

ENDhERI Student Small Grants Request for Applications

(IUL)438-ENV/438/2024/70

**Enhancing National Development through Environmentally
Resilient Islands (ENDhERI)**

Student Small Grants

Request for Applications

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Government of the Republic of Maldives through the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy is implementing Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI) project financed by Global Environment Facility (GEF) and assisted by United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) with the objective of enhancing reef protection, resilience and ecosystem recovery by reducing development impacts in a selected project site in the Maldives, enabled for replication nationally through public awareness and integrating the values of marine biodiversity and other natural capital.

This project aims to assist the government of the Maldives in its implementation of new environmental policies and transition towards national adoption of Green Growth atoll development that will sustain marine Natural Capital (NC) and strengthen the resilience and recovery of reef ecosystems. This will be informed by learning from atoll-wide integrated coastal zone management within a Managed Marine Area / Biosphere Reserve framework, and the application of innovative sustainability practices and standards in agriculture, fisheries, tourism and construction sector as the basis for transforming the human ecological footprint in Laamu Atoll, and taking this up to national level through sector transformation, and improved governance based on NC accounting. The intermediate objective of this transformation is to minimize pollutants from land and marine based activities into the adjacent marine environment and reduce marine-based drivers of reef degradation including baitfish and reef fisheries. Overall, the project seeks to enhance reef ecosystem integrity and resilience through sustainable management, reducing development impacts and integrating NC accounting into national planning.

2. MAIN OBJECTIVE:

The primary objective is to allocate a small grant through the ENDhERI project to assist postgraduate students in conducting research on marine natural capital valuation and accounting. The focus extends beyond biodiversity conservation, encompassing aspects relevant to business and accounting professions in the corporate sector. Additionally, the project aims to facilitate student placements with organizations engaged in marine research and offer internships specifically focused on Natural Capital.

3. GENERAL CRITERIA

- **Eligibility:**
 - The grant is open to all postgraduate students interested in conducting research projects and those intending to undertake research as their thesis within their respective degree programs.
 - Applicants must be Postgraduate (or equivalent) Degree students from Maldives.
- **Focus Area:** Research Projects can focus on, but not limited to; (Student project ideas attached in the Annex B)
 - The main focus of the research project MUST be in the field of Natural Capital Accounting.
 - Research projects should emphasize the integration of Natural Capital Accounting principles into various aspects of environmental research.
- **Research scale:**
 - The grants are designed to aid small-scale or pilot projects, emphasizing support for initiatives of limited scale rather than large-scale endeavours.
 - Ideally, the grant should cover 50% to 100% of the project costs.
 - In cases where the ENDhERI Student Grant is not the sole source of funding, evidence of support from other sources will be required.

- **University Approval:**
 - The project must have endorsement and approval from MQA accredited University.
 - A brief letter of support from the supervisor must be submitted along with the application.
- **Research Focus Area:** Research can focus on, but not limited to; (Student project ideas attached in the Annex B)
 - Environmental Footprint Analyses for different sectors.
 - Identifying Mechanisms for Integrating Natural Capital Accounting and Biodiversity Targets into Different Business Planning.
 - Species and Ecosystems Analysis and Accounting.
 - Research Projects can focus on particular species, ecosystems, or both, addressing issues related to biodiversity, habitat preservation, and ecosystem health.
 - The scope can include threatened habitats, major issues like human-wildlife conflict, and community education.
 - No restrictions on projects focusing on threatened habitats, emphasizing a holistic approach to conservation.
- **Species Analysis and Accounting:**
 - Projects can focus on particular species or have a more general focus, such as on a threatened habitat or major issues like human-wildlife conflict.
 - Projects can consider working on any species, provided it fulfils the IUCN Red List criteria.
 - Consideration for projects on species not yet assessed but thought to be threatened is encouraged.
- **Exclusions:** The following categories of projects will NOT be eligible for support.
 - Research which does not align with focus area.
 - Pure research with no obvious conservation benefit.
 - Expeditions, particularly where the applicant must raise funds to participate.
 - Attending conferences or seminars.
 - Publishing books.

This comprehensive set of criteria ensures that the ENDhERI Student Grant supports a diverse range of projects within the Natural Capital Accounting framework, including species, ecosystems, and broader environmental considerations.

ENDhERI Small Grants will support activities relating to the above key projects within the student's Postgraduate program. Each Student is allowed to submit **only one application** of their preferred project.

4. WHO CAN APPLY?

Maldivian students currently enrolled in postgraduate programs in universities recognized by the Maldives Qualifications Authority, including those studying in foreign institutions.

