

Maahara digest

ISSUE 02

REVIVING KANDOODHOO YOUTH CENTER



Transparency Maldives, the National Chapter of Transparency International in The Maldives, is a non-partisan organization that promotes collaboration, awareness and undertakes other initiatives to improve governance and eliminate corruption from the daily lives of people. Transparency Maldives views corruption as a systemic issue and advocates for institutional changes that will punish and prevent corruption.



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REVIVING KANDOODHOO YOUTH

INTRODUCTION

The lack of social connectedness is felt deeply among the country's youth. This stands true for most local island communities, including Th. Kandoodhoo, a local agricultural island with a small population.

The second issue of the Maahara Digest focuses on one local NGO's endeavor to revive their island's Youth Center. Through reviving Kandoodhoo Youth Center, the Kandoo Sports Club NGO is hopeful in their efforts to improve social relationships and build togetherness, particularly among young people.

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Parents are often concerned about their children being exposed to drugs or negative behaviors. What we forget is that children often resort to such behavior because of family breakdown or a lack of adequate care and support from friends and family. However, these young individuals often get shunned and labelled as 'bad'.

The reality is when you shun these young individuals, you are essentially closing the door to bringing them back to society, and the child may well start to believe that they are in fact, bad.

Kandoo Sports Club upholds the philosophy to never exclude anyone, and everyone is encouraged to come to the Youth Centre.

*~ Mohamed Mufeed
President, Kandoo Sports Club*

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What is Social Cohesion?

Social cohesion refers to the level of connectedness and solidarity among different groups in society (Kawachi and Berkman, 2000). It's essentially the glue that holds communities together. It can be regarded as a measure of how well people get along, trust and support one another.

Studies have found that social connectedness has a positive correlation with quality of life and better wellbeing. On the flipside, social isolation and loneliness are also linked to poor wellbeing and disillusionment. (Moosa, 2020)

DECLINING SOCIAL COHESION - A CONCERN FOR KANDOODHOO YOUTH

During a discussion with young people from Kandoodhoo, they were questioned if they were interested in participating in community based activities. Everyone stated that they were interested, but when asked if they had the opportunity to participate in community activities, the response was significantly different:

No one raised their hands.

The revival of youth center hopes exactly to address this gap – by creating opportunities for community engagement



Dismantling barriers to promote youth engagement - a daunting challenge but a necessary approach:

In today's fast-paced and digitally-driven world, social isolation has become a pervasive issue affecting communities worldwide. Among the most vulnerable to its detrimental effects are young individuals, who often struggle to find a sense of belonging and connection within their societies.

Unfortunately, many young people, especially in developing countries such as the Maldives, also face serious social and economic challenges. These issues are often deep-rooted and have a big impact on their lives. The problem is, they often don't have a say in the policy decisions that affect them the most, both in the present and in the future (UN, 2020).

Making sure young people are included and have a voice is a formidable challenge. It means breaking down barriers like unfair laws, policies, and attitudes (UN, 2020). We need to change the way things are done to ensure that young people aren't left out. One way to tackle this challenge is by encouraging more youth engagement. This means getting young people involved in organized groups, clubs, or activities (Laurence, 2020). Such efforts can help them connect with others, learn new skills, and make a positive difference in their communities (Ibid.).

SOCIAL ISSUES AS NOTED BY KANDOODHOO YOUTH

SOCIAL:

DECLINE IN COMMUNITY BASED ACTIVITIES

Cultural activities and customs have declined among the country's population, which can easily inhibit community interactions and adds to feelings of isolation (UNDP, 2019). Community activities can serve as catalysts for fostering relationships, solidarity, and trust among fellow community members.

With the establishment of youth center, the youth community of Kandoodhoo is excited to enjoy a space where various community activities and social gatherings may be hosted.

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“Youth center can be made a place where young people can learn new skills, share and develop ideas” –

~ Kandoodhoo Youth

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“There is no avenue for youth to improve their talents on this Island. This lack of opportunity is the reason for many of the social problems. With so much underutilized free time on their hands it's easy for youth to go towards the wrong path.”

~ Kandoodhoo Council

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Culture, Community and Cohesion

It is crucial to recognize the transformational power of culture and community-oriented activities in fostering a sense of belonging among young individuals (UN, 2013). Culture, and cultural heritage can particularly play an important role in ensuring inclusive and cohesive societies, as they help strengthen local identities and create a sense of belonging” (OECD, 2021) Engaging in cultural activities allows young people to explore their heritage, traditions, and artistic expressions, ultimately allowing youth to forge a sense of identity. (UN, 2013).



