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# Preserving Mahl dialect and Dhivehi Language Heritage: Digitising and Indexing documents of Maldives and Minicoy

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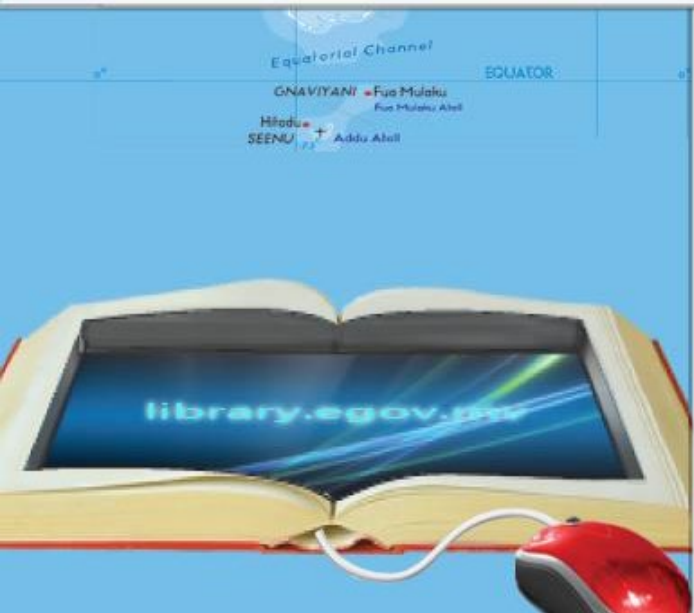
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# G20 LIBRARY SUMMIT: CONNECTING NATIONS FOR KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE,

7-9 February 2024, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

## Preserving Mahl dialect and Dhivehi Language Heritage: Digitizing & Indexing documents of Maldives and Minicoy



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**Aminath Riyaz** (PhD)  
*Assistant Professor, The Maldives National University*

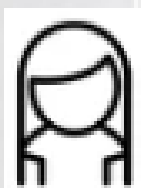
“During fieldwork in Mambila region of Cameroon’s Adamawa province in 1994-95, **I came across a number of moribund languages** ... For one of these languages, **Kasabe** (called Luo by speakers of neighboring languages and in my earlier reports), **only one remaining speaker, Bogon, was found.** (He himself knew of no others.) In November 1996 I returned to the Mambila region, with part of my agenda being to collect further data on Kasabe. **Bogon, however, died on 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1995, taking Kasabe with him.** He is survived by a sister, who reportedly could understand Kasabe but not speak it, and several children and grandchildren, none of whom know the language.”

(Crystal, 2002, p. 1)

These findings are based on sociolinguistic conversational analysis I carried out in November 2023, from Maldivians of different age categories.

## Maldivians speak in Dhivehi BUT find it difficult to converse in Dhivehi language without code-mixing or code-switching

Age	Gender	Topic	Language	Duration
4	Female	Lessons that you learn from other people in your life	Dhivehi	0:53
1	Female	Do you believe you start learning	Dhivehi	1:01
4	Female	When did you start learning? Do you think you start learning from a young age?	Dhivehi	1:02
1	Female	Is it hard to learn? Do you think you learn from a young age?	Code-switching	1:54
1	Female	But, we all, keep learning always	Code-switching	2:04
6	Female	How'd you describe your career?	Dhivehi	2:07
1	Female	How'd you describe your career?	Dhivehi	2:10
2	Female	How'd you describe your career?	Code-switching	2:12
1	Female	How'd you describe your career?	Code-switching	2:18
1	Female	How'd you describe your career?	Code-switching	2:18



These findings are based on sociolinguistic conversational analysis I carried out in November 2023, from Maldivians of different age categories.

