

# Replication Study

## Review of the National Statistical System in the Maldives



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## **I. Executive summary**

The National Statistical System (NSS) of Maldives is highly decentralized. The lead agency – the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) – works closely with line ministries and agencies as the main hub for data production, quality assurance of data and coordination.

The Statistics Regulation of the Maldives provides the mandate for official statistics and the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) sets out the framework for strengthening the national statistical system to deliver statistical information more cohesively and efficiently. Following a shift from donor-driven production of statistics to increasing government resourcing, the mid-term point of the NSDS provided an important opportunity to conduct a review to take stock of official statistics and identify priorities for development in the future.

The review was jointly undertaken by the ESCAP and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UNSD) within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (RPES). The objective was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the institutional, organizational and technical capacity of the country to produce and disseminate official statistics that comply with international standards and recommendations. Taking place over two years, it was conducted through remote communications and through two missions between the international review team, NBS, stakeholder agencies, and users.

Using a combination of information gathered through a questionnaire, desk research and consultation meetings, the review covered the main data producing agencies in the Maldives and key data users. The process not only provided the means for compiling information but also for increasing the visibility of the national statistical office, system and the importance of official statistics.

The findings from the review provide a template for a well-organised NSS. It provided recommendations to benefit the further development of statistics in the Maldives, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in specific areas of concern along with practical recommendations to strengthen official statistics. This included reforms to the regulatory framework, data sources and data quality, structure and functioning of the NSS, and specific recommendations for strengthening economic statistics.

Lessons learned from the perspective of NBS included:

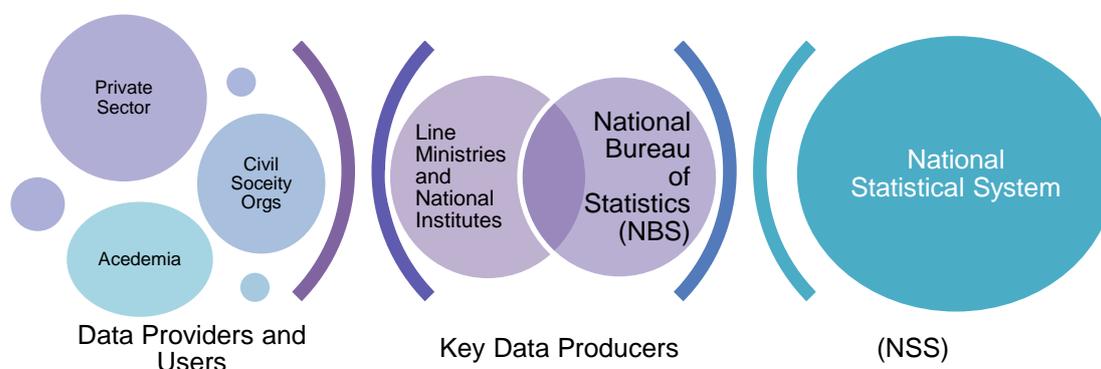
- Regular reviews of the NSS are needed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the system and to ensure it effectively caters to current and emerging needs;
- Success of a review relies on engagement of all stakeholders across all levels;
- Strong political and policy level support is essential throughout the process; and
- The review needs to cover all aspects of official statistics, including economic, social and environment statistics along with the institutional and legal environment of the whole NSS.

## II. Background

### A. About the Maldives national statistical system

1. The National Statistical System (NSS) of Maldives is highly decentralized. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) is the lead agency for official statistics and sits under the Ministry of National Planning & Infrastructure. NBS works closely with line ministries and agencies as the main hub for quality assurance of data and coordination. NBS also works on the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics from censuses, surveys, and through administrative sources and registers (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Components of the National Statistical System of the Maldives



2. With around 45 staff, NBS is solely responsible for national accounts, price data, population and housing census (every 10 years), household income and expenditure survey (every 5 years), and for basic economic surveys. At the sub-national level, statistical officers are based at five atolls to manage data collection from their areas. Statistical activities are carried out in more than 15 agencies outside NBS. Some have their own statistical unit (with varying capacity), one or two staff assigned to compiling administrative data and transmitting summary statistics to NBS on an annual basis.

