



- Thanks to USAID, a growing number of residents on one of the most populous islands have an increased sense of responsibility to protect their environment.
- Through training workshops and the development and distribution of the 'Coral Reef Fish of the Maldives' manual among private and public entities, USAID is making advancements in preserving the Maldives' coral reef ecosystems.
- USAID helped establish a media monitoring unit that monitored elections in 2011.

Photo Credit: IUCN Maldives Marine Projects

Country Profile

Maldives, an archipelago of 1,200 coral islands grouped in 26 atolls, is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to global climate change with its highest point only 8 feet above sea level. After 30 years of authoritarian rule, Maldives held its first democratic election and enacted its first constitution in 2008, though its democratic transition remains fragile. Located along major shipping routes in the Indian Ocean, a peaceful and resilient Maldives is critical to maritime security and regional stability.

USAID programs in Maldives address vulnerabilities that climate-related impacts such as rising sea levels and drought have on Maldivians and their livelihoods, and additionally seek to consolidate the country's democratic transition.

OUR WORK

Home to approximately 330,000 people, Maldives was among the world's poorest countries just three decades ago. In 2011, fueled by rich marine life and biodiversity along with a booming tourism industry, the country earned middle-income status. The island nation has also achieved notable improvements in health and education, with life expectancy of 77 years and a 98 percent literacy rate.

Maldives faces undeniable challenges to its future progress due to significant threats posed by climate change. High population density — ranked 11th in the world — and dependence on climate-sensitive industries such as fisheries and tourism exacerbate the country's vulnerability. USAID works to mitigate the adverse effects of global climate change by improving water security and strengthening the management of coastal resources, particularly coral reefs. Maldives' political transition is made more challenging by increasing extremism, political polarization and low representation of women in politics. USAID helps strengthen democratic governance by supporting political reform and reconciliation, civic education and engagement, and increased women's political participation.

ENVIRONMENT AND GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Atoll ecosystems, coral reefs, islands, lagoons and diverse aquatic species are considered to be the lifeline of the country. Not only do they form a basis for Maldives' existence but they also provide shoreline protection and resources upon which the entire economy depends. The biodiversity of atoll ecosystems underpins at least 71 percent of national employment, 89 percent of gross domestic product and 98 percent of exports. These ecosystems are under increasing threat from human and climate change impacts. The Government of Maldives is undertaking a national effort to establish more marine protected areas and enact and implement sustainable coastal fisheries regulations.

USAID helps the Government of Maldives achieve its conservation goals and enhance the country's resilience to the adverse effects of climate change by strengthening the sustainable management of coastal resources, particularly coral reefs. USAID support includes mapping coral reefs, developing a system that monitors the protection of coral reefs and educating Maldivians on the urgency of protecting marine resources critical to economic growth. USAID also works with the tourism industry to foster an eco-friendly culture among visitors and residents alike — a culture that does not yet exist.

In addition, USAID is implementing a water security project on one of the largest and most populous islands, Hinnavaru, which includes providing a new potable water system to all 5,300 residents and building the capacity of utility operators to operate and maintain the system. USAID is also developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for residents to understand water resource management and help mitigate climate change challenges at the household and community levels.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

After 30 years of authoritarian rule, Maldives held its first democratic election and enacted its first constitution in 2008. In 2012, the country experienced an unexpected transfer of presidential power that led to political insecurity and violence. In 2013, national elections resulted in a peaceful transition of power and restoration of political stability. However, media reports highlight concerns that the country is currently at risk for increasing extremism and weakening democratic governance. Low representation of women in politics overshadows the Maldivian political landscape while trafficking-in-persons, narcotics abuse and gender-based violence are challenging the social fabric of the country.

USAID interventions help build the capacity of civil society and Maldivian independent commissions to promote inclusive governance and protect the integrity of the electoral process. USAID's civic education activities enhance constructive and participatory relationships between citizens and their elected leaders, thus supporting pluralism, democratic political space and dialogue. USAID works with marginalized groups, particularly women and youth, to increase their engagement.

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