Maldives Ventures into the Blue Economy

Almost half of Maldives's population and more than 70 percent of its critical infrastructure lie within 100 meters of its shoreline

This close proximity to the ocean makes the island nation a prime location to benefit from the Blue Economy, which refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth and better lives.

But with 1,190 coral islands scattered over 90,000 square kilometers, Maldives' dispersed geography also provides unique challenges.

Water is a prime example.

While almost all residents of the capital city Male' have access to safe water, this proportion drops to 15 percent for those living in outer atolls.

Research predicts that per capita groundwater and rainwater availability will decline by 34 percent by 2035 while demand will continue to increase.

To make matters worse, rising sea levels caused by climate change will likely further foul water as saltwater seeps into the *ground* in many areas.

Sewage and a growing amount of waste also threaten the pristine environment that contributes to tourism revenues.

"The Maldives is turning obstacles into opportunities to boost its blue economy and create a more sustainable future for its citizens."

Wetlands and marine ecosystems in Maldives are rich in biodiversity and have immense recreational value and act as bulwarks against coastal erosion.

Photo: World Bank

Preserving wetlands and marine ecosystems

To preserve its shores and boost its burgeoning blue economy, Maldives' Ministry of Environment is implementing the Coastal Protection Projects with support from the World Bank.

The projects focus on protecting coral reef and coastal wetlands, which are rich in biodiversity and have immense recreational value and act as bulwarks against coastal erosion.

[The Maldives boasts over 250 species of corals and 41 islands with unique wetland ecosystems](.).

Since it started in 2013, the Coastal Protection Unit in the Ministry of Environment and Energy has completed projects on fifteen different islands.

By protecting these marine ecosystems and its fauna, Maldives is also protecting two sectors, tourism and fisheries, which contribute almost 80 percent to its economy.

Building on these efforts, the government has also committed to modernizing fisheries and preventing overfishing while also exploring the massive potential of mariculture to help diversify the sector.

Innovative solid and liquid waste management is urgent in Maldives as solid waste has reached unsustainable levels, threatening its pristine environment. Photo: World Bank

Managing waste better

Solid waste has reached unsustainable levels in Maldives, threatening its pristine environment.

The country's resort islands and its international airport generate nearly six times the waste produced by local populations.

Untreated sewage contaminates groundwater: A 2010 survey in 70 islands reported that water was not suitable for drinking in almost all of them.

Innovative solid and liquid waste management is urgent as Maldives currently does not have policies or regulations in place to reduce the use of hazardous chemicals in its industries and agriculture

The Government of Maldives is keen to implement a national solid waste management strategy to increase bulk water uptake as an alternative to plastic bottles as well as promote recycling and reuse.

The capital city Malé, which is home to one-third of the population, shows that achieving environmental sustainability is possible. All residents are connected to a sewerage system and universal access to sanitation has been achieved.

Now, the World Bank is supporting the construction of a sewerage treatment plant in Hulhumalé, in the south of the North Male Atoll, to prevent untreated sewage from being released into the ocean.

Overall, out of 186 islands, 66 have adequate sewer facilities, while work on 27 other islands is ongoing.

The Maldives is turning obstacles into opportunities to boost its blue economy and create a more sustainable future for its citizens.