



NATIONAL WATER AND SEWERAGE POLICY

Ministry of Tourism and Environment
Republic of Maldives

2026



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

NWSP	National Water and Sewerage Policy
UN SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goal
MoTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment
MWSA	Maldives Water and Sanitation Authority
FENAKA	FENAKA Corporation Limited
STELCO	State Electric Company Limited
MWSC	Male' Water and Sewerage Company Pvt. Ltd.
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
WDCs	Women Development Committees
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
SACOSAN	South Asian Conference on Sanitation



FOREWORD

His Excellency President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu

The water and sewerage sector plays a pivotal role in driving the country's economic and social growth. The provision of a safe water supply and adequate sewerage for all inhabited islands, regardless of their size and population, is recognized by the Government as a high priority.

Water is a fundamental resource that underpins our health, prosperity, and environmental sustainability. Given our geographical position as a coastal nation, the available freshwater resources are particularly precious and require diligent management to ensure they meet the needs of present and future generations. Additionally, sewerage services are essential for maintaining public health and protecting the environment by safely managing wastewater and promoting sewerage standards.

The National Water and Sewerage Policy (NWSP) is a commitment towards sustainable development and the well-being of our people. It reflects our determination to ensure equitable access to water and sewerage services, advance scientific understanding and technological innovation, strengthen our human capital, foster partnerships, and safeguard our natural freshwater resources.

I commend the efforts of all those who contributed to the development of this NWSP. Their dedication and expertise have produced a framework that will guide our actions and investments in the water and sewerage sector for years to come.

I urge all stakeholders – government agencies, private sector partners, civil society organizations, and the general public – to join hands in implementing these policies. Together, we can achieve our vision of the Maldives where every citizen has access to safe water and sewerage, where our freshwater resources are conserved and managed sustainably, and where future generations can thrive.

Dr. Mohamed Muizzu

President of the Republic of Maldives

MESSAGE

*Honourable Minister of Tourism and Environment,
Mr. Thoriq Ibrahim*

As we navigate the challenges of climate change and sustainable development, the management of our water resources and sewerage services becomes increasingly critical. Protecting and conserving our natural freshwater resources is paramount. Through sustainable management practices, we can safeguard our environment for future generations while meeting the needs of our present population.

The NWSP is aligned with the sector's legal framework and United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 6, affirming the Government of Maldives' commitments regarding the right to safe drinking water and sewerage for our citizens.

The Government is firm in its commitment to provide access to a safe water supply and adequate sewerage services in all inhabited islands, irrespective of the size of the island and population. To enable this, the NWSP emphasizes the importance of research and innovation in preserving our natural freshwater resources and enhancing water supply and sewerage infrastructure. It also underscores the necessity of strengthening sector's human resources in the water and sewerage sector, fostering partnerships both domestically and internationally, and promoting social equity. By engaging in advocacy and awareness initiatives, we aim to instill a culture of responsible water use and sewerage practices among our citizens.

I thank all stakeholders involved in shaping this NWSP, which represents a collective effort towards sustainable water and sewerage management in the Maldives. Let us work together diligently to implement these policies and strategies, ensuring a resilient and prosperous future for our nation.

Mr. Thoriq Ibrahim
Minister of Tourism and Environment



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Water and Sewerage Policy (NWSP) is formulated by the Water and Sanitation Department of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE), with consultations and contributions from various stakeholders whose expertise, dedication, and commitment have been invaluable.

MoTE would like to acknowledge and extend our sincere appreciation to all stakeholders who participated in and contributed to the NWSP formulation. Their contributions have been instrumental in shaping this comprehensive policy, and we look forward to continued collaborations in implementing and achieving our goals.

This NWSP reflects our collective commitment to ensuring equitable access to safe water and sewerage services, promoting sustainable water resource management, and safeguarding the environment for future generations.

