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QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT: PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE IN THE MALDIVES



“

It is difficult to find a Maldivian tale where there is not a woman, or a group of women, playing a central role.

”

– The Maldivian Islanders

Xavier Romero-Frias

1999:179



Qualitative Assessment: Perceptions about Women’s Participation in Public Life in the Maldives

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This study, “Qualitative Assessment: Perceptions about Women’s Participation in Public Life in the Maldives”, is made possible with the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of IFES and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AP	Adhaalath Party
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSC	Civil Service Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DQP	Dhivehi Qaumeey Party
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
DRP	Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HRCM	Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
IDP	Islamic Democratic Party
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IWDC	Island Women’s Development Committee
JP	Jumhooreey Party
LFPR	Labour force participation rate
MDA	Maldives Development Alliance
MDP	Maldivian Democratic Party
MLP	Maldivian Labour Party
MMA	Maldives Monetary Authority
MNC	Maldivian National Congress
MSDP	Maldivian Social Democratic Party
PA	People’s Alliance
PP	People’s Party
PPM	Progressive Party of Maldives
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SLP	Social Liberal Party
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WDC	Women’s Development Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Maldives is in the process of democratisation, following a sweeping change to the country's governance structure after the adoption of a revised Constitution in 2008. The country ranked 103 on the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), had a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of US\$5600 in 2013, and has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) at 0.243. While near universal access to primary education has been achieved, gender equality in all aspects of development remain a significant challenge, as the country lags behind in achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The development situation of Maldivian women has been well studied by development partners and other stakeholders over the last three decades. The 2014 IFES study "Women's Empowerment in Political Processes in the Maldives" is one of the most recent among a meaningful body of literature that now exists with insights on issues affecting the progress of women. This qualitative assessment is a response to the recommendation of that 2014 IFES study, to understand negative perceptions and attitudes towards women in public life, including broader societal attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment in the Maldives.

Following several weeks of field visits to seven different locations across the country, this study reached a total of 131 women and men in their communities to obtain their views and perceptions about women's participation in community and public life. The findings of this study reveal that consistent with long-standing gender stereotypes, the societal positioning of women is primarily in the domestic sphere and a significant pre-occupation of women is as mother, parent and chief caregiver to the family. Women participants observed that the double-burden of work, household and childcare responsibilities limited their ability to participate in community activities, as the latter is perceived to be secondary. Nevertheless, women's involvement in community activities was evident, as significant contributors to grassroots level social and political participation. A key issue for women is the situation of the struggling WDCs who lack both the power and budget to fulfil their mandate. This situation is perceived as an indicator of lack of support and acknowledgment by relevant stakeholders to the efforts and contributions of women.

Despite the existing challenges to their development and the socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics that negatively influence progress, the aspirations for gender equality among women is impressive. In some communities, men's support to women's participation in public life was also a positive finding, indicating the potential for men to engage in women's empowerment. It is evident that proponents of non-discrimination and supporters of women's greater participation in public life do exist among men in the Maldives. The willingness with which both women and men participants shared their views and the eloquence with which some women advocated for parity with men was notable. At the same time, the study also revealed that particular religious-based interpretations of women's role in society can limit their ability to participate in public life. There is a critical need to examine and address such interpretations.

Overall, the findings of the study show the prevalence of major socio-cultural, political and economic issues which affect the situation of both women and men. However, what was very clear was that these issues did not entirely suffocate the aspirations among women in particular, about their right to equal participation with men in decision-making and public life for community and national development.

Therefore, the recommendations of this study urge development stakeholders to capitalise on the potential for Maldivian women's increased participation in public life which are found to exist in the beliefs and aspirations of many women and also men. Moreover, the ability of women to work towards that greater developmental goal of gender equality will depend on the type and level of support provided by all relevant stakeholders in the current development context.

SECTION I - INTRODUCTION

1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In June 2014, IFES Maldives published the study “Women’s Empowerment in Political Processes in the Maldives”. A series of recommendations were provided in this report to address identified gaps, in order to help improve the situation of women in the Maldives. One of the key recommendations of the study was the need to change perceptions and attitudes, given the observed prevalence of the issue of stereotyping and negative perceptions of women. In order to initiate a process of change, the report recommended “supplementing existing quantitative data with qualitative studies examining prevailing attitudes and perceptions that marginalize women in public life.”¹ Further, the report recommended broader measures including gender sensitisation of key stakeholders; and engaging in a public awareness campaign to recognise and promote women’s contributions in their communities.

In light of the recommendations of the above study, IFES Maldives initiated this qualitative study. The purpose of this inquiry is to examine the root causes of negative perceptions towards women in decision making roles in the Maldives. This study aims to understand general perceptions and attitudes towards women in public life including broader societal attitudes towards gender equality and women’s empowerment. It seeks further insight into these prevailing concerns through a process of qualitative inquiry using the methodology outlined below.

2. METHODOLOGY

As noted above, this study is a qualitative inquiry to understand the perceptions and attitudes towards women’s participation in public life in the Maldives context. The field work was conducted in the following communities.

- 1) Haa Dhaal Atoll : Kulhudhuffushi and Nolvivaram
- 2) Kaafu Atoll : Malé and Maafushi
- 3) Laamu Atoll : Gan and Fonadhoo
- 4) Gnaviyani Atoll : Fuvahmulah

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were the main data-gathering tool used and FGDs were conducted with both women and men in every community visited. In addition, two to three individual interviews were conducted in order to gain further insights about the communities visited. The majority of individual interviews were conducted at the interviewees’ home or place of work.

Location	Women’s FGD	Men’s FGD	Individual Interview
Haa Dhaal Kulhudhuffushi	16	7	3
Haa Dhaal Nolvivaram	3	4	2
Kaafu Atoll Male’ (1)	6	3	2
Kaafu Atoll Male’ (2)	6	n/a	
Kaafu Atoll Maafushi	10	5	2
Laamu Gan	9	7	3
Laamu Fonadhoo	13	14	2
Gnaviyani Fuvahmulah (1)	10	4	3
Gnaviyani Fuvahmulah (2)	10	4	
Total number of participants	83	48	17

Figure 1: Locations visited and research activities

1 Women’s Empowerment in Political Processes in the Maldives, IFES/USAID, 2014:35

A total of 18 FGDs were planned and 17 FGDs were successfully conducted. Due to the large population size and the administrative dynamics in Malé and Fuvahmulah, 2 FGDs each for both women and men were planned in these two locations. Interestingly, the most challenging FGD to convene was the men's consultation in Malé, due to the unavailability of participants because of busy schedules. Even where prior arrangements were made, last minute changes resulted in two aborted efforts to conduct men's FGDs in Malé, resulting in only one FGD being possible with men in Malé.

This difficulty was not experienced in any of the other communities visited and the field visits were successfully conducted as planned. The breakdown of the FGD consultations, number of participants and individual interviews are provided in Figure 1 above. A total of 131 men and women were reached through these group discussions.

In every community visited, except for Malé, FGD participants were sourced through engagement and support of three specific stakeholder groups: the local council, Women's Development Committees (WDCs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). The criteria used for sourcing participants were that they are of voting age; that they normally resided on the island; and that they would be willing to contribute towards a discussion on women's role and participation in the community.

Attempts were made to ensure each FGD was attended by at least 8 to 10 participants. However, this was not always feasible depending on the availability of participants at a given location during the time of the FGD. Nevertheless, as Figure 1 shows, a very satisfactory response was received from the majority of the locations visited.

All consultations were conducted in Dhivehi and were also recorded with the verbal consent of participants. The data was later transcribed, thematically coded and analysed. The guiding questionnaire used for the FGDs is provided in Appendix 1. The majority of individual interviewees were sourced from among and through FGD participants, selected based on their contribution during discussions and availability. All the individual interviewees were women and where relevant, these interviews were conducted with reference to the FGD discussions, probing for further insights on specific points.

3. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The overall research effort was well planned and executed in the logistically challenging context of the Maldives. Time limitation is one of the main challenges experienced during this study. Nevertheless, the smooth execution of the field visits helped greatly to work within the available time-frame.

Convening men's FGD participants in Malé proved to be an unexpected challenge. Of the three attempts, only one successful FGD was conducted with men in Malé. Elsewhere, despite the limited time available for the consultations, it was possible to convene both men and women FGDs at short notice. Another challenge encountered was the difficulty of arranging meetings with WDCs in several locations, which is a reflection of the situation of the WDCs in the prevailing context. The situation of the WDCs is elaborated in Part II section four of this report in the literature review and, also observed in the findings section in Part III section b [see also Box 8]. However, the support and assistance of WDC members were available in most locations. Therefore, this did not negatively affect the research effort.

Overall, all the field visits went exceptionally smoothly, and credit is due to the IFES Maldives Country Office and programme staff, for their excellent planning and implementation of this research activity.

SECTION II - BACKGROUND

Located in the Indian Ocean, the island nation of the Maldives is among the few 100% Muslim countries in the world, as mandated by its Constitution.² The country has a population of 341,256 nationals, as well as a significant expatriate population.³ The Maldives is a small developing State experiencing the challenges of democratic transition following the country's adoption of a revised Constitution in 2008 which radically changed the system of governance from an autocracy to an open democracy with separation of the three powers of State. The country has experienced significant development gains over the last several decades with a thriving tourism sector, supplemented by fishing, shipping and construction industries. According to the World Bank, in 2013 Maldives had a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of US\$5600.⁴ The country ranks at 103 in the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) although having "major disparity between women and men" in all three dimensions of the Gender Inequality Index (GII) at 0.243.⁵ Maldives also lags behind in achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, despite being an MDG plus country.⁶

In terms of women's development, the arrival of the Family Act in 2000 which set the minimum age of marriage to 18 is a significant milestone which contributed to the transformation of the average age of marriage for women from 16 years in 1995 to 19 years in 2009.⁷ The Maldives has achieved gender parity in access to primary education enjoying 98% school enrolment with more girls than boys in lower secondary education. However, quality of education remains a major hurdle. Significant gender disparity exists in access to tertiary education where urban-rural dynamics disadvantage women in the geographically dispersed communities.⁸

Although Maldivian women have been described as among the most 'emancipated' in the Islamic world and in Asia too, the country is extremely vulnerable to the prevailing global trends of religious conservatism and radicalisation. Access to sexual and reproductive health information and services has a direct correlation to women's autonomy, empowerment and development. However, research has documented the removal of key sexual and reproductive health education information from the school core curriculum during the last fifteen years, which is a development concern.⁹ A recent study produced by human rights NGO Maldivian Democracy Network about the influence of conservative religious ideology in the school Islam curriculum is a disturbing indicator of the socio-cultural shift emerging from such influences.¹⁰ The overall development situation along with gender discriminatory socio-cultural norms and increasingly conservative religious interpretations and practices pose significant barriers to the equal participation of women with men, in all areas of decision-making in public life.

2 Constitution of the Republic of Maldives 2008, Articles 9 and 10

3 Population and Housing Census 2014 : Preliminary Results, November 2014

4 The World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/maldives> (accessed : 29 April 2015)

5 Maldives Human Development Report, 2014:30 ; UNDP Maldives website <http://www.mv.undp.org/content/maldives/en/home/countryinfo/> (accessed : 30 April 2015)

6 Maldives Human Development Report, 2014:30

7 Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behaviour of Young Unmarried Women in Maldives, UNFPA, 2011:7-8

8 Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, 2012:15-16&47

9 Reproductive Health Knowledge and Behaviour of Young Unmarried Women in Maldives, UNFPA, 2011

10 Love for Islam vs "Holy War", Maldivian Democracy Network, March 2015

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The 2014 IFES study on women's empowerment in political processes is one of the most recent among a meaningful body of literature that now exists, which seek to understand the status and situation of women in the Maldives.

The study entitled the Status of Women produced in 1989 is perhaps one of the earliest comprehensive studies conducted to assess the situation of Maldivian women. The twenty year review of Gender and Development in the Maldives from 1979 – 1999 is another valuable study that documents the progress of women in the Maldives. In 2001, the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) country briefing paper on women in the Maldives summed up the status of women in the public arena as follows.

“At present there is one woman in the Cabinet (Minister of Women's Affairs and Social Security) and five women in the Parliament. However, even after three decades of development, there are very few women in high-level positions both in the government and private sectors. Present-day society in the Maldives is, by and large, dominated by males, particularly in senior government positions. Women, however, enjoy many liberties in their day-to-day lives as compared with their counterparts in many other Islamic countries in the region. They have a high degree of physical and social mobility, equal right and access to education and health services, and the freedom to select or divorce their spouses.”¹¹

In addition, the document observed that “[i]n general, overt sex-based discrimination is not a part of the Maldivian psyche.”¹² An important development for women's participation at local level reported in this assessment was the government's decision to separate “the administrative and religious functions of island chiefs”.¹³ This move helped to open previously closed doors for women who were exempt from that leadership role due to the religious functions of the post that could only be performed by a man.

A further ADB assessment in 2007 reported that,

“Maldivian women are among the most emancipated in South Asia and the Islamic world. There is no institutional discrimination along gender lines in access to education and health services or for jobs in the public sector.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, the report also informed that “women face legal obstacles to their participation in development, including with respect to property rights, inheritance and provision of legal evidence. Challenges also exist in women's participation in decision-making, with women under-represented in local and national government, and particularly so in policy making positions.”¹⁵ Notably, this point is a reiteration of the same in the ADB study of 2001, cited previously.

