

**Appraisal of the Maldives Education Sector Plan  
2019 - 2023**

**Final Report**

Sept 2018

Commissioned by:  
UNICEF Maldives Country Office

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# Scope and Methodology

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## Context

In 2015, The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Maldives expressed interest in joining the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and requested for a GPE Grant to develop the Education Sector Plan for 2018-2022. To meet the grant requirement of the GPE, a National Education Consultation Committee (NECC) was formed to serve as the Local Education Group (LEG), and UNICEF was nominated as the Grant Agent (GA) and the Coordinating Agency (CA) for the management of the grant.

Subsequently Maldives received funding from the GPE to undertake a comprehensive education sector analysis (ESA) and develop its new education sector plan (ESP) for the next five-year period. A team of three consultants including an International Consultant (IC) and 2 Local Consultants together with the active engagement of respective teams from the Ministry of Education (MOE) have recently formulated the ESP. As per the requirement of the funding model of the GPE, the ESP must be credible and must be appraised independent of the actors who contributed to the education plan preparation. This should be conducted before finalizing the ESP and endorsement by development partners supporting education in the country. This endorsement signifies their commitment to support the implementation of the ESP.

As the coordinating agency, UNICEF is tasked with coordinating the independent appraisal on behalf of the development partners. As such, UNICEF has engaged an international consultant to appraise the ESP.

The consultant's primary role has been to appraise the soundness, relevance and coherence that forms the credibility of the ESP.

The GPE has provided guidance on for ESP appraisals, and the consultant will follow the GPE guidelines while giving due consideration to the Maldives context. The appraisal process has been participatory, to enable consultations at all levels of the appraisal process.

The resulting process has generated this report, which seeks to provide a fair review of the ESP strengths and areas in need of improvement. The findings from the appraisal will be shared with the Ministry of Education and the findings will be used to improve the final version of the ESP.

The consultant's work has largely comprised:

Major activities	Deliverables
In consultation with development partners, determining the scope and methodology of the appraisal to be used and develop a common vision of the whole process.	Final appraisal report.

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Conducting a desk review of the ESP and the relevant documents informing the ESP.

Undertaking interviews with key stakeholders

Conducting a workshop for the validation of the findings of the appraisal, conclusions and recommendations.

Draft the appraisal report and share it with the development partners for feedback

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The following provides a brief overview of the scope and methodology of the appraisal, as shared previously with stakeholders:

## Approach

The consultant has undertaken an exploration of the questions and key areas of enquiry specified by the GPE guidance on ESP evaluation. These required discussions with key stakeholders, as well as reviews of the ESP, the ESA, and those documents and sources of evidence which informed the development of the ESP. In broad terms, the core questions to be resolved by this exercise comprised:



Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent? (leadership and participation)



Does the plan constitute a solid corpus of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector? (soundness and relevance)



Are the issues of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance? (key issues of equity, efficiency, learning)



Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP? (coherence)



Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement? (feasibility, implementability, monitorability).

The purpose of this assignment is to provide external, and independent validation, of the soundness, relevance, and coherence that form the credibility of the Maldives' ESP; the primary objective of this appraisal report is to support the finalization of a high quality, and credible, ESP. It will provide a fair review of the ESP strengths and areas in need of improvement before the endorsement by partners, ensuring that partner commitments and support are dedicated to an

ESP which has widespread buy-in, and which is informed by evidence, real need, and widespread national ownership.

The appraisal is independent of the actors who contributed to the education plan preparation. The use of a consultant for this process, in line with GPE stipulations, is intended to avoid situations of conflict of interest involving the political decisions that have prevailed in the development of the plan and its future implementation. This appraisal was undertaken by Mr. Matthew Goldie-Scot, an expert consultant holding substantial relevant expertise, with past experience of working with key stakeholders in The Maldives, allowing for the development of a well-informed and objective appraisal report. The consultant has completed the GPE-IIEP Course on the Appraisal of Education Sector Plans. The appraisal will be further based on reliable information, which the consultant will verify and cross-check where applicable. In addition to meetings, interviews, and consultations with stakeholders who participated in the development of the plan, the consultant has reviewed the documentation that was the basis for the development of the plan (in particular, the ESA).

To this end, the consultant has adopted a mixed methods approach, though many of the methods (with the exception of document review) will be more qualitatively-driven, given the nature of the questions to be asked, and the focus of contracted activities. In all cases, the methodology has been participatory and consultative, working closely with UNICEF and key stakeholders at the government level to ensure the deliverables are informed by local needs and expertise, and that all activities drive continued and deepened national ownership of the ESP. An overview of the methods deployed comprises:



#### **Primary document review**

The consultant began with a review of the primary documents submitted by the client. This included those already supplied, in addition to any additional documents identified as being relevant in the course of the consultancy. For reference, the documents received by the consultant to-date include:

- ❖ Annex 1 Risk & Institutional Capacity
- ❖ Annex 2 ESP 2018-2022 PIP
- ❖ Annex 3 ESP 2018-2022 Costing Model
- ❖ Annex 4 ESP 2018-2022 PIP
- ❖ Annex 5 MV Edu Sector Planning Model 20180627
- ❖ ESP Annexes 1, 2, 3
- ❖ ESP Implementation Manual
- ❖ FINAL Maldives ESP 2018-2022 August 1 No Annexes
- ❖ Maldives – Secretariat’s comments on the initial ESP draft
- ❖ Maldives ESA
- ❖ Maldives ESP 2018-2022 Final Draft

Documents were, in all cases, reviewed for relevance, quality, and credibility prior to their incorporation in analyses, with relevant thinking and rationales incorporated in the final deliverable as appropriate.



### **Secondary evidence review**

The consultant also explored key sources of evidence from international sources, seeking to provide context, and well as understand whether ESP recommendations and plans conform to international evidence on what works and what might be feasible, with a primary focus on the improvement of learning outcomes and educational access for students in the Maldives.



### **Online survey**

The consultant developed an online survey for distribution to a wider variety of stakeholders to allow for them to be contacted during the short time available for in-country work. UNICEF was responsible for driving responses and improving rates of completion, as appropriate. This instrument was intended to allow for broader exploration of the key questions and areas of enquiry specified by GPE's guidance, as well as quantitative insights to emerge where sufficient responses are received.



### **Key informant interview / Focus Group Discussion**

This instrument provided the majority of evidence and information, aside from documentary review, informing the consultant's evaluations. The consultant undertook a consolidated questionnaire, with notes and key stakeholders, with insight recorded directly into a structure evaluation checklist. This checklist and consolidated KII has been incorporated in the annexes for UNICEF's review.



### **Validation workshop**

Once the initial discussions had been undertaken, and the consultant had completed his first draft presentation of findings, a validation workshop was undertaken with key stakeholders from the national education authorities, key partners at the national and international level, and UNICEF representatives. The workshop focused on ensuring evaluations were correct, appropriate, and informed by the needs and requirements of local stakeholders; this exercise heavily informed the findings, conclusions, and recommendations to feed into the ESP finalization. The consultant worked to ensure this process resulted in improved buy in and ownership of those

stakeholders who are intended to drive the ESP's implementation over the coming five years.

## Demographics

### Number of Interviews / Focus Group Discussion

	KIIs	FDGs
<b>Total</b>	12	3

### Number of participants

	KIIs		FDGs	
	M	F	M	F
<b>Participants</b>	6	6	5	5
<b>Total</b>	12		10	

### Organizations represented

	M	F	Total
<b>Ministry of Education</b>	6	4	10
<b>World Bank</b>	1	2	3
<b>National Institute of Education</b>	1	3	4
<b>Maldives National University</b>		1	1
<b>UNICEF</b>	1		1
<b>International Consultant (Monitoring and Evaluation)</b>	1		1
<b>Local Consultant (Financial Expert)</b>	1		1
<b>International Consultant (ESA/ESP)</b>		1	1
<b>Total</b>	11	11	22

### Ministry of Education Departments

- ❖ State Minister
- ❖ Deputy Minister
- ❖ LEG
- ❖ NECC
- ❖ QAD
- ❖ TVET

## M/F breakdown demographics

	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>T</b>
<b>Participants</b>	11	11	22

## Timeline

The project has been undertaken on the basis of the following timeline.

<b>2-11 Aug</b>	In consultation with development partners, determine the scope and methodology of the appraisal to be used and develop a common vision of the whole process.
<b>11 Aug</b>	Consultant arrives in Male
<b>12 Aug</b>	Planning meeting with UNICEF stakeholders, including stakeholder mapping for interviews
<b>12-15 Aug</b>	Key informant interviews
<b>13-15 Aug</b>	Online survey launch, UNICEF driving responses
<b>12-15 Aug</b>	Consultant analyses initial evidence, and prepares workshop brief and discussion points
<b>15 Aug</b>	Validation workshop with key stakeholders
<b>16 Aug</b>	Draft appraisal submission to GPE (Close of Business, Maldives)
<b>16 Aug</b>	Final discussion with UNICEF and key partners prior to deliverable draft
<b>16-20 Aug</b>	Client feedback on Draft
<b>21 Aug</b>	Final appraisal submission (Close of Business, Maldives)
<b>02 Sep</b>	Incorporation of Feedback from GPE into Draft.

# Independent Appraisal

## Summary of Findings

The following serves as a narrative summary of each of the dimensions set out within the five key dimensions of the GPE/IIEP appraisal guidelines:



Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent? (leadership and participation)



Does the plan constitute a solid corpus of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector? (soundness and relevance)



Are the issues of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance? (key issues of equity, efficiency, learning)



Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP? (coherence)



Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement? (feasibility, implementability, monitorability).

It should be noted that each of these is systematically addressed in turn within the relevant Annex ('ESP Appraisal Checklist and KII Protocol'), with details provided of supporting evidence, drawn from key informant interviews with stakeholders, focus group discussions, reviews of documentation, and analysis of data provided (drawing on relevant literature, and findings, from international good practice, where appropriate). This precis seeks to provide a clear and concise overview of the findings of the systematic review, as well as highlighting concrete recommendations arising from this.



### Leadership and Participation

Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent?

Evidence collated during the process of the independent appraisal found that this dimension was **partially met**.

*To what extent is national leadership and partners' ownership reflected in the ESP?*

The plan preparation process did indeed engage with local stakeholders, and had a degree of local leadership, but this was potentially undermined by time limitations, and a degree of 'fragmentation' of approach.

There was limited local 'ownership' reflected in the ESP. While the ESP was broadly consistent with priority objectives of national development, poverty reduction strategies, and the medium-term expenditure framework, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group discussions noted a lack of clarity regarding leadership of the development of the ESP.

When asked who was leading the process, key stakeholders provided varied and conflicting responses. No one group was identified by more than 40% of respondents – with the most cited party being the international consultant. This suggests a potential lack of 'big picture' oversight within the Ministry of Education, largely emerging as a result of the highly limited timeframe.

This appears to have arisen as a result of two key issues:

- a. A 'fragmented' approach was taken to the development of the ESP, with specialists primarily contributing to the ESP as it related to their own role. As a result, there was limited 'big picture' oversight of the process; and
- b. The timeframe to which the various stakeholders were working was very constrained – with a longer time-frame, it may have been possible to engage all stakeholders more fully in the process.

This was reflected in a lack of knowledge and understanding amongst those responsible for leading the development of the ESP on a local level, of its broader aims. Specifically, the ESP sets out four key 'Goals' comprising:

1. Improved Learning for All, through Equitable Access to Quality Education;
2. Skilled Youth and Adults for employment, decent work and Entrepreneurship;
3. Ensure Equitable Access to Lifelong, Affordable and Quality Higher Education for All; and
4. System Strengthening for Efficiency and Quality Schools for All.

Interviews with stakeholders garnered responses relating to knowledge and understanding of these.

Only 40% of respondents referred to the 4 'Goals' at all when asked: 'To your knowledge, what are the key 'high level' priorities within the ESP?'. 7% of respondents listed all of the goals correctly. This is indicative of the concerns noted above in relation to 'big picture' local oversight and ownership of the ESP.

Throughout the drafting process, the role of the LEG (local education group) was primarily focused on reviews of drafts. Concerns were raised by some parties that there was limited time for systematic review, and a potential lack of

consultation during the drafting process. Due to time constraints, LEG representatives suggested that the drafting of the ESP was largely led by the International Consultant, but noted the positive capacity building aspects of this process:

*'The mere fact that these groups sat down together, and came up with a paper (guided very much by the consultant) [was a key achievement].'*

Concerns over approach focused on a perceived lack of sufficient consultation (compounded by time constraints):

*'I wanted to read it, and are comments, but there was too little time.'*

*'I was not consulted during the drafting process. I was not happy.'*

*'I would have liked to have been consulted, or shown the document. I am the kind of person who reads the whole document.'*

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i.** In future, a less compressed timeframe would potentially allow for an approach that ensured a more collective leadership of process, with a clear understanding from stakeholders of the work of their colleagues, overseen by a clear and consistent, overarching vision, as to the 'big picture' of the ESP;
- ii.** There would be significant potential benefits from deep collaboration between colleagues working within disparate parts of the Ministry of Education, to ensure an understanding of the complementarity of the various sectors, goals, and targets, within the ESP;
- iii.** It is essential that a clear communications strategy underpin the process, to ensure all stakeholders have a higher level of awareness of the nature of the process in which they are participating – such a strategy should be introduced as a matter of priority;
- iv.** It may be helpful to ensure clear Terms of Reference for all stakeholders engaged in the process, to ensure clarity of responsibilities, and tasks;
- v.** Where stakeholders are expected to play a key role in shaping documentation, it would be helpful to provide sufficient time to allow for this; and
- vi.** A less compressed timeframe may potentially have allowed for an approach that would have allowed for greater 'ownership' of the process by the LEG.

*What is the level of involvement among the local stakeholders and development partners?*

With regard to the extent to which the process was participatory, there was engagement with a range of stakeholders, but with concerns over the effectiveness of this process.

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions provided limited evidence of the sharing of the sector diagnosis being shared and discussed effectively, with many stakeholders suggesting that they had not been able to provide key inputs into the process.

This potentially arose as a result of reliance on short workshops, with large numbers of participants, undertaken at short notice. Again, this was exacerbated by a very short time-frame for ESP preparation.

This potentially suggest the need for a strengthened communication strategy to ensure that documentation is fully reviewed, and that processes are in place to ensure meaningful dissemination of key information to stakeholders.

