



**YOUTH, OPPORTUNITIES
AND CORRUPTION IN
THE MALDIVES:
A SITUATIONAL
ANALYSIS**

 **TRANSPARENCY
MALDIVES**
A Coalition for Integrity

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
Youth in the Maldives	7
Policy Framework	8
Research Methodology	11
Research Objectives	11
Research Themes	11
Study Design	11
Ethical Considerations	11
Constraints and Limitations	12
Accessing Opportunities	12
Higher Education	12
Housing	12
Employment	13
Health Services	15
Leadership and Civic Engagement	15
General Barriers to Access	16
Case Study: Island A	17
Conclusion	18
Recommendations	20

Executive Summary

Youth constitutes a high percentage of the population of Maldives. Recent governments have increasingly been targeting their policies and programmes on the development of young people. Youth features heavily on the present Government's manifesto as well, with a specific chapter devoted to youth, as well as youth considerations included in chapters related to other areas. However, as with most other facilities and services in the country, entrenched and systemic illegal and corrupt practices impede equal access to these opportunities for young people.

The objective of this assessment was to undertake a situational analysis focusing on youth as victims of corruption, and areas where young people become victims of corruption, specifically focusing on the areas of higher education, housing, employment, health services, and leadership and civic engagement. Key policy personnel from the sectors related to the assessment and youth groups were interviewed, as well as young people from across the country.

Young people interviewed generally felt that the government and policy makers are recognising the importance of youth and addressing their issues more than before. However, there was a general view that young people are mostly utilised to get things done and in most cases does not have a say in the decision making. There was concern regarding slow progress of the quality of services in healthcare, and that mismanagement and corruption was affecting the development of the sector. And while housing opportunities for young people and the adherence to the criteria in issuing housing in the atolls were viewed favourably, there was the general perception that housing schemes in the capital area were used as a means to gain political support.

Of all the sectors, young people interviewed had the most negative perceptions of

employment opportunities, with the youth reporting that employment positions (both public and private) are given to those with political or family affiliations. Most young people also felt that there is no culture of transparency and consultation before important policy level and legislative decisions are made. This loses the connection between young people and the agencies that work to improve their situation, and in most cases gives rise to suspicion and perceptions of foul play in all aspects of governance.

Finally, there was also a lot of criticism on the exploitation of youth by political actors in the country, where youth are mobilised to show numbers at rallies, and then put in the frontlines in protests where they face violence and persecution while the leaders remain in the background. It was also interesting to note that all those interviewed had the perception that corruption existed everywhere at all levels in the country. Most young people were also concerned that that political turmoil was getting in the way of the implementation of development activities, which impacts available opportunities and services for young people.

While opportunities in various areas have increased for young people, it is apparent that a multitude of forces, both related and unrelated to corrupt practices, are impacting their ability to fully access, engage and utilise these opportunities. Lack of consultation and information sharing by the government is also adversely impacting relations between young people and policy makers, and giving rise to the perceived notion of corruption and unfair practices being prevalent in all areas and sectors of the government. It is recommended that the government at all levels needs to increase opportunities and mechanisms for consultation with young people, increase transparency and disclosure to the public on the decision making processes, and utilise more youth friendly platforms and mediums for communication of information.

In addition, more information programmes need to be targeted at youth in democratic principles and civic participation, as well as recognising and reporting corruption, and the protections available for those that report incidents of corruption. And finally, oversight mechanisms within and outside the government and state institutions need to be strengthened and penalties implemented for those who engage in unlawful practices.

Introduction

The Maldives has undergone a period of rapid democratic reform from the early 2000's and has experienced numerous changes to the political and economic systems, institutions, and the society at large. A series of reforms, including the ratification of a new Constitution in 2008, opened up systems of democratic governance through the establishment of key institutions such as the Supreme Court, the Human Rights Commission, the Anti Corruption Commission, the Elections Commission and the establishment of local government bodies at island and atoll levels.

The new Constitution enshrined, for the first time ever, separation of powers amongst the three branches of Government: the Executive, legislature and the Judiciary.¹ A number of checks and balance mechanisms established by the Constitution included an independent Auditor General, a Prosecutor General, and a Judicial Services Commission.² The Parliament is vested with wide powers to check the conduct of the Executive and statutory institutions, and to make them answerable to the public. Maldivians, for the very first time, have begun to experience political freedoms such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and freedom of political association.

The first ever multi-party elections were held in October of 2008, heralding widespread expectations that democracy would deliver development and freedoms immediately. However a multitude of challenges remain in the country due to capacity gaps in the newly formed democratic institutions including civil society, as well as low public awareness and familiarity with the newly established systems, freedoms and rights. In addition, an unexpected and highly contested transfer of power in 2012³ highlighted the delicate state of the country's governing bodies, aggravated by polarised politics and a general absence of constructive dialogue among the various political actors and parties, as well as between the governing bodies and citizens.

Such weaknesses in the political system are rooted in the traditionally transmitted undemocratic practices embedded in the political system of the Maldives. Despite the successful establishment of a new Constitution, the political system of the Maldives still suffers from historical political practices acquired from past authoritarian governments.⁴ This creates

uncertainty in the political system, and the chance for systematic failure of the kind seen in February 2012.

The Maldives has achieved an impressive level of economic growth over the last few decades, graduating from the group of Least Developed Countries (LDC) on the UN list in 2011.⁵ However, despite the substantial tourism revenue flowing into the country, a number of developmental challenges continue to persist, especially in the distant islands. Many of the developmental benefits experienced have been concentrated on the capital island, Male', due to policy choices that have neglected to adequately account for the socio-economic needs of the island populations. Although the Maldives may be able to boast the highest per capita GDP in the region, living standards and access to many basic human services remain a major issue for those living outside the capital.⁶

The fundamental problem of development in the Maldives is the geographical spread of the country, which comprises islands spread out across a large geographic area, some of which are inhabited by fewer than 500 people. This has led to high costs in the provision of infrastructure and social services, as a result of attempts to provide each and every island with at least some degree of these services. The resultant disparities in the levels of development are reflected in the uneven distribution of wealth and socio-economic opportunities between communities living in the capital, Malé, and the atolls.⁷ As a result of this, the social and economic opportunities, including education and health benefits, employment and public services, are concentrated in Male', and are considerably better here than they are in the island communities. Significant levels of income inequality between the capital and the islands also exist.⁸

