



MALDIVES

A JOURNEY OF HEALTH

Maldives: A Journey of Health

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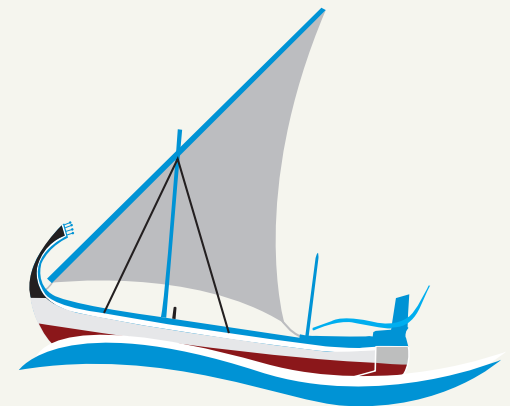
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MALDIVES: A JOURNEY OF HEALTH



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Message from the Minister of Health, Maldives

I am proud and pleased to see this Publication that captures a little slice of our life here in The Maldives. Our lives have been fraught with unique challenges that our geography presents us with. But it has been a journey teeming with stories of victories and achievements over the Years. This is a story about my Islands, my Country and my People and most of all; this is about our Health and our World.

This Journey of Health has been made possible by all the stakeholders, individuals and contributors from different sectors who collaborated with us in addressing our health concerns. Their hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm are noteworthy and it has been encouraging to see such multi-sectoral support.

The people who most deserve our gratitude through this continuing journey have been our health Workforce and our Communities. Their tireless quest for safe and healthy lives overwhelms me.

As a Nation, we must continue to address the challenges that lie ahead for us while remaining committed to sustaining gains such as maintaining disease free status and as we strive together as a Nation for excellence in health.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the generous and continued support of the country and regional offices of World Health Organization – an unprecedented collaboration right from the start. This has been evidenced especially over these last few years where several key milestones are achieved and much progress has been made in our results-oriented partnership.

I would like to congratulate WHO Country Office for highlighting the collaboration and achievements through an innovative approach of photobook. I look forward to our continued partnership for a happier, healthier and secure future for our people.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, flowing letters.

Abdulla Nazim Ibrahim
Minister of Health





Regional Director's Message

A good story is always worth telling. The Journey of Health embarked upon and shared by the Ministry of Health, Republic of Maldives, and World Health Organization is one such example.

Our collaboration began in the late 1950s, when WHO visited the country as part of a blood-sampling mission for filarial parasites. It grew closer in 1965, when a WHO Country Office opened in Malé, the country's capital. And it continued to advance as Maldives' development trajectory took flight, and as the Ministry of Health forged dramatic public health gains.

Between 1977 and the present, for example, life expectancy increased by more than two-thirds, going from 47 years to more than 75. Maternal mortality decreased from 677 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 41 per 100,000 live births in 2014. Since launching its Expanded Programme on Immunisation in 1976, Maldives has recorded some of the highest coverage rates in the South-East Asia Region, with more than 99% of all people now reached.

Maldives continues to be a leader, both regionally and globally. In 2015 Maldives became the first country globally to be certified malaria-free in the SDG era. In 2016 it became one of two countries in the Region to eliminate lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem. Just this year, Maldives was certified to have eliminated measles three years ahead of the Region's 2020 target.

The story continues, with Maldives showing leadership in areas of pressing concern. In response to the health impacts of climate change, for example, it is building a more climate-resilient health system via the Low Emission Climate Resilient development project. And in response to rising rates of noncommunicable diseases, Maldives is implementing a series of innovative measures aimed at changing consumer habits, including increased taxation of tobacco and sugary energy and soft drinks.

Now as always, WHO – and with it the Regional Office for South-East Asia – is proud to be a part of Maldives' Journey of Health, which is ably captured in the following pages. The Seventieth Regional Committee, which Maldives is hosting, is indeed an opportune time to celebrate Maldives' remarkable public health achievements, and the institutional and collaborative relationships that made them possible.

Long may Maldives' Journey of Health – and the story it writes – continue.

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh

Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region





WHO Country Representative's Message

Remarkable tales of human achievement and community participation can be told about the enchanting island Nation of The Maldives. Comprising more water than land mass, the people have created a robust life and affluent communities that are happy, healthy and engaged.

Sharing a long history of working together to promote and protect health and prevent the people from disease and disability, the partnership between WHO and the Ministry of Health has led to a number of historic achievements in public and international health – Maldives eliminated polio, maternal and neonatal tetanus, is free from malaria, filaria and measles now. It ensures control of several communicable and other vaccine-preventable diseases and brought considerable declines in infant and maternal mortality rates.

More recently the National Master Health Plan (2016-2025) provides a multi sectoral roadmap to achieve health-related Sustainable Development Goals that are aligned with global climate change and tobacco control goals. These successes and achievements are the result of the dedicated work of generations of policy makers, health workers, partners, UN agencies and WHO.

This photobook is published within this context and captures some success stories and landmarks of the health development evolution in the Maldives and is an attempt to showcase the journey of health through glimpses of historical information, collaborative efforts and important milestones of partnerships in health. This is not a technical document, but more of a collection of information on the joint activities between WHO, at all three levels of the organization, and the Government, mainly represented by the Ministry of Health. It is a humble offering from me and my country office team.