The plan preparation process included a range of stakeholders, including, but not limited to:

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ❖ School principals / School Heads | ❖ NGOs                             |
| ❖ Schools                          | ❖ World Bank                       |
| ❖ Parents                          | ❖ UNDP                             |
| ❖ Teachers                         | ❖ UNICEF                           |
| ❖ Teacher Training Organisations   | ❖ Ministry of Education            |
| ❖ Teacher unions                   | ❖ Ministry of Finance and Treasury |
| ❖ MoE schools                      | ❖ Ministry of Gender and Family    |
| ❖ Private colleges / universities  | ❖ Ministry of Environment          |
| ❖ Department heads                 |                                    |

Stakeholders reported, however, that the process of ESP would have benefited from wider engagement with certain stakeholders groups (at all, or to a greater degree), including:

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| ❖ HE Qualifications authority and private sector providers. | ❖ Teachers                    |
| ❖ Youth Ministry  | ❖ Private Sector              |
| ❖ Students  | ❖ Civil Society Organisations |
| ❖ President's Office  | ❖ Unions                      |
| ❖ Parents   | ❖ INGOs                       |
|   | ❖ Municipalities              |

The primary reasons cited for potential non-engagement, or insufficient engagement, included:

- ❖ 'Time constraints'

- ❖ ‘They were - but we couldn't get anything in writing’
- ❖ ‘We didn't ask’
- ❖ ‘I am not sure if they were there’
- ❖ ‘They do not appear to be on speaking terms with the Ministry’
- ❖ ‘Political constraints’

The most significant factor highlighted by stakeholders was that of ‘time’ – again in relation to the highly compressed timeframe in which both the ESA, and the ESP were developed.

Some wider concerns were also noted, included potential tensions between teacher unions and the Ministry of Education.

Inevitable challenges of geography potentially limited some engagement to the Male’ area (within the timeframe available), though the ESA/ESP preparation process did involve some limited visits to:

*‘...three islands, 4 schools in total, and one school in Male ... focus was on the process of learning and teaching ...’*

This also involved:

*‘... some qualitative focus groups discussions (with students, with teachers, etc.), [focused on] curriculum understanding, etc. Understanding of textbooks, etc.’*

Principals were also involved in consultations throughout the process of developing the ESP.

As such, to some extent, there was involvement of the units and persons responsible for the programme implementation, particularly at the decentralized, and school levels, though this was inevitably limited as a result of the aforementioned time-constraints under which the ESA/ESP was developed.

There were frustrations raised by certain stakeholders that findings were ‘presented to us’ rather than ‘discussed by us’.

The process did, however, include proactive engagement with other ministries during the plan preparation process, including:

- ❖ Ministry of Finance and Treasury;
- ❖ Ministry of Gender and Family; and
- ❖ Ministry of Environment.

The Local Consultant engaged to undertake the costings model, and financial planning, for the ESP was based within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, with a strong working relationship with the Ministry.

Macro-economic financial assumptions were shared locally with the Macro-Economic Policy Coordination Committee, within the Ministry of Finance, this is a Cross-Office Committee that includes Ministry of Finance, Central Bank, National Bureau of Statistics, and the Ministry of Tourism, as well as other groups, when required.

While the plan was shared and discussed with stakeholders, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions provided limited evidence of this process having been undertaken in a manner that ensured full engagement with, and understanding by, key stakeholders – particularly those providing key inputs into the process.

As noted above, the approach taken, and the time-constraints faced, resulted in concerns raised over the level of engagement with stakeholders, and the extent to which these have had the potential to shape the development of the ESP.

In some cases, policy documents that predated the process of developing the ESA/ESP (such as those relating to Higher Education) were incorporated with no substantive alterations. While not inherently problematic, given the ‘fragmented’ approach noted previously, this potentially undermines the ‘cohesiveness’ and ‘responsiveness’ of the ESP, particularly in a context in which improvements could be achieved through meaningful stakeholder input.

Again, a large majority of key informant interview, and focus group discussion, respondents, noted that the compressed timeframe, and the reliance on workshops with large groups, and limited opportunities for extended dialogue, had potentially exacerbated these issues.

## Feedback and Recommendations

- i. In future, greater efforts should be made to ensure a more participatory approach, with meaningful engagement with a wider range of stakeholders, to a more significant degree than has been achieved within the context of this process to date;
- ii. Ideally, such initiatives should be undertaken under less pronounced time-pressure; if this cannot be avoided, then the focus should be on ensuring that the aforementioned engagement strategy is prioritized and resourced;
- iii. A strengthened communication strategy to ensure that documentation is fully reviewed, and that processes are in place to ensure meaningful dissemination of key information to stakeholders;
- iv. Greater scope for collaboration, complementarity, and positive feedback between sectors, and sub-sectors;
- v. Greater ‘shared ownership’, and refined programming, in light of insights from stakeholders, and proactive dialogue to inform policy and action planning; and
- vi. A focus on structuring feedback sessions and workshops to allow for genuine input that can shape future iterations of such documentation.



### Soundness and Relevance

Does the plan constitute a solid corpus of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector?

There was some capacity building undertaken during the preparation of the ESA and ESP, though this was potentially undermined by the highly pressure timeframe. This requirement was **met**, though there were concerns noted in some areas.

#### *What empirical evidence was available and was it used effectively?*

Partners provide a wide range of technical support during the preparation process. A number of local consultants were engaged during the drafting of the ESA, collating data provided by Ministry Officials.

The ESA/ESP was funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a global fund and a partnership focused entirely on education in developing countries. The UNICEF Male' Office played the dual role of the Coordinating Agency (CA) as well as the Grant Agent (GA). UNICEF supported the engagement of local consultants (through the Ministry), and a number of International Consultants (likewise), to undertake the key aspects required to maintain momentum throughout the process, and to provide the Ministry of Education with the additional capacity required to maximize the likelihood of a high-quality ESA/ESP. The World Bank also attended a number of meetings, and provided input as appropriate. This was undertaken under the oversight of the Senior Political Executive within the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of Education Staff Associate, Education Officer provided managerial and administrative leadership during the whole process. For the development of the ESP itself, the following expertise was drawn upon:

- ❖ An International Consultant was engaged to support the drafting of the ESA/ESP. The International Consultant worked closely with representatives of all the various parts of the Ministry, with responsibility for their various sub-sectors, as well as the leadership of the Ministry. The International Consultant was an employee of GPE, with a strong knowledge of GPE practices.
- ❖ An International Consultant was also engaged to prepare the Education Sector Plan Implementation Manual for Monitoring and Evaluation of the ESP; and

A Local Consultant was engaged to prepare the Costings and Financials. The Local consultant was an employee of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury.

The UNICEF Male' Office played the dual role of the Coordinating Agency (CA) as well as the Grant Agent (GA). This was undertaken under the oversight of the Senior Political Executive within the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of Education Staff Associate, Education Officer provided managerial and administrative leadership during the whole process.

National Officers worked closely with consultants, and there has been demonstrable benefit from the process of collaborative work within various parts of the Ministry to undertake this process, though an opportunity has potentially been missed for high-level collaboration, an integrated approach, and clear lesson-learning throughout the process – many of the inputs were largely unchanged from existing policy agendas:

*‘there are no things to change for higher education – it is already validated ... so we just needed to reformulate to harmonize with 3 other goals’*

This was perhaps exacerbated by the compressed timeframe - one stakeholder noted:

*‘you cannot imagine; it was crazy – I will never do that again in my life. You need more time ... you need more time for consultations with schools, parents, private sector...’*

Stakeholders also noted challenges in identifying capable and qualified local consultants:

*‘[We] needed more time to find local experts – because not all of them are at the level that this work requires. There were excellent people who, because of the [limited] time, we did not have access to them.’*

While strong consultants were identified, it appears their inputs were very pressured – all those interviewed noted this in their responses. This potentially limited the potential for transfer of techniques and competencies, as the focus was on completing the work within deadlines.

That this was potentially a missed opportunity was noted by stakeholders involved in the drafting:

*‘It would be good to use the ESP to strengthen capacity, buy-in, and ownership’.*

In this context, while it appears that time-constraints potentially undermined opportunities for lesson-learning, collaboration, and capacity building, the process of preparing data for consultants, within the short time available, and the close collaboration this involved within specific departments, has undoubtedly been a formative exercise within the Ministry of Education.

On the basis of the input received from stakeholders, the area that was most effective for capacity development was sector diagnosis, as this necessitated a focused, sustained, and rapid process of data collation, and interaction with expert consultants to provide clear inputs to inform the process. Moving forward, the area identified as being most in need of future capacity development is that of Monitoring and Evaluation, where concerns were raised by multiple stakeholders over existing capacity. This need is explicitly addressed within the ESP, particularly within the Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Framework.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. In future, a less pressured time-frame may provide better opportunities for capacity building; and
- ii. There are questions over the validity of data – benchmarking and validation exercises would strengthen the credibility of the ESP.

A range of evidence was drawn upon, though there may be some questions over data validity. Specifically, no validation was undertaken of local data during the preparation of the ESA and ESP. While some qualitative inputs were derived from a small number of visits to schools, and meetings with stakeholders, there was no substantive primary data collection. Concerns were raised by a significant portion of stakeholders over potential issues with the quality, and validity, of data within the Ministry – as such, the extent to which the data that informed both the ESA and ESP is ‘empirical’ is unclear.

As noted above, the ESP was based on the recent ESA, which was prepared immediately prior to the preparation of the ESP.

The ESA covers:

- ❖ Early childhood education (pre-primary);
- ❖ Primary, secondary;
- ❖ TVET, and
- ❖ Higher Education.

Regarding NFE, some references are made to creating ‘alternative’ pathways to education, and non-formal TVET; however, there appears to be no reference to NFE for basic education within the ESP.

The sector analysis address all areas of access, internal efficiency, participation, equity, quality, management, costs, and financing. There do not appear to be important challenges that are not identified or not analysed in the sector analysis.

It appears that the education sector analysis is based on the most recent available data. As noted, the reliability of this data is unclear, as much has not been externally validated.

The ESP has drawn on a range of studies and analyses, including:

- ❖ United Nations Children’s Fund. (2015). Country Program Document: Maldives.
- ❖ United Nations Development Program. (2014). Maldives Human Development Report 2014 Bridging The Divide: Addressing Vulnerability, Reducing Inequality. The Ministry of Finance and Treasury and the United Nations Development Program in the Maldives.
- ❖ United Nations Development Program. (2006). Developing a Disaster Risk Profile for Maldives.
- ❖ World Bank & Asian development Bank. (2005).
- ❖ Maldives Tsunami: Impact and Recovery.

❖ Joint Needs Assessment by World Bank-ADB-UN System.

The contextual analysis section of the ESA covers political economic, social, and environmental factors in the Maldives which may impact on the ESP. These are further expanded upon in the section on Challenges/Problems. Additional vulnerability and risk/vulnerability analysis is also undertaken throughout the introduction to the ESA.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- ❖ In future, a less pressured time-frame may provide better opportunities for capacity building; and
- ❖ There are questions over the validity of data – benchmarking and validation exercises would strengthen the credibility of the ESP.

### *Do the proposed priorities and programmes form a relevant response to the challenges?*

Strategic policies and plan priorities have been informed the data set out within the ESA, (including gender analysis). However, as noted above, the extent to which this data can be considered ‘empirical evidence’ is potentially limited – much has not been externally cross-checked, or benchmarked.

Furthermore, a number of policy objectives do not appear to have a clear rationale rooted in evidence (either from local evidence, or international good practice). Policies relating to TVET programming are perhaps the best exemplar of these concerns. Interviews with stakeholders enquiring as to the rationale for the revitalisation of the Polytechnic suggested that it needed to be revitalised because had been in a cycle of decline and failure. Given the limited evidence for the efficacy of long-term class-room based TVET training in relation to meeting labour market needs, a counter-suggestion, that past underperformance, and international findings, potentially suggest a case for closing the Polytechnic, had not been considered. This is not to say that the policy position is inherently flawed, but that the evidence base, and rationale, should be explicitly addressed. The ESP as a whole would benefit from a more ‘questioning’ approach, to assess the validity of policy positions throughout.

Some knowledge gaps have been identified by the ESP, and a strategy for addressing this gap is described in Goals 1-2, and 4 with reference to their relevant sectors or administrative systems. The ESP contains a clear rationale for systems strengthening, and explicitly addresses the need to strengthen monitoring. However, with concerns having been voiced from multiple senior stakeholders during Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions, over the validity of existing data (and therefore, the validity of some targets), in addition to widespread concerns voiced over current shortfalls in capacity for data collection, and monitoring and evaluation, it is recommended that these areas be given greater prominence within the ESP – in particular, the importance of establishing reliable, and accurate, baseline data.

The ESP does not appear to make consistent or explicit reference to previous lessons learned in implementation; systemic challenges are identified, but learning linking to what has or has not worked in the past was not explored in substantial detail.

There is a Theory of Change set out within the documentation, which seeks to describe the causal chain informing the development of the ESP, though as noted above, some of the assumptions, and evidence, underlying this causal chain may be potentially problematic (such as discussions of selected teaching methodologies, '21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environments', and evidence underpinning selected approaches to TVET and 'soft skills'), creating potential breakages in linkages between inputs and outcomes. These areas would benefit from revisiting with a 'questioning' approach, that seeks to ensure a robust evidence base (underpinned by local data, and international evidence) for proposed strategies.

As such, while strategies and interventions appear to be broadly well defined and targeted, some potentially problematic evidence and approaches have been used in their development.

The ESP highlighted the following key challenges and constraints:

- ❖ Climate change effects: the national government has highlighted the need to build capacity in water, energy, transport - approaches to strengthening TVET undertake to address many of these challenges.
- ❖ Geographical dispersion of pupils, and difficulty in access, resulting in uneven educational quality and support - the ESP sets out a broad strategy for addressing this challenge.
- ❖ Wide achievement gaps (both gendered, and across various other demographic groups) – The ESP sets out a broad strategy for addressing this challenge.
- ❖ Cultural and ethnic diversity posing challenges in uniformity of delivery and outcome- this is tangentially addressed within the ESP.
- ❖ Volatile political environment - is not explicitly addressed within the ESP.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- ❖ Benchmarking and validation of existing data would strengthen the credibility of the ESP;
- ❖ The ESP would be strengthened by a clearer rationale, drawing on robust evidence, ideally comprising large-scale RCT studies, for certain specific policy agendas, and recommended approaches, specifically:
  - TVET policies;
  - The revitalisation of the Polytechnic; and
  - Approaches recommended in relation to pedagogic / teaching and learning ('Soft Skills' '21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning', etc.).
- ❖ The ESP could be strengthened by explicitly addressing political risk.

*Is the financial framework adequate and credible?*

The financial framework appears to be broadly adequate and credible, insofar as available data and evidence allows. It covers all sectors, with the exception of NFE (which may not be completely relevant to the Maldivian context), and appears to align well with the overall strategies of the ESP. It makes use of a model and quantitative scenario based on reasonable past assumptions, and considers a range of funding options for the targets set within it, building on the data which could have reasonably been collected in the course of drafting the ESP. Feeding into the financial model are various projections for enrolment and human/physical resource requirements, most of which also appear to be credible. The model also considers the cost of debt and loan outlay, though there appears to be no working capital consideration.