Another major issue that impedes equity in development is corruption. Various research has consistently shown that the Maldives experiences problems with corruption in many sectors. According to the Global Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2011, published by Transparency International, the Maldives was ranked amongst the most corrupt countries in the Asia Pacific region. Whilst the top scoring, New Zealand and Singapore, had scores of 9.5 and 9.2 respectively, the Maldives obtained a score of 2.5 on a scale of 1 to 10, indicating a high level of perceived corruption in the public service of the Maldives.⁹ Transparency International's Global

1 Constitution of Maldives 2008, Chapter 1

2 Constitution of Maldives 2008, Chapter 7

3 Commission of National Inquiry, Report of the Commission of National Inquiry, Maldives, 30 August 2012, www.maldiveshighcommission.org/.../30_d748abfc3a3c45b05a768812c

4 Transparency Maldives (2014) National Integrity Assessment 2014

5 UNDP (2014) Maldives Human Development Report 2014

6 *ibid*

7 *ibid*

8 Department of Planning (2012), Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012

9 Transparency Maldives (2014) National Integrity Assessment 2014

Corruption Barometer (GCB) survey, found that the perceived level of corruption in the Maldives had increased during the 2009-2011 period in that 56 per cent of people who took part in the survey in 2011 thought that corruption had increased over the preceding three years.¹⁰The top three areas in which perceived corruption existed were in the Parliament (74 per cent), political parties (71 per cent) and the Judiciary (64 per cent). The GCB 2013 also identified the Parliament, along with political parties, as the most corrupt institutions in the Maldives, closely followed by the Judiciary. The least corrupt institutions were seen to be NGOs, the education sector, and the health sector.

The first ever corruption-related legislation in the country was enacted in the year 2000. The Prohibition and Prevention of Corruption Act 2000 (the Anti-Corruption Act) criminalized corruption offences such as bribery and the misuse of public authority and resources, and established certain codes of conduct for public officials.¹¹The first dedicated institution with a mandate to fight against corruption in the Maldives, the Anti-Corruption Board, was established on 12 April 1991, under the President's Office. Upon the ratification of the Constitution of 2008, and the enactment of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2008, the Board was dissolved and all matters relating to the fight against corruption came under the domain of the newly established Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

The ACC is responsible for the prevention and curbing of all acts of corruption in public offices and the private sector. Statutory powers are available to the ACC allowing it to take necessary measures, within the law, on matters related to anti-corruption activities, including investigation and prevention measures.¹²However, legislation does not ensure the ACC's financial independence, and its access to resources is subject to resource allocation by the state, limiting its independent authority to investigate and prevent acts of corruption in the public sector. Despite such challenges at political and practical levels, the ACC has shown a high degree of transparency and accountability in carrying out its functions since its establishment.¹³

Although numerous audit reports show a large number of incidences of malpractice in public accounting regulations, and allegations of corruption have been made, only a few cases have been successfully

investigated, prosecuted or sanctioned. The State audit system itself lacks adequate resources to conduct regular auditing of all institutions within the Executive in order to ensure accountability in practice. Overall, the oversight mechanisms lack the capacity to prosecute or sanction officials of the Executive effectively.

There have been various declarations made by the different pillars of the state and political actors on their commitment to battle corruption, but actual actions remains limited. The impact of corruption is not only poorly equipped public services and facilities but it also undermines justice, economic development and destroys public trust in government and their leaders.

Youth in the Maldives

Similar to other countries in the region, the Maldives is experiencing a youth bulge with young people between the age of 15-24 years comprising of almost a quarter of the population of the country.¹⁴This is potentially an advantageous situation as youth are a highly productive group.

However, access to equitable opportunities is important for youth to reach their full potential and be productive members of the society. In this regard the impact of disparities in access to opportunities are particularly harmful for youth as they are particularly sensitive to exclusion.¹⁵The manner in which youth respond or challenge their situations could range from activism, to withdrawal from mainstream society and/or having increasingly cynical views of the society.¹⁶

As mentioned previously, the geographical make up of the country impedes the delivery of services and facilities across the atolls in an equitable manner. As with the rest of the population, this affects the opportunities and options available for young people. For instance, not all the islands has access to higher education opportunities or tertiary and reproductive healthcare services, and young people have to depend on the atoll capitals or Male' to access these services. Unemployment is also a serious issue with 43% of the youth population being unemployed.¹⁷In addition, differentiation in development of various regions takes its toll on employment opportunities of youth, particularly of rural islands, which makes young people migrate to urban centres, resorts and the capital for better or relevant positions of

10 Transparency International (2014) Global Corruption Barometer Survey 2013, <http://transparency.mv/en/publications/downloads/global-corruption-barometer-survey-2013-013d407166ec4fa56eb1e1f8cbe183b9>, accessed 28 August 2015

11 Transparency Maldives (2014) National Integrity Assessment 2014

12 Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2008 (Law No. 13/2008)

13 Transparency Maldives (2014) National Integrity Assessment 2014

14 National Bureau of Statistics, Census 2014 Preliminary Results
15 UNDP (2014), Sri Lanka NHDR 2014: Youth and Development – Towards a more inclusive future, UNDP Sri Lanka

16 *ibid*

17 Department of Planning (2012), Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012

employment, leaving small islands almost devoid of young people to take up important roles and responsibilities in the community.

Another area where youth face serious challenges is access to housing, primarily in the more urban islands and at quite critical levels in the capital. In Male' the majority of the residents live in extremely crowded conditions at exorbitant rental prices.¹⁸ These conditions cause claustrophobia both physically and psychologically, causing young people to spend a large part of their time outside of their homes.¹⁹ Coupled with the issue of youth unemployment this then creates a breeding ground for anti-social behaviour, crime and drug use.²⁰

Nevertheless, the opening of space and freedoms with the new Constitution has been beneficial for youth in the area of civic engagement. Young people have always been at the forefront of organising communal activities in the islands of the Maldives, organising the marking of cultural and religious activities, as well as volunteering in communal tasks such as clean ups and restoration of public assets. With the introduction of the political party system and rights such as freedom of speech and association young people are also participating in large numbers in civic activities such as campaigning, voting, and establishing and leading civil society organisations related to areas of good governance and human rights.²¹

Policy Framework

According to the current policy framework, youth is defined as those falling within the age group of between 18 to 35 years of age.²² However, for the purpose of this assessment, youth is considered as young people falling within 15 to 24 years of age, as per the UN definition.

The overall guiding policy on youth is the National Youth Policy, formulated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2003.²³ The vision of the Policy is as follows:

Maldivian youth will fully participate in the development of the country and will be able to get opportunities they need for their own advancement.