**Maldivians speak in Dhivehi BUT find it difficult to converse in Dhivehi language without code-mixing or code-switching**

Age groups

- >50** ● The 'mature/older' Maldivians speaks in **Dhivehi language**
- 50-40** ● The 'middle-aged' Maldivians resorts to **code-mixing** of Dhivehi & English
- 40-30** ● The mature Maldivians **code-mixing & code-switching** Dhivehi & English
- 30-20** ● The young Maldivians often use **code-switching**
- <10** ● The Maldivian children speaks in **English language**

Dash, R. K. (2020, March). **Revitalizing endangered languages in India:**

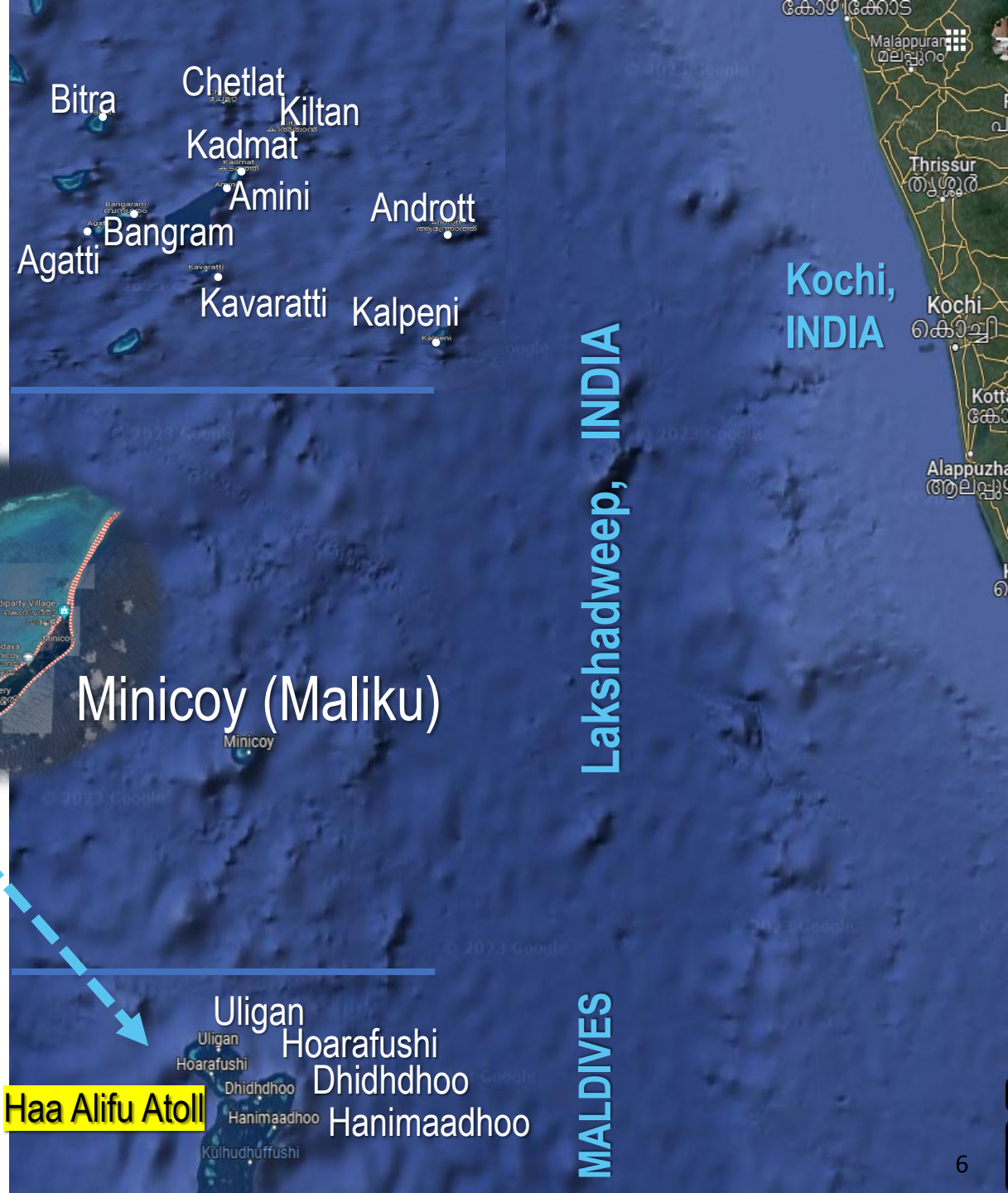
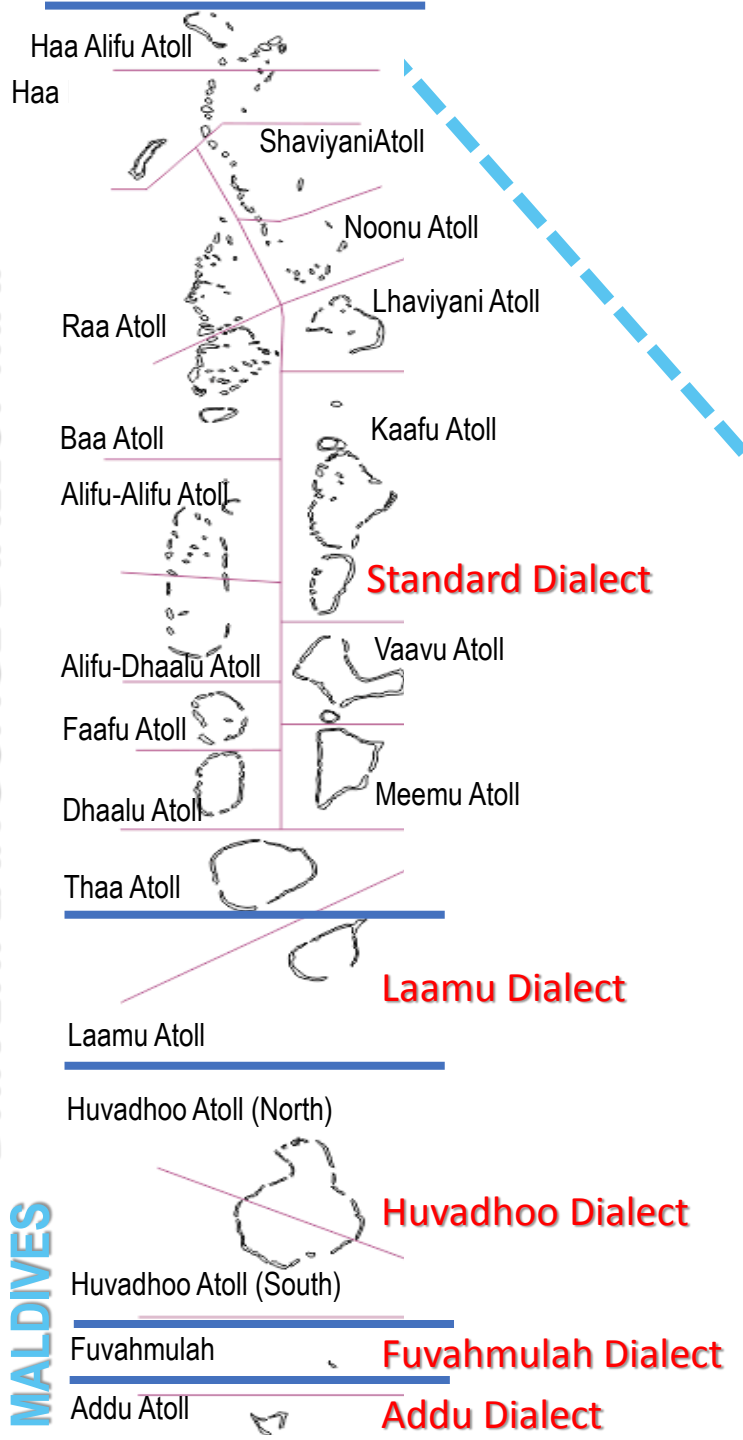
**Can public-private partnership (PPP) work.** In *2nd International Conference on Social Sciences in the 21st Century, Seminar Paper.*

