

# A CLIMATE OF CHANGE



By **Ahmed Shifaz**,  
Head of the Resilience and Climate Change  
Programme, UNDP Maldives

## Have you seen the movie 'Don't Look Up'?



This movie - an allegory of the climate crisis - provides the perfect analogy for the times we live in. It is a metaphor for the tepid human response to an imminent extinction-level threat.

Outside of celluloid, it is this denial in the face of irrefutable science that frustrates those who are dedicating their lives to study this and raise the alarm. Scientists have checked and rechecked their numbers. And the mountain of evidence hurtling towards us show that the earth is warming, polar ice caps are melting and sea levels are rising. Unlike the movie, this disaster is entirely caused by humans, and we have the power to change it. Only that time is running out...

The climate crisis is the defining challenge of our generation. Under current estimates from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the global mean sea levels are projected to rise by 1 to 3 feet by 2100 if greenhouse gas emissions remain at high rates. Sitting barely 1 meter above sea level, small islands states such as the Maldives, who contribute least to climate change, face a future that is uncertain.

Maldives has taken ambitious steps to respond to the climate crisis and has been playing an active role championing for the rights of climate vulnerable countries on the world stage for over more than a decade. It is the first developing country to phase out hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) that destroy the ozone layer, 10 years ahead of the target. It has committed to doing a lot more, including achieving net-zero emissions by 2030.

However, none of the actions we take in the Maldives will be enough. Like all global issues – from the pandemic to the climate crisis – our collective success is dependent on collective action and robust partnerships.





Through its decades of experience, UNDP has brought together its extensive infrastructure, networks and breadth of substantive offers to support countries like Maldives to increase resilience to climate impacts and support sustainable development priorities.

UNDP has remained a source of support to the country in accessing climate financing from bilateral donors and international instruments such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Putting climate resilience at the heart of every development decision from the grassroots up, UNDP supported the development of a planning toolkit for local government to ensure local development planning is evidence-based, gender-responsive, low emission climate and disaster resilient.



We are supporting the Government to establish water security in 29 islands of the north of the Maldives and create water reserves to last a 90-day dry period, in turn improving national practices for water management across the country.

We have provided modern facilities and equipment to several islands to manage waste at the community level and are supporting the government to tackle sub streams including managing hazardous chemical waste such as persistent organic pollutants.

We have been investing in climate resilient food systems as a source for food security and economic empowerment, through the introduction of contract farming in the Maldives and setting up urban micro farms which reduces the carbon footprint of produce. Harvests are maximized through country wide network of cold storage facilities powered through renewable energy.



While acknowledging the pivotal economic role of the tourism sector to the Maldives, we must also acknowledge that at present, the tourism sector contributes the largest stake in the country's greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation. UNDP and the Government have been working closely to 'reimagine' what sustainable tourism should look like in the Maldives, by diversifying tourism through leveraging natural ecosystems, history, and cultural heritage, facilitating a bigger role for local councils in tourism planning and development and through linking of cross-sector value chains of the tourism sector with women entrepreneurs and informal livelihoods. A renewable energy feasibility study for the sector is also being development which would provide a roadmap to reduce the carbon footprint.

UNDP is now scaling up its support through its newest offer to the Maldives.

Building on experiences, UNDP will continue its long-standing partnership in the Maldives and explore new and innovative ways of doing things. We will provide comprehensive support to complement the countries' development choices through informed development planning and strengthen infrastructure, capacities, and institutions to prevent, mitigate and respond to crisis, natural disasters, and climate shocks. To return to sustainable development, we will put nature and the environment at the heart of national planning and economy, bringing in sustainable financing and other resources to help the Maldives protect, manage, and value natural assets such as water. We will focus on increasing energy access for those furthest behind and accelerate the transition to renewable energy.

UNDP will center its support around multi-sector engagement to reduce carbon footprint, and in transitioning key economic sectors including tourism, transport, fisheries, and agriculture towards market-oriented environmentally sustainable practices. We will work with the Maldives to find solutions through circular economy principles for integrated solid waste management programmes, and sound management and disposal of chemicals, persistent organic pollutants, and waste. We will strengthen capacities

for evidence-informed and gender-responsive, inclusive, participatory development planning methods including land-use planning that integrate disaster risk management, climate adaptation and mitigation as core principles. UNDP will invest in MSMEs and greener business models and accelerate innovative local solutions for sustainable and climate resilient communities by working closely with community-based organizations across the country.

As UNDP poised to provide a new offer of support to help Maldives, the future may seem uncertain and largely out of our hands. However, there are things that are within our control and things that we can do today that will help us plan for and adapt to the predicted impacts. Some of it may require us to change the way we approach the problem. Some of it may require us to think beyond the symptom and systematically diagnose underlying factors that hold up the current status quo. All of it will require action from individuals and institutions alike. It will require partnerships and alliances. We will surely need to rethink our development practices of the past and visualize one that is more in line with what our future generations expect us to do.

We must move forward towards a new climate of change.