The landmark study on Women's Health and Life Experiences in the Maldives was also published in 2007, revealing the sobering statistic that 1 in 3 Maldivian women aged 15-49 experienced “physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives, including childhood sexual abuse.”¹⁶ A significant development since has been the criminalisation of domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act which was ratified in April 2012. Nevertheless, serious challenges remain in the implementation of the law and its practical effectiveness to improve the situation of women.¹⁷ The 2014 UNDP survey in the Maldives entitled the Maldivian Women's Vision Document provides recent insights into the issues that concern women most. Of the ten most pressing personal concerns identified by 75% of survey respondents, violence against women is reported to head the list.¹⁸

11 Country Briefing Paper, Women in the Republic of Maldives, ADB, 2001 [no page numbers – see references]

12 *ibid*

13 *ibid*

14 Maldives : Gender and Development Assessment, ADB, 2007 [no page numbers]

15 *ibid*

16 The Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Experiences, 2007:53

17 Domestic Violence Prevention Act 3/2012 : Two Years On, Nov. 2014 [unpublished]

18 Maldives Women's Vision Document, UNDP, 2014:12 [unpublished draft]

In 2011, the ADB conducted a country evaluation of the Maldives, reporting that “[t]he country has been able to create conditions for parity between male and female enrolment in elementary education”, which few South Asian countries had thus far achieved.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it went on to say the country lagged behind in post-secondary education and in the labour force participation status of women. The report further observed that Maldivian women were “a major unutilised resource” which, “given appropriate support could be an agency for sustaining the Maldives on its development trajectory.”²⁰

The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) produced its first baseline study on knowledge, behaviour and attitudes towards human rights in the Maldives in 2005, followed by a second replication of the same survey in 2011. Comparing the findings of the two studies, the HRCM observed the disturbing trend that among men, the belief about equality of rights in family matters had dropped from nearly 85% in 2005 to 67% in 2011.²¹ The change for the same figure among women though less drastic, is 85.9% in 2005 to 80.7% in 2011.²²

The Situational Analysis of Women in Public Life in the Maldives was a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) in Maldives in 2011. According to this report, respondents “suggested in some cases that women are no longer seen as individuals in their own right, but rather objectified representations of social and cultural expectations.”²³ The report observed social barriers to women’s participation due to “an underlying patriarchal system” which “demarcated the private sphere as ‘a woman’s place’” and “male dominated political agendas.”²⁴ Nevertheless, the report also observed that despite the challenges, both men and women remained “optimistic and committed to the increased participation, representation and influence of women in public life.”²⁵ One of the recommendations of that report is to “facilitate a shift in traditional mindsets”, through national level public awareness on “gender issues, good democratic practices, gender justice, voter responsibilities and favourable attitudes towards women’s political participation and representation.”²⁶

The Maldives ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, acceding to its Optional Protocol in March 2006. The country continues to retain a blanket reservation on Article 16 of CEDAW, on equality in marriage and family life. However, efforts are being made to remove the reservations at least partially.²⁷ In 2010, the country withdrew its initial reservation on Article 7 of CEDAW following the ratification of the new Constitution in 2008 and consequent lifting of the bar on a woman holding the post of head of state.

It is evident that over the last twenty-five years, a significant knowledge base has been produced to understand the situation of Maldivian women and their development status. Significant steps have also been taken to improve the situation of women in some areas, specifically on the issue of domestic violence. Nevertheless, the question remains about the extent to which these insights and development have been actively utilised in practice, to significantly and positively impact the de facto situation of women.

19 The Maldives : Evaluation Study, ADB, 2011:105

20 ibid

21 Six Years On : The “Right’s” Side of Life, HRCM, 2011:2

22 ibid

23 Women in Public Life in the Maldives : A Situational Analysis, UNDP, 2011:41

24 ibid

25 ibid

26 ibid:42

27 Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, 2012:7

2. WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND HISTORY OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women in the Maldives achieved suffrage on 4 June 1964 following a Constitutional amendment in which the previously gender discriminatory voter eligibility clause specifying only men was removed.²⁸ Since their enfranchisement and over the last half century, Maldivian women have actively participated in exercising their right to vote as well as asserted their right to participate in the political arena. The first political party established in the Maldives was the People's Muthagadhim Party, by Mohamed Ameen Didi on 19 October 1950.²⁹ In 1953, the party membership was reportedly 4741 strong, with 2870 (60.5%) men and 1871 (39.5%) women.³⁰ Among the five honorary vice presidents of the party, two were women and among the sixteen-member advisory committee, three were women.³¹ Notably, two of these three women were of royal descent. The life of the Muthagadhim Party was short-lived during the very brief history of the First Republic in 1953.

It was not until the revised Constitution came into force in 1998 that renewed efforts were made to establish a political party in the Maldives. There were five women among the forty-two signatories who signed the first formal documents submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs in March 2001, requesting to register the first political party in recent history, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP).³² Given the political context at that time, the party was eventually created in exile in Colombo, Sri-Lanka in 2003. When the party's national council was appointed in 2004 through an internet voting process, fifteen members were elected of whom two were women.³³ Therefore, it is evident that despite challenging times, women had participated in the emergent political processes in the Maldives in various moments in history.

Political parties were first legally allowed in the Maldives in 2005, facilitated through a presidential decree.³⁴ Since then, a number of political parties were established with significant numbers of women subscribing for party membership. According to the 2012 NGO Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, there were 15 registered political parties in the Maldives with a total membership of 124,620 suggesting that 40% of the population have political party membership.³⁵ In some parties women's membership figures exceeded that of men, notably in the Dhivehi Rayyithunge Party (DRP), Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP). The report also showed that in each of the six largest political parties, women's membership stood at 40% or higher.³⁶

28 "Votaai Dhivehin", *translation : Maldivians and the Vote+ Dhivehi essay by Hassan Ahmed Manik, M. Meynaage [publication details unknown – circa 1960-70s]

29 Dhivehi Jumhooriyyaa ah Maruhabaa, 1953:210 [Dhivehi publication]

30 ibid

31 ibid:212

32 Dhivehi Raajje Democracy ah kuri dhathuru, 2011:22-23 [Dhivehi publication]

33 ibid:24

34 Elections Commission of the Maldives, <http://www.elections.gov.mv/index3ffa.html>, (accessed : 25 March 2015) [Dhivehi page on establishment of political parties]

35 NGO Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, 2012:39

36 ibid:40

At present, there are 14 political parties registered with the Elections Commission and all parties have a significant women’s membership, as evident in Figure 2 below.³⁷



Figure 2: Political Party Membership by Gender
Source: Elections Commission, 01 April 2015

However, it is notable that among political parties, women are a significant minority in the executive decision-making bodies and in leadership positions. The 2014 IFES study reported that the 28 member PPM council had 4 reserved seats for women and had adopted a 33% quota for women deputy leaders.³⁸ The Adhaalath Party (AP) had 3 reserved seats for representatives of their Women’s Council in the 50 member Party Council which included 4 women.³⁹ The Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) has a gender quota for deputy leaders and the 22 member Party Council included 3 women.⁴⁰ The MDA currently has 4 deputy leaders of whom, one is a woman.⁴¹ The current 27

member National Council of the governing party PPM consists of 7 women. The largest opposition party MDP had a woman chairperson until recently, although this is no longer the case. The MDP has a 108 member Gaumees Majlis (National Council) which has 8 women.⁴² There are no women in the 16 member National Council of the Jumhooree Party (JP).⁴³ These figures help to highlight women’s insignificant representation at the highest level in political parties, which is in stark contrast to women’s membership in political parties, as evident in Figure 2 above.

A Commonwealth Observer Group produced a report on the most recent 2013 Maldives Presidential Election of 7 September 2013, the re-run of the same on 9 November 2013 and the subsequent run-off election on 16 November 2013.⁴⁴ The observers reported that the “high level of women’s participation as voters and as polling officials was a positive feature of this election”, citing the “total number of registered women voters was 116,418, which is 49 per cent of eligible voters.”⁴⁵ The voter turnout figures for the last four national level elections shows that women’s participation exceeds that of men in all but one, by about 2 to 4 percentage points (see Figure 1 below). In the 2013 Presidential Election women’s turnout was significantly lower than men, although notably higher in the 2014 Parliamentary Election and the two Local Council elections in 2011 and 2014.

37 For full names of parties, please refer to Abbreviations on pg.4
 38 Women’s Empowerment in Political Processes in the Maldives, IFES/USAID, 2014:17
 39 ibid
 40 ibid:17
 41 Direct communication with party executive, 25 April 2015
 42 Direct communication with party executives, 14 April 2015
 43 Website of the Jumhooree Party, http://www.jumhooreeparty.com/?page_id=5320, accessed : 23 Jun 2015
 44 Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group : Maldives Presidential Election, 2013
 45 ibid:11

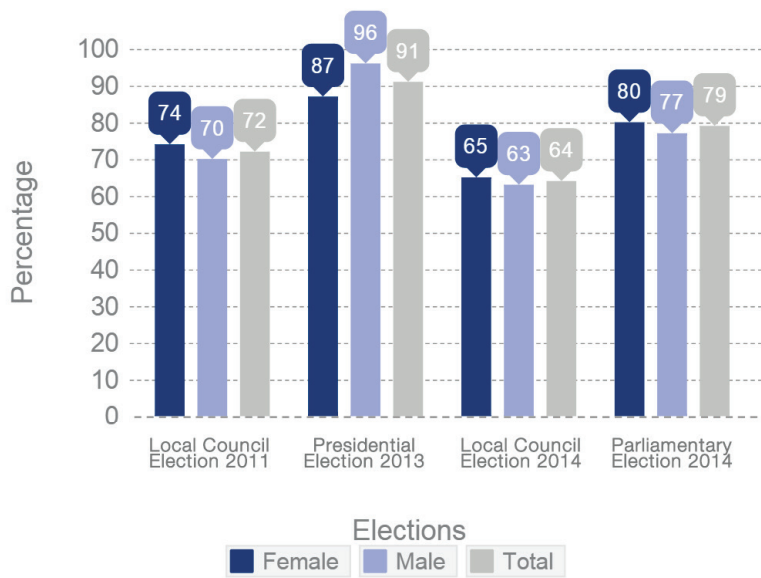


Figure 3: Voter Turnout Figures

It is further noteworthy that The Commonwealth Observer Group on the 2013 Presidential Elections made the following observation in relation to women’s participation in the current political context.

“... in the course of briefings, various national stakeholders informed the Group that women were active members within political parties, often serving as key mobilizers. Despite the overwhelming representation and participation of women at the grassroots level of political parties, there were reportedly only a small number of women in paid senior management in political parties or in key party leadership positions. It was further noted that there remained socio-economic and political barriers to women’s participation at the senior most level or even as candidates.”⁴⁶

These observations of the Commonwealth Observer Group are extremely pertinent and consistent with the findings of this study.

46 Report of the Commonwealth Observer Group : Maldives Presidential Election, 2013:11

3. WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

In the preamble of the Maldives Constitution of 1968, it is stated that “all the prerogatives on how to govern Dhivehi Raajje for time immemorial, lay in the hands of the country’s Kings and Queens.”⁴⁷ Therefore, it is evident that the Maldives with its long and rich history as a sovereign State had been governed by women in its distant history. Research shows that the “country’s early history shows a remarkable record of women’s participation in various aspects of nation building. Powerful queens ruled the nation, with Queen Rehendi Khadeeja (1343-79) being the most famous, having ruled three times for a total of 33 years.”⁴⁸

More recently, during the First Republic established on 01 January 1953, women’s inclusion in the legislature was a notable new development for women’s participation in state building. The Constitution of that time established a ‘Senate’ and ‘Rayyithunge Ge’ [People’s House] where women were represented. The 18 member Senate included 4 women and the 42 member People’s House included 11 women.⁴⁹ The First Republic was short-lived and starting from the newly convened People’s Majlis in 1954 until 1968, there was no women’s representation in the legislature. Between 1968 and 1975, the male dominated Majlis included just one woman. During subsequent decades, women continued to be represented in the Majlis, albeit in very limited numbers.⁵⁰ The ADB gender assessment conducted in 2007 reported that, of the 50 seats in the People’s Majlis, 06 were occupied by women, and in the 113-seat Special Majlis sitting at that time, only 11 seats were represented by women.⁵¹ The current People’s Majlis elected in 2014 constitutes a total of 85 seats, of which, just 05 seats are represented by women. In terms of leadership in the legislature, history shows that a woman was unanimously elected as the President of the Senate in 1953, and in 2008 a woman was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the People’s Majlis for the first time.⁵²

Refer Figure 4 to 7: Graphical Representation of the Women in Parliament and Local Councils below.