The authors of the NWSP would like to thank Honourable Minister of Tourism and Environment, Mr. Thoriq Ibrahim, for his support and invaluable guidance during the NWSP formulation process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Water and Sewerage Policy (NWSP) of Maldives is a comprehensive strategic framework aimed at addressing key challenges and opportunities in the water and sewerage sector. It reflects the vision for water and sewerage sector management in the Maldives and represents a unified commitment to sustainable practices. Through the NWSP, Maldives aims to achieve universal access to safe water and sewerage services, bolster environmental resilience, and drive socio-economic development.

The NWSP is structured with six pivotal policies – affordable and universal access, resource protection, innovative technologies and tools, research, capacity building and awareness– designed to ensure sustainable development and environmental stewardship. These policies ensure access to safe water supply and adequate sewerage services for all, conserve natural freshwater resources, promote innovative technologies, tools and research on water and sewerage sector and strengthens sector's human resource capacity, advocacy and awareness.

Provision of safe drinking water and sewerage services to all inhabited islands, regardless of size or population is the primary policy of the NWSP, which emphasizes infrastructure development and service delivery improvements to meet basic human needs and promote public health across the nation.

NWSP also aims to protect, conserve, and manage natural freshwater resources of Maldives. Recognizing the vulnerability of freshwater resources in a marine-dominated environment, this policy underscores the importance of conservation and management. It advocates for policies and practices that preserve water quality, protect ecosystems, and mitigate the impacts of climate change on water resources.

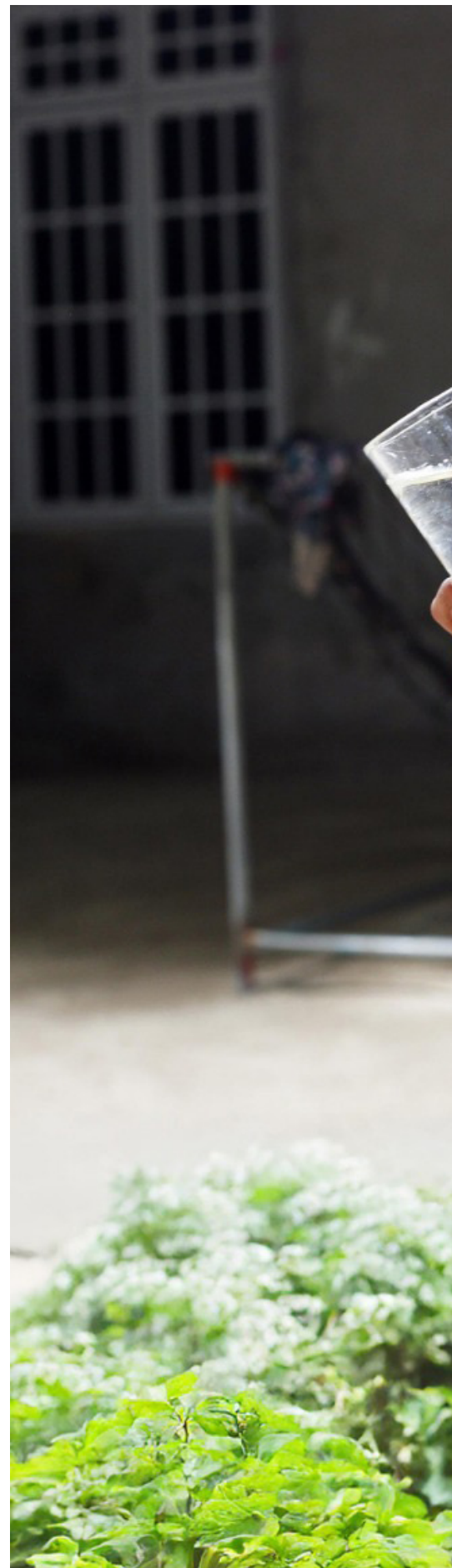
Adoption of advanced technologies and tools is essential for improving the efficiency of water supply and sewerage services, as well as managing natural water resources. In recognition of this, the NWSP outlines strategies to promote the adoption of innovations and relevant tools to advance the sector.