### B. Enabling environment for official statistics

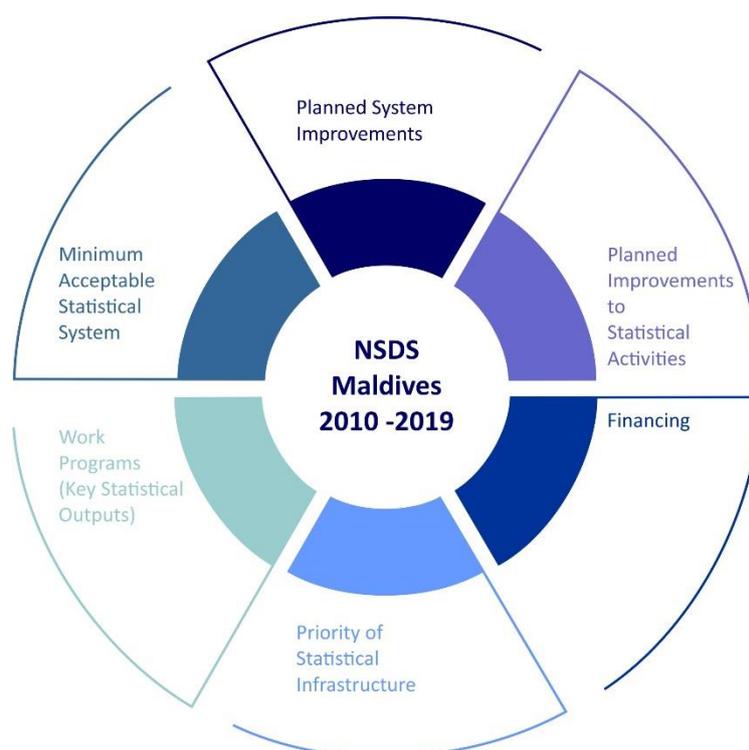
3. Official statistics is overseen by the Statistics Regulation of the Maldives (SRM), passed by the Parliament of Maldives in 2013.<sup>1</sup> This latest revision came into force in January 2013 with the original SRM being in effect since 1999. The SRM broadly covers the most important principles for official statistics and includes direct reference to the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UN-FPOS).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Bureau of Statistics. Statistics Regulation of the Maldives. <http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/statistics-regulation/>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. 2014. Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (A/RES/68/261). <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx>

4. The National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) 2010-2019 – the 10-year plan on Statistical Activities – was endorsed by the former National Planning Council in 2010. It was implemented to ensure regular availability of indicators for monitoring and evaluation, providing the data needed for monitoring national progress. The NSDS includes six components including financing arrangements, the key outputs, standards and plans for improvement (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Components of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics 2010-2019, the Maldives, 2010



### C. Drivers for a review of the national statistical system

5. The statistical system of the Maldives has seen major developments since the early 1990s. In the past, the system has been heavily dependent on donors for key activities such as household surveys. Donor support has reduced over time as the Maldives' fiscal capacity to support statistical development in the country has increased. Government commitment and ownership has been gradually improving. However, still it lacks the commitment in terms of a strong legal basis for statistics, and sufficient funding for key statistical operations.

6. A **review of the National Statistical System of the Maldives** (afterwards referred to as 'the review') was initiated in response to a request by the Government of the Maldives to United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Following this, a scoping mission was undertaken by ESCAP in October 2015, activated by the fact that the Maldives had reached the mid-term point for its current NSDS implementation (2010-2019). The review would feed into the revision of the upcoming NSDS for the next ten years,

so the scoping mission resulted in further detailed agreement on the substantive focus, process and expected results of the review.

7. The review was jointly undertaken by ESCAP and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UNSD) within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (RPES). It took place over two years and was conducted through remote communications and through two missions between the international review team, NBS, stakeholder agencies, and users. It involved an extensive assessment performed prior to, after and during visits by the review team using a questionnaire (the review tool) tailored to priority focus areas of the review. These included legal provisions, institutional setting, coordination within the national statistical system, and economic statistics production, dissemination and underlying data sources and registers.

8. The objective of the review was to provide a comprehensive analysis of the institutional, organizational and technical capacity of the country to produce and disseminate official statistics that comply with international standards and recommendations.

9. In preparation for the assessment and surrounding consultations, the following key documents were shared with the ESCAP team during their field mission to Maldives:

- Unofficial translation of the Statistical Act (Proposed)
- PPI Paper of Maldives
- Household, Income & Expenditure Survey database
- A guide to the Consumer Price Index of Maldives 2012, Final draft V
- Compiling the Supply and Use Tables of Maldives
- Filled Review Tool Questionnaire Maldives (Until 12 June 2016)
- Sources and methods GDP Compilation