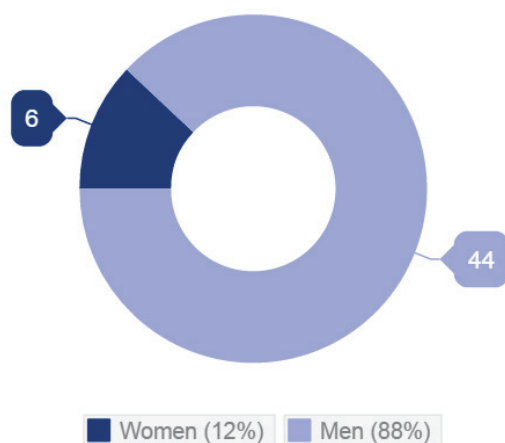


Figure 4: 2007 16th People’s Majlis

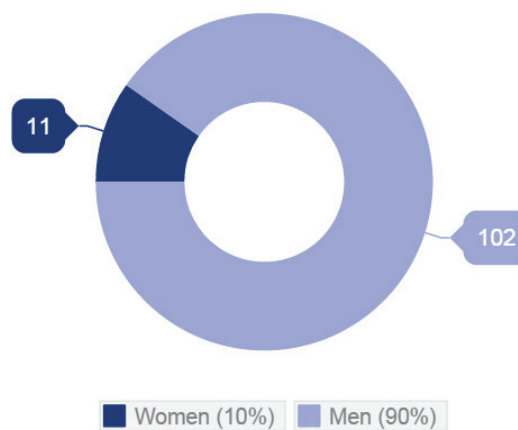


Figure 5: 2007 Special Majlis¹

¹ Note : the Special Majlis was convened to undertake the work of Constitutional revision at the time

47 Maldives Constitution, 1968, pg.1 ; Dhivehi Raajje is the local term for the Maldives, which translates as “land of Dhivehi” – dhivehin is the local term for a Maldivian

48 Status of Women : Maldives, 1989:7

49 Rayyithunge Majlis 1932-2014, 2014:59-61

50 ibid

51 Maldives : Gender and Development Assessment, ADB, 2007 [no page numbers] ; Note : the Special Majlis was convened to undertake the work of Constitutional revision at the time

52 Rayyithunge Majlis 1932-2014, 2014:235&243

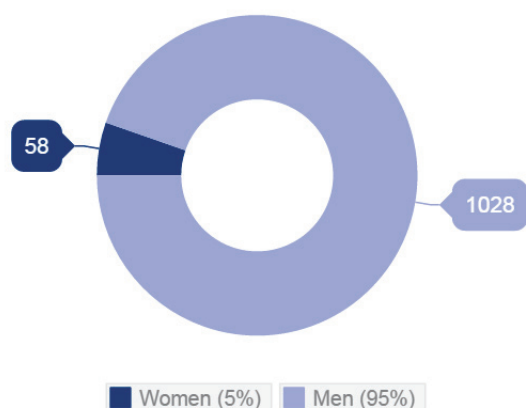


Figure 6: 2011 Local Council

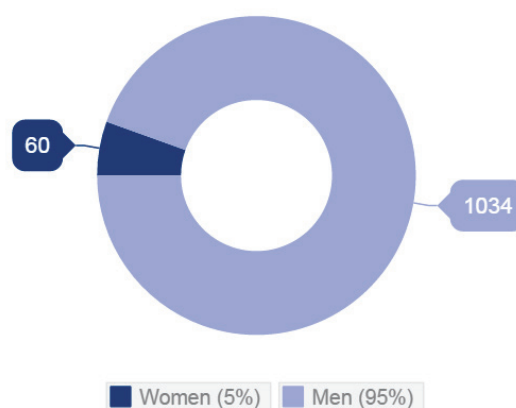


Figure 7: 2014 Local Council

From the first written Constitution of the Maldives ratified in 1932 during the time of monarchy, the notion of a woman as the head of state was made unacceptable and legally impossible, as specified in Article 25(d) and 25(k) which sets the criterion that the head of state must be a man, of royal patrilineage.⁵³ This discriminatory clause remained after the country transitioned into the Second Republic and through subsequent revisions of the Constitution, in Article 24(c) of the 1968 Constitution and Article 34(c) of the 1998 Constitution.⁵⁴ The current, 2008 Constitution is neutral in its instruction on this point, with Article 109(c) saying that the Head of State must be “a person” who has reached thirty five years of age.⁵⁵ Consequently, the country’s reservation on Article 7 of CEDAW was lifted in 2010.

In regional governance, a notable personality recorded in history is the first female atoll chief who hailed from Gnaviyani Atoll Fuvahmulah. In the island’s currently documented history, Dhonsithiboo is considered the first atoll chief from the island.⁵⁶ The Maldives has a culture of oral history, and such an account of this notable woman leader is provided as an undated folkloric tale, related to a historian in 1985 by a local man.⁵⁷ The first woman atoll chief in recent history was appointed in 2001, while the first woman island chief was appointed in 2000.⁵⁸

The country’s first woman Cabinet minister was Moomina Haleem, who was appointed as the Minister for Health on 6 January 1977.⁵⁹ In 2007, there were 4 women in the 22 member Cabinet.⁶⁰ While several women have served in the Cabinet since, there are two women in the current 16 member Cabinet that came to office in 2013. One is the minister for education and the other holds the portfolio for foreign affairs.

Data available from the President’s Office website in January 2015 regarding the gender distribution of other political post holders serving the State Executive show a total of 72 deputy ministerial posts, occupied by 13 (18%) women and 59 (82%) men. Among a total of 36 State Ministers, 5 (14%) were women and 31 (86%) were men. Among a total of nine High Commissioners and Ambassadors in the diplomatic services, only one position is held by a woman currently.⁶¹ Among independent institutions, an exceptional example is the Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) where there are several women leaders. The Governor, Deputy Governor and Assistant Governor of MMA are all women. Of the institution’s 13 Senior Executives, 10 are women.⁶² The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives and

53 Dhivehi Raajjeyge Qaanoonu Asaasee, 1932:13 [Constitution of the Maldives – Dhivehi]

54 Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, 1968 and 1998

55 Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, 2008

56 Text of the plaque at the historic Kedeyre Miskiy at Fuvahmulah, which dates from 1555

57 Xavier Romero-Frias, *The Maldivian Islanders*, 1999:179 [author uses the name Doo Sittibū]

58 Women and development in the Maldives – Fact-Sheet, UNFPA [undated – ref. web resources]

59 Press Release – Ref.2012-769, The Presidency - website, Maldives, 22 December 2012, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/?lid=11&dcid=8399> (accessed : 24 January 2015)

60 Maldives : Gender and Development Assessment, ADB, 2007 [no page numbers]

61 Presidency Maldives, <http://www.presidencymaldives.gov.mv/Index.aspx?lid=156>, (accessed : 24 January 2015)

62 Website of the MMA, <http://www.mma.gov.mv/exc.php>, (accessed : 25 April 2015)

the Police Integrity Commission are also headed by women. The 5 member Civil Service Commission includes 3 women and 2 men. The 10 member Judicial Services Commission however, has 1 woman and 9 men. Most independent institutions have at least 1 woman in a leadership position, with none notably, in the 5 member Elections Commission. Among the 185 sitting judges in the country, 9 are women.⁶³

With the major changes to the governance structure that came with the 2008 Constitution and the subsequent Decentralisation Act of 2010, local government administrators are now elected officials. In the country’s first local council elections held in 2011, a total of 1086 councillors were elected to a three year term, of whom 58 were women.⁶⁴ In the last local elections held in 2014, a total of 1094 councillors were elected of whom 60 were women, maintaining a 5.4% women’s representation at this level.⁶⁵ From the seven locations visited for the purpose of this study, only four locations had any women represented at local council level. In Malé City Council, Councillors include 2 women and 9 men, where the Deputy Mayor is a woman. In Maafushi, there are 2 women and 3 men Councillors. In Kulhudhuffushi, there are 2 women and 5 men Councillors. In Nolvivaram Council, the President is the only woman, with 4 men Councillors. Gnaviyani Atoll Fuvahmulah was notable for the absence of any women representatives, considering the eight administrative wards of the island, each having a 3member elected local council occupying a total of 24 seats. The 6 member Fuvahmulah Atoll Council also has no women.

4. ISLAND WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES AND WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES

Women’s Committees (WCs) were first established in 1982, having its “genesis in the Second National Conference for Women held in 1982”.⁶⁶ Membership of the committee was by appointment and nomination by the then Department of Women’s Affairs and also Island Chiefs or *katheeb*. Members included community leaders such as health workers, midwives and teachers among others. Beginning in April 1993, the WCs were elected by the women in the ward or island community and in July 2000, the WCs were renamed Island Women’s Development Committees (IWDCs).⁶⁷ Since their establishment in 1982, women’s committees have been a major feature of island community life. The purpose of the IWDCs was to promote women’s development in key areas, including “women’s rights, health, education, economic activity and political participation.”⁶⁸

According to a 2001 ADB study, IWDCs “were established ... to increase women’s participation in community activities and national development” and at the time of the study, were 215 strong.⁶⁹ At the time of the IWDC evaluation in 2010, there were a total of 169 IWDCs across the country.

The evaluation consulted a total of 23 IWDCs, of which, 15 were reported as active and 5 inactive.⁷⁰ The author observed that the “[m]ajority of the island offices associated IWDCs with cleaning the island, cooking for the official guests and social issues”, a perception prevalent about IWDCs. However, it is very clear from the evaluation that many of the IWDCs made substantial contributions to community development. The IWDC in Thaa Atoll Hirilandhoo is a notable example, and not an exception, as per the following statement given by the island office.

63 Data obtained from the List of Judges published by the Judicial Services Commission, December 2014

64 Joint Submission to the 22nd Session of the UPR, SHE/SRI, 2014:3

65 *ibid*

66 Pandav, 2010:5

67 *ibid*

68 *ibid*

69 Country Briefing Paper, Women in the Republic of Maldives, ADB, 2001

70 Pandav, 2010:5-6

“The IWDC started the provision of electricity, health centre construction, cable TV, pre-school, secondary school, pharmacy. The IWDC contributed up to 50% of the costs. IWDC has also donated Rf 100,000 and initiated harbor dredging. The government assistance followed afterwards. IWDC is very important for the island.”⁷¹

A more recent assessment of the work of the WDCs by Transparency Maldives observed that the “primary activities WDCs conducted were cleaning programs, social awareness programs related to health education and religion, sports events, fundraising activities, and sewing and cake courses.”⁷²

With the ratification of the Decentralisation Act in 2010, the IWDC structure and mandate changed radically. Although initially the IWDC was a government supported community body, it had no legal status. The Decentralisation Act made the new WDCs into a legal entity with a mandate to plan and implement a host of social welfare activities at the island level, facilitated by the Island Council. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Decentralisation Act has been dogged by political disagreement and challenges. The government’s decision to take over the assets of the IWDCs was a major challenge to the committees; and the fact that the legislation maintains the earlier election process of only women voting in the WDC elections remains an additional bone of contention requiring amendment [see Box 1]. In March 2014, the government announced a major overhaul of the WDCs, calling for their abolition and revision.⁷³ The women’s committee, which for decades had been accepted as a representative body of women at community level, now require additional effort and legislative amendment to establish itself effectively.

Box 1

“ I think it’s ridiculous that only women can vote in the WDC elections. The women are coming, elected only by women. So there is no participation or involvement of men. But we elect the 7 male councillors with our vote too, the President is elected with our vote too, all the men in the parliament are there with women’s vote too – but just because it is a body of elected women, only women are to vote! It’s as if women are a different people. So they will be separated. It will be better if men too, participate in that. Now, the men say it’s the women’s committee elected by women. But they are also coming to represent citizens for a three year term. ”

[Women’s FGD – Gan]

71 ibid:9-10

72 Assessment of Women’s Development Committees in the Maldives, 2015:

73 Government proposes abolishing Women’s Development Committees, Minivan News, 30 March 2014, <http://minivannews.com/politics/government-proposes-abolishing-women%E2%80%99s-development-committees-81252#sthash.awZuDsWg.dpbs> (accessed : 04 April 2015)

5. WOMEN’S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

According to an ADB gender assessment, “the female employment participation rate” had declined in the Maldives “from 60% in 1978 to 21% in 1995 – from one of the highest in the region to one of the lowest in the world.”⁷⁴ The same report further observed that the country’s “economy is hampered by skill shortages and human resource development constraints, resulting in part from women’s exclusion from the labour force.”⁷⁵ An earlier study also reported the “displacement of women from the fish processing industry” and the absence of alternative employment, especially in the atolls which had resulted in the reduction of labour force participation of women.⁷⁶

According to the 2014 Maldives Human Development Report (HDR), the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for women in 2000 was 45.3% compared with 74% for men. In 2006, this figure had risen to 52.9% for women while the figure for men remained unchanged at 74%.⁷⁷ Some sector specialists observe that the LFPR of 2006, sourced from the Census of the same year, cannot be compared with earlier estimates due to changes in methodology. Nevertheless, the 2014 HDR noted “a substantial difference” in the LFPR between men and women, with higher unemployment among women and their absence from the largest industry, the tourism sector. The report asserts that restrictions to women’s mobility influenced by “cultural, religious and societal restrictions” limit women’s participation in paid work.⁷⁸ The report further attributed the low LFPR of women due partly to “the unavailability of childcare services causing young mothers to exit the labour force to assume domestic roles.”⁷⁹

Women’s capacity to be economically independent is thus, heavily compromised. The 1989 Status of Women study observed that the “average monthly income of women was 19 Rufiyaa” whereas for men, this was 89 Rufiyaa. Unsurprisingly, 98% of women and 99% of men felt that women needed increased income generating opportunities.⁸⁰ The rapid growth of the tourism industry had provided opportunities for work to men but not women, with less than 100 women among the nearly 5000 Maldivians employed in the tourism sector in 1996.⁸¹ The ADB report further explained that “Maldivian women.... have resisted work for which they would have to travel away from their homes because of continuing traditional beliefs about the role of women, and culturally induced fears of women’s exposure to “moral” danger or external influences that are inconsistent with the prevailing cultural and religious mores.”⁸²

A paper on female labour force participation post-Census 2006 observed that the country’s largest primary industry, the tourism sector was served by 87% men, with 13% women’s participation.⁸³ Additionally, of the women in the secondary manufacturing sector, nearly 90% were self-employed home-based workers in insecure and informal employment.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the 2014 HDR observed that the Maldives was one of the poorest countries in South Asia during the 1970s, although today it has the highest per capita income in the region, attributable to the tourism and related service industries.⁸⁵ What is notable is that despite tourism being the largest revenue earning sector in the economy, the participation of Maldivian women in tourism is negligible. Instead, women are disproportionately represented in the low-income home-based informal sector, experiencing high unemployment at 39%.⁸⁶ The challenges for women to access the thriving tourism sector are directly correlated to their continued socio-political exclusion from the industry and relegation to the domestic sphere.

