Mid-Term Review of the Asian and Pacific Conference on Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development,
Bangkok 26-28 November 2018
Country statement - Maldives

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Government of Maldives, my delegation and I would like to convey our appreciation to UNESCAP and UNFPA for convening this midterm review of the Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.

The Maldives is a Small Island Developing State with a population of 512,000 dispersed over 187 inhabited islands, across the Indian Ocean. In addition to this the country comprise of many non-administrative islands, including over one hundred tourist resorts. Maldives is a middle-income developing country with a per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of USD 9,088 in 2017.

The country consists of a young population, with 33 percent of the population being children under 18 years. Working age-population stands at its peak providing the country with a demographic window of opportunity. The elderly population accounts for 5 percent. As per the 2014 Census, 16 percent of the country’s resident population were migrants from neighboring countries.

Over the past 25 years since the ICPD Programme of Action and the APPC Ministerial declaration in 2013, the Maldives has achieved much progress in achieving its objectives. While the country faces emerging development challenges, Maldives has achieved remarkable progress in relation to population and developmental issues.
The life expectancy at birth has increased for both men and women, child survival has improved significantly and maternal mortality ratio has declined significantly.

Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) stood at 8 per 1,000 live births, under 5 mortality rate at 9 per 1,000 live births and Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) at 44 per 100,000 live births in 2016.

One of the key factors behind the reduction of maternal and child mortality has been improved access to essential interventions and services. Family planning, antenatal care, delivery at health facilities and skilled birth attendance has all increased. DHS 2009 reported 98% of pregnant women received antenatal care by skilled health care professionals and 95% of deliveries attended by a skilled health personnel. Immunization coverage for all EPI diseases has been successfully maintained at above 90 percent.

The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has decreased over the years to a woman on average having 2.46 children in 2014 and is expected to reach below replacement level of 1.9 children per woman by 2050.

During the period 2010 to 2014, the population of the country grew at a rate of 1.67 percent per annum and is projected to decrease to 0.90 percent by 2050.

**Health and Social Protection**

The social protection programmes in the country provides a range of schemes for the most vulnerable and poor elements of the population. Single parent allowance, foster parent allowance, and disability allowance aims to reduce poverty and improve the living standards of the vulnerable population.

The current Health Master Plan 2016-2025 enables the implementation of SDGs by aligning these with the global and regional health agenda making progress in terms of universal health coverage. This allows for the improvement of access to needed service including a robust healthcare workforce that can deliver those services with increased accessibility to affordable medicines, in terms of strategies to protect people from impoverishment owing to healthcare costs.

Improving mental and psychosocial health is in process with the development of National mental health policy and mental health strategy.
Maldives is moving from a high burden of communicable diseases towards an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases. The universal health coverage scheme allows for the unlimited coverage of all healthcare services.

The Maldivian Health Master Plan (2016-2025) and the National Reproductive Health Strategy (NRHS) 2014-2018 prioritized sexual and reproductive health to include, the strengthening of the adolescent-friendly health services, the government recognizes that reproductive health is a crucial component of the general health.

The sexual and reproductive health services made tremendous improvement in the implementation of the programmes. The National Reproductive Health Strategy work towards strengthening the services provided for providing antenatal care, family planning services. Maldives is committed towards the provision of comprehensive sexuality education and universal access to reproductive health to its population.

**Education**

The country has also achieved universal primary education and secondary education and is moving towards improving the quality of education and educational facilities.

The overarching education policy of the current government, “No Child Left Behind”, reaffirms the government’s commitment in ensuring inclusive quality learning opportunities which caters to the needs of every child to reach their full potential. As such all children are now guaranteed 14 years of free education starting at the age of 4 in pre-primary education till they complete higher secondary education at age of 18 or 19, which includes a 10 years compulsory cycle from grades 1 to 10. A comprehensive inclusive education policy also ensures and facilitates the education provision for children with disabilities across the nation.

The current government that came into effect from November 2018 has a pledge to provide higher education free up to graduate level.
Gender Equality and empowerment of women

The Maldives has made significant progress on gender equity and equality in recent years. This has been reflected in the country’s development indicators such as high literacy rate for both men and women, and gender parity in enrolment and attainment in primary and secondary education. Women are more in higher education than men in the country. Maldives struggled to achieve gender goal in MDG and hence the government needs to plays a pivotal role in achieving the SDG Goal 5.

The enactment of the Gender Equality Law (GEL) in 2016 marks a milestone in laying the legislative foundation to ensure gender equality in the country. Despite the progress at the national level, women remain under-represented in the political and economic sphere.

The Ministry of Gender Family and Social Services provides psychosocial support and basic needs to women and girls who are victims of abuse. In addition, the Ministry in collaboration with UNICEF and the Maldives Police Service launched a call center and a mobile application in 2017 to facilitate the reporting of violence against children.

The gender pay gap for employees show that women earn 20 percent less than men. The high number of women in informal sector and informal employment needs to be addressed.

Additionally, women’s engagement in politics and other leadership activities is not even up to mark. A high percentage of women were among the recently appointed cabinet with 7 out of 19 Minister’s being women.

Elderly population

Elderly constitute 5 percent of our population today. In 40 years, the elderly population will constitute 14 percent of the population share as the population undergoes changes to become an ageing population.

