component, but these are difficult to quantify, and given the lack of follow through, there is a real possibility they undermined rather than built community confidence. While the country office has worked hard to resolve these issues, many of them were still unresolved at the time of the evaluation.

Finally, issues surrounding the joint working of UN agencies were not well considered. With over seven agencies involved, the transaction costs of coordination were high. Individual agencies did some good things within their resource constraints, but it is not clear how working jointly added value

in pursuing the objectives of the project.²⁶ This should have been considered more closely by the project design.

Reflecting these challenges, the project was assessed by the final evaluation as only moderately effective, and as having limited ownership and sustainability. Unsurprisingly, given its modest outcomes and limited sustainability there has been no attempt to establish a second phase of the project.

Support for disaster risk reduction

● ● RELATED CPD OUTPUTS

Output 2.1: Effective institutional, legislative and policy frameworks in place to enhance the implementation of disaster and climate risk management measures at national and subnational levels

Output 2.2: Mechanisms in place to assess natural and man-made risks at national and subnational levels

Output 2.3: Gender-responsive disaster and climate risk management is integrated into development planning and budgetary frameworks of key sectors (e.g., water, agriculture, health and education)

Output 2.5: Preparedness systems in place to effectively address the consequences of and response to natural hazards (geo-physical and climate related) and man-made crises at all levels of government and community

²⁵ The country office advised on this point that there were discussions at the outset about how to institutionalize these facilities through island-level utility service providers, but councils wanted ownership despite island-level capacity for operation and maintenance being quite low. The facilities were handed over with commitment from councils for operation and maintenance, which was not well followed through on every island.

²⁶ This point was emphasized by the final evaluation of the project, which observed: "Joint programming should be coherent, aim for reduced transaction costs. At the very core of a joint programme should be an overall vision and strategy that brings together multiple existing initiatives and projects. Despite some joint work, it is not fully clear how LECReD has been doing business in a joint way in terms of programme design, implementation and management. Donors and stakeholders expect that joint programming will result in reduced transaction costs, increased effectiveness and the creation of synergy effects. However, clear quantitative information is not available at the moment of writing on what has been reduced and saved or where the value added is to be found. In fact, to some degree, it appears that the LECReD programme has resulted in an increase in internal UN transaction costs as more time and resources were spent in coordination between various agencies."

Finding 7. UNDP has provided support for disaster risk reduction through the two-year Disaster Risk Reduction project funded by Japan (\$0.4 million spent since 2016). The Disaster Risk Reduction project was executed by the National Disaster Management Centre and was completed in 2018, building on an earlier core funded two-year project working with the same institution. Based on the final project summary and interviews with staff of the National Disaster Management Centre and UNDP, the IEO considers the project was useful and well aligned to the role and mandate of Maldives' key disaster management authority.

While it was relatively small in scale, the project supported a number of very useful National Disaster Management Centre activities, including:

- **Supporting improved local response capacity.** This focused on supporting the establishment of island-level disaster management focal points and community response teams to prepare for and respond to emergencies and disasters at the local level.
- **Upgrading early warning messaging systems** to ensure the National Disaster Management Centre and other response bodies are able to maintain uninterrupted communication across all atolls of Maldives in case of localized and/or national emergencies.
- **Improving collection of disaster statistics**, by supporting the National Disaster Management Centre to re-establish the DesInventar system, a database for disaster loss and damage that was established in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, but was neglected in the years that followed.²⁷

The IEO's main concern about the intervention relates to its short duration and current inability to fund a further phase of support. At just over two years, there are risks that both hard and soft components of the project will not be institutionalized. Moreover, the short duration of the project makes it difficult for UNDP and its staff to capture and retain learning from the project, and to develop a more authoritative position and capacity in the area, drawing from its experience across the programme. Given its links to other work in the environment portfolio, UNDP's mandate, and Maldives' vulnerability to disasters, work on disaster risk is one area UNDP could consider prioritizing in future, if resources can be mobilized.

