



- Thanks to USAID, a growing number of Maldivians have an increased understanding of how climate change impacts their households, communities and natural environment.
- USAID helps the government and private sector develop and use tools that enable informed decision-making about coastal resource management.
- USAID supports Maldivian youth through fellowships and educational opportunities that allow for the exchange of ideas and exposure to local and international expertise about coastal and marine management.

Photo credit: Chemonics

Country Profile

Maldives is an archipelago of 1,200 coral islands grouped in 26 atolls in the Indian Ocean. With its highest point only 8 feet above sea level, it is one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to global climate change. Located along major international shipping routes, a peaceful and resilient Maldives is critical to maritime security and regional stability.

Coordinated closely with other U.S. activities in-country, USAID programs address vulnerabilities that climate-related impacts such as rising sea levels, increasing shortages of potable water and droughts have on Maldivians and their livelihoods. USAID programs also seek to promote democratic discourse and practices.

OUR WORK

Home to approximately 330,000 people, Maldives was among the world’s poorest countries just three decades ago. However, rich marine life and biodiversity fueled a booming tourism industry and by 2011, Maldives 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.

However, 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 strengthen the resilience of Maldivians to the adverse effects of global climate change in two main areas: water and coastal resource management, particularly coral reefs.

Politically, Maldives struggles with increased religious extremism, political polarization and low representation of women in politics. USAID helps strengthen democratic practices by supporting civic education, political reform and increased participation of women in politics.

ENVIRONMENT AND GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Atoll ecosystems, coral reefs, islands, lagoons and diverse aquatic species are the lifeline of Maldives. 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 improve the management of protected coastal and marine areas and sustainably manage the fisheries sector.

USAID helps the Government of Maldives achieve 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 coastal and marine resources, monitoring and developing tools for the government and resorts to inform their decision-making around resource management and the protection of coral reefs, and educating Maldivians on the importance of marine resource protection to economic growth.

USAID also works with residents to help them understand and adapt to climate change impacts on their natural environment, particularly the supply of clean water for drinking and domestic use. On Hinnavaru, one of the largest and most populous islands, USAID is providing a new potable water system that will serve all 5,300 residents. The new integrated water management system is partially powered by solar energy and harvests rainwater and desalinates water for human and household consumption. USAID also trains utility operators on how to effectively operate and maintain the system.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

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 the restoration of political stability. However, recent political developments have heightened concerns about increasing extremism and weakening democratic governance. Low representation of women in politics overshadows the Maldivian political landscape while human trafficking, narcotics abuse and gender-based violence are challenging the social fabric of the country.

USAID interventions increase women and youth participation in civic life, engage them in the political process, and support policies, laws and regulations to enable greater participation of women and youth in elections. USAID collaborates with government ministries, independent commissions, local and international partners, stakeholders and the general public to implement its programs.

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Divers, biologists and resort staff contribute to conservation efforts and promote environmentally-friendly practices. Photo credit: IUCN



Citizen scientists and marine biologists collect data on a variety of species to inform decisions affecting marine resources. Photo credit: IUCN