Some of the objectives stated in the policy includes: ensuring all young people have equal opportunity to pursue a better quality of life; reducing urban and

rural disparities in the services and opportunities available to young men and women; facilitating youth leadership in all social, economic, and cultural spheres; to provide appropriate pathways for access to information, advice and support; and to provide consultative and participatory opportunities for young women and men to express their needs and aspirations and to provide opportunities for youth to actively participate in planning, organising, and decision making, in all youth related activities.²⁴

The Policy sets out the key issues affecting young people such as education, employment, health, and housing, and outlines nine key strategic areas for youth interventions. These include:

1. Education and training
2. Housing
3. Employment pathways
4. Sport, leisure and recreational opportunities
5. Youth participation in society
6. Healthy lifestyles
7. Unlawful or criminal behaviour
8. Sustainable development and environment
9. Development of youth affairs²⁵

The Ministry of Youth is currently in the process of drafting a Youth Act in order to support the incorporation of the needs and concerns of young people into the decision making processes.²⁶

There is also a National Youth Council that acts as an advisory body to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, specifically to the Department of Youth. The Council was established in 1981, and currently comprises of nine members. However, the Council has not recently been active in its functions.²⁷

Even though a national policy on youth exists, after the new Government came into power in 2013 the reference point for all the decision making is their Manifesto. Youth features heavily on the present Government's manifesto with a specific chapter devoted to youth, as well as youth considerations included in chapters related to other areas.²⁸

There are many key pledges in the youth chapter of the manifesto including: creating jobs for youth, providing financial assistance to develop small and medium enterprises, providing vocational training for students and youth, establishing infrastructure to cater for sports and entertainment for youth, increasing ICT knowledge, providing higher education

18 UNDP (2010), Report on Fostering Youth Participation and Volunteerism, UNDP Maldives

19 ibid

20 ibid

21 Interview with UNDP Maldives, 12 August 2015

22 Interview with Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2 August 2015

23 Ministry of Youth and Sports, Maldives National Youth Policy 2003

24 ibid

25 Ministry of Youth and Sports, Maldives National Youth Policy 2003

26 Interview with Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2 August 2015

27 World Bank (2014), Youth in the Maldives: Shaping a new future for young women and men through engagement and empowerment.

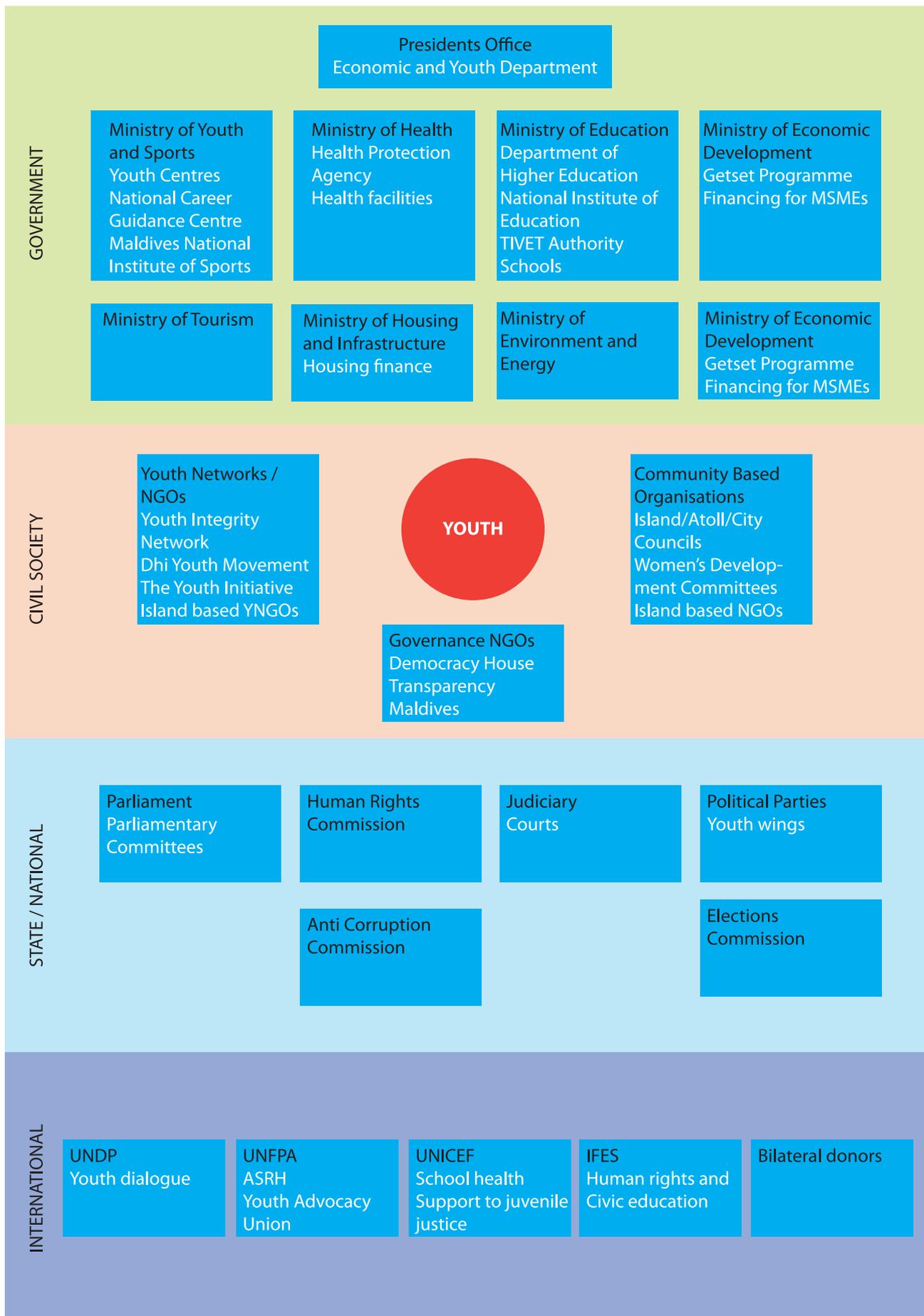
28 PPM Manifesto

opportunities, enhancing the music and arts sector, and providing rehabilitation services for drug abuse.

There are also youth specific pledges in the education, fisheries, and agriculture chapters. Other major chapters such as those on housing, health and tourism also contains pledges that are targeted for the general population but has direct implications on opportunities and services for youth.

The general stakeholders in the area of youth development are outlined below.

Stakeholders



Research Methodology

Research Objectives

The objective of the research was to undertake a situational analysis focusing on youth as victims of corruption, and areas where young people become victims of corruption. The situation analysis aimed to develop a youth profile of the Maldives, analyse the current situation of young people, identify critical needs and challenges of young people, and identify areas where youth become victims of corruption.