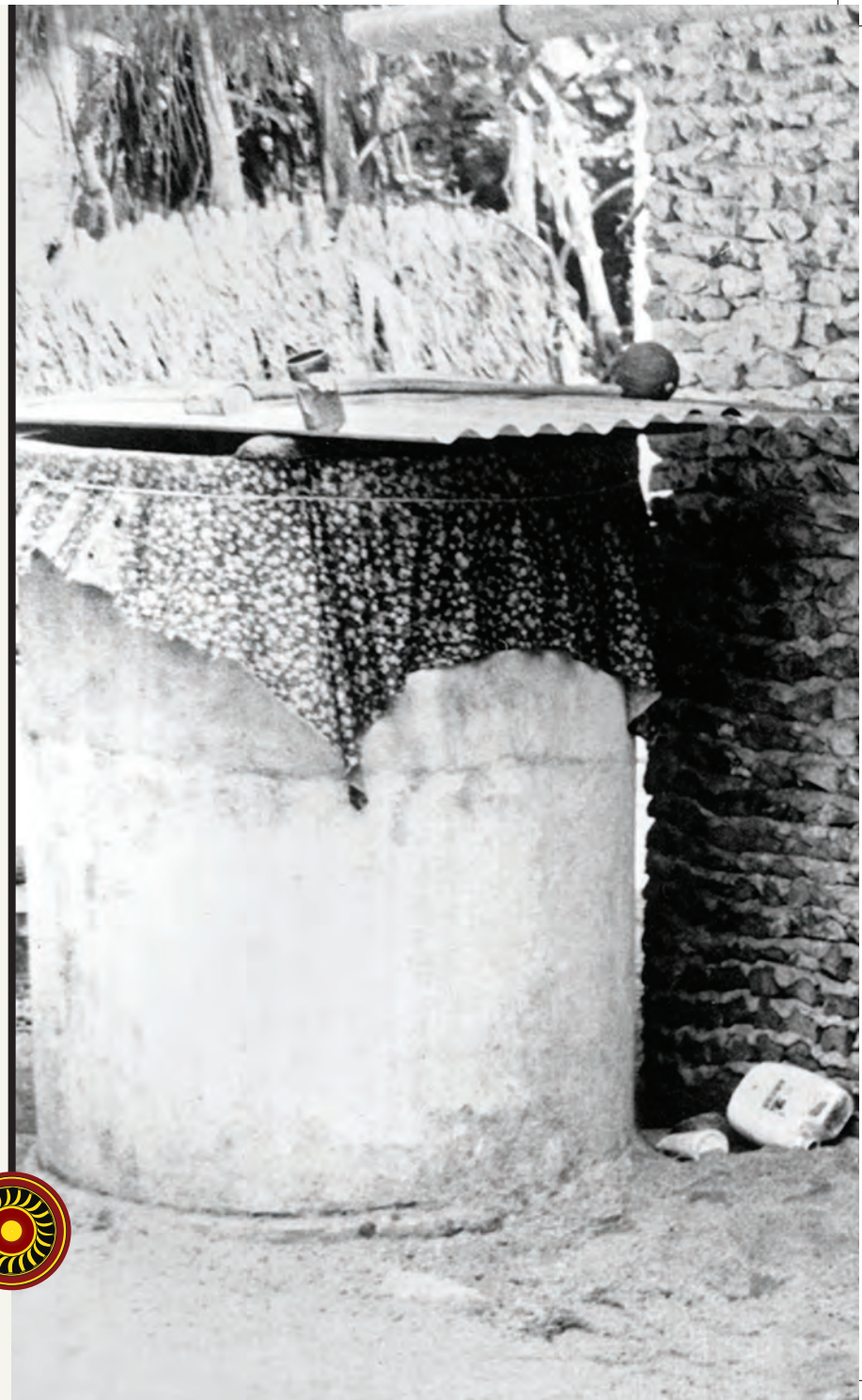
It gives me immense pleasure to share this Photobook of The Maldives at the historic occasion of the 70th Regional Committee Meeting of all member countries of the WHO South East Asia Region.

Dr. Arvind Mathur
WHO Country Representative



THE BEGINNING

The waves that lap the shores of this gentle archipelago have a story to tell. They speak of myriad changes in the history of the land and in the lives of the people. Of these, what stands out as most positive is the thrust towards the health and wellbeing of all.







Where it all began: 'Kanbaa Ganduvaru Hasfathaal' — the first hospital of Maldives

Early Days

The early days saw happy people, but ones whose lives were constrained by dreaded diseases. Diseases like malaria and lymphatic filariasis were rampant. TB and leprosy were other problems that the communities had to deal with. Measles was killing children. And coupled with this, were adverse conditions related to maternal health. When it came to healthcare delivery, the challenge was huge because reaching out to people in the numerous islands and atolls was difficult.

Undeterred by this, the Maldives' Government moved ahead with establishing a blueprint for change. In 1948 the first medical centre was established in Malé, and modern medicine firmly took root in the Maldives.



Happy families, now healthy families





Islands and atolls in plenty and water all around: The challenge of access

Initial Challenges

This journey is about dedication, tenacity and grit. Travelling on foot, using makeshift boats, a rudimentary workforce were literally taken onto the hard-to-reach islands. In those challenging circumstances, they never stepped back in their efforts to help change the lives they had promised to care for.