Risks and issues are also addressed in the main ESP document, including macro-economic risks, providing further credibility to the model. Different scenarios are also presented for the model, allowing for a degree of flexibility and responsiveness to emergent challenges. This appears to have broadly addressed questions relating to how realistic macroeconomic projections are.

The ESP also touches on sources and adequacy of funding, assessing availability of external funds realistically, as well as addressing the government's funding gap of the ESP in substantial detail. It appears that these assessments are broadly realistic.

**Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. Some financial and economic assumptions and sources for assumptions should be made more explicit;
- ii. ESP financials would be strengthened by incorporating working capital considerations;
- iii. The rationale for enrolment growth and target rates might be clarified;
- iv. Sources or rationales for unit costs in the financials might be strengthened by clarification;
- v. The funding gap might be reduced through a renewed focus on achieving improved efficiencies in the education sector; and
- vi. Donors may wish to consider 'packaging' different components of the ESP for delivery, promoting efficiencies in programming.

*Does the action plan provide a sound operational framework?*

The action plan appears to be sound, though will be contingent on MoE capacity to deliver.

Financial projections are to be revised every two years. The action plan is phased with targets for every two years (2020 and 2022). Target and plan adjustment is to be undertaken at midline evaluation, with periodic reviews and adjustments to be undertaken multiple times per year.

Comprehensiveness in intervention can be a challenge given limited national resources and capacity. Further to previous discussions on evidence underpinning selected approaches, it is unclear how well aligned some activities are to the stated objectives (thereby potentially impacting on the comprehensiveness of response). In some cases, activities are broadly described which makes it difficult to establish linkages to outcomes (e.g. capacity building and training can have multiple interpretations, and not all approaches to capacity building and training are effective), nonetheless, there appears to be strong alignment between the action plan, results framework, and financial framework. Likewise, the action plan is structured in a way that it can readily be cross-referenced with the national education budget and MTEF (medium-term expenditure framework) - activities are clearly identified, costed, and linked to results.

Resources have been identified for all activities in the PIP. These draw on substantial government and MoE investment. Additional support from WB, UNDP, GPE, and UNICEF is identified as appropriate. However, this has not, as of yet, been undertaken in detail. The local consultant considers that there is a need to increase efficiency (trimming, etc.), in addition to approaching donors for funding, or proposing new policy initiatives to provide more funding from donors.

The volume of expected disbursements appears to be realistic, given much is reliant on government support and not far outside current spending patterns (given high percentage of government education expenditure coverage) – disbursement timeframes have not yet been addressed.

Most indicator targets (relevant to gender disaggregation) in the results framework have not yet been set (as these require a comprehensive baseline); as structured, targets are not incompatible with gender disaggregation.

The plan includes consistent reporting/evaluation indicators that can be assessed during annual joint sector review, and institutional structures identified to implement the ESP include clearly designated responsibilities for results and mandates for each activity – these are set out within the PIP.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. A further degree of detail relating to donor support for activities would strengthen the ESP.
- ii. The ESP would be strengthened by explicit incorporation of a consistent, and unified, strategy for approaching donor organisations for programmatic support; and
- iii. The ESP could be strengthened by including a more detailed overview of disbursement timeframes.



### Key issues of Equity, Efficiency, Learning

Are the issues of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance?

The key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning are **partially addressed** within the ESP.

#### Are the designed strategies and programmes relevant to address the three key dimensions?

Strategies set out within the ESP are relevant, though sometimes draw on a rationale that is not entirely clear (this is particularly the case in relation to strategies relating to TVET, the revitalisation of the Polytechnic, and content pertaining to teaching methodologies and capacity development).

Nonetheless, the sector analysis clearly identifies the key issues relating to equity, efficiency, and learning, though using different language (e.g. quality, enrolment, etc.), in addition to GPE language. There is a potential lack of focus on ‘measurable learning’, and content relating to teaching approaches do not always appear to draw on international good practice, or empirical evidence of efficacy.

Data is sufficient to offer insights into:

- a. **internal disparities (geographical, income, gender, minorities, and disability); and**
- b. **the efficiency of the system (as the ratio of the outcomes to resources for the three dimensions).**

However, assessment of:

- c. **learning improvements (quality and availability of inputs, learning outcomes)**

does not appear to sufficiently focus on measurable learning outcomes, instead prioritising a set of recommended approaches and methods, some of which are not supported by empirical evidence. Concrete examples of this might include the ESP’s focus on ‘Life Skills’, or training programmes for teachers which do not link directly to learning outcomes but instead to a set of trends in teacher education and training which are supported by limited evidence.

The sector analysis sufficiently includes causal explanations or determining factors for these key issues, inasmuch as available data allows, likewise, the underlying causes relating to the key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning are properly addressed in the strategies and programmes, to the extent that this is possible with the data available.

There appears to be limited explicit linkage to past lessons learned. Some international practices appear to have informed the development of the ESP, but as noted, some of these have unclear bases of evidence substantiating them. This once again links to discussions of life skills, as well as TVET, neither of which

appear to have any evidence base supporting their use as effective tools for personal or economic development. In the case of TVET, past challenges in the national sector appear to have been glossed over in favour of expensive renovation projects which may have limited positive impact on the sector.

Specific strategies for marginalized, disabled, and at-risk groups are included within the ESP.

There appears to be limited direct linkage between efficiency (internal or financial) and access, quality, and learning in the ESP

Some specific strategies are set out within the ESP to manage and remedy learning issues, though these do not always draw on a substantive evidence-based to provide a clear rationale for their implementation.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. The ESP would benefit from expanded content on historic ‘lesson learning’;
- ii. The ESP would benefit from a detailed, evidence-based, rationale for policies relating to learning outcomes (and associated approaches to pedagogy / learning and teaching); and
- iii. The ESP would benefit from further explicit linkage, between efficiency (internal or financial) and access, quality, and learning in the ESP.

### *Are the strategies designed to introduce transformational changes?*

The ESP makes good use of a range of theories of change founded in credible external literature and relevant to the local context. It relies on a range of innovative strategies to address the key issues in the sector, and is based on a credible results chain.

The ESP refers to a range of ICT-led innovations to education service delivery. It also mentions processes and intents to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The proposed programmes address the issues identified in the ESA and address the goals of equity, and efficiency. Strategies are included that focus on improved learning, but these are not consistently underpinned by a clear, and empirical, evidence-base.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. Where recommendations relate to improved learning, a clearer evidence-based underpinning the proposed approach would strengthen the credibility of the ESP.

Can the results framework be used to monitor improvements in the three key areas?

The results framework is comprehensive and well-structured with regards to the stated goals. It offers measurable targets and means of verification for each subset of goals. Some targets have not yet had baselines undertaken to inform their current status, and some targets are binary (e.g. yes/no), not reflecting the ‘quality’ or ‘degree’ of completion.

The programmes’ expected results relate to the three dimensions reflected in the M&E framework, these are translated into relevant indicators to measure their impact. The indicators are well defined, though some indicators have not been measured at the baseline level and for others, targets have not yet been specified.

Most indicators are easily calculated. Some are binary e.g. ‘TVET policy revised’ which may be delivered according to externally set criteria. ‘Means of Verification’ are explicitly considered for each indicator, which should make them verifiable on a regular and annual basis.

### Feedback and Recommendations:

- i. Where possible, binary targets should be expanded to allow for analysis that gauges the ‘quality’ or ‘degree’ of completion.



#### Coherence

Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP?

The plan constitutes a broadly consistent and coherent corpus of strategies and actions, although concerns have been raised over the robustness of empirical evidence that was used to inform the ESA and ESP, particularly due to the limited amount of time required to complete them. As such, this aspect is **partially addressed**.

Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP?

The various components of the ESP are generally coherent and consistent. Goals of the education sector permeate through all of the key components. The ESA provides basis for the findings of the ESP, though the evidence base for the ESA could have been improved.

The broad strategic policies and plan priorities have been informed by the content of the evidence collated in the ESA. There were some concerns raised by multiple stakeholder, however, regarding the quality of the data that formed the basis of the ESA, and the resulting ESP, these included comments such as:

*‘There were some potential inconsistencies (and perhaps quality issues) of data - the time frame was very compressed’*

*'Some indicators were based on percentages, but we did not have reliable figures.'*

*'There were some issues to do with net enrolment rate ... we worked with a small team, to analyse to understand why it was over 100% - there was no time to produce new data, but there were some hypotheses (double recording, transfers, etc.). Expat children cannot be found in statistics, but are enrolled in schools. If the figure is over 100% - we need to consider whether expatriate workers are increasing this number (particularly low-level workers), the strategy is to 'dig deeper' during the implementation of the ESP. This also applies to some data which we needed to develop policies in TVET sector.'*

*'Instead of relying on what other say [data] should have been independently checked and verified.'*

*'Secondary data should have been validated - it was not validated.'*

This appears to have arisen from two factors:

The first, as noted, is a challenge across the development of the ESP as a whole, relates to a lack of time.

Because of this there was effectively no primary data collection undertaken during the ESA - thus the ESP was formulated on the basis of data that has not been externally validated.

Several stakeholders suggested that there is significant uncertainty relating to the appropriateness of several targets, particularly those based on % improvements in specific areas, as there are questions over existing data.

For this reason, it may be that certain policies should be revisited in light of evidence from international good practice, and research findings - in parallel it is essential that the Ministry continues to build capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation, and that it establish a Clear Baseline at the Start of the Implementation of the ESP. If this is not undertaken promptly, it has the potential to significantly undermine the efficacy of the ESP and its intended outcomes.

The Maldives is a small country, as such, establishing a baseline in all areas should not prove onerously expensive, and will allow for informed monitoring, and strategy, moving forward. While the need for building capacity in Monitoring and Evaluation is already noted within the ESP, this should perhaps be emphasized, and prioritized, further, given the concerns raised above. As noted by one senior stakeholder:

*'[There are] issues with data - there needs to be a solid benchmarking. We are not sure, at a policy level, how much they have checked what we have gathered. They need to check whether these are practical activities, or not.'*

Strategies and programmes within the ESP have a clear logical structure, and they are well organized. Every strategy is coherent with other strategies; there is consistency between the strategies at different education levels.

The proposed strategies and interventions are sufficient relative to the targets set; all strategies proposed reference outcomes either quantitative or qualitative. These outcomes would demonstrate impact if achieved. There is a results framework with an intermediate target of 2020 set for all KPIs (summarizing the links among the planned inputs and the expected impact of the ESP over the medium term). There is strong consistency between the design of the ESP and the action plan - the priorities of the Action Plan are broadly aligned with the goals of the ESP.

### Feedback and Recommendations:

- i. Where possible, the validation of secondary data (through benchmarking, or 'spot-check' validation, would significantly strengthen the credibility of the ESP; and
- ii. The baseline should be prioritised strategically – failure to undertake this promptly could significantly detract from the success of the ESP.

### How consistent are the scenario and the costing with other parts of the ESP?

This is **partially addressed** - the costing model available to the independent consultant proposed a quantitative scenario founded in mostly robust assumptions, but appeared not comprehensive in the sense of including all proposed programmes and strategies of the ESP:

There is a quantitative scenario that is consistent with some strategies, programmes, and targets; although not all programmes included in the ESP are available in the costing model.

The cost estimates mentions all key sectors other than NFE.

The following was mentioned during interviews in relation to the development of the costing and its relation to the assumed targets:

*'The local consultant worked on the basis of an assumed cost-base - this is a demand-led model. It is not based on available resources. This includes, for example, budgeting for repairs, maintenance, etc. to build long-term efficiency - but it should be noted that this is based on need, and not on resourcing'*

The costing model is not entirely comprehensive - the programmes included are consistent with the costing - not all programmes are included.

The Local Consultant responsible for preparing the financial model noted several gaps in data that limited the extent to which the models set out within the initial ESP could be drawn upon:

*'it is based on the information that we have - in the sphere of the Education Ministry, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Statistics - all this information, I have used. I did not particularly use the ESP simulation model.*

*I built a model based on the model used (same logics, etc.) in the ESP - I did not use the ESP one. There were data gaps in the ESP model - I had to make a lot of assumptions. Some of the ESP assumptions were not appropriate to context - I adapted to be suitable'*

Within this context, the Local Consultant suggested that the costing included programmes and activities 'based on the information we have' - however, he noted explicitly that: 'Costings are sound if inputs are sound - but we have not validated the inputs externally. There has been no time for that either.'

In this context, the ESP could potentially be strengthened by working collaboratively to ensure the validity of costings further, particularly as the Local Consultant considered that there is potential to significantly narrow the funding gap if unit costs can be reduced, and other efficiencies identified'

The ESP action plan structured so as to be conversant with the budget classification, while the document has not been aligned to the extent that low-level entries will tally in their entirety, all high-level budget headings, etc. should align.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i.** The costing model should be updated to ensure complete alignment with wider ESP documentation, and the ESP simulation model;
- ii.** The financial modelling should be revisited to ensure that unit cost estimates, and input data, are robust; and
- iii.** Potential cost savings should be explored further, and explicitly, within the ESP, in addition to strategies for incentivising these.

### *Are the M&E indicators consistent with the policy priorities and the planned programmes and activities?*

The M&E approach proposed within the ESP makes direct use of the defined results framework, thereby aligning its targets and areas of monitoring with the expected outcomes and indicators of each programme.

The ESP proposes a comprehensive and well-structured M&E system, which will rely on data included in the Maldives Education Management System (MEMIS) to produce compliance and outcome reports. It makes use of the results framework to monitor expected outcomes on key indicators. The M&E indicators make use of the Results Framework directly within the ESP, as such the two are intrinsically aligned.

It is possible for each indicator to have a baseline and a target for 2020 and 2022. These have not been defined consistently for all targets.

### Feedback and Recommendations:

- i. The baseline should be prioritised strategically – failure to undertake this promptly could significantly detract from the success of the ESP.



#### Feasibility, Implementability, Monitorability

Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement?

The ESP appears broadly feasible on the basis of the information included within it and with regards to opinions and points of evidence revealed during stakeholder interviews. There is a clear implementation manual that has been developed, and major risks and issues have also been considered. The results framework provides a good structure for monitoring progress on a regular basis and evaluating impact of the ESP. Having said that, not all indicators selected have a clear evidence-based base-line, and targets for some indicators have yet to be set.

The ESP makes use of several scenarios, whereby the level of funding required depends on the macroeconomic performance of the country, and the level of funding committed by the Ministry. Should the performance of the economy be low, the funding gap could be unreasonable, and unsustainable.

Domestic resources do not cover planned recurrent expenditure - there is a gap in funding identified to be covered through a mixture of GPE and external funding. Figures are given within the ESP for the funding required overall and projected financial resources available domestically. As such the need for donor contribution can in theory be calculated. Nevertheless, the different scenarios of funding available domestically mean that the external funding required may vary significantly.

The local consultant responsible for preparing the financial model, based within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, noted limited donor funding at present, but expressed the view that the Ministry of Education could be successful in securing substantial donor funds to support the programming set out within the ESP, provided these are 'packaged' correctly' in a manner that is credible, and aligns with donor appetite. This should be emphasized more explicitly within the ESP.