Research Themes

Broadly, the study examined the following themes:

- The general status of youth in the Maldives, as well as government policies, legal protections, responsible agencies and stakeholders;
- Opportunities for youth currently in the Maldives, focusing on the areas of
 - o Housing
 - o Employment
 - o Education
 - o Health services
 - o Leadership and political participation; and
- Barriers to accessing the opportunities in these areas, particularly as a result of corruption

Study Design

The design of the study was a cross sectional qualitative assessment. A small section of the youth population across the country was covered in the assessment, and qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus group discussions were utilised.

Research Methods

The assessment employed four methods:

1. Documentary review of secondary sources

Secondary literature on youth as well as national and international corruption related reports and working papers were reviewed for background information for the assessment.

2. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders

In order to gain understanding of the existing policy framework related to youth and the current ongoing programming directly and indirectly related to youth, in-depth interviews were conducted with key government agencies related to the areas covered under this assessment, including Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Education, TVET Authority, Health Protection Agency, and Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure. In addition, interviews were conducted with youth NGOs DhiYouth Movement, The Youth Initiative, and Youth Integrity Network; Youth Wings of the two major political parties; and two international partners based in the Maldives that have a mandate for youth development: UNDP and UNFPA.

3. A Case study of an urban island with a large population

A field trip was conducted to an urban island, and interviews were conducted with the Island Council, Women's Development Committee, and two NGOs. In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted with a group of male youth and a group of female youth.

4. Telephone interviews, from respondents across the country in selected islands

Telephone interviews were conducted with 40 young people from across the country. The interviewees consisted of 30 young people from the atolls and 10 from the capital. The atolls participants were from six atolls and 10 islands, covering all regions of the country. The atoll interviewees included 12 females and 18 males, and there were six females and four males among the Male' interviewees.

Sampling Design

1. Semi structured interviews

Criterion and snowball sampling methods were used to identify interviewees. Initial interviews were those who meet the criterion of being from focal point agencies of youth or have an interest in youth, and from then on snowball sampling was employed as other key persons were identified through the initial interviews.

2. Case study

An island with a medium to large sized population was chosen for the case study. Islands with small populations were ruled out due to the limited opportunities overall in those islands which would have made it difficult to discuss access to opportunities within the island, and as the participants could only discuss issues and experiences regarding access to opportunities outside the island.

3. Telephone interviews

Alumni who were from the atolls of the annual Youth Leadership Programme implemented by the NGO Democracy House were contacted and a snowball sampling method employed to get contacts from those islands for the telephone interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Due to the sensitive nature of the information shared, efforts are made to as much as possible to ensure the information is not attributed to any individual. Permission was sought from interviewees if an attribution was required. Information gained from case studies that can be easily attributed to respondents is treated sensitively and "make no harm" principle was used to gauge whether to use certain information in the report or not.

Constraints and Limitations

Due to time and resource constraints, field work was limited to one island, as a result of which the information obtained from the field visit is used as a case study only and not considered representative across the country. Phone interviews were utilised in order to obtain more nationwide data.

In the sampling for phone interviews, islands with alumni from the YLP programme were taken and islands chosen on the basis of coverage of all the regions in the country and population levels. However, a considerable amount of the alumni could not be reached due to reasons such as changes in phone numbers, and as a result the islands had to be chosen again based on available YLP contacts. This affected the sampling in that it prevented a systematic selection of islands based on different levels of population and wider geographical coverage within the country.

In addition, there were difficulties getting in touch with the target number of interviewees, once again due to reasons such as changes in phone numbers or not responding to phone calls. Therefore the number of phone interviewees is lower than targeted, which might limit the representativeness of the conclusions drawn being applicable to all areas of the country.

Accessing Opportunities

The assessment looked at opportunities for young people in the areas such as higher education, housing, employment, health, and leadership and civic engagement. It also looked at whether and how these opportunities are affected through corrupt practices such as discrimination, undue influence and illicit activities. This section will give an overview of the opportunities for youth in the mentioned areas and describe barriers and challenges for access reported by youth, particularly those related to corrupt practices.

Higher Education

Post secondary and higher education opportunities available within the country have expanded considerably in the past few years. Islands with schools up to higher secondary education have been increasing. The net enrolment rate for higher secondary education rose from 17.4% in 2011 to 23.6% in 2014.²⁹ The net enrolment rate in 2011 for boys was 18.4% and 16.4% for girls, which rose to 20.2% for boys and 27.3% for girls in 2014.³⁰

There are a multitude of higher education institutions in the capital as well, offering from Certificate level to undergraduate and even post graduate degrees. Educational institutions such as the Maldives National University and Villa College have also opened campuses in other islands. However, the selection of courses offered are limited compared to those in the capital and this has not significantly lessened the need for young people to travel to the capital to benefit from a wider variety of options in terms of both institutions and fields of study. In addition to opportunities from formal institutions, some island-based NGOs also provide educational opportunities, which are open to all interested individuals for nominal fees.

Scholarships from international donors for undergraduate and postgraduate study abroad are facilitated through Department of Higher Education, and also Ministry of Islamic Affairs under the Zakat Fund, although such opportunities are limited. The government has introduced a study loan scheme for those without the means to finance their studies abroad.³¹

Youth access to higher education

The majority of the youth interviewed had favourable views with regards to the expansion of higher educational opportunities across the country, and most reported that all those who meet the entrance criteria and are motivated have access to higher educational opportunities. One interviewee also reported that some institutions in her island actively try to encourage youth to study in that institution.

Some of the respondents (19%) reported financial constraints as a barrier towards accessing higher education that is available in the country. A small number of interviewees expressed dissatisfaction regarding the government study loan scheme, as it only provides support to regional countries. And approximately 10% of the interviewees expressed the view that scholarship opportunities for overseas educational institutions were pre-arranged to those who had connections with people in high positions.

Housing

Pledges related to housing featured heavily on manifestos of all parties during the Presidential election of 2013. The manifesto of the present government does not have a pledge on housing specifically targeting youth, but does include a pledge on providing shelter for all focusing on vulnerable groups.³² The means for this includes

29 Ministry of Education, School Statistics 2014, <http://www.moe.gov.mv/category/view/14>, accessed 18 August 2015
30 *ibid*

31 Hassan Hazim (2008), Tertiary loan scheme application opens, <http://www.vnews.mv/33786>, accessed 21 August 2015

32 PPM Manifesto

provision of social housing schemes and housing finance opportunities.

The Government currently has ongoing and planned housing schemes providing both flats and houses in Male', Hulhumale', and the urban centres of north and south of the country such as Hanimaadhoo, Dhidhoo, Kulhudufushi, Villingili, Thinadhoo etc. And as normal custom in the country, specific islands that have the space also continue issuing land periodically through their Island Councils to those who meet certain criteria set by the Council.