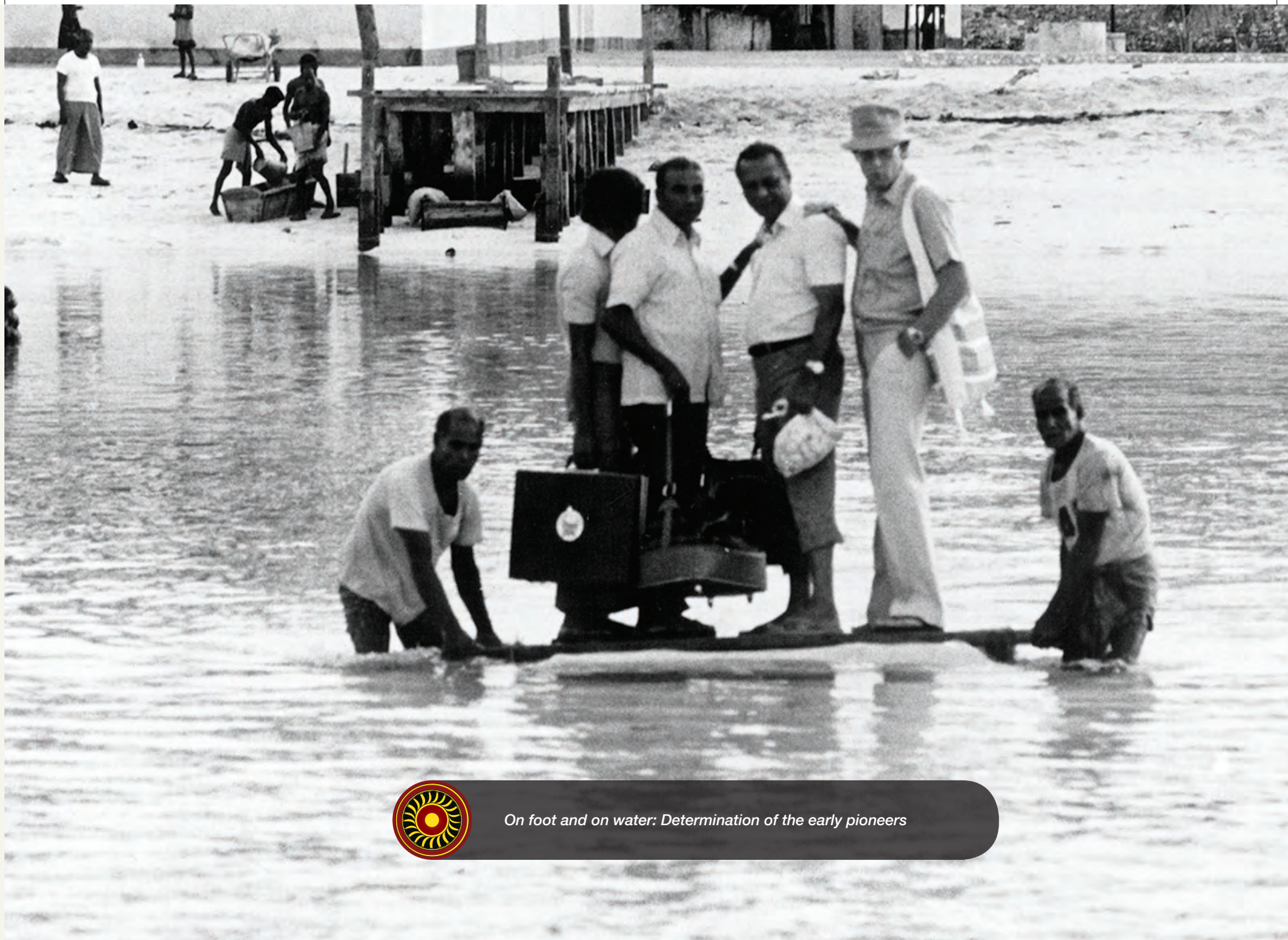


Naifaru Kaaduge: One of the earliest health centres



The eyes of the future: The Government now works on Health for All





On foot and on water: Determination of the early pioneers

FIRST STEPS

The commitment to ensure that each person must have access to healthcare fed into an enduring and meaningful partnership between WHO and the Government of Maldives.

Evolving strategies, helping people get equipped to handle the task at hand and establishing programmes that work— this was what working hand-in-hand meant in the past, now and in the future.





Prioritising Healthcare

Remarkably, in the first constitution of Maldives in 1932, 12 departments were established and health was one of them. Clearly, it was a very high priority.

As much as 40 per cent of the National Budget is allocated to social sector spending – more than any other South Asian country. The speed at which change has occurred, and the fact that Maldives has moved on from achieving an MDG+ status to now working on and achieving the SDGs is testimony to this.



President Mohamed Ameen Didi (front centre) meeting with foreign delegations



President Mohamed Nasheed inaugurating the Telemedicine Unit at Haa Alif Hoarafushi Health Centre





President Ibrahim Nasir signing the Declaration of Independence from the British



President Maumoon Abdul Qayyoom administering the oral polio vaccine to a child



President Mohammed Waheed Hassan launching the Trust Fund for Health Services



President Abdulla Yameen Abdul Qayyoom visiting patients during the inauguration of Ungoofaaru Regional Hospital

Partners in Change

Right since the 1950s WHO has been collaborating and partnering with the Government of Maldives. It was, in fact, the first United Nations (UN) Agency to partner with the country. Initially, WHO's support lay in areas of urgent need such as disease control, particularly for communicable diseases. With time partnerships were also forged with other UN Agencies, Bilateral Organizations, NGOs and different Ministries within the Government. Community partnerships with Atoll Chiefs, religious leaders and prominent families helped further a health agenda for the population on these islands.



Maldives deliberating on health issues at global level



Then: Transporting vaccines by wooden boat "Bokkuraa"

Now: Speedboats are used for easier logistics



Dedicated Workforce

"The meaning of being a doctor is sacrificing for humanity. The classes we are commencing today will not be to teach medicine, instead it will be to give lessons on how to reach out to communities and spread the word of medicine in addition to general healthcare, common ailments and cures"

**Dr Muhammad Umar Hayat, WHO,
who conducted the first training**



Dr Hayat and students who took part in the first training session



Until the late 1960s, there were no qualified doctors or nurses in Maldives. More formalisation came through the establishment of the Maldives Medical Council and National Board of Health Services

THE BREAKTHROUGHS

Finally, the vision got translated into reality. It took the shape of well thought out strategies and the formulation of programmes. Gradually the scenario changed and the effect was seen in the number of people reached out to and the stories of hope that emerged. Children, women, men and older people experienced the joy of leading better and healthier lives.







