

Gender and Development In the Maldives

A Review of Twenty Years
1979 ~ 1999



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UN Theme Group on Gender

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List of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CHW	Community Health Worker
CPR	Contraceptive Revalance Rate
DPH	Department of Public Health
FE	Faculty of Education
FES	Faculty of Engineering Studies
FHS	Faculty of Health Sciences
FHTS	Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies
FHW	Family Health Worker
FMC	Faculty of Management and Computing
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGMH	Indhira Gandhi Memorial Hospital
IMR	Infant Mortality Rate
IWC	Island Women's Committees
MHREL	Ministry of Human Resources, Employment and Labour
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOH	Ministry of Health
MPND	Ministry of Planning and National Development
MWASS	Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security
RH	Reproductive Health
SHE	Society for Health Education
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TBA	Trained Birth Attendant
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VPA	Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment Survey
WHO	World Health Organisation

Preface

This report was compiled by Ms Husna Razee at the request of the UN Interagency Theme Group on Gender as part of the workplan of the UN Resident Coordinator. Work on the report was initiated at the suggestion of the Honourable Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Security Ms Rashida Yoosuf during her discussions with the Gender Theme Group. The report could not have been finalised without the input of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security, which provided support and guidance to the work throughout the process and especially during the initial months of research.

Mr Asim Ahmed of BFS Consultancy Pvt. Ltd. developed the conceptual framework, summarised and consolidated the main findings of the draft study report, "*20 Years of Women in Development in the Maldives, 1977-1997*". A number of government ministries and departments as well as UN agencies provided comments and feedback. The present report highlights the basic characteristics of gender and development in the Maldives and provides an assessment of the progress achieved within a framework of equity, participation and empowerment.

The main content of the report focuses on developments over a twenty-year period from 1977 to 1997. However, some of the data has been updated to the year 2000. Hence, some discussion is included regarding the new Family Law Act which was enacted in the year 2000 since it has significant impact on issues of gender and development and women's rights in the Maldives.

Dunya Maumoon
UN Theme Group on Gender
2000

1. Introduction

The early 1970s saw the beginning of systematic efforts worldwide, at understanding the role of women in society. These efforts reflected the increasing concern that women faced various forms of discrimination and subordination that deprived them of opportunities to participate, contribute and benefit from development as much as men. The consequent “women in development” approach took women as a segment and sought to identify the constraints faced by women and devise ways to address them. This approach brought to the world’s attention that while women as one half of humanity, constituted a valuable resource for development, and undertook much of the world’s labour, they did so in very underprivileged conditions¹. Policy initiatives that followed from this approach emphasised the creation of income and employment opportunities of women and the improvement of their living and working conditions.

At the global level these concerns found expression in the First International Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, when the UN Decade for Women was inaugurated. In 1979 the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted. This was followed by the Mid- Decade Conference in Copenhagen in 1980. Official efforts at the world level were complemented by a number of non-governmental initiatives from the developing countries as well as the industrially advanced countries. An important milestone in this regard was the NGO Forum, convened in Beijing in 1995 simultaneously with the Third UN Women’s Conference. These activities stimulated intensive discussions on the question of women’s advancement and served to lay the basis for national and international action.

The international debate spurred a number of academic and popular studies on the topic, leading to the further refinement of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. It came to be recognised that women’s issues need to be seen within the total context of development rather than in isolation. This gave rise to the concept of gender and development as the appropriate frame of reference. Lisa Ostergaard offers the following definition of gender.

“Gender refers to the qualitative and independent character of women’s and men’s position in society. Gender relations are constituted in terms of the relations of power and dominance that structure the life chances of women and men. Thus gender divisions are not fixed biology, but constitute an aspect of the wider social division of labour and this, in turn, is rooted in the conditions of production and reproduction and reinforced by the cultural, religious and ideological systems prevailing in society².”

This approach highlights three key elements. First, the destiny of women is not pre-ordained or determined by sex. Second, women’s role in society is the result of a complex of relations between men and women. Third, social institutions including culture and the dominant ideology serve to perpetuate existing unequal relations between men, women and the rest of society. This approach marks a significant advance in the general understanding and perception about issues relating to women. First, it locates the issues of women in the wider social context. Second, it therefore helps to understand the social and political position of women in addition to their material conditions. This has led to new

¹ Ostergaard, 1992, p.5

² Ibid, p.6

policy and programme initiatives that focus on social relations and multi-dimensional and holistic approaches to the advancement of women and men.

The gender perspective has now become the dominant framework of analysis. The Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 was, in this respect, the most ground-breaking conference on women, which addressed the broad range of issues they faced and located its origins in the social, economic, cultural, political and ideological contexts. The twelve areas for action identified in the Beijing Platform for Action therefore covers a wider range of concerns compared to those traditionally associated with the women in development approach. Gender concerns were also integral to other summit meetings such as the International Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, the International Conference on Population and Development 1994 and the World Summit for Social Development in 1995.

The evolution of gender theory has broadened women's concerns and laid a new basis for action. This approach emphasises the need for fundamental changes in social structure and values in order to bring about comprehensive and qualitative improvements in the material well-being and social position of women.

It would be fair to say that up until very recently, even in the Maldives women were seen as a segment that needed special attention. Consequently, many development projects and programmes have been formulated and implemented with women as their target group. Concerns about women came to be systematically addressed in Maldives during the late 1970s, following the detrimental effects they faced as a result of structural changes in the economy. Women participation in fisheries declined as the economy changed from primary production to tertiary activities and manufacturing. The processes of internal migration to urban areas, particularly to Male', that accompanied these changes left the majority of women and children behind as the men went in search of employment and social services.

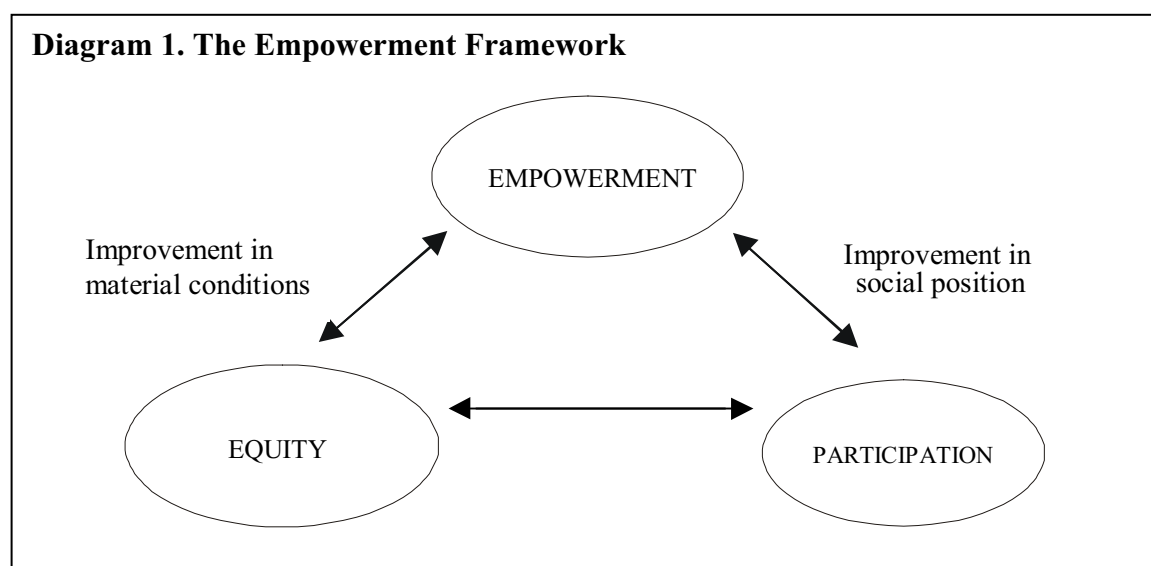
Issues about women's welfare and productive employment thus became important policy concerns, leading to the creation of institutional mechanisms to address them. The national machinery to address women's concerns evolved from a cell in the President's Office to a section in the then Ministry of Planning and Development, to become the Department of Women's Affairs and finally to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security supported by the National Women's Council. This period also saw the establishment of Island Women's Committees in all the inhabited islands.

While systematic efforts towards addressing the issues that relate to women date back to about twenty years, national efforts at alleviating the condition of women were underway much before that. The adoption of the country's first constitution in 1932 gave women the franchise and opened up opportunities for education and wider economic participation. The constitution, which laid the foundation of the new Maldivian republic, symbolised a period of modernisation, which permeated all areas of social, economic, political and cultural life. The economy expanded through increased regional trade and commerce, and saw the creation of new political institutions and the establishment of parliamentary law for the first time. Issues relating to women became important areas of concern as the Maldivian polity and society embraced the new order characterised by democracy, rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Notably this period saw the establishment of a girl's school for the first time and greater opportunities to pursue education abroad.

It must be noted that while women in the Maldives had occupied positions of power and leadership during the early period of the Sultanate access to such positions was largely confined to women from the nobility. Thus the wider community and women in general, were excluded from playing any significant part in politics. It was after the adoption of the 1953 constitution that women and men across the social spectrum were given the opportunity and began to participate formally and openly in politics.

After twenty years of rapid and successful development, the central question is how far have women come in terms of equal access to resources, power and social participation, and to what extent can they influence their life choices?

In seeking to answer this question, this report will address three interrelated questions. First, are the benefits of growth and development shared equally between men and women? Second, what is the nature and extent of women's participation in the country's social, economic and political life? And third, what is the nature and level of women's empowerment? This framework could be schematically represented as follows.



The main assumptions of this conceptual framework are that social and economic equity derives from access to resources. Income and social services would greatly improve the material well being of women. At the same time, greater participation in development including economic, social and political levels would enhance their social position through greater involvement in policy and decision-making, enabling them to influence their life choices. Both these processes would lead to their empowerment through economic independence, political participation and conscientisation. All these processes are also interlinked where each would have a positive effect on the other. Greater empowerment would create opportunities for further improving their material condition. While the same process of empowerment would lead to greater awareness and participation in development. These processes would set in motion a virtuous cycle where future generations would enjoy even greater prosperity, independence and self-advancement. Within a framework of gender equity, participation and empowerment, this report will also review the progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

2. Geography, Culture and Demography

Geography

The Maldives is part of a narrow chain of coral islands formed along the Laccadive-Chagos submarine ridge, which runs South West of the Indian subcontinent. The 1192 islands that make up the Maldives is scattered over an area of 115,300 sq. kms. In most cases, the land area comprises less than 1 per cent of the area enclosed by the lagoon around the islands. The exclusive economic zone extends to 859,000 square kilometres of ocean.

Surrounded by sea, the Maldives is rich in marine resources. Almost half the economy is based on either fisheries or tourism. The dominant crop is coconut, which is used for producing oil, thatch, and mats. It is also used as a source of food, drink and fuel. The thin topsoil of the islands however, does not support wide spread agriculture, except in a few islands mostly in the south and central atolls, which have relatively better agricultural conditions.

Culture

Gender roles and responsibilities are defined within a particular cultural framework. In the Maldives the combined influence of the country's South Asian Heritage and Islamic traditions have played an important part in conditioning social behavior. The Maldives has over the centuries, evolved its distinct life style and culture, where men usually occupy the top echelons of the social hierarchy and women face subtle and sometimes overt forms of subordination. In the case of Maldives, these dynamics are manifested mainly in legal areas such as property rights, inheritance and the provision of evidence in courts of law, all of which have a male bias. Other more obscure areas of subordination relate to the perceptions held by society at large concerning the domestic role of women. These aspects notwithstanding however, the island communities of the Maldives are close-knit and cohesive where men and women socialise freely without any segregation.

The protectiveness displayed by society towards women has an impact on their mobility. This often results in restrictions on women with regard to traveling to other islands. Women are usually accompanied by a male relative when they do. The same culture of protectiveness is seen in early socialization when girls are encouraged to remain at home, helping them to develop characteristics such as shyness and subservience while boys are encouraged to be out-going, forward and self confident. The culture of unequal gender relations therefore influences the social behavior of boys and girls at an early age, in preparation for their culturally prescribed roles in adult life.

The culture of the Maldives is in part related to the island geography of the country. The Maldives is a seafaring nation where the people have always looked to the sea for their livelihood. As such the pattern of daily life is shaped by their needs and what they do for a living. In the Maldives, fisheries and to a lesser extent agriculture, have traditionally been the most important economic activities. The relative isolation of the Maldives has also to an extent, protected the country from foreign influences. This has helped the Maldives to create and preserve a culture, social structure and values and beliefs unique in many ways.

The economic needs of the people provide an important basis for the roles and expectations between the genders. Traditionally Maldivian women are generally expected to take charge of the domestic front and men the public and political domains. Children in most rural areas are apprenticed on the basis of gender where the son goes with the father and daughter stays with the mother. Within the context of the extended family, they produce for subsistence and own consumption. This requires a simple division of labour where the men go fishing and women process the fish once they are landed, even though in agricultural communities women worked alongside men and sometimes alone, in the field. Together with other religious and cultural norms, the subsistence structure tends to create and instill a cultural pattern that encouraged a gender divide at the social, economic and political levels.

However, recent economic changes have begun to transform the traditional subsistence economy and social structure. The transition from primary production to tertiary activities changed the employment structure and with it, the system of social relations. The decline of traditional fisheries and the introduction of industrial methods eliminated the need for processing, which was done largely by women causing a decline in their labour force participation. Increased migration to urban areas affected family ties. As a result of such changes, traditional roles and expectations between genders have changed, if not become challenged by the younger generations. While women are still expected to undertake a greater role in domestic and family life, with increased educational opportunities and other social advancements, parents and society now encourage women to climb the social ladder and engage in economic, political and social activities. As development and progress spread to remoter parts of the country, the change in cultural norms and the transformation of gender roles, which have so far been largely confined to Male' and other urban centers, are likely to become more uniform across the country. Moreover, changes in technology have the demonstrated potential to ease domestic work and free women from the drudgery of house-hold work. At this same time, in urban areas, municipal services have also greatly reduced the workload, which would otherwise fall on the women. The process of modernization that has accompanied social and economic change has begun to change the material conditions and the roles and responsibilities of both men and women. Indeed, these changes are already becoming manifest in emerging urban areas outside Male'.

In addition to socioeconomic structures, religion and language are important forces that have helped to shape the culture, traditions and way of life of all Maldivians, including the relations between the genders. The country has remained largely independent in thought and faith for the last 800 years. This has ensured a shared system of values based on the principles of Islam through out the country, making it cohesive and close knit. In addition the people have always shared a single language Dhivehi that has evolved and developed in the hands of Maldivians.

Having raised the average standard of living and material condition of women through rapid economic growth over the last three decades, the challenge now is to overcome cultural beliefs that stereotype them in domestic roles, which restrain their freedom to make independent decisions about life choices and supplant them with new values that improve the social, economic and public position of women in relation to their male counterparts.

Demography

About half the country’s population is female. According to the Population and Housing census of 1995, there are 96 females for every 100 men, which is an improvement from 1977. As indicated in table 1, there were only 90 women for every 100 men in 1977. At the regional level, the sex ratio for Male’ is 87 per 100. This may be due to in-migration of men from other islands and not necessarily an indication of higher female mortality in Male’.

Table 1: Sex Ratio, 1977-1995

Locality	1977	1985	1990	1995
Republic	90	93	95	96
Male’	77	77	83	87
Atolls	93	99	100	100

Source: Derived from Census 1977, 1985, 1990 & 1995, MPND

In terms of sex ratio by age, in 1995 there were 70 women per hundred men in the age group above 60 years. However there were 103 women per 100 men in the reproductive age group of 15 - 49 years, indicating a higher mortality rate for women at higher age groups.