Currently there is a government housing loan scheme administered by the Housing Development and Finance Corporation, where 40% of the loans are reserved for youth. There is also an interest free housing loan scheme using Islamic Banking principles administered through HDFC, that requires no collateral and no interest is charged. The Housing Ministry is working towards reducing the age for qualifying to apply for social housing to 18, and also focusing on introducing mid level housing schemes as they believe there is a demand for it, particularly from educated and professional youth.³³ Currently there is social housing and high end housing schemes with nothing in between.³⁴

Youth Access to Housing

In terms of access to housing, there was a large discrepancy in the views of interviewees from the capital and the atolls. All the interviewees from the atolls (except one island where issuing of housing plots were suspended) expressed the view that housing plots were issued fairly by Island Councils to those who met the criteria. They also stated that in fact it is the young people who benefit and access such opportunities the most. Although few interviewees did state that occasionally there might be plots issued to people who had some political or family connections. Few interviewees from the atolls were not so familiar with the process, but reported that they were not aware of any issues in the island due to unfairness or issues due to undue influence with regard to the issuing of housing plots.

In comparison, the interviewees from the capital expressed quite negative views with regard to youth access to housing facilities. More than 80% of the interviewees stated that they were not eligible for

current housing opportunities, and also that such schemes only benefit those who are affiliated with a certain party or the government at that time, or is used for political gain. Some quoted the example of Rehendhi Flats, which were given by the present government to the Supreme Court Justices, four heads of independent bodies, including the President of ACC,³⁵ and the awarding of flats to certain groups during the last Presidential elections.³⁶ One respondent stated that signing for a particular party was "the way to get flats".

It was also identified that there seems to be a disconnect between the technical level decision making process within the Ministry and decisions made on housing allocation at the political level. There are stringent criteria and evaluation processes established for allocation of housing that are participatory, in that officials from the islands where such schemes are offered are part of the group that makes the criteria and procedures. According to the ACC, a lot of the times the criteria is sound and there were some cases where they had reviewed the criteria and seen certain areas that might lead to unfair practices and had made recommendations to change those specific points. However, there are ad hoc decisions made, at a higher level, to award housing for people that do not fit the target groups identified by the Ministry of Housing, such as in the cases mentioned above.

There was also the issue of limited information dissemination, and youth not being proactive in getting the required information. All of the interviewees were not aware of housing finance loan scheme introduced by the Ministry of Housing, or that any efforts were being made by the Ministry to make housing opportunities more accessible to young people. ACC stated that in the case of housing, demand exceeds supply by a substantial amount, particularly in the capital, which leads to dissatisfaction, as there would be more people who are not awarded flats than those who are under each housing scheme.

Employment

The Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2012 found that 43% of the youth labour force aged 15-24 years is unemployed. Inability to find suitable employment ranks highest among the reasons for

33 Interview with Ministry of Housing and Infrastructure, 26 August 2015

34 ibid

35 Hassan Mohamed (2015), Government hands discounted flats to judges, commission heads, <http://minivannewsarchive.com/politics/government-hands-discounted-flats-to-judges-commission-heads-95522#sthash.l0ABqITV.dpbs>, accessed 22 August 2015

36 The presidency (2013), Hope to provide more flats to Police and Armed Forces – President Waheed, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=11&dcid=13099>, accessed 22 August 2015

unemployment in this age group followed by lack of opportunities and being engaged in studies.³⁷ Being engaged in household chores was also a significant reason for female youth, while it did not feature as a reason for male youth.³⁸

The government's manifesto puts a lot of emphasis on developing employment opportunities for youth, and includes pledges for creating at least 94,000 jobs for youth, providing financial assistance to develop small and medium enterprises, provision of vocational training, facilitating youth to obtain fishing vessels, and promoting agriculture as an industry for youth.³⁹ The key government agency implementing these pledges is the Ministry of Economic Development (MED), whose broader policy goals include employment creation, with a particular focus on youth and women. The Ministry implements programmes such as Getset which includes assistance to micro, small and medium enterprises.⁴⁰ The Ministry, through Getset and other programmes, provides collateral free access to finance, credit guarantees, and business training through their Business Centres established in six regions.

The TVET Authority of the government provides various skills development and training opportunities for young people. There are apprenticeship and training programmes in the area of food and beverage and tourism, and an online training programme to develop pharmacists across the country. TVET Authority also implements a Student Internship Programme with the Ministry of Education.

There are initiatives run by the private sector as well to meet the skill shortages in the sector. Most notably some companies and resorts in the tourism sector have training and apprentice programmes to train people coming into the sector, which predominantly comprises of youth. Major companies in other sectors such as audit firms also provide internship opportunities for those entering into the job market.

Youth access to Employment

All interviewees generally perceived access to employment very negatively. Seventy three percent of interviewees from the atolls reported that most of the jobs in their respective islands were assigned to people who had family connections to those in high positions, or they were given to people affiliated with the party that had the most power in the island. They

reported that a person would be pre-assigned to a job and the advertisement for the post is normally a formality. Hence, most reported that having the right qualifications were not a guarantee to get a job, but rather having connections and being active politically were more enabling factors. One respondent stated that "if you stand on a podium and give a rousing speech you are guaranteed to get a job". Some interviewees also reported that added to the political influence in being able to secure jobs, there were also quite limited job opportunities in their islands so most educated youth migrate to other islands, especially to the capital, for employment.

Interviewees from Male' had the same concern, but for attaining jobs at higher levels. Male' interviewees did not feel that there were corruption related barriers at securing entry level positions. However, some of the interviewees stated that the prevailing attitudes of both young people and their parents prevented them from going for certain types and levels of positions. And most Male' interviewees felt that those with connections or with political influence were given unfair advantages in the job selection process of higher positions in the government and companies. One Male' interviewee cited an example where a decision making level position at a government Ministry was advertised with the exact qualification of the person that were pre-assigned for the position, while that qualification was not related to the position in question.

The Ministry of Economic Development was aware of the widespread negative perception in the area of employment, and did acknowledge that there were issues related to information dissemination and lack of transparency in the area of recruitment. For instance, most employers did not publish the results of the selection process in appointing people to job positions. MED stated that lack of transparency is a systemic issue and a lot of the times it was difficult to separate practices with the wider environment. The ACC began to publish the details of their recruitment process on their website, and they reported that complaints from those unsuccessful applicants have decreased drastically.⁴¹ In addition, MED pointed out that there are issues with the attitudes and discipline of the workforce as well that causes a negative perception of the employability of youth. And the overall policy of the Ministry currently was employment creation, with a specific focus on youth and women, and there are no advocacy activities being conducted to promote fairness and non discrimination in the employment sector at this time.