Jalda; Asur; Hemal; Bedia, Kurukh, Toto, Turi

Sl. No.	Name of Union Territory	Major Language(s) Spoken	Other Languages Spoken	Endangered Languages
1	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Bengali	Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Nicobarese & Malayalam	Jarawa, Tehniu, Luro, Muot, Sanenyo, Shompen, Great Andamanese, Lamongse, Muot, Onge, Pu, Sentilese, Takahanyilang
2	Chandigarh	Punjabi	Hindi and English	Rai Sikh, Sansi and Odi
3	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	Gujarati	Hindi, Konkani and Marathi Gujarati, Bhili, Bildoli	Warlis, Dhodia Kokna tribal languages
4	Daman and Diu	Gujarati	Marathi, Hindi, Bildoli or Bhili, Konkani, English	Portuguese
5	Delhi	Hindi	English	NOT KNOWN
6	Lakshadweep	Malayalam	English, Divehi	Muduga, Malaveda, Kanikkar, Kakkala, Mahl
7	Puducherry	Tamil	Telugu, Kannada and Urdu	

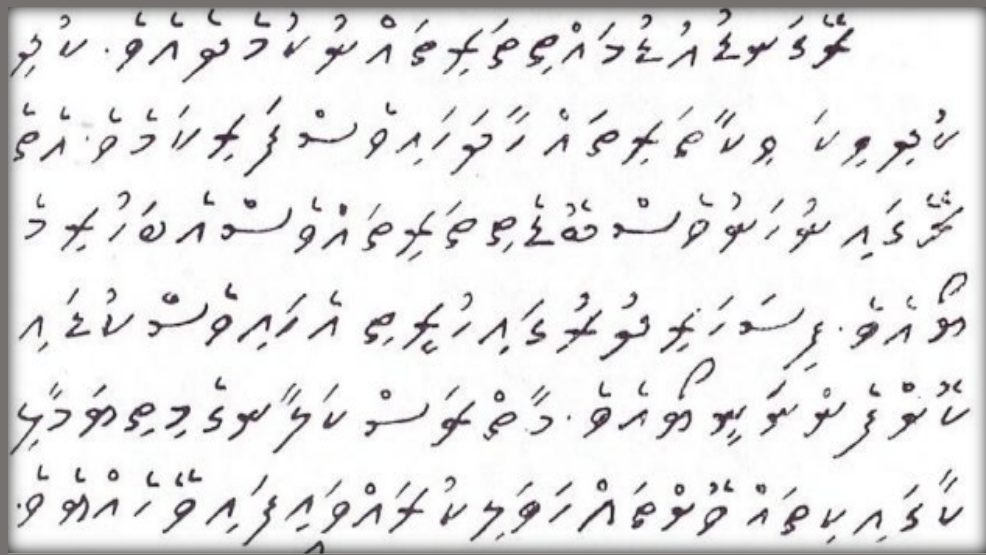
**NOTE:** This list is a compilation of data available from various sources, including UNESCO.

# DHIVEHI LANGUAGE DIALECT MAP



# Mahl dialect vs Standard Dhivehi language

An extract from Maliku thaanaa book



The book is assumed to have been published in the 1980s or earlier

Analyzed the **first 14 pages** of the book  
**1035 words**

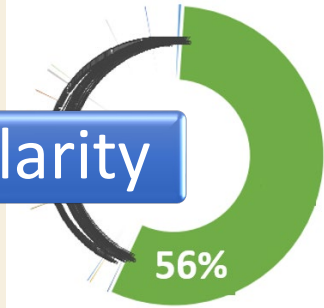
**1035 words**



**693 Unique lexemes**



**Lexical similarity**



**12.5% lexical difference**  
The rest are phonological & morphological differences

**PUBLIC = ރިވުޅު**

An extract from Riyaz & Nashfa (2011)

Dhivehi – the locality and the language of the Maldives – is celebrated with this newly created digital library by the Maldives National University (MNU) Library. The most prominent literary work of Dhivehin (locals of the Maldives) is the “Faithoora” journal that has been in circulation since 1979. The monthly journal is highly referred to by local researchers and students from all levels of education. The journal is in Dhivehi language and for the past twenty-two years it was available only in its print form.