Support for better management of pollutants

● ● RELATED CPD OUTPUTS

Output 2.8: Solutions developed at national and subnational levels for sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystem services, chemicals and waste

● ●

Better management of pollutants is an ongoing effort funded through the multilateral fund for the implementation of the Montreal protocol to phase out Hydrochlorofluorocarbons in Maldives. It is too early to offer a clear assessment of its outcomes. Under the Global Environment Facility (GEF 6), the country office was successful in mobilizing resources for a project focusing on eliminating persistent organic pollutants. It is currently in the design stage.

²⁷ Scaling Up the National Capacity for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management in the Maldives Project, Final Progress Report 2016–2018.

2.3 Gender equality

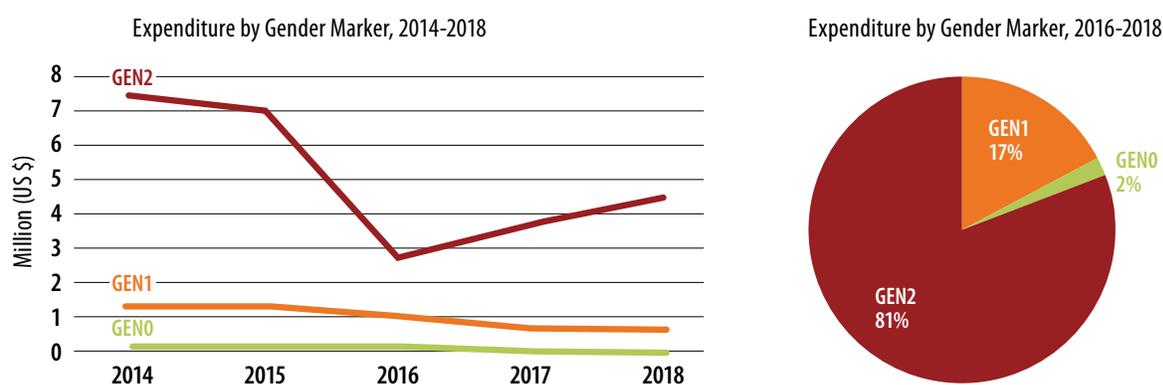
The Maldives office has 16 staff (12 women and 4 men) and a balanced representation of men and women at different levels. This is considered in internal and project oversight committees. The office does not have a gender specialist on staff, but there is a multidisciplinary gender focal team.

UNDP’s programming policies state that CPDs should include sufficient budget allocation to effectively implement actions and achieve results related to gender equality and women’s empowerment, and ensure adequate human and financial resources to monitor and report on gender-related progress towards results. This underpins the approach to implementing UNDP’s Gender Equality Strategy, which requires that at least 15 percent of UNDP’s budget be invested in gender-specific interventions. Consistent with UNDP corporate policies, the Maldives country office gender strategy (2016–2018) outlines an intention to mainstream gender equality in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes and in human resources and management. It also commits to “work towards ensuring 15 percent of the total expenditure is for gender equality by 2017”.

Statistics on the gender focus of the Maldives programme are set out in Figure 2. Since 2014, expenditure recorded as promoting gender equality in a significant and consistent way (GEN2) has fluctuated, but remained steady as a proportion of total expenditure. From 2016 to 2018, the Maldives country programme attributed 81 percent of its expenditure to promoting gender equality in a significant and consistent way (GEN2), with most of the remaining expenditure being recorded as making a limited contribution to gender equality (GEN1). Since 2014, the programme has not attributed any of its expenditure to having had gender equality as a main objective (GEN3).

Under the governance programme, the Integrated Governance Programme II (2016–2020) project aims to “strengthen democratic institutions [...] and improve social cohesion and human security” with targeted outreach to encourage the participation of women and youth in public life.²⁸ The project has GEN1, GEN2 and GEN3 components, which include outputs to enable women’s political participation and strengthen sexual and gender-based violence referral mechanisms. The programme’s more targeted gender activities are small.

FIGURE 2. Country office reporting on gender focus of programme



²⁸ The project document outlines a budget of \$6.27 million. However at the time of signing (November 2015) there were only \$950,000 allocated, funded by Australian Aid, the EU and the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery.

