MALDIVES

Domestic Violence Prevention

STRATEGIC PLAN

2017 - 2021



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Executive Summary

Overview of domestic violence prevention in the Maldives

Like in many other countries domestic violence is a significant problem in the Maldives. Available data from research, reported cases and anecdotal evidence reveal a high prevalence rate, a significant gap in estimated victimization and the reported incidents and a misunderstanding of the problem. In the last few years there have been improvements in attending to domestic violence as an important issue facing the Maldives.

However, progress has been slow and much remains to be done. As a recent introduction to the policy discourse, domestic violence remains under-funded and under-resourced. Key institutions lack resources and are under-staffed. There are some ambiguities about the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholder agencies too, which further impedes timely actions. Access to justice is improving but unevenly. There are issues to be mindful of related to the broad criminal justice system as well as issues specific to processing a crime as complex as domestic violence that influences access to justice. While institutional awareness of domestic violence has increased, there is a concern that within important organizations the required organizational culture change has not happened and, in some cases, is deteriorating. Furthermore, a well-established perpetrator rehabilitation program does not exist. Coordination also remains fragmented and can be improved significantly.

This is not to suggest, however, that important work is not underway to prevent, tackle and eradicate domestic violence. Last few years, especially, has seen much activity geared towards a common vision of making Maldives a country free from all forms of domestic violence. The 2012 Domestic Violence Prevention Act (hereafter the DVPA or the Act) is a significant step forward. The DVPA offers a comprehensive legislative framework that provides a definition for domestic violence, a mandate for all relevant organizations to work collaboratively and a directive to resource and upskill important organizations. Furthermore, the DVPA established a specialist organization called Family Protection Authority (FPA) with the primary mandate to focus on domestic violence. FPA and leading other institutions are well-aware of, and committed to, tackling domestic violence effectively and efficiently. There has been much work on raising awareness, providing basic training to key institutions and improving access to justice. Therefore, without any dispute, it can be stated that gradual progress has been achieved in the last few years.

Building on these recent achievements it is now important to move the domestic violence prevention agenda forward. The purpose of this Maldives Domestic Violence Prevention Strategic Plan (2017-2021) is to identify key areas of focus that will help achieve this and guide all relevant institutions and stakeholders to work towards a common goal.

Domestic violence in the context of Maldives

Herein, a brief clarification of terminology in the context of Maldives is necessary. The preferred and commonly used term in the Maldives is domestic violence because the DVPA (2012) uses it. The Dhivehi word for it, *Geveshi Aniya*, is now a familiar 'new' Dhivehi word that Maldivians use frequently. The DVPA (2012) defines domestic violence in a way that it covers various types of violence. The emphasis is on the relationship between the perpetrator and the survivor/victim and not necessarily on the gender and/or the age of either the survivor/victim or the perpetrator.

The definition provided in the DVPA 2012 is a very broad definition, however. Notwithstanding this, there are both benefits and constraints related to the definition. It allows many different forms of acts to be classified as domestic violence and use the special powers granted to the police and the justice sector to be used for these various types of offences which relates both to underlying causes and symptoms of domestic violence (an example child abuse). It allows intimate partner violence to be criminalized too. It uses both physical, emotional, psychological, financial abuse to be recognized and reacted.

Because of this broad definition, however, there is a lack of consensus and difference in opinion about what is, and what is not, domestic violence. It covers several actions that are already criminal in other contexts such as child abuse, sexual offences and physical violence. Because the DVPA (2012) is not in itself a criminal law, criminal charges can only be laid based on clauses in the Penal Code, an exception is when protection orders are breached. The DVPA provides for criminalization of the breach of protection orders and is a separate offence. As much as the DVPA (2012) is hailed as the single biggest achievement towards the prevention of domestic violence in the Maldives, there are emerging concerns that point towards a need for re-evaluation and re-assessment of the law in a context of streamlining and clarifying the existing ambiguities.