The NWSP also emphasizes importance towards research and innovation to improve provision of water supply and sewerage services and conserve natural freshwater resources. This will help to drive innovation and enhance sector performance.

Effective implementation of the NWSP relies on building human capacity within the water and sewerage sector, which is therefore another imperative policy of this sector. This policy encourages partnerships with government agencies, private sector's, local governments and international organizations to leverage expertise and resources. It also aims to promote social equity by ensuring equitable access to water and sewerage services for all communities.

Awareness and advocacy are another devoted component of the NWSP, seeking to raise public consciousness about responsible water use, sewerage practices, and freshwater conservation. By engaging stakeholders and fostering community involvement, the policy aims to instill a culture of sustainable water management.

The NWSP will undergo a mid-term review in the tenth year of implementation. The progress of implementation will be monitored and reviewed by the Water and Sanitation Department of Ministry of Tourism and Environment.





1. INTRODUCTION

The Maldives consists of 26 natural atolls, comprising of 1,192 small, low-lying coral islands with an average elevation of 1.5 meters above sea-level, is spread across over 90,000 sq. km. stretch in the Indian Ocean. The country's distinctive geographical features, coupled with the dispersed and uneven distribution of its population, present numerous challenges in delivering essential services like water and sewerage. Furthermore, the vulnerabilities posed by climate change and environmental degradation highlight the need for strategic and sustainable approaches in the water and sewerage sector.

Access to safe water and sewerage is not only a fundamental human right but also a constitutional mandate in the Maldives, aligned with global initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG6). The government is committed to establishing water supply and sewerage system in all inhabited islands across Maldives.

The National Water and Sewerage Policy (NWSP) of the Maldives provides a holistic and a sustainable framework for addressing water and sewerage challenges by promoting resilience, equity, and universal access to safe services while protecting the environment. It emphasizes the introduction of innovative technologies, promotes research, and strengthens human resource capacity within the sector. The NWSP also highlights the importance of collaboration with sector stakeholders both locally and internationally to enhance advocacy, public awareness and institutional capacity of the sector. The NWSP also focuses on conserving fragile freshwater ecosystems in response to climate challenges, reflecting a proactive approach to resource management. Ultimately, the NWSP underscores the Maldives' commitment to sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and the protection of human rights, ensuring resilience and prosperity for all.



VISION

To ensure universal access to safe drinking water and improved sewerage services, while fostering sustainable management and conservation of natural freshwater resources through innovation and collaboration.

MISSION

To strengthen the sustainable management of natural water resources, water supply and sewerage services by leveraging innovative technologies, encouraging research and awareness, developing human resource capacity, and fostering partnerships that ensure equitable access and environmental stewardship





2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The challenges faced by the water and sewerage sector including climate change, pollution and geographical dispersion of the Maldivian islands exposes the natural water resources as well as water supply and sewerage services to several risks. This underscores the critical need for fostering synergies across all pertinent sector's, encompassing governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. It is therefore imperative to establish enforceable guidelines, targets, policies, and strategies.

This NWSP provides a comprehensive framework for the management, development, and sustainability of water and sewerage services and water resources across the nation, addressing the fundamental challenges and opportunities in the water and sewerage sector. It advocates for financially, technically, and environmentally sustainable approaches, emphasizing the protection, conservation, sustainable use, and efficient management of water resources.

Aligned with Articles 22 (protection of the environment) and 23 (economic and social rights) of the Constitution of Maldives, the NWSP also corresponds with global and regional agreements, including Goal 6 of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other regional commitments such as SACOSAN.