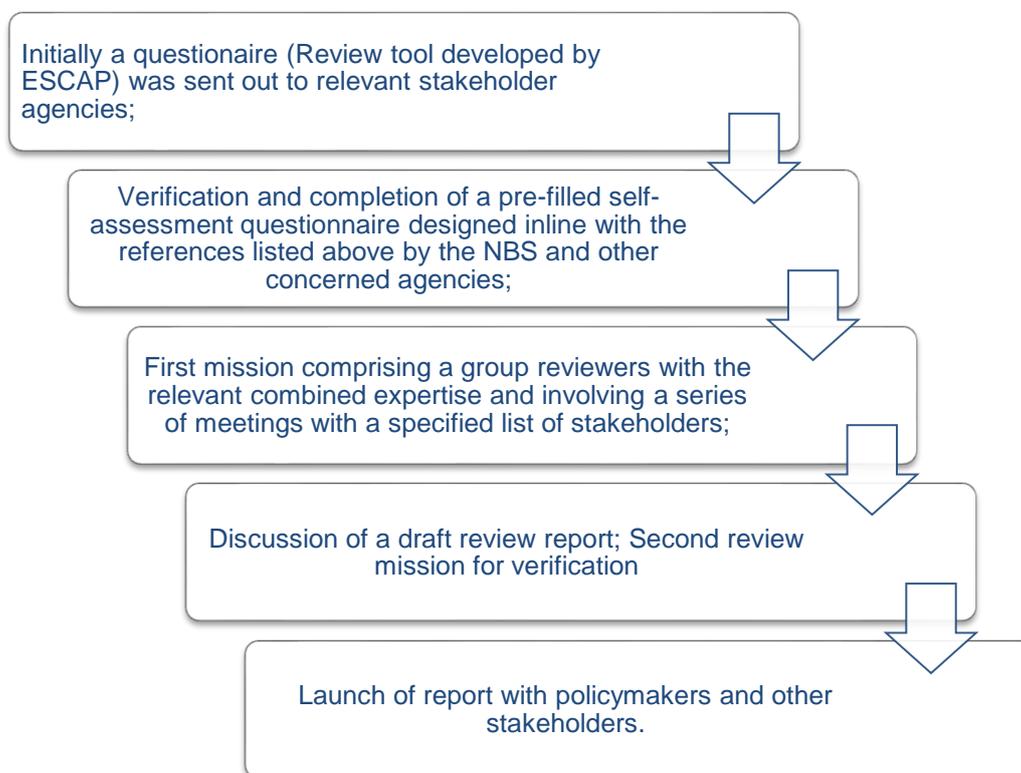
#### **D. Contacts for further information**

10. More information can be obtained from Musfiqa Ibrahim ([Mushfiqa.ibrahim@stats.gov.mv](mailto:Mushfiqa.ibrahim@stats.gov.mv)) and/or Ashiyath Shazna ([ashiyath.shazna@stats.gov.mv](mailto:ashiyath.shazna@stats.gov.mv)).

### **III. How was the review conducted?**

11. The review of institutional and organizational aspects covered the NBS, as the lead agency for statistics, as well as other major producers and users of official statistics in the country. Technical capacity assessment focused on data sources and statistical business processes for the production and dissemination of economic statistics and the entities that produce these statistics. The review comprised five main phases as shown in Figure 3: develop questionnaire to stakeholders; gather and analyse completed questionnaire; first mission by review team to conduct consultations; draft report and second mission for validation; and finalize and launch report.

Figure 3 - Stages of the Review of the Maldives NSS



12. This review took stock of and assessed the capacity of the NSS of the Maldives to meet data demands and provided a set of recommendations for strengthening the production and dissemination of official statistics. It also explored opportunities to strengthen the functioning and resourcing of the national statistical system in light of the Government of the Maldives and the international community commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### A. Assessment questionnaire

13. The review was assisted by a questionnaire, tailored to the requested priority focus areas including legal, institutional, coordination within the NSS, and economic statistics production, dissemination and on the key data sources and registers. The questionnaire was developed by the ESCAP team and aligned to the United Nations Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics (UN-FPOS), international statistical standards and classifications for national accounts and economic statistics, and relevant quality assurance frameworks. It was also based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, considering the increasing demands on NSS coordination and for economic statistics.

14. The questionnaire was based on the one used for global assessments conducted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and partner organizations during the last decade in countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

Figure 4 – Cover and table of contents of the questionnaire used to gather information for the Maldives NSS review

**Review of the National Statistical System of the Maldives  
Institutional and Organizational issues**



**Guidance Questionnaire**

**Important Note**  
In the present questionnaire, while there are given response categories for each question that states a statistical principle, policy or situation, it is essential to supplement the short responses with explanatory text and reference to supporting documents for a successful review process. The questionnaire covers questions that fall within the competencies of various national agencies and hence should be completed through a collaborative effort by the national statistical system. The national statistical office, the Statistics Division of the National Bureau of Statistics in the Maldives, is tasked with coordinating the completion of the questionnaire.