37 Department of Planning (2012), Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2012

38 *ibid*

39 PPM Manifesto

40 Interview with Ministry of Economic Development, 6 August 2015

41 Interview with ACC, 30 August 2015

It is to be noted that none of the interviewees reported any of the cases of unfair appointment to job posts cited in their interviews, for reasons such as not being comfortable with reporting actions of people in power or being aware of how to report. In addition, almost 70% of those interviewed were not aware of the programmes run by the government and private sector to train young people for the job market. This was particularly so among the atoll interviewees.

Health Services

All inhabited islands have a healthcare centre managed by the government. However, severe limitations of professional staff and limitation of financial resources constrain service delivery of these institutions.⁴² There are six regional hospitals, 13 atolls hospitals, and one government tertiary hospital in the country.⁴³ The number of private hospitals and clinics has been increasing in recent years.

The overall policy framework for the government in the provision of healthcare is the manifesto as well. There is no specific youth related pledge in the area of health, but the manifesto includes pledges to expand and improve healthcare facilities and services, provide maternal health services from every island, strengthen health insurance, ensure treatment for mental illnesses, and ensuring school health monitoring in schools.⁴⁴

Access to basic healthcare has been expanding, however as with most facilities, most of the specialised services and facilities are centralised in the capital. The services in the islands also face limited funds and inconsistent availability of professional staff.

In terms of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, it remains a sensitive and in some cases a taboo subject. As a result, young people have difficulties accessing contraception and have limited awareness about sexuality education, particularly in rural islands.⁴⁵ Research has shown that young people do engage in risky behaviours, such as unprotected sex, drug use and accessing unsafe abortion procedures.⁴⁶ In small communities young people and adolescents also face lack of privacy to feel comfortable in accessing sexuality and health information.

Youth Access to healthcare

Quality of healthcare was the concern of all the atoll interviewees and majority of Male' interviewees. There was concern about the limited availability of health professionals, low quality of healthcare facilities, unavailability of critical medicines and medical tests, and quality of care. Some of the interviewees talked about lack of proper attention given to improve healthcare around the country on the premise that the government does not have the required funds while there were considerable amounts of financial resources spent on infrastructure projects and "Independence Day celebrations" that only benefitted the capital.

The Anti-Corruption Commission is presently completing an assessment in the area of health sector management, which examines whether corrupt practices are being employed in areas such as the recruitment of staff and procurement of health equipment. The findings of the assessment have not been published at present. There were also other issues raised in the phone interviews that were not specific to healthcare sector, such as misappropriation of funds and selective development interventions, which is detailed in the section General Barriers to Access below.

Leadership and civic engagement

The opening of space and freedoms with the new Constitution has been beneficial for youth in the area of civic engagement. There are annual opportunities such as Youth Leadership Programme and Democracy Camps organised by Democracy House and Transparency Maldives respectively that aim to equip youth with the knowledge and skills to participate in political and policy-making processes. Youth NGOs that have previously been primarily active in leading economic and recreational activities in the communities have begun to develop leadership skills of youth and educating them in democratic governance and civic engagement.⁴⁷

Youth participation in political activities such as campaigning and political rallies is very high. Political parties become the source of information for such young people on democracy and human rights.⁴⁸ On

42. Ministry of Health, The Maldives Health Statistics 2012

43. *ibid*

44. PPM manifesto

45. UNDP (2008) Biological and Behavioural Survey on HIV and AIDS, UNDP Maldives

46. Ministry of Health, (2010), Maldives Demographic and Health Survey 2009; UNFPA, (2013), Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behaviour of Young Unmarried Women in the Maldives; Ministry of Education (2009), Global School-based Student Health Survey Maldives Country Report

47. Interview with UNDP Maldives, 12 August 2015

48. *ibid*

the flipside young are also implicated and involved in incidents of political violence, with research showing connections between gangs and political parties. An assessment on gangs in Male' revealed that political groups use gangs by providing them with money, alcohol or drugs, to carry out specific tasks such as participating in political protests, voting, starting political riots, destroying property or injuring a third party.⁴⁹

Access to Leadership and Civic Engagement

With regard to youth access to decision making the views were mixed among both atoll and Male' interviewees. There was general consensus that opportunities for civic engagement and voicing opinions have increased in recent years. Over half of the young people interviewed also expressed satisfaction that the government and policy makers were recognising youth as an important target population for development interventions as well as consulting them on issues.

Many of the young people, particularly Male' youth, stated that there were opportunities to voice their opinions and those who wish to be actively engaged in civic activities currently have the opportunity to do so. As one interviewee reported: "if you are interested in a certain issue just stand up and try to do something about it, and the Council is very cooperative". However, it is important to note that there was a difference between atolls and Male' youth in what the interviewees meant by civic activities. Most atoll interviewees tended to view civic engagement as participation in organising community, cultural, religious and sports activities, while almost all of the Male' interviewees viewed leadership and civic participation as efforts to voice their opinions to decision makers in order to influence policies, legislation etc, and being involved in organised efforts to protest or contest certain decisions.

In addition, 42% of interviewees stated that although a lot of the time youth are called on to participate when there is an activity in the community, they are not allowed to be part of the decision making process. Some stated that the youth participation is used to mobilise a work force and get things done rather than with an intention of empowering youth to be active agents in the communities. One Male' interviewee expressed concern that there were no formal mechanisms where youth were consulted on issues as a norm, but rather it is either up to the young people to organise themselves and get the message across or they are only consulted if the key decision makers in a certain situation decides to do so. Youth groups from Male' expressed dissatisfaction over

the lack of consultation during the drafting of the Youth Bill for instance. They reported that they were not consulted, and had to "invite themselves" to the meeting by the Youth Ministry to discuss the Bill, only after it was drafted.

There were also strong views that youth participation in civic and political activities was hindered by disingenuous intentions of those in high positions. For instance some interviewees stated that youth are exploited in protests and campaigns to further the interest of political leaders while they remain out of harm's way. As a result young people are arrested and get sentenced which has implications on their present and future opportunities. Some interviewees were also of the view that political leaders did not want potential leaders to emerge out of the youth population as that challenges their position, and as a result potential leadership and decision making opportunities for youth are controlled and young people just become means to maintain the status quo. One interviewee stated that: "Politicians are not doing constructive things like building youth, but rather they are using youth".