Growth monitoring for children

Trailblazing Achievements in Maternal and Child Health

When the first caesarean section took place in 1961, it actually made news! Soon after, proper healthcare systems came into being. House visits by mid-wives and staff nurses provided important ante- and post-natal care. People slowly understood the importance of receiving such attention and public confidence in health services began to rise.

Maternal mortality ratios kept declining — 677 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 41 per 100,000 live births in 2014. There has been a significant and rapid deceleration in infant mortality rates as well — 34 per 1000 in 1990 down to 8 per 1000 births in 2014.

An intensive drive against polio, measles and neonatal tetanus, high vaccine coverage, the National Expanded Programme on Immunisation and the Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses were the steps that led to this great success. Nutritional education programmes were rolled out to communities. The corresponding reduction in under-5 mortality rate for the same period were 48 in 1990 to 10 in 2014.



Mothers, children and immunisation records





Above: Happy, healthy families, a result of better healthcare

Right: Healthy mother means healthy children



“

We are so excited to be expecting our first child. I work in healthcare myself and am confident that I have access to best level of care for me and my child right here in Maldives. I would never even consider going to some other country for my delivery.

”

Jihadhaa Mohamed



Working at Preventive Measures

An efficient and successful health sector should focus on preventive measures to reduce the burden of diseases. WHO experts played crucial roles to help build the capacities of health workers. They could now tackle a multitude of health problems stemming from preventable causes. This was now an aware community committed to change. This was the start of universal access for maternal, new born, child and adolescent health services in Maldives.



Above and right: The huge success of the vaccine programme is due to dedicated and systematic healthcare measures





“

I am happy to see that within the last 10 years the quality of Medical care available to my family and me has improved significantly. I feel privileged to raise my child in a country that can promise to keep her healthy and spare no cost in ensuring a full future for her.



”

Shiyaana Ali





Vaccines for Victory over Diseases

The first vaccination programme in Maldives started in the 1960s. Some of the early successes were small-pox eradication and the introduction of DPT vaccines. The National Programme on Immunisation and Travel Health (that later became National Expanded Programme on Immunisation EPI) came through in 1976. Vaccine-preventable diseases have been controlled to such an extent that infections like polio, measles, neonatal tetanus, whooping cough and diphtheria are non-existent. These outstanding successes have been due to decades of high vaccine coverage, successful community campaigns and quality surveillance. The national programme currently offers vaccines against 10 diseases.



Left and above: Vaccine programmes have changed the face of health situation in the country



“

Measles was a growing threat back in the 1980s, parents did not support vaccine programmes; therefore, people would ignore the immunisation schedule. There was no established transport system and we always had to travel by sea. We had to commute every three months for immunisations on the islands, and the health workers worked really hard to meet these schedules. The measles elimination that we have achieved today is as a result of the concerted hard work done by health workers back then. Parents are a lot more aware now. They support immunisation drives. They adhere to the immunisation schedules. We are a much safer country now.

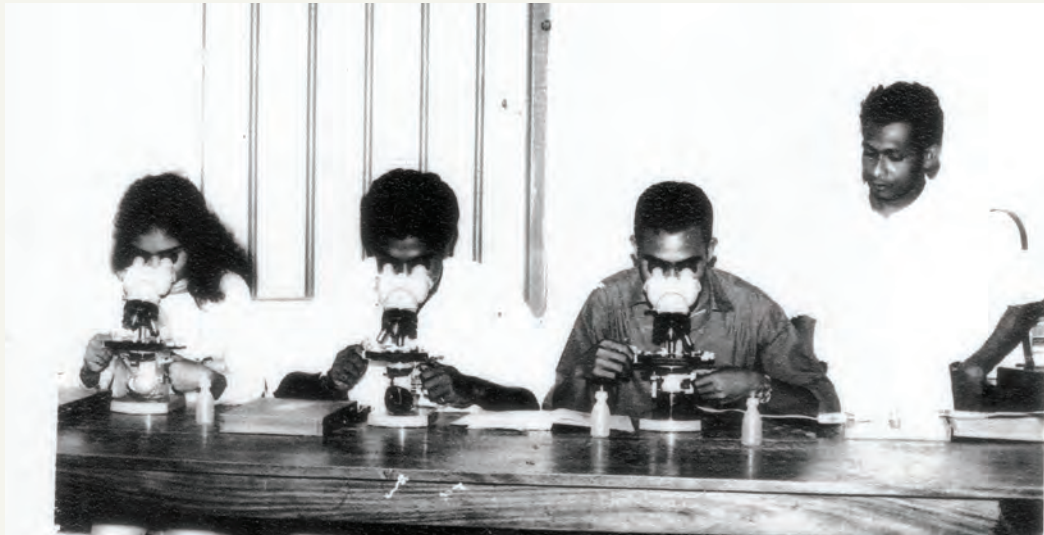
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Nasheedha

Zeroing Down on Malaria

The battle against malaria is truly an epic one. Maldives is the first country in WHO's South East Asian Region to be free from malaria. In 1964, the Ministry of Health and WHO launched the Malaria Eradication Programme. Health workers made house visits, treated malaria patients, sensitised the public, implemented effective vector control programmes, even used larvivorous fish in their fight against malaria. Seven hundred years after the explorer Ibn Battuta had called malaria "Maldivian fever", today Maldivians live free from this fear.