Maldives Domestic Violence Prevention National Strategy (2014-2016)

The Maldives Domestic Violence Prevention National Strategy 2014-2016 (DVPNS 2014-2016) is the first ever strategic plan formulated to tackle domestic violence in the Maldives. The DVPNS 2014-2016 provides a multi-sectoral approach to, and a cohesive framework within which, various agencies can work towards the prevention and enhance support services for domestic violence. The DVPNS 2014-2016 had four key components. They are:

- Prevention
- Victim based interventions
- Perpetrator based interventions
- Collaboration

Based on this good foundation there is an opportunity to build on future development to identify national priorities and objectives. There are important lessons learned and significant gaps identified which offers a conceptual framework to begin drafting a new strategic document to tackle domestic violence in the Maldives. This new plan seeks to address these gaps.

Objectives

The objectives of this new strategic plan are:

- 1. To provide strategic guidelines to enforce the Maldives Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2012).
- 2. To ensure that all relevant stakeholders work towards a common vision with regards to combating domestic violence in the Maldives.
- 3. To coordinate and sustain the works of various agencies by providing a collaborative framework to fulfill the obligations of various agencies.
- 4. To clearly articulate necessary steps and actions that can reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in the Maldives and promote a culture of change where there is a zero-tolerance to domestic violence.
- 5. To identify social, political and economic context within which domestic violence occurs and target the root-causes of domestic violence based on thorough research and analysis.

Guiding principles of the plan

The following principles have guided the development of this strategic plan:

- 1. Domestic violence is not acceptable in any form or shape.
- 2. The central focus always needs to be on survivors. If there are any conflicts as to what should be the priority, with competing interest, the survivor will always take precedent.
- 3. Domestic violence has significant economic and other social implications too and thus it needs to be not just a criminal justice issue. A whole of government, a whole of society and an integrated approach to domestic violence is needed. This is not just an issue for the FPA or the social services section.
- 4. Research, data and analysis is not only important to understand the nature of the problem but should be the main ingredient in policy making and program focus.

Key to Success

The success of this plan lies in:

- All relevant stakeholders taking full ownership of the strategic plan.
- Strong leadership from relevant office bearers.
- Ensuring that there is a collaborative and integrated approach where all agencies take necessary actions to fulfill what is laid out in the plan.
- The plan is well-communicated to all necessary individuals who would be involved in implementing it.

- There is continuous monitoring, formal evaluations and systematic program design and implementation.

Approach(es) to domestic violence

There are many different approaches that can be taken when trying to make sense of domestic violence. Some of the common approaches are:

- Law and order approach which comprises of zero-tolerance, pro-arrest and pro-prosecution strategies.
- Risk management/mitigation approach in which the central focus is on early intervention and harm reduction.
- Empowerment approach, especially when it comes to long term goals.
- The human rights approach which considers domestic violence first and foremost a violation of basic human right and offers solutions accordingly.
- Responding to domestic violence effectively requires an analysis of domestic violence that incorporates gender. While men are also survivors of domestic violence, data confirms that in overwhelmingly majority of the cases the survivors of domestic violence are women. Hence, adopting a gendered approach which tends to place primary attention on domestic violence as a crime in which women are survivors and men are perpetrators is important.
- Public health approach which uses proactive preventative strategies focusing on primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.
- Crisis-intervention approach which reacts to the crisis of domestic violence.

All these approaches have important lessons to offer, especially when it comes to strategizing against domestic violence in the early stages, which is the case in the Maldives. This strategy uses a combination of these various approaches and draws widely from what can be implemented in the context of Maldives. Because it is important to be realistic about what can be achieved in a set timeframe focusing both on results and good practice. In doing so, the strategy is based on identifying those that can have the greatest impact through multi-disciplinary approach. Therefore, it draws from existing legislative and regulatory procedures, preventive, proactive and reactive measures and problem solving approach. The strategy recognizes there are underlying factors, fears and consequences that require attention and aims to move focus beyond the symptoms of domestic violence.

Five national priorities

Keeping the above in mind, the following five national priorities are identified and highlighted.

- Prevention
- Protection
- Partnership
- Accountability and
- Governance

Strategic assessment

Methodology

The process of planning began with a broad review of existing documents and information about domestic violence in the Maldives. By using these existing secondary data, a general view of the state and nature of domestic violence in the Maldives was formed. This helped to identify common themes regarding domestic violence in the international context.