In addition some interviewees felt that young people with proper qualifications were overlooked in political parties unless they are also an "activist". Vocal youth in the political parties are included more in party activities by the leadership and hence they get more experience and exposure that leads to higher positions in the parties. According to one interviewee: "Qualified young people who may have constructive ideas but who might not necessarily be vocal activists or connected through family to the high officials of the party struggle for leadership positions within parties, so they lose the motivation and become inactive".

A few interviewees had a counter view that political parties, through their use of youth in political activities, increased their awareness of democratic principles and rights. In the absence of awareness programmes on civic engagement political parties played an important role in building leadership skills and knowledge of young people in this area. One interviewee had the opinion that although political parties and leaders exploit youth, this opportunity to participate in demonstrations and protests actually empowers youth. "The young person who speaks on the podium or even bursts through the barricades is actually getting an opportunity to be empowered and can apply that capability in his/her daily life and become strong and assertive".

General Barriers to Access

In discussing barriers to access, there were some

49. Asia Foundation (2012) Rapid Assessment of Gangs in Male', Asia Foundation

that were raised pertaining to wider governance and political factors which were applicable to all the sectors mentioned in the above sections. These included:

1. Lack of accountability in financial management

About one third of those interviewed expressed concern that the government spends a lot of money, including donor funds, on development initiatives but it has not translated into significant changes over the years or even decades. The opportunities were still centralised and concentrated in the capital, and facilities and services in the atolls have not progressed in accordance to the spending of the government. Almost all of the interviewees stated as a fact that corruption is everywhere in the government. One interviewee stated that the country receives a lot of aid over the years but there is no accountability of how the funds are utilised. Corruption was given as one of the main reasons for the slow development of the healthcare system, particularly by Male' interviewees. Mismanagement of funds was cited by some as one of the reasons which limits the opportunities for progress of the island communities in general and youth in particular. Some expressed the view mismanagement and corruption was a systemic issue across board and was affecting access to opportunities in many areas.

2. Preferential treatment of ruling party members and supporters

Almost all of the young people interviewed cited party affiliation as a factor that either hinders or improves access to opportunities. More than 92% of the interviewees stated that party affiliation affected your chances of employment opportunities, particularly at decision making level. Male' interviewees stated that housing opportunities were easier to access for members and supporters of the ruling party at a given time. Some interviewees stated that awarding of contracts from the government was also biased towards groups affiliated with the ruling party, and one interviewee stated that contracts to carry out activities for the marking of 50 years of independence of the country were awarded to youth groups affiliated with the high level government officials and the ruling party.

3. Political turmoil

About half of interviewees viewed the constant political turmoil in the past years as detrimental to development of the country. Some interviewees stated that when the country goes into political unrest the systems and mechanisms that upholds transparency and accountability stops functioning, which has substantial negative impact on the functioning of the state. For instance development interventions slow down or come to a standstill and there are wastage of resources since the government is unable to implement such initiatives at the normal pace. This impacts the benefits of such programmes

to the citizens as well as causing opportunities for corruption and mismanagement of funds.

4. Lack of transparency and consultation in decision making

About a third of the interviewees expressed concern that there was no transparency in decision making on major decisions by the government. Decisions on major development projects are made without communicating to the public on the processes followed to come to the decision and it is announced without any consultation or prior information. As a result information regarding the decisions is then circulated among the public on informal channels and social media based on rumours. This was also echoed by the ACC, where they stated that proper information is not provided which limits opportunities as well as leads to negative perceptions. They stressed the importance of access to information, and also to utilise youth-friendly means of disseminating information

According to ACC, there is a significant issue with perception with regards to corrupt practices. In 2014, the ACC reviewed 783 cases of corruption, out of which only 38 cases, constituting approximately 5 percent of cases, were recommended for prosecution. ACC attributes this to lack of transparency and also lack of initiative in accessing the proper information.

One interviewee stated that no matter how technically sound a decision is, if there is no consultation or information given prior to the announcement, it would not be accepted in a positive light and in the current politically charged context there will always be suspicion of corrupt practices, illicit actions and undue influence. And in such a climate young people would feel no sense of agency and will tend to become discouraged and disenfranchised.

Case Study: Island A

Island A is a large urban island with a residing population of approximately 8,000. Youth consists of around 40 percent. The main occupations for men are fisheries, construction and managing small business. As with a lot of islands in Maldives, many young men also work away from the island in tourist resorts. Many women are employed in the civil service and traditional occupations such as making coir rope are still prevalent among older women.

The island has a regional hospital with some specialist services available, and also two private clinics. There is an Adolescent Health Desk in the Public Health Unit of the Hospital that conducts health related information services for young people. Youth access to healthcare and reproductive health

information is relatively reasonable. In terms of higher education, there is a higher secondary school and the Maldives National University has a campus in the island, with several young people enrolled from the island as well as other surrounding islands. In addition, two colleges provide courses in limited subject areas. The vocational training programme Dhasvaaru is also available to students who perform poorly in academics. There are no difficulties for youth in accessing higher education and training opportunities available within the island.

Land availability in the island is limited so plots of land have not been allocated to applicants since 2007. However, other types of housing schemes such as allocation of row houses and flats are being offered. Demand for housing is very high, and in the last allocation for row houses there were around 700 applicants for the 100 units offered. However, generally young people are satisfied that the criteria for housing allocation is followed.

Employment opportunities are limited within the island with most young people opting to go outside the island for employment, particularly young males. Religious conservative views are adversely affecting the participation of women in employment. There is a general perception that most employment opportunities in the public sector as well as the private sector favour people related or connected to those in higher positions, and that political party affiliation also is a deciding factor. However, some also acknowledged that in most cases recruitment is based on merit.

Decisions regarding the development of the island are made by the central government, and the Council is consulted sometimes. In some cases specific institutions are consulted depending on the project area. There is no culture of consultation with people in decision making as a general rule, including with youth. However, information regarding decisions are shared via the Council notice board. Even though the Decentralisation Act mandates the Councils to have meetings with the public twice in the year, the council had only held one public meeting in the last two years. According to the Council, not many people attend the meetings and the Council also do not have much to report to the public anyway since they are not able to conduct many activities or programmes due to the limited funding and budget they receive. However, individual people do come and meet the Council on specific issues, and young people are also in contact with the council, especially during the planning and organising of “youth related” activities in the community.

The local youth groups do agree that there are opportunities for youth to participate in leadership and civic activities and they do participate. Although

some stated that such activities were only in the areas of sports and recreation. No discrimination in such opportunities with regards to any type of affiliation was reported. However, there was dissatisfaction expressed on lack of inclusiveness and transparency in the decision making process, particularly by the central government. The methods of information dissemination, particularly used within the island, were not very youth friendly and, as a result, young people were not properly informed about opportunities that arise in various areas. However, it is also a factor that young people were not proactive in seeking out information.