The first ever National Elderly Policy was launched in October 2017 and works toward a National Action Plan for the implementation of the National Elderly Policy is currently underway.
**Good practices on ageing**

The primary objective of Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme (MRPS) is to ensure individuals save during employment to cater for their livelihood in retirement and ultimately creating financial independence.

MRPS is a defined contributory pension scheme funded from contributions from both employees and employers. Presently, the Pension Act mandates a contribution of 14 percent of the pensionable wage, comprising of a minimum of 7 percent each from the employee and the employer.

Additionally, old age pension scheme provides MVR 5,000 per month as basic pension benefit to ensure financial security for the all persons aged 65 years and above.

**Poverty and inequality**

The proportion of the population living below the national poverty line stands at 8.2 percent in 2016. In particular, the number of poor people in the Atolls is more when compared to Male’.

The income inequality in 2016 as per the gini coefficient stands at 0.313 while the inequality in Male’ is higher than in the Atolls.

**Employment**

According to the 2016 Household Income and Expenditure Survey the female labour force participation rate is as low as 42 percent. Women among the youth of 18-35 years who were not in employment, education or training were higher than that of men (39 percent for women and 17 percent for men).

While the labour force participation rate is low among women, women in managerial position is also low (at 19.5 percent). Despite the fact that many women are pursuing higher education, the low participation of women in such activities has to be addressed and empowered. In 2016 nearly half of the women (46%) who are not employed prefer to work at home or home-based work, as per the HIES. Lack of support services such as child care, elderly care limits the opportunities for women in paid work, as 53 percent of their time is spent on unpaid care work.

Unemployment rate among youth remains a challenge. Creating decent jobs and safe space for youth is of importance and is a priority of the current government.
About 20 percent of the contribution to the retirement pension scheme comes from hotels, tourist resorts and travel agencies categories. Women working in the tourism industry remains very low. Contributions to the retirement pension scheme by the private sector has increased tremendously over the years from 3 percent in 2010 to 59 percent in 2017. However, proportion of women employees are much lower in the private sector.

As per the employment approval issued, the number of expatriate employees in the country increased from 57,424 to 76,342 during the period 2013 to 2017.

Migration and Urbanization

With better infrastructure and services and employment opportunities the capital Male’ continues to attract high levels of migration, both internal as well as international.

Maldives population projection highlights that the migrant population is expected to increase by 10 percent growth rate over the next 8 years and the share of foreigners is expected to increase to 41 percent by 2054. Addressing the migration issues and challenges in the country in the context of socio-economic development needs to be prioritized and requires policy attention.

Several legislative changes including laws, policies and programmes were implemented in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of migrants. This includes the salary and wages enforcement regulation for foreign migrant workers, which ensures that the salaries and wages of all foreign migrant workers are deposited to a bank account. This legislation enables the Labour Relations Authority (LRA) to closely monitor and identify discrepancies in the employment of foreign migrant workers, and take action accordingly. In addition to this, it also acts as the institution in the Maldives for potential victim identification under the Anti-Human Trafficking Act.

Population and sustainable development

The population dynamics of the country is expected to undergo remarkable changes in future with a decreasing child population and with an increasing ageing population. The composition of population between Male’ and Atolls changes with more than 64 percent of the Resident Population being concentrated in Male’.
In order to fully capture the first demographic dividend, it is important to build on the youth human capital, acquiring them with the necessary skills and education to equip them for a productive work force.

Sustainable development implicates many challenges for the country. A recent analysis on ‘Maldives’s Population Dynamics: Policy Prospects for Human Growth and Opportunity’, highlighted need for Maldives to prioritize three specific challenges, namely:

➢ improve youth’s human capital, reproductive health outcomes and gender equality,
➢ capture first demographic dividend and
➢ manage internal and international migration.

These were identified as the key building blocks to fulfill SDG goals and policy commitments.

**Data and Evidence**

Maldives has a decentralized statistical system and addressing the availability, coordination and dissemination of data always remains a challenge. With SDGs, majority of the indicators are based on administrative data sources. Strengthening administrative data and to use it for statistical purpose requires immense support from all the sectors involved and is accorded as high priority by the government.

The capacity for information collection, collation, analysis and reporting also varies widely throughout the system, with an urgent need in some areas to improve and upgrade capacity. One such area is the Vital Registration System (VRS) where numerous delays are being faced in generating and entering records into the system. The functionality of the whole VRS system needs be addressed to get data in a timely manner. The well-developed national ICT infrastructure needs to be better utilized, and new technologies need to be integrated into the information system to gather data more easily.

In order to collect migration data, and the process can only be complemented by regularly updated information for dissemination and awareness raising.

Work is underway in developing the second ‘National Strategy for the Development of Statistics’ (NSDS) in the Maldives for the period 2019 to 2030,
to address data issues and focus on modernization of data infrastructure and
the production of statistics for the monitoring of SDG indicators.

Reaffirming commitment to ICPD agenda

I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Government of Maldives’
commitments to the ICPD goals, and accords a high priority to its
implementation. We look forward for successful deliberations and productive
outcome with strong partnerships and actions at the regional level to achieve
our shared commitments.

Thank you Chair