As Figures 2 and 3 show, the sex ratio in the atolls tilts in favour of women, owing to the high out-migration of males in the wake of recent socio-economic changes.

The Maldives has a youthful population with 46 per cent of the population below 15 years of age. The elderly, or the age group above 60 years, has steadily increased from 1977 onwards. Four per cent of the population was above 60 years of age in 1977. The 1995 Census shows a one-percentage point increase. Between 1977 and 1995, females in the age group above 60 years increased from 36 per cent to 41 per cent.

Fig 1. Sex Ratio by Age Group, Republic 1977 & 1995

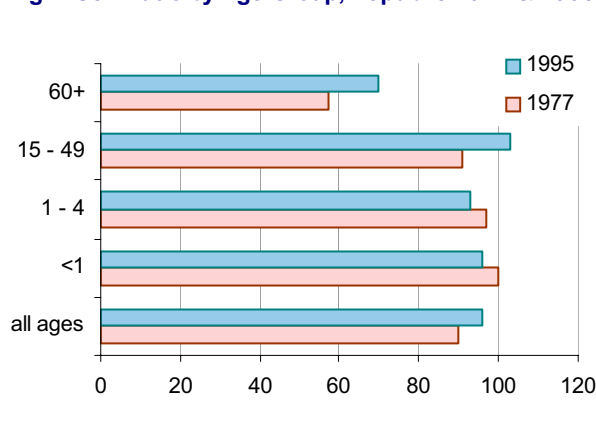
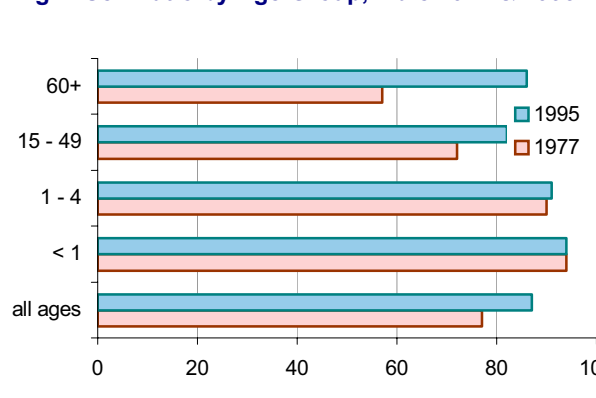


Fig 2. Sex Ratio by Age Group, Malé 1977 & 1995

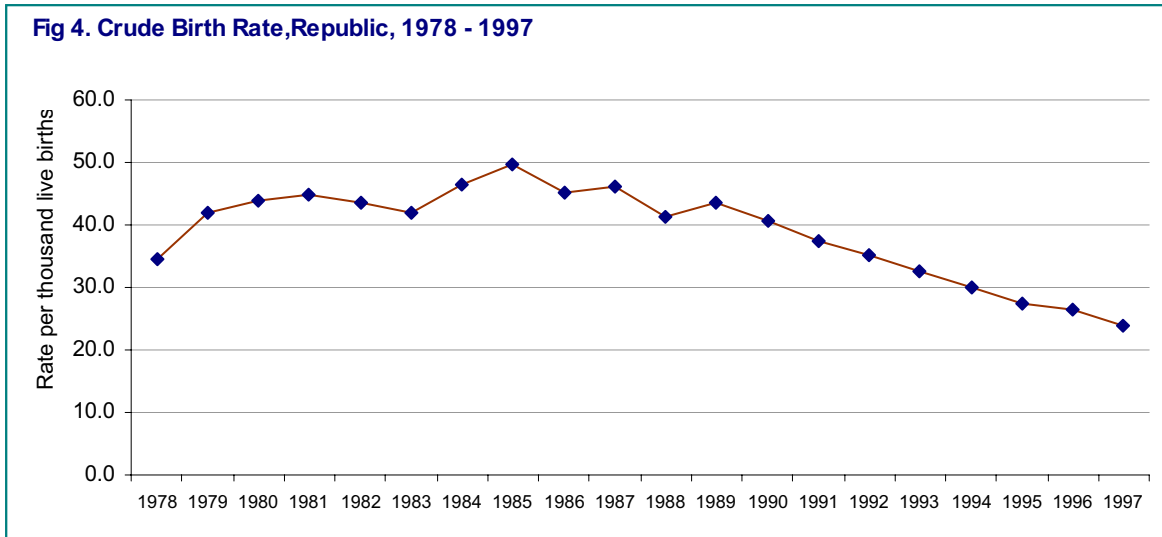
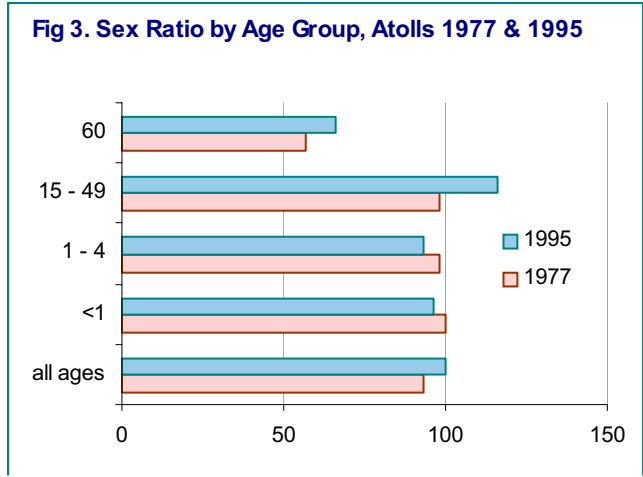


Births and Deaths

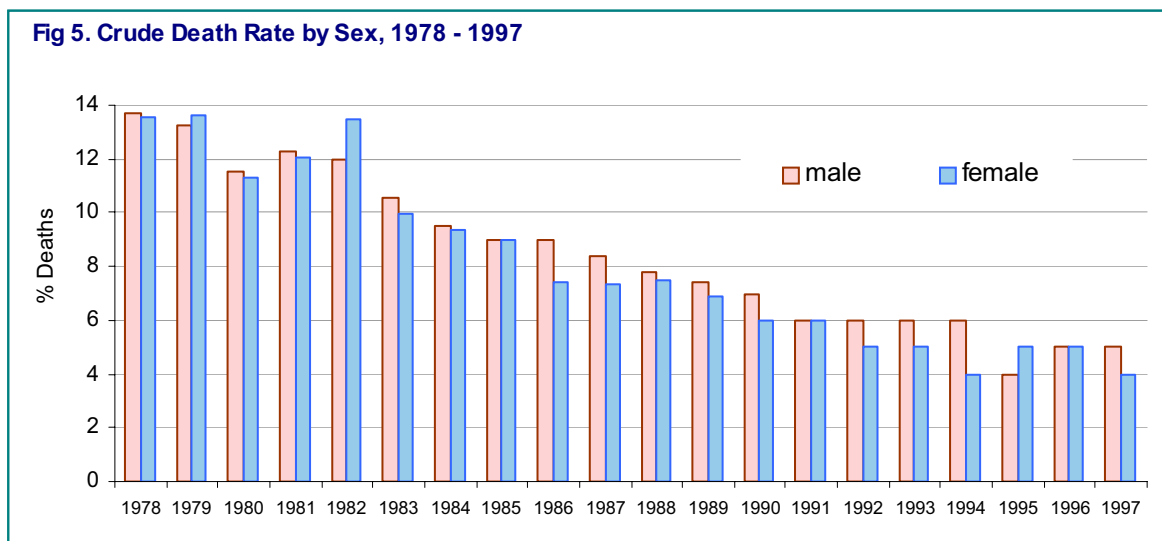
The Maldives, similar to most developing countries, is in the penultimate stages of the demographic transition where birth rates are high and declining and deaths are low. This leads to a high momentum driven by the youthful population and the large number of women in the reproductive

age groups. As figure 4 shows, Crude Birth Rate declined from 34.5 per thousand in 1978 to 23.8 by 1997.

This decline reflects the rapid socio-economic changes which the country experienced over the past two decades including greater educational and employment opportunities, which encourage smaller families and tend to delay the age of marriage. As Figure 5 shows, similar trends are also evident in Crude Death Rates, with little difference between men and women.



Source: MOH



Source: MOH

The Preliminary Results of Census 2000 shows a considerable decline in the population growth rate from 2.7 per cent in 1995 to 1.9 per cent in 2000, indicating a lowering of birth rates and fertility over the last five years.

Mortality by age and sex shows a higher mortality rate for females in the age group above 65 years. This is linked to lower female life expectancy during 1980s. According to census data women in rural areas have a higher average change in mortality than the rest of the country, reflecting the difference in service delivery.

The substantial increase in public spending and the improvement in health services over the recent period have resulted in a rapid overall decline in female mortality rates especially in the reproductive age groups across the country, in fact, over-taking men.

During the period, 1978 to 1997, crude death rates declined by 9 per thousand in the country as a whole; from 14 in 1978 to 5 in 1997. Gender desegregated data shows a similar decline in crude death rates for both men and women. A decrease of 10 percentage points is seen for women, between 1978 and 1994, and 9 percentage points for men during the same period. These figures indicate an overall improvement in health and living conditions.

Infant and Child Mortality

Table 2 shows a countrywide reduction in age specific death rates for both males and females during the last 15 years. The most significant reduction is in infant mortality, especially female infant mortality, which came down by 82 percentage points during 1980 to 1995. The same trend can be observed for Male' and the Atolls. In Male' however, the rate of reduction is slower than in the Atolls. Overall, there is a substantial improvement in the survival of children with girl children taking the lead, regardless of where they live in the Maldives.

Table 2: Percentage Change in Infant and Child Death Rates, Republic

Age Group	Location	85 – 90		90 – 95		85 - 95	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Under 1	Republic	-34	-36	-3	-1	-37	-37
	Atolls	-30	-29	-4	-3	-34	-32
	Male'	-2	-20	-5	7	-7	-13
1 - 4	Republic	-5	-4	-2	0.3	-7	-4
	Atolls	-6	-5	-2	-3	-8	-7
	Male'	-2	-2	-1	-0.4	-3	-2

Source: Derived from census data

Table 3: Infant Mortality Rate estimates 1985 -1997

Source	Infant Mortality Rate		
	Republic	Male'	Atolls
Census 1985	121	95	127
VRS 1985	60	47	63
Census 1990	88	73	91
VRS 1990	34	35	33
Census 1995	72	55	76
VRS 1995	32	36	31
VPA Survey 1998	62	37	69
VRS 1997	27	-	-

Source: VPA, 1998, page 45

While Vital Registration statistics point to a rapid, overall decline in IMR, the Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment Report shows a slightly higher infant mortality rate. Similar discrepancies are observed between census figures and VRS figures. As table 3 shows, however, the overall trend in both estimates point to a rapid decline in infant mortality rate across the country.

Analysis of IMR rates show that girls have a better chance of survival than boys during the first year of life. However, between the ages 1 to 4 years, there is a higher mortality rate for girls, especially in the atolls. The reasons for the gender differences are not clear and further investigations are required, but with greater improvement in physical infrastructure and health services delivery systems, the survival rates are likely to improve for both in the future.

Fertility

The high birth rate is to a large extent, driven by high fertility rates. Completed fertility stood at six to seven children per woman in 1985 and remained unchanged in 1990. Women in the age group 20 – 24 had an average of 7 to 8 children by the time they reached the ages 45 to 49 years. According to the 1995 Census, the average number of children born to all females over 15 years of age in Male' was 2.72 and the average number of living children was 2.27. For the Republic as a whole the total number of children born to the same age group was 3.75. For the atolls this number stood at 4.16 children. Census data for 1995 showed that by the time a woman reached 39 years of age she had borne an average of 6.15 children out of which 5.28 were living. The average number of children born to a woman 35 – 39 years was lower for Male' (4.81) than in the atolls (6.62).

Traditional beliefs that favour early marriage and childbirth, conservative attitudes towards contraceptive use, and the lack of opportunities for higher education and employment especially in the rural areas, contribute to larger families. Because of the high rate of fertility most women spend their reproductive years either in a state of pregnancy, lactation or caring for young children. While women play an important role in social reproduction in the form of taking care of children and meeting the demands of household

work, early and closely spaced or frequent pregnancies takes an early toll on their health, which, combined with domestic duties, prevents them from fully participating in the economic activities outside the home and the wider development process.

However, more recently, there have been indications of fertility decline together with the delay in marriage. The sizes of families have consequently become smaller.

Life Expectancy

Improvements in health conditions and the availability of better social services have increased average life expectancy by over 10 years during the last twenty years.

Figures from the Ministry of Planning and National Development show that life expectancy had increased from 48 to 69 years for males and 46 to 70 years for females during 1978 to 1997. During 1978 to 1993 life expectancy for males stood slightly higher than females. However, during 1994 to 1997, female life expectancy overtook that of men and they today enjoy a higher life expectancy than men as in most other countries.

These figures however, are at variance with those derived from the VPA survey. As Table 4 shows, despite these variations average life expectancy has improved. The results of the Vulnerability survey also confirm that Maldivian women have a slightly higher life expectancy than their male counterparts. According to this survey female life expectancy for the Republic is 64 years while it is 61 for males. At the regional level, life expectancy has improved for females in both Male' and the atolls. Women in Male' enjoy a longer life (69 years) than women in atolls (62 years), reflecting a difference in services and the average level of development.

Table 4: Life expectancy estimates 1985 – 1997

Source	Life Expectancy at Birth		
	Republic	Male'	Atolls
Census 1985	50	55	49
VRS 1985	61	61	61
Census 1990	56	60	56
VRS 1990	65	63	62
Census 1995	60	64	59
VRS 1995	70	70	70
VPA Survey 1997	62	68	60
VRS 1997	70	-	-

Source: UNDP & Ministry of Planning and National Development, page 45

Marriage and Divorce

Culturally, marriage is an important aspiration for both men and women but especially for women. In rural areas where opportunities for working outside the home are almost non-existent and educational opportunities are limited, marriage is viewed as a desirable objective of life once a girl or a woman reached a marriageable age, which could be as young as 15 years. The pattern of early marriages is more common for women than for

men, which underscores the cultural primacy given to women’s reproductive and domestic role. Women tend to get married at an earlier age than men and often to older men indicating the need for security and stability, which men are culturally expected to provide.

Table 5: Proportion of males and females by marital status and location (15- 24 years), 1995

Marital Status	Republic				Male				Atolls			
	15 – 19		20 – 24		15 – 19		20 – 24		15 – 19		20 - 24	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Never married	41	25	53	17	34	24	56	29	46	26	51	12
Married	2	20	33	70	1	9	25	52	3	26	39	77
Divorced	0	2	4	8	0	1	2	7	1	3	4	8
Widowed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Derived from Census 1995

Comparison of marital status patterns between Male’ and the atolls show very little difference for females in the age group 15 – 19 years. Nine per cent of females in the age group 15 to 19 years in Male’ were married, while the proportion in the atoll was 26 per cent. A similar trend is observed among men with only a slight difference of 2 percentage points in the atolls. Both in the atolls and in Male’ men tend to marry later than women. However, compared to urban areas, men in rural islands marry at a relatively younger age. In Male’, 25 percent of men in the age group 20-24 are married while in the atolls 39 percent are married³.

Despite strong cultural norms, which favour early marriage, recent socio-economic changes including better educational opportunities, urbanisation and migration and the advent of tourism and related industries, have begun to alter the trend of early marriage. The mean age at marriage increased from 15 years to 18 years during 1985 to 1994. In 1997 the majority of marriages (34 per cent) took place among the 20 – 24 age group with 11 per cent occurring among the 15 – 19 age group for the year 1996. For 1996 no marriages were recorded for children below 15 years of age.