They include, for example:

- Developing a gender equality action plan with the Ministry of Gender and Family, building on its work on the Gender Equality Law (2016)²⁹ and the National Human Rights Framework
- Mapping women’s participation in political parties and training 100 leaders (70 female) from all five parties on women’s political leadership
- Instructing 10 female candidates from the remote South Thiladhunmathi atoll in preparation for the 2017 council elections (one was elected) and advocating for women’s representation in the #anhenVERIN (women leaders) campaign
- Drafting the General Regulation for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, conducting a study on women’s access to justice, and supporting a conference promoting pro bono legal aid
- Supporting 40 stakeholders in Fuvahmulah atoll to create a domestic violence advocacy plan and prevention group
- Training 45 female pro bono paralegals with a focus on family, domestic violence and inheritance laws affecting women through a pilot project with the Maldives Law Institute.

These activities, while positive, are micro in nature and therefore unable to make a significant difference to gender equality in Maldives. Efforts to introduce political quotas have been unsuccessful due to inadequate political buy-in. Therefore, interventions have relied on more diffuse support to individual candidates and public awareness campaigns.

Almost all spending in the environment portfolio was on outputs coded as GEN2. For the Low Emission Climate Resilient Development Project (2013–2018), gender-focused activities included revising the development planning method local councils used to develop the 2017–2021 island and atoll development plans,³⁰ and conducting age- and gender-specific advocacy on community-based disaster risk reduction. The programme board included women’s development committee representatives, who, among others, oversaw implementation. Due to challenges with women’s participation, especially for engagements requiring travel, the project shifted to single-day meetings. This saw a modest 13 percent increase in women’s participation in dialogues. Overall, this project would be more accurately categorized as GEN1. While LECReD has some gender analysis and gender-disaggregated indicators, there is not a demonstrated significant contribution to women’s equality beyond the indirect effects of improved quality of life.

The other major GEN2 projects include two water resource projects and two projects to manage climate change risks.³¹ These interventions address universal concerns related to access to clean water and climate risk, while considering gendered issues of women’s participation in decision making.

The recently completed Adaptation Fund project, Integrated Water Resources Management (2011–2018), was also marked GEN2. While women who participated approved of the project’s potential to decrease the time and cost to access clean water, this project had a mixed record on gender mainstreaming. According to the mid-term evaluation:

²⁹ The law covers equal employment opportunities and gender-based violence protection but stopped short of a quota for parliament, as recommended by UNDP.

³⁰ The revised methodology included elements on climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and gender equality. UNDP developed a toolkit including a handbook and video, which was rated “very useful”.

³¹ Projects with combined 2013–2018 budgets above \$1 million: 1. Green Climate Fund – Managing Climate Change-Induced Water Shortages (2017–2021): \$9,020,000. 2. Integrated Water Resources Management (2011–2018): \$8,954,168. 3. Low Emission Climate Resilient Development (2013–2018): \$7,607,333. 4. Integrating Climate Change Risks in Maldives Project (2009–2016): \$4,729,473. 5. Tourism Adaptation to Climate Change (2010–2016): \$2,237,925. The remaining project budgets range from \$39,389 to \$684,065.

Overall, the project did not try to garner participation from women. There was no effort made to hold discussions with women's groups. [IWDCs] were not consulted, although individual members of the IWDC may have attended some meetings.

The GCF 'Managing Climate Change-Induced Water Shortages' project is underpinned by thorough gender analysis, which supports a considered action plan for implementation. The gender analysis notes that clean water benefits men and women alike, while also mitigating women's health issues arising from exposure to unclean water during household chores. The project will work closely with Island Council water task forces, and include inputs from Island Women's Development Committees. Designated gender equality indicators include access for men and women to water, and uptake of employment and training opportunities. However, these activities target government officials and utility specialists, likely benefiting the few women already employed in these areas rather than creating a new pipeline. (There is community training, but it focuses more on awareness rather than building professional skills in management or infrastructure).

