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**COUNTRY PAPER
MALDIVES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Maldives is a nation of 1190 islands with a population of 305,000 as of mid 2007. The country consists of small islands scattered in an area of 90,000 sq. km in the Indian Ocean, southwest of Sri Lanka. From north to south, the country covers a stretch of 820 kilometers; from east to west at its widest, it covers a distance of 120 kilometers. Only 196 islands are permanently inhabited by local people.

The island universe in the Maldives is particularly varied and diverse. All are very small. According to the population and housing census in the year 2006, only 30 inhabited islands have a land of more than 1 square km in area. Only 16 islands have a population of more than 2,000 inhabitants. This gives the Maldives a geography that is unique, even by the exceptional standards of small archipelagic states.

2. CURRENT STATISTICAL SYSTEM OF THE MALDIVES

The statistical system of the Maldives is decentralized, with the various government ministries and agencies generating statistics through censuses, surveys and through by-product of administrative and regulatory functions.

The Statistics Division of the Ministry of Planning and National Development (MPND) occupies a key role in generating all-purpose statistics such as population, households and businesses through censuses and surveys; and in compiling the national accounts. It has a critical role as the coordinator of statistical activities of the country. The coordination role has to ensure that all the agencies generating statistics follow common definitions and standards. It also takes the lead in developing statistical manpower resources in the country.

3. ENHANCING STAFF CAPACITY OF THE STATISTICS DIVISION

The expansion of the statistical services in the country requires additional trained manpower to carry out the statistical activities. This enlargement of the mandate of the Statistics Division has subsequently increased the number and complexity of tasks and responsibilities to be executed by the organization. It is essential to develop a proper human resource development plan for degree and diploma programs for present and future staff of the organization and thereby increase the incentive of the staff to serve the organization on a long-term basis. On one hand, this human resource plan should be instrumental to be able to place staff with appropriate educational background in middle and higher management position, and on the other hand it should meet the increasing competition among public and private institutions to recruit and maintain qualified Maldivian staff and stop the high rate of staff turnover experienced by this organization.

Although, this type of training is necessary and highly valued, it is not sufficient to retain the staff within the organization on a long-term basis. Due to the considerable importance attributed to higher education, in part induced by higher salary levels,

staff with work experience tends to leave the organization with the increasing number of opportunities for higher studies becoming available elsewhere.

4. TRAINING OF STAFF

Due to the small size of the country and lack of specialized tertiary education, entry-level staff in the statistical system generally is coming straight from high-school. They obtained either O-level or A-level certificates. **All statistical training has been provided during their period of employment.**

In the past, this has been a rather haphazard process. Often, the first step of the process has been to obtain some certificate from short-term statistical training courses, as conducted for instance by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), either at its premises in Japan or as country course in Male' or the sub-region.

The second level of training was generally obtained by attending a Diploma course program at one of the foreign training institutes providing those training. This was then generally followed by a bachelors or a masters degree course, depending on the past training and work experience of the individual staff member and the entry requirements of the university.

The main problems with the past practices were, first, that there was no clear training plan for the individual staff members. It leads to frustration, poor morale and a higher staff turnover due to better training prospects provided by other agencies within or outside the government. The second problem is that the entry-requirements of the universities are being increased so that it becomes much more difficult for the Maldivians, who lack adequate training facilities at home, to substitute formal training requirements with more abundant work experience.

In this respect, it may be noted that work experience of staff in the Maldivian statistical service is in general much broader and richer than that of staff at the same points in their careers in many other countries. First, the limited number of statistical staff requires them to cover a much wider area of statistics. Second, the staff has to move much more frequently from one area to another as a statistical activity of any size (e.g. an economic or household survey) requires the reassignment of staff to support those activities. In addition, **because of the small numbers of staff, many are assigned to short-term in-country training courses provided as part of various technical assistance programs.** The three factors mentioned above together indeed can substitute for a fair amount of formal training. However, with more and more focus on standardized procedures in the education systems they can mostly not be taken into account any more. This is reducing the opportunities for staff currently searching university entrance.

The Maldives has established an Accreditation Board (MAB), which provides standards for the post secondary-education in the country and lays out its relationships with degree course that for the moment still need to be obtained from abroad. At the same time, the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) has

developed a wide range of diploma courses while various private institutions too have come up with various training programs.

The Statistics Division of the Ministry of Planning and National Development (MPND/SD) is developed a two-year Advance Diploma Course in Applied Statistics in collaboration with the MCHE. The first batch graduated this year and the second batch of students is waiting for the commencement of the program. Technical assistance of a consultant and training materials have been received from UNSIAP for this program. The MCHE plans to offer the course on bi-annual basis due to shortage of resources and lecturers. As it was mainly targeted for government employees, the course was conducted on the basis of part-time evening class, but with the experience of the first batch, now it is planned to conduct on full time basis.

Educational developments in the Maldives now have entered a period of accelerated growth and degree courses in several fields are now being offered. MCHE expects to offer a one-year bachelor's degree course to complement the advanced diploma course from mid next year.

It is expected that short-term training received at SIAP, ISEC, IIPS and other foreign institutions can be credited towards the diploma course requirements. On successful completion of the Advanced Diploma Course, staff will have 180 credits towards the minimum of 270 credits required for the bachelor's degree study is not (yet) available locally.

There is a continuous movement of staff and the overall staff requirements of the statistical service in the country will need to enhance the staff to cope with the growth in the volume of work.

STRENGTHENING OF STATISTICAL CAPACITY AT ISLAND AND ATOLL LEVELS & ELECTRONIC TRANSFER OF DATA BETWEEN ATOLLS AND MALÉ.

In the decentralized statistical system, it is the atoll and island staff takes the main responsibility in the data collection and data provision to the government. Given their position and the ongoing efforts to centrally coordinate, streamline and harmonize of the statistical requirements, it is utmost importance that the statistical capacity of the island and atoll staff is strengthened.

Moreover, the gradual introduction of modern information and communication technology will improve the efficiency and quality of the two-way data transfer and exchange between the islands and atolls and the center, Malé. The statistical and information-technology capability of the staff at atoll and island level is needed to be enhanced. A recruitment policy is also needed that lead to the placement of assistant statistical officers at island level and statistical officers at atoll level.