74 Maldives : Gender and Development Assessment, ADB, 2007 [no page numbers]

75 ibid

76 Razee, 2000:33

77 Maldives Human Development Report, 2014:62

78 ibid:30

79 ibid

80 Status of Women : Maldives, 1989:25

81 Country Briefing Paper, Women in the Republic of Maldives, ADB, 2001 [no page numbers – see references]

82 ibid

83 Increasing Female Labour Force Participation in the Maldives, Final Draft, unpublished paper [undated, circa 2007], supported by UNFPA

84 ibid

85 Human Development Report, 2014:52

86 HIES 2009-2010, DNP/MoFT, 2012

The Maldivian civil service is the largest public sector employer. According to the website of the Civil Service Commission (CSC), as at the end of December 2010, “52 per cent of permanent local civil servants were women.”⁸⁷ The CSC further explained that more than 50% of middle management employees were women, while among senior management, “females are in the minority”.⁸⁸ Sex disaggregated data of Civil Service employees by rank is provided in Appendix 2.

Women’s representation in the Ministry of Education stood at 64% compared to 36% men. In the Ministry of Health, 66% of employees were women and 34% men.⁸⁹ This situation is reflected in the findings of the twenty year gender review in 2000, when the author observed that - “... while women dominate the health and education sectors, men generally hold the better-paid and higher status jobs. ... While women comprised 67 percent of employment in 1996, only 21 percent of females occupied executive level positions in 1997... in the Education sector, where women accounted for 51 percent of all staff, women occupied only 9 percent of the executive level jobs in the Ministry. At the level of schools, only 2 percent of Headmasters and 20 percent of Principals were females.”⁹⁰ It is evident that the historical trend had continued in a way that continues to restrict women’s access to the higher level decision-making positions even in sectors where women dominate in numbers.

87 Website of the Civil Service Commission of the Maldives,
<http://en.csc.gov.mv/2011/08/25/statistical-bulletin/>, (accessed : 25 March 2015)

88 ibid

89 ibid

90 Razeed, 2000:37

SECTION III - FINDINGS

1. VIEWS ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AT ISLAND/COMMUNITY LEVEL

In all the communities visited, there was a sense that women were involved and active in all aspects of public life where it is possible for them to do so, considering the socio-economic and political situation of the community. Women's views about women's participation and those of men varied considerably in some instances, although in most communities, these were generally consistent. Overall, the primary domain of women is believed to be firmly within the home, which is considered a fundamental element of womanhood itself. Therefore, in the communities visited with the exception of urban Malé, the gender role for women is synonymous with parenthood, that of childcare provider and household manager.

This reflects the observation made in the twenty year gender and development review produced in 2000, which stated that "[i]n general, women's participation at the domestic level is comprehensive and total. ... Culture defines the nature of participation at the household level, and assigns motherhood and the role of caregiver to the women."⁹¹ This culturally gendered role of women as caregiver remains strong and virtually absolute among all the communities reached in this inquiry. Therefore, women's participation in any other area of life is generally viewed as secondary to the perceived primary role of wife, mother and chief caregiver to the family. Nevertheless, it was evident that although this is the societal norm, women's acceptance of this compartmentalisation is not necessarily so complete.

a) The Social Positioning of Women

In several communities, participants spoke about the societal perception that parenting is an exclusively women's job. It was clear from the discussions that the women themselves are not content with this status quo, although the situation in some islands is such that there is no alternative. In many communities such as Fuvahmulah, significant numbers of men are away from the island for work and are not present to share daily childcare responsibilities. According to respondents, even when fathers are present, this perceived societal norm prevails.

Box 2

“ If it's a parent, it's a woman. If it's a woman, she should stay at home. [Women's FGD – Fonadhoo]

“In the school environment, 95% of [parental participation] is by women. If it's to do with parents - that means women, or mother. [Women's FGD - Fuvahmulah]

A 2007 ADB study reported that an estimated “4% of men contribute to the household tasks of cooking, childcare, cleaning, washing or ironing”, with nearly half of Maldivian households being headed by women. The reasons for this include husbands being away for work in Malé, at resorts, at sea or due to being widowed or divorced.⁹² Therefore, cultural and socio-economic factors contribute to the social positioning of women in island communities.

The participation of women in school related activities, specifically the parent teacher association (PTA) was observed as a common pre-occupation, although in some communities PTAs are not always headed by women. From Kulhudhuffushi to Fonadhoo to Fuvahmulah, participants said that the role of parent (or guardian) falls almost entirely on the woman [see Box 2].

In urban Malé however, an individual interviewee who is a teacher informed that the participation of fathers in their children's school related activities has increased significantly over the years, citing a rough estimation that 30% of fathers would be involved with school activities. However, more data is needed to ascertain differences in the extent

91 Raze, 2000 : 32

92 Maldives : Gender and Development Assessment, ADB, 2007 [no page numbers]

of fathers' parental involvement between Malé and the atolls. Reasons for this difference could be increased sharing of childcare responsibilities by both parents in formal employment due to necessity in Malé, where the cost of living is high, and increased mobility of men who are more likely to own a vehicle and may already be the mode of transport to school.

Participants observed the double burden of women's dual role as caregiver and breadwinner as a possible barrier to women's active participation in public life. Additionally, household work was described as something that is optional for men, unlike for women, even in situations where the woman actively contributes to the household income or is the higher earner [see Box 3].

Box 3

“ If a woman goes to work, her workload doubles. If a man goes to work, it is not compulsory for him to do any household work – that is what happens most often. There are exceptions. But if the woman goes to work, she has to go to work, do the cooking, take care of the children... carry all that burden. Maybe that's why women do not come out to participate in public activities because their responsibilities are much more – not because they don't want to come out. ... the bigger responsibility of childcare falls on the woman. Even where the woman is earning more, her household work does not decrease.

[Women's FGD, Malé]

Box 4

“ When we talk about women's participation, let's say there is a parents meeting at school tomorrow – then you will see what that participation is. Among 400 parents, you will find only about 10 men there.

[Men's FGD – Fonadhoo]

In most of the islands outside Malé, when participants were asked about the role of women in community life the overwhelming response was that they are engaged in the domestic sphere. Public participation is often linked to parenting responsibilities, such as participation in school related activities like engagement with the PTA or other school-based activities. As one male participant articulated, women's participation is clearly positioned in the context of parenting [see Box 4].

It is important to observe the somewhat lesser expressed patriarchal perceptions about the position of women, as described by one participant in Fuvahmulah, who by his own admission, considers his own to be somewhat different to the prevailing views [see Box 5]. However, similar patriarchal views were observed in the men's FGD in Kulhudhuffushi, although notably not shared in this way elsewhere.

Box 5

“ In my view, when God created men and women, one side was given physical strength, and patience and kinship was given especially to the other side. At the same time, the capacity to enslave the party with the kinship trait was assigned to men. This is how it is. And from the moment a woman is given birth to, a man is assigned her guardianship – as fragile and innocent people. It is the compassion of Allah that women are put under the guardianship of a man from the moment of birth to death. For example, until such time as a wali is to be given, it's the father; from the moment of marriage, the husband; from the point of divorce, once again the father or own brother. And then, it has to be accepted from a religious viewpoint and a worldly viewpoint that one has to submit/obey whomsoever is one's guardian. So from the point of being entrusted to a man for guardianship, it is required for the woman to obey him from the beginning of life till the end.

[Men's FGD – Fuvahmulah]

b) Participation in the Social and Political Arenas

The importance of women's participation beyond the domestic sphere was well articulated by women respondents in a Malé FGD, where household responsibilities and patriarchal attitudes were cited as a possible critical barrier to women's participation in public life [see Box 6].

Box 6

“ In reality, all household work is seen as the responsibility of women and they are required to stay at home. But if they have to stay at home like that, they will go mental. It is absolutely necessary that women should come out in public, express their opinions – it is a must. They are unable to come out due to the responsibilities, or because of their fathers or husbands.

[Women's FGD – Malé] ”

In every community, women expressed their views without hesitation about the relevance and importance of women's greater role in decision-making and participation in public life. In some instances, the clarity and power of their conviction about this is notable [see Box 7].⁹³ Women observed that they are involved in most areas of social and political life in the community. However, there are challenges to their greater participation and attainment of public positions.

Box 7

“ It is necessary that women are part of the decision-making process. For instance, on this island, the 7 councillors make decisions about something. They are 7 men. Below them as “zimmaadhaaru verin” are all men. The rest of the employees in the council secretariate are also men. If there is any [State] institution on the island, they are headed by men. So when these people get together to make decisions, there is no contribution from women. If there was a woman to give her views, there is a possibility that the decision may be even better. The contribution of both sides may lead to a better outcome. So it's important for women to be at that level.

[Women's FGD – Gan] ”

In several communities, women considered their level of participation in social and political activities to be far greater than that of men. While women felt they were somehow “held back” by societal constraints and expectations, men's perceptions in many instances were that no meaningful barriers exist to hinder women's participation, although there is no clear consensus among them about the reason why women are not in decision-making positions. In one men's FGD, one participant explained there are “no barriers” but “on this island, the majority population do not support women contesting in political activities”.

Another said that the lack of support had nothing to do with a person being a woman, but based on “distinctions made due to island and ward, with a few large families” that influence the political arena. Yet another disagreed insisting the lack of support is “because it is a woman”. What was evident was that significant challenges exist to the broader participation of women at community level. The reasons for this were varied and complex given the socio-cultural, economic and political context of the individual community. Some of these aspects will be elaborated later.

Whether rooted in particular cultural, religious or social perspectives, a minority of the FGD respondents expressed their beliefs that a woman's role is in the home rather than in public life. In one participant's view, women were “overloaded” in his community because “they are doing everything, including cooking, cleaning, washing, income generating work and childcare responsibilities”. As a result, it was felt that “women have gone beyond their naturally decided boundaries”, which was perceived to be the domestic sphere. The result of this undesirable situation is perceived to be social malaise.

93 The title “Zimmaadhaaru Verin” meaning “Responsible High Official” is given to the most senior Civil Service position in the local council secretariate. Both words in the title are also very meaningful in general language usage.

In another location, a male participant explained that he had heard in a religious sermon that for “every step a woman takes out of her home without her husband’s permission”, she will incur the punishment of God or azaab. In the same discussion, a participant explained that the existing social deterioration in the community can be improved by confining women to the home, so that they can remain with the children, which will in turn improve societal issues. He further explained that this is not to say that women cannot continue to do whatever work is possible to do within the home. Therefore, a minority of male participants expressed the view that women’s role in their community was too extensive, and the perception that women ought to be confined to the home and dedicate all their time to domestic duties in order to curb social deterioration. These views were particularly evident among men in Fuvahmulah and Kulhudhuffushi, which are two of the more populous islands visited.

Women’s participation in “social” [“ijthimaaee”⁹⁴] activities (with the exception of Malé), is defined primarily as island cleaning/sweeping. As one young man observed in Maafushi, there was a “tendency for women to be engaged in traditional activities” whereby “women’s role is seen as cleaning the island”. The statement showed the respondents understanding that this is how women’s engagement has been perceived in the community as a “traditional activity” and not necessarily a personal endorsement of the status quo. Island cleaning was perceived as a community-spirited voluntary activity conducted by women and organised by the long established IWDCs. However, under the changes brought in by the Decentralisation Act in 2010 and other policy changes, this is now a pay-based function overseen by the local council. These radical changes to “island cleaning” and the status of the WDCs has caused discontentment among both men and women. Island cleaning is no longer perceived to be done as well as before, notably by a few male participants, allegedly due to the absence of the kind of commitment that women used to give to the task. A male participant in Gan said that “for a long time, women used to clean the island with their own materials, but since it became a paid job – the whole place is full of weeds”. Another male respondent in Fonadhoo said, “..... the most effective work that women had been doing which shows their empowered status used to be island cleaning, which is now non-existent. That is where women’s empowerment has been lost.” He further explained that the activity of island cleaning required leadership and there were very effective women who mobilised others and used to lead this activity. Interestingly, women themselves did not articulate these issues in quite the same way, although their dissatisfaction was focussed on the disempowered status of the WDCs.

Box 8

The continuing beleaguered situation of the WDCs was quite evident from the information shared by respondents in most of the communities visited and a source of considerable discontentment among women [see Box 8].

In Fonadhoo for instance, a woman explained that “women are used to cook, in the unpaid women’s committees”, and it was “ok if we clean the whole island, create a park, establish a pre-school” because women are expected to work for nothing as it was not “desirable for a woman to earn money”.

