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# **ENHANCING SOCIAL AND GENDER STATISTICS WORKSHOP**

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### **COUNTRY PAPER – MALDIVES**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Maldives is a nation of 1190 islands with a population of 270,101 as of the last census conducted in March 2000. The Republic, which was a British Protectorate until the mid 1960s, consists of small islands scattered in the Indian Ocean southwest of Sri Lanka. From north to south, the country covers a stretch of 820 kilometers; at its widest, it covers a distance of 120 kilometers. The islands that make up the country are grouped into 26 natural atolls, but for administrative convenience they are re-grouped as 20 atolls. Only 200 islands are inhabited, and another 100 islands have been developed as resorts or special-purpose islands.

#### **2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The country has a long tradition of census taking which provides a basis of the demographic, social and economic changes that have taken place. A census on population and housing was conducted in as early as 1911. A total of 22 censuses were conducted at different intervals between 1911 and 1974.

The first modern census was conducted in 1977, which laid the foundation for a new era of census taking in the country. In view of this experience and rapid changes in the population characteristics, the Government decided to conduct censuses every 5 years. The new series began in 1985, followed by censuses in 1990, 1995 and 2000.

In 1978, the Government of the Maldives recognized the necessity for the systematic collection of data for purposes of macroeconomic and monitoring, management and planning of the national economy. This recognition led to the creation of the National Planning Agency, later upgraded to a ministry that at present has evolved as the Ministry of Planning and National Development. With the increasing importance attributed to timely and reliable statistics, the Statistics Section under the Ministry was formed in 1980.

In recent years, the organization of the Statistics Section of the Ministry of Planning and National Development has undergone significant changes, due to two Technical Assistance (TA) projects that are being undertaken. One project is financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to develop the System of National Accounts for the country. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) supports the second project for the Population and Housing Census, 2000. Both projects have been instrumental in extending the statistical services.

### **3. ORGANIZATION OF STATISTICAL SERVICES**

The Statistical Rules and Regulation of the Maldives provides the mandate to the Ministry of Planning and National Development to collect and disseminate a wide array of timely and reliable statistical information to the public administration, the private sector and general public.

The Ministry of Planning and National Development acts as the central coordinating agency in producing and disseminating major statistics required for national planning purposes and in approving data collection activities by other public and private institutions. The setup continues to be based on the decentralized system where various agencies take responsibility in compiling statistics relating to their own fields, while the Ministry of Planning and National Development plays the role of coordination and harmonization of the statistics within the national statistical system.

The need for the development of the Statistical System is increasing with the expansion of the statistical services within the country. The enlargement of the mandate of the Statistics Section has subsequently increased the number and complexity of tasks and responsibilities to be executed by the organization.

### **4. DATA SOURCES**

The national statistical system in the Maldives is characterized by its decentralized nature. Typically, each ministry, or government agency formulates its data needs and chooses its statistical methods. Subsequently, they request atolls to collect the necessary data according to predefined statistical methods, and transmit these data to the ministry in the defined format. Subsequently, the Statistics Section of the Ministry of Planning and National Development puts forward the requests for this secondary and administrative data from the ministries and other agencies.

The Statistics Section complements administrative data with statistics generated from its own surveys and censuses administered at selected atolls. In these surveys, data are collected and transmitted usually by the staff of the Ministry of Planning and National Development.

The advantage of the decentralized system is that each government agency can specify its data requirements to suit its specific needs. However, a disadvantage for the national statistical system as a whole is the inconsistency and incomparability caused by the use of different concepts, methods and classifications. The coordinating and integrating role of Statistics Section has to act as the leading statistical agency to implement the statistical laws and regulations.

In the decentralized statistical system, it is the atoll and island staff taking the main responsibility in the data collection and data provision to the government. Given their position and the ongoing efforts to centrally coordinate, streamline and harmonize the statistical requirements, it is utmost importance that the statistical capacity of the island and atoll staff is strengthened.

Moreover, the gradual introduction of modern information and communication technology will improve the efficiency and quality of the two-way data transfer and exchange between the islands and atolls and the center in Malé.

The strengthening of the information, communication technology and statistical capability of staff at lower administrative levels is an integral part of the decentralization of planning and policy making and supports the regional development strategy of the Government of the Maldives.

## **5. GENDER AND SOCIAL STATISTICS**

Gender disparities are visible in the available statistics of the country. There are social and cultural factors, which also act as barriers in achieving gender equality and mainstreaming gender concerns. The geography of the country further exacerbates the problem.

There is a huge disparity between the urban and rural in terms of the level of development and the extent and the quality of services available. In some areas, the urban rural disparity is more pronounced than the gender disparity.

In many spheres of life, women continue to experience inequalities and as a result, their quality of life is lower than that of men. There are very few women at the decision-making level or in senior government posts. All religious leaders in the country are also male. This leads to a lack of feminine perspective in defining problems, identifying solutions as well as streamlining development goals. Women need to be active in all fields and at all levels in order to be on par with men on the ladder of development.

In the education and health sectors, the gender disparity becomes evident at a certain stage. That is, the enrolment rates of girls and boys for primary and secondary education are equal or higher for females. Literacy rates for females are higher than that of men. However, when it comes to higher secondary and tertiary education, females tend to lag behind.

Morbidity and mortality among women of childbearing age are still much higher than any other age group, either female or male. There is also a lack of awareness both among women and men on family planning, reproductive issues and choices and gynecological and obstetric health. Another factor is the lack of adequate services for dealing with emergencies at all islands. In large, this is due to the island geography of the country.

Advocacy and social mobilization have been two key strategies, which have been missing in the attempts to gain gender equality and hence, need to be dealt with particular importance. In an attempt to adopt a holistic approach, focus has been given to education and training, women and health, violence against women, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women and the media and the girl child.

Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security is the organization initiated for mainstreaming women in development. The Ministry is at present headed by a woman minister, has a National Women's Council to support all activities carried out in relation to women's development.

At present the organization is responsible for carrying out projects in relation to enhance development of skills and empowerment of women. The projects undertaken are financed by multilateral agencies, and from the development budget expenditures of the government of Maldives.

In comparison with other sectors, lack of trained and experienced personnel hinders development. The collection and compilation of data are not regularly carried out and there is no adequate database to meet the planning requirements and information demands of the country. Adequate needs assessments have not been carried out due to a lack of capacity.

The Statistics Section of the Ministry of Planning and National Development is the body that acts as the Central Statistical Organization responsible for collection and dissemination of statistics. Since gender cuts across all sectors, there is no unit established so far in the Statistics Section. The mandate to improve gender statistics will be placed under the Statistics Section of the Ministry of Planning and National Development in addition to its routine statistical compilations.