At this early stage, the feasibility of aspects of the plan is untested. For example, it is not clear what the outcome would be from planned efforts to employ more women in male-dominated areas, which is likely to be challenging, especially when dealing with contractors. Overall, analysis suggests the project will likely have a modest positive impact through two outcomes. First, time saved due to the provision of piped water will likely benefit women slightly more than men (survey results show that water collection is slightly more likely to fall to women than men). Second, improvements in water quality can reasonably be expected to improve health outcomes for beneficiaries, releasing women for work associated with their traditional roles as caregivers for sick family members.

The IEO considers both the Adaptation Fund and GCF projects would be more accurately categorized as GEN1. While they had some gender analysis and gender-disaggregated indicators, neither demonstrated a significant contribution to women's equality beyond the general effects of improved quality of life. Efforts to ensure women's involvement and leadership in areas addressed by the projects are commendable, but will likely only deliver modest improvements given the reliance on local councils' use of existing structures (women's development committees), and the fact that the gender composition of elected bodies is something over which UNDP has only marginal influence. Training/job creation is small scale and limited to the pool of utility company employees and local government.

Finding 8. Overall, resource constraints have limited the country programme's scope to have a significant impact on gender equality, and there are no realistic mechanisms for the office to pursue UNDP's corporate target of 15 percent of all country programme and project budgets allocated to advancing gender equality and/or empowering women as their principal objective (GEN3).³² The evaluation team's assessment of the country office portfolio, and its heavy reliance on resources from environment funds, suggests the scope for using programme resources to achieve significant gender equality outcomes, **compared to the status quo**, is currently limited. Unfortunately, the prevailing practice of coding programme outputs using the gender marker substantially overstates the degree to which the Maldives programme has focused on promoting gender equality. This reflects broader and long-standing concerns about the accuracy of the information captured by coding of projects using the gender marker.³³

The lack of significant dedicated resources available for targeted approaches to promoting gender equality is unfortunate, as the gender equality

³² A target in both the previous (2014–2017) and current (2018–2021) gender equality strategies.

³³ The IEO's evaluation of UNDP's contribution to gender equality observed, for example, that there were "variations in the way the gender marker codes are assigned", which had "compromised the accuracy of the information produced by this tool". Analysis conducted by the gender team at that time found that more than one third of all projects/outputs had been incorrectly rated. UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (2015). *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*.

challenges in Maldives are serious, and there are signs that they are trending in the wrong direction (see annexes). Ideally, UNDP's resourcing would enable it to develop specific programmes targeting gender equality, but there is limited scope to take this forward given resource limitations. Instead, with existing resourcing, UNDP will be largely limited to effective mainstreaming of gender considerations in projects that, by their nature, do not provide significant scope to promote meaningful gender equality outcomes.

2.4 UNDP's positioning and capacity in Maldives

Finding 9. Given an indicative funding envelope of just \$7.8 million over the strategy period, the CPD displays a lack of realism about the level of influence UNDP can hope to have over objectives, or activities UNDP can hope to deliver with any kind of substance. This reflects a failure to consider UNDP's likely resources and comparative advantage, and to identify plausible theories of change for how the country programme will contribute to the achievement of national objectives.

The current CPD is not consistent with the commitment made in the UNDAF to redefine its approach with more focused and strategic interventions. In contrast, the CPD sets out a very ambitious programme with a very broad scope and unrealistic objectives, given the scale of UNDP's resources. For Governance, this is: *"Citizen expectations for voice, sustainable development, the rule of law, and accountability are met by stronger systems of democratic governance."* The objective for the environment side of the programme is no less ambitious: *"Growth and development are inclusive, sustainable, increase resilience to climate change and disasters, and contribute to enhanced food, energy and water security and natural resource management."* This lack of realism is evident throughout the CPD, which highlights commitments, such as:

- Provide development solutions at scale
- Reposition UNDP as a thought leader by developing evidence-based knowledge products, including a national human development report, that propose strategic approaches to emerging development issues such as urbanization, youth unemployment, and ecosystem conservation
- Establish... institutional mechanisms that allow for systematic community engagement in designing the solutions and monitoring their implementation
- Promote inclusiveness in policy and decision-making, and enhance human rights protection and access to justice
- Deepen engagement with key governance institutions at the national level and atoll/island level, civil society organizations, community-based groups and media
- Support women's empowerment through initiatives to develop leadership capacities and promote participation in public life and decision-making processes, including in the area of elections and at the community level
- Build on its partnership with the Attorney General's Office and civil society organizations to strengthen the legal framework by developing a mechanism for legal aid services to prosecute violence against women.

The country office advised the evaluation team that at the time the CPD was developed there was no national development plan with which to align it. It was deliberately broad to allow for agility in the country office to: adapt when needed, as a result of changes in the political environment; provide interventions and support to the government in an environment where resources are limited and prospects uncertain; and be able to capitalize on an opportunity when it presented itself. The evaluation

acknowledges this is a tension, but emphasizes that existing policies provide sufficient flexibility, such as decisions being made at the programme level.³⁴

2.5 Results-based management

UNDP's programming policy states that, within the framework provided by the UNDAF, the CPD is intended to outline UNDP's contributions to national results, and serves as the primary unit of accountability to the UNDP Executive Board for results alignment and resources assigned to the programme at country level.

Finding 10. Reflecting the broad scope and level of ambition of the CPD, the CPD's results and resources framework does not provide a basis for clear and transparent reporting of UNDP's contribution to national results. Analysis completed by the evaluation shows there is a very weak connection between most of the results claims reported in the Maldives ROAR, and the objectives they are supposed to be addressing. The evaluation team considers that, of the 24 indicators included in regular performance reporting, there are only two over which UNDP has more than a low or negligible influence (see annexes). Similarly, of the 25 results claims put forward in the Maldives ROAR, the evaluation

team considers that all except one has low significance in terms of the scale of the impact suggested by the claim, when it is considered against the objective it is supposed to be addressing (see annexes).

The result is that it is difficult for country offices to use reporting requirements to have a more grounded discussion and reporting in the areas they can expect to influence, given the resources they have. With this as the framework within which country programmes operate, it is no surprise that so many country programmes view these tools as a compliance requirement, rather than an opportunity to have a meaningful discussion about what they are really trying to achieve, and how they are progressing. This point has been made repeatedly by IEO evaluations and is one that requires a strong corporate response.³⁵

While results-based management frameworks and reporting are weak, the country office has done a good job of ensuring coverage by evaluations of its main activities.

³⁴ UNDP's policy, **B5: Manage Change**, provides relatively broad discretion for programmes to approve changes without resubmitting the programme document to the UNDP Executive Board. These include: (a) removal of outputs that would not adversely affect the achievement of agreed outcomes; (b) adding new outputs necessary to achieve a given agreed outcome identified after the approval of the programme document; and (c) changing outcome or output indicators that measure the progress of the programme.

³⁵ UNDP corporate evaluations have found that despite increased emphasis on results-based management, there is limited evidence of its use beyond programme design. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation is the most common ICPE recommendation. Overall, a consistent finding affirmed by this evaluation is that country office staff see results-based management as time-intensive, and lacking sufficient resources and training to build their capacity. While there are some successful examples of country offices developing theories of change and identifying lessons for improved effectiveness, overall, results-based management functions more as a compliance and reporting requirement. For more detailed discussion see: UNDP IEO, *Independent Country Programme Evaluation Synthesis*, August 2018; UNDP IEO and Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI), *Joint Assessment of the Institutional Effectiveness of UNDP*, January 2017.



CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

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This chapter presents the evaluation's conclusions on UNDP's performance and contributions to development results in Maldives, recommendations, and the management response.

3.1 Conclusions

● **Conclusion 1.** UNDP's operating environment in Maldives has been very difficult. The recent extended political crisis, which triggered strong criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the adoption of a framework for sanctions from the European Union, reflects serious concerns about governance trends in recent years. Declining ODA, partly in response to Maldives' improving income status and partly reflecting donor concerns about governance standards, has limited UNDP's resources, especially for democratic governance activities. As a result, the space for UNDP to work in a meaningful way with the government in many areas outlined by the CPD has been constrained.