Following this a review of the existing DVPNS 2014-2016 was carried out. The review looked at the extent to which the key outcomes and activities have been carried out. The main sources of data were analysis of documents which consisted of Family Protection Authority's Annual Reports and consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Situation analysis

To move forward with a new strategic plan, it is always important to do a thorough situation analysis. There are various approaches to this. This plan used the model known as PESTEL-O (see appendix A) which stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, Legal and Organizational factors that have an impact on domestic violence. This part provides the PESTEL-O analysis done for domestic violence in the Maldives.

Review of the DVPNS (2014-2016)

The review of DVPNS (2014-2016) identified key achievements from the last three years. It explored the extent to which, and how, domestic violence has remained in policy and in practice. The findings suggest that important works are underway and that resource limitation has affected all relevant stakeholders from full-filling their mandate.

The review also identified that there are much to be achieved through better collaboration and systemizing several activities that are already in place. There are untapped resources that can be better utilized with proper strategizing. This plan, therefore, emphasizes on a partnership approach.

A cultural change is required for domestic violence to be a national priority and to ensure that domestic violence is eradicated from Maldives. In some contexts, this change can be seen happening but the progress is slow. Even when institutions make domestic violence a priority there are other

impeding factors such as cultural norms and practices of individuals that hinder what is promoted by institutions. There is a general concern that domestic violence prevention is just a rhetoric and more needs to be done in practice. The strategy aims to make prevention a more central tenant of all domestic violence related policies.

Key components of strategic plan 2017-2021

National priority one: Prevention

There is now a wide agreement that prevention should be a key objective of domestic violence plans. While criminalizing domestic violence has been important, prevention has furthermore extended benefits. It is important to acknowledge that prevention requires resources, time and effort and instead of just using prevention rhetoric ensuring it is practiced is important. While prevention can be a widely-agreed concept, when it comes to resourcing and funding it often takes a secondary role to other objectives related to domestic violence.

Prevention requires addressing root-causes of domestic violence. The root causes of domestic violence in Maldives are similar to many other countries. There are political, economic and social structures that contribute to domestic violence. Issues of gendered hierarchy, power imbalance, patriarchal cultural practices and discriminatory social norms affect the level of domestic violence too. There are other factors such as prevalence and exposure to other forms of violence, issues like child sexual abuse, other crimes like drugs and alcohol abuse and psycho-social issues that contribute to domestic violence.

Prevention is a high priority in the Maldives too, both in DVPA 2012 and DVPNS 2014-2016. Therefore, there is a good opportunity to make prevention of domestic violence a high priority by building on the existing works undertaken. Taking a well-established, focused and targeted approach to prevention is necessary. These issues may need to be further explored and detailed in a specific prevention plan on domestic violence. A multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial approach to prevention needs to be the focus.

Furthermore, there are emerging issues related to domestic violence that needs to be considered. There are links to be observed between domestic violence and trafficking of persons and migrant smuggling. The migrant community in Maldives itself is a vulnerable group with limited opportunities to access service and justice with regards to domestic violence and beyond. There are valid concerns about possible links between domestic violence and radical narratives and extremist ideologies.

Therefore, prevention of domestic violence needs to be well-placed and linked to other prevention strategies of related issues. Drawing on these and building on existing development, prevention

should be a well-funded and well-focused strategic priority. The following represent areas where prevention can be focused.

Goal: Ensure that Maldives domestic violence policy remains prevention focused and that all relevant organizations proactively address the root-causes of domestic violence

- Develop a detailed prevention plan that reflects primary, secondary and tertiary prevention activities and streamline domestic violence related prevention work.
- Develop a series of standard domestic violence prevention videos and other materials specific to targeted audiences and disseminate to various actors engaged in domestic violence prevention.
- Revisit and review existing reporting mechanisms, develop additional reporting avenues such as through social media and further strengthen anonymous reporting by strengthening the existing mechanisms to ensure anonymity is fully maintained.
- Develop, pilot and implement innovative and targeted prevention campaigns to men and boys, teenagers, dating relationships and within pre-marriage counselling sessions.
- Inform, aware and empower women and girls about domestic violence and ensure gender neutral and gender empowering policies are pushed at national policy level.
- In consultation with the Ministry of Education and relevant other agencies develop and implement an age appropriate standard domestic violence awareness program for children.
- Identify domestic violence related to cultural practices and develop a strategy/program to prevent violence linked to such cultural practices.