“ Because it is the women’s committee, they have no office, no desk, no wages, no budget – so it is evident that they want to keep women at a very low level. Although they may support women to educate themselves – there is no intention at all to allow women to have any power.

[Women’s FGD – Gan]

There is no office for the WDC and no budget to conduct activities. But on this island, 23 women contested for 9 positions. In some islands, there wasn’t even enough interest. There is a lot of talk about improving the status of women, but not much is done in practice.

[Women’s FGD – Kulhudhuffushi]

These statements showed the level of frustration women felt and the belief among them that women’s efforts and their participation at community level are undervalued, undermined and marginalised at a structural level where men dominate in decision-making.

94 Ijthimaaee – Dhivehi word meaning social

In all communities visited, the perception about increased levels of participation of women in the political arena was observed and there was agreement about this among both men and women. This is entirely consistent with the significantly high membership numbers of women in political parties, as well as the publicly visible participation of women in political activities, including attendance at party rallies, door-to-door canvassing during election time as well as active participation in protests and demonstrations.^{95, 96} It is possible to say that the time women would have otherwise given to “island cleaning” is now being given to political activities, activism and grass roots participation.

In Nolvivaram, a woman respondent explained that many women participate in political activities such as party meetings, although in other activities things are different. She elaborated that the two wards in the island are “like two islands” which “do not mix”, where the “style is different, behaviour is different, cooking is different – the two are very different”. In this instance, it is suggested that long held ward-based rivalries and differences are set aside and politics become a uniting factor. This is an interesting point raised by women in Maafushi also, where participants explained that there is “no ward rivalry on this island now, but it used to be bad. Before, they would play sport separately, do cultural activities separately and they say they also used to throw stones at each other! But the WDC began to work differently by dividing the island into areas – so that diffused the ward rivalry. Now with the arrival of the party system, the divisions are along party lines.” In Nolvivaram also, the involvement of the WDC to reduce ward-based conflict was noted, where the WDC members were equally elected to represent both wards. Nevertheless, the perception was that these rivalries continue, although they are much less significant than before.

In some communities, women were critical of the way women’s engagement in politics is confined to stereotypical activities consistent with the perceived gender role of women. In Fonadhoo, a woman complained about the fact that political parties were getting women to put “garlands around people’s neck”, saying that men should be doing this too. In Kulhudhuffushi, a woman participant said that “women are most active in political activities, but they do things like cooking”, and are “not in leadership positions”. She further explained that this could be because of women’s lack of education in politics or simply because they are “reluctant to come out and lead.” The latter observation also relates to the traditional gender roles assigned to women and the continued practice in island communities of engaging and even expecting women to cook for events, including for visitors and in particular, dignitaries who visit from Malé.

In Gan, women complained that men were colluding to undermine women’s participation in political life, explaining that men would go so far as do black magic to stop women from participating. One such example shared is that a group of 10 women had submitted a petition to the Council regarding an issue relating to the pre-school. In response, a counter petition with 180 signatures was submitted by a group of men. The women further alleged that the men “think that 180 men’s signatures are more powerful than the rights of 68 children”, adding that many signatories did not even have children of pre-school age. One reason given for this behaviour is the existence of rivalries between families or groups across different wards in the community. These stories suggest that unlike in Nolvivaram and Maafushi noted earlier, the issue of ward based or group-based divisions is more serious in Gan.

95 See Figure 2 on page 13

96 Women’s Empowerment in Political Processes in the Maldives, IFES/USAID, 2014:16

Box 9

In Fuvahmulah women described a situation whereby women are engaged in conducting much of the door-to-door canvassing for political parties and other associated support work benefitting a top layer of men, although the men themselves do not encourage the inclusion of women to join their political ranks [see Box 9]. Such party activism at grassroots level is mainly voluntary. This issue raised by women in Fuvahmulah is supported by the fact that there are no women in any of the eight local councils on the island, as discussed earlier. The absence of adequate support to women from political parties was evident from these complaints and criticisms expressed by women about their participation in political activities. In addition, the prevailing culture of patriarchy and the socio-cultural relegation of women to the domestic sphere are significant factors women are required to push against, in order to assert themselves in the political arena. An interesting insight gained through individual interviews in Fuvahmulah suggests that although each of the eight wards of the island has its own WDC, activities are mostly conducted within the ward rather than in collaboration across multiple wards. This indicates that women themselves are yet to work together on common issues affecting them as a group.

“ Whether it is door to door [canvassing] activities or responding to a demonstration, there will be more women. ... If there are 2 men, there would be 6 women. Women do most of the work. But if a woman contests for a [political] position, they are not accepted. It's just the way they view women. Perhaps they believe women's brains are not well developed – that's what the majority of people think. ... They have even said that for such and such a position, a man would be better than a woman. For instance, if a woman runs for a council position, the men would come and say it would be better to have a man because they are more capable of planning ahead, or that they will be more knowledgeable. Even if you put aside the political arena, even in other areas, this is the way it is viewed.

[Women's FGD – Fuvahmulah]

As noted earlier, a minority of men held negative perceptions about women's increased participation at the community level although in all communities men acknowledged women's participation and in some, were openly supportive of this. This is particularly evident in Maafushi where a male participant explained that “women played a key role” in the community. According to another respondent, “in the political arena, [women] are equally active as men. In the last election, in my constituency, they were leading. When we came to observe the voting, there were 2 men and 6 women. Also in the work at the jagaha,⁹⁷ they are far ahead of us. So from that perspective, if they come out, they work much better than the men.” With reference to the work of the WDC in Maafushi, male respondents were very complimentary, as evident from the quote in Box 10. However, an interesting observation made by male respondents in Maafushi was that despite their efforts to support woman candidates to political positions, their experience was that women are reluctant to face challenges inherent in the political arena. These include decision-making and dealing with personal attacks and anti-campaigning by political opponents.

Box 10

“ In development work, men have not had the kind of successes they [women] have had. There used to be an island development committee and a women's committee – but the women's committee now has many [assets], although they started off with what the island development committee provided for them. So during the time that I have lived here, I can say that women are far ahead [of men] in island development activities.

[Men's FGD, Maafushi]

97 Jagaha is the Dhivehi word for a party member meeting/gathering place, designed for that purpose mainly located in residential areas

In Nolvivaram too, male participants were supportive of women’s participation in politics in the community. As one participant observed, “the President of our Council is a woman and a young woman too. They have very good ideas too, but there isn’t much to do in these islands – there are not many resources or opportunities either.” The support of men in Nolvivaram for women in the political arena was evident from the following remark made by a woman respondent, who said that : “I hear a lot of men saying that next time, they will give their vote to a woman. ‘We won’t give our vote to these men again. We will try to bring out a woman next.’ Many men who had led [political] campaigns are saying this – that next time, if they know of a woman who is thinking of contesting, they would pressure that person to come out and support her – I hear men saying this. So I believe that next time round, it is likely we may see a woman.” These views and remarks show significant potential to engage men to support women in the political arena in these communities.

When participants were asked whether there was a level at which women should not participate, the overwhelming response was that there was not, despite the evident existing challenges to their participation. However, in several instances both women and men cited the perception that the religion does not allow women to hold the position of head of state, which is a point that will be discussed later in this report.⁹⁸ An interesting observation from some of the responses is the direction of the thought process this question generated, specifically among women. Some respondents suggested that women must operate within “acceptable religious boundaries” in their behaviour, which are subjective and open to different interpretations. Some participants said that women must not do “unfeminine” things like smoke cigarettes, although further probing revealed that the gudu-gudaa [hookah] was fine for older women to smoke.

Another response was that women must not use drugs or do things that undermine their reputation. Participants acknowledged that some of these perceptions are more relevant and important for women than men, as men’s unacceptable behaviour is more easily forgotten or ignored. These somewhat tangential responses specific to socially acceptable behaviour, can be interpreted to suggest that participants did not have a belief that women, as a societal group, must be excluded from any level of participation in social and public life which defined the context of the conversation. Among men too, the responses to the question if there was a level women should not participate were largely positive, with comments such as; “there shouldn’t be any, right?” and “not really, if they have the courage, although they may hesitate due to childcare responsibilities.” These responses while positive also suggest socio-cultural expectations of women as primarily parents and caregivers. In contrast in Kulhudhuffushi, several participants from the men’s FGD felt that women “should not be in decision-making positions” although they should participate in the consultation process, prior to making decisions.

Box 11

“ We talk about this all the time, from when we were studying [to be teachers], in nursery school, it’s entirely women, in primary, entirely women – in the hospital too, carers are women – men too will have that caring side – men care about us too, right? It’s just a belief they believe in ... that’s what I think and it’s a very bad belief – we have to raise awareness among Maldivians about this.

[Women’s FGD – Malé] ”

The point of emphasis was that women cannot have the final say. However, further discussion revealed that this position although strongly held, is somewhat inconsistent because the same participants supported women’s representation in the Parliament and in the Cabinet [see also next section].

With reference to whether there was a level at which women should participate, several responses reflected more traditional gender norms. These include the perception that women must be in the education sector, health sector and other caring professions, such as counselling. A common response from both women and men was that women must be in the teaching profession in general and as pre-school teachers specifically.

98 See Part III, point 4, pg.30 ; also note that there is no legal barrier to a woman being head of state, which is a fact most participants were unaware of

Box 12

“ In everything that benefits society, women have to participate. Women’s counsel is extremely important because she establishes her entire family based on her views, most of the things in society are dependent on the way women think. So, if women are kept at home and men come out to do things in society, it may not be the most beneficial for the rest of the people in the society. For instance, to find out what the most relevant service is for this school, you ask the men. But the men never come to this school.

[Women’s FGD – Gan]

One male respondent in Kulhudhuffushi specified that women must teach the “lower grades” because they are “better at talking to children due to their maivanthakan” or motherliness.

Consistent with the unwavering perception of the primary role of woman as parent and chief caregiver, some respondents explained that women must be in all areas in which children are attended. Younger women described this kind of response as stereotypical, which need changing [see Box 11].

To summarise, a participant from the women’s FGD in Gan provided a very eloquent justification for women’s participation in every aspect of public life, as below [see Box 12]. However, the same participant believed that a woman cannot be a head of state in an Islamic country, which was a minority view expressed in her FGD.

2. VIEWS ON WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Women and men’s perceptions about women’s participation at the national level were quite similar across the communities consulted. Most of the respondents were of the view that women were adequately represented nationally in public positions, although there were not enough women in higher level decision-making positions in State institutions, specifically in the Parliament. There were some exceptions among men, where the perception was that women’s participation at the national level was too high.

Box 13

“ At national level, in employment, there is an acceptable level of women’s participation. But in the Majlis, there isn’t. At decision-making levels, there aren’t enough women.

[Women’s FGD – Fonadhoo]

“At national level, at the Majlis or minister’s level and in the councils, women’s participation is low.

[Women’s FGD – Maafushi]

“I have no issue with the number [of women] in the Majlis and the Cabinet increasing. But I would not want too much of an increase. That is because in a small population like this, it is not necessary for men and women to be present equally...

[Men’s FGD – Fuvahmulah]

Women respondents observed that the number of women Cabinet ministers, judges and councillors are too few [see Box 13]. They further noted that in the Civil Service, there is a significant level of women’s participation although women are disproportionately represented in the lower ranks of the establishment. Data on Civil Service employees for 2010 shows that in the two lowest ranks of the institution, women and men are employed equally at 50% while the number of women in managerial services exceeds men.

At executive level, women are fewer.⁹⁹ Participants also said that women's representation may be higher in the education and health sectors, although once again, not in decision-making positions. There was a perception that in the atolls, more civil service jobs are held by women than by men, which is consistent with the fact that in most communities, civil service jobs are in the education and health sectors where women are over-represented. The lack of women in leadership positions in the political arena was observed, mainly by women. The following interesting observation about the lack of women at local governance level, and the need for more representation is notable. Explaining a challenging situation that was preventing the island community's ability to access a pharmacy, a woman respondent said that she could "almost visualise that, if there were a majority of women on the Council, this issue will have been resolved already. I have that level of confidence in women."

Among men, the general view was that women's participation at national level is adequate. There were a few respondents who held the view that women's participation was too high. One participant observed that "men lead in a lot of areas, and because there are more men in leadership, it appears that there are more men" in the public arena, suggesting that this is actually not the case. According to another participant, there is a distinction between Malé and the atolls where in Malé, women's participation is high although elsewhere in the atolls, this is not the case, particularly in higher level decision-making positions. A further observation was that in the more developed islands, including Malé, Addu City, Fuvahmulah and Thinadhoo, most government jobs are occupied by women, whereas in smaller islands, men hold these jobs. In Fuvahmulah, a men's FGD participant expressed concern at the increased numbers of women in the public sector, which he estimated at 75-80%. He further expressed the need to do research on men's representation, to bring balance to this perceived over-representation of women, which he believed will cause problems if unaddressed. Another concern raised by a male participant about the perceived increase of women's representation in the education sector was his belief that most leaders are created in this sector. Therefore, he expressed his concern that if the education sector has more women than men, there will eventually be a shortage of men among national level leaders.