Maldives upper-middle-income status means UNDP has limited regular core funding to work with in Maldives, with just \$350,000 allocated annually. Funds UNDP can potentially mobilize from other sources have been constrained. Traditional donors have responded to negative governance trends and Maldives' strong economic growth by reducing ODA to levels that are roughly half what they were in 2012. UNDP has mobilized some resources from the private sector, but these have been modest, and the transaction costs have been high. Significant partnerships with new and emerging donors have been hard to establish.

In adapting to this situation the country office wisely switched focus away from working directly with government to work more closely with civil society, the private sector and youth, and its contributions in these areas have been positive, albeit limited in scale. Civil society partners consulted by the evaluation were very positive about the role UNDP had played in promoting good governance during this period, and in acting as a channel for them to communicate some of their concerns to government.

● **Conclusion 2.** There is currently renewed interest from donors in supporting Maldives. UNDP has a good opportunity to re-engage with the new government in some key policy areas. The IEO considers that development of proposals for future work in governance should pay more explicit attention to the risks and problems that have been documented in the governance programme in the recent past.

These are that:

- Limited resources will be stretched across too many activities and partners to make a substantive difference in any single area
- ODA trends will prevent UNDP from maintaining substantive long-term engagement in the areas that are currently a focus
- Prevailing policy positions will change and undermine the objectives of the programme. Given the recent history detailed elsewhere in this report, the IEO considers there is at least a moderate risk that government commitment to decentralization will change over the political cycle (this risk is assessed as low in the project concept note).

In framing its next phase of assistance in Maldives, consideration should be given to identifying a limited number of key objectives on which to work with the new government over the medium term, including some that appear to be more achievable, and others that are important, but are higher risk.

● **Conclusion 3.** In contrast to the work in governance, UNDP's work in the environment area has been implemented on a scale where there are opportunities for meaningful influence on the Maldives Government. Unfortunately, the results produced in this area have been modest, and below expectations, given the level of resources applied. The joint United Nations LECReD project, funded through the MPTFO was problematic on several

fronts. The key assumption of the design, that policy commitments to decentralization would result in an increased flow of resources to local authorities, was flawed. Limited concrete benefits were derived from capacity building activities of local authorities that lacked resources. The project's investment component also largely failed to deliver the concrete benefits it was designed to deliver for island communities. There were high transaction costs from working jointly with seven other UN entities, when there were no obvious advantages to working jointly. The other large environment project, funded by the Adaptation Fund and focusing on integrated water resource management, was also unsatisfactory.

While the weakness in results delivered in the environment portfolio is largely due to factors over which UNDP has a reasonable amount of control, the IEO recognizes that the context for it to act as a strong advocate for environmental sustainability has been challenging. Maldives' push for large infrastructure developments in recent years has been increasingly criticized as failing environmental sustainability tests, with several major developments attracting controversy on the grounds of their negative impact on Maldives' fragile ecosystems. Declines in standards of transparency and due process in Maldives have undermined the confidence that can be had in these cases that adequate consideration has been given to the importance of environmental goods and services in decision making.³⁶

- **Conclusion 4. Mobilization of GCF resources for a major project to improve water supply and sanitation was a significant achievement and will provide an important test of UNDP's capacity to deliver large and complex service delivery projects at scale in Maldives.** To underpin effective implementation of this project, it will be important to closely consider and ensure that lessons from previous work in water resource management have been addressed.

- **Conclusion 5. The lack of flexible resources within the country office means the scope for the country office to achieve significant gender equality outcomes is currently limited. Most of the country programme's resources are earmarked for environment projects, which can be expected to provide general benefits for the Maldives' population, but afford relatively limited scope for pursuing significant improvements in gender equality.** The prevailing practice of coding programme outputs using the gender marker substantially overstates the degree to which the Maldives programme has focused on promoting gender equality.

