



COVID-19 response WASH lessons learned Maldives

SUMMARY

- As of 24 January 2021, there have been 14,885 positive cases, 13,815 recoveries, and 50 deaths across the country.
- UNICEF procured and handed over 175 metric tons of PPE supplies to the Ministry of Health (worth over USD 400,000) for 5,000 front-line, health professionals responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The UNICEF Country Office reached over 281,529 people through its social media channels.
- Maldives is a small island state, reliant on imports. A key challenge has been that items such as disinfectant are not available in the local markets.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic spread to the Maldives when its first case was confirmed on 7. March 2020. As of 24 January 2021, there have been 14,885 positive cases, 13,815 recoveries, and 50 deaths across the country. With UNICEF's technical support, the Ministry of Education (MoE) prepared an Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (ERRP) for the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan is used to guide the return to schools in a safe and coordinated manner. Already before the outbreak, the country office had a small WASH programme working with schools. The focus of the response has been on supporting schools to reopen by promoting disinfection, IPC standards/guidelines, and promoting COVID-19 prevention messages. The focus has been on parents, teachers, children, and adolescents as

Maldives plans to reopen schools and public spaces.

Response

Strategy/Approach taken by Maldives Country Office:

- **Schools:** UNICEF and the MoE collaborated on a Back-to-School Campaign ('Ufalun Schoolah'), which aimed to build trust, awareness, and share information on the safe return to schools following closures. UNICEF provided WASH products (soap and sanitisers), IPC supplies (surface disinfectants), and cleaning materials to support that the IPC protocols are effectively implemented in all government schools. Instructions for the safe reopening of schools

were sent to schools with a reopening date of 1 July 2020 for all schools in non-COVID-19 islands. These protocols were shared with parents, teachers, and students in the form of short videos.

- UNICEF also supported the MoE to establish 44 handwashing stations in 22 schools that did not have sufficient handwashing stations for students and school staff.
- **IEC materials:** UNICEF has disseminated multilingual prevention messages to promote personal hygiene through social and broadcast media (including Dhivehi language articles, videos, and resources). IEC materials have been developed for the general public and children; SOPs for frontline workers are to include child and gender sensitivities and inclusive service provision.

Result/s achieved:

- UNICEF procured and handed over 175 metric tons of PPE supplies to the Ministry of Health (worth over USD 400,000) for 5,000 front-line, health professionals responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The items included gowns, masks, face shields, and other essential protective gear.
- UNICEF provided USD 30,000 of soap and USD 293,918 of IPC supplies for schools. An additional batch of handwashing soap worth USD 40,000 is being procured for schools.
- UNICEF provided alcohol hand rub and hand sanitisers (17,000 bottles) and antibacterial handwash (12,000 bottles) for health facilities.
- The UNICEF Country Office reached over 281,529 people through its social media channels. The cumulative reach through UNICEF messaging, as well as those disseminated through its partners' social media channels (multiple platforms), has reached over 400,000 people with some

LESSONS LEARNT

- *The very high internet coverage in the Maldives (covering around 83 per cent of the total population) has made it possible to disseminate key messages on COVID-19 prevention primarily through social media and infographics shared through social networks (Viber, WhatsApp, etc.). A Viber chat bot was launched in April 2020 in English and Dhivehi to increase the reach of key messages on prevention.*
- *With the easing of the greater Malé lockdown measures, the challenge is now to keep the public engaged in washing hands with soap. Messages and infographics were disseminated on social media and posters at shops/public venues. Billboards with key lifesaving messages were installed in the greater Malé region and other islands.*
- *Specific WASH support is needed for particularly-vulnerable families and individuals, including the migrant community in Greater Malé city, homeless persons, and drug users.*
- *The pandemic has triggered more comprehensive contingency planning to strengthen WASH facilities and services beyond the current response to COVID-19.*

people being reached multiple times with the key lifesaving messages.

Learning

Challenges and constraints:

- Maldives is a small island state, reliant on imports. A key challenge has been that items such as disinfectant are not available in the local markets.
- Government and schools requested that UNICEF provide alcohol hand rub, yet since international guidance indicates this is not

suitable for small children; UNICEF decided to not respond to this request.

- Greater Malé has a high population density, limited urban accommodations, and migrant workers living in packed dormitories creating further challenges for the COVID-19 response.
- The MoE initially requested support to ensure the safe reopening of all schools, but UNICEF has no significant national experience working in private schools. Later this request was changed to support government schools (as it was found that private schools can afford the cost of the COVID-19 response through fees).
- The maintenance of public handwashing facilities remains a challenge due to the misuse of facilities and the high cost of water consumption. Drinking water insecurity has become an immediate health risk in several atolls, especially during the dry season.
- UNICEF attempted to engage the private sector in investing in public handwashing facilities. However, because of misuse and lack of assurance of proper maintenance, companies declined to engage given the risk to their brand names.

Additional resources:

- “UNICEF Maldives and the United States Join Hands to Support COVID-19 Response” (<https://www.unicef.org/maldives/press-releases/unicef-maldives-and-united-states-join-hands-support-covid-19-response>).

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