It is noteworthy that in one of the FGDs, women explained that there are cases where women complete their higher education and return to "stay at home obediently as per the husband's wishes". Describing this as a "waste of education", a more disturbing observation was that even if such a woman wanted to return to work, she will not be "allowed" to do so. This is indicative of the prevalence of certain beliefs and newly introduced religious practices which are perceived to limit women's autonomy. An anecdote shared by one individual interviewee is the case of a young girl who was removed from school by the girl's family shortly before her final school year O-level exams, influenced by such beliefs. The result of this was the student losing her opportunity to complete her education and being subsequently confined to her home. Women making these observations clearly disapproved of such developments evident in some communities. Reports such as the 2012 NGO Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee and the 2014 HDR also cite several factors including increasing conservative religious interpretations resulting in "restrictions on women's role in the public domain".^{100, 101}

In general, there was positive acceptance among both men and women on the question of women holding decision-making positions in State institutions. There were, as with every question, exceptions. For instance, a male respondent in Kulhudhuffushi held the view that a woman can hold any Cabinet post, except oversight of the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) and the Maldives Police Service (MPS).

99 See Appendix 2 for Civil Service employee data for 2010

100 Maldives NGO Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, 2012:3,35,56

101 Maldives Human Development Report, 2014:30-31

Notably, these are two institutions traditionally and stereotypically dominated by men.¹⁰² Some participants who held conservative and patriarchal views appeared to apply these standards in interesting ways. For instance, one male participant was adamant that women cannot be in positions to make final decisions on matters, although he agreed that women can be in the parliament and the Cabinet. Notably, these are two institutions where both individual and collective decisions are made. Another example is the perception that women cannot hold the highest position in an institution, but can hold the next one below. For example, it is acceptable for a woman to be the vice president but not the president.

3. VIEWS ON WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Similar to all other questions, the one relating to voter support to a woman contesting for a seat at the People's Majlis received a variety of responses from participants. Foremost among them was the almost indignant response that the vote will not be given simply because someone is a woman, but based on their capacity and eligibility for the position. Among women's groups, there were responses given that suggested they would vote for the woman, should a choice of two equally eligible candidates of each sex be presented to them. Others included the somewhat resigned response that whoever the political party presented can expect to get the vote.

Box 14

“ ... us islanders are very unthinking – we are completely sold to our parties. If our party presents a cat, we will vote for that – but in fact we lose out as a result of that.

[Women's FGD – Gan]

Whether it's a man or woman, money would get the vote.

[Women's FGD – Nohivaram]

If there's a man and a woman, we will vote for the woman ... but we will vote for the most able person

[Women's FGD – Maafushi]

I don't think people would look at whether it's a man or woman when giving their vote. It's not about a man or a woman – it's about the party.

[Women's FGD – Malé]

I wouldn't necessarily give my vote to a man or woman because we don't vote for the sex of a person.

[Men's FGD – Fonadhoo]

The party can bring some vagabond off the streets, but they will get elected ...

[Men's FGD – Fuvahmulah]

The importance of the party and voters' loyalty to their respective parties is reflected in the interesting statement given from different communities that “even if the party presents a cat”, people will vote for that. This last sentiment was expressed in Gan, Maafushi and Fuvahmulah, and indicates considerable consistency of the perception that a party ticket assured an election victory regardless of the quality of the candidate [see Box 14]. Therefore, according to most respondents, their own and their communities' most important consideration when voting an MP is perceived to be the candidate's eligibility or party before any other consideration.

A somewhat different but interesting response was given in one of the men's FGDs, where participants were convinced that in their community, voting priority would be given based on “kinship, friendship, belonging to the same ward, belonging to the same political party, most eligible person – in that order.” Participants themselves were critical about the perceived fact that eligibility comes last in that order of priority, suggesting that they consider eligibility and capacity of the candidate more important although this is not how it is practiced in their community. In the same group, a participant explained that in their community, “the able person becomes stunted”, suggesting that ability is not valued and merit not considered. These views are indicative of wider frustrations with the socio-political dynamics in this community, where the existence of ward-based conflict and political divisions were evident from the discussions

102 ibid : 57-58

with both men and women. Moreover, socio-economic issues and the lack of opportunity for community development were among the complaints shared by this group, along with a lack of confidence in the authorities and discontentment with the urban (Malé) rural divide they experience.

A somewhat unique point raised by a men’s FGD participant as a reason for not giving his vote to a woman relates to the issue of maternity leave. In his view, “there is a period of time that women cannot serve, which is the length of time women take for maternity leave”. For this reason, if a man and woman of equal eligibility contests for a seat, he will vote for a man. It is worth noting that according to the People’s Majlis, there is no record of maternity leave for any parliamentarians during the 16th, 17th and current 18th People’s Majlis, which covers the timeframe since 2004.¹⁰³ This particular view was observed in the Women in Public Life study of 2011, in which a government stakeholder (sex not identified) expressed horror at the idea of women of “child bearing” age being able to hold a “decision-making position in parliament and then they all got pregnant”. According to that respondent, the “country would collapse” if such a situation was allowed.¹⁰⁴ Besides the Parliament, similar sentiments were shared in relation to women in the teaching profession having to take maternity leave, in the men’s FGD discussion in Kulhudhuffushi. Interestingly, in that discussion, while maternity leave and time off for breastfeeding the child was discussed in a manner that can be described as derisory, the same participants expressed the necessity to have women to teach younger children. The reason for this was the perceived “motherliness” of women and their ability to communicate with children better than men. Once again, among participants expressing patriarchal perceptions, inconsistencies in their views appear more pronounced.

In addition to these responses, another perception was that regardless of the sex of the candidate, whoever could distribute the most money will get the vote. The issue of vote buying and selling was a common concern raised in relation to this point in almost all communities. Participants also acknowledged the need to raise public awareness to stop this detrimental practice. The 2014 IFES survey on Money and Elections in the Maldives provides a recent account of the extent of vote buying in the Maldives, which found that 37% of Maldivians have either been offered, or know of someone else being offered money or gifts for their vote.¹⁰⁵

4. VIEWS ON WOMEN JUDGES AND HEAD OF STATE

Participants’ views regarding a woman holding the position of head of state generated both positive and negative responses. The most common and immediate response among both women and men was that a head of state cannot be a woman as the religion would not allow this [see Box 15]. Interestingly, in some instances, both women and men were keen to clarify that the negative position they held was not because of a belief that a woman will not be capable of holding the position of head of state, but rather, it was purely because of a perception that the religion does not allow it. It is also worth noting that many respondents did not see a contradiction between women’s leadership and their religion. Elsewhere, it was evident that men considered women inherently incapable of undertaking the responsibilities of that position.

Box 15

“ I cannot agree with that – it is very clearly explained and evident in the Qur’an and Hadis of the Prophet that if a woman is given precedence in decision- making, the chance of such a place going to conflict and ruin is very likely. It is possible for a woman [to be the head of state] but I cannot support that.

[Women’s FGD – Gan]

I too have heard that. I mean that it’s not a good thing from a religious point of view [for a woman to be the head of state]. But the exact point, for instance, such and such a verse, or such and such a Hadis says it [we don’t know] ... it’s what we’ve heard. No inquiry has been done and no one asked to find out.

[Women’s FGD – Maafushi] ”

103 Direct communication, People’s Majlis, 26 March 2015

104 Women in Public Life in the Maldives, 2011:19

105 Money and Elections in the Maldives, 2014:1

The majority of participants were not aware of the change in the 2008 Constitution permitting a woman to be appointed as the head of state. In the Kulhudhuffushi men's FGD, some participants were adamant that the Constitution contravened the religious position on this and that religion "prohibited" a woman from becoming the head of state. When participants were probed for further information, in many communities both men and women admitted they were unclear what exactly the religious position was on this point. Acknowledging certain knowledge gaps, participants explained what they have always known is that a woman cannot be a head of state. In some instances, respondents' opposition to women serving as head of state became less definitive as other respondents highlighted the existence of women heads of state in Muslim-majority countries.

Men's perceptions and attitudes towards a woman being the head of state included a range of views, from outright rejection to full support. Similar to the women, some respondents were uncertain whether this is permissible in the religion. The general position and attitude that emerged during most of the discussions was that if there is no religious barrier to a woman becoming the head of state, then there was no issue. Some participants expressed the view that it is worth testing it out, to see how well a woman performed as the head of state. Yet another perception was that a woman can hold the position of Vice President, but not the President.

While some men and women used religion-based arguments to reason that women should not be heads of state, others utilised their religious knowledge to justify women's leadership and public participation. This dichotomy demonstrates the subjective nature of religious interpretations as impacted by social and cultural factors. In the women's FGD in Gan for instance, one woman explained that in Islamic history, women had been in high positions, citing the case of Prophet Muhammed's wife, Aisha.

Box 16

“ Perhaps it is our upbringing. Right from when we were little, what we understood, and what we saw was that the head of state is a man, and must be a man. That's the way it is also, right? A woman cannot, right? We don't know the religious position that much as we don't know the religion that well.

[Women's FGD – Fuvahmulah] ”

In the women's FGD in Maafushi, several respondents initially cited their understanding of the religious prohibition of women as head of state. In response, another participant explained that she had come across nothing that says so in the translation of the Qur'an. In the ensuing discussion, participants agreed that more clarity was needed to know the real reasons behind these perceptions. In many communities, participants shared possible reasons for the perceived prohibition including that a woman cannot lead the Friday prayers, which excluded her from being the head of state. It is notable that none of the respondents across all communities were able to provide a specific justification, religious or otherwise that support the prohibition, besides the received wisdom of what they have always known. Therefore, an interesting response provided by a woman participant when probed on this point, is telling [see Box 16].

In all the discussions, the perceptions and attitudes relating to whether women can be judges were strongly linked to religious interpretations, as it was with the question on a woman being the head of state. However, on this point too, significant differences of opinion were observed ranging from total rejection to complete endorsement. As with the question on the permissibility of a woman being the head of state, respondents gave a variety of reasons in favour of or in opposition to women serving as judges. In general, men were more likely than women to disagree about women being judges. When participants were probed for clarification on their disagreement, the most often used reason was that it was what the participants had always known.

Women who agreed that women should be judges provided a range of reasons to explain their position. These included perceptions that women judges will be more empathetic, more just, more considerate, more loyal, more God-fearing, less likely to take bribes, less biased, make better and more substantial decisions, and less likely to be “turned”. One participant observed that she had never heard negative things about women judges’ rulings, posing the question whether this is because their decisions are better than men’s. Others advocated for the need for women judges, especially to adjudicate domestic violence cases [see Box 17].

Among men who agreed that women should be judges, one said that it is a “good thing” to have women judges and that the gender is irrelevant, the important thing being their “sincerity to the public and how able they are to show that.”

Another male participant explained that based on his personal knowledge from contact with lawyers, “women judges perform very well in matters of sentencing.” [See Box 18] A further interesting perception shared by a man was that women adjudicate on matters within the household all the time, to ensure things are done fairly among the children. Therefore, women are “used to taking such decisions and well-practiced”, which means there are women who are eligible and would perform very well as judges.

Box 17

“ Often, the perception is that women are emotional people. But that is not the case – women’s decision-making will have much more substance than men’s, because women will consider both sides – the positives and the negatives. [Women’s FGD – Fonadhoo]

... women will decide things justly without bias, more so than men. Maybe I say this because I am a woman. I have confidence that a woman would make decisions justly, and would not be turned. [Women’s FGD – Nolvivaram]

Box 18

“ To my understanding, women judges perform very well in matters of sentencing.... The general public may not know how eligible they are, so the tendency will be to see them how society perceives them [as women]. [Men’s FGD – Malé]

Women who held negative perceptions about women being judges based their rationale on religious grounds and certain perceived character traits of women, such as being “emotional” and “weak”. Interestingly, there was no consensus in the majority of women’s FGDs on negative perceptions on this point. Some participants expressed reservations from a religious perspective, citing the fact that there are distinctions made by religion about women’s fitness to do certain things. For instance, women’s witness statements have less weight than men’s.

In Maafushi, a woman participant shared her perception that “it is sometimes said that women are emotional and make unjust decisions”, which was rebutted by another participant who said that “men have been so strong they have also made decisions without any empathy.” She added that men “have also punished people who do not deserve punishment”, arguing that “regardless of whatever human does it, if it is done right, then that is good.” In Kulhudhuffushi, a very interesting negative perception was presented by a woman who said that it could be “very dangerous” for a woman to be a judge because her judgements may be influenced by her husband. This position was also rebutted by another participant who argued that male judges could also be influenced by their mothers or some other source. She went on to provide a lengthy explanation that being a judge is a professional job, requiring qualification and practiced under oath, which means she is not required to do as her husband says. In fact, she stressed that such influence would be wrong from a religious perspective too.

In Fuvahmulah, an interesting explanation was provided that in Islam, women are always placed “under the protection” of a man, indicating her secondary position although the latter was not articulated as such by the respondent. Further, the participant had read an article on the internet, which argued convincingly that a woman cannot be a judge from an Islamic perspective.

Among men, the negative perceptions about women being judges were also primarily based on religious interpretations and gendered assumptions about women’s character traits. In one FGD, participants observed that a Hadd punishment cannot be issued by a woman.¹⁰⁶ Here, there was also some confusion about the meaning of fandiyaaru (judge) and the “person issuing a sentence” in the religious sense. There was some clarity issues whether a civil case can be adjudicated by a woman or not. These perceptions may be influenced by the fact that the Civil Court has had a woman judge until recently. However, what was evident was that there was no clarity on these matters, except a strong perception about the existence of a religious prohibition about women being judges.