### Feedback and Recommendations:

- i. The baseline should be prioritised strategically – failure to undertake this promptly could significantly detract from the success of the ESP;

- ii. There should be explicit contingencies within the ESP for cases in which low broad economic performance renders the funding gap unsustainable;
- iii. The ESP would be strengthened by explicit incorporation of a consistent, and unified, strategy for approaching donor organisations for programmatic support; and

*Does the plan identify and address capacity constraints that would affect plan implementation?*

Capacity constraints are largely addressed within the ESP:

There is an existing capacity development plan, and the needs in personnel and skill development in central and decentralized administration appear to be sufficiently considered in the ESP and included in the budget.

It has not been possible during the appraisal to validate whether the ministry has clear definitions or job descriptions of the roles and responsibilities, and the corresponding profiles, of education personnel at various levels. It is unclear from the budget documents, or from the ESP, whether resource allocations to decentralized levels are adequate in relation to their roles in implementing the ESP.

On the basis of the ESP, universities are planning to support the process through teacher training, or close coordination with the implementation of the ESP. Other than in the context of TVET, there is limited engagement planned with Private Sector providers. However, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions suggest a lack of effective engagement with stakeholders during the drafting of the ESA and ESP, largely due to time constraints. As such, there is a need to emphasise the importance of engagement with stakeholders moving forward, and of establishing a clear communication strategy to ensure buy-in and collaboration.

**Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. Capacity building for Monitoring and Evaluation should be prioritised and expedited;
- ii. The ESP would benefit from further focus on engagement with the private sector, particularly in relation to non-TVET provision;
- iii. A clear communications strategy, both internal, and with the wider stakeholder community, should be included within the ESP.

*Are there strategies in place to improve and establish good governance practices and management accountability across the system?*

Uneven performance across the below indicators has resulted **partial achievement** of this indicator.

No robust communication strategy appears to exist, nor does it appear there is one planned within the ESP.

No substantial increases appear to be planned in the transfer of resources to units and schools below the national level.

Monitoring and Evaluation systems are to be strengthened, and broad plans are set out within the ESP to promote ‘participation’ of local stakeholders in the education system. There are provisions for 3<sup>rd</sup> party evaluations within the Monitoring and Evaluation strategy, though limited mention is currently made of public access to data.

The ESP does not appear to include effective strategies included to monitor education expenditure and leakage (e.g. through sector expenditure reviews and the expenditure tracking of resources distributed or disbursed to schools).

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. A clear communications strategy, both internal, and with the wider stakeholder community, should be included within the ESP; and
- ii. There should be further explicit reference made to public access to data within the ESP; and
- iii. The ESP should include explicit strategies for the monitoring of education expenditure and leakage (e.g. through sector expenditure reviews and the expenditure tracking of resources distributed or disbursed to schools).
- iv. The ESP would benefit from further focus on engagement with the private sector, particularly in relation to non-TVET provision

### *Does the ESP design take into consideration possible risks and constraints in implementation?*

The ESP design takes into consideration some possible risks and constraints in implementation, though this exercise could have been undertaken in further depth and breadth.

Risks in financial governance are partially addressed, though this exercise is limited in scope. Likewise, there is limited discussion of performance-linked incentives in the ESP; if well managed, resources may support achievement of desired results.

Implementation capacity constraints have been assessed to some extent within the ESP, and in many cases have been addressed through specific strategies or activities.

### **Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. The ESP would benefit from a more exhaustive exploration of risks and constraints;

*Does the M&E system provide robust indicators based on valid and reliable data to monitor the progress toward the achievement of outputs and outcomes described in the results framework? Are the reporting, feedback, and consultation mechanisms transparent and adequate to maintain broad ownership during implementation?*

The M&E system provides robust indicators based on data that can be monitored, and which is generally aligned with ESP goals, programmes and priorities. Though capacity and capability to monitor and evaluate ESP implementation in the Maldives has been strengthened significantly, there are still some concerns over the overall human resources capability. Hierarchy of accountability and reporting has been clearly defined, though Local Education Groups have not been explicitly given a role in the M&E process.

There is a results framework, and the plan contains key indicators for M&E in the form of KPIs and associated targets. Not all indicators are disaggregated by sex or socio-economic status, even among the more relevant ones, e.g. SEN-related indicators.

M&E indicators in the results framework are directly derived from individual programming priorities and strategies, each indicator has a linked target for 2020, and 2022, although not all targets have been specified.

The M&E indicators cover the planned programming comprehensively and provide a baseline and a target for each indicator. There are gaps in the results framework provided by the MoE, which when filled in will provide a sufficient and adequate basis for monitoring progress. The ESP describes a detailed process for ‘Management, Reporting and Accountability’ of the M&E process, and also includes details regarding the ‘means of verification’ and ‘reporting frequency’ for each indicator in the results framework.

Capacity concerns relating to the delivery of high-quality M&E in the past have been cited during stakeholder interviews. In light of these concerns additional capacity has been allocated to the M&E of the current ESP, and know-how built through training and internal professional development. As such, the human resources capacity has a good potential to implement the M&E arrangements, although this ESP implementation would be its first large-scale programme to be monitored.

**Institutional responsibilities for reporting clearly identified within the ESP** - There is no explicit role for the LEG specified for M&E arrangements.

There are dedicated annual reviews planned for reporting:

*‘MoE will organize comprehensive annual reviews at the national level. Annual review will pay attention to learning outcomes and quality of ESP implementation.’*

The M&E framework does not include the monitoring of strategies to mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts, though such risks have been evaluated as part of the ESP's own risk review.

**Feedback and Recommendations:**

- i. Capacity building for Monitoring and Evaluation should be prioritised and expedited;
- ii. There should be further disaggregation of indicators by sex or socio-economic status throughout the ESP; and
- iii. The Monitoring and Evaluation framework should include the monitoring of strategies to mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts.

# ESP Appraisal Checklist and KII Protocol

In line with IIEP-UNESCO's guidance Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal, the following sets out an overview of the 'soundness, relevance, and coherence' of the Draft ESP as it currently stands, with a view to informing dialogue and reflection, to ensure there is scope for further enhancement prior to submission to the GPE.

This is followed by a summary 'Key aspects of credible education sector plans' review, intended to provide a briefing tool for stakeholders.



## 1. Leadership and Participation

*Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent?*



The plan preparation process has engaged with local stakeholders, and has had a degree of local leadership, though this has potentially been undermined somewhat by time limitations, and a degree of 'fragmentation' of approach.



### 1.1. Leadership and ownership

*General question: To what extent is national leadership and partners' ownership reflected in the ESP?*



There is limited ownership reflected in the ESP.



#### 1.1.1. To what extent do the planned objectives correspond to the priority objectives of national development, poverty reduction strategies, and the medium-term expenditure framework?



The ESP appears to be consistent with the most recent version of the national poverty reduction strategy released in the public domain by the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, specifically in the areas of: outer island development and investment; human resource development; and decentralisation of key decision-making processes.

#### 1.1.2. Was there consistent leadership of a national team in developing and writing the ESP?



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Key informant interviews and focus group discussions suggest a lack of clarity regarding leadership of the development and writing of the ESP.

The question ‘Who led the Process?’ generated a wide range of responses from stakeholders, including:

‘It was the Ministry of Education, as main implementing agency’

‘International Consultant’

‘Planning Section’

‘ESP Team’

This suggests that there was a lack of clarity with regard to ownership, as well as a potential lack of unified overarching oversight.

No one group was identified by more than 40% of respondents.

40% of people mentioned the international consultant as leading the process indicating lack of ‘big picture’ oversight and lower stakeholder engagement due to limited timeframe.

It appears these issues arose for two reasons:

- i) A potentially fragmented approach. Most stakeholders consulted had a focused understanding of specific aspects of the ESP as they related to their own role - few, had a 'big picture' oversight of the process; and
- ii) Time has been extremely limited. Due to the very limited timeframe available, there has perhaps been insufficient time to engage all stakeholders fully in the process.

This ‘fragmented’ approach was potentially reflected in a description of the process of developing the ESP by the LEG:

‘Basically, we had several meetings. Stakeholders came up with their sectoral urgencies, their 'wish list', to process policies, and policies that are yet to be formulated. We came up with these lists, then worked in thematic groups, and from that emerged some themes. We worked in the groups, brought that together, and consolidated. The theme groups would meet at a sub-level, and produce a document that was circulated with other groups. Then we had a plenary session with stakeholders, where all of this was shared. Then a document was produced, and shared - we commented on that, etc. It was a bottom-up process. It wasn't 'rock the boat' - it was more, through the ESA, trying to understand what was going on, based on that, the ESP was

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seeking to strengthen what is being done, or achieved. In order to do that, there have been ideas based on brilliant thinking of some people, and worldwide best practices (from the International Consultant).’

It should be noted that LEG representatives suggested that the process had been led by the ‘International Consultant’, in addition to the political appointee within the Ministry of Education responsible for the process.

This appears to be primarily a result of insufficient communication of broader initiatives to diverse stakeholder groups, largely due (on the basis of stakeholder feedback) to the compressed timeframe for the development of the ESA and the ESP. This was perhaps exacerbated by a workshop-based approach in which, due to large numbers of participants, there was limited opportunity for extended dialogue.

It should be noted that the Ministry of Education has clearly been proactive in providing data, and developing focused strategies within various parts of the Ministry of Education. This has been noted by a wide range of stakeholders (for example, with regard to Higher Education, much of the content reflects pre-existing policy positions, which have undergone little amendment prior to inclusion). As such, this does not imply that there was ‘no ownership’ or ‘no leadership’ (indeed, while 40% suggested that the International Consultant led the process, the majority of respondents referred to leadership being within the Ministry, albeit in different parts thereof), but that this was not unified consistently to ensure a broad understanding amongst key stakeholders of the work of colleagues in other parts of the Ministry of Education. What appears to have been lacking is a clear sense of ‘big picture’ ownership, which has potentially undermined the potential to generate widespread ‘buy in’ and understanding of the wider agenda driving the ESP.

There are Four ‘Goals’ set out within the ESP, comprising:

5. Improved Learning for All, through Equitable Access to Quality Education;
6. Skilled Youth and Adults for employment, decent work and Entrepreneurship;
7. Ensure Equitable Access to Lifelong, Affordable and Quality Higher Education for All; and
8. System Strengthening for Efficiency and Quality Schools for All.

All the stakeholders interviewed had some level of involvement in the drafting of the ESP; several were responsible for undertaking the task of providing input for, and reviewing, drafts directly (including members of LEG, etc.).

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However, of those interviewed only 40% referred to the 4 'Goals' at all when asked 'To your knowledge, what are the key 'high level' priorities within the ESP?'

40% of responses noted that there were 4 Goals, and 7% listed all of them correctly.

One senior respondent, who had provided key input on part of the draft, was not aware of the wider ESP at all.

In this context, there are three potential considerations:

- i) In future, a less compressed timeframe would potentially allow for an approach that ensured a more collective leadership of process, with a clear understanding from stakeholders of the work of their colleagues, overseen by a clear, and consistent, overarching vision, as to the 'big picture' of the ESP; and
- ii) There would be significant potential benefits from deep collaboration between colleagues working within disparate parts of the Ministry of Education, to ensure an understanding of the complementarity of the various sectors, goals, and targets, within the ESP;
- iii) It is essential that a clear communications strategy underpin the process, to ensure all stakeholders have a higher level of awareness of the nature of the process in which they are participating.

### **1.1.3. What was the role of the local education group (LEG) members in the preparation of the plan?**

LEG representatives noted their primary role as involving 'Review of drafts', in addition to:

'Meetings, workshops, reviewing documents, editing drafts, etc.'

LEG representatives also noted that:

'We had quality assurance, and local teams, and consultants, working on it also.'

However, there were concerns raised over issues of time to undertake tasks as fully as members would have liked. This included explicit concerns over drafts being shared with LEG members on the day of meetings in which documents were to be discussed, etc. Comments included:

'I wanted to read it, and are comments, but there was too little time.'

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While another member cited broader concerns:

'I was not consulted during the drafting process. I was not happy.

I would have liked to have been consulted, or shown the document. I am the kind of person who reads the whole document.'

The LEG representatives suggested that, in their view, the process was driven by the 'International Consultant' in addition to the Political Appointee within the Ministry of Education responsible for this task.

The LEG noted the potential capacity building aspects of the process, including their observation that:

'The mere fact that these groups sat down together, and came up with a paper (guided very much by the consultant)' was a key achievement of the process.

The approach taken was described in further detail (as noted above) by members the LEG:

'Basically, we had several meetings. Stakeholders came up with their sectoral urgencies, their 'wish list', to process policies, and policies that are yet to be formulated. We came up with these lists, then worked in thematic groups, and from that emerged some themes. We worked in the groups, brought that together, and consolidated. The theme groups would meet at a sub-level, and produce a document that was circulated with other groups. Then we had a plenary session with stakeholders, where all of this was shared. Then a document was produced, and shared - we commented on that, etc. It was a bottom-up process. It wasn't 'rock the boat' - it was more, through the ESA, trying to understand what was going on, based on that, the ESP was seeking to strengthen what is being done, or achieved. In order to do that, there have been ideas based on brilliant thinking of some people, and worldwide best practices (from the International Consultant).'

The general consensus within the LEG representatives was that this approach had been broadly effective:

'The process worked'

Though they noted that they considered it could have been improved with:

'More time' and 'more consultation'.

In particular, they noted that they considered it would have been helpful to engage with

'Students, Parents, Teachers, Private Sector, [and] Industry' and indeed with 'All Stakeholders'.

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While noting that this had not been completely essential, noting that there was already some data within the ministry from these groups.

Potential recommendations arising from these statements are:

- i) It may be helpful to ensure clear Terms of Reference for all stakeholders engaged in the process, to ensure clarity of responsibilities, and tasks; and
- ii) Where stakeholders are expected to play a key role in shaping documentation, it would be helpful to provide sufficient time to allow for this; and
- iii) A less compressed timeframe may potentially have allowed for an approach that would have allowed for greater 'ownership' of the process by the LEG.



## 1.2. Participatory Process

*General question: What is the level of involvement among the local stakeholders and development partners?*

There has been engagement with a range of stakeholders, but with some concerns over the effectiveness of this process.

### 1.2.1. Was the sector diagnosis shared and discussed?

While the sector diagnosis was shared and discussed with stakeholders, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions provided limited evidence of this process having been undertaken in a manner that ensured full engagement with, and understanding by, key stakeholders – particularly those providing key inputs into the process.

This was potentially exacerbated by a reliance on short workshops, with a large number of participants, often with documentation shared at short notice (within the context of a very compressed timeframe for all ESA/ESP activities).

This potentially suggest the need for a strengthened communication strategy to ensure that documentation is fully reviewed, and that processes are in place to ensure meaningful dissemination of key information to stakeholders.