Pathology brought a new dimension to disease control



NEARLY

1200

ISLANDS

182

INHABITED

26

NATURAL ATOLLS
IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

364 000

PEOPLE
LIVE HERE

1965

INDEPENDENCE
FROM THE BRITISH

2015

MALDIVES DECLARED
MALARIA FREE
BY WHO



MAP OF MALDIVES



“

When I booked my holiday to Maldives and it included more than just some resort islands, I had friends and family caution me about mosquitoes and malaria. You name it, I was going to be exposed to it all and getting sick according to them! They could not have been more wrong – I am so happy to be able to enjoy my holiday in a clean, safe and relatively disease-free country!

”

Minori Hisada





A child being treated for complications of leprosy



Smile of Maldives' victory over leprosy

Leprosy no longer a Scourge

Like malaria and filariasis, leprosy had been responsible for a lot of suffering in Maldives. Mainly because patients lived in isolation on islands, with little or no social contact or assistance to help them deal with any medical complications.

From 1971 to 1987, technical assessments were consistently done by WHO consultants. The last report in 1987 concluded, "Case-finding programme is effective and patients are being detected early and put on regular and efficient treatment... drugs are well tolerated and stigma is virtually non-existent". Though not validated as having been completely eradicated, Maldives achieved elimination of Leprosy as a public health problem in 1997, three years ahead of the global target.



Stigma associated with the disease is now virtually non-existent





No disability resulting from leprosy has been diagnosed in children since 2006



GDh. Thinadhoo island where Filariasis patients were kept in isolation





Filariasis mobile team preparing for a field mission



Freedom from Filariasis

In a significant progress against Neglected Tropical Diseases, Maldives became the first country in the WHO South East Asia Region to be certified for elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis. This disease was a dreaded one with a distinct physical manifestation that spelt exclusion. The collaboration between WHO and the Ministry of Health began in 1951, and a National Filaria Control Programme was launched in 1968. The unflagging determination of frontline health workers is the main catalyst for this achievement. Any stigma associated with this disease is now a thing of the past.



Providing every child a measles-free future

Measles: A Killer Nailed

Victory against this major childhood killer disease is another major success of the national immunisation programme. In 2017, Maldives was one of the first two countries in the WHO South East Asia Region to be validated for measles elimination as a result of high vaccine coverage, good and consistent response repeatedly against any outbreaks, mass vaccination campaigns and quality surveillance efforts. The Government has declared immunisation as a right for all children.

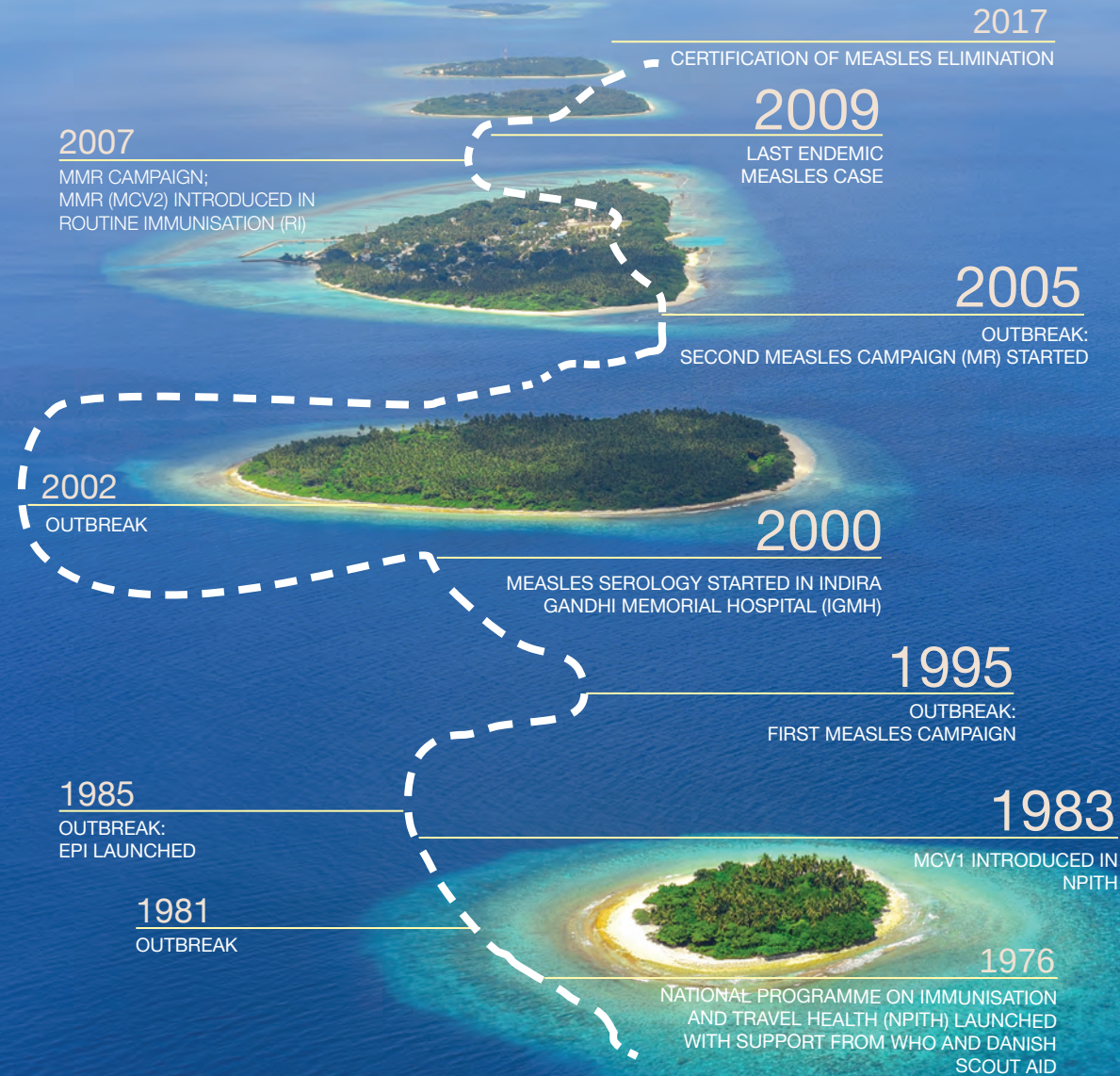
A recent measles and rubella vaccine campaign was held in early 2017 where the vaccine was administered to all at-risk population and not just to infants. In a major diagnostic upgrade, the National Measles Reference Laboratory of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital will soon start diagnosing the measles virus using the RT-PCR.