There were also distinctions made about the unequal weight given to women’s witness statements, as noted earlier, which was used as a reason why a woman cannot be a judge. In one instance, a male participant admitted being at a loss to respond due to a lack of clarity about the religious position. In contrast, another participant expressed his disagreement explaining that there are no women judges in any Islamic country except for Egypt, historically, and that no 100% Islamic state besides the Maldives have women judges. In fact, he explained that when the appointment of female judges was discussed in the Maldives, scholars raised their concern. Further, when it was initially proposed to permit a woman to become the head of state, scholars had submitted a petition protesting this change. Therefore, his view was that it is entirely unacceptable from a religious point of view to have women as judges or as a head of state.

Beyond arguments rooted in religious interpretations, an essential point that surfaces from the discussions was a perception among some men and women about an inherent weakness in the constitution of women which make them ineligible to hold high public office. In Malé, for example, a male respondent repeated the perception held by a woman participant in Kulhudhuffushi, about the potential for the influence of husbands on women judges [see Box 19]. In a Fuvahmulah FGD, a participant explained that if men and women’s “brain function and mind” were to be assessed, men would be “more just”. He went on to add that in our society “we have to give precedence to men” and considering that even men sometimes lose the capacity to be just, it wasn’t feasible for “weaker” women to do so. On the other hand, other respondents were keen to clarify that their negative position is not because of a belief about an inherent inability of women to lead, but a perceived religious prohibition which informs their position. Yet others hold very positive perceptions, justifying the importance of women’s participation at all levels, on equitable terms with men. The latter, as discussed above, is an important positive element often unrecognised or unfound in many inquiries.

Box 19

“ The head of a nation and the person who issues a judicial sentence have to be men.”
[Men’s FGD – Fonadhoo]

I oppose 100% about women being judges. That’s because when we consider the state of our society, we have to give precedence to men.

[Men’s FGD – Fuvahmulah]

It’s not about the intelligence, eligibility and capacity ... what we have to consider is that women judges will be subject to their husband’s influence ... which will be quite strong.

[Men’s FGD - Malé]

I have never been able to clarify what the religious position is on women being judges. If the religion allows it, I very much support it. But if the religion does not allow, I would not approve.

[Men’s FGD – Fuvahmulah]

106 Hadd are punishments prescribed in the Qur’an, Ref: Oxford Islamic Studies Online <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e757> (accessed : 12 April 2015)

5. VIEWS ON THE CONCEPT OF GENDER EQUALITY

The guidance questionnaire asked for participants’ views on the following extract from the government’s Vision2020 policy document: ‘For Maldivian society to become one in which men and women participate equally in the political, social and economic arena.’¹⁰⁷ This extract was selected to generate discussion about participants’ perception on the concept of gender equality. The statement was presented without any reference to its source, although two participants, one man and one woman from two different locations recognised the statement’s origin. This is indicative of the fact that there exists a certain level of familiarity with the statement and the concept. While most participants did not associate the statement with a policy level declaration, it was positively received as a general statement of equality that is perceived as desirable. It is notable that in most communities, requests were made to repeat the statement a second time before responding. Therefore, it is assumed that participants gave due consideration before responding to the statement.

Box 20

“ I would support that statement. It would be our dream for the Maldives to become a place where there is equality between the sexes.

[Men’s FGD, Nolvivaram]

In my opinion, it is a good statement. For the country to develop, both men and women must participate equally in those areas. For me, that is good.

[Men’s FGD, Fuvahmulah]

From a religious perspective, this may not be possible, regardless of how much it is talked about.

[Men’s FGD, Malé] ”

Among women, there was no contention about the statement, and the aspirations contained in the statement were perceived as the direction women are headed although some participants were sceptical about its achievement. In a Malé FGD, participants added that the increased numbers of women visible in the mornings going to work is indicative of the potential for gender equality in public life in the future. One participant made the following prediction that, “...in future, we will probably see mostly women involved in major activities, more than men. Boys will probably be seen more in the private sector.”

Among the men consulted, both negative and positive views were expressed, including a certain level of cynicism [see Box 20]. However, in most communities, men also accepted the statement and considered the statement to be a desirable goal. There were a few dissenting views among a minority of men, including one perception that it is “not necessary” for men and women to be “equal politically or otherwise”, because bringing women to the forefront in public life “results in family breakdown.”

Another man explained that the statement reflect what is already “on paper”, noting reservations given the cultural similarity of the Maldives with South India where “gender roles are well defined.” A further perception shared was that gender equality may not be possible from a “religious perspective ... regardless of how much it is talked about.”

Overall, there was clear consensus that gender equality is a desirable goal and, among some women participants, an even more positive attitude that it is in fact, an achievable one in the Maldives.

107 See guidance questionnaire in Appendix 1

6. VIEWS ON DAUGHTER HOLDING A HIGH PUBLIC POSITION

A variety of responses were given when asked whether participants would want to see their own daughter in a leadership position. Most respondents were positive about wanting their daughter to do well in her career, regardless of whether it is in a public institution or in the private sector. Several respondents expressed that they did not wish to see their daughter in politics or the People’s Majlis, which was perceived as especially unsavoury for a girl. The quote referring to politicians provided in Box 21 helps to explain the negativity with which politicians are perceived by some participants. In one individual interview, a woman provided a telling insight about the response of a friend when she expressed an interest in going into politics. She shared her friend’s views and her own response as follows : “in politics, one has to accept bribes, give bribes and [the friend] gave a big long list of unethical things, saying I will have to have the courage to do all those things. I said that day if that is what I have to do, then it can’t be done.” Such negative views about politics indicate the perceived undesirability of women choosing politics as a career.

Among women, positive aspirations were shared by participants for their daughters’ future progress. A career in law was a notable favourite among some participants for their daughters to follow. Participants were keen to emphasise that they would not compel or force their children to go into any particular area of work, although many expressed distaste for politics as a possible career path for their children. Some participants explained that they would love to see their child in a leadership position in a public institution and that it would be an honour to see such a day.

One of the male participants expressed his hope that his daughter would climb as high as possible, including as high as the presidency [see Box 21]. Some male participants observed that they would not want their child to do anything that was in conflict with the religion. Another explained that he would prefer if his children set up their own private business and pursued a technical field of their choice, rather than go into government employment. Another expressed disillusionment with education as that didn’t assure the opportunity of decent work or pay that should be consistent with professional qualifications. The latter point is a reflection of the views expressed in many communities that when it comes to recruitment for public positions, merit was not a consideration. Moreover, these complaints suggest a lack of merit-based recruitment standards and procedures, malpractice and the prevalence of political influence in recruitment for jobs in the public sector.

Box 21

“ My daughter will finish grade 12 this year. I hope she will go as high as to become the President.... That would be my hope.

[Men’s FGD, Nolvivaram]

I do not want my daughter or my son in a high government position. I don’t want them to be in politics. Politicians have no respect among the people – they cannot say the same thing twice, they cannot tell a truth, they are perpetrating major crimes - they have destroyed this country. I cannot stop them [children] from doing what they want, but I will not advise them to go there [politics] – and that’s not just for my daughter, but for my son too.

[Men’s FGD – Fonadhoo]

Overall, respondents offered a mixture of responses although it is very clear from most responses that public office or political positions were especially not favoured. There is a perception that politics is an unpleasant and undesirable career. Perhaps the strongest such sentiments were expressed by an FGD participant in Fonadhoo, as provided in Box 21, which require no further explanation.

SECTION IV - CONCLUDING ANALYSIS

During the course of this qualitative assessment, a series of discussions were conducted with both women and men to gain insights into the root causes which manifest in negative perceptions about women’s participation in public life in the Maldives. A series of questions were used to guide the discussions, which mainly focussed on identifying perceptions about women’s participation in public life. The views of respondents were sought along with the reasons underpinning those views.

The questions gauged respondents’ perceptions on women’s participation at the local island level, national level and leading state institutions; areas where women should or shouldn’t be represented; support for electing a woman to the People’s Majlis and the Presidency; views on women being judges; views on gender equality and whether respondents would want to see their own daughter in high level positions in public office.

The literature review on the background to women’s participation in development over the last few decades shows that women have continued to play a visible role in various arenas of public life in the Maldives, with varying degrees of success. The gender and development review of 2000 found that 93% of respondents believed that women should participate in community development efforts. A decade later in 2011, the ADB country evaluation observed that women were an “unutilised resource” in the country’s development. Nevertheless, the UNDP study on Women in Public Life in the same year observed the optimism of both women and men about the increased participation of women in public life, despite the existing challenges limiting women’s participation. This qualitative inquiry in 2015 finds a host of negative perceptions and attitudes about women’s participation in decision-making positions in public life which would undoubtedly have a detrimental effect on their development opportunities and progress. Nevertheless, a striking and somewhat unexpected observation of this study is the positive aspirations held especially by women, and the perceived desirability for women’s equitable participation with men, in all areas of public life.

In all communities consulted, it was evident that the perceived primary role of women is as parent and mother with the responsibility to care for children, the household and family. All other activities are viewed as secondary, which are further compounded by the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political context of the community. It was also evident that often, women are taking on the dual role of head of household and breadwinner, leaving little space or time for engagement with community activities.

The observation was made by women participants that family responsibilities prevented them from engaging in public activities, even if they wanted to do so.

Box 22

“ Women have to be a lot more daring than what they are now. They have to come out to claim their rights. Even now, very few people will come out to go somewhere to talk about something. Why shouldn’t we come out? We can also advocate. If our crowd gets bigger, we will increase our chances to get our rights. The voices of 30 women will be stronger than 3 women. So women have to come out more to get their rights and face those challenges more. We should fight.

[Women’s FGD – Gan]

”

Therefore, while “society” positions women in a defined gender role, women themselves are clearly not content with this compartmentalisation and perceived “norm” to relegate women to the domestic sphere. Moreover, despite the perceived gender roles, it is evident that in all communities, women are consistently attempting to overcome these socio-cultural limitations and break out to assert themselves. The level of success they have in doing this is reflected largely in their strength of conviction that women can and must be represented in all arenas of public life, and women must “fight” to “claim their rights” [see Box 22]. Among both women and men, respondents’ perceptions about the capacity of women to contribute towards community and national development are undeniable. What emerges then is that the specific socio-cultural, religious, socio-economic and socio-political dynamics of the community are significant factors which compromise the accessibility of women to engage in various areas of public life.

One of the key pre-occupations of women in most communities was their engagement with the children's school based activities. It was evident from the views shared by women that they felt confined to the category of mother and parent by society. Nevertheless, there was no question that in every community consulted, women were engaged in all aspects of community and public life and in several communities, the perception existed that women were more active than men. Discussions also showed that many women were deeply interested and willing to participate in social and political activities, and aspired to achieve parity with men in all arenas of public life. This is evident in the positive perceptions held by most women and also some men, about the desirability of achieving equality between the sexes. Deeply conservative and patriarchal perceptions also existed among respondents, which endorsed the confinement of women to the domestic sphere. However, these were not as dominant as the more moderate perceptions which were supportive of women's increased participation in all aspects of public life.

A further factor which affects island community dynamics is the existence of long-held rivalries between the different wards, adding yet another dimension to the existing tensions in the prevailing political climate. This aspect was most evident in Gan, although observations showed the existence of this in Fonadhoo, Nolvivaram and Maafushi. It is in that context that women are required to find a way to make a social contribution towards island development and assert themselves as stakeholders in decisions that affect their lives, livelihoods and opportunities for development in their community. Despite this seemingly bleak situation, it is clear that women hold strong views about their abilities and the necessity for their active participation in all areas of public life, to facilitate development and establish a meaningful role for themselves in their communities. Many of the men consulted also acknowledged and supported women's active participation in their communities. For instance, in Maafushi, participants in the men's FGD described the island's WDC as a "model committee".

The synonymous association of women's "community development" activity and island cleaning is clearly a misperception, considering the types of work the IWDCs had been engaging in, as evident from the 2010 IWDC evaluation and observations made during this study. This is not to dismiss the fact that island cleaning was a major community activity women undertook, which served both as a symbol of community cohesion and one that generated income for other activities. The almost reactive response that women's "social" activity is "island cleaning", even among them indicates a stereotyping of women's association at island level that requires greater scrutiny. Women's substantial contributions at community level, without the necessary broad-based support from government and other stakeholders must be given due recognition. Therefore, it is clear that there is a need to acknowledge the efforts of women at community level, to understand the areas in which they are actively engaging and make specific interventions to galvanise their efforts. Undoubtedly, this must be done with due regard to the specific conditions and social dynamics that exist in individual communities, with optimal engagement with women, using a multi-faceted approach.

The perceived demise of the IWDCs and the disempowered status of the WDCs in the prevailing situation of flux of the decentralisation process all cohere to further undermine the position of women and devalue the contributions of women at local level. During this study, it was apparent that the views and aspirations of women belie their structurally disempowered status and their willingness and efforts to participate and contribute towards community development. This is especially ironic considering in many communities women are the primary human resource available for island development while a significant number of the male population is away from the island for work. As the 2007 ADB study highlighted noted earlier, women remain an underutilised resource. This study further finds they are also a 'frustrated' resource due to their perceived marginalisation from the development agenda at local level especially. What is evident from this study is also that women's capacity to associate, network and organise are unsupported by government and other stakeholders. Instead, existing long-standing in-community rivalries are fanned, reinforcing a culture of division and conflict in some communities. In others, there was recognition that social and political rivalries are damaging and detrimental to the development of the community.