The MNU Library in affiliation with the Maldives Greenstone support Network (MGN), trialled the creation of a digital library of the Faithoora using Greenstone open source software. With this project, the MGN, in cooperation with University of Waikato, has also introduced Dhivehi language interface for Greenstone software (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: The language for the interface can be adjusted to the preferred language

At present, the digital library can be browsed by title and date as seen in Figure 2. It can be searched based on the title of the articles as seen in Figure 3. While full text is available, it is not searchable at present due to issues with optical character recognition of Dhivehi script on scanned documents. This enhancement is marked as the next phase of the MNU Library’s DL project for Faithoora. The creation of this collection has facilitated in the creation of other much needed Digital Library collections of local material.

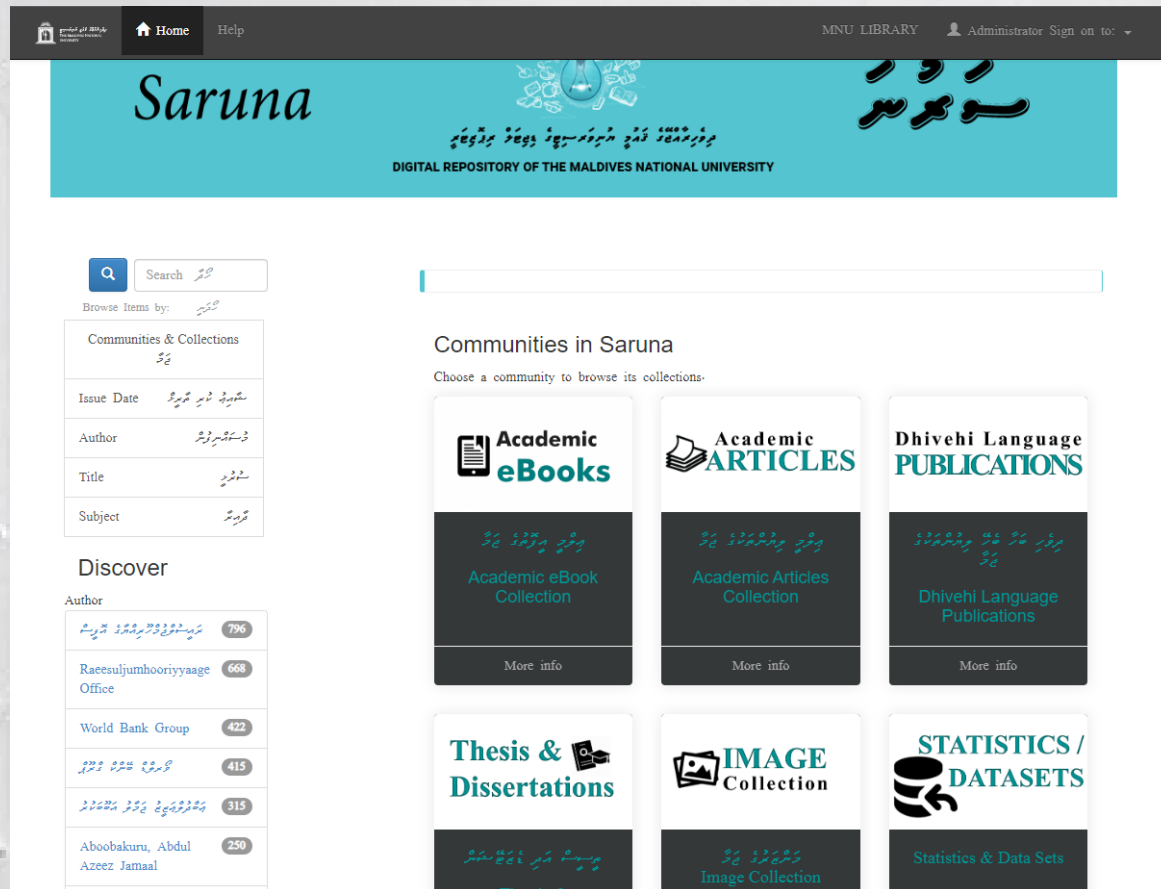


Figure 2: “Title” view of the Digital Library which displays all the titles in the library (displayed in the English language interface)