According to studies on preferred age of marriage girls and their parents favour a higher age of marriage. Available data, however, shows that there is a gap between expectations and actual practice. Limited opportunities for higher education and employment in outlying islands often make marriage the only choice available. Greater efforts are needed to increase the age at first marriage in order to address reproductive health issues and encourage responsible parenthood.

Polygamy is legal in the Maldives. According to the Islamic Shariah a man is allowed to have a maximum of 4 wives at a time. According to the Family Court, 59 polygamous marriages took place in 1998. This is just about 5 per cent of all marriages.

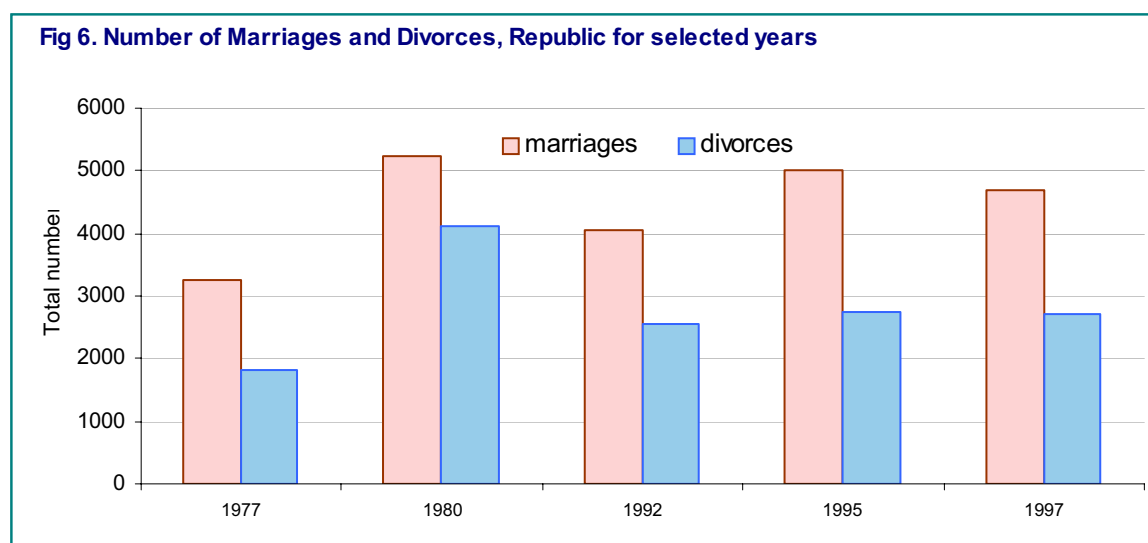
A combination of factors including relatively early marriages and easy divorce procedures among others, have led to a high rate of marriage, remarriage and divorce.

³ Census 1995

Anthropological studies show that socio-cultural conditions such as those prevailing in Maldives: loose kinship family structures and customs relating to ownership of property and inheritance, which are not tied to family units, also contribute to greater instability in marriage. During the period 1977 – 1981, the crude divorce rate doubled from 12 or 13 per 1,000 people to 25 with a higher incidence in Male'. According to the 1977 census, for every 100 women ever married there were 14 divorces and in 1995 this number reduced to 11 for every 100 marriages. In 1998 in Male', a total of 2195 marriages and 1546 divorces were registered. This means for Male' there were 70 divorces per 100 marriages in 1998. It must be noted however, that divorces are also frequently followed by remarriage to the same person and often do not constitute a complete and permanent separation of the couple.

Data from the survey on Island Women conducted in 1979 shows that half of all women married at 15 years or younger. On average a woman weds four people, three of them by the age of 30. She will have had three different husbands and will have married one of those husbands twice⁴. These findings are in keeping with a similar survey carried out in 1991⁵. This survey showed that close to two-thirds, or 63 per cent were married two or more times, with 37 per cent who were married only once. Among those with multiple marriages, slightly over half, or 52 per cent were married 2 to 3 times, while the remaining 47 per cent were married 4 or more times. These figures also confirm the finding from the census cohort analysis that Maldivian women have four marriages on average by the time they reach 50 years of age.

In general it seems that many women spend a significant part of their life without a partner. This becomes difficult for women as they are forced to bring up children without the support of a partner. Polygamous situations, migration of the spouse, divorce or widowhood can lead women to live without a supportive partner. Hence, the extended family continues to play an important part in supporting the young mother and her children in the Maldives. Such support is often crucial in urban areas where more women work outside the home.



⁴ Seilder, 1979

⁵ Miraldo Ibrahim, 1991

3. Growth with Equity

Equitable growth is an important goal of development. In the Maldives, as in other countries, national plans and strategies are drawn to ensure that everyone shares in the benefits of economic growth and social development. These goals are reflected in the master plans and specific sectoral plans of the agencies responsible for implementing development programmes and projects. This section aims to evaluate the extent to which the benefits of growth and development have been shared between the genders. It will specifically focus on health, nutrition, education and the legal system, which are key areas in the context of social and gender equity and equality in the Maldives.

Health Status

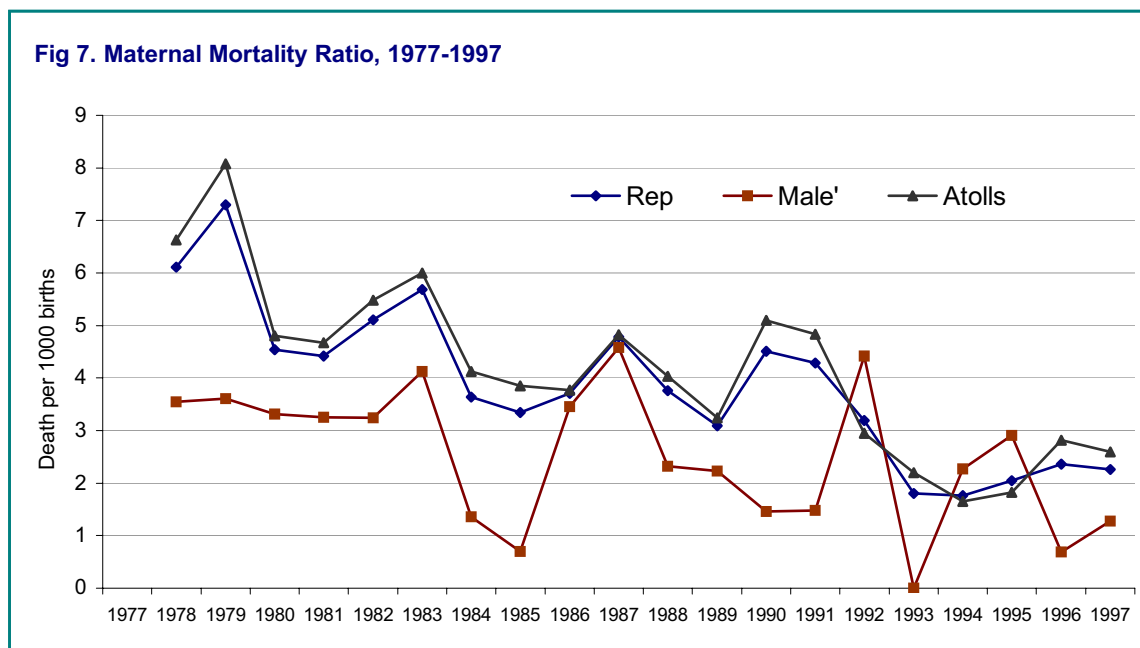
The health of the average person has improved significantly over the last twenty years. The crude death rate and infant mortality rate was halved during the period 1987 – 1997. Debilitating diseases such as malaria, childhood tuberculosis, polio, filaria and leprosy have either been eradicated or brought under control. Universal immunisation coverage has been achieved and continues to be maintained. Access to health care has improved throughout the country. As a result both men and women in Maldives enjoy a longer life and better quality of health. Despite these developments, however, women continue to be disadvantaged especially during the reproductive years. The maternal mortality rate in 1999 was 1.72 per 1000. As Figure 7 shows MMR has declined considerably but still remains high. Health problems such as uterine prolapse and obstetric fistula that occur to some extent in Maldives are direct consequences of pregnancy. Many other health conditions are often exacerbated by pregnancy.

The incidence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) is not clearly known due to a lack of reliable data. Informal discussions and interviews with health care providers, however, reveal the presence of STDs but at a very low level. However, it is likely that the existing information from official and informal sources probably underestimate the true extent of the incidence and prevalence of STDs. The national public health programme has been working to address the issue of HIV/AIDS since the middle of the 1980s. Eleven cases of AIDS have been reported to date. Thus far, one woman has been checked positive for HIV/AIDS. Nevertheless, given the pattern of frequent marriage and divorce, STDs and HIV/AIDS could become a serious problem for men and women if appropriate preventive steps are not taken now.

To combat the issue of HIV/AIDS, the Department of Public Health has taken measures to train health care providers in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention as well as carrying out a number of programs for educating the general public on prevention and protection against HIV/AIDS. The success of these programs is seen in the Reproductive Health Survey finding that over 92 per cent of men and women knew at least one valid way in which HIV/AIDS can be contracted and 84 per cent reported HIV/AIDS to be sexually transmitted and 45 per cent said that it could be transmitted through blood⁶. The survey also showed that in contrast to knowledge about HIV/AIDS, people were not at all informed about other sexually transmitted diseases. Only 28 per cent of women and 33 per

⁶ Reproductive Health Survey, Ministry of Health, 1999.

cent of men knew at least one valid sign of STD and only 56 per cent of men and women could report a valid way of catching an STD. These findings indicate the need for greater awareness creation in the area of STDs and this is being taken into consideration in the planning of future programmes.



Source: MOH

Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

The availability of services is an important indicator of equity. In terms of gender equity it is important that health services including those that are intrinsic and exclusive to the needs of women as well as the needs of men are as widely available and accessible as possible. Prenatal and postnatal care are the most crucial interventions to ensure safe motherhood. Other interventions recommended by WHO include those related to primary prevention of infection, the prevention, detection and treatment of iron deficiency and the detection of hypertension disorders and eclampsia⁷.

Prenatal care is now widely available in the Maldives. This includes the provision of immunisation against tetanus, screening women for high risk factors such as anaemia, hypertension and management of complications related to pregnancy, provision of iron with folic acid, health education related to diet, prevention of infection and referral of high risk pregnancies. The health services at the island level aims to ensure that every pregnant woman receives at least three prenatal check ups during pregnancy by a trained person: i.e a doctor, a nurse, a Community Health Worker (CHW), or a Trained Birth Attendant (TBA) or a Family Health Worker (FHW). According to the Reproductive Health Survey, 90 per cent of women reported having had at least 2 or more prenatal visits⁸. Only 11 per cent reported not having been to a doctor at any stage of their last pregnancy.

⁷ UN 1995

⁸ MOH, *Ibid*

Despite the many improvements in reproductive health services the quality and access needs to be further strengthened in areas such as breast cancer and cancers of the reproductive tract. Diagnostic or treatment facilities for their prevention and management are not available except in Male'. Services for better reproductive and sexual health of adolescents and young people needs to be greatly improved. Programme implementers should ensure that the improved services are sensitive to the needs of young women and men and especially unmarried youth to prevent embarrassment and ensure that they do not feel threatened. Currently such services are integrated into the general service delivery and adolescents/youth do not get special attention at any level of the health care system.

The goal of the Health Master Plan (1996 – 2005) is to ensure that a Trained Birth Attendant carries out every delivery⁹. For the most part this objective has been achieved. However, the VPA study found that while 90 per cent of the population live on islands with a trained health worker, 6 per cent of the island population were on islands where there is no trained midwife.

Family planning services were introduced in 1984. Sixteen years later today, information on reproductive health choices and contraceptives as well as family planning services are accessible throughout the country for married women and men. At present most modern methods of contraception are available to all married couples from government health facilities. At the island level condoms, oral pills and injectable contraceptives are available while at the hospitals it is possible to carry out sterilisation operations as well as IUD insertion. However, despite the availability of family planning services, the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) while it has increased somewhat, continues to lag behind in terms of national and international goals. According to the Health Master Plan, the target is to raise CPR to 50% per cent by the end of 2005. The Reproductive Health Survey conducted in 1999 showed the following results for married women in the age group 15 – 49 years.

- 42 per cent use some method of contraception
- 32 per cent use a modern method of contraception
- 23 per cent use a modern temporary method of contraception

According to this survey, contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) for modern temporary methods increased from 10 per cent in 1991 to 23 per cent in 1999. Interviews on contraceptive habits and knowledge showed that 35 per cent did not want any more children yet were not using any method of contraception. Forty one percent reported not wanting more children and yet did not use any modern method of contraception. Box 1. Gives some of the common reasons for not using contraception. It is significant that religion and tradition is no bar for the majority of respondents.

⁹ Health Master Plan, MOH, 1996-2000

Box 1: Reasons for not using contraceptives as reported by the Reproductive Health Survey

Reasons for never using contraceptives

No need – 589 (45 per cent)
Don't want to use - 360(27 per cent)
Information and services not available - 159(12 per cent)
Husband disagrees - 68(5 per cent)
Inconvenient - 65(5 per cent)
Side effects - 62(5 per cent)
Religion/tradition - 19(1 per cent)

Reasons for stopping contraceptive use

Side effects – 117 (34 per cent)
Spouse absent – 66 (19 per cent)
Want more children – 44 (13 per cent)
No specific reason – 36 (11 per cent)
Inconvenient – 20 (6 per cent) Method failure 22 (6 per cent)
Other reasons quoted included supply stopped, spouse disagrees (3 per cent), too old to use, taking too long and doctor advised.

Improved access to health care has improved the overall health of women as well as their reproductive health status. But greater emphasis needs to be placed on improving maternal health. Given the relatively young average age of marriage, sexual and reproductive health of adolescent girls in particular needs further attention.

Non-governmental organizations have played an important role in expanding the reach of family planning services. They have considerably improved the accessibility of young people to relevant information and services. The Society for Health Education (SHE) has played a significant role in this regard and provides information and counselling services from their office in Male'. Professionals from SHE also visit other islands and hold discussions with the community and school children on issues relating to reproductive and sexual health. SHE also provides modern methods of contraception to the public.

There is therefore little or no gender disparity in accessibility to general health care services. However, the special health concerns of women need emphasis especially those relating to sexual and reproductive health.

Nutrition

Nutrition is a general indicator of socio-economic well-being. The difference in the level of nutrition between men and women indicate the nature of equity and access between the genders. Severe forms of malnutrition are rare in the Maldives. However, moderate and mild forms of malnutrition are quite widespread and affect a considerable proportion of men, women and children. The most common nutritional problem is that of wasting and stunting¹⁰. The Infant Feeding and Weaning Survey conducted by the Department of Public Health in 1994 revealed that 30 per cent of male and 29 per cent of female children were stunted. Wasting was seen among 17 per cent of boys and 19 per cent of girls. The

¹⁰ MOH, 1995

survey also indicated that in terms of under nourishment, girl children were at a slight disadvantage, with 47 per cent of boys and 50 per cent of girls falling into this category¹¹.

According to the Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey conducted in 1995 by UNICEF, nearly 26 per cent of female children and 28 per cent of male children below 5 years of age were stunted. The same study showed wasting among 16 per cent of female and 18 per cent of male children while 44 per cent of girls and 42 per cent of boys were undernourished¹².