The primary objective of the NWSP is to develop tools for the effective management of water resources and the water and sewerage sector, facilitating informed decision-making and guiding sectoral development comprehensively. This will also play a crucial role in facilitating dialogue among government authorities, private enterprises, civil society, external support agencies, and financing institutions. This collaborative approach will enhance synergies, efficiency, and investment in the water and sewerage sector, ensuring sustainable development and resilience in the face of evolving challenges.

Thus, by pursuing these objectives, the NWSP aims to achieve a future where everyone has access to safe water and sewerage services, contributing to improved public health, sustainable development, and enhanced quality of life for all residents of the nation.





3. BACKGROUND

The Maldives receives considerable rainfall ranging from 1700 to 2300 mm annually, which contribute to the formation of a shallow groundwater aquifers in thin lenses over the salt water, just one or two meters below the land surface. Rainwater and groundwater are the only source of natural fresh water in the country as there is a lack of surface water such as rivers and lakes except for a few swampy areas with fresh or brackish water in some islands.

The porous sandy soil in the islands makes the thin freshwater lens highly vulnerable to elevated salinity levels due to saltwater intrusion resulting from sea-level rise driven by climate change and flooding from sea swells. Moreover, contamination from inappropriate waste disposal, sub-standard sanitation practices and the 2004 Tsunami has further exacerbated the situation making the groundwater unsuitable for consumption. The country also experiences a dry period from December to April which have been noticeably unpredictable in recent years thereby acting as a major stressor on an already limited groundwater resource.

Provision of water services in Maldives – A Brief History

Traditionally, drinking water was abstracted from shallow aquifers using hand-dug open wells from shallow fresh groundwater aquifers. However, in 1902, during the reign of Mohamed Imaaduddin (1893-1902), it was discovered that groundwater in Male' was not fit for potable use due to contamination of human waste. Hence for the very first time, efforts were made to look for alternative solutions. Given that this was a persistent concern in the capital city and other factors such as population growth increased the demand for water, concrete tanks were constructed in 1916 in the Henveiru ward to store harvested rainwater in Male'. On the other hand, majority of islands continued to use groundwater as a potable source.

In 1965 chlorine was used for the first time as a primary response to a diarrhea and cholera outbreak which lasted for 20 years. During this period, the regulatory bodies governing the water and sewerage sector were also established, named as Maldives Water and Sanitation Authority (MWSA) in 1973. Male' Water and Sewerage Company was established in 1995 as the first utility provider with a mandate of providing water supply and sewerage services in the capital island of Male'. The company commissioned the first modern desalination plant and municipal water supply network with household connections with a capacity of 200 m³/day in 1996.

Public health concerns such as cholera, diarrhea and shigella were one of the main drivers to ensure provision of safe water in the outer islands of Maldives. The cholera epidemic that occurred in 1978, Shigellosis epidemics in 1982 and frequent diarrheal outbreaks claimed the lives of many children and adults especially during the rainy season, when rainwater washes faecal material into the soil. As a result, several efforts were made to contain the spread of these diseases including the construction of rainwater harvesting tanks that were either made from steel, ferrocement, high density polyethylene (HDPE) or fiberglass to safely collect and store drinking water for the population. These community tanks evolved into water storage that were used during emergencies in dry seasons in case the household rainwater harvesting tanks are empty. The modern HDPE storage tanks were also widely used following the 2004 Tsunami recovery program during which government and international relief agencies as well as funding parties provided each household with a 2500 liter rainwater storage tanks to ensure water security for the whole population.