National priority two: Protection

While prevention is desired and ideal it is always important to keep in mind that domestic violence has far reaching consequences, impacts a wide variety of people involved and has devastating economic, social and psychological costs. A key objective of this strategic plan is to ensure that the strategies used can end the 'cycle of violence' and provide the needed protection and support to survivors of domestic violence.

Data confirms that most survivors of domestic violence are women. As such, there is a significant need for protection of women from men and provide supporting services to women and girls.

Yet, to address the incidents of domestic violence holistically, it is also important to note that domestic violence is not a crime specific to any one gender. Along with women, men and boys are survivor of domestic violence too. The existing system lacks proper, and sometimes any, relevant support service to victimized men and boys. While there is no policy difference in terms of accepting, or considering who is a survivor, in practice, for cultural and many other reasons, male oriented protection and support programs are limited. Therefore, there is an emerging need to have

protection and support services that are more gender neutral and ensure that all survivors, irrespective of their gender, receive necessary services.

Goal: Ensure that all survivors who contact designated institutions receive appropriate level of protection and support that they need

- Enhance survivor support services within key stakeholder organizations and establish a survivor support mechanism within the judicial sector.
- Strengthen the Family Protection Unit within IGMH and develop similar arrangements or mechanisms within all health service institutions.
- Undertake a review of Protection Order and identify ways to improve and optimize the objectives of Protection Order to survivors.
- Identify new avenues to, and enhance existing mechanisms related to, psychological counselling services and legal aid services.
- Establish and promote safe platforms, which include cyber and other forms of support groups that can enhance opportunities to discuss and share survivors' experience anonymously.
- Enhance emergency and support care service and protocols to survivors of domestic violence (both adult and children) within health and other related environments.
- Develop a robust regulatory mechanism to oversee the operation and services of all
 domestic violence service providers which include domestic violence shelters and other
 social service providing centers established throughout the Maldives.
- Develop and distribute written documents such as manuals and handbooks to facilitate a streamlined and standardized response to judicial and law enforcement process is practiced.
- Secure court settings for survivors of domestic violence by investing in court design and space.

National priority three: Partnership

The need for a well-coordinated and broad partnership in the fight against domestic violence cannot be overemphasized. Partnership is not only necessary for enforcement of the DVPA, which now is more often the case. Partnership can be an important tool to achieve all other strategies of this plan. For example, there is much to be achieved through partnership with higher training bodies in research and analysis, training and information dissemination. Also, men in power, prestigious positions and popular personalities can be useful 'gatekeepers' to the needed culture of change. Media can be useful partner too. There is a need to look at a broad horizon to see who can be effective partners and promote partnership for domestic violence broadly. There are those who are not traditionally considered partners for domestic violence purpose but who can reach out to people and groups that the state alone cannot.

Therefore, the strategy advocates for and promotes the use of partnership to the full extent possible. To this end the following strategies are advised.

Goal: Use a partnership based approach to achieve effectiveness and efficiency

- Mobilize key community agents including men, businesses and organization in the fight against domestic violence
- Form formal partnerships with the Civil Service, Councils, politicians and political parties, training institutions, sports community, selected businesses and NGOs for various domestic violence related activities such as prevention and research and analysis of domestic violence.
- Establish a permanent technical and steering committee within FPA to inform and better coordinate domestic violence related initiatives and minimize resource duplication improve effectiveness and efficiency through better coordination.
- Develop a robust partnership with a wide range of media entities to disseminate accurate information and sensitize the public
- FPA should develop formal partnership with regional and international related institutions/organization to share knowledge and experience.
- Promote the cause of domestic violence prevention and reduction within tertiary student communities and school leavers to increase interest for employment and volunteering within the social sector.