The most recent data for stunting and wasting among children is available from the VPA survey where a total of 1,425 children in the atolls and 250 children in Male' were measured. This survey showed that malnutrition is much more widespread than previously believed. Except in four atolls (Noonu, Meemu, Thaa and Gnaviyani) around one in 2 of all girls between the ages of 1 to 5 years, can be considered stunted, compared to just over one in 3 of all boys in the same age group. In some atolls more than 70 per cent of the girls were stunted. Comparisons of VPA data with previous surveys indicate that the nutritional status of children has worsened over the recent period despite sustained economic growth. They also show that girls are worse off than boys.

Table 6: Extent of Stunting and Wasting in Maldives

(Percentage of population in age group 1-5 years)

Location	Stunting (percent)			Under Weight (percent)		
	Boys	Girls	Average	Boys	Girls	Average
Male'	14	18	16	22	42	30
Atolls	37	49	43	39	63	50
Republic	31	41	36	35	58	45

Source: Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment Survey 1998, Maldives

The nutrition status highlighted above is of critical concern to the well being of both girls and boys. Stunting and wasting are highly detrimental to the physical and cognitive development of children. Research shows that the Maldivian children also have a high incidence of anaemia as a result of inadequate iron in the diet, poor bioavailability of iron from cereal-based diets, and high intestinal worm infestations.

In addition, iodine deficiency is also becoming another serious nutritional problem according to the Multi Indicator Cluster Survey carried out by UNICEF. In 1995, 27 per cent of girls and 21 per cent of boys between the ages 1 – 5 showed iodine deficiency.

It is therefore reasonable to say that girls in the Maldives have a worse nutritional status than boys during the early years. Some of the reasons for this include poor dietary habits during pregnancy, frequent infections, worm infestation and poor weaning habits. Inadequate nutrition during the first years of life hampers physical growth and lead to stunting. This is especially critical for adolescent girls. Stunting coupled with anaemia and the young age of pregnancy becomes a fatal combination for women, which could lead to infirmity or death.

¹¹ DPH, 1994

¹² UNICEF, 1995

Education

Equal access to educational opportunities is a crucial aspect of gender equity. With more than half the population in school, it is vital that sufficient education, and training are provided in order to prepare the younger generations for the world of work. Tomorrow's world would require a high level of computer literacy and technical skills commensurate with the demands of the new economy, which is increasingly characterised by digital communications and globalisation.

Against the historical background of education in the Maldives this section will review the access to education in terms of enrolment, attainment and completion rates, at primary, middle, secondary and post secondary levels.

The people of Maldives have always placed great emphasis on education. In Maldivian society, children whether boys or girls, begin their education at three years of age. They attend a traditional educational institution, the *Kiyavaage* or *Edhuruge*, where they learn the national language *Dhivehi*, reading and writing the Arabic language, recitation of Qu'ran as well as basic arithmetic skills and general knowledge. While the traditional system still exists to some extent, these institutions are increasingly being replaced by the modern pre-school system.

In the past, at the age of nine or ten, boys in the atolls tended to terminate their education at the *Kiyavaage* and start their apprenticeship with their fathers. However, girls usually continued their education at the *Kiyavaage* for longer periods. This may be the reason why female literacy rate has always been a little higher than male literacy. The traditional educational system has been important in achieving the country's overall high literacy rate. According to the VPA survey, literacy rates for males and females are 98 per cent and 97 per cent respectively. According to this survey 100 per cent of adult female population in Male' and 99 per cent of males are literate. There is no difference in literacy rates between men and women in the atolls. High literacy rates are further confirmed by Census results (see Table 7).

The nobility have historically enjoyed a lead in formal education. They had the opportunity to travel overseas and study herbal medicine, navigation and religious doctrine, abroad in Sri Lanka, India, Bengal and Egypt. The women, however, rarely went abroad for studies, even from the nobility and were bound by the general norms and traditions of social conduct. Therefore, while men enjoyed some opportunity for formal education, this was largely restricted to a minority and education was not available to the general public. Women across all social classes were less fortunate.

General education came to be emphasised in public policy with the establishment of the first boy's school in 1929. The opportunities for women to obtain general education opened up with the adoption of the first constitution in 1932. In 1944 the first girl's school was established as a branch of the boys school and later became an exclusive girls school. In the 1960s, the government began awarding overseas scholarships to girls.

Table 7: Literacy Rates by sex and location, 1977 – 1995

Year	Republic		Male'		Atolls	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
1977	71	70	89	88	67	65
1985	87	86	94	94	84	82
1990	91	90	96	76	89	87
1995	94	94	97	97	93	92

Source: Census data

Enrolment

In comparison to the past, today, however, there is little gender disparity in educational opportunities. As Table 9 shows, the proportion of boys and girls enrolled in schools throughout the country from 1986 to 1997 is about the same.

Table 8: Enrolment in Educational Institutions by sex and location (%)

	Republic		Male'		Atolls	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1986	50	50	47	53	51	49
1987	51	49	53	47	50	50
1988	51	49	53	47	50	50
1990	51	49	53	47	51	49
1995	51	49	51	49	51	49
1997	51	49	52	48	50	50
1998	51	49	51	49	51	49

Source: Educational Statistics, MOE, 1986 - 1998

From 1987 to 1998 males comprised 51 per cent and females 49 per cent of total enrolment. However, from 1987 to 1990 there is a 6 percentage point difference between the enrolment rates of males and females in Male' with a bias towards males. This is mainly due to the higher enrolment of boys at the upper secondary level. Apart from this there is no significant gender disparity in enrolment, as seen in Table 9

Table 9: School Enrolment by sex and level (%)

	Pre School		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Upper Secondary	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
1987	50	50	49	51	49	51	45	55	31	69
1993	49	51	49	51	50	50	49	51	39	61
1994	49	51	49	51	51	49	48	52	40	60
1995	50	50	48	52	51	49	49	51	39	61
1996	50	50	48	52	50	50	50	50	35	65
1997	50	50	48	52	51	49	50	50	36	64
1998	48	52	48	52	51	49	51	49	43	57

Source: Educational Statistics 1986 – 1998

Even though there is relatively little or no gender disparity in total enrolment and therefore in general access, it must be noted that most of the atolls lack opportunities for secondary

education. The recent establishment of the Northern Secondary School in Ha.Dhaalu, Kulhudhufushi and the Southern Secondary School in Seenu Atoll, Hithadhoo, have greatly increased the chances for both girls and boys in the atolls to pursue education beyond primary and middle school. Secondary education in science subjects needs further improvements in the atolls.

Educational Attainment

Enrollment figures alone however, do not indicate educational progress. Educational progress is more clearly seen in attainment and completion rates¹³. Enrollment figures only provide part of the picture and are more an indication of access. Table 13 shows that considerable progress has been achieved in attainment, where nearly 75 per cent of females over 6 years of age had passed some level of educational standard in 1995 as compared to 64 per cent in 1985. A similar trend is observed among the male population above 6 years of age. In 1985, 66 per cent of males had passed some standard of education while the proportion increased to 76 per cent in 1995.

There is no significant difference between men and women in terms of the proportion that have passed some standard of education. Further there is a marked reduction in the proportion of males and females that have not attained any standard of education, indicating an overall improvement in educational attainment (over 6 years age group).

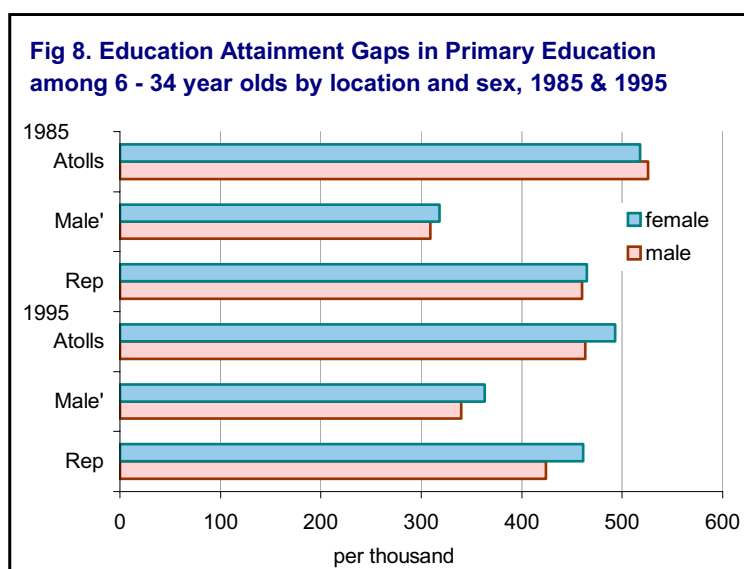


Table 10: Proportions of males and females with No Standard Passed by Age Group: 1985 – 1995

Age Group	1985		1995		% Point Change	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
>6	23.91	24.90	34.16	35.89	10.25	10.99
6- 9	13.67	24.75	37.85	36.58	24.18	11.83
10 – 14	7.04	12.02	5.04	5.07	-2.00	-6.95
15 – 19	11.63	17.30	6.79	8.43	-4.84	-8.87
20 – 24	16.85	24.39	18.78	23.53	1.92	-0.87
25 – 29	17.27	27.10	35.15	40.93	17.88	12.76
30 - 34	18.70	28.15	48.98	55.95	30.28	27.80

Source: Derived from Census Data

¹³ Attainment is defined as reaching or entering a particular standard. Completion is defined in terms of completing that standard.

However, there is an increase in the proportion of males and females who have not attained any standard of education among the age group 30 to 34 years. This implies that the older age groups did not have the same opportunity as present generations to obtain a formal education.

As can be seen in figure 11 a comparison of primary education attainment between 1985 and 1995 among the 6 to 34 year age group shows that attainment rates for both males and females had not changed significantly for the country as a whole. For instance in 1985, 425 out of every 1000 males and 434 out of every 1000 females attained a primary education. In 1995 there was an increase of 31 per 1000 for females compared to 35 per 1000 for males. There is no major gender difference in the attainment of primary education between Male' and the Atolls. In fact, as Table 14 shows, for the Republic as a whole and for Male', more females than males have attained primary education.

Table 11: Education Attainment (completion) Rates (per thousand) among 6 – 34 years by level, sex and location.

Level/Location		1985		1995	
		Males	Females	Males	Females
Primary	Republic	425	434	460	465
	Male'	329	347	309	318
	Atolls	473	463	525	518
Middle	Republic	39	29	181	177
	Male'	76	84	257	245
	Atolls	21	11	147	153
Secondary	Republic	20	14	94	79
	Male'	49	53	218	231
	Atolls	6	1	40	24

Source: Derived from census data

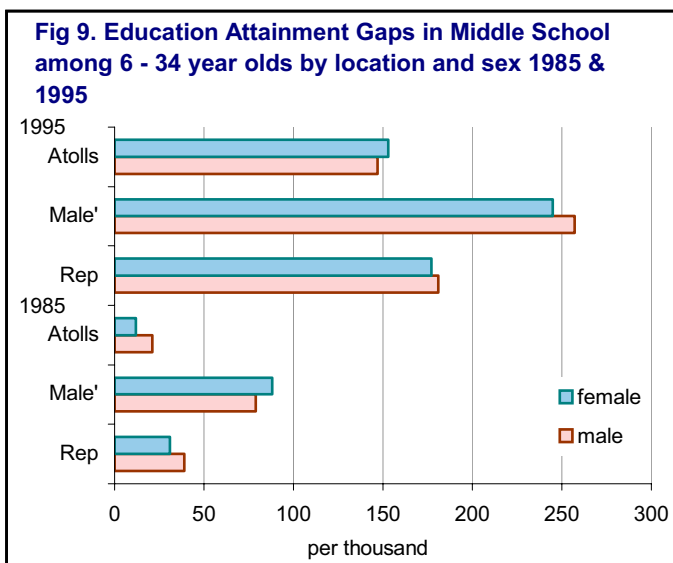
Figure 9 shows significant improvement in the rates of both boys and girls who attained middle school education during the period 1985 to 1995. For the country as a whole 39 out of every 1000 males in the 6 to 34 year age group had attained a middle school education in 1985. The rate increased nearly five folds in 1995 with 181 boys attaining a middle school education. Attainment rates for females of the same age group shows a lower rate than males 29 with 177 per thousand attaining a middle school education in 1985 and 1995 respectively. The gender gap therefore, is very small. Similar trends can be observed for Male' with boys doing better than girls in 1995. In the atolls, 153 per thousand girls and 147 per thousand boys had attained a middle school education, with a minimal gender gap.

Secondary education in the Maldives consists of grades 8-10 (lower secondary) and 11-12 (upper secondary). Lower secondary is now being extended to the atolls through the gradual addition of Grade 8-10 classes in some Atoll Education Centers (AEC's) and Atoll Schools (AS's), and by the creation of two regional secondary schools, one in the north and one in the south. The upper secondary education which remained limited to two formal Schools namely, Center for Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) (formally known as SEC) and the Institute of Islamic Studies and a few non-formal centers in Male' up to now, is to be extended to the atolls in three regions beginning 2001.

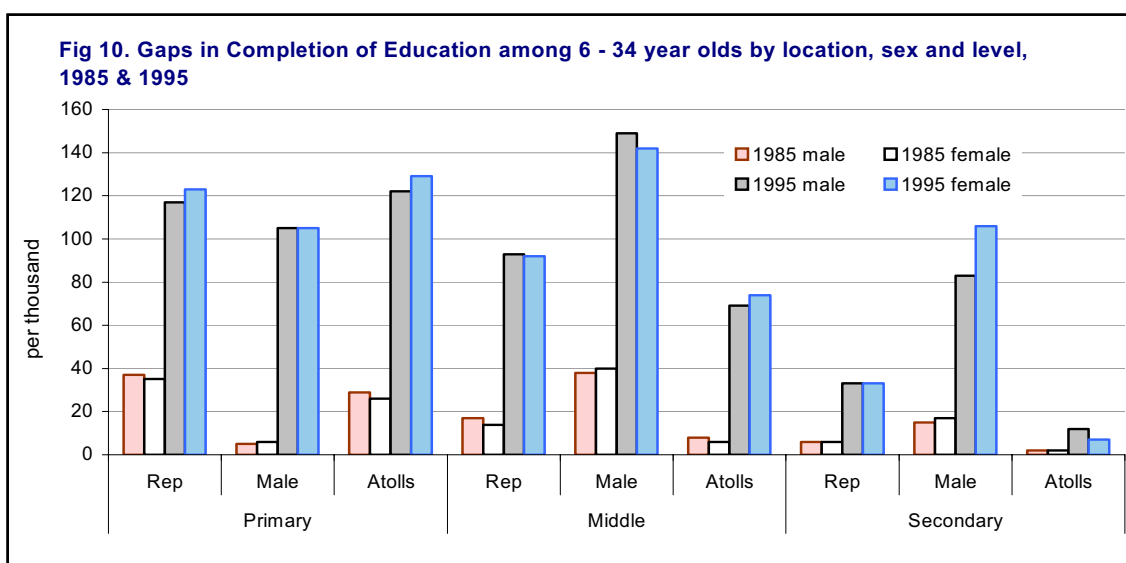
At the level of secondary school however, there is a significant gender gap in attainment for the country as a whole. In 1995, 94 out every 1000 males in the age group 6 to 34

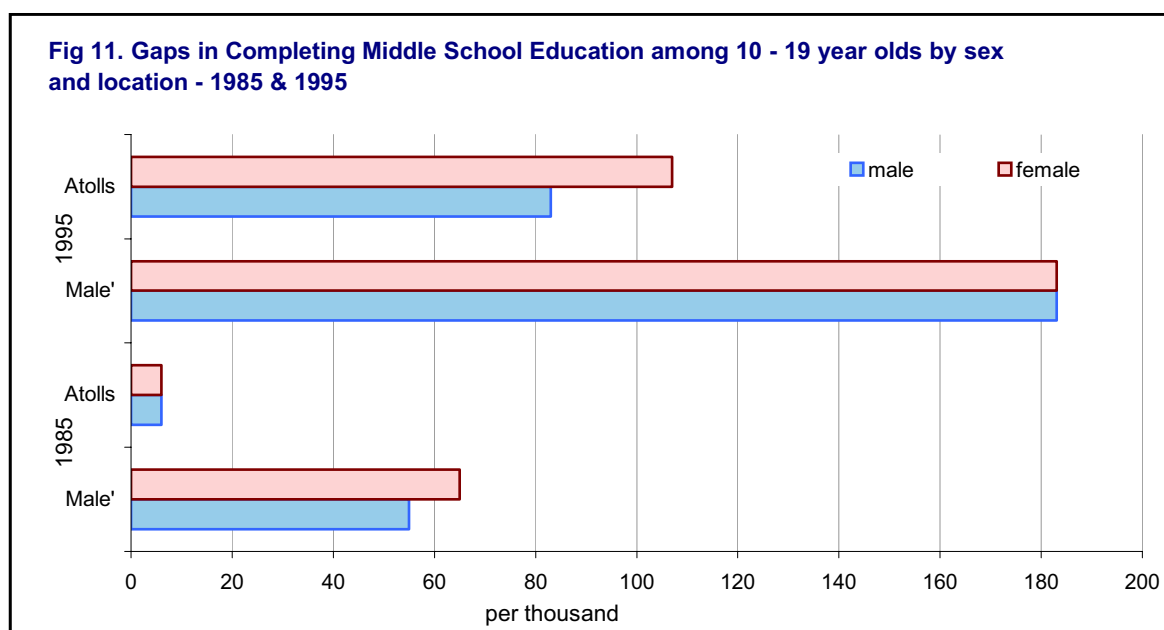
years had attained a secondary education compared with 79 per thousand for females. The gap is wider in the Atolls with 40 per thousand males and 24 per thousand females having attained a secondary education. The gender disparity in secondary education in the atolls is a direct result of the lack of secondary education facilities in the atolls. Where secondary education is available, such as in Male, females are as likely to attend as males. During 1985 and 1995, females in Male' had a higher attainment rate than boys. In 1985 53 per 1000 females as compared to 49 per 1000 males attained a secondary education. In 1995 this figure increased to 231 per thousand and 218 per thousand respectively for females and males.