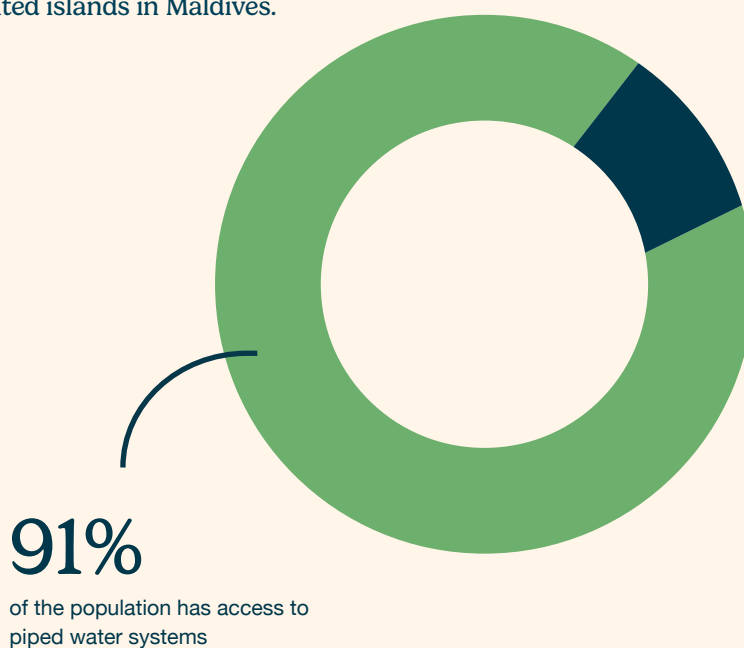
Although, people continued relying on harvested rainwater and groundwater for domestic use in other parts of the country, the 2004 tsunami was also known to exacerbate the salinization of fresh groundwater aquifers which were already affected due to rapid developmental ventures and poor sewerage practices, making it unsuitable for potable use. The lack of fresh water sources, mismanagement and pollution of limited fresh water resources increase the vulnerabilities faced by the population of Maldives contributing to water scarcity. Moreover, increasing climate variability and change, and with limited storage capacity in islands, and stretch of the northeast monsoon (dry season) the harvested rainwater tanks at individual household and community levels have been running out with increasing frequency. This resulted in an increased reliance on expensive, emergency water supply from the capital hub to different parts of the country. Between 2017 and 2023, 55 islands on average, were supplied drinking water by sea transport during the dry season with an average annual volume of about 2538 cubic meters at an annual average

cost of MRF 6.9 million. This increasing water supply needs of the nation are currently met through desalinated seawater, which is either directly supplied to the households through piped metered water connections and communal tap-bays or bottled water.



Water supply and sewerage systems are operated by three State Owned Utility Companies and two Private Companies namely FENAKA Corporation Limited (FENAKA), State Electric Company Limited (STELCO), Male' Water and Sewerage Company (MWSC), ALTEC Maldives Pvt Ltd and Villa Utilities Maamigili. As of October 2025, 91% of the population in 133 islands have access to piped water systems out of 189 inhabited islands in Maldives. The current water systems are designed based on the principles of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) to ensure environmental sustainability by utilizing rainwater and renewable energy in their operations.

As of October 2025, 91% of the population in 133 islands have access to piped water systems out of 189 inhabited islands in Maldives.



Provision of sewerage services in Maldives – A Brief History

Historically, Maldivians used the beach or the Athirimathi for defecation which then evolved into a designated area in the household backyard (Gifili) to bury the faeces in shallow holes, but the rain leaches the faeces into the groundwater.

The first public toilet system was introduced in 1960 in Male' which was established on the old Coast Guard building. However, with the increase in cases of waterborne diseases, including a cholera epidemic in 1978 and a shigella epidemic in 1982, work was initiated to improve the sewerage services in Malé and a sewerage network was designed and built in Malé with external funding and technical assistance. Under the Malé Water Supply and Sewerage Project, completed in August 1988, over 46 000 metres of sewer pipes were laid on Malé and nine pumping stations were constructed, with six ocean outfalls at four different locations.