5. Grant Funding Allocation:

- **Maximum Funding:** The funding amount is capped at a maximum of MVR 100,000.00.
- **Disbursement:** The total grant value will be disbursed in three tranches based on the progress of the research.
 - 25% of the fund will be released upon signing the agreement.
 - The remaining 50% will be disbursed after the submission of the detailed methodology and timeline, duly approved by the supervisor.
 - The final tranche of 25% will be released upon the completion of field assessments and data collection.
- **Fund Misuse or Project Stagnation:**
 - In the event of any misuse of funds or if the project fails to progress as expected, the Ministry reserves the right to withdraw the remaining funds immediately.
 - If the student decides to discontinue the course, the Ministry holds the authority to demand repayment of the utilized amount.

6. PROJECT DURATION

- **Maximum Duration:** The maximum duration for the funded activity is Twelve (12) months from the date of the award.
- **Completion Report:**
 - A comprehensive project completion report, following the provided format, must be submitted within the specified timeframe.
 - Report should include a detailed table outlining data collection specifics, such as data, location, data type, and collecting method, along with all analysed data, appropriately labelled to match the report's table.
 - The completion report should include the endorsement of the project supervisor.
- **Publication and Dissemination:**
 - Research outcomes will be published on the Ministry website.
 - Research findings may be made available at the public library if deemed appropriate.
 - Research papers resulting from the project should aim for publication in a peer-reviewed journal, ensuring the quality and credibility of the research.
 - Researchers are encouraged to present their findings in relevant forums, including marine symposiums and other annual conferences organized nationally.
 - The dissemination of research outcomes in conferences contributes to knowledge sharing and networking within the scientific community.

7. MONITORING PROJECT PROGRESS

In addition to the disbursement tranches, the following deliverables will serve as key indicators to monitor the progress of the research project:

- **Literature Review and Research Plan:**
 - A thorough literature review relevant to the research topic, demonstrating a solid understanding of existing knowledge and gaps in the field.

- Submission of a detailed research plan and schedule, including milestones, to provide a roadmap for the project's timely execution
- **Progress Report:**
 - Quarterly submission of interim progress reports highlighting achievements, challenges, and adjustments made to the research plan if necessary, along with the Supervisors feedback.
 - Quarterly submission of financial statements detailing the utilization of funds, ensuring transparency and accountability in financial matters.

8. SUBMISSION (CAN SUBMIT VIA E-MAIL)

To ensure the completeness of the proposals, the following mandatory documents must be submitted along with the research proposals. Proposals lacking any of these documents will be disqualified and not considered for further evaluation:

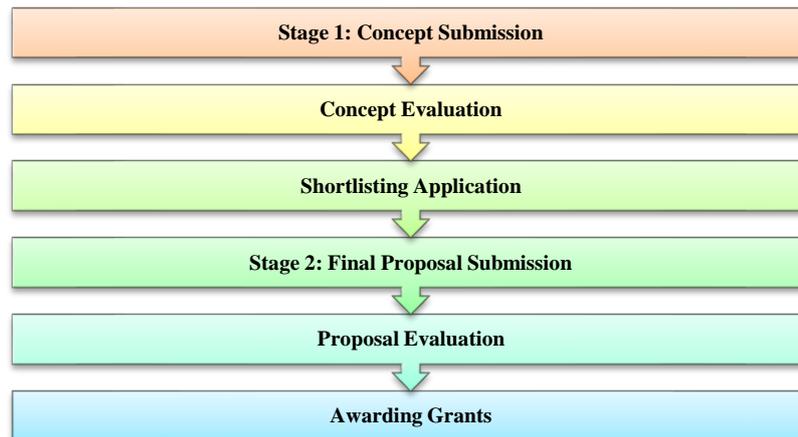
- **National ID Card:** copy of the student's National ID card, serving as proof of identity.
- **Student CV:** A comprehensive Curriculum Vitae (CV) of the student, providing details on academic qualifications, research experience, and any relevant skills or achievements.
- **Project Concept Note:** A detailed Project Concept Note outlining the research objectives, methodology, expected outcomes, and the significance of the study.
- **University Course Offer Letter:** A copy of the official university course offer letter confirming the student's enrolment in the relevant postgraduate program.
- **Supervisor's Reference Letter:** A reference letter from the project supervisor, ensuring that the student will receive appropriate guidance throughout the entire research period

9. APPLICATION AND EVALUATION:

The Small Grant scheme applications will be implemented in two stages.