National priority four: Accountability

One area that was most under achieved in the DVPNS 2014-2016 is actions targeting perpetrators. Because the DVPNS 2014-2016 had an imminent need to implement the basic programs and services that will help survivors, understandingly, perpetrator oriented activities may be secondary to the preventative, survivor oriented and training related actions. Keeping this in mind, now there are opportunities to make perpetrators more accountable to the offence they commit.

But accountability is not just about holding perpetrators accountable before a court of law. It involves ensuring they take responsibility and are held accountable to their actions. Accepting the wrong is key issue for accountability. Institutions that engage with perpetrators of domestic violence inform that many perpetrators want to change their behavior once they realize what they have done. There is, in many instances, 'a window of opportunity' to engage with the perpetrator and direct them to behavior change programs by adopting a systematic restorative approach. The police have an important role to play in such a restorative approach that can be exercised during investigation stage.

However, it is also to be accepted that there are those who would need to be dealt with in the criminal justice system

Beyond perpetrator accountability there is also a need to hold all necessary stakeholders accountable for their actions Institutions and individuals working within institutions must take responsibility and must be accountable for every single decision they take. Institutions and individuals cannot and should not cite their organizational culture or individual belief reasons to not act upon or be and not see domestic violence as an issue of priority.

Goal: All perpetrators are held accountable to their action

- Design, develop and pilot a behavior change program for domestic violence perpetrators.
- Develop mechanisms based on restorative justice principles that target domestic violence suspects whose cases end up closed at police and prosecution stage without further action.
- Coordinate with correctional agency and incorporate behavior change and behavior management courses to rehabilitation programs within the corrections system.
- Develop and provide necessary re-integrative assistance to perpetrators of domestic violence after their conviction is served.
- Maintain mechanisms to record and refer incidents of domestic violence reported to designated institutions.
- Engage with selected key occupational sectors to enhance organizational commitment to preventing and reporting of domestic violence through internally established procedures.

Goal: Ensure that all stakeholder agencies are held responsible and accountable for their action/inaction on matters related to domestic violence

- Develop guidelines to periodically review practices against established policies within all key institutions.
- Develop a policy discussion paper, in consultation with relevant agencies, on the opportunities and costs for a specialist court mechanism for domestic violence in the Maldives.

National priority five: Governance

To meet the objectives of this plan capacity of key institutions needs to be built. This priority relates to identifying this and ensuring that there is sufficient emphasis on capacity building and upskilling staff from important organizations.

The FPA is legally mandated with a wide variety of tasks related to domestic violence. The main two to this end are regulating survivor support services and providing services to perpetrators. Yet FPA is vastly under-resourced to perform these broad tasks. Not only are there financial and human resource limitations, the institutional arrangement as a semi-autonomous agency needs a reassessment. No doubt, more funding and resources are needed to FPA. FPA has a well-trained

staff and a highly-experienced Board who need further applied knowledge and experience gained from exposure to different national and international approaches linked to domestic violence.

But it is not just FPA that will be involved in implementing this plan. This plan requires an integrated approach from several key organizations both governmental and non-governmental. These various stakeholders require various knowledge, training and experience. A key objective of this plan is to have a multi-agency ownership of the plan.

Research and data relevant to all these institutions and what work they do are important to gather. A new approach to research where the focus should not only be on very comprehensive research consisting of primary data should be the focus. Instead, there are other small scale research opportunities and data available that needs to be systematically collected and analyzed. But, with no comprehensive research since the DVPA (2012) there is an imminent need to go back and look at what has been achieved and inform policy direction with proper prevalence rate statistics. There is much to be learned about causes of, and better prevention approaches to, domestic violence in the Maldives by looking at domestic violence in South East Asia and beyond including countries with similar religious backgrounds.

Goal: Build capacity and upskill staff from FPA in key responsibilities

- Provide staff from FPA to participate in bi-lateral training/study tour opportunities received to Maldives on domestic violence.
- Develop and approve a training needs assessment for FPA and continuously train staff accordingly.
- Develop capacity to internally develop key strategic documents, evaluate plans and programs.
- Develop a robust mechanism to monitor, review and undertake formal evaluation of the strategic plan and other programs FPA invests in.