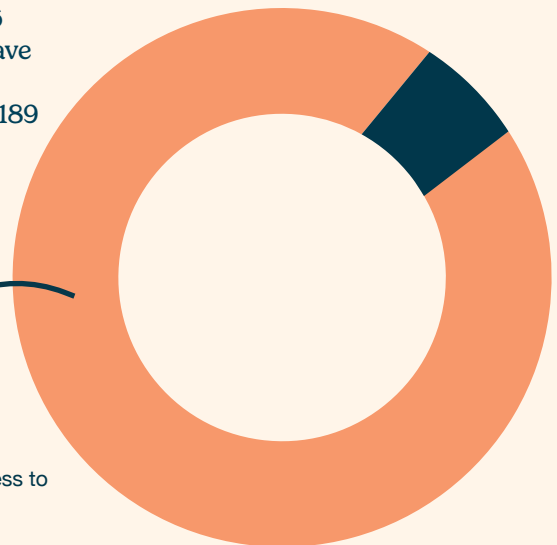
In the outer islands, the predominant sewerage technology was onsite septic tanks and soak pits. On some islands, this is combined with a shallow sewer or small-bore sewerage systems. Septic tanks are either connected to a sewerage system, to a soak pit, or to a soakaway. Most septic tanks are connected to pour-flush toilets, whereas most sewerage systems are connected to conventional flushing toilets. However, septic tanks that are not emptied regularly, impacts the effectiveness of the system in treating the wastewater before it leaches into vulnerable groundwater aquifers.

Following the 2004 Tsunami, the Maldives received assistance from donors to construct different types of sewerage systems, such as vacuum systems (including small-bore sewers) and simplified gravity systems/conventional systems with pumping stations and treatment facilities. Recent statistics indicate that, as of October 2025, 94% of the population across 146 islands in the Maldives have access to piped sewerage systems, out of a total of 189 inhabited islands.

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94%

of the population has access to piped sewerage systems





4. POLICY GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

The following sets of goals are based on a comprehensive process of consultation including situation analysis, desk reviews and multi-stakeholder consultations. They emphasize the adoption of climate-friendly sustainable technologies, capacity building within the sector, and research to ensure the sustainable provision of water and sewerage services throughout the Maldives, while safeguarding available water resources.





POLICY GOAL 1:

Ensure sustainable, affordable and universal access to safe drinking water and improved sewerage services

Policy Objective:

Ensure equitable access to safe water supply and sewerage services for all

Strategies:

- 1.1 Improve the policy and legal framework to ensure access to safe water supply and sewerage services to all inhabited, commercial and industrial islands
- 1.2 Establish and improve water supply and sewerage infrastructures
- 1.3 Improve water and sewerage services in a more sustainable and cost-effective manner
- 1.4 Ensure compliance monitoring and safety planning to strengthen operation, maintenance and management of water supply and sewerage networks
- 1.5 Develop and strengthen emergency response and management mechanisms to build resiliency for the provision of water and sewerage services
- 1.6 Leverage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to optimize the management and delivery of water and sewerage services



POLICY GOAL 2:

Protect, conserve and manage natural fresh water resources

Policy Objective:

Ensure sustainable management, conservation, and protection of natural freshwater resources

Strategies:

- 2.1 Establish and promote Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) principles
- 2.2 Promote climate-resilient Sustainable Practices in Conservation of natural water resources



POLICY GOAL 3:

Promote innovative technologies and tools for sustainable management of natural fresh water resources, wastewater, water supply and sewerage services

Policy Objective:

Foster the adoption of innovative technologies and tools to enhance the sustainable management of water resources, wastewater, water supply and sewerage services.

Strategies:

- 3.1 Introduce innovative tools to maximize efficiency in water usage, and in provision of water and sewerage services
- 3.2 Introduce cost-effective and environment-friendly sewage treatment and disposal technologies
- 3.3 Introduce and implement digitally transformative, innovative and efficient water and sewerage service monitoring tools



POLICY GOAL 4:

Promote research on natural freshwater resources, wastewater, water supply and sewerage services

Policy Objective:

Improve provision of water supply and sewerage services, wastewater management and conservation of natural freshwater resources through research and development.