- **Conclusion 6. There is a mismatch between the scope and reach of objectives stated in the CPD and what can be realistically achieved given the limited resources UNDP provides and the fact that those resources are but a small fraction of resources available to the Maldives Government. This reflects a failure to consider UNDP's comparative advantage and how it can best position itself to assist the Maldives Government in achieving its objectives. The CPD does not identify plausible theories of change for how the country programme will contribute to the achievement of national objectives. It does not provide a sound framework for reporting of performance or results, or for promoting accountability to the UNDP Executive Board. At issue is how UNDP can use the resources at its disposal in more focused and potentially more impactful ways. Future CPDs would be wise to directly address this question.**

The gulf between UNDP's ambitions and its resources is evident across the programme but is most stark in the governance portfolio. This reflects the fact that resources have been most constrained for governance, but it also reflects the fact that these limited resources are spread too widely across too many different activities to have a discernible influence over Maldives' standards

³⁶ See for example, detailed reporting of concerns about tourism development by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project at: <https://www.occrp.org/en/paradiseleased/>

of democratic governance. The next CPD should endeavour to focus available resources on influencing Maldives Government policy in a small number of key areas, rather than spreading resources so thinly that meaningful impacts are impossible to achieve.

The next CPD should reflect the high likelihood that if Maldives' economic growth trajectory continues, it will become progressively harder to mobilize donor funding for governance work, and that substantial funding will likely only be available through vertical funds focusing on the environment and climate change.

3.2 Recommendations and Management Response



Management Response

Overall comments: The country office notes the ICPE team's recommendations with appreciation. The country office reiterates the challenges that were experienced due to the country's extreme political difficulties and lack of a national development plan during the programming period that was evaluated. The country office will effectively use the ICPE recommendations in designing the next CPD, with strategic and realistic focuses, with flexibility that will allow adaptive management of programme portfolios, and considering the political environment, opportunities and risks.



Recommendation 1.

In the area of governance, the country office should work in the short term with the new government to identify and articulate its policy priorities, and work across government. In the longer term, the country office should ensure its governance programme is:

- Focused on working with a small number of partners, to underpin the achievement of a small number of realistic objectives
- Informed by a strong analysis of Maldives' political economy, and focused on supporting sound reforms that have cross-party support and are likely to be resilient across political cycles
- Flexible enough to allow for adaptive management, to respond to likely shifts in the political environment

Major projects in the past have failed to achieve their objectives because of changes in Maldives Government policy commitments. UNDP's governance programme should be more strongly informed by analysis of the prospects for reform in areas it might support.



Management Response:

After the ICPE was carried out, the country had a change in government. The new administration has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda with many aspects directly relating to and being supported by UNDP. These include the national development planning process reforms and return towards decentralization, and comprehensive judicial sector reform. UNDP is able to provide direct support to the government on these areas as a leading development partner.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking*	
			Status	Comments
<p>1.1. Future work through the project will be based on strategic partnerships that contribute directly to the advancement of the country's governance agenda. These include focused and realistic priorities underpinned by the government's agenda such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Direct support to the formulation of the National Development Plan, including cross-sectoral engagement b. Support to the judicial reform process through the Attorney General's Office. 	November 2018 to December 2019	Governance		
<p>1.2 The President's Office is seen as the government's main hub for policy. Having close links with the President's Office through UNDP's support to the strategic action planning process will allow for stronger policy support.</p>	November 2018 to December 2019	Governance		



Recommendation 2.

The next Maldives CPD should contain a much stronger statement of strategic intent for the programme than the current CPD. Within the framework provided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), the next CPD should include a much stronger articulation of the link between the analysis of context and statement of priorities, and of causal pathways that explain how UNDP will plausibly contribute to the achievement of stated objectives. CPD objectives, targets and related indicators should only be included if there is a realistic prospect of UNDP having a measurable influence over them.