Again, the importance of adequate time, where possible, is also clear here.

### 1.2.2. Did the plan preparation process include a broad range of stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, teacher unions, decentralized levels of government, non-governmental education providers, and development partners?

As noted above, documentation, and stakeholder interviews and focus group discussion suggest that the following groups had at least some level of engagement:

- ❖ School principals / School Heads
- ❖ Schools
- ❖ Parents
- ❖ Teachers
- ❖ Teacher Training Organisations
- ❖ Teacher unions
- ❖ MoE schools
- ❖ Private colleges / universities
- ❖ Department heads
- ❖ NGOs
- ❖ World Bank
- ❖ UNDP
- ❖ UNICEF
- ❖ Ministry of Education
- ❖ Ministry of Finance and Treasury
- ❖ Ministry of Gender and Family
- ❖ Ministry of Environment

Concerns were raised by several stakeholders, however, that the process of developing the ESP would have benefited from wider engagement with other groups (at all, or to a greater degree), including:

- ❖ HE Qualifications authority and private sector providers.
- ❖ Youth Ministry
- ❖ Students
- ❖ President's Office
- ❖ Parents
- ❖ Teachers
- ❖ Private Sector
- ❖ Civil Society Organisations
- ❖ Unions
- ❖ INGOs
- ❖ Municipalities

A range of reasons were provided for non-engagement, including:

- ❖ 'Time constraints'
- ❖ 'They were - but we couldn't get anything in writing'

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- ❖ ‘We didn't ask’
  - ❖ ‘I am not sure if they were there’
  - ❖ ‘They do not appear to be on speaking terms with the Ministry’
  - ❖ ‘Political constraints’

The most significant of these, reported by 13% of respondents was ‘time’ – in relation the highly compressed timeframe in which both the ESA, and the ESP were developed.

Some wider concerns were also noted, included potential tensions between teacher unions and the Ministry of Education. Inevitable challenges of geography potentially limit some engagement to the Male’ area (within the timeframe available), though the ESA;ESP preparation process did involve some visits to schools in the islands. As noted above:

There were a small number of visits to schools, including those on islands other than Male’ undertaken during the development of the ESA and ESP, these comprised visits to:

‘...three islands, 4 schools in total, and one school in Male’ ... focus was on the process of learning and teaching ...

This also involved:

‘... some qualitative focus groups discussions (with students, with teachers, etc.), [focused on] curriculum understanding, etc. Understanding of textbooks, etc.’

Principals were also involved in consultations throughout the process of developing the ESP.

Tentative recommendations arising from this feedback include:

- i) In future, greater efforts should be made to ensure a more participatory approach, with meaningful engagement with a wider range of stakeholders, to a more significant degree than has been achieved within the context of this process to date; and
  - ii) Ideally, such initiatives should be undertaken under less pronounced time-pressure; if this cannot be avoided, then the focus should be on ensuring that the aforementioned engagement strategy is prioritized and resourced.
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### 1.2.3. Were the consultations inclusive? Did they involve the units and persons responsible for programme implementation, particularly at the decentralized and school levels?

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions, as well as a review of the relevant supporting documentation, demonstrate that a range of stakeholders were included during the process, including some at a decentralized, and school level.

Stakeholder involvement cited in interviews and Focus Group Discussions included:

- ❖ School principals / School Heads
- ❖ Schools
- ❖ Parents
- ❖ Teachers
- ❖ Teacher Training Organisations
- ❖ Teacher unions
- ❖ MoE schools
- ❖ Private colleges / universities
- ❖ Department heads
- ❖ NGOs
- ❖ World Bank
- ❖ UNDP
- ❖ UNICEF
- ❖ Ministry of Education
- ❖ Ministry of Finance and Treasury
- ❖ Ministry of Gender and Family
- ❖ Ministry of Environment

There were a small number of visits to schools, including those on islands other than Male' undertaken during the development of the ESA and ESP, these comprised visits to:

'...three islands, 4 schools in total, and one school in Male' ... focus was on the process of learning and teaching ...

This also involved:

... some qualitative focus groups discussions (with students, with teachers, etc.), [focused on] curriculum understanding, etc. Understanding of textbooks, etc.'

Principals were also involved in consultations throughout the process of developing the ESP.

60% of respondents listed additional groups they should have been included in consultations, or included more in the process. These included:

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- ❖ HE Qualifications authority and private sector providers.
  - ❖ Youth Ministry
  - ❖ Students
  - ❖ President's Office
  - ❖ Parents
  - ❖ Teachers
  - ❖ Private Sector
  - ❖ Civil Society Organisations
  - ❖ Unions
  - ❖ INGOs
  - ❖ Municipalities

Furthermore, a substantial amount of the ESA inputs that informed the development of the ESP appear to have been drafted by consultants, rather than by ministry officials. This potentially undermines 'ownership' further, as well as 'big picture' understanding and 'buy in'.

There were frustrations raised by certain stakeholders that findings were 'presented to us' rather than 'discussed by us'.

One senior stakeholder noted:

'I was not consulted during the drafting process. I was not happy. I would have liked to have been consulted, or shown the document. I am the kind of person who reads the whole document.'

#### 1.2.4. Did other ministries participate in the plan preparation process?

A range of other Ministries were noted by stakeholders as having participated in the ESP preparation process.

These include:

- ❖ Ministry of Finance and Treasury
- ❖ Ministry of Gender and Family
- ❖ Ministry of Environment

#### 1.2.5. Was the ministry of finance consulted on the macro-economic financial assumptions and sector projections?

The Local Consultant engaged to undertake the costings model, and financial planning, for the ESP was based within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, with a strong working relationship with the Ministry.

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Macro-economic financial assumptions were shared locally with the Macro-Economic Policy Coordination Committee, within the Ministry of Finance, this is a Cross-Office Committee that includes Ministry of Finance, Central Bank, National Bureau of Statistics, and the Ministry of Tourism, as well as other groups, when required. .

#### **1.2.6. Was the plan formally presented to and discussed with stakeholders?**

While the plan was shared and discussed with stakeholders, Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions provided limited evidence of this process having been undertaken in a manner that ensured full engagement with, and understanding by, key stakeholders – particularly those providing key inputs into the process. Responses (as detailed above) relating to understanding of the plan, suggested some issues with communication between different groups within the ministry, and suggested that the approach utilized had been somewhat ‘compartmentalized’

This was potentially exacerbated by a reliance on short workshops, with a large number of participants, often with documentation shared at short notice (within the context of a very compressed timeframe for all ESA/ESP activities).

This potentially suggest the need for a strengthened communication strategy to ensure that documentation is fully reviewed, and that processes are in place to ensure meaningful dissemination of key information to stakeholders. Again, the importance of adequate time, where possible, is also clear here.

#### **1.2.7. Are the outcomes of the stakeholder consultations adequately reflected in the ESP?**

As noted above, concerns have been raised by a number of stakeholders over the level of engagement with stakeholders, and the extent to which these have had the potential to shape the development of the ESP.

One stakeholder, within LEG, noted:

‘The process was not controlled by us, it was presented to us’.

This suggests some wider concerns, as noted previously, pertaining to ‘ownership’ and ‘leadership’ of the ESP, and the extent to which stakeholder consultations tangibly shaped the document during its development.

Likewise, in some cases, policy documents that predated the process of developing the ESA/ESP (such as those relating to Higher Education) were incorporated with no substantive alterations. While not inherently problematic, given the

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‘fragmented’ approach noted previously, this potentially undermines the ‘cohesiveness’ and ‘responsiveness’ of the ESP, particularly in a context in which improvements could be achieved through meaningful stakeholder input.

A large majority of key informant interview, and focus group discussion, respondents, noted that the compressed timeframe, and the reliance on workshops with large groups, and limited opportunities for extended dialogue, had potentially exacerbated these issues.

As such, there is potential future benefit to ensuring a greater time-frame is available for stakeholder input. In relation to the existing document, it is recommended that stakeholders be provided with additional opportunity for input to ensure:

- i) Greater scope for collaboration, complementarity, and positive feedback between sectors, and sub-sectors;
- ii) Greater ‘shared ownership’, and refined programming, in light of insights from stakeholders, and proactive dialogue to inform policy and action planning; and
- iii) A focus on structuring feedback sessions and workshops to allow for genuine input that can shape future iterations of such documentation.



### 1.3. Capacity Development

*General question: To what extent was the plan preparation used as an opportunity to develop national capacities in education policy and planning?*

There was some capacity building undertaken, potentially undermined by the highly pressured timeframe.

#### 1.3.1. Did partners provide technical support during the preparation process? If yes, what kind of support?

Partners provide a wide range of technical support during the preparation process. A number of local consultants were engaged during the drafting of the ESA, collating data provided by Ministry Officials.

#### 1.3.2. How was the technical support provided by the partners coordinated?

The ESA/ESP was funded by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a global fund and a partnership focused entirely on education in developing countries. The UNICEF Male’ Office played the dual role of the Coordinating Agency (CA) as

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well as the Grant Agent (GA). UNICEF supported the engagement of local consultants (through the Ministry), and a number of International Consultants (likewise), to undertake the key aspects required to maintain momentum throughout the process, and to provide the Ministry of Education with the additional capacity required to maximize the likelihood of a high-quality ESA/ESP. The World Bank also attended a number of meetings, and provided input as appropriate. This was undertaken under the oversight of the Senior Political Executive within the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of Education Staff Associate, Education Officer provided managerial and administrative leadership during the whole process. For the development of the ESP itself, the following expertise was drawn upon:

- ❖ An International Consultant was engaged to support the drafting of the ESA/ESP. The International Consultant worked closely with representatives of all the various parts of the Ministry, with responsibility for their various sub-sectors, as well as the leadership of the Ministry. The International Consultant was an employee of GPE, with a strong knowledge of GPE practices.
- ❖ An International Consultant was also engaged to prepare the Education Sector Plan Implementation Manual for Monitoring and Evaluation of the ESP; and
- ❖ A Local Consultant was engaged to prepare the Costings and Financials. The Local consultant was an employee of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury.

### **1.3.3. How was the technical support provided by the partners coordinated?**

The UNICEF Male' Office played the dual role of the Coordinating Agency (CA) as well as the Grant Agent (GA). This was undertaken under the oversight of the Senior Political Executive within the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of Education Staff Associate, Education Officer provided managerial and administrative leadership during the whole process.

### **1.3.4. Did national officers work closely with the consultants? To what extent was the transfer of techniques and competences effective?**

National Officers did work closely with consultants. Initially, this was focused on:

‘meetings and technical discussions with the key stakeholders, to formulate the theory of change’

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Following this, as noted above, there was collaborative work on the development of the ESA and the ESP. This relied on secondary data, provided by the ministry, and not (in most cases) externally validated, as there was insufficient time to gather primary data, or undertake secondary data validation.

Inputs were then provided by various working groups within the Ministry, and shared with the International Consultant to inform the drafting process.

As noted above, there has been demonstrable benefit from the process of collaborative work within various parts of the Ministry to undertake this process, though an opportunity has potentially been missed for high-level collaboration, an integrated approach, and clear lesson-learning throughout the process – many of the inputs were largely unchanged from existing policy agendas:

‘there are no things to change for higher education – it is already validated ... so we just needed to reformulate to harmonize with 3 other goals’

This was perhaps exacerbated by the compressed timeframe - one stakeholder noted ‘you cannot imagine; it was crazy – I will never do that again in my life. You need more time ... you need more time for consultations with schools, parents, private sector...’. Stakeholders also noted challenges in identifying capable and qualified local consultants:

‘[We] needed more time to find local experts – because not all of them are at the level that this work requires. There were excellent people who, because of the [limited] time, we did not have access to them.’

While strong consultants were identified, it appears their inputs were very pressured – all those interviewed noted this in their responses. This potentially limited the potential for transfer of techniques and competencies, as the focus was on completing the work within deadlines.

That this was potentially a missed opportunity was noted by stakeholders involved in the drafting:

‘It would be good to use the ESP to strengthen capacity, buy-in, and ownership’.

Nonetheless, there was a general consensus that ‘Technically, and analytically, the majority of things are there. 90% is there.’

It appears that time constraints, and the need to achieve deadlines, and produce material quickly, potentially undermined opportunities for lesson-learning, collaboration, and capacity building. Nonetheless, the process of preparing data for

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consultants, within the short time available, and the close collaboration this involved within specific departments, has undoubtedly been a formative exercise within the Ministry of Education.

### 1.3.5. Which steps (sector diagnosis, programme design, scenario and costing, action plan, monitoring and evaluation [M&E] framework) were the most effective for capacity development?

On the basis of the input received from stakeholders, the area that was most effective for capacity development was sector diagnosis, as this necessitated a focused, sustained, and rapid process of data collation, and interaction with expert consultants to provide clear inputs to inform the process. Moving forward, the area identified as being most in need of future capacity development is that of Monitoring and Evaluation, where concerns were raised by multiple stakeholders over existing capacity. This need is explicitly addressed within the ESP, particularly within the Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability Framework.

## 2. Soundness and relevance

*Does the plan constitute a solid corpus of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector?*

The plan has a solid corpus of strategies and actions.

### 2.1. Evidence-based education sector analysis

*General question: What empirical evidence was available and was it used effectively?*

A range of evidence was drawn upon, though there may be some questions over data validity. Specifically, no validation was undertaken of local data during the preparation of the ESA and ESP. While some qualitative inputs were derived from a small number of visits to schools, and meetings with stakeholders, there was no substantive primary data collection. Concerns were raised by a significant portion of stakeholders over potential issues with the quality, and validity, of data within the Ministry – as such, the extent to which the data that informed both the ESA and ESP is ‘empirical’ is unclear.

#### 2.1.1. Has a recent education sector analysis been conducted?

Yes, a recent ESA was conducted immediately prior to the preparation of the ESP.

### **2.1.2. Does the sector analysis cover all subsectors?**

Early childhood education (pre-primary), primary, secondary, TVET, and higher education are all addressed within the ESP. Regarding NFE, some references are made to creating 'alternative' pathways to education, and non-formal TVET; however, there appears to be no reference to NFE for basic education.

### **2.1.3. Does the sector analysis address all areas of access, internal efficiency, participation, equity, quality, management, costs, and financing? Are there some important challenges that are not identified or not analysed in the sector analysis?**

Access is explicitly addressed by those indicators and activities undertaking to promote greater enrolment (Goal 1, Goal 3, and others). Internal efficiency is addressed by those activities and indicators undertaking to improve completion (Goal 1, Goal 2, and Goal 3) and transition rates (Goal 1, and Goal 3), as well as raise standards of education (Goal 1, 2, and 3). Participation in education is addressed by Goals 1-3, while stakeholder and community participation in education guidance and leadership is addressed in Goal 3; the section on M&E and Management (Goal 4) notes use of this system to ensure systematic participation in the national education process. Equity is again addressed across all Goals (1-4). Quality is also addressed in all Goals (1-4). Management is touched on across many of the goals, but receives primary focus in Goal 4. Costs are covered in Goal 4, as well as in Chapter 3.1 (Education Sector Plan Cost and Financing).