Goal: Research and publish data on domestic violence in the Maldives

- Enhance data collection and management of data by harmonizing data collection and coding among all key institutions.
- Undertake a comprehensive research on domestic violence in the Maldives.
- Identify vital data gaps in the understanding of domestic violence related issues and facilitate and/or undertake research, analysis and evaluation studies on specific issues related to domestic violence.
- Gather feedback from survivors and systematically analyze to identify areas of improvement.
- Engage with other institutions that undertake related research to have questions on domestic violence within the researchers conducted.
- Publish empirically analyzed reports and papers relevant to domestic violence related issues in the Maldives in relevant local and international journals and other publications.

Goal: Build capacity of relevant organizations by providing them with training opportunities

- Upskill staff from key relevant organizations including governmental and non-governmental partners to equip them with relevant knowledge and skills.
- Advocate for and assist NGOs working within the domestic violence field gain funding from government and abroad.
- Ensure health sector training is rolled-out to all health institutions in the Maldives.
- In partnership with the police develop and implement an advanced standardized course/module on domestic violence for judicial and law enforcement.
- Develop health care providers' capabilities to detect and secure proper evidence in examination of suspected domestic violence cases.
- Explore the opportunities for an emergency fund and facilitate the establishment of a fund accessible to relevant stakeholders.

Appendix A: PESTELO Analysis matrix

Political	 A key component of presidential manifesto. A strong commitment to safety in general communicated by the President and relevant institutions Strong political and policy support to eradicate domestic violence and gain gender equality Ministerial portfolio and the structure of parent Ministry changed frequently in the last few years. A separate Ministry established recently for gender development Women participation in political arena is low Goals related to gender remains the only unachieved millennium goals from the Maldives by end of 2016 Domestic violence presents an opportunity to gain cross-party endorsement as all major political parties are vested in less domestic violence within their own policy directions Women participation in high income economic activities very low More women work in civil service than men Significant disparity exists between the capital and islands A culture of economic dependency on men by women remains intact Emerging trends of migrants becoming survivors of domestic violence
	 Potential for economic data, research and analysis exist that can inform and direct future research into domestic violence in areas such as economic cost of violence
Social	 A social transformation highly influenced by globalization and affects young people significantly The social stigma related to domestic violence high Increasingly religious arguments are used to vilify survivors and/or represent domestic violence as a private family matter within pockets of communities. A significant role for religious leaders and proper religious knowledge exist A highly patriarchal culture with many challenges to change culture Growing links to other social issues such as human trafficking, radicalization, cyber crimes A general issue with access to health, law enforcement and justice that impedes effective domestic violence prevention mechanisms Mental health and psychological health an underdeveloped area in general and affects domestic violence policy and practices
Technological Environmental	 A highly technology friendly population. High mobile phone usage Social media popular amongst young people Limited data sharing mechanism through integrated database within organizations Each organization developing ICT capacity to meet individual office needs Social media and technology used increasingly as a tool of intimidation, blackmail and harassment Lessons to learn from NGOs working in the environmental sector
Livilorimemai	- Women disproportionately affected by environmental challenges
Legal	 A comprehensive legislation exists on DV A new penal code passed and enacted recently which allows for mitigating and aggravating factors to be considered which can include whether violence can be classed as a domestic violence or not A new criminal procedure code passed and soon to be enacted which is expected to shorten the duration of justice sector response A major challenge to reaching out to magistrate courts and a need to streamline and harmonize practices with regards to protection orders and court process between Male' and islands Breach of protection order requiring new focus as currently the process is a fragmented response International research and UN guidelines promote specialist courts which needs policy discussion in the Maldives
Organizational	 FPA operating with limited resources for a regulatory agency responsible to oversee a broad area of services A highly trained and experienced team of staff and Board within FPA A good working informal relationship between related agencies exist Issues of role clarity, especially within FPA and the Ministry of Gender and Family which needs more systematic clarification to ensure better continued coordination beyond informal relationships A well-established coordination mechanism such as a permanent committee comprising of key staff from all relevant institutions needed An opportunity exists to partner with unorthodox institutions to promote the cause of domestic violence Limitations within civil society sector to reach out to all parts of the country. Significant capacity building and resources needed