There is high participation of youth in political activities. However, views regarding benefits to youth as a result of political participation is mixed. Some view it as opportunities for youth to voice their views and be leaders in the society, while others see youth being exploited by politicians by the use of bribes for obtaining votes or funding illegal activities which are mostly done through youth. Some reports negative impacts to youth such as imprisonment for political activities and court cases that had been delayed previously being fast tracked if the young person is an opposition supporter.

Thus, relatively, young people in Island A have considerable access to opportunities in areas such as health, higher education, and leadership and civic engagement. As with most islands employment opportunities were limited, and most young people work in other islands and resorts. Limited space was impacting access to housing as well. While corrupt practices were not viewed to impact access to basic services such as health, education and housing as well as leadership opportunities, young people perceived opportunities for employment within the island quite negatively with connections, political and otherwise, thought to be affecting access.

In addition, political participation of youth was viewed by many as negatively impacting youth and their access to opportunities, particularly if the person was affiliated with the opposition. And much improvement is needed to increase transparency, inclusiveness and access to information regarding decision-making for the development of the island by the Council, and particularly by the central government.

Conclusion

Youth represents a significant proportion of the population of the country. They are also at a situation of increased vulnerability from the wider socio-political practices and processes. Young people tend to be more exposed to illicit activities such as bribery as they are involved in many areas of the society in different roles such as students, workers, customers and citizens.⁵⁰ In a context where there are geographical, financial and political barriers to opportunities, young people are especially prone to be susceptible to, and be victims of, corrupt activities.

The objective of this assessment was to undertake a situational analysis focusing on opportunities for youth in the Maldives and examine how youth become victims of corruption in accessing these opportunities. Key informant interviews with policy makers, youth groups and phone interviews with young people across the country were conducted in this assessment, which aimed to develop a profile of the situation of youth looking particularly at the areas of housing, employment, healthcare, higher education and training, and leadership, and if and how corruption affects opportunities for youth in these areas.

Young people interviewed generally felt that the government and policy makers are recognising the importance of youth and addressing their issues more than before. They were satisfied with the expansion of opportunities in areas such as higher education and training, and leadership and civic engagement. However they were concerned with the slow progress of the quality of services of healthcare, particularly outside of the capital, and felt that mismanagement and corruption were affecting the development of the sector. And while housing opportunities for young people and the adherence to the criteria in issuing housing in the atolls were viewed favourably, there was the general perception that housing schemes in the capital were used as a means to gain political support and that flats were issued unjustly to those that do not meet the criteria.

Of all the sectors, young people interviewed had the most negative perceptions of employment opportunities, with youth from the atolls reporting that positions in their islands are given to those with the right political or family affiliations. Male' youth had the same view for positions and jobs at higher or decision making levels. In addition, almost half of the young people were of the view that while there are more civic participation opportunities for youth, young people are mostly utilised to get things done

and in most cases does not have a say in the decision making.

Most young people felt that there was no culture of transparency and consultation before important policy level and legislative decisions were made. It was identified that a lot of interviewees, especially from the atolls, did not have proper information about the programmes being conducted by the government for youth development in many areas. One reason may be that government agencies do not fully utilise youth-friendly mediums such as social media to communicate their programmes and decision making processes. This loses the connection between young people and the agencies that work to improve their situation, and also in most cases gives rise to suspicion and perceptions of foul play in all aspects of governance.

And finally, there was also a lot of criticism for the exploitation of youth by political actors in the country, where youth are mobilised to show numbers at rallies, and then put in the frontlines in protests where they face violence and persecution while the leaders remain in the background. Furthermore, a lot of the young people expressed concern over lack of accountability on the utilisation of public funds and the disparities that still exist between the capital and other islands in terms of services and facilities, despite international aid and the implementation of numerous development projects. It was interesting to note that all those interviewed had the perception that corruption existed everywhere at all levels in the country. Most young people were also concerned that those who were affiliated with the party in power at that moment in time had access to more opportunities and benefits than average youth, and also that political turmoil was getting in the way of the implementation of development activities, which impacts available opportunities and services for young people.

While opportunities in various areas have increased for young people, it is apparent that a multitude of forces, both related and unrelated to corrupt practices, are impacting their ability to fully access, engage and utilise these opportunities. Lack of consultation and information sharing by the government is also adversely impacting relations between young people and policy makers, and giving rise to the perceived notion of corruption and unfair practices being prevalent in all areas and sectors of the government. Such a context also does not provide a conducive environment for young people to be able to pursue avenues for self development without resorting to illicit means. Much effort is required to promote democratic principles such as equality, transparency

50. Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, U4 Expert Answer – Best Practices in Engaging Youth in the Fight Against Corruption, accessed

and accountability, as well as strengthening the implementation of laws and regulations that uphold such principles. It is also essential to harness the transformative potential of young people and engage them in the fight against corruption.

Recommendations

Most young people interviewed did not report the incidences of corruption they cited due to reasons such as not being aware of the procedures or not wanting to report against those in powerful positions.

- More information programmes targeted at youth and youth groups are required on recognising and reporting corruption, including the protections available for those that report incidents of corruption.

There was concern that those in power and political positions were exploiting young people in order to further personal agendas or for party politics.

- Information sessions and awareness needs to be raised on democratic principles, and what constitutes civic participation and engagement in a democracy.

Young people felt that there was no culture of transparency and consultation before important policy level and legislative decisions were made, and this gives rise to suspicion and perceptions of foul play in all aspects of governance.

- Government at all levels need to increase opportunities and mechanisms for consultation with young people, particularly on issues that are related to them
- More transparency and disclosure to the public is necessary on the decision making processes by the government at all levels, from the beginning of the process to the final decisions made, including the technical information considered and consultations made in making the final decision.
- Government and state agencies needs to utilise more youth-friendly platforms and mediums to communication information on their programmes and decisions.

Concern was expressed over lack of accountability on the utilisation of public funds and the disparities that still exist between the capital and other islands

- The implementation of legislation and regulations regarding public finance needs to be strengthened
- Internal oversight mechanisms within government and state institutions need to be strengthened and penalties implemented

- Asset disclosure regime of the country needs to be strengthened and strongly implemented with penalties enforced

There was concern that those who were affiliated with the party in power at that moment in time had access to more opportunities and benefits than the average youth

- Transparency in selection criteria and procedures for positions of all levels of government is required
- Appointments for political and policy level posts require transparency and adherence to openly available selection criteria



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