Strategies:

- 4.1 Strengthen legal and regulatory framework to support and promote research in the field of water, wastewater and sewerage
- 4.2 Create a conducive research environment in the field of water, wastewater and sewerage
- 4.3 Promote dissemination of research findings in the water, wastewater, and sewerage sector



POLICY GOAL 5:

Strengthen human resource capacity and promote social equity in water, wastewater and sewerage sector

Policy Objective:

Develop human resource capacity in the water, wastewater and sewerage sector and promote gender and social equity in WASH initiatives.

Strategies:

- 5.1 Improve human resource capacity of water and sewerage sector
- 5.2 Foster national and international multi-sectoral partnerships to build sector capacity
- 5.3 Increase accession and participation in key international conventions related to water, wastewater and sewerage
- 5.4 Promote gender equality and social inclusion in the WASH sector by providing opportunities for individuals of all genders and social backgrounds.



POLICY GOAL 6:

Strengthen advocacy and awareness in water, wastewater and sewerage sector

Policy Objective:

Enhance awareness and advocacy in the water, wastewater and sewerage sector through targeted education and strategic collaborations

Strategies:

- 6.1 Create awareness on water resources conservation and wastewater management, WASH, water supply and sewerage services
- 6.2 Promote engagement and participation of local councils, WDCs, CSOs, NGOs and CBOs and communities towards advocacy on water, wastewater and sewerage sector

5. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The overall vision of the NWSP requires a holistic and robust institutional arrangement for its successful implementation to foster integrated, sustainable, and equitable management of water resources, water and sewerage services, promoting resilience against climate change impacts and ensuring the well-being of all citizens in the Maldives. Sector stakeholder support and involvement is fundamental for the effective and sustainable implementation of the NWSP in the Maldives.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment will be the leading institution for the implementation of the NWSP, coordinating efforts across various stakeholders to ensure the policy's objectives. However, a collective effort from all relevant stakeholders including line ministries, regulators, private sector, independent institutions, state-owned enterprises, civil society organizations, academia, donors, institutional partners, island/atoll councils and community representatives, is crucial for improving water and sewerage services, enhancing resilience to climate change, and safeguarding water resources for present and future generations.

Stakeholder consultations and participatory approaches are integral to identifying local needs, priorities, and solutions. Collaboration between public entities, private sector stakeholders, and civil society organizations is encouraged to leverage resources, expertise, investments in the sector and to ensure inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in water and sewerage management in a sustainable manner.





6. RESOURCES

The successful execution of the goals and strategies outlined in the NWSP hinges on sufficient human resource capacity and financial resources. Skilled professionals in various fields of the sector including water management, engineering, policy development, and regulatory oversight are required to strengthen local expertise and ensure sustainable management practices. Alongside this, securing adequate funding is paramount for infrastructure development, maintenance, operation and service delivery improvements outlined in the NWSP.

To achieve this, it is essential to engage international funding agencies and financial institutions including development banks, bilateral and multilateral donors and climate funds in the implementation process of the NWSP goals. Their involvement can facilitate access to resources needed to enhance water and sewerage services throughout the Maldives. Additionally, fostering resource mobilization through public-private partnerships (PPPs), national budget allocations, and community contributions is crucial for addressing resource gaps and development of the sector.

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

The NWSP will also undergo a mid-term review in the tenth year of implementation to ensure its effective execution and continuous improvement. This review will involve assessing progress towards targets, evaluating achievements, and identifying challenges encountered. It will also provide an opportunity to adjust strategies and interventions as necessary to address emerging issues effectively. The implementation progress of the NWSP will be monitored by the Water and Sanitation Department of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

In addition to this, a five-year action plan will be formulated outlining specific targets and actions aligned with the policy goals of the NWSP, along with the timelines, responsible parties, and resource allocations. This plan will provide a roadmap for implementing strategies to ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in the management and provision of water and sewerage services in the Maldives.





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