

Policy Note 11

Promoting Participatory Approach to Development by Empowering Women



Maldives
Partnership
Forum 2019

Investing in a Resilient & Sustainable Maldives

The Maldives is committed to the principle of gender equality through numerous national and international commitments. The Constitution of the Maldives (2008) guarantees equality between men and women and gender mainstreaming has been adopted as national policy to integrate gender perspectives in policy, planning and budgeting. Maldivian women are considered amongst the most emancipated in South Asia.¹ Maldives ranks the second highest after Sri Lanka on the United Nations Gender-related Development Index (GDI). And the highest on the United Nations Gender Equality Index (GII).²

Despite these advancements, gender discrimination exists in the realm of public service, politics, economic opportunities and access to justice. Maldives was ranked 101st in Economic Participation and Opportunity Score in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report of 2018.³ The Labour and Income indicators estimated women's monthly income at MVR7,510 as compared to MVR11,977 for men.⁴

Traditionally, women played a significant role in the economy, especially in the fishing industry. However, industrialisation of the fishing industry and the rise of tourism has depleted the opportunities from local islands to resorts and industrial islands. Additionally, gender stereotyping and sociocultural barriers prevent women from taking on jobs away from families.

Women are also at a disadvantaged position in terms of property rights, family responsibilities, and political and economic participation. In addition to a simple lack of opportunities, especially within the atolls, women face obstacles to participation in the development of the country. The under representation of women is reflected in the low proportion of seats held by women in the Parliament and other decision-making bodies. Women account for only 4.6% of the incoming parliament and 19.5% of all people employed in decision-making and management roles.⁵ Although women's participation in political discourse is high, their representation among political parties and at the decision-making level is notably low.

In terms of the legal framework, little to no movement is reported in the operationalisation of the Gender Equality Act, Sexual Offenses Act of 2014 and the Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Act of 2014. Domestic violence remains under funded and under-resourced, with ambiguities about the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders. There are issues related to the broad criminal justice system as well as issues specific to processing a crime such as domestic violence that influences access to justice.⁶

This brief highlights the challenges faced in terms of women empowerment and the policy priorities of the Government to enhance women's participation in political decision-making, economic development, and access to justice.

Challenges

Asset Ownership for Women Remains Low:

Few policies exist to promote and increase women's control over assets, which also hinders their access to opportunities for self-employment and establishment of SMEs.

Operationalization of the Legal Framework:

Violence against women is a problem in the Maldives, with recent Government reports estimating that one in three Maldivian women aged 15-29 experienced some form of physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. Reported workplace harassment continues to be ignored and enforcement mechanisms need to be functionalised in order to ensure confidence and strengthen the system.

Fewer Women in Decision-making:

While women comprise of 68% of civil service jobs⁷, women representation among senior officials and legislators are extremely low. The very few platforms that do exist to promote women's participation, such as Women's Development Committees (WDC), are constrained by a general lack of understanding of the institutional support that is required for it to operate to its full potential. Additionally, WDCs receive no financial support and do not get a seat at the decision-making level of these communities.

Decline in Female Labour Force Participation:

Reasons for decline in female labour force participation include attitudinal and cultural factors relating to perceptions that constitute a "good" job. Women are underrepresented in the tourism sector due to stigmas associated with young unmarried women staying in resorts over long periods, the perceived risk of traveling alone, and the limited access to childcare facilities.

¹ Statistical Pocketbook 2018, National Statistics Bureau (2018)

² Maldives: Gender and Development Assessment, Asian Development Bank (2007)

³ Human Developmental Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update, UNDP (2018)

⁴ The Global Gender Gap Report, World Economic Forum (2018)

⁵ Labour and Employment Indicators, National Statistics Bureau (2018)

⁶ Labour and Employment Indicators, National Statistics Bureau (2018)

⁷ Maldives Domestic Violence Prevention Strategic Plan, Family Protection Authority (2017)

Policy Priorities

Increase Role of Women in Social, Economic and Political Decision-making:

As outlined in the previous section, the role of women in decision making level is significantly low at both community and national levels. Few policies exist to promote and increase women's control over assets, which also hinders their access to opportunities for self-employment and establishment of SMEs.

The government aims to achieve this by strengthening, empowering and increasing budget allocations for local Women's Development Committees (WDCs) throughout the country. WDCs provide a vital platform in the empowerment of women and creating avenues for collective action at community level. The Government will also strive to ensure more women occupy executive level positions. To increase female participation in politics and leadership posts, the Government will institute and implement quotas for women in local government, political parties and executive councils.

Increase Women's Employment in High-growth Sectors:

The Government aims to eliminate barriers to women's employment in high-growth sectors and support community efforts in addressing taboos towards women in employment. In this regard, women dormitories and other facilities that are perceived to decrease familial reluctance to allow young women to travel to work will be established, childcare at places of employment will be provided, and support to women's SMEs will be strengthened. In addition, the Government recognises the need to promote shared work and parental responsibilities as a means to eliminating barriers towards women's economic empowerment, and hope newly introduced regulations on maternity and paternity leave will contribute to the development of such societal attitudes.

Take steps to mitigate Gender Based Violence (GBV):

As outlined, little to no movement in the operationalization of the legal framework, which reduces victim's access to justice and also barriers in providing care for victims of GBV.

The Government is committed to ensure the implementation and capacity building of current laws and regulations designed to mitigate Gender-Based Violence. In order to achieve this, the Government will train care providers to screen and recognise GBV to provide necessary care and services, develop hotlines to securely report GBV incidents, enable victims to access care providers, and relevant authorities, and raise awareness on GBV through the media.