The priority areas identified in the current CPD are ambitious statements that do not match the current capacities in UNDP or the indicative CPD outputs and UNDAF outcome indicators. Many of the indicators, baselines and targets contained in the Results and Resource Framework cannot be understood when viewed with the resources, capacity and comparative advantage of UNDP in Maldives. The country office should avoid a business as usual approach in the next CPD. The next CPD should be grounded in a realistic appraisal of UNDP’s likely constrained resource base for governance activities, and its capacity to have a meaningful influence on Maldives’ policies and governance, given the size, sophistication and complexity of the Maldives Government.



Management Response:

This recommendation is noted, and the country office will ensure that the next CPD has a strong strategic intent based on UNDP’s competitive advantages in Maldives. The country office will engage deeply in the formulation of the UN Cooperation Framework, embedding a theory of change, in light of other partners and priorities contributing to the SDG agenda. Consequently, the next CPD will be closely and fully geared towards achieving the SDGs under the Cooperation Framework umbrella.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
2.1. Ensure that CPD formulation is SDG based and strongly grounded in UNDP’s competitive advantages a. Country office to carry out ‘sensing/visioning’ exercise in September 2019.	September 2019 – January 2021	Management		
2.2 Engage in the formulation of the cooperation framework with a clear theory of change of UNDP’s comparative advantage, and statement of objectives.	September 2019 – January 2021	Management/ Programme		



Recommendation 3.

The country office should develop a strategy for addressing gender equality that is founded on a clear-headed assessment of the scope provided by different activities to do so. Gender marker coding should be reviewed annually, and coding updated where necessary to ensure the data provides an accurate picture of the level of focus on gender equality of UNDP’s programmes.

The focus on gender needs to be strategic, and realistic about the opportunities provided to promote gender equality across the programme. Coding of activities using the gender marker suggests a lack of realism about where and how they will contribute in a consistent and significant way to gender equality. Inaccuracies in coding of the programme’s focus on gender equality undermine the capacity of management and the UNDP Executive Board to track progress towards UNDP’s corporate commitment, that at least 15 percent of UNDP’s budget should be invested in gender-specific interventions. In the Maldives context, lack of flexible resources makes it highly unlikely that a 15 percent corporate target will be achievable.



Management Response:

The country office takes note of this recommendation and will undertake a review of the existing actions and strategies within its programmes for gender equality, and put in place the following measures to strengthen gender action.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
3.1 The country office will develop a gender strategy before finalization of the next CPD.	January 2020 – March 2020	Gender Focal Team		
3.2 Gender scorecard developed for UNSDCF by the UN country team will be used to review its applicability to ongoing initiatives. UNDP will make its own, derived from the UNSDCF gender strategy. UNDP’s specificity would apply in terms of its areas of support and office capacity.	January 2020 – March 2020	UNSDCF Outcome Group Chairs		
3.3 Gender markers will be reviewed annually.	Final quarter every year	Programme Units		



Recommendation 4.

UNDP should undertake an early review of the risks facing the GCF project, including political and institutional risks, and those related to procurement and delivery of required infrastructure in remote locations, with any revisions submitted to the project board for its consideration.

There is no explicit consideration of the lessons from previous work in water and sanitation in the GCF project document, and it did not highlight risks associated with procurement and delivery of required infrastructure in remote locations. This created significant challenges in the previous project and presented problems for the current one.



Management Response:

The recommendation is noted, and the country office will put in place the following measures to address this.

Key Action(s)	Time Frame	Responsible Unit(s)	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
4.1 Review of risk log will be carried out and risks updated based on current experiences a. Review of political, geographical and procurement risks b. Presentation and discussion at project board.	October 2019 – December 2019	Resilience and Climate Change		

* The implementation status is tracked in the ERC.

Annexes



Annexes to the report (listed below) are available on the website of the Independent Evaluation Office at:
<https://erc.undp.org/evaluation/evaluations/detail/12281>

Annex 1. Terms of reference

Annex 2. Projects included in scope of the ICPE

Annex 3. Gender equality in Maldives

Annex 4. IEO assessment of the Maldives country office results reporting

Annex 5. People consulted



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