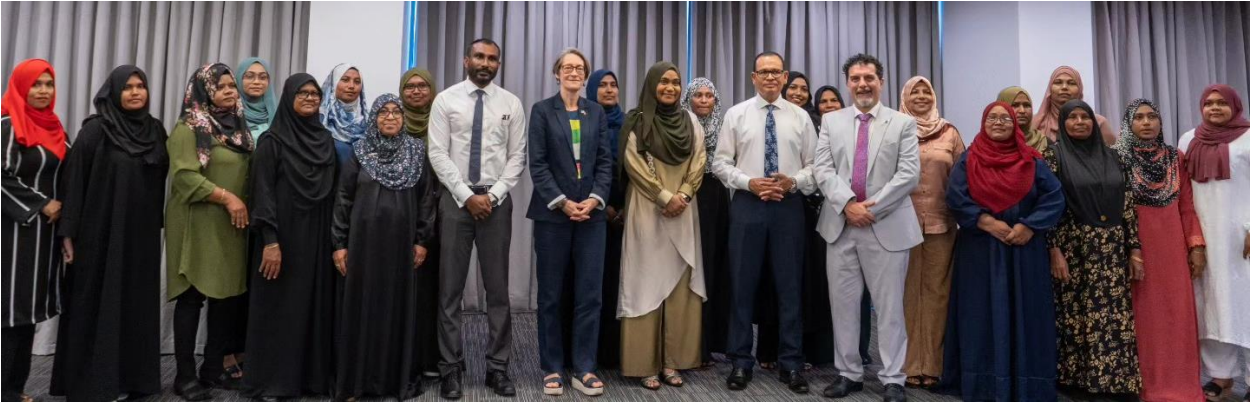


Women in Local Governance Forum

Final Report

12 – 13 December 2023



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In accordance with the responsibility conferred on the Local Government Authority under the Decentralization Act, the Authority has been working in various ways to strengthen and promote decentralization in the Maldives. From the nine key strategic goals that the authority strategically focuses on to improve its functioning, two key goals are 'empowering women politically and economically' and 'increasing women's participation in governance'. As part of its efforts to promote these two sectors, the Authority will organize a series of women forums specifically curated for women called 'Ranhiru Dharubaaru'.

In this regard, the second iteration of the series, held from December 12-13, 2023, was conducted by the Local Government Authority with the support of the Government of UK – FCDO, Maldives' Ministry of Social and Family Development and UNDP Maldives jointly. The forum was designed specifically targeting women councilors and members of women's development committees in all cities and atolls. The forum saw the participation of 40 participants, of which 20 participants were women councilors and the remaining were WDC members. This cohort was representative of every administrative city and atoll in the country.

The forum was designed to target women in local governance specifically to increase women's participation, increase women's representation within the local governance system, and enabling to create a forum where women councilors and WDC members can come together to discuss and exchange views and information and advocate for gender sensitive policies. The forum also saw the contribution of thematic experts discussing with participants on key specific areas of concern.

Key Areas Discussed within the Forum:

1. Gender in Lived Reality
2. Gender in the Workplace
3. Gender and Decentralization

Forum Proceedings

The 2-day forum was conducted through a dynamic process of providing pertinent information from stakeholders about the selected areas and fostering discussion amongst all participants and between stakeholders. During the first session of the first day of the forum, the forum participants were briefed about the Ministry of Social and Family Development's national Gender Equality Action Plan.

In the second session, UNDP Maldives briefed the participants on the social challenges they face in working towards equality in everyday life, followed by an extensive discussion among the groups on how to eliminate the various ways in which discrimination perpetuates and reduce the structural challenges faced by women in local governance.

During the third session of the day, UNDP Maldives briefed the participants on the discrimination in the workplace including the limited availability of training and other learning opportunities, and the challenges they face in coordinating local governance strategies and administrative challenges in the workplace. This session was also followed by a comprehensive discussion among the participants regarding challenges and possible solutions.

In the first session of the second day, participants were briefed by LGA regarding various dynamics of gender in the journey to realize decentralization within the country. These discussions were followed again by a detailed discussion where participants shed further light on the contextual situations faced in different atolls and circumstances.

The afternoon session consisted of discussing who the main stakeholders of decentralization were, in strategizing and presenting action points on possible solutions that the participants recommend in addressing all of the issues discussed.