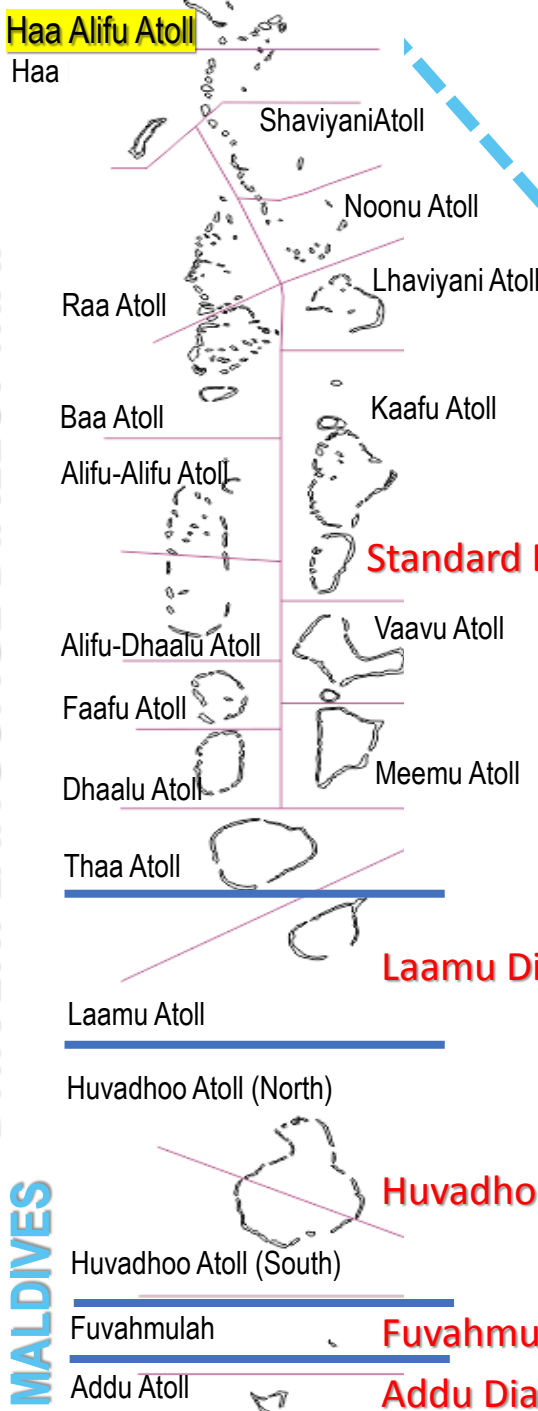
# The Maldives Digital Library website launched in July 2012

- Union Catalogue of 21 libraries across the Maldives
- Digital collections (*Faithoora*, EDC publications, Local Publications, Thesis/Dissertations)



The Digital Library evolved to Saruna and was launched in 2018.