Stage 1: Submission of Concept Note

Stage 2: Submission of Proposal for shortlisted projects



STAGE 1: CONCEPT NOTE

Upon announcement of grant scheme, applicants will first have to submit a brief concept note (see Annex A). The Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy will acknowledge receipt of the concept no later than one week after submission. Concept plans will then be assessed to ensure they align with the research focus area (Clause 3). Among the received concepts, shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a detailed proposal. Along with the full proposal package submission, a proposal presentation session will be held where a panel consisting of experts in the field will ask additional questions regarding the proposal. Prior to submission of proposals, the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy will request detailed proposals. The concept plans will be assessed based on the following criteria:

Evaluation Criteria:

- Is the applicant enrolled in an MQA (Maldives Qualifications Authority) recognized University?
- Is the concept note in line with the focus area for the grant?

- Asses the allocated budget for personnel and contractual services is reasonable, realistic, and aligns with the scope and objectives of the proposed research.
- Examines the appropriateness of budget allocations for administrative, traveling, personnel, contractual services, and equipment expenses in relation to the overall funding available.

STAGE 2: FINAL PROPOSAL FOR SHORLISTED RESEARCH PROJECT

The detailed proposal will be required after the research projects have been shortlisted. The following needs to be addressed in the final proposal.

Title: Clarity and conciseness of the research title, its effectiveness to present research focus.

Rationale of Research: How well the application outlines the problems or opportunity driving the research, providing a comprehensive understanding of its purpose.

Purpose and objectives: Clarity in highlighting immediate outcomes and benefits and verify the justification for the research's contribution to the academic area.

Research Plans: Detailed activities proposed, examining the explanation of key outputs and their alignment with the main research objective.

Expected Research Outcome: Presentation of the key research benefits and the potential impact of the study within academic context.

Timeline and Schedule: Ensuring the provided timeline and work schedule are realistic and well-structured for the proposed research activities.

Research Budget: Budget breakdown, focusing on its alignment with proposed activities and justification for each budget item. The budget should be explicitly designated for research activities, promoting transparency and accountability in resource utilization.

Implementing Student Research: Details of the student researcher, ensuring a clear rationale for the student involvement in the research project.

Inclusivity in Research: Measures taken to ensure inclusivity in search participants, considering diversity and equitable representation.

Sustainability of Research impact: Potential Impact of the research within the academic community and data gaps of the country, providing justification for the sustainability of the research outcome.

The research application will be thoroughly evaluated for student research grant proposals comprehensively addresses the evaluation criteria set below.

10. EVALUATION CRITERIA:

#	Evaluation Criteria	Poor 0-2 Points	Fair 4 Points	Satisfactory 6 Points	Good 8 Points	Excellent 10 Points
1	Rationale of Research	Need is not stated.	The stated need does not address the specified research.	The stated need addresses the specified research.	Addresses the need fairly and is consistent with the specified research	Addresses the need and is consistent with the specified research, providing a comprehensive understanding of its purpose.
2	Purpose and objectives:	The objectives are unclear; no measurable outcomes are included.	The objectives are defined, but measurable outcomes are unclear.	The objectives are defined, but measurable outcomes are somewhat clear.	The objectives are defined, and the outcomes are stated.	The objectives are defined and obtainable. The outcomes are stated and measurable.
3	Research Plan	Activities are not identified, and no explanation of key outputs.	Activities are identified, and the explanation of key outputs is not clearly defined.	Activities are identified, and the explanation of key outputs are defined fairly.	The activities proposed are instructionally sound, and the explanation of key outputs align with the main research objective. The research may not be doable.	The activities proposed are instructionally sound, and the explanation of key outputs align with the main research objective. The research is doable.

4	Expected Research Outcome	No stated impact or benefit is given.	There is little indication that the positive impact of the study	Research benefits and positive impact of the study within academic context is average.	Some benefits and search impacts identified within academic context.	Research benefits and positive impact of the study within academic context.
5	Timeline and Schedule	No timeline is included.	The timeline is unclear or is not realistic for the successful completion of the research.	The timeline is fairly attainable.	The timeline is clear with realistic, attainable dates.	The timeline is clearly stated with realistic, attainable dates. All activities are linked to the timeline and the overall outcome of the research.
6	Project Budget	<p>0 Points: Budget is unclear or unrealistic for the proposed research project.</p> <p>10 points: Budget is clear, estimated amount does not match the proposed research project. Exceed allocated percentage for administrative and equipment.</p> <p>20 points: Budget is clear and realistic for the proposed research project. The estimated amount matches the allocated budget. Does not exceed allocated percentage for administrative and equipment (with evidence of Support from other sources of funding)</p> <p>* The allocated funds are explicitly designated for research activities, promoting transparency and accountability in resource utilization.</p>				
7	Implementing Student Research	No details	Limited information	Limited information on student	Details of the student researcher,	Details of the student researcher,