ECONOMIC:

LACK OF INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

There is a significant disparity in income and wealth levels, particularly between urban areas like Male' and rural islands. Island communities like Kandoodhoo face a lack of employment options, resource constraints and a lack of access to basic services. Families are frequently forced to travel or relocate to Male' in order to get education, health care, and other fundamental socioeconomic necessities.

The result is that the community's population has declined substantially, straining on the community's close-knit connections. Furthermore, stakeholders in Kandoodhoo raised concerns about how lack opportunities to develop skills, knowledge, and employability can drive young people into a life of crime and expose them to harmful behaviors.

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“There is no opportunity for progress and self-development on the island”

~ Kandoodhoo Youth

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“Youth wants to do a lot of things. But there isn't enough opportunity”

~ Kandoodhoo Council

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“It's difficult to get job opportunities. It's difficult to even start a business because the population is so small, and due to the lack of demand”

~ Kandoodhoo Youth

Social cohesion- a crucial factor for continued growth:

Promoting equal economic opportunities is a key element of social cohesion. (Berman and Phillips, 2004) This is because social cohesion is inextricably linked to social quality which is "the extent to which citizens are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential." (Beck, van der Maeson et al., 2001) Conversely, a lack of social quality and cohesion is characterized by the prevalence of "regional disparities, the suppression of minorities, unequal access to public goods and services and an unequal sharing of economic burdens" (Berman and Phillips, 2004). Therefore, it becomes imperative to create pathways that ensure youth participation in the local economy as a means to address the decline in social cohesion.

POLITICAL: INCREASING POLARIZATION

The small community of Kandoodhoo is also grappling with political polarization, which appears to be a major source of worry among the youth. Kandoo Sports Club, stakeholders, and even youth dialogues found that although political differences and division are present, community members' relationships are typically positive.

However, the youth community of Kandoodhoo shared their concerns that political polarization has created division between community groups, harmed family relationships, and contributed to the loss of long-standing traditions of closeness and compassion

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“Because of political issues, the voices of young people are only heard sometimes”

~ Kandoodhoo Youth

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“It’s sad that such a small community has become separated because of politics”

~Kandoodhoo Youth

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“Political differences have led to weakened unity”-

~ Kandoodhoo Youth

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The detriments of increasing polarisation:

Political polarization has a significant impact on society as it deepens divisions and hampers constructive dialogue. It can exacerbate intolerance and discrimination, and possibly lead to a breakdown in societal trust, ultimately hindering the ability to find common ground on important issues. Political polarization can contribute to social fragmentation, hinder problem-solving efforts, and undermine democratic norms and processes (Carothers and Donohue 2019).

KANDOODHOO YOUTH CENTER

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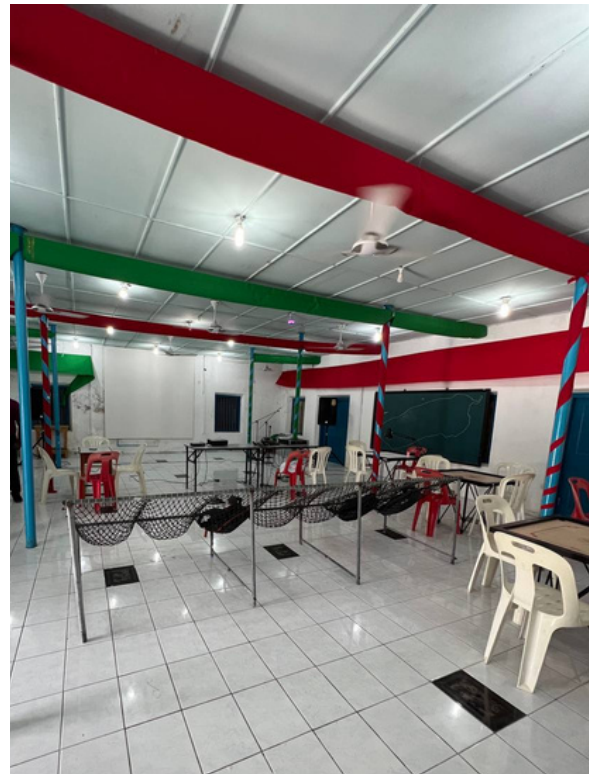
Through reviving the youth center, we hope to prevent at-risk youth from being involved in criminal activities by building a generation of well informed and skilled youths that can make better future decisions and increase women engagement in the community to increase gender equality.