### **2.1.4. Is the sector analysis based on the last available and reliable set of data (including sex-disaggregated education data)?**

It appears that the education sector analysis is based on the most recent available data. The reliability of this data is unclear, as much has not been externally validated.

### **2.1.5. What other studies or analyses, including studies from civil society organizations, were used to prepare the plan?**

Additional studies used include:

- ❖ United Nations Children’s Fund. (2015). Country Program Document: Maldives.
- ❖ United Nations Development Program. (2014). Maldives Human Development Report 2014 Bridging The Divide: Addressing Vulnerability, Reducing Inequality. The Ministry of Finance and Treasury and the United Nations Development Program in the Maldives.
- ❖ United Nations Development Program. (2006). Developing a Disaster Risk Profile for Maldives.

World Bank & Asian development Bank. (2005). Maldives Tsunami: Impact and Recovery. Joint Needs Assessment by World Bank-ADB-UN System.

### **2.1.6. Does the education sector analysis identify the vulnerability of the education system to political, economic, social, and environmental risks (and if necessary, has a vulnerability analysis been conducted)?**

The contextual analysis section covers political economic, social, and environmental factors in the Maldives which may impact on the ESP. These are further expanded upon in the section on Challenges/Problems. Additional vulnerability and risk/vulnerability analysis is also undertaken throughout the Introduction.

## **2.2. Relevance of policies and programmes**

*General question: Do the proposed priorities and programmes form a relevant response to the challenges?*

The priorities are largely relevant as a response to the challenge.

### **2.2.1. Are the strategic policies and plan priorities informed by the empirical evidence presented in the sector analysis (including gender analysis)?**

Policies and priorities in Goals 1-4 are regularly linked to empirical evidence arising from the ESA. However, interviews identified some areas of concern in relation to the validity of data (this is addressed in further detail in subsequent sections of this document), which has not been externally cross-checked, or benchmarked. Furthermore, a number of policy objectives to not appear to have a clear rationale rooted in evidence (either from local evidence, or international good practice). Policies

relating to TVET programming are perhaps the best exemplar of these concerns. Interviews with stakeholders enquiring as to the rationale for the revitalisation of the Polytechnic suggested that it needed to be revitalised because had been in a cycle of decline and failure. Given the limited evidence for the efficacy of long-term class-room based TVET training in relation to meeting labour market needs, a counter-suggestion, that past underperformance, and international findings, potentially suggest a case for closing the Polytechnic, had not been considered. This is not to say that the policy position is inherently flawed, but that the evidence base, and rationale, should be explicitly addressed. The ESP as a whole would benefit from a more ‘questioning’ approach, to assess the validity of policy positions throughout.

### **2.2.2. Is there a comprehensive knowledge base for each of the strategic priorities? Or is a process built into the ESP to address the data and knowledge gaps?**

Some knowledge gaps have been identified by the ESP, and a strategy for addressing this gap is described in Goals 1-2, and 4 with reference to their relevant sectors or administrative systems. The ESP contains a clear rationale for systems strengthening, and explicitly addresses the need to strengthen monitoring. However, with concerns having been voiced from multiple senior stakeholders during Key Informant Interviews, and Focus Group Discussions, over the validity of existing data (and therefore, the validity of some targets), in addition to widespread concerns voiced over current shortfalls in capacity for data collection, and monitoring and evaluation, it is recommended that these areas be given greater prominence within the ESP – in particular, the importance of establishing reliable, and accurate, baseline data.

### **2.2.3. Do the strategies take into account the lessons learned from past policies and implementation experience?**

Documentation does not appear to make consistent or explicit reference to previous lessons learned in implementation; systemic challenges are identified, but learning linking to what has or has not worked in the past was not explored in substantial detail.

### **2.2.4. Are the strategies and programmes based on an explicit causal chain?**

There is a Theory of Change, which seeks to describe the causal chain informing the development of the ESP (included in the final pages of Chapter 1, as well as for each Goal).

### 2.2.5. Is there evidence that the proposed strategies and interventions will have the expected impact?

Some of the assumptions, and evidence, underlying this causal chain may be potentially problematic (see discussions of selected teaching methodologies, ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environments’, and evidence underpinning selected approaches to TVET and ‘soft skills’), creating potential breakages in linkages between inputs and outcomes. These areas would benefit from revisiting with a ‘questioning’ approach, that seeks to ensure a robust evidence base (underpinned by local data, and international evidence) for proposed strategies.

### 2.2.6. Are the strategies and interventions well defined and relevant to address the constraints in each of the priority areas (e.g. safety and security challenges to learning)?

Strategies and interventions appear to be broadly well defined and targeted across the priority areas; however, some potentially problematic evidence and approaches (as noted in section 2.2.5) are used in their development. As such, while the described approaches may be ostensibly well targeted, the foundational evidence may not result in the outcomes being targeted, raising questions as to the overall relevance of interventions.

### 2.2.7. Do priorities take into account the risks and constraints faced by the education sector? Do the proposed strategies mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts as identified in the sector diagnosis?

The ESP highlighted the following key challenges and constraints:

- ❖ Climate change effects: the national government has highlighted the need to build capacity in water, energy, transport. Approaches to strengthening TVET undertake to address many of these challenges.
- ❖ Geographical dispersion of pupils, and difficulty in access, resulting in uneven educational quality and support. The end of Chapter 1 endeavours to lay out the broad strategy for addressing this challenge.
- ❖ Wide achievement gaps (both gendered, and across various other demographic groups). The end of Chapter 1 endeavours to lay out the broad strategy for addressing this challenge.
- ❖ Volatile political environment. This is not explicitly addressed.

- ❖ Cultural and ethnic diversity posing challenges in uniformity of delivery and outcome. This is tangentially addressed at the end of Chapter 1 in discussions about use of education to instil core values and skills in pupils (consequently promoting improved national cohesion).

### 2.3. Soundness of the financial framework

*General question: Is the financial framework adequate and credible?*

The financial framework is adequate and broadly credible, insofar as available data and evidence allows. It makes use of a model based on reasonable past assumptions, and considers a range of funding options for the targets set within it, building on the data which could have reasonably been collected in the course of drafting the ESP. Risks and issues are also addressed in the main ESP document, including macro-economic risks, providing further credibility to the model. To improve the robustness of the model, some assumptions and sources for assumptions could be made more explicit. Furthermore, the financial framework is reliant on the validity of the data that has informed it – questions over which have been raised by numerous senior stakeholders.

#### **2.3.1. Does the plan include a quantitative scenario? Was the scenario generated by a simulation model?**

The costing model includes a quantitative scenario providing projected numbers for all key areas of support. There are three funding scenarios dependent on the performance of the economy included in the ESP.

#### **2.3.2. Do the projections include all subsectors?**

The projections include all subsectors (pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, higher-secondary, SEN, TVET, and higher education).

#### **2.3.3. Do the projections cover enrolment, human and physical resources, and financial requirements?**

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The projections cover enrolment, human capital requirements, and requirements of physical resources. Financial requirements are considered insofar as there are salaries and other cost projections for other cost categories. The model also considers the cost of debt and loan outlay, though there appears to be no working capital consideration.

**2.3.4. Are the projections based on recent and reliable baseline data?** 

The projections are based on census data, enrolment data, and past cost data. The rationale for some growth and target estimates is unclear.

**2.3.5. Is the quantitative scenario consistent with the strategies, programmes, and targets?** 

The quantitative scenario reflects the four goals set within the ESP.

**2.3.6. Are the financial projections based on clear and reliable assumptions of unit costs?** 

The sources of unit costs of some assumptions are not made explicit. Where sources are given, these appear reliable (e.g. census data, enrolment data, etc.), though it has not been possible to review the methodology and accuracy of the sources used.

**2.3.7. Is the overall estimated cost of the ESP comprehensive, including the planned programmes and covering the full perimeter of the education budget (including recurrent costs such as salaries)?** 

The overall cost of the ESP is comprehensive in the sense that it covers the four goals set within the ESP. Salaries and recurring costs were both included in the estimates.

**2.3.8. How realistic are the macro-economic assumptions made to project potential domestic resources? Were they validated by the ministry of finance?** 

The local consultant responsible for the preparation of assumptions considers that the macro-economic assumptions are likely sound, unless there is a shock to the tourism sector. These assumptions were validated by the Ministry of Finance and

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Treasury, and the Central Bank, they are based on published information. The local consultant worked with staff in the Fiscal Affairs Department to secure the data pertaining to estimates.

### **2.3.9. Is the funding gap clearly identified and reasonable?**

The funding gap is identified. It is the view of the local consultant, who works within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, that it is 'reasonable' - however, the local consultant noted that there is potential to significantly reduce the funding gap by identifying efficiencies. The views of the international consultant, undertaking this appraisal, on the basis of the documentation provided, align with this assessment. This should be noted as a priority within the ESP.

### **2.3.10. Is there an analysis of past and potential external funding?**

The consultant engaged to undertake costing preparations, etc. undertook an analysis of past external donor funding from 2008 onward. There is significant potential for the Maldives to secure more external funding - on the basis that there is potential to engage with donors, given 'appetite' for education, and to achieve outcomes. It is the view of the local consultant that certain parts of the ESP could be easily 'packaged' into programmes, that could secure funding. The current challenge is, in the view of the local consultant, that donors have not been approached with viable 'packages' to secure such funds. It is the view of the independent appraisal consultant that this is likely to be the case. This should be prioritized in the final version of the ESP.

### **2.3.11. Are the financing options realistic?**

It is the view of the local consultant responsible for drafting the costing estimates that the financing options are realistic. The views of the international consultant, undertaking this appraisal, on the basis of the documentation provided, align with this assessment. The budget allocations are, in the view of the local consultant, feasible, but there will continue to be a funding gap - there is unlikely to be much more funding allocated to the Ministry of Education - there is currently a budget deficit. Current funding is 10-11% of budget allocation - this is unlikely to increase. It is the view of the local consultant that, through efficiencies, more can be achieved to narrow the gap - the remainder can be sought through external sources, as noted elsewhere.

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## 2.4. Soundness of the action plan ● ●

*General question: Does the action plan provide a sound operational framework?*

The action plan appears to be sound, though will be contingent on MoE capacity to deliver.

### 2.4.1. Is a multi-year action plan available? Is there a process in place for the subsequent preparation of annual action plans? ●

Financial projections are to be revised every two years. The action plan is phased with targets for every two years (2020 and 2022). Target and plan adjustment is to be undertaken at midline evaluation, with periodic reviews and adjustments to be undertaken multiple times per year (ESP 2018-2022 Review Mechanisms section).

### 2.4.2. Are the activities sufficiently comprehensive to attain the objectives? ●

Comprehensiveness in intervention can be a challenge given limited national resources and capacity. Further to previous discussions on evidence underpinning selected approaches, it is unclear how well aligned some activities are to the stated objectives (thereby potentially impacting on the comprehensiveness' of response). In some cases, activities are broadly described which makes it difficult to establish linkages to outcomes (e.g. capacity building and training can have multiple interpretations, and not all approaches to capacity building and training are effective).

### 2.4.3. Is the action plan in line with the ESP policy and strategy choices modelled in the financing framework? ●

There appears to be strong alignment between the action plan, results framework, and financial framework.

### 2.4.4. Is the action plan structured in such a way that it can readily be cross-referenced with the national education budget and MTEF (medium-term expenditure framework)? ●

Clear linkages possible through combination of PIP and ESP financial model.

### 2.4.5. Are the activities clearly identified, costed, and linked to results? ●

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These are clearly identified and linked throughout the ESP document, and clearly costed in PIP annex.

**2.4.6. Have resources been identified for all activities? For activities without an identified source of funding, is there a strategy for identifying additional funding sources?**

Resources have been identified for all activities in the PIP. These draw on substantial government and MoE investment. Additional support from WB, UNDP, GPE, and UNICEF is identified as appropriate. However, this has not, as of yet, been undertaken in detail. The local consultant considers that there is a need to increase efficiency (trimming, etc.), in addition to approaching donors for funding, or proposing new policy initiatives to provide more funding from donors. These recommendations have a degree of validity, which should be considered by relevant stakeholders when finalising the ESP.

**2.4.7. Are the volume and timing of the expected disbursements realistic relative to absorptive capacity (e.g. relative to recent experience, relative to plans to strengthen implementation capacity, and relative to the available capacity to manage higher expenditure, particularly in decentralized settings)?**

This appears to be realistic, given much is reliant on government support and not far outside current spending patterns (given high percentage of government education expenditure coverage). This will depend on project milestones – disbursement timeframes have not yet been addressed.

**2.4.8. Are the indicators and target outputs described for each activity? Are they sex-disaggregated?**

Most indicator targets (relevant to gender disaggregation) in results framework not yet set (these require the baseline); as structured, targets are not incompatible with gender disaggregation.

**2.4.9. Does the plan include consistent reporting/evaluation indicators that can be assessed during annual joint sector reviews?**

These are described both in the results framework, as well as in the relevant M&E section of Goal 4.

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**2.4.10. Do the institutional structures identified to implement the ESP include clearly designated responsibilities for results and mandates for each activity?**



Specific mandates and responsibilities are detailed in the PIP.

**3. Equity, efficiency, and learning in basic education**

*Are the key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance?*



The key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning are partially addressed.

**3.1. Robustness and relevance of the strategies**

*General question: Are the designed strategies and programmes relevant to address the three key dimensions?*



Strategies are relevant, though sometimes draw on a rationale that is not entirely clear, e.g. in relation to strategies relating to TVET, the revitalisation of the Polytechnic, and content pertaining to teaching methodologies and capacity development. These could be strengthened by the provision of a clear review of empirical evidence that has informed the approaches. Specifically, it should be noted that widespread implementation of similar policies elsewhere is not, in and of itself, evidence of their efficacy. This should be addressed where justifications are provided.

**3.1.1. Does the sector analysis clearly identify the key issues relating to equity, efficiency, and learning?**



Issues clearly identified throughout each subsector chapter, though using different language (e.g. quality, enrolment, etc.), in addition to GPE language. There is a potential lack of focus on ‘measurable learning’, and content relating to teaching approaches do not always appear to draw on international good practice, or empirical evidence of efficacy.

**3.1.2. Are available data sufficient to assess: (a) internal disparities (geographical, income, gender, minorities, and disability); (b) the efficiency of the system (as the ratio of the outcomes to resources for the three dimensions); and (c) learning improvements (quality and availability of inputs, learning outcomes)?**

Data is sufficient to offer insights into:

- (a) internal disparities (geographical, income, gender, minorities, and disability); and
- (b) the efficiency of the system (as the ratio of the outcomes to resources for the three dimensions).