<p>Issue 1</p>	<p>Political parties not providing opportunities for women and forcing currently elected women councilors to decide/work a certain way.</p>		
<p>Proposed Solution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amending the law to include a women’s quota in key positions of political parties - Amending the law to include a quote for women in Parliament 		
<p>Activities to be undertaken</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amending the constitution - Increasing awareness on the constitution - Increasing opportunities for women to undertake relevant training 		
<p>How the activities will be measured</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting training programs - Achieving gender equality - Amending the constitution within 1 year - Amending the policies of political parties 		
<p>Possible outcomes of the activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased opportunities for women in political positions - Equal opportunities for women in the political sphere - Increased representation of women in Parliament - Increased representation of women in political party leadership positions 		
<p>Tentative timeline for implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual forums targeting various political areas - Achieve gender equality in the political sphere and increased opportunities for women 		
<p>Lead implementer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parliament - Political Parties - Elections Commission 	<p>Lead Responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Majlis: Amending the laws - EC: Advising - Parties: lobbying
<p>Supporting Implementer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LGA - Ministries that work with councils 	<p>Supporting Responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LGA: advising and lobbying

Issue 2	Lack of WDC-specific mandate, and challenges arising from WDC guidelines not being amended		
Proposed Solution	Undertake policy reforms and provide a working environment like councils		
Activities to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Undertake skills development programs for WDCs - Conducting awareness programs 		
How the activities will be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased number of women councilors who can make budgetary decisions benefiting the community - Allowance of maternity leave, pre-maternity leave, living allowance - Set times for working (8 hours) and have set roles and responsibilities 		
Possible outcomes of the activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women feel more confident in getting into the political sphere - Increased belief from the community that the WDC plays a crucial role in community development 		
Tentative timeline for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 years 		
Lead implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LGA 	Lead Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LGA
Supporting Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finance Ministry - Parliament 	Supporting Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Majlis: Undertake monitoring, amend policies, eradicate challenges for WDCs and councils

Issue 3	No role for women councilors and WDC members in the Atoll Councils		
Proposed Solution	Amend LGA procedural guidelines to reflect necessitate women councilors' representation at Atoll Council general meetings and increase representation of WDC members		
Activities to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amending LGA procedural guidelines - Educating councils and WDCs on the above changes - Undertaking monitoring of the implementation of the changes 		
How the activities will be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting training programs (2 times annually) - Undertake monitoring and quality assurance of the proposed changes every quarter 		
Possible outcomes of the activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased empowerment of women - Diverse discussions in island development, and more innovative solutions - Increased communication and healthy competition between Atolls 		
Tentative timeline for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amending procedural guidelines: 4 months - Conducting awareness and education of the changes: 2 months 12 days - Introducing the changes to the procedural guidelines: everyday 		
Lead implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LGA - Parliament 	Lead Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amending procedural guidelines - Mainstreaming the changes
Supporting Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All government institutions that are key stakeholders 	Supporting Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advising amending process - Participating intraining of councils and WDCs

Issue 4	Lack of support from men and family members for women in political work and senior positions		
Proposed Solution	Increasing awareness of the community to become more inclusive and thus increase women's participation in political activities		
Activities to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss women's empowerment within the family on all platforms - Utilize social media to shed light on exemplary women as examples and show that political work can also be done ethically. 		
How the activities will be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased number of women who are accepted by society be involved in political work 		
Possible outcomes of the activities			
Tentative timeline for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No set tentative timeline 		
Lead implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government institutions 	Lead Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entrusting the responsibilities of the Ministry by law or regulation made by law
Supporting Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools, families, NGOs, political parties, social media 	Supporting Responsibilities	

Issue 5	Not accepting the opinions shared by a woman and discrimination based on gender in awarding tasks and assigning responsibilities		
Proposed Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase awareness on gender equality - Increase awareness on the Gender Equality Act and implement activities contained within it - Amending guidelines of councils to necessitate the requirement of women representation in making any decision 		
Activities to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct a survey to understand the level of gender inequality and discrimination - Conduct an awareness campaign on the Gender Equality Act - Implementing laws and guidelines/increasing awareness on laws and guidelines 		
How the activities will be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 surveys conducted annually - 50 staff trained: 6 months - Implementing laws and guidelines: 2 months - Evaluation: 6 months 		
Possible outcomes of the activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased opportunity for women to share opportunities - Ensure gender equality - Establish a conducive environment where opinions of women are acknowledged and accepted 		
Tentative timeline for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct Survey: 1 month - Develop/amend laws and regulations: 2 months - Conduct training programs: 6 months - Introduce the laws and regulations: 3 months - Total 1 year period of implementation – re-assessment conducted at 6 months 		
Lead implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atoll Councils, City Councils 	Lead Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveying - Developing regulations - Conduct training - Monitoring
Supporting Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councils - WDCs 	Supporting Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing changed regulations - Advising on amending process