Periodic Measles and Rubella Campaigns, including the latest “Maves Jahaifin” Campaign in 2017 ensures that children and young adults are safe from this killer



SIGNIFICANT EVENTS



ON COURSE

With strategy and programmes firmly in place and many of the dreaded diseases under control, the country surges ahead to look at further preventive programmes and problems that are due to lifestyle choices. Lively yet informative awareness campaigns and counselling have spelt hope and will ensure that Maldives' exemplary health record will stay on course





Maldives has one of the lowest HIV prevalence rates in the region

Enemies to Eliminate Now

Tuberculosis, hepatitis and HIV/AIDS are problems the country must deal with. Dengue and the Zika virus have now emerged as some of the biggest enemies. Raising awareness about the risks and the solutions for these diseases is now a focus. As a result, the number of overall reported cases is shrinking. Previous elimination cases give hope that together much can be achieved by utilising the available resources properly.



All patients have access to free TB diagnosis and treatment





Nationwide Vector Control Campaign launched in 2016 to fight against vector borne diseases

Kick the Habit – Non Communicable Diseases

The partnership between the Ministry of Health, and the WHO has led to a number of historic achievements in public health, including the sustained control of communicable diseases.

However, Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs) have slowly started rising and account for 81 per cent of total deaths in Maldives. This is due to lifestyle risk factors (dietary habits, high blood pressure, high body mass index and smoking). Cardiovascular diseases, chronic lower respiratory diseases, cancers and diabetes are emerging problems. NCDs, including mental health are also contributing significantly to morbidity and disability.

Keeping this in mind, the Ministry of Health and WHO launched campaigns highlighting the importance of maintaining ideal body weight, healthy eating habits, daily physical exercise and anti-tobacco and anti-smoking campaigns like #ICHOOSSELIFE. The observance of 'health days' have added to the growing awareness about healthy living and healthy ageing.

Import duty hiked for cigarettes and energy drinks

President Abdulla Yameen ratified Thursday import duty hikes approved by parliament for cigarettes and energy drinks.

The price of a pack of cigarettes has shot up from MVR48 (US\$3.11) to about MVR75 (US\$5)

after the import duty hike from MVR1.25 to MVR2 per cigarette came into effect. The price of a single cigarette is up from MVR2.50 to about MVR4.

The parliament also approved charging an



Above and top right: Open air gyms and exercise are being encouraged





“

Here is a fact -- I have been a Fitness Model and Personal Trainer for more than 23 years. Here is another fact -- I have been a smoker this whole time. I recently gave up smoking and immediately noticed that my capacity and stamina has increased since I quit. Awareness on the dangers of tobacco at the community level is a major reason why I have now become a tobacco-free champion and a spokesperson to promote a healthy lifestyle for all Maldivians.

”

Abdulla Niyaz
(Jam Allo)





Modern technology and facilities at Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital (IGMH)

Resilient Healthcare Systems for All

The Government of Maldives recognises that sustainable development in the country will not be possible without maintenance of health and wellbeing of its people. Health is a basic right of every Maldivian; this has been the guiding principle that has shaped health policy development here. The national priorities for health development are to improve accessibility, affordability and quality of care to meet the increasing demand for health services by the rapidly growing population in line with their social and economic uplift.

There has been a rapid expansion of medical services in the last ten years. The health ministry has highly subsidised healthcare services for the entire population and despite challenges of lack of skilled personnel, the health system has substantially expanded access to healthcare.



Every island has a doctor, a nurse, a lab and a pharmacy





Sea ambulances are now available to transport patients to the nearest regional hospital



Bins have been placed around the islands for segregating garbage

Preserving What Matters the Most

Being a low-lying island country, Maldives is highly vulnerable to hazards associated with changing climate. It has been addressing climate change by identification of preventive measures to minimise its impact on the islands, and through various awareness programmes. The Low Emission Climate Resilient Development (LECRd) programme, is being implemented through partnership with various ministries, communities and United Nations agencies, and this is contributing to health-system resilience. The country has proved to be a clear leader in calling for mitigation action against climate change. It emerges as an example for striving to be a carbon neutral country by 2020.





Erosion is one of the most devastating effects of climate change, impacting many islands

Ready to Respond

Maldives is vulnerable to different types of hazards including floods, storms, tsunamis and epidemics. National protocols have been developed and drills are routinely conducted for public health emergencies and (to a lesser extent) on national emergency situations. Emergency preparedness and response needs in all public health programmes have been identified and discussed. Support provided by WHO has focused on capacity-building, communication and information management, response operations and recovery activities to reduce environmental hazards to health.