			on student researcher	researcher and their involvement	information on student involvement in the research project is limited	ensuring a clear rationale for the student involvement in the research project and its academic context.
8	Inclusivity in Research	No mention of measures taken for inclusivity.	Limited measures taken for inclusivity.	Some mention of inclusivity measures, but they are vague or insufficient.	Clearly stated measures for inclusivity in research participation.	Explicit and well-defined measures for inclusivity, ensuring diverse and equitable research participants.
9	Sustainability of Research impact	No mention of plans for sustaining impact of the research.	Unrealistic mention of plans for sustaining the research.	Mention of plans, lack of well-defined strategy for sustaining the impact.	Sustainable plans are defined to some extent but may lack clarity or details.	Explicit and well-detailed plans for sustaining the impact of the research. Incorporates monitoring guidelines to ensure long-term sustainability.

11. SUBMISSION DEADLINE

Deadline for submission of concept note is **15th April 2024, Monday, 14:00**. All applicants will be notified of the shortlist outcome, including both successful and unsuccessful applications, within 4 weeks. Shortlisted applicants will also be notified of the final proposal deadline and marking criteria.

The filled concept note (template attached as Annex A) should be submitted via email to endheri@environment.gov.mv with the email subject **“ENDhERI Student Grant - (IUL)438-ENV/438/2024/70”**

Any queries regarding the grant scheme must be sent via email to endheri@environment.gov.mv by 15th March 2024.

Annex A

CONCEPT NOTE

Section 1: Title Page

i Use this section to provide a brief title and key information about the research project, including the names of the principal investigator(s), institutional affiliation of the applicants (the department and university), name and address of the granting agency, project dates, amount of funding requested, and signatures of university personnel authorizing the proposal (when necessary).

Section 2: Introduction

i Use this section to list the key elements of your proposal, including a statement of the problem, the purpose of research, research goals or objectives, and significance of the research.

Section 3: Literature Review

i Use this section to you've done the necessary preliminary research to undertake your project. Literature reviews should be selective and critical, not exhaustive.

Section 4: Project Narrative

i Use this section to supply all the details of the project, including a detailed statement of problem, research objectives or goals, hypotheses, methods, procedures, outcomes or deliverables, and evaluation and dissemination of the research.

Section 5: Personnel

i Use this section to Explain staffing requirements in detail and make sure that staffing makes sense. Be very explicit about the skill sets of the personnel already in place (you will probably include their Curriculum Vitae as part of the proposal). Explain the necessary skill sets and functions of personnel you will recruit.

Section 6: Timeframe

i Use this section to explain the timeframe for the research project in some detail. When will you begin and complete each step? It may be helpful to reviewers if you present a visual version of your timeline.

Section 7: Budget

Projected Expenditures

i In the table below, list down expected budget breakdown for the project in MVR.

Expense category	Total expected cost	Maximum percent of budget permitted
Contractual services costs*		
Staff and other personal costs		
Specialized and technical Equipment*		
Travel		
Additional cost (explain)		
TOTAL		

Annex B

Proposal for student scholarships dedicated to advancing research in natural capital and ecosystem services. These suggested options serve as a foundation, allowing students and institutions to customize them according to specific academic goals and research priorities.

Options for student scholarships contributing to natural capital and ecosystem services research.

Prepared by: Dr Jordan Gacutan, Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) Secretariat

Background

Environmental Economic Accounting (EEA) for the ocean faces significant challenges. As a novel framework, there are few established processes, a lack of experts and limited available data that is fit for purpose. This hinders the development of comprehensive and accurate accounts, impacting policy decisions and the monitoring of sustainability goals. Student researchers can play a crucial role in addressing these issues by contributing to data collection, exploring, and developing new methodologies, and highlighting the importance of EEA for management and decision making. By bridging the knowledge gap and building future capacity, student research can help ensure that EEA becomes a powerful tool for achieving environmental sustainability. The MCCEE has offered to provide student grants in support of research assessing (i) environmental footprint analysis for different sectors and (ii) natural capital accounting and biodiversity targets into business planning.

This brief provides an overview of key thematic areas of interest suggested by the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy (MCCEE), followed by suggestions for topics. The brief ends with operational considerations with the student grants.