However, assessment of:

- (c) learning improvements (quality and availability of inputs, learning outcomes).

does not appear to sufficiently focus on measurable learning outcomes, instead prioritising a set of recommended approaches and methods, some of which are not supported by empirical evidence, indicative examples include:

- i) Approaches to pedagogy;
- ii) Policies on TVET; and
- iii) The revitalisation of the Polytechnic.

**3.1.3. Does the sector analysis sufficiently include causal explanations or determining factors for these key issues?**

Linkages established inasmuch as available data allows.

**3.1.4. Are the underlying causes relating to the key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning properly addressed in the strategies and programmes?**

Linkages established inasmuch as available data allows.

**3.1.5. Do the strategies on the three dimensions take into account lessons learned from evaluation of past programmes and experiences, or build on international practices?**

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As noted previously, there appears to be limited explicit linkage to past lessons learned. Some international practices appear to have informed the development of the ESP, but as noted, some of these have unclear bases of evidence substantiating them.

**3.1.6. Are there specific strategies for marginalized, disabled, and at-risk groups (such as underserved communities, girls, the poor, children with disabilities, orphans, children in hard-to-reach communities, ethnic minorities, refugee and internally displaced populations, and children affected by HIV and AIDS)? Do the strategies and interventions reflect an equitable distribution of the resources and inputs to the system?** ●

Specific strategies incorporated for identified marginalised groups throughout relevant Goal subchapters.

**3.1.7. Are the issues of efficiency addressed in relation to access, quality, and learning outcomes? Is there evidence that the strategies related to equity and improved learning are cost-efficient and cost-effective? Do the strategies and interventions reflect an efficient deployment of the resources of public, private, and external development partners relative to impact? Were alternative strategies considered?** ●

There appears to be limited direct linkage between efficiency (internal or financial) and access, quality, and learning in the ESP.

**3.1.8. Are there specific strategies to manage and remedy learning issues? To what extent can inputs related to learning (e.g. number of instructional hours, language of instruction, teaching and learning materials, qualified teachers) promote and incentivize improvements in student learning processes and learning outcomes?** ●

There are specific strategies throughout Goals 1-4, though the strategies include some rationale, and provide limited evidence for why the specific approach in question may be effective, or why such interventions were selected. Building on previous discussions regarding potentially unsupported or problematic approaches recommended in some instances, more detailed justification for strategies focused on learning would strengthen the ESP.

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### 3.2. Change strategies

*General question: Are the strategies designed to introduce transformational changes?*

The ESP makes good use of a range of theories of change founded in credible external literature and relevant to the local context. It relies on a range of innovative strategies to address the key issues in the sector, though, in cases, strategies lack a clear and empirical evidence-base (or the evidence-base is not explicitly referenced). The extent to which these are ‘robust’ is dependent on efficacy of implementation, and the evidence underpinning some assumptions – for this reason, validation of data would strengthen the ESP, as would a more explicit rationale for policy and action priorities.

#### 3.2.1. Are the strategies based on a credible results chain?

The proposed strategies draw on a range of external literature and local findings to address the key issues of the Maldivian education sector identified in the ESP.

#### 3.2.2. Do the programmes include innovative ways to address the key issues?

Yes, the programmes refer to a range of ICT-led innovations to education service delivery. It also mentions processes and intents to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

#### 3.2.3. To what extent can the planned programmes and actions be expected to have a leverage effect on the sector performances in terms of greater equity, efficiency, and improved learning?

The proposed programmes address the issues identified in the ESA and address the goals of equity, and efficiency. Strategies are included that focus on improved learning, but these are not consistently underpinned by a clear, and empirical, evidence-base.

### 3.3. Results framework

*General question: Can the results framework be used to monitor improvements in the three key areas?*

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The results framework is comprehensive and well-structured with regards to the stated goals. It offers measurable targets and means of verification for each subset of goals. Some targets have not yet had baselines undertaken to inform their current status and some targets are binary (e.g. yes/no), not reflecting the ‘quality’ or ‘degree’ of completion.

**3.3.1. Are the programmes’ expected results related to the three dimensions reflected in the M&E framework?** 

Yes, the results framework lists expected results directly related to improving equity, efficiency and learning (ESP, p.82-92)

**3.3.2. Are they translated into relevant indicators to measure their impact?** 

Yes, the indicators are structured and reasonable.

**3.3.3. Are those indicators well defined?** 

Yes, there is an option for each indicator to have a baseline, target for 2020 and 2022. Some indicators have not been measured at the baseline level and for others, targets have not been specified (e.g. ESP, p87-90).

**3.3.4. Are those indicators easily calculated on a yearly basis? Is there provision for making them available on a regular basis?** 

Most indicators are easily calculated. Some are binary e.g. ‘TVET policy revised’ which may be delivered according to externally set criteria. ‘Means of Verification’ are explicitly considered for each indicator, which should make them verifiable on a regular and annual basis.

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## 4. Coherence

*Does the plan constitute a consistent and coherent corpus of strategies and actions?*

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The plan constitutes a broadly consistent and coherent corpus of strategies and actions, although concerns have been raised over the robustness of empirical evidence that was used to inform the ESA and ESP, particularly due to the limited amount of time required to complete them.

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#### 4.1. Coherence among the strategies, programmes, and interventions

*General question: Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP?*

The various components of the ESP are, in most cases, coherent and consistent. Goals of the education sector permeate through all of the key components. The ESA provides basis for the findings of the ESP, though the evidence base (in particular, the validity of data) for the ESA could have been strengthened through benchmarking, or other validation approaches.

##### **4.1.1. Are the strategic policies and plan priorities aligned with the empirical evidence presented in the sector analysis?**

The broad strategic policies and plan priorities have been informed by the content of the evidence collated in the ESA. There were some concerns raised by multiple stakeholder, however, regarding the quality of the data that formed the basis of the ESA, and the resulting ESP:

‘There were some potential inconsistencies (and perhaps quality issues) of data - the time frame was very compressed’

‘Some indicators were based on percentages, but we did not have reliable figures.’

There were some issues to do with net enrolment rate ... we worked with a small team, to analyse to understand why it was over 100% - there was no time to produce new data, but there were some hypotheses (double recording, transfers, etc.). Expat children cannot be found in statistics, but are enrolled in schools. If the figure is over 100% - we need to consider whether expatriate workers are increasing this number (particularly low-level workers), the strategy is to 'dig deeper' during the implementation of the ESP. This also applies to some data which we needed to develop policies in TVET sector.’

‘Instead of relying on what other say [data] should have been independently checked and verified.’

‘Secondary data should have been validated - it was not validated.’

This appears to have arisen from two factors:

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The first, as noted, is a challenge across the development of the ESP as a whole, relates to a lack of time.

Because of this there was effectively no primary data collection undertaken during the ESA - thus the ESP was formulated on the basis of data that has not been externally validated.

Several stakeholders suggested that there is significant uncertainty relating to the appropriateness of several targets, particularly those based on % improvements in specific areas, as there are questions over existing data.

For this reason, it may be that certain policies should be revisited in light of evidence from international good practice, and research findings - in parallel it is essential that the Ministry continues to build capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation, and that it establish a Clear Baseline at the Start of the Implementation of the ESP. If this is not undertaken promptly, it has the potential to significantly undermine the efficacy of the ESP and its intended outcomes.

The Maldives is a small country, as such, establishing a baseline in all areas should not prove onerously expensive, and will allow for informed monitoring, and strategy, moving forward. While the need for building capacity in Monitoring and Evaluation is already noted within the ESP, this should perhaps be emphasized, and prioritized, further, given the concerns raised above. As noted by one senior stakeholder:

‘[There are] issues with data - there needs to be a solid benchmarking. We are not sure, at a policy level, how much they have checked what we have gathered. They need to check whether these are practical activities, or not.’

**4.1.2. Do strategies and programmes have a clear logical structure? Are they well organized?**



Yes, the goals follow logically from the requirements of the ESP for equity, efficiency, and improved learning. Specific programmes identified then address the goals set in a well-organized manner.

**4.1.3. Is every strategy coherent with other strategies? Is there consistency between the strategies at different education levels?**



Yes, key points of focus are identified across different levels of education (ESP, p.33). There is a clear ‘big picture’ view of the focus of different strategies across education levels.

**4.1.4. Are the proposed strategies and interventions sufficient relative to the targets set?**



Yes, strategies are directly linked to KPIs in the results framework.

**4.1.5. Are clear descriptive or quantitative outcomes laid out for the planned strategies and programmes that demonstrate impact?**

Yes, all strategies proposed reference outcomes either quantitative or qualitative. These outcomes would demonstrate impact if achieved.

**4.1.6. Does the ESP clearly summarize or define the links among the planned inputs and the expected impact of the ESP over the medium term (e.g. in a logical framework or economic analysis)?**

Yes, there is a results framework with an intermediate target of 2020 set for all KPIs.

**4.1.7. Is there strong consistency between the design of the ESP and the action plan?**

Yes, the priorities of the Action Plan are broadly aligned with the goals of the ESP.

**4.2. Comprehensive costing aligned with the budget**

*General question: How consistent are the scenario and the costing with other parts of the ESP?*

The costing model available to the independent consultant proposed a quantitative scenario founded in mostly robust assumptions, but appeared not comprehensive in the sense of including all proposed programmes and strategies of the ESP.

Ensuring a comprehensive, well-presented, costing model would strengthen the ESP's rationale and proposed solutions overall.

**4.2.1. Is the quantitative scenario consistent with the strategies, programmes, and targets?**

There is a quantitative scenario that is consistent with some strategies, programmes, and targets; although not all programmes included in the ESP are available in the costing model.

**4.2.2. Do the cost estimates cover all subsectors? Are the targets and costs of post-basic education described in the ESP reasonable in relation to the goals in basic education?**

The cost estimates mentions all key sectors other than NFE.

During the interviews the following was mentioned in relation to the development of the costing and its relation to the assumed targets: 'The local consultant worked on the basis of an assumed cost-base - this is a demand-led model. It is not based on available resources. This includes, for example, budgeting for repairs, maintenance, etc. to build long-term efficiency - but it should be noted that this is based on need, and not on resourcing'.

**4.2.3. Is the costing consistent with the targets set?**

The costing model is not entirely comprehensive as per the comments above. Some of the programmes included therein are consistent with the costing, though not all programmes are included.

**4.2.4. Does the costing include all planned programmes and activities?**

The Local Consultant noted several gaps in data that limited the extent to which the models set out within the initial ESP could be drawn upon:

'it is based on the information that we have - in the sphere of the Education Ministry, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Statistics - all this information, I have used. I did not particularly use the ESP simulation model.

I built a model based on the model used (same logics, etc.) in the ESP - I did not use the ESP one. There were data gaps in the ESP model - I had to make a lot of assumptions. Some of the ESP assumptions were not appropriate to context - I adapted to be suitable'

Within this context, the Local Consultant suggested that the costing included programmes and activities 'based on the information we have' - however, he noted explicitly that: 'Costings are sound if inputs are sound - but we have not validated the inputs externally. There has been no time for that either.'

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In this context, the ESP could potentially be strengthened by working collaboratively to ensure the validity of costings further, particularly as the Local Consultant considered that there is potential to significantly narrow the funding gap if unit costs can be reduced, and other efficiencies identified'

#### 4.2.5. Is the ESP action plan structured so as to be conversant with the budget classification?

The Local Consultant engaged to prepare the financial aspects of the ESP costings, etc., aligned with the action plan, is an employee of the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, and is thus familiar with the budget classifications. While the document has not been aligned to the extent that low-level entries will tally in their entirety, all high-level budget headings, etc. should align.

### 4.3. Coherence of monitoring and evaluation indicators

*General question: Are the M&E indicators consistent with the policy priorities and the planned programmes and activities?*

The M&E approach proposed within the ESP makes direct use of the defined results framework, thereby aligning its targets and areas of monitoring with the expected outcomes and indicators of each programme.

#### 4.3.1. Do the M&E key indicators properly reflect plan priorities and expected outcomes?

The ESP proposes a comprehensive and well-structured M&E system, which will rely on data included in the Maldives Education Management System (MEMIS) to produce compliance and outcome reports. It makes use of the results framework to monitor expected outcomes on key indicators.

#### 4.3.2. Is the coverage of M&E indicators appropriate? Are there missing areas?

The M&E indicators make use of the Results Framework directly within the ESP, as such the two are intrinsically aligned.

#### 4.3.3. Are the M&E indicators well defined?

It is possible for each indicator to have a baseline and a target for 2020 and 2022. These have not been defined consistently for all targets.

## 5. Feasibility, implementability, and monitorability

*Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement?*

The ESP appears broadly feasible on the basis of the information included within it and with regards to opinions and points of evidence revealed during stakeholder interviews. There is a clear implementation manual that has been developed, and major risks and issues have also been considered. The results framework provides a good structure for monitoring progress on a regular basis and evaluating impact of the ESP. Having said that, not all indicators selected have a clear evidence-based base-line, and targets for some indicators have yet to be set.

### 5.1. Financial feasibility

*General question: Is the financial plan adequate and realistic?*

The ESP makes use of a number of macro-economic scenarios to evaluate the availability of domestic funding for the financial plan, though these are not sufficiently put into perspective with regards to the level of granularity required to explore these in full detail.

#### 5.1.1. Does the funding gap remain at or below a reasonable level over the planned period?

The ESP makes use of several scenarios, whereby the level of funding required depends on the macroeconomic performance of the country, and the level of funding committed by the Ministry – as education expenditure is defined as % of GDP (ESP, p.73). Should the performance of the economy be low, the funding gap could be unreasonable, and unsustainable.

#### 5.1.2. Do the domestic resources cover planned recurrent expenditure?

No, there is a gap in funding identified to be covered through a mixture of GPE and external funding.

**5.1.3. If domestic financing is insufficient, are the needs for donor contributions quantified?** 

Figures are given for the funding required overall and projected financial resources available domestically. As such the need for donor contribution can in theory be calculated. Nevertheless, the different scenarios of funding available domestically mean that the external funding required may vary significantly.

**5.1.4. How will development partners align their financial support with the ESP?** 

The local consultant, based within the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, noted limited donor funding at present, but expressed the view that the Ministry of Education could be successful in securing substantial donor funds to support the programming set out within the ESP, provided these are 'packaged' correctly' in a manner that is credible, and aligns with donor appetite. This should be emphasized more explicitly within the ESP.

**5.2. System capacity**  

*General question: Does the plan identify and address capacity constraints that would affect plan implementation?*

Capacity constraints are largely addressed.

**5.2.1. Is there an existing capacity development plan?** 

Goal 4 includes a substantial capacity development plan.

**5.2.2. Are the needs in personnel and skill development in central and decentralized administration sufficiently considered in the ESP and included in the budget?** 

The needs in personnel and skill development in central and decentralized administration appear to be sufficiently considered in the ESP and included in the budget.

**5.2.3. Does the ministry have clear definitions or job descriptions of the roles and responsibilities, and the corresponding profiles, of education personnel at various levels? If not, is there a plan to develop them?**

It has not been possible to validate this point.