*~ Mohamed Mufeed
President, Kandoo Sports Club*

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Th.Kandoodhoo Youth Center Revival is an initiative under Kandoo Sports Club's project "Today's Youth - Tomorrow's Future", which aspires to produce youth who are valuable and beneficial to the community and country.

The initiative includes a variety of programs aimed at increasing youth empowerment, employability, and capacity, such as life skills sessions, career guidance programs and agricultural programmes.



YOUTH CENTERS - AN UNDERUTILIZED SOURCE FOR COMMUNITY COHESION

There are complaints from youth all over the country regarding the increased politicization of social events, which deters civic involvement and effectively leaves them feeling excluded. In an environment where youth have been frequently marginalized and attempts for their empowerment have been disregarded, Kandoo Sports Club's proactive initiative to revive the island's youth center revival provides a platform to recapture youth engagement.

Due to budgetary and resource constraints for local councils, as well as other unforeseen delays in project construction, youth centers around the country are frequently underutilized and undermaintained. They may, nevertheless, be vital spaces for social cohesion. In this light, Kandoodhoo's Youth Center is a notable example of a local CSO effort. Kandoodhoo's Youth Center is now a popular hangout for young people who participate in a variety of social activities during their free time. However, as Kandoo Sports Club points out, the success of this initiative is due to the participation of community members and stakeholders.

YOUTH CENTERS CAN CAN BE A KEY SOURCE OF COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY.

HOW?



Get together for social interaction and entertainment



Carry out trainings and capacity building



Engage youth and divert from negative pathways



Access communal services and amenities



Foster support groups and a safe space for dialogue

A GLANCE INSIDE KANDOODHOO YOUTH CENTER

The efforts of Kandoo Sports Club have transformed this space into an active youth center, providing a variety of entertainment alternatives such as carrom, karaoke, cultural activities, gaming, and so on. With the support and technical expertise of TM and the Maldives Pool Billiard Association, Kandoo Sports Club has also successfully procured engaging additions to the center, including a foosball table, carrom board, and billiards table, further enhancing the recreational options available to the youth.

The space has also become a vital communal space among the youth, where both men and women are welcome to spend time, socialize, and take advantage of the amenities. Aside from providing a location for youth to be more creative and active, the area is also utilized to organize numerous events such as game nights, match nights, and movie nights. In this respect, Kandoo Sports Club has already hosted a movie night with films about social concerns in order to ignite conversation among community members, as well as to promote principles such as equality, non-discrimination, and tolerance.

The youth center, established by the dedicated efforts of Kandoo Sports Club, has proven to be a versatile space that fosters community engagement. During the FIFA tournament, the youth center was transformed into an electrifying fanzone, creating an immersive and vibrant atmosphere for the island's youth to come together and revel in the spirit of football.



KANDOO YOUTH CENTER CHALLENGE 2023

The youth center has become a hub for nurturing the skills and talents of young people in our community. One exciting event that took place was the "Kandoo Youth Center Challenge" organized by the Kandoo Sports Club. This challenge brought together local youth from all walks of life to compete in various tournaments. The challenge consisted of a series of tournaments- thrilling billiard matches, foosball showdowns, PlayStation FIFA battles, and thought-provoking chess matches.

The Kandoo Youth Center Challenge not only ignited friendly rivalries but also rekindled connections and a sense of community spirit among the youth. As local youth showcased their skills and embraced healthy competition, these tournaments also created opportunities for young people to interact, bond, and discover common interests



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Despite the fact that many people were unfamiliar with the games, as it was new to the community and only a few had played it in resorts, we received tremendous support from the community for the tournament. It was a lot of fun and created a lively atmosphere.

~ Kandoo Youth Center Challenge Contestant

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Previously, during the evenings, there was simply nothing to do, and the youth would wander around aimlessly, feeling bored. However, now every night after Isha prayers, many youth spend time at the youth center, participating in games, enjoying watching and playing matches. Especially now that there are so many activities set up. In fact, the youth center is almost never empty now.

~ Kandoo Youth Center Challenge Contestant

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WOMEN-ONLY TIMES

The Kandoo Sports Club has taken a significant stride towards promoting inclusivity and empowerment by introducing dedicated women-only times at the youth center. This progressive initiative recognizes the importance of ensuring equal opportunities for women and girls in a society where youth disengagement can often lead to feelings of exclusion. By providing exclusive time for women and girls, the youth center aims to create a safe and supportive environment where they can actively participate and flourish.

