

‘FUTURE-PROOFING’ GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS



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Paradise isn't without problems. A little more than a decade ago, Maldivians braved democracy amidst heavy political turbulence and uncertainty. Three presidential elections later, and with another looming closer, it is safe to claim that we are more confidently navigating this boat. Democracy isn't 'uncharted waters' anymore. Despite the choppy journey, few states can boast the kind of legislature and institutions in place, which would easily check many boxes on 'how to democracy'.

There have been deliberate and conscious commitments towards decentralisation and devolution of powers, efforts to build accountable institutions; expansion of human rights mechanisms; and assurances towards ending gender-based discrimination – all noteworthy and significant. Despite progress made, not all of these have translated nearly as smoothly from legislature into real life, nor was transferred equally to people it meant to serve. Men still outnumber women where decisions are made, young people struggle with identity and income, persons with disabilities haven't enjoyed dignified empowerment in the true sense. Underlying these inequalities are a host of factors, all of which ultimately boils down to deficiencies in access.



UNDP's support has focused on bridging these gaps in access: bringing justice closer to people by supporting legal and judicial reform; creating alliances with civil society and media to allow information exchange to and from the people; formative and sustained support to decentralisation and local governance; and not just encouraging but advocating and insisting on inclusion. In 2019, with UNDP support, the Decentralisation Act was amended to include a mandatory 33% quota for women in local councils. Today, we have 36% women in local councils, exceeding the quota allocation.

UNDP also facilitated the responsible and efficient use of modern digital technologies in court rooms – something which would have hardly scraped the surface as an idea, let alone an aspiration, as recent as four to five years ago. The digital transformation of the judiciary wasn't just a COVID-19 by-product to ensure business continuity of essential justice services during crisis-time. It was a conscious and strategic support offer by UNDP as a result of a progressive, trusted partnership with the judiciary towards making justice more accessible to all.

Engaging young people and communities to create their own opportunities, and inform our work is another key principle of our work. Every year, through various engagements, we work directly with hundreds of young men and women and help bring their voices and ideas to the foreground. Sometimes it takes the form of social innovation camps, sometimes leadership trainings, or behavioural insight experiments such as STEM introductory sessions for young girls. We also create safe spaces where diversity is celebrated and respected, artistic expression is encouraged, and community-led interventions are supported. In all shapes and forms, these continue to make our communities more open and cohesive, and resilient to external shocks – be it in a pandemic or a conflict.

It is only natural that UNDP continue to deliver on what it does best, offering integrated development solutions driven by country priorities. In UNDP's newest offer of support, we place strategic importance on addressing emerging complexities in the Maldives by "future-proofing" governance systems through anticipatory and accountable approaches: a governance for and by people.



The bottom line is to create an enabling environment for people engagement in a decentralised manner, by bringing to focus those most at risk of being left behind: women, youth, migrant workers and persons with disabilities. In doing so, we enhance independence, transparency, and accountability of the governance and justice system, leading to meaningful human development.

It ensures a re-sharpened focus on empowering local councils and promoting meaningful decentralisation and decentralised delivery of public services and instill a culture of transparent and participatory governance.

To maximise development impact, we will leverage digital technologies for effective delivery of services across the geographic divide, and build an inclusive, ethical and sustainable digital society.



We will also continue to provide support towards establishing an independent and impartial justice sector that protects human rights. We will build on the first ever 33% reserved seats for women in local councils and will continue to accelerate women's political participation. At its core, in the next five years, UNDP seeks to enhance entire institutions, and increase voice and participation for strengthened governance which advances the future of development for the people of Maldives, while leaving no one behind.