Community awareness and participation are helping to mitigate the effects of public health emergencies

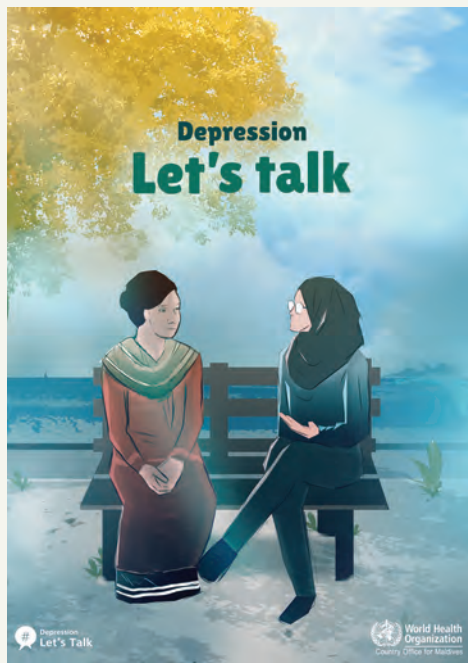


One Emergency Health Kit serves 10,000 people for three months during an emergency



Flu clinics are established to cater to increased number of patients during an outbreak





Reaching Out to the Community

One of the most effective ways of bringing about a change in the health situation is by reaching out to the community and building trust there. Community engagement was started in the early days itself and a level of confidence was built up. Partnerships with the education sector, use of social media and information technology helped increase this community buy-in. Now the community has become so receptive that they line up to welcome the health workers. The message is permeating all sections, school and college students, adults and those in the outlying areas. What makes this kind of community engagement unique to Maldives is the very positive note and feel of all campaigns – **‘you are the change’!**



Who could resist this messenger?





Tomorrow and Beyond

The country recognises that putting health in the forefront not only ensures a healthy nation but also a very productive one. One of the major moves forward is the dynamic 10-year National Master Health Plan (2016- 2025). The outcomes of this Master Health Plan tie into a roadmap to achieve health-related Sustainable Development Goals. The plan emphasises a Quality of Care Framework for assessing and improving health facilities and services throughout Maldives.







Environment comes first

Targeting Sustainable Development Goals

Building on maternal and child health achievements and elimination of selected communicable diseases; Ministry of Health (MOH) places Universal Health Coverage at the center of its multi-sectoral approach. Together with a special SDG division within Government and partners, MOH is geared to address and achieve health in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with focus on equitable, affordable and quality health care for all citizens and achieving excellence in health.



Committed to actualising the Sustainable Development Goals





Traditional gender roles reversed - women playing the Boduberu drums



Healthy lives mean a brighter, better tomorrow

Acknowledgements

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Aminath Abbasa, Director, Academy of
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WHO Country Office Team, Maldives

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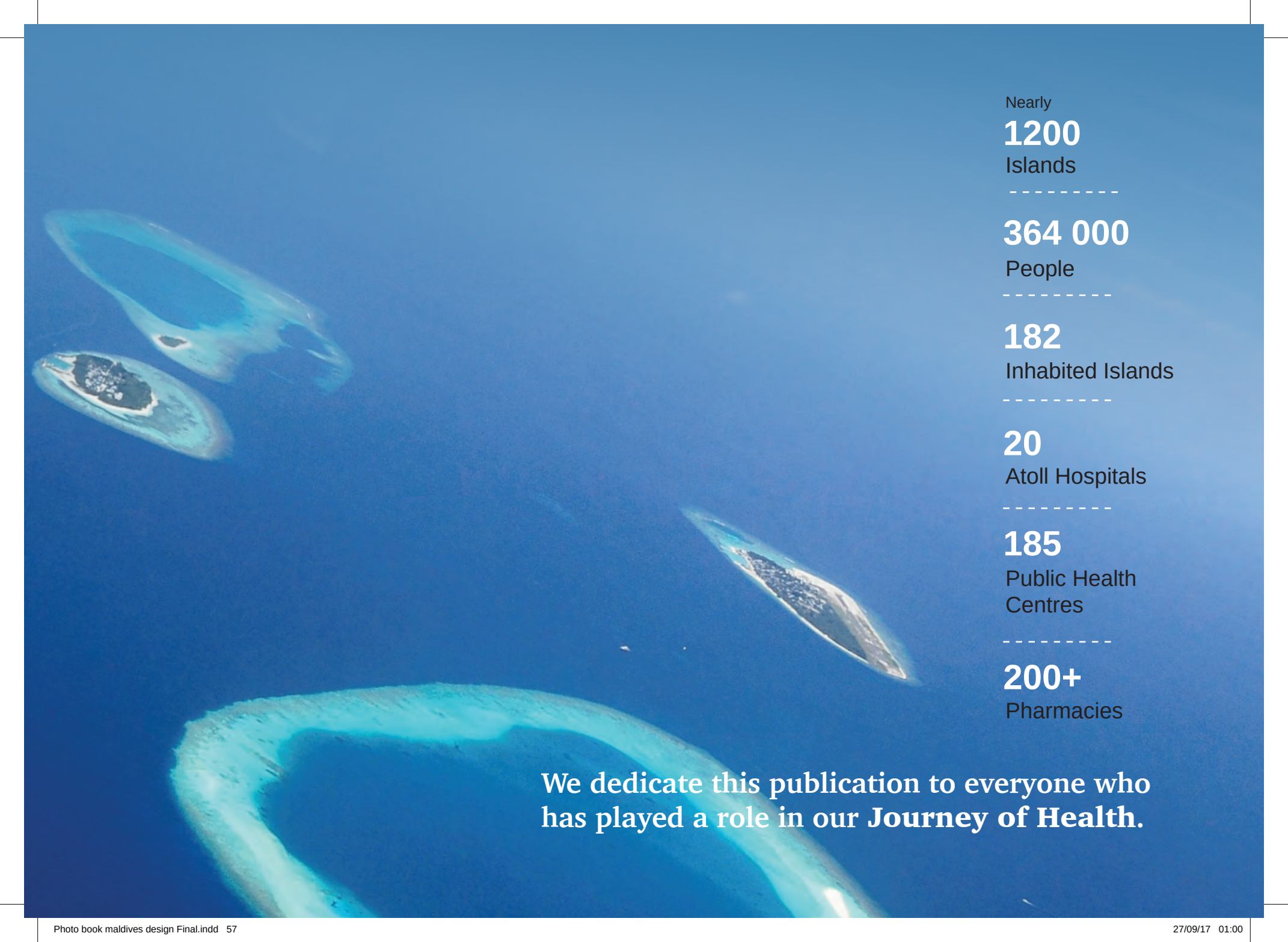
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Ibrahim Shaabil (Vaguthu News)