Issue 6	Society believes that women should only engage in certain jobs/employment		
Proposed Solution	- Introduction of “Good Behaviour” as a subject		
Activities to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct various programs to create awareness among the community. - Include a new subject within the school curriculum to make school children familiar with the subject of “Good Behaviour” 		
How the activities will be measured	- All school students from Grades 1 to 10 (in all islands and atolls)		
Possible outcomes of the activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a generation of women that can work at the same level equally alongside men - Develop a generation of capable and courageous women 		
Tentative timeline for implementation	- Annually, according to the National Curriculum		
Lead implementer	- Ministry of Education	Lead Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop new curriculum - Implement new curriculum
Supporting Implementer	- All schools	Supporting Responsibilities	- Teach “Good Behaviour” as a subject to all students

<p>Issue 7</p>	<p>Lack of training opportunities and programs for women</p>		
<p>Proposed Solution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrating training programs for women into the workplan. - Council and LGA to formulate a policy to ensure training programs are provided to women so that women can be on the same level playing field as men 		
<p>Activities to be undertaken</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of women's training programs in the council's workplan every year. - LGA to implement programs in a similar manner involving the council and women's development committees of each island/city. 		
<p>How the activities will be measured</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women's training programs should be implemented once in three months. - LGA-run programs at a frequency of 2 programs per year. - LGA to formulate a policy to involve women in training. 		
<p>Possible outcomes of the activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women are more trained and capable 		
<p>Tentative timeline for implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 years – a full term for all councils and WDCs 		
<p>Lead implementer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atoll Council - City Councils - LGA 	<p>Lead Responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure information about all trainings are received by all islands/councils and WDCs
<p>Supporting Implementer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parliament 	<p>Supporting Responsibilities</p>	

<p>Issue 8</p>	<p>Women being harassed at the workplace</p>		
<p>Proposed Solution</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct awareness programs (for women and the community) - Ministry of Social and Family Development to monitor compliance under the Gender Equality Act. - Councils to set up and mobilize committees on gender equality 		
<p>Activities to be undertaken</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of gender equality committees by councils. - Conducting awareness programs. - MoSFD to monitor compliance to the Gender Equality Act 		
<p>How the activities will be measured</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design of training programs - No. of people trained from the programs - Frequency of monitoring undertaken by the Ministry 		
<p>Possible outcomes of the activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women face no harassment at the workplace, and can comfortably engage in various employment fields - Community believes decisions taken by women - Ascertain that any form of harassment is met with equal repercussion, justice is ensured 		
<p>Tentative timeline for implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 year 		
<p>Lead implementer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Atoll Council - Island Councils - LGA - MoSFD 	<p>Lead Responsibilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councils: develop programs - LGA, MoSFD: monitoring achievement of gender equality
<p>Supporting Implementer</p>		<p>Supporting Responsibilities</p>	

Issue 8	Society's belief that women have to live in a certain way and that doesn't give them the time they need for their own development		
Proposed Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct training programs - Ensure increased representation of women in all activities being currently conducted 		
Activities to be undertaken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If the above does not suffice, lodge official complaints to LGA 		
How the activities will be measured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased representation and participation of women in the workplace - Increased confidence in women to express opinions and make decisions 		
Possible outcomes of the activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing the belief in society that women have to live a certain way 		
Tentative timeline for implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As long as it takes to realize the desired change 		
Lead implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councils - LGA 	Lead Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting training programs - Advising councils
Supporting Implementer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parliament 	Supporting Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase women empowerment by amending current laws

Conclusion

The forum saw the participants discussing and sharing important information that would be necessary to increase women's participation and representation within the local governance system. In addition, there was a series of discussions on the difficulties faced by women to participate in the affairs of the local governance system politically and economically, as well as the WDCs' experience in administrative governance.

In addition, the forum saw women councilors and WDC members from all cities and atolls meeting in a common environment, sharing their experiences and strengthening the relationship of councils and WDCs. The participants also got to network and connect with relevant agencies to advocate for strategize on the best ways to increase women's participation at the local governance stage.