Educational attainment in primary and middle school show that there are no significant gender disparities. However, gender disparities do exist with a bias in favour of males in middle school competition rates. These trends are reversed when secondary education is considered for the age group of 6 to 34 years with females doing relatively better. The attainment rates for secondary education in male' and the atolls have improved for both sexes during the period 1985 to 1995.



Compared to attainment, however, completion rates are much lower among both males and females. In 1995, 465 per thousand females attained primary education whereas only 123 per thousand completed primary education. However, it is clear from figure 10 that when completion rates alone are considered significant improvements have been made in all levels of schooling over the past 10 years. Similar trends can be seen for Male' and the Atolls. While there is almost no gender gap in completion of primary education in 1985, a gender gap emerges in 1995 with more females completing primary education than males. In 1995, 123 per 1000 females had completed primary education as against 117 per 1000 males.





However, more females in the age group of 10 to 19 years have completed middle school both for the country as a whole and in the atolls (see fig. 11). Completion rates in 1995 for the atolls stood at 107 per thousand for girls and 83 per thousand for boys. In Male' the completion rates were the same for boys and girls – 183 per thousand. This perhaps reflects a higher dropout rate in the atolls for boys, who at that age frequently begin apprenticeships and other activities in preparation for adult employment. More boys also tend to come to Male' to complete middle and high school than girls.

Completion rates for secondary education show equal rates for both sexes for the country as a whole. Completion rates for both sexes were 33 per thousand in 1995, nearly a six-fold increase from 1985. However in Male' with a 23 percentage point difference as can be seen from Table 15 a significantly higher proportion of females complete secondary education. In the atolls, the completion rates for males are 5 percentage points higher than females. This is mainly due to differences in access to secondary education between Male' and the atolls. Furthermore, due to existing cultural and traditional norms, proportionately more males have the opportunity to come to Male' to pursue higher education than females.

There are no significant gender biases in the proportion of females and males enrolled in primary, middle and secondary schools. Nor is there such a bias in the attainment rates for both primary and middle schools. Gender differences in education emerge mainly from secondary school onwards where enrolment, attainment and completion rates are lower for girls except for Male'. In addition to this the findings also indicate that the completion rates for all levels of education irrespective of gender is relatively low which suggests a considerably high average dropout rate.

The gender gap widens at higher levels of education where women are much less represented than men. According to the Census, as of 1985 and 1995 the rate of males and females who have attained a University Education have not improved much for the country as a whole. As Table 12 shows, in 1985 for every 1000 females there was not even one woman who had attained a university education. However, in 1995 the rate had increased to one per thousand females while the rate for males had not changed at all. The trends for Male' and the Atolls remain more or less the same with no significant change.

Table 12: Education Attainment Rates (per thousand) among 6 – 34 years by level, sex and location.

Level/Location		1985		1995	
		Males	Females	Males	Females
University	Republic	1	0	1	1
	Male'	3	2	4	2
	Atolls	0	0	1	0
Informal & Vocational	Republic	189	168	10	6
	Male'	220	177	12	11
	Atolls	174	165	8	4

Source: Derived from Census 1985, 1995

Table 13: Proportion of males and females attaining Higher Education (first degree and above) 1977 – 1997

Field	1977 - 1985		1986 – 1995		1996 – 1997		Total		%	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Medicine	4	8	19	43	12	14	35	65	36	64
Nursing	1	0	7	0	4	0	12	0	100	0
Other Health Fields	1	4	21	9	2	2	24	15	62	38
Teaching/ education	15	62	75	102	29	45	119	209	36	64
Engineering	1	21	0	53	0	33	1	107	1	99
Architecture	0	4	1	5	0	2	1	14	0	100
Law	1	15	4	29	7	13	12	57	22	78
Business / Economics	2	23	16	46	9	32	27	101	21	79
Political Science	1	5	0	4	0	0	1	9	11	89
Journalism	0	2	0	3	0	0	1	5	14	86
Public Administration	3	5	0	6	1	3	4	14	22	78
Aviation	0	0	6	0	0	8	6	8	43	57
Other Fields										
Total							245	606	29	71

Source: Ministry of Human Resources Employment and Labor

Table 13 shows the gender gap in the attainment of higher education. Between 1977 and 1997, a total of 245 females and 606 males or 29 per cent of females and 71 per cent of males had obtained higher education under the government fellowship scheme. The

attainment of higher education according to field of specialization shows that females who enroll for higher education tend to pursue fields such as health and education. Except in the field of nursing, which in Maldives is presently an all-female field, males dominate in all other areas. Even in the areas of teaching and education, only 36 per cent of those with a first or higher degree were females whereas males comprised 64 per cent.

Also between 1977 and 1997 a total of 149 men and women had completed or were studying for a Masters degree. This included 108 males and 41 females. At the level of Doctoral studies the gender gap is even wider with a total of 19 either having achieved or studying for a Ph.D. Degree. Of these only 16 per cent or 3, were females.

Table 14: Proportion of males and females undergoing post-graduate studies, 1977 - 1997

Degree	Total Number		%	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Masters	108	41	72	28
Ph.D.	16	3	84	16

Source: MHREL

Table 15: Proportion of males and females graduating from Tertiary Education Institutes in Male' 1973 – 1997

	FHS		FE		FHTS		FMC		TOTAL	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1973 – 1984	33	67	69	31					46	54
1985 – 1989	30	70	40	60	85	15			48	52
1990 – 1994	27	73	36	64	70	30	57	43	49	51
1995 – 1997	19	81	34	66	68	32	55	45	51	49
Total	29	71	42	58	73	27	56	44	49	51

Source: FHS,FE,FTH,FMC

Table 15 shows that more females than males graduated from tertiary Institutes in Male' prior to 1989. This is because prior to 1989 the two main Faculties providing training were the Faculty of Health Sciences - FHS (then known as Allied Health Services Training Center) and the Faculty of Education (FE). The majority of female graduates came from FHS where women dominated all courses offered with very few male students. Even in FE the majority are females. This is closely related to traditional norms encouraging women to assume the roles of nurturer and care-provider. Thus females dominate both the areas of teaching and health. While, these trends have however, begun to change slightly with the establishment of the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies (FHTS) and the Faculty of Management and Computing (FMC) the stereotypical roles still persist.

According to the Statistical Year book of 1997 only 2 per cent of females graduated from Faculty of Engineering Studies (FES) during 1995 to 1996. This has been the pattern throughout the life of FES and it is only over the recent few years that FES has been able to attract even a small percentage of females. FES offers training in areas such as engineering, building and construction, woodworks and related fields, all of which have been traditionally dominated by men. New ways of attracting girls into these traditionally male professions need to be explored.

The most significant educational disparities are therefore seen at the levels of secondary and tertiary education. It is important to note however, that the disparity in educational status derives not from policy, but due to the lack of resources, facilities and infrastructure. Culture however, has an influence on the selection of fields of specialization, which tend to reinforce their domestic roles. On the whole it seems that higher education for women is not as highly acclaimed by society whilst women also face other constraints due to marriage and motherhood.

The growth in public investment in education is physically seen in the increasing number of government and private educational institutions over the years. Community schools were introduced in 1992 and prior to that community schools were classified under private schools¹⁴. Therefore, the drastic reduction in the number of private schools in 1992 seen in table 16 is the result of a change in the method of classification. If private schools are combined with community schools, then there does not seem to be a significant change in the number of private schools.

Table 16: Number of Educational Institutions, 1986 – 1995

Locality	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Republic										
Total	257	257	253	261	263	265	262	265	264	262
Government Schools	47	48	48	50	50	50	56	57	57	59
Private Schools	210	209	205	211	213	215	28	31	30	29
Community Schools							178	177	177	174
Male'										
Total	20	20	20	23	22	20	17	17	17	17
Government Schools	7	8	8	10	10	10	9	9	9	9
Private Schools	13	12	12	13	12	10	4	4	4	4
Community Schools							4	4	4	4
Atolls										
Total	237	237	233	238	241	245	245	248	247	245
Government Schools	40	40	40	40	40	40	47	48	48	50
Private Schools	197	197	193	198	201	205	24	27	26	25
Community Schools							174	173	173	170

The educational policy of the government is to ensure that basic education up to grade 7 is available on all islands by the year 2000. However, there is still some way to go before this target is achieved¹⁵. The survey findings show that in early 1998, 12 per cent of the

¹⁴ Statistical Year Book, 1997

¹⁵ VPA, MPND

islands had education only up to grade 5, while more than 40 per cent provided education up to grade 7. Secondary education was available only in 15 per cent of the islands. Access to higher levels of education therefore continues to be limited in the atolls.

The VPA also finds that 8 percent of the atoll population live on islands with more than 100 students per trained teacher. Only 2 percent of the atoll population are found on islands that have no trained teacher, and trained teachers are available for the entire population in 15 atolls. These figures indicate that significant progress has been achieved in reducing the ratio of students to trained teachers. However, student-teacher ratio is still unacceptably high with nearly one third of the population living in atolls that have a student/trained teacher ratio of 50 to 100 per trained teacher.

Gender and the Legal System

The legal system defines the rights and obligations of individuals. The relationship between gender and the legal system is therefore important in understanding the basic rights and freedoms entitled to and enjoyed by men and women.

Maldivian law is derived Parliamentary Acts, Presidential Decrees, Regulations and *Shari'ah* Law. Under the Maldivian legal system, women and men are subject to the same punishments and legal reprieve, although in practice, women are often given a lighter sentence in view of their domestic responsibilities. There are no separate penal institutions for women in the country.

The government in its efforts to promote equality of rights between men and women has ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women* albeit with some reservations. The Maldivian Constitution provides for equality of men and women. However, at the same time, it prohibits a woman becoming the President of the country.

Although *Shari'ah* law requires women to obtain consent of the male guardian before entering into a marriage, in the Maldives women are free to choose their marriage partners. In the event of refusal of consent by the male guardian, the woman could challenge the decision of the legal guardian, and ask for the consent to be given by the judge. Forcing a woman to enter into marriage is an offence.

A Family Law Act was recently enacted by the parliament and will come into force in July 2001. This would be the first law that specifically relates to gender relations, marriage and family life. It is expected to strengthen the institution of family and protect the rights of women, especially in the context of gender and family relations. Under this new Act, the minimum age is set at 18 years of age. However, a woman (or a man) who has reached puberty may make an application for marriage. The court would, in consideration of the woman's physical health and the reasons for marriage permit such a marriage. This discretion however rests with the Registrar of Marriages. The new Family Act also restricts men's right to enter into polygamous relationships. However, consent of the wife is not required under such circumstances.

The New Act also encourages couples to enter into Prenuptial Agreements, and it is expected that this would pave the way for more equitable ownership of property acquired during marriage.

Recently custody and alimony regulations have been strengthened with stricter action against fathers defaulting on childcare support. Under this statute a father's salary will be withheld in part, till payments are completed. However, currently this applies only to government employees.

Another positive feature of the new law is that in the event of divorce, the woman is entitled to remain in the matrimonial home provided that the custody of the children vests with the mother. Further, the woman is given priority for the custody of the young child until he /she reaches 7 years of age provided she does not enter into another marriage. However, the woman's position with regard to child custody is considerably weakened once she enters into a marriage with a new partner.

One of the most important legislation in relation to women is Law No. 14/72 relating to the provision of evidence in cases where the sentence involves lashing. This relates specifically to cases of "*Zina*", which is defined as consensual sex between partners who are not married to each other, and in cases of non-consensual sex, either rape or any other form of sexual violence. Rape and sexual violence remains difficult to prove given the strict requirements for eyewitnesses.

There are certain matters in which Islamic law is followed in the Maldives. In *Hudood* offences, a woman's word does not always carry the same weight as that of a man in a court of law. Partly as a result of this, violence against women is likely to be heavily under-reported. As such, it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics on violence against women and the prevalence of the problem needs to be ascertained through appropriate social research.

The rules of inheritance, which derives directly from Islamic Shari'ah, also treat men and women differently. Woman receives less than what man receive in a number of situations, the actual entitlement being dependent on her relationship to the deceased. However, in the case of state-owned land, where land has to be partitioned among the legal heirs, it is normally partitioned equally in the Maldives. The differences in inheritance under the Shari'ah system have to be seen in the context of differing responsibilities placed upon men and women. The legal obligations laid down under Islamic Shari'ah, awards men the responsibility to provide maintenance for women.

The belief that a woman's word is not equal to that of a man and that they are a weaker sex that needed male protection continue to be the subject of debate among the scholars of Islamic jurisprudence. Many modern Muslim scholars the world over argue that the original Qur'anic teachings should be placed in the context of history and culture and distinguished from the fundamental ethical principles of the text¹⁶. These scholars argue that many issues are too often interpreted in legal/formal terms, while in fact they belong

¹⁶ Maumoon 1996

to the realm of Islamic ethical/moral principals. These principles uphold the equality of men and women in the eyes of God, and that they must be obeyed.

4. Participation in Development

Meaningful development is development by the people and for the people. It is also the most democratic form of development, which is important in order to ensure the freedom and right to participate in development. It is development in which the people are not only passive beneficiaries, but also active participants and partners in shaping their own future and that of coming generations. Women, just like men, need to fully participate in all areas of development if it is to have any meaning or relevance to their own lives. Further, it is through active participation at appropriate levels of policy making that positive changes could be brought about especially the social position of women. This section will look at the participation of women and men in the total development process, beginning from their participation at the household level through to economic, cultural and political levels.