Laila Abdulla (personal album)

An aerial photograph of several atolls in the Maldives, showing the characteristic ring shape of these islands with white sandy beaches and turquoise lagoons surrounded by deep blue water.

Nearly
1200
Islands

364 000
People

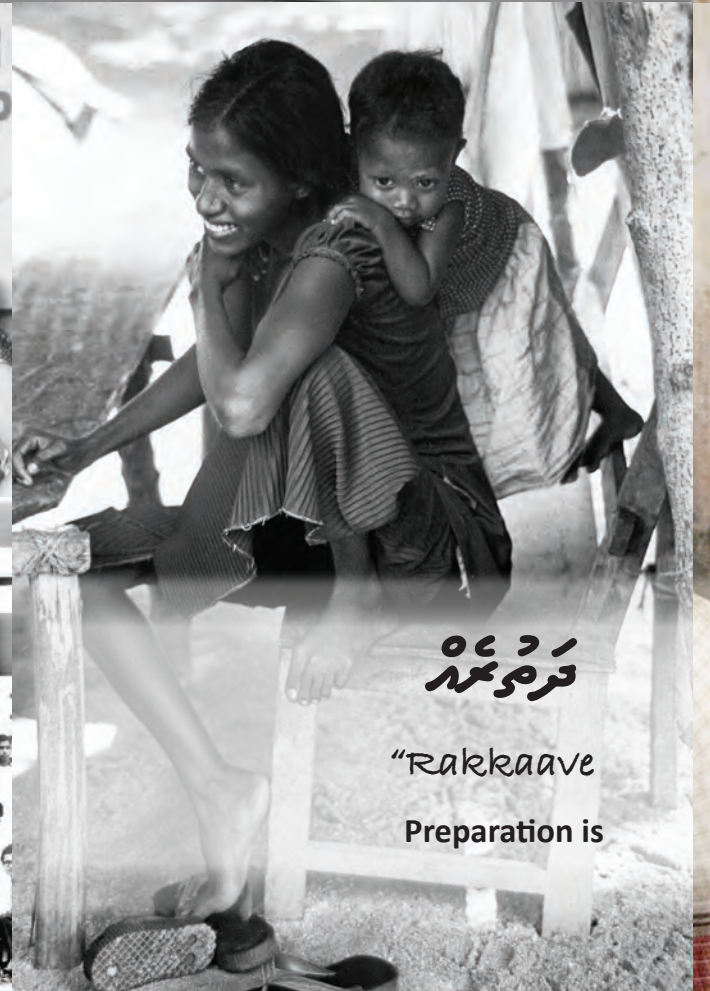
182
Inhabited Islands

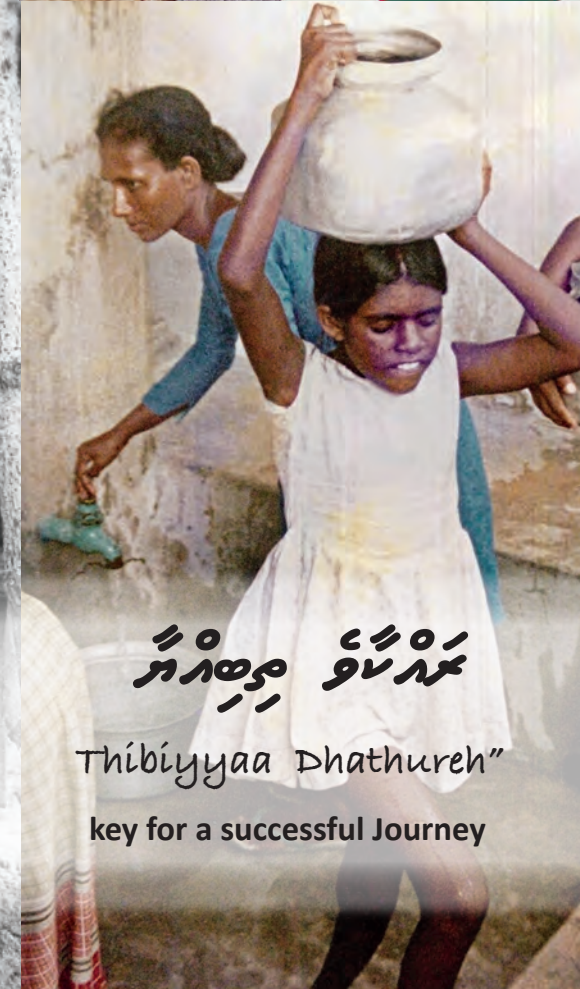
20
Atoll Hospitals

185
Public Health
Centres

200+
Pharmacies

We dedicate this publication to everyone who
has played a role in our **Journey of Health.**





Thibiyaa Dhathureh"
key for a successful Journey





Thibiyaa Dhathureh"

key for a successful Journey



Ministry of Health
Republic of Maldives



**World Health
Organization**
Maldives