Developed by UNESCAP and UNSD

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<http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/review-of-the-national-statistical-system-of-maldives-july-2017/>

**B. Consultations, information gathering and writing up the results**

15. Prior to the missions, the NBS held a meeting with the National Statistical Coordinating Committee to inform them and encourage buy-in and ownership of the process. The committee was briefed on the components of the questionnaire, which was also circulated for more detailed review and feedback.

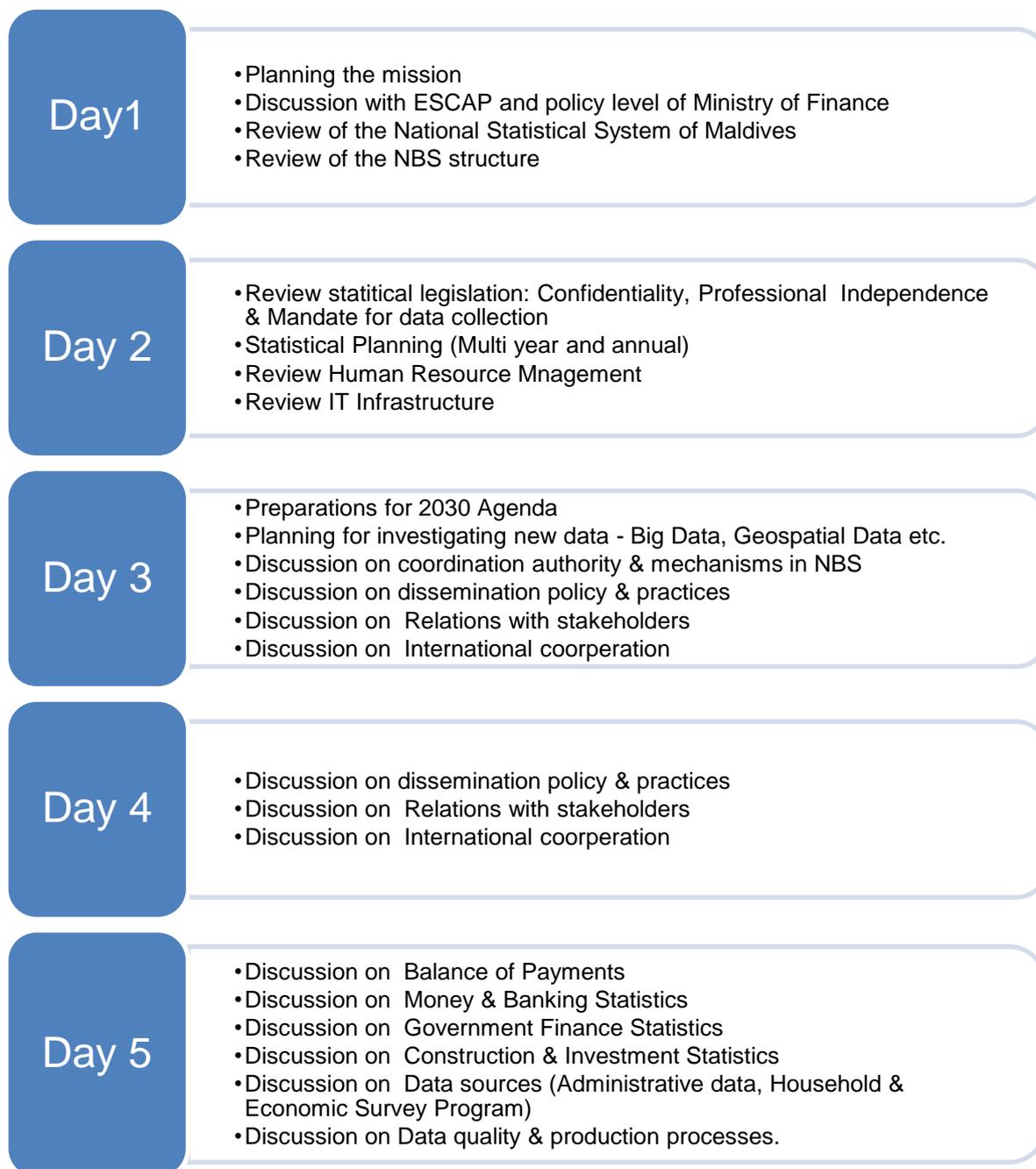
16. NBS completed most of the review tool prior to the visits by the review team, in coordination with other institutions of the NSS as relevant. The questionnaire was sent to those sectoral agencies who regularly sends data to NBS. Responses were not easily forthcoming, however, with several efforts some of the agencies managed to send back the filled questionnaire and this provided valuable feedback that was useful for the review team to prepare for sectoral meetings held during the validation phase.