**DHIVEHI LANGUAGE DIALECT MAP**



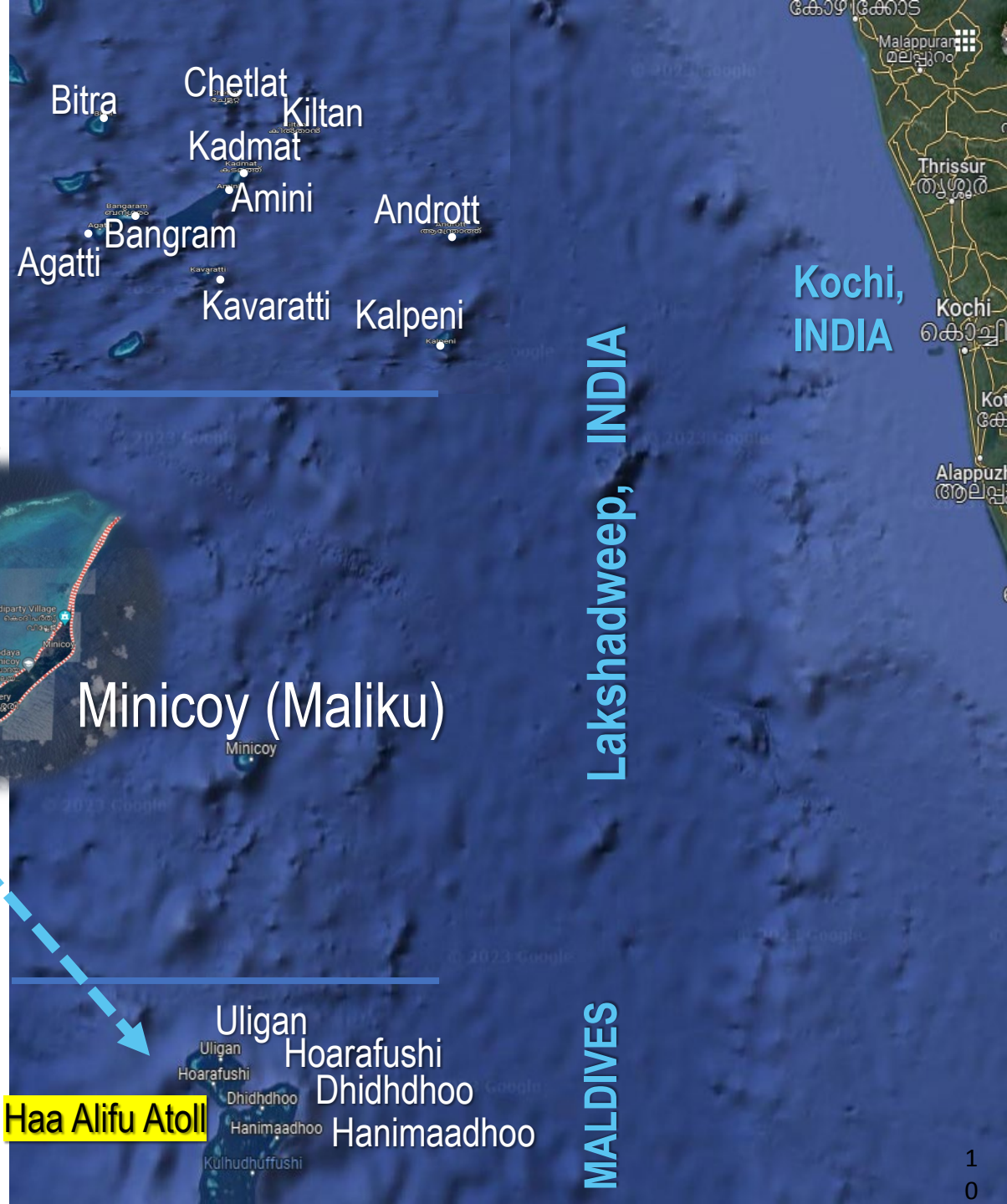
**MALDIVES**

**Mahl (Maliku) Dialect**



**Minicoy (Maliku)**

**Haa Alifu Atoll**



**Lakshadweep, INDIA**

**MALDIVES**

**Kochi, INDIA**

## Linguistic diversity maintenance

1. Researching Mahl further should be a national priority for both countries, given its endangerment status
2. A country-wide large scale dialectology research across all dialects
3. Mahl dialect is a unique treasure that can complement the standard Dhivehi language.

## Cultural heritage

1. Cultural documents encapsulate centuries of wisdom, folklore, and cultural practices.

**Expand Saruna to actively seek Mahl documents**

2. By systematically indexing these documents, we create a structured repository that future generations can explore to understand and appreciate the depth of our cultural heritage.
3. Librarians and archivists have a crucial role to play.

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## Language Preservation & Maintenance through documentation



**THANK YOU**