**5.2.4. Are resource allocations to decentralized levels adequate in relation to their roles in implementing the ESP?**

This is unclear from the budget documents, or from the ESP.

**5.2.5. How do other stakeholders such as universities, civil society, and nongovernmental education providers plan to support the implementation of the ESP?**



On the basis of the ESP, universities are planning to support the process through teacher training, or close coordination with the implementation of the ESP. Other than in the context of TVET, there is limited engagement planned with Private Sector providers. However, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions suggest a lack of effective engagement with stakeholders during the drafting of the ESA and ESP, largely due to time constraints. As such, there is a need to emphasise the importance of engagement with stakeholders moving forward, and of establishing a clear communication strategy to ensure buy-in and collaboration.

**5.3. Governance and accountability**



*General question: Are there strategies in place to improve and establish good governance practices and management accountability across the system?*

Uneven performance across the below indicators has resulted in incomplete achievement of this indicator.

**5.3.1. Is there a robust communication strategy (or are there plans to develop one) to help stakeholders at all levels understand the objectives, strategies, and activities of the plan, and the role of stakeholders in implementing them?**



No such strategy appears to exist, nor does there appear to be one planned in the ESP.

**5.3.2. If the plan foresees an increase in the transfer of resources to units and schools below the national level, does it indicate how this will be done, and has attention been given to ensuring equity, efficiency, accountability, and predictability?**

No substantial increases appear to be planned.

**5.3.3. If gender imbalance in educational management has been identified as a concern, are there strategies in the plan to address this concern?**

-This does not appear to apply.

**5.3.4. In what ways does the ESP aim to strengthen accountability to beneficiaries? (For example, is there a set of service delivery standards that are monitored? Does the ESP propose instruments for community feedback?)**



M&E systems are to be strengthened, and broad plans are being put in place to promote 'participation' of local stakeholders in the education system – this is covered in Goal 4.

**5.3.5. To promote transparency, are there provisions for third-party evaluations, and disclosure of and easy public access to ESP monitoring, financial, and technical audit reports, data, and evaluations?**



There are provisions for 3<sup>rd</sup> party evaluations (Goal 4 section on M&E). Limited mention is made of public access of data.

**5.3.6. Are effective strategies included to monitor education expenditure and leakage (e.g. through sector expenditure reviews and the expenditure tracking of resources distributed or disbursed to schools)?**



No such strategies are identified.

**5.4. Risks to implementation and the mitigation of risks**



*General question: Does the ESP design take into consideration possible risks and constraints in implementation?*

This was undertaken in some areas, though some potential room for improvement was identified. In particular, there is no clear inclusion of risk mitigation for political instability, or for de-scaling programming in the context of a broader economic downturn rendering the funding gap unsustainable and unreasonable. Issues of capacity building are addressed, but there is a lack of clear mitigation strategy should these prove ineffective, or do not impact change as quickly as anticipated. The ESP could be strengthened by addressing these points explicitly.

**5.4.1. Have potential risks in financial governance been sufficiently assessed and appropriate mitigation measures identified? Have all contextual (political, social, or environmental) risks associated with the implementation of the strategies been adequately analysed and addressed?**



Brief discussion of mitigation and contingencies is in the ESP, though this is limited in scope.

**5.4.2. Do the resources and incentives outlined in the ESP have the potential to support implementation and progress toward the expected results?**



There is limited discussion of performance-linked incentives in the ESP; if well managed, resources may support achievement of desired results.

**5.4.3. Have implementation capacity constraints at all levels been assessed, and are appropriate strategies included in the programme to address these?**



These have been assessed to some extent within the ESP, and in many cases have been addressed through specific strategies or activities.

**5.5. Robustness of the monitoring and evaluation framework**



*General question: Does the M&E system provide robust indicators based on valid and reliable data to monitor the progress toward the achievement of outputs and outcomes described in the results framework? Are the reporting, feedback, and consultation mechanisms transparent and adequate to maintain broad ownership during implementation?*

The M&E system provides robust indicators based on data that can be monitored, and which is generally aligned with ESP goals, programmes and priorities. Though capacity and capability to monitor and evaluate ESP implementation in the Maldives has been strengthened significantly, there are still some concerns over the overall human resources capability. Hierarchy of accountability and reporting has been clearly defined, though Local Education Groups have not been explicitly given a role in the M&E process.

**5.5.1. Is there a results framework? Does the plan contain key indicators for M&E? Are all indicators disaggregated by sex and when relevant by socio-economic status?**



Yes, there is a results framework. Yes, the plan contains key indicators for M&E in the form of KPIs and associated targets. Not all indicators are disaggregated by sex or socio-economic status, even among the more relevant ones, e.g. SEN-related indicators (ESP, p. 85)

**5.5.2. Are the M&E key indicators aligned with plan priorities and strategies?**



Yes, the M&E indicators in the results framework are directly derived from individual programming priorities and strategies.

**5.5.3. Are key outcomes included? Are there missing areas?**



Yes, each indicator has a linked target for 2020, and 2022, although not all targets have been specified.

**5.5.4. Are the M&E output indicators aligned with the outcome indicators?**



Yes, each indicator has a linked target for 2020, and 2022, although not all targets have been specified.

**5.5.5. Is the coverage of M&E output indicators sufficient to adequately monitor progress?**



The M&E indicators cover the planned programming comprehensively and provide a baseline and a target for each indicator. There are gaps in the results framework provided by the MoE, which when filled in will provide a sufficient and adequate basis for monitoring progress.

**5.5.6. Are there transparent arrangements and processes for stakeholders to review and validate the sector results and performances?**



Yes, the ESP describes a detailed process for ‘Management, Reporting and Accountability’ of the M&E process (ESP, p.76), and also includes details regarding the ‘means of verification’ and ‘reporting frequency’ for each indicator in the results framework.

**5.5.7. Is there sufficient human resources capacity to implement the M&E arrangements?**



Capacity concerns relating to the delivery of high-quality M&E in the past have been cited during stakeholder interviews. In light of these concerns additional capacity has been allocated to the M&E of the current ESP, and know-how built through training and internal professional development. As such, the human resources capacity has a good potential to implement the M&E arrangements, although this ESP implementation would be its first large-scale programme to be monitored.

**5.5.8. Are institutional responsibilities for reporting clearly identified?**



Yes, the hierarchy of reporting is identified in the ESP (ESP, p.76)

**5.5.9. What is the role of the LEG in M&E arrangements?**



There is no explicit role for the LEG specified for M&E arrangements within the ESP

**5.5.10. Is reporting during annual joint sector reviews planned?**



Yes, there are dedicated annual reviews planned for reporting: ‘MoE will organize comprehensive annual reviews at the national level. Annual review will pay attention to learning outcomes and quality of ESP implementation.’ (ESP, p.79)

**5.5.11. Does the M&E framework of the ESP include the monitoring of strategies to mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts as identified in the sector diagnosis and programme design?**



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The M&E framework does not include the monitoring of strategies to mitigate the vulnerability of the education system to political, social, and environmental impacts, though such risks have been evaluated as part of the ESP's own risk review.

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# Summary Assessment Checklist

Questions	✓/✗	Comment
<b>Sector-wide</b>		
1. Does the plan cover all subsectors including non-formal education, literacy, and higher education?	✗	NFE not explicitly covered by the ESP; some non-formal TVET is mentioned, but no clear mention of NFE for basic education.
<b>Based on a sector analysis</b>		
2. Does the ESP summarize key results of the sector analysis and identify key challenges based on those results?	✓	Undertaken in the introduction of the ESP.
<b>Coherent and consistent strategies</b>		
3. Do the general objectives, specific objectives, and activities address the key challenges and their underlying causes?	✓	All objectives and activities were specifically linked in the ESP.
4. Are there any major inconsistencies in the presentation of general objectives, specific objectives, and activities across different sections of the ESP (e.g. narrative of the strategies, logic framework, action plan)?	✗	No major inconsistencies identified.
<b>Sound cost framework</b>		
5. Has the plan been costed?	✓	The plan has been costed (see PIP).
6. Are the data presented by education level?	✓	Data is presented by education level where appropriate both in the ESP and in the PIP.

7. Are the data presented by year?	✓	The financial model is presented by year both in the financial model and in the PIP;.
8. Does the cost framework specify the capital and recurrent expenditures as well as the staff salaries share?	✓	The cost framework identifies these both in the ESP section on costs, as well as in the annex financial model.
<b>Sound financial framework</b>		
9. Is the financial framework based on official macro-economic assumptions?	✓	Financial models prepared by MoF representative, and Validated by Macro-economic Policy Coordination Committee, within the Ministry of Finance – Cross-Office Committee that includes Ministry of Finance, Central Bank, National Bureau of Statistics, and Ministry of Tourism.
10. Does the financial framework specify the domestic and external resources allocated to the education sector?	✓	Domestic and external resources specified in the PIP.
11. Does the financial framework specify the financial gap?	✓	The gap is addressed in the cost section of the ESP.
12. What is the level of the funding gap as a percentage of the total resources available (including external aid)?		This figure does not appear to have been provided.
<b>Simulation model</b>		
13. Was a simulation model used for testing the policy targets and informing the policy dialogue?	✓	A simulation model is presented in the costs section of the ESP.
14. Was a simulation model used for devising the financing framework?		A financial model was built by the local consultant.
<b>Sound action plan</b>		
15. Does the action plan contain a precise timeline for each activity?	✓	Specified in PIP, not the action plan.

16. Does the action plan contain a responsible authority for each activity?	✓	Specified in PIP, not the action plan.
17. Does the action plan contain the total cost and source of funding for each activity?	✓	Specified in PIP, not the action plan.
<b>Monitoring tools and mechanisms</b>		
18. Does the ESP contain a description of the monitoring tools and mechanisms that will be used to monitor progress, or mention a plan to develop them?	✓	Plans mentioned for development and strengthening of these. Existing (and appropriate) tools mentioned in relevant sections.
<b>Clear roles and responsibilities</b>		
19. Are there clear roles and responsibilities defined for the implementation and monitoring of the ESP?	✗	Allocations of responsibility are specified in the PIP; though this lacks substantial detail, and does not explicitly lay out roles and responsibilities.
<b>Sound indicators</b>		
20. Are most of the indicators well defined, meaning they contain a target, a timeframe, and are measurable?	✓	This appears to be the case from the submitted logframe (end of ESP).
21. Do most objectives have corresponding outcomes, and do most activities have corresponding outputs?	✓	This appears to be the case.
<b>Capacity development</b>		
22. Does the ESP contain a programme on capacity development that is based on an assessment of capacities?	✓	This is primarily covered in Goal 4, though Goals 1-3 also touch on the topic.
<b>Strong government leadership</b>		
23. Did the ESP's preparation process demonstrate strong leadership of the government?	~	Due to limited timer availability, and issues with stakeholder engagement, there were some challenges with leadership and ownership.

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**Broad stakeholder participation**

24. Did the preparation of the ESP involve a participatory process that included a broad range of stakeholders: central government, decentralized levels of government, civil society, teacher unions, nongovernmental organizations, and development partners?



Respondents expressed concerns over a lack of meaningful engagement with stakeholders, largely arising from tight time-frames.

# Appendix

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## Maldives ESP Revised Survey

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### Background Information

**1) Do you consent for the responses in this interview to be used within the ESP Appraisal?**

Yes

No

**2) Do you consent for your participation in this interview to be noted within the ESP Appraisal?**

Yes

No

**3) Should responses be attributed, or not attributed, to you, within the ESP Appraisal?**

Attributed

Not attributed

**4) What is your name? (optional)**

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**5) What is your role or title?**

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**6) For what institution or organisation do you work?**

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**7) Gender:**

M

- F
- Decline to state

**8) Are you aware of, or have you read, the contents of the new ESP?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**9) Were you involved in, or consulted towards, the preparation of the ESP?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

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**ESP Knowledge, Challenges, Strengths**

**10) To your knowledge, what are the key 'high level' priorities within the ESP?**

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**11) To your knowledge, what is the rationale for these priorities?**

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**12) To your knowledge, how were these priorities agreed?**

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**13) Do you agree with these priorities?**

- I don't know
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**14) Why?**

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**15) What, if any, were the aspects of the ESP you consider are most likely to be effective?**

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**16) What, if any, areas of the ESP do you consider are most likely to be implemented?**

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**17) Are there any ways in which the ESP is ineffective?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**18) If yes, please tell us more:**

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**19) Was there anything you would have improved in the ESP?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**20) If yes, please tell us more:**

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**21) What, if any, challenges were faced during the process of preparing the ESP?**

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**22) What, if anything, would you do differently if you were to repeat the process of preparing the ESP?**

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**23) To what extent do you consider the ESP to be feasible?**

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**24) Why?**

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**25) To what extent do you consider the ESP to be implementable?**

- Very implementable
- Somewhat implementable
- Not at all implementable
- I don't know

**26) Why?**

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**27) To what extent do you consider the ESP to be monitorable?**

- Very monitorable
- Somewhat monitorable

Not at all monitorable

I don't know

**28) Why?**

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**29) To what extent do you consider the various components of the ESP are consistent?**

Very consistent

Somewhat consistent

Somewhat inconsistent

Very inconsistent

I don't know

**30) Why?**

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**31) What is your view on the likely effectiveness of the financing, implementation, and monitoring of the ESP?**

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**32) Are there any recommendations or findings in the ESP you consider inappropriate to the context, or unrealistic?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**33) If yes, please tell us more:**

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**ESP Involvement**

**34) In what capacity did you participate in the ESP process?**

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**35) What did this involvement comprise?**

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**36) Who led the process?**

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**37) Was the leadership effective?**

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**38) Why?**

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**39) What aspects of the process, if any, were strengths?**

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**40) Could this process have been improved in any way?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**41) If so, how?**

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42) To your knowledge, which stakeholder groups were consulted in the preparation of the ESP?

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43) Were there any groups that should have been consulted (at all or in more depth) but were not?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

44) If yes, which ones?

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45) Why were they not consulted?

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**ESP and Efficiency, Equity, Learning**

46) What is your understanding of 'efficiency' to education? How would you define it?

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**47) What, if any, are the biggest challenges facing efficiency to education in the Maldives?**

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**48) What, if any, steps should national actors (state and non-state) take to promote efficiency to education in the Maldives?**

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**49) What is your understanding of 'equity' in education? How would you define it?**

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**50) What, if any, are the biggest challenges facing equity in education in the Maldives?**

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**51) What, if any, steps should national actors (state and non-state) take to promote equity in education in the Maldives?**

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**52) What is your understanding of 'quality' and 'learning' in education? How would you define them?**

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**53) What, if any, are the biggest challenges facing education quality and pupil learning in the Maldives?**

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**54) What, if any, steps should national actors (state and non-state) take to promote education quality and improved pupil learning in the Maldives?**

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**Thank You!**

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