This thoughtful approach acknowledges the unique needs and experiences of women, affirming their importance and providing a platform for them to thrive alongside their male counterparts. The implementation of women-only times can be an empowering move that can help foster a sense of belonging for young women in Kandoodhoo.

“The ‘women-only’ times are very beneficial. Some girls may be hesitant to go to the youth center if men are there. Implementing women only times can increase their interest and ensure them a chance to use the center”

~Kandoodhoo Women

Inclusivity for Empowerment:

Empowerment is related to the sense of being economically, politically, psychologically, and morally equal to the rest of the world. (Arora and Patro, 2021) The significance of "women-only" times as an empowering measure for women lies in the understanding that inclusivity can lead to empowerment (Ibid.). It can create a supportive environment where young girls and women can freely express themselves without fear of judgment or discrimination (Harris, 2003).



WHAT CAN BE LEARNT?

The resilience of the community and youth against ideas that deviate from social norms and undermine community safety must be strengthened. Increasing youth interaction, engagement, and empowerment is crucial for building resilience. Promoting resilience will also serve as a barrier against behaviours and beliefs attempting to forward a political agenda or religious propaganda.

Building the social fabric cannot be done overnight, but the creation of a safe space to build social ties is most definitely a good start to promote youth resilience and social cohesion.

What is Resilience?

Resilience relates to the ability to respond, cope, resist and recover from a threat, harm or loss. In other words it is the ability to 'bounce back' (Manyena, 2006)

So, what can we learn by this commendable initiative by Kandoo Sports Club on promoting resilience?

INSTIGATING LONG TERM CHANGE

Factors that impede social connectivity and result in a fragmented community cannot be overcome in the short term and necessitate long-term initiatives. The establishment of a physical space open for all youth creates an avenue to initiate and promote continuous change.

INCLUSION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Community engagement process should be democratic and ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged populations. As such, Kandoo Sports Club intends to designate "women-only" hours in the youth center to guarantee the involvement of women as well as provide a safe space to socialize.



IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTATIVE EFFORTS

Promoting knowledge seeking, creative endeavors among young people can guide them away from harmful ideas. The youth center in this regard has become a place where youth can share their creativity, hidden talents and build their skills.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Efforts to combat extremism, and polarization require not just reactive countermeasures, but also proactive and preventative efforts. In this regard, the space for youth to utilize their time more productively, building their skills and fostering relationships can act as a safeguard.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Promoting resilience and long-term change requires joint efforts. Collaboration, coordination and strong partnerships between various stakeholders such as the island council and WDC played a key role in Kandoo's work to revive the Youth Center as well.

PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND OPENNESS

To ensure that the youth center is a space that welcomes all, the youth community wishes to set in place ground rules that can prevent bullying and promote values of tolerance, openness and unity.



“Youth center can be made a place where young people can learn new skills, share and develop ideas”
~ Kandoodhoo Youth

“The island has become much livelier with the youth center.”
~ Kandoodhoo Council

The revival of the Kandoodhoo Youth Center can definitely be an inspiration to small communities across the country that are concerned about strained community spirits and disenfranchised youth. Kandoo Sports Club's efforts to revive the Youth Center has certainly ignited hope and inspiration among the local community:

“We want to see the community develop a better future with the youth center. We want Kandoodhoo to be a lively place where even youth from nearby island can come to, and not just during celebrations. We want to create an intervention space in the youth center, where we can talk about problems and give advice if needed and help people to get on a better path”
~ Kandoodhoo Youth

“Some kids' hidden talents, such as singing, or music can be showcased. With more events, they get a platform to showcase their skills”
~ Kandoodhoo Youth

“The activities of Kandoo Sports Club are very important. Looking at the community, this is a very good opportunity. The only activity they have right now is football, but through this project there is an opportunity for other activities to be introduced as well. This project is expected to have a very good impact on the community.”
~ Kandoodhoo Council



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CONSULTATIONS HELD WITH:

- Kandoo Sports Club – 28th August 2022
Kandoodhoo Youth – 28th August 2022
Kandoodhoo Council – 29th August 2022
Kandoodhoo WDC – 29th August 2022
Kandoodhoo School – 29th August 2022
Kandoo Youth Center Challenge Participant - 4th June 2023



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