Thematic areas

1. Environmental footprint analyses for different sectors

Environmental footprint analysis (EFA) and natural capital accounting (NCA) are two complementary approaches that together provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between human activities and the environment. **EFA** measures the total amount of resources used and waste generated by a particular activity, product, or organization, while **NCA** focuses on the value of natural capital stocks and the flows of services they provide to the economy. These tools can be linked to determine the risks and dependencies of specific economic sectors on natural capital, through analyses such as:

- **Identifying hotspots of environmental impact:** EFA can be used to identify areas where resource consumption or waste generation is particularly high. This can then be linked to changes in natural capital and ecosystem services.
 - **Track progress towards sustainability goals:** EFA and NCA can be used to track progress towards goals concerning greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity targets.
- ### 2. Identifying mechanisms for integrating Natural Capital Accounting and biodiversity targets into different business planning.

Integrating NCA and biodiversity targets into business planning provides transparency in a business' environmental, social and governance (ESG) actions and could also assist in maximizing financial returns. The UN has developed the Taskforce for Carbon Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and Taskforce for Nature Financial Disclosures (TNFD) to better link the private sector to the environment and carbon emissions. The TNFD provides ways of linking

business activities with global conservation efforts, ensuring the long-term health of ecosystems and the services they provide. By integrating these two approaches, businesses can proactively manage environmental risks, enhance resilience, and generate sustainable returns for stakeholders.

Student projects

1. EFA and NCA analyses for economic sectors

Measuring natural resource use by tourism for an Atoll in the Maldives

Description: This project would use EFA and NCA to measure the environmental impact of tourism for a single Atoll in the Maldives. The EFA would quantify the resources used by the tourism sector (i.e., physical assets and related activities), such as water, energy, and land. The NCA would provide complementary information in assessing the economic value of the natural capital stocks that support tourism, such as coral reefs, and seagrass.

Components:

Students could explore the following projects:

Project	Expertise needed	Difficulty*	Field component
Calculate the land footprint of tourism (and supporting infrastructure) within an atoll	GIS (in collaboration with Maldives Land and Survey Authority)	Moderate – GIS skills vital	Potential
Calculate the carbon footprint of recreational activities for resorts and guest houses within an atoll	Social surveys, accounting	Moderate to high (depending on survey responses)	Yes
Calculate the waste generation per capita for tourists compared to residents within an atoll	National Accounting, social surveys	Very high	Potential (data dependent)
Calculate the water usage per capita for tourists compared to residents within an atoll	National Accounting, social surveys	Very high	Potential (data dependent)
Estimating tourism-related footprint on coral reefs within an atoll	Environment, GIS	Moderate	Potential
Links between mangroves and tourism in an established eco-tourism area: dependencies and risks	Environment, social surveys	Moderate	Yes
Link marine plastic pollution with impacts to tourism amenity: estimates of costs and hotspots across an atoll	Environment, GIS, social surveys	Low	Yes

*Considering likelihood of completion of the project and existing skill base of students (i.e., the need to learn new skills)

2. NCA and biodiversity targets for businesses

Using natural capital accounting and biodiversity assessments to identify natural capital stocks for businesses.

Description: Businesses are increasingly recognizing their dependency on natural capital and the opportunities it provides. For example, many resort areas within the Maldives may be host to significant levels of biodiversity and could be used to measure their contribution to marine biodiversity and ecosystem services. Businesses, however, may lack the tools and knowledge to effectively identify these natural assets or the opportunities they provide. The following projects aim to address this gap by implementing natural capital accounting (NCA) and biodiversity assessments at the business level.

Components:

Students could explore the following projects:

Project	Expertise needed	Difficulty*	Field component
Exploring the potential of a biodiversity market instruments within the Maldives, drawing from international examples	Environment, policy	Low - moderate	No
Exploring the potential of blue carbon instruments for seagrass within the Maldives: benefits and costs	Environment, policy	Low - moderate	No
Calculate blue carbon stocks within seagrass and mangroves within resort areas in an atoll	Environment, GIS	Moderate	No
Quantifying coral reef extent, biodiversity, and their services under resort management within an atoll	Environment, GIS	Moderate	Potential
Estimating the contribution of uninhabited agricultural islands to carbon storage within an atoll	Environment, GIS	Moderate	Yes
Estimating the contribution of uninhabited agricultural islands to biodiversity within an atoll	Environment, GIS	Moderate	Yes

*Considering likelihood of completion of the project and existing skill base of students (i.e., the need to learn new skills)