Household Participation

The role and nature of women's participation in development begins at home. Traditionally, Maldivian women have been responsible for managing the household, taking care of children and looking after the elderly. This is a formidable task in large extended families. According to a study undertaken in 1980 the average household size was 6.47. About 50 per cent of women belonged to a household of 6 occupants or less while 16.69 per cent lived in a household of 10 or more people. With higher population density, the household size in Male' is much larger. About 80 per cent of all respondents of the survey lived in nuclear families with children comprising 53 per cent of all occupants in the family. In Male' and in some of the other more populated islands, large families have led to overcrowded households, bringing with it not only the economic burden of providing enough food and other basic needs, but also increasing the likelihood of health problems and social tensions. Indicators of child-woman ratios (CWR) further illustrate this gap. As table 17 shows, the child woman ratio per woman has remained largely unchanged at around 7 and 9. The CWR has however, decreased considerably for Male' during the period 1990 to 1995. Yet, for the atolls it has remained constant between 9 and 10 children per woman. The trends in CWR indicate a heavy burden of childcare on women.

Table 17: Child -Woman Ratios, 1977 - 1995

	1977	1985	1990	1995
Republic				
Population 0 – 4	23837	32888	39430	36972
Population female 15 – 49	30893	39064	45439	5 3642
Population married/female 15 - 49	26939	33076	36445	40373
Male'				
Population 0 – 4	3794	6634	7056	6127
Population female 15 - 49	6624	10156	12897	15813
Population married/female 15 - 49		7599	8831	10016
Atolls				
Population 0 – 4	20043	26281	32374	30845
Population female 15 – 49	24269	28908	32542	37829
Population married/female 15 - 49		25477	27614	30357
Republic				
CWR (per woman)	8	8	9	7
Male'				
CWR		7	6	2
Atolls				
CWR	9	10	9	

Source: Derived from Census Data and statistical yearbooks.

In the Maldives, household division of labour remains very much conditioned by gender. Procuring food and earning the family income rests largely with husbands or another male member of the household¹⁷. Mostly women carry out all household tasks. According to the 1991 survey on women in Maldives, over 60 per cent of women said they did the bulk of household chores such as taking care of children, cooking, washing, ironing and cleaning among other things. Less than 4 per cent of men contributed to either cooking, childcare, cleaning or washing and ironing.

According to this survey, the time spent by the women in the capital on household exceeds the standard 36-hour work-week. Childcare consumes most of the women's time at home, and as many as 42 per cent spent over 48 hours a week on childcare while 51 per cent spent at least 33 hours on this task each week. The majority of women carried out these tasks largely by themselves.

The survey also revealed that in addition to child care and routine housework, women in Male' also spent considerable time in teaching or tutoring children and caring for the sick or ageing members of the family. Around two thirds of wives and mothers in the capital were engaged in tutoring or assisting their children with school work, while 20 per cent took care of the sick. While women in Male' and now even in other islands, often perform a difficult juggle of time between housework and taking children to school and fetching them back, sometimes more than once a day. While men also undertake this task, women usually take the main responsibility for the job. Such household responsibilities prevent women from engaging in social and economic activities outside the home, especially in the absence of child-care facilities.

¹⁷ Marildo Ibrahim, 1991

As a result of extensive household responsibilities however, women have a significant say in matters that relate to disciplining of children and managing the house. According to the survey on island women in 1980, 33 per cent of men consulted their wives on decisions regarding expenditure while 65 per cent of women claimed they had a say¹⁸. Subsequent surveys have shown that trends in male and female responsibilities within the household have not changed much.

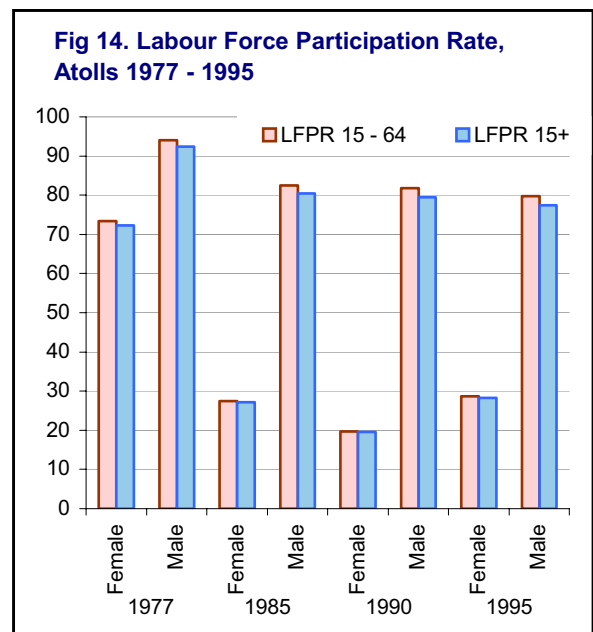
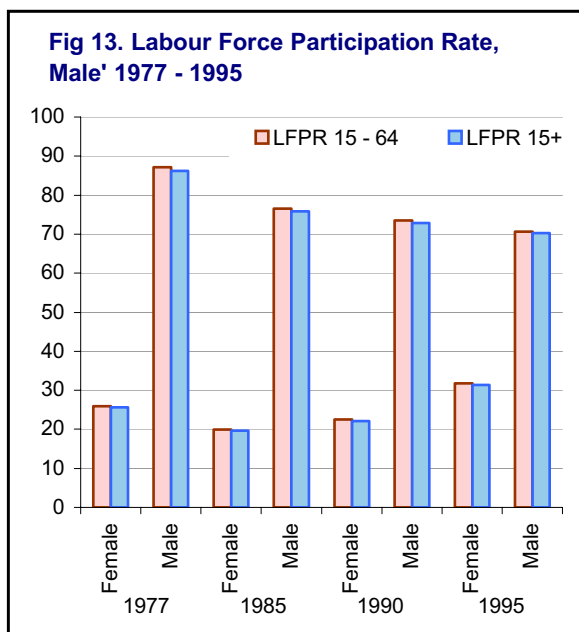
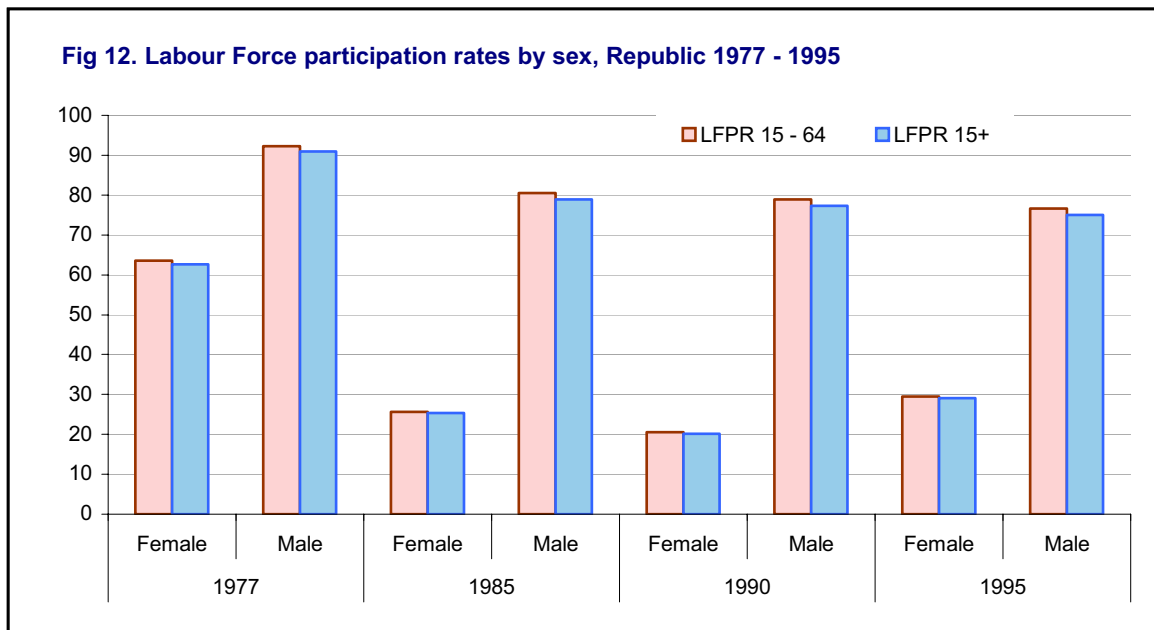
While the head of the household is usually a male, there are also a significant number of female-headed households. The Vulnerability and Poverty Assessment (VPA) Survey of 1998 revealed that a woman headed one in three households. There were no major differences in this respect between Male' and the atolls. However there were variations between atolls with almost one half of the households in some atolls having a female head. In most cases this was because the men had migrated to other islands. The VPA survey finds that heading the household leads to additional problems for women and difficulties in fulfilling their roles. Some women reported difficulties in either securing work or borrowing money to meet their basic needs, while others reported difficulty in acquiring firewood for cooking. A few women also reported the problem of loneliness. The great majority of women however reported that managing a household was not a problem, if resources were available.

In general, women's participation at the domestic level is comprehensive and total. In part, the traditional authority of the men derives from the control of household resources. Culture defines the nature of participation at the household level, and assigns motherhood and the role of caregiver to the women. However, changing socio-economic conditions will necessarily make way for change in meeting the new social roles and demands of the changing urban-industrial economy, where younger generations of women are increasingly looking for work outside the home.

Economic Participation

The Maldives witnessed rapid economic growth and social transformation during the seventies when the country changed from primary production to services and tertiary activities. The new industrial and service oriented economy-displaced labour in the traditional sectors and created the demand for new skills. Women, who comprised half the traditional sector, were the hardest hit when men migrated and switched occupations to find alternative employment. Consequently as Figure 12 shows, the labor force participation rate (LFPR) of women dropped from nearly 63 per cent to 20 per cent between 1977 and 1990. However, a slight increase of nine percentage points can be observed in the LFPR of women 15 years of age and an increase of 9 percentage points for women in the 21 to 30 year age group. LFPR for males dropped from 79 to 77 per cent among the 15 to 64 year age groups and from 77 to 75 percent among age group 15 years and above. This is commensurate with the increase in the school going population.

¹⁸ Siedler, 1980



At the regional level, the labour force participation rate for Male' and the Atolls follow a similar trend as that of the Republic with one difference. As Figures 13 and 14 shows, the decrease is much larger for females in the atolls due to changes in the rural employment structure, a large part of which included women during the seventies and early eighties. During 1977 to 1985 LFPR in the atolls declined by 46 percentage points and for the country as a whole by 38 percentage points. This reflects the displacement of women from the fish processing industry and the lack of alternative job opportunities for them. But women in Male' increasingly engage in urban and industrial employment.

As table 18 shows, women's share in total employment is also low compared to that of men. In 1977 women accounted for 38 per cent of all employment while men accounted

for 62 per cent. In 1995, women's share was down to 27 per cent and men's share increased to 73 per cent. Consequently, men dominate virtually all industry classifications and occupational categories, including the service sector.

Table 18: Proportion of employment in various industry classifications for Maldives.¹⁹

Industry	1977		1985		1990		1995	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Agriculture & Forestry	53	47	45	55	45	55	61	39
Fishing	25	75	2	98	3	97	2	98
Manufacturing	79	21	62	38	50	50	63	37
Quarrying			9	91	3	97	5	95
Construction	3	97	1	99	1	99	1	99
Electricity and Water	1	99	1	99	8	92	9	91
Wholesale & retail trade			8	92	6	94	16	84
Commerce	12	88						
Transport, storage & communication	3	97	3	97	6	94	9	91
Financing, Insurance and business			2	98	18	82	33	67
Tourism	6	94						
Hotels, restaurants etc							4	96
Services (community, social & personal)	30	70	19	81	31	69	44	56
Others	16	84	27	73	26	74	30	70
Total	38	62	25	75	20	80	27	73

Source: Census

¹⁹ The occupational and industrial classifications have change over the Census years and therefore these figures would provide only an order of magnitude

Table 19: Percentage shares of employment in selected occupational categories by sex and location.

Occupation & Location		1977		1985		1990		1995	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Professional	Republic	31.4	68.6	20.0	80.0	34.6	65.4	36.8	63.2
	Male'	27.3	72.7	18.2	81.8	32.0	68.0	32.5	67.5
	Atolls	35.2	64.8	21.3	78.7	36.8	63.2	40.5	59.5
Administration	Republic	22.5	77.5	9.6	90.4	14.0	86.0	10.8	89.2
	Male'	25.8	74.2	16.5	83.5	19.6	80.4	9.0	91.0
	Atolls	5.4	94.6	3.0	97.0	5.5	94.5	12.8	87.2
Service	Republic	29.7	70.3	10.9	89.1	12.2	87.8	19.7	80.3
	Male'	28.5	71.5	14.3	85.7	17.5	82.5	8.5	91.5
	Atolls	31.0	69.0	7.9	92.1	9.0	91.0	34.7	65.3
Agriculture & Animal & husbandry	Republic	30.0	70.0	9.8	90.2	11.4	88.6	10.9	89.1
	Male'	8.9	91.1	2.3	97.7	2.6	97.4	2.6	97.4
	Atolls	30.4	69.6	10.3	89.7	12.0	88.0	11.2	88.8
Production	Republic	79.5	20.5	36.3	63.7	24.9	75.1	45.5	54.5
	Male'	39.9	60.1	13.3	86.7	10.5	89.5	30.5	69.5
	Atolls	82.9	17.1	44.2	55.8	31.1	68.9	48.8	51.2
Total	Republic	37.9	62.1	21.6	78.4	19.8	80.2	25.8	73.0
	Male'	16.3	83.7	14.3	85.7	18.8	81.2	27.0	74.2
	Atolls	42.0	58.0	24.5	75.5	20.3	79.7	27.5	72.5

Source: Derived from census data

In 1977 women had a lead in the agriculture and forestry sector with a share of 53.21 per cent. Men accounted for 46.79 per cent. Men led the manufacturing sector with 78.87 per cent. However women's participation in agricultural areas have steadily declined since then as Table 22 shows. According to Table 19, women's share from 1985 onwards dipped below men and recovered in 1995. In the area of manufacturing women's share has decreased but remains stable. However, with the change in the economic structure including the expansion of the social services sector and improvements in education over the last 20 years, the proportion of women in professional and technical occupations has steadily increased over the recent period, as Table 19 shows. In 1977 women comprised 31.4 per cent. By 1995 there was a 5.4 percentage point increase, with women accounting for 36.8 per cent. The trend is the same for both Male' and the Atolls with an increase of 5.2 and 5.3 percentage points respectively for the period 1977 to 1995.