It was evident that across the communities consulted, clarity issues existed as to the permissibility of women in certain public leadership positions, from a religious perspective. Some participants expressed reservations about women

holding high public office, saying they were not sure what the religious position is about this. However, among both men and women, there were a significant number of respondents who did not perceive the existence of any such barriers and supported the idea of a woman becoming a head of state or a judge. In fact, among women especially, there was emphasis on the need for women to be judges, as discussed earlier [See Part III, point 4]. Despite some religious interpretations that promoted women's public participation, it is also clear there is a need and opportunity to educate citizens on Muslim women's rights to participate in public life, in keeping with Islamic principles. Closing such knowledge gaps would enable women to navigate a clear path towards greater engagement in all areas of public life. This will also increase their confidence and allow them to exercise their abilities to contribute in their communities, and claim their rightful place as active citizens on a par with men.

The findings of this qualitative assessment suggests that many of the recent quantitative studies showing an extremely disturbing and negative social landscape for women have not entirely captured the spirit and aspirations of the people in some of the communities. Furthermore, it is possible to say that people in these communities do aspire to an equitable, just and non-discriminatory society where both women and men have the opportunity to participate and contribute equally towards community and national development. For instance, conversations conducted with both women and men in Maafushi and Nohivaram were extremely positive and promising from a women's empowerment and development perspective. The fact that both women and men shared perceptions that strongly supported the increased participation of women in public life is indicative of the potential that exists in both islands to engage men as champions for women's development.

It was evident from the FGD with male participants in Maafushi that they have already played an active role in supporting women to public office. Nevertheless, it is also evident that several challenges exist, although these can be addressed with a carefully planned intervention to build capacity of potential women candidates to contest for public office in a supportive environment. Political parties must also have both the intention and the conviction to support the inclusion of women in practice, to achieve the desired equitable participation. In Nohivaram, both women and men expressed very positive perceptions which indicate sound support to the equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of public life. In both Maafushi and Nohivaram, women were perceived as pro-active and willing participants of development, who have the capacity to be partners in all areas of public life, alongside men. The positive attitudes of both men and women can only be described as strengths in these communities, which are yet to be tapped by development stakeholders.

The consultations also revealed issues and perceptions that provide insights into relevant island level dynamics which are distinctive. Stakeholders that are interested to support women's development and empowerment in the Maldives are recommended to take such specificities into consideration. The views expressed by women and men in each island were mostly consistent, although there were instances where they did not match. For instance, in Laamu Atoll Gan, the women informed that men were a significant barrier to women's social and political participation, while the men informed that they were supportive of efforts to increase women's participation. As discussed earlier, women specifically observed that men colluded to obstruct community activities initiated by women, as evident from the example about a petition regarding a pre-school. What this example indicates is that there is a need to create greater capacity to resolve conflict between women and men in relation to development efforts in communities where such issues exist. In Laamu Atoll Fonadhoo also, male participants observed the absence of any barriers to women's participation although women's consultations indicate otherwise. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that in some communities, perceptions about the favourability of the prevailing environment for women's participation are inconsistent among women and men. This in turn may be another significant factor which affects the ability of women to actively engage in decision making in the community. Improved communication and dialogue between stakeholders on various community issues would undoubtedly help to improve this situation.

A further factor limiting women's participation in this community was the perceived mobility issue, due to the large size of the island. This issue did not affect men. This perceived disparity raises a host of questions as to why women's mobility is limited while men remain unaffected. It was observed from the field visit that Gan is a large island with

communities spread across the island with no public transport system. Private transport like taxis is much more expensive than in Malé. However, there was no evident restriction on women driving motor-bikes or cars, although everyone would not be able to afford such transport. Therefore, the perception about women's limited mobility may be attributable to limitations imposed by child-care responsibilities, greater societal scrutiny about the purpose of women's movement in public or the absence of and own vehicle due to financial constraints. A comparable community is Fuvahmulah, which is another large island where women are highly mobile and have similar island dynamics to Gan in terms of multiple separate wards. While it is beyond the scope of this study to delve into a meaningful comparison of both, such dynamics are worth studying to understand how change may be possible and what kind of intervention might facilitate such change. An anecdote shared from Fuvahmulah is that a loan scheme was introduced to the island some years ago and women used the funds to purchase motor-bikes, which provided them the wheels to become mobile. Can such a loan scheme change the ability of the women in Gan to become more mobile and thereby, more able to mobilise as agents for change in their community?

In Fonadhoo, there were no perceptions limiting or excluding women from participation in public life. Women especially were supportive of women's full participation at all levels. However, support to women's election to public office is perceived to be linked to prevailing socio-political divisions that undermine the participation of women in particular. The perception of women "boycotting" women is indicative of rivalries and divisions which further disunite women, and undermine their potential for participation, further disempowering them. Understanding these social fault-lines may help to tailor interventions more effectively at community level.

Kulhudhuffushi portrayed a somewhat different picture to most other islands. Despite its large population, the perceptions shared indicated a gloomy and confused outlook about the potential for women's equitable participation with men in any arena. In this community, particular conservative interpretations of Islam among both men and women were perceived to considerably limit women. A generational gap was observed, which suggest that among men, the young people are more aware of stereotypes and rejected them. However, overall, the contrast between the aspirations of men and women were quite different. The strong patriarchal attitudes of the consulted men explained the somewhat subdued outlook of women about their position and freedom to assert themselves in any area of public life. Nevertheless, despite the situation that affected their views, responses clearly indicated women's aspirations to be able to participate equitably with men in all areas of public life. The need for greater education and awareness among both men and women was expressed by women here.

In Malé, the perception among women especially was one of positivity and hope for a brighter future for women's participation in public life. The difference between attitudes and perceptions in Malé and the rest of the communities visited are not comparable due to the vast developmental differences between them.

The eight island councils of Fuvahmulah have no women councillors. The perception that women are "overloaded", doing everything, everywhere, in all areas of public life is clear from the views shared by respondents in Fuvahmulah. The question then arises why there are no women at decision-making levels in the eight, 3-member Local Councils or the Atoll Council? The information received from respondents is that women are the most active at the grassroots level that ensures the election of men to public office. Women themselves consider the existence of the "glass ceiling" effect to be unacceptable. The perceived "use" of women in the political arena to serve the political aspirations of men is implicit in the picture this situation generates. Moreover, a further underlying factor shared in an individual interview was that patriarchal attitudes of men influence voting behaviour of women, preventing women from exercising their vote freely. In the socio-cultural and political context of the Maldives, voting behaviour is perceived to be strongly influenced by family loyalties and other affiliations.

Additionally, the perception shared by a male respondent that a woman is chosen for a political position only in situations where there are no eligible or interested men, is indicative of a situation where women are perceived as a fall-back option. Therefore, these lesser discussed social dynamics also add to the complexity of the issue of women’s limited participation in decision making positions.

In light of the findings of this inquiry, several recommendations are proposed in the following section. These recommendations were discussed following a presentation of the findings of this study at a stakeholder meeting convened by IFES in Malé. The recommendations take into consideration the input provided by various stakeholders and have been further enriched as a result.

SECTION V - RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed to the relevant Government institutions, NGO stakeholders and political parties who are at the forefront in conducting activities to increase women's empowerment and participation in public life.

Government institutions and NGO stakeholders

1. Support a public awareness campaign through multi-stakeholder engagement, to educate the public on the positive contributions of women at local, regional and national levels to acknowledge and recognise women's contribution towards development in all areas, but specifically in the political arena
2. Address the significant knowledge gaps relating to the existing legal framework on gender equality, with specific reference to the 2008 Constitutional provision in Article 109(c) that a woman can hold the position of head of state, providing the rationale for lifting the existing bar on women's participation during the Constitutional revision
3. Increase awareness raising activities and components in all civic education programmes to address the negative perceptions about women's participation in public life, specifically the importance and relevance of women's participation in political decision-making and as judges
4. Address knowledge gaps relating to women's position in Islam by producing and disseminating materials (in Dhivehi) relating to the equitable position and participation of women and men in public life [one suggested source for such resources is www.musawah.org]
The dissemination of such materials can be done in various ways, including through traditional media, social media platforms and also through the creation of a pool of trainers or knowledgeable persons to impart this information to a variety of audiences. A specific target group to reach with such trainings are teachers. Additionally, this information must be produced in such a way that it is easily accessible to lay persons
5. Facilitate opportunities for women in island communities to connect, engage, network and discuss community issues in various fora on the island, to create an enabling environment for collective mobilisation on common community and socio-political issues
6. Conduct awareness raising activities to encourage the participation of men in household work and childcare responsibilities, to reduce the double-burden on women and increase acceptance about the responsibilities of men in the domestic sphere
7. Address negative attitudes about women's participation in non-traditional roles, and advocate for the increased inclusion of women in the labour force – with specific emphasis on increased participation in the tourism sector
8. Increase and support the engagement of men as champions for women's development by identifying women's empowerment advocates among men in various communities and provide opportunities for capacity building to enable them to facilitate change at community level
9. Submit amendment(s) to the Decentralisation Act 2010 to strengthen and give equitable due process in the election process of WDC members, so that both men and women participate in the voting process without discrimination
10. Facilitate the establishment and proper functionality of Women's Development Committees to undertake the responsibilities of their mandate as per the Decentralisation Act 2010

Political Parties

1. Facilitate increased access for women to participate as candidates in local, regional and national level elections (by the next round of national elections) with a view to significantly reduce the gap in women's participation in decision-making positions at all levels, including local governance and at the People's Majlis
2. Introduce a quota system within the party machinery to increase the representative participation of women in internal decision-making positions, consistent with the party membership of women
3. Actively facilitate inclusivity of women from island communities in the party machinery
 - a) by strengthening island level party branches and encouraging women's greater participation in decision-making at island level
 - b) by including women from island communities in national level activities with a view to building their capacity and tapping their potential to contribute
 - c) conduct sensitisation for national/atoll/island level party leadership to encourage them to recruit women for party activities
 - d) prioritise funding support to build capacity and assist women candidates to conduct effective campaigns

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APPENDIX 1

Guidance questionnaire for FGDs

1 - ޖަޚްޚިޔާ ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

(ޖެނެރަލީ، ޔެކޮނޮމިކަލީ، ސޯޝަލީ، ޕޮލިޓިކަލީ، ރިސޯޝަލް ޖެނަރޭޝަން، ރިސޯޝަލް ޖެނަރޭޝަން، ރިސޯޝަލް ޖެނަރޭޝަން...)

1 – To what extent do women participate in activities in this community?

(eg. generally, economically, socially, politically, in island development, etc)

2 - ޖެނެރަލީ ނުވަތަ ރިސޯޝަލް ޖެނަރޭޝަން ގޮތުން ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ރަސްމީ ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

2 – What do you think about women being active and taking leadership in the community?

3 - ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

“ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?”

3 – Are there certain things that women do not have to or must not participate in?

[Probing questions : What are they? Why?]

4 - ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

“ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?”

4 – Are there certain things that women should get involve with?

[Probing questions : What are they? Why?]

5 - ޖަޚްޚިޔާ ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

5 – In the Maldives now, is women's participation at a satisfactory level or not?

6 - ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

6 – Is it desirable or not, for women's participation to increase/broaden?

7 - ޖަޚްޚިޔާ ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

7 – Has a woman ever been in the position of island chief in this island?

8 - ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

“ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?”

8 – Has a woman ever contested for local elections in this island?

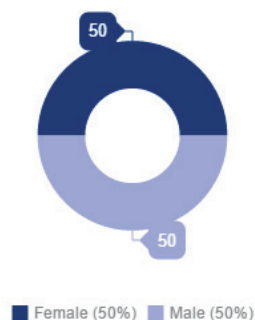
[If no – why do you think that is so? If yes – what was the result? Why do you think that is so?]

9 - ޖަޚްޚިޔާ ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް ނުވަތަ ނިސްވަތްތެރިން ހެއްދެވުމުގެ ސަރަޙައްދުގައި ބައިވެރިވާ ފުރުޞަތް ހުރިހާ ފަރާތްތަކަށް?

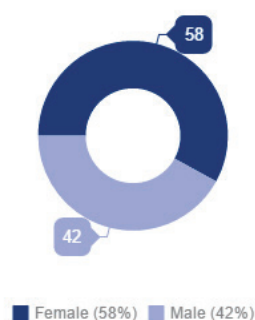
9 – If a woman contests for parliamentary elections to represent this constituency, will you vote for her?

APPENDIX 2

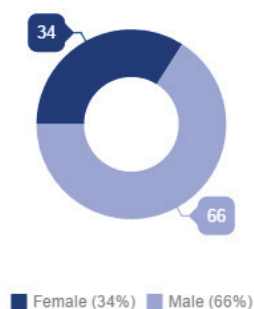
Support & General Service



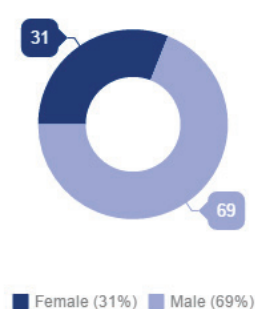
Managerial Service



Executive Service



Zimmaadhaaru Verin



Civil Service employee by rank in 2010, disaggregated by sex.

Note : Zimmaadhaaru Verin means “Responsible High Officials”, which refer to the ranks of Permanent Secretaries and the highest ranking administrators at Local Council Secretariates.

Data Source :

Website of the Civil Service Commission

<http://en.csc.gov.mv/2011/08/25/statistical-bulletin/>(accessed : 27 April 2015)



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