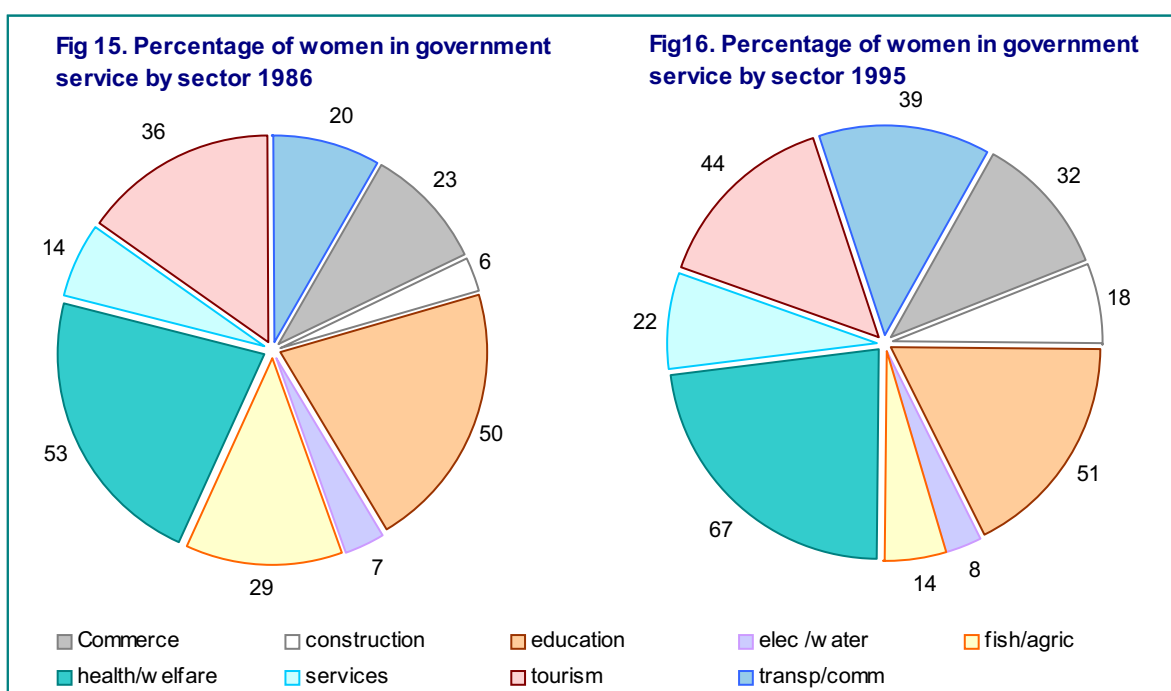
According to the VPA survey the main employer at the national level is the government followed by fisheries, tourism and manufacturing sectors. Nearly two thirds of the economically active population is employed in these sectors. It must be noted however, that census data and the data from VPA survey cannot be compared, as the classifications used in the VPA survey are different from that of the census. For the country as a whole the proportion of women in the government sector has increased from 25 percent in 1986 to 32 percent in 1995 while the proportion of males have dropped from 75 percent to 68 percent. Even in the government, women tend to dominate areas that are traditionally related to the role of nurturer and care-provider. Areas such as construction have very few women. For both 1986 and 1995 females dominate the education, health and welfare sectors while only one tenth of the total employees in the construction sector comprised women. Traditionally this has been a male dominated sector. Even the 10 per cent of

women in the construction sector are not engaged in actual construction work but mostly in administrative tasks. Table 23 shows the sectoral distribution of employment according to the VPA survey.

Table 20: Proportion of males and females employed by sector and sex

Sector	Total	Female	Male
Government	22	36	16
Fishing	18	3	24
Tourism	14	3	18
Manufacturing	12	31	4
Construction	9	1	12
Services	9	8	9
Transport/Communications	5	1	6
Own worker	4	4	5
Agriculture	4	10	2
Trade	3	2	3
Mining	1	0	1
Other	1	1	1

Source: VPA Survey, 1998 p 68



It is encouraging, however, that the participation of women in the labour force is increasing. But they still account for a comparatively low proportion of the labour force.

In terms of the status of employment, which refers to classifications such as employee, employer, or own account workers among others, the majority of women and men in the labour force are employees. In 1977 nearly 91 percent of males were employers while only 9 percent of females had the same status. 1995 saw a reduction in the proportion of men as

employers and an increase in the percentage of female employers. A reversal in trends is observed for own account workers with the percentage of male own account workers increasing from 57 percent to 79 percent during 1977 to 1995, while the percentage of own account female workers declined by half from 43 percent to 21 percent. Own account workers in the Maldives is similar to informal workers where the size of the enterprise is small, technology is low, formal organizational aspects are weak and may not have legal recognition or protection, especially those enterprises that are often unregistered. Household chores carried out by children who come to Male' for studies in exchange for their stay, upkeep and sometimes schooling could also be categorized within the informal service sector. Girls often dominate this sector. In the case of family workers the percentage of family workers increased by 15 percentage points during the period 1985 to 1995 while there was a reduction of 15 percentage points for male family workers. These trends show considerable gender disparity in employment status and overall economic participation.

Women tend to enter the labour force into culturally conditioned roles, particularly those that reinforce the conventional norms relating to women. In some instances this may be related to practical choices made by women. This accounts for the lack of women in the position of employer or in positions of ownership and control. Despite the wide gender disparity in the labour force participation rates, Maldives has always had a system of equal pay for equal work irrespective of gender. As such there is no discrimination in the remuneration paid to men or women whether in terms of direct wages or other benefits. Upon the signing of the Convention for the Rights of Children (CRC) the Maldives made it illegal for children under the age of 14 to be employed.

In addition to the low participation of women in the labour force and low employment status, women also dominate the lower levels of the organisational hierarchy, even in sectors where they dominate in numbers. For example while women dominate the health and education sectors, men generally hold the better-paid and higher status jobs. This is illustrated in table 21. While women comprised 67 percent of employment in 1996 only 21 percent of females occupied executive level positions in 1997. Similarly in the Education sector where women accounted for 51 percent of all staff, women occupied only 9 percent of the executive level jobs in the Ministry. At the level of schools, only 2 percent of Headmasters and 20 percent of Principals were females. In the private sector the situation is even worse with extremely few women occupying jobs at higher levels.

Table 21: Percentage of men and women at senior levels within sectors in the government dominated by women

Sector / Position		Percentage	
		Males	Females
Health & Welfare	Director & above	79	21
Education	Director & above	91	9
	Headmaster	98	2
	Principals	80	20
	Deputy Principals	50	50

Source: MOH & MOE, May 1999

Labour force participation is the most direct way of economic participation. Even in the labour force the size of informal employment is never certain and could be considerable. In the Maldives, economic transformation, technological changes and social advancement

have in its wake, changed the labour market and employment structure with widespread under employment and unemployment among women. Men were quick to shift occupations including taking over informal activities, while women, constrained by social structure and culture, were left outside the labour force. New opportunities are however opening up in the new economy that demand new skills and strategies in radically new industries, which cater to the world market. In a world market where the nature and structure of the economy and indeed society, are determined greatly by the forces of globalisation, younger generations of women need to be trained and ready to take advantage of new and emerging opportunities for employment and income generation and enhance their participation in the process of economic development. There is a positive trend in the shift of women's employment towards skilled areas and a gradual increase in their participation in the labour force.

Cultural and Community participation

Culture and the people's way of life show their unique identity and independence. Participating in cultural development serves to pass the values, beliefs and social norms on to future generations. As such, women have always played an important cultural role in the Maldives, where they continue to play an important part in the early socialisation of the young and the expression of cultural values and beliefs through song and dance in addition to taking part in community development activities.

The traditional authority and leadership of the island chief combined with a broad spirit of co-operation and participation, ensures that everybody including women, men, children and the elderly take part in most community activities, whether they are registered members of formal organisations or not. In a rapidly developing economy, the people are constantly engaged in construction work and the development of physical infrastructure, all of which call for dedicated community efforts. Indeed, the people in some of the smaller islands are often unable to go fishing when undertaking 'community work' for development.

Women play an important role in these efforts. If the activity is physically demanding, men normally undertake it even though in some island communities women also take part in beaching dhonis and other demanding physical work. In many cases, women play a supportive role in work performed by men such as by preparing refreshments and assisting in other ways to ensure that work continues uninterrupted. This also reflects the domestic role of women that is culturally ascribed to them and in the end may serve to reinforce the stereotyped roles and perception of women.

However, in Male' the capital, the situation is different. Largely because of the different economic structure and the nature of urban life, women's participation in community activities is often restricted to participation in Government organised Ward Committees and to a lesser extent in private development organisations. Compared to the islands, therefore, women in Male' are less visibly active in community work. Even in Male', however, women are active in informal community work and in community wide efforts such as environmental campaigns and social awareness activities.

Because of the informal nature of certain kinds of community work and the broad participation of women in most community development efforts, the statistics on women's

participation in community activities based mainly on their membership in formal organisations, should be interpreted with caution. At the same time non-governmental and private development initiatives are only beginning to emerge in the Maldives. The general absence of private groupings and organisations tend to limit the opportunity for the increased participation of women in community activities. However, women's participation in community efforts is considerable especially in health related initiatives.

Despite the possible undercount, however, an order of magnitude may be derived from a survey undertaken in 1991²⁰. According to this survey, 7 per cent, or 26 women out of 388 respondents, were members of Ward Committees in Male'. The survey indicates a low level of participation in community activities as measured only by membership in ward committees. They do not include membership in private or non-governmental development organisations. If they were included, the participation of women in community activities would be much higher.

While the overall participation of women in community activity seems small in numbers, their total contribution towards community development is likely to be considerable if all their activities, both formal and informal, are taken in to account. Their willingness to participate is further reflected in the finding that 93 per cent of the respondents believed women should be involved in community development efforts. The large majority felt that women could make a useful contribution in ward development and community awareness raising programmes (30.9 per cent), followed by child care programmes (29.4 per cent), and in the advancement of women's concerns (18.3 per cent).

The overall involvement of women in community development is likely to increase in the future as greater organisational avenues for public participation become available. Women are willing and able, but lack the opportunity and therefore, continue to face constraints in fully participating at the community level. Greater organisational and formal avenues are needed in order to institutionalise the involvement of women in community development efforts in Male'. In the atolls, the smallness of the communities as well as the traditions of consultation, and the representation of women on all development committees have institutionalised their participation in community development efforts over time. Presently efforts are being made to make these institutions more efficient and effective.

Political Participation

While economic participation is important to effectively address and improve the material well being of women, and cultural and community participation highlights the role of women outside the home, political participation ensures that their voice is heard. It also provides women the opportunity to influence decisions about their life choices and ultimately to further their social position. The Maldives has historically seen a number of women in leading public positions both before and after the country embraced Islam. Most noteworthy among them are the queens – Queen Rehendhi Khadeeja, Queen Dhaainkaba, and Queen Raadhafathi.

These women however, were from the nobility and had opportunities for political participation that others in the community did not have. The large majority of women were outside the ring of politics, which could be proportionately small and jealously guarded in

²⁰ Miraldo and Ibrahim, 1991

small communities such as the Maldives. Partly as a result of the weakening of the Sultanate and the lack of successor generations, women from the nobility did not continue to rule the country. Women in general were therefore, largely excluded from broad political participation during the early period of Maldivian history.

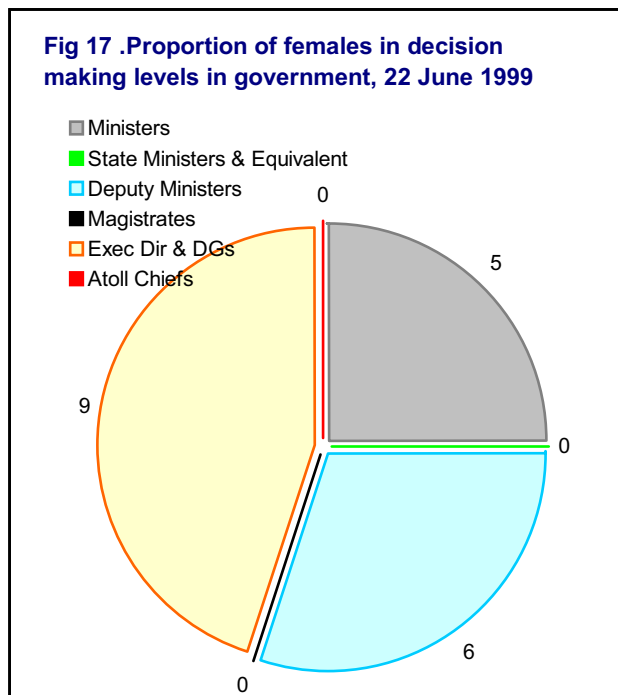
However, during the first Republic in the early 1950s women began to play a greater role in politics. The first political party set up in Maldives in the early 1950s consisted of 4741 members. Nearly one third of them were women. Further, the first parliament had 45 members of whom one fifth were females. Also a Senate was set up which consisted of 9 elected members from among the Parliament members and 9 appointed members. However, the gains made by women were eroded with the dissolution of the First Republic.

The current parliament, which consists of 50 members, has two elected female representatives and three females appointed by the President, comprising 10 percent of parliament members.

Except during the brief period when queens ruled the country there has been no female head of state or government in Maldives. In fact at present the Constitution does not provide for a female leader. According to the Constitution of the country drawn up in 1932 and later revised and adopted on 1 January 1998, being male is one of the prerequisites for being President or Vice President of the Maldives.

At the level of cabinet Ministers there have so far been only two Ministers, both in the social sector. The first female minister was the Minister of Health who was appointed during the 1970s. Later in 1993 another female minister was appointed as the Minister of Women’s Affairs Youth and Sports, and she continues at present as the Minister of Women’s Affairs and Social Security. Females occupy only 8 percent of government decision-making²¹. If levels above that of Directors are considered, the proportion of females serving within the government is negligible compared to men. Females occupy only 3 percent of such posts.

Atoll Chiefs and Island Chiefs form the upper crust of leadership in outer atolls and islands. At present there are two assistant island chiefs and one assistant Atoll Chief at Meemu atoll who are women. There are no female Magistrates in the Maldives. There are no females at the level of Officers in the National Security Service (NSS) although women have been serving in the NSS for about 12 years.



²¹ At the level of decision making here are included Ministers, State Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Executive Directors, Director Generals, and Atoll Chiefs

Table 22: Proportion of males and females at Senior Executive levels in the Government

Designation	Males	Females	Total
Ministers and equivalent	20	1	21
State Ministers and “Dhigumudhdhathah khidmaiyy kurevvi	9	0	9
Deputy Ministers and equivalent	15	1	16
Executive Directors and equivalent	5	1	6
Director Generals and Equivalent	74	7	81
Assistant Director Generals and equivalent	13	1	14
NSS Officers	51	0	51
Directors and equivalent	114	21	135
Atoll Chiefs	18	0	18
Magistrates	169	0	169
Island Chiefs	501	0	501
Total	1026	33	1059

There is no data available on the numbers of males and females serving as Chief Executive Officers in private businesses. Women are not represented in the Maldives Chamber of Commerce, the Maldives Traders Association or in the Maldives Association for Tourism Industries, which are the main organisations that represent the interests of the business community. There is very little representation of women on the Board of Directors of smaller private business companies. On the whole women entrepreneurs are not common.

The media is an important avenue for political participation. Yet few women are represented at influential positions in the media. In the Maldives the two most powerful media organisations are Television Maldives and the Voice of Maldives. Both are managed and run by the government. Within these two organisations and even in the Ministry of Information, Arts and Culture there are no females in top management posts. Trained female journalists are also quite few in number. In addition, the country has three main daily newspapers: Haveeru, Miadhu and Aafathis, all of which have male editors.

The media’s portrayal of women and the type of issues carried by the media are critical to how women are perceived in society and has a strong influence on shaping social attitudes about and towards them. The media’s portrayal of women in film and drama presently tend to reinforce existing perceptions and stereotypes about women, which focuses particularly on the domestic role of women. This tends to promote a subservient role where the husband or male figures are shown to be the dominant figure. In the same way, advertisements, which capitalise on women’s physical appearance and beauty to sell particular products tend to portray women as objects and is demeaning to women. On the contrary, the media could play a powerful role to advocate for gender equality and equity and to assist in changing current public perceptions and practices. The media would have to be sensitised on issues of gender equality and equity and adequate training has to be given to enable it to play a more positive role.

Greater participation of women in the media could be useful in providing a more comprehensive coverage of women’s issues and concerns and to change stereotypical attitudes towards women. And that would constitute political action through positive participation.

5. Empowerment

Empowerment is the end result of achieving gender equity and greater participation in the process of development. At the same time, empowerment itself helps to achieve greater equity and participation in development in the manner of a virtuous cycle.

In this way, empowerment is a process of advancement, which equips women to participate equally in development. As such, having access to resources, education, income and employment, are important aspects of empowerment. Empowerment also becomes the result of that process. Whichever way one sees it, empowerment has in its essence, the concept of power; that is, the power to affect one's life chances and choices²².

For analytical purposes, the concepts of empowerment could be seen at different levels. First the welfare level. At this level it is important to see the extent to which the welfare and basic needs of the female population are met. In the context of the Maldives, recent economic and social progress has considerably improved the quality of life. So that, much of the basic needs are met or are being addressed. A minority of the population live purely on welfare benefits. Women in the Maldives have in this sense, achieved a basic level of empowerment.

The second level of empowerment is access to resources. A higher level of empowerment than the availability of basic services, access to resources ensures greater influence over domestic matters or social concerns. At the household level, resources are for the most part obtained and managed by men although women also exercise some autonomy in this regard. Women who do not have access to their own resources and income have little choice except to accept male authority with regard to managing resources and determining their life choices. In this sense Maldivian women have little economic empowerment that derive from access to resources owing especially to their low participation in the labour force and the relative lack of income sources.

Empowerment through participation in development is yet a third and higher level of self-awareness. In the Maldives, the lack of sufficient economic empowerment and political participation keeps women somewhat outside the mainstream of development while cultural and community participation gives them a sense of belonging, recognition and appreciation. They cannot significantly influence their social position vis-à-vis men in the absence of political and economic empowerment. Therefore, the overall position of women remains challenged unless they assume a greater economic and political role.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security is an important symbol of women's advancement in Maldives and their progress towards empowerment. The ministry which grew from a cell in the President's Office to a Department and finally to a full-fledged Ministry, has encouraged greater political participation of women and carries out many programmes to strengthen Island Women's Committees and their institutional structure. At the national level, efforts are made to entrench women's role in development by mainstreaming their concerns across all social and economic sectors. The institutional

²² Karl M.1995.

structures for promoting the concerns of women have encouraged their greater participation in development. But the practical opportunities remain elusive.

The fourth level of empowerment is conscientisation. Conscientisation is the recognition of gender gaps and being aware of the structural reasons for such disparities. It is a stage of reckoning where understanding gender differences lead to their elimination through conscious action, at social, economic and political levels. Even today, women don't always understand their rights and obligations. Women need greater awareness regarding the legal provisions that are available to them and the importance of promoting their own interests. Culture and tradition continues to act as a barrier to the empowerment of women in many areas of life. This prevents them from taking part in positive action that would release their creative and productive potential for the ultimate benefit of all.

Control is the fifth and ultimate level of empowerment. At this level, women are fully independent and able to determine their life choices including both productive and reproductive choices. This is the ideal stage of empowerment, which women in the Maldives as else where in the world, would aspire to achieve. The present, control over their life choices are constrained by social and cultural forces. As discussed earlier the large majority of women do not control resources at the domestic level or in public. They are poorly represented in the private business sector. Political control is negligible. Hence greater and more concerted efforts are needed by women and society at large, to increase women's control and influence over their own lives.

To be truly empowered, there needs to be equality and equity between the genders, in terms of access to, and availability of social services, especially health and education. The availability of primary health care and the elimination of many infectious diseases indicate the relatively wide access to basic health services. Similarly basic education is near universal and literacy rates are high for both males and females. In addition, basic transportation and telecommunication services are also available throughout the country even though they are inadequate. In the Maldives considerable gaps exist, however, between Male' and the atolls in the availability of secondary schooling and tertiary education. Similarly health care is more accessible in some geographical regions than in others. Therefore, while gaps in equity exist, they are mainly between regions rather than primarily between the genders. Maldivian women then, presently enjoy a basic level of empowerment.

Rapid rates of economic growth and greater participation of women in the economy and polity together with institutional development of a gender management system would lead to their effective mainstreaming and greater empowerment of all women. The real challenge in the empowerment process lies in achieving social, economic and political control over their life choices, which at present seem to be elusive.

6. Implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action

The Beijing Platform of Action identified twelve critical areas of action. They are women and poverty, education and training, women and health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision making, institutional mechanism for the advancement of women, human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment and the girl child.

In the Maldives, the process of national development has laid great emphasis on many of these areas. General economic growth, which averaged 10 percent per annum over the eighties and stayed between 6 to 7 percent during the nineties have considerably reduced widespread poverty. However, as the VPA Report states, the main disparity is between Male' and the rest of the country. Income in Male' is about 3 times higher than in atolls. At the same time, rapid economic growth improved the overall situation of poverty.

As part of the government's poverty reduction strategy at the regional level, many programmes have been introduced especially at the project level to involve women in economic activities. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security with technical assistance from the Bank of Maldives conducts a small-scale soft loan scheme under a UNFPA executed project. In addition, UNDP and IFAD also carry out loan schemes and enterprise management programmes for women and the community in general. Skill development workshops have also been carried out by the MWASS towards enhancing the capacity of women to more actively participate in economic development.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security has been advocating for the greater participation of women in political and decision-making levels. However, the government bureaucracy has a disproportionate percentage of men in higher positions, as discussed earlier. Similarly women are largely excluded from senior decision-making positions in the private sector. Nevertheless, efforts continue to be made to improve the representation of women at policy levels in the government. The MWASS has conducted a series of regional workshops on increasing political awareness and participation.

Many efforts have been made over the last twenty years to develop the institutional capacity for the advancement of women. The development of IWCs the establishment of the National Women's Council to advise and guide the development of policies for gender mainstreaming. And the institutionalisation of women's issues at the central level shows a rapid and steady development in the institutional mechanism for the advancement of women.

The human rights of women are guaranteed in the constitution. In addition, legal measures are being taken to further strengthen their position. In particular, the legal protection of children's rights including those of girl children and the enactment of the Family Law Act are important steps that have been taken to ensure further improvement in the position of women. The government has recently extended maternity leave from forty-five days to sixty days with a choice of commencing leave in the last trimester of pregnancy until after the delivery. The 3-day leave given to husbands has been extended to one week. These changes constitute a significant step towards the improvement of the welfare of pregnant women and the rights of women.

In addition, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Security has developed an Action Plan for the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action. The concerns in the action plan are to be addressed at multi-sectoral levels where each sector will take into account the gender implications of all programmes. As part of this process, "the Beijing Platform of Action has been taken to the people"²³. In this way the public have been invited to identify the critical issues facing Maldivian women in relation to the twelve areas identified in the Beijing Platform of Action. This exercise found Education and Training of women, Women's Power and Decision making and Women and Poverty to be the most important areas. These are also the key areas of focus in order to reach the highest levels of empowerment.

The government is committed to focus its attention on achieving the full and equal contribution of women and men in the process of national development as highlighted in the country's Vision 20-20. The Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Security Honourable Rashida Yousuf, stated at the Conference to commemorate the Third Beijing Biennium that the country's priorities in the immediate future were education and training, advocacy and social mobilisation, economic empowerment and strengthening the institutional mechanism for the advancement of women.

²³ Minister of Women's Affairs and Social Security, Hon. Rashida Yousuf's Address at the Conference on Commemorating Beijing III, Bandos Island Resort, Maldives, 26-27, September 2000.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This report has reviewed the situation of gender and development in the Maldives over the last twenty years. Given the inter-relationship between the concepts of gender and development, the main issues have been discussed within a framework of equity, participation and empowerment.

The Maldives witnessed rapid economic change and social development during the past two decades. The increasing prosperity enabled the public sector to invest in social services and infrastructure, which has improved the delivery of health, education and most of the basic social services. The private sector has also begun to make investments in these areas, which has further increased the accessibility of services to a wider spectrum of people and assured a high degree of gender equity in terms of access to social services. However, there are some areas, which compromise equity as summarised below.

In health, the areas of concern are:

- Inadequate sexual and reproductive health services
- Continuing high maternal mortality rates.
- High child mortality.
- Nutritional deficiencies leading to high level of stunting and wasting

In the areas of concern in education are:

- Lower achievement of boys in primary, middle and secondary level
- Low average attainment and completion rates, for both genders
- Lower access to secondary education for girls compared with boys
- Lower rates of enrolment for females in vocational and technical areas due to cultural perceptions about “femininity” and “masculinity”
- Lower rate of female enrolment in the tertiary institutions.

Equity issues were also identified in the legal area:

- Differential rights of men and women with regarding to testifying and giving evidence
- Differential inheritance rights
- Divorce procedures and inadequate enforcement of child support laws/regulations
- Violence against women/domestic violence

Complex issues of gender disparity can also be seen in the area of participation. Women and men participate in social, economic, cultural and political spheres in different ways. Not always can these differences be compared with each other because they both play different but functional roles within the social-cultural system. It could even be possible to argue that they are complementary ways of participating in the same process of development. If however, different forms of participation intrinsically imply a loss for one or the other person, then it infringes on the social position of individuals and inhabits them from enjoying the full and equal benefits of development. Hence, issues relating to participation in each of the identified areas are as follows.

At the household level the main concerns are:

- Insufficient sharing of work and responsibilities at the household level which tends to burden women
- Difficulties faced by women heads of households in the absence of secure and reliable sources of income
- Household work/domestic responsibilities prevent women from gaining productive employment outside the home
- Lack of control over household resources
- Cultural perceptions/media portrayal which perpetuate women's stereotypical role as nurturer

At the level of economic participation the main issues are:

- Structural and technological change that displaces female labour
- Low level of requisite skills among women for reemployment under new economic conditions
- Economic dependence of women on men and the continuing low employment rate of women
- Cultural barriers to occupational choices
- Lack of institutional support systems such as child-care facilities for women with children.

Relevant issues at the level of cultural and community participation are:

- Lack of institutional avenues for greater participation of women in community and cultural affairs
- Weak organisational capacity of community organisations/women's organisations
- Lack of non governmental development organisations in the country to promote greater involvement of women in this area

While the basic level of gender equity is present in Maldivian society to achieve higher levels of equity it would be important to address the issues identified above. The relatively low level of political participation reduces the relative position of women in society. It also deprives them of the cultural and social freedom to influence their life choices. Under these conditions, the empowerment of women remain at a low level across the board, even though specific social classes, especially the middle class may have achieved greater freedom of choice in determining their future status. However, the present analysis did not focus on class relations and therefore all conclusions are made at a general level, which may well show an accurate picture, given the large numerical size of the lower income classes.

The main issues with regard to empowerment are:

- Women do not have broad ownership and control of resources
- They are often unable to make independent productive or reproductive choices
- Lack of consciousness about the structural reasons for gender disparities and the inadvertent endorsement of oppressive conditions

These, therefore, are some of the main issues that emerge from the report. Given below are some of the recommendations to alleviate the disparities in gender relations and achieve

higher levels of empowerment through economic growth and broad-based participation in all social and developmental areas.

Recommendations

Health

- Further improve access to sexual and reproductive health services through training of health care providers.
- Provide greater access to family planning through social marketing.
- Encourage greater access to IEC and counselling on sexual and reproductive health.
- Educate adolescents on sexual health and reproductive behaviour
- Provide diagnostic and treatment services for treatment of breast cancer, cervical and others that affect women
- Carry out public campaigns on safe motherhood practices in order to reduce maternal morbidity and deaths.
- Enhance health care delivery and the provision of infrastructure to overcome the barriers of geography
- Encourage greater participation of males in RH activities.
- Move towards a holistic concept of RH and a cohesive RH policy.
- Establish an effective system for the prevention and management of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS
- Develop and implement a sustainable program to reduce malnutrition among children, especially girls.
- Conduct research to find out the reasons for the gender discrepancies in malnutrition.
- Strengthen 'well-women' clinics established at different health facilities.
- Conduct life skills education program for students of secondary schools as well as out of school adolescents of both sexes. Such programs should be designed to empower girls to say "no" to unprotected sex and any form of abuse and to advocate men's participation in empowering women.

Education

- Conduct surveillance and careful monitoring of progress of students in primary, middle and second school with a view to raising the average pass rate at all levels.
- Increase access to secondary education in the atolls by providing necessary infrastructure and by devising other means such as temporary classes to induct students into secondary education
- Encourage through time-bound affirmative action the greater enrolment of girls in tertiary education
- Create public awareness about the need to encourage females into educational fields presently dominated by males.
- Review curriculum materials and textbooks to eliminate gender biases.
- Establish a database that will provide comprehensive gender disaggregated data on educational attainment and performance at the primary, middle school and secondary levels.

- Conduct research on why women do not seek higher education and formulate a plan of action based on findings to encourage more women to seek higher education.
- Sensitise teachers, curriculum developers and writers of textbooks on the need for gender-neutral educational materials.

Legal System

- Conduct research into Islamic jurisprudence and its relationship to local culture.
- Initiate legal reform in the areas of providing evidence and inheritance
- Create greater awareness among women about their legal entitlements and rights.
- Establish a gender sensitive legal mechanism that would encourage abused women and men to seek the necessary legal assistance and justice.
- Establish a system to provide legal advice for victims of abuse.
- Address problems women face with regard to divorce procedures and inadequate child support

Addressing these areas would create the conditions for greater gender equity in access to services and in the legal domain. Equity would need to be complimented by greater participation of women in the total developmental context. The following recommendations are made towards overcoming the constraints to participation identified previously.

Household participation:

- Create awareness about the importance of equal participation of men and women in household work.
- Encourage women to take a leadership role in household affairs in order to increase their say in domestic decision-making.
- Create appropriate cultural change through awareness campaigns on the need for a balance between domestic duties of women and their social and economic participation outside the home

Violence Against Women/Gender-based violence

- Conduct research on gender-based violence/domestic violence
- Initiate support services & counselling for victims
- Greater IEC/Advocacy on issue of gender-based violence/domestic violence

Economic participation:

- Conduct intensive skills development programmes for women in order to overcome the negative effects of technological change.
- Enhance the economic independence of women through greater participation in the labour force.
- Identify specific economic areas in which women could contribute effectively.
- Implement credit schemes for the benefit of women entrepreneurs
- Create an enabling environment for women to work outside the home.

Cultural and community participation:

- Improve the organisational awareness and capacity to promote greater participation of women such as the creation of developmental organisations and improving management of existing organisations.
- Give greater public recognition to outstanding women in the community to encourage the development of role models.

Political participation:

- Conduct workshops and hold public forums to raise the political consciousness of women.
- Encourage and support women to stand for elections at all levels.
- Strengthen the institutional machinery for the advancement of women through training and organisational and managerial skills.
- Increase the number of suitably qualified women in decision-making levels of in the public and private sectors.
- Promote the mainstreaming of women across all developmental areas to encourage their participation in all spheres of social life.
- Time bound affirmative action to ensure a specified percentage of all decision-making positions and bodies within the public and private sector will be women.
- Sensitise public officials on the importance of women's participation in all fields of development.

Media

- Sensitise media personnel on issues of gender and development
- Provide incentives for women to enter journalism studies through specially targeted scholarship schemes;

Gender equity and participation in development are important ways to increase the empowerment of women. At present, the level of empowerment derives from the relatively high level of equity that has followed recent economic progress. However, both equity and participation continue to be constrained by culture, tradition and lack of social and self-awareness. It is important, therefore, to raise the consciousness of women and men and their awareness about fundamental rights and the detrimental impacts of gender stereotyping. Overcoming deeply ingrained values and beliefs would not be easy or simple. But it is necessary in order to reach higher levels of empowerment and self-awareness.

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