17. The review also used materials available at ESCAP, UNSD and other international organizations and the NBS provided supporting materials that are relevant and requested by the review team.

18. After gathering all the relevant details through the questionnaire and associated documents, the review team fielded the second mission during 2017 to verify the information provided and gather any additional requirements to support the review. Their visit included sessions with staff members of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) as well as with experts from relevant ministries and other national and international stakeholders.

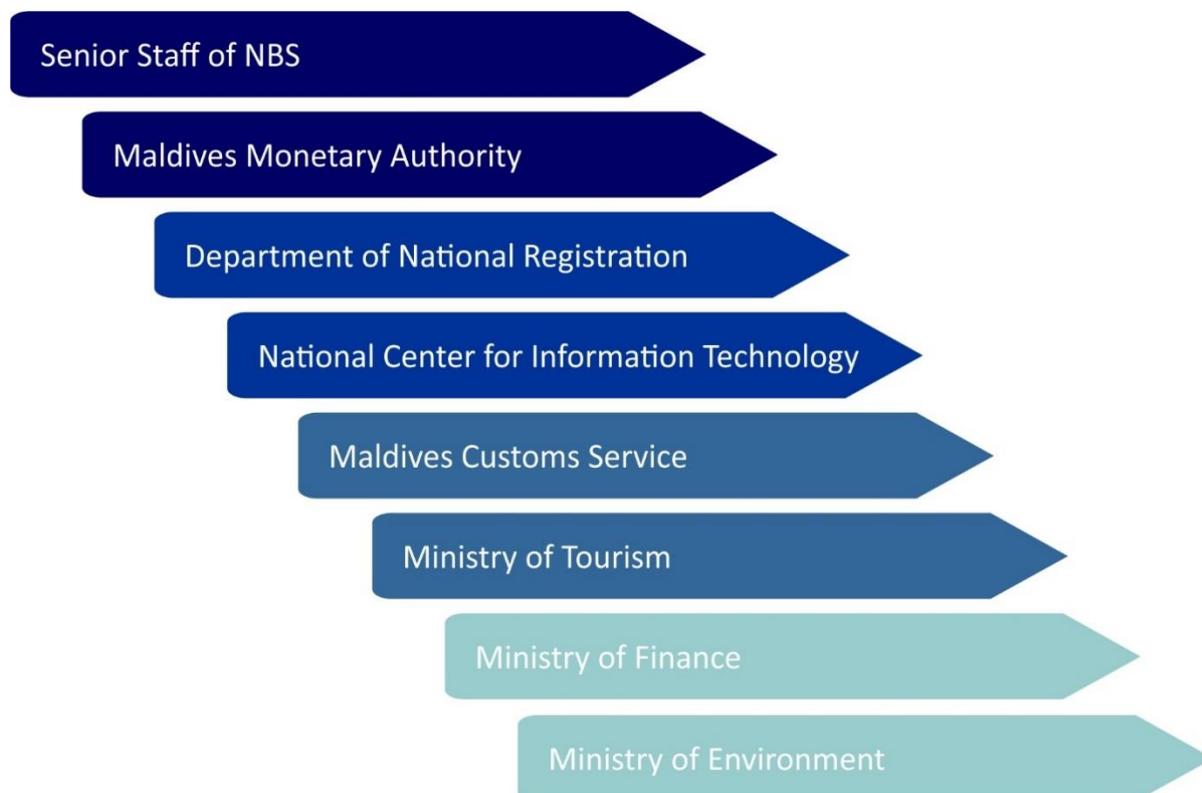
19. The review team included Ms. Badamtsetseg Batjargal, Director, Administrative Department, General Authority for Intellectual Property and State Registration (and former Director, Integrated Policy and Foreign Relation Department, National Statistical Office) Mongolia; Mr. Gabriel Gamez, Interregional Adviser on Statistics, UNSD; and Ms. Rikke Munk Hansen and Mr. Christopher Ryan, respectively Chief of the Economic and Environment Statistics Section and Regional Adviser at the Statistics Division of ESCAP. Management and staff from NBS were actively involved in substantive discussions during the two assessment missions and provided valuable knowledge and insights about the NSS of the Maldives.

Figure 5 – Programme of meetings during the visit by the Review team



20. After the mission, a draft report prepared by ESCAP and UNSD was sent for further modifications and feedback. It was checked closely by those involved, validating the accuracy of information and to ensure the recommendations are achievable and make sense from a national perspective. Parts of the draft report relevant to respective sectors were sent for comments/feedback. Following are the agencies to which the draft report was sent to as they were the divisions/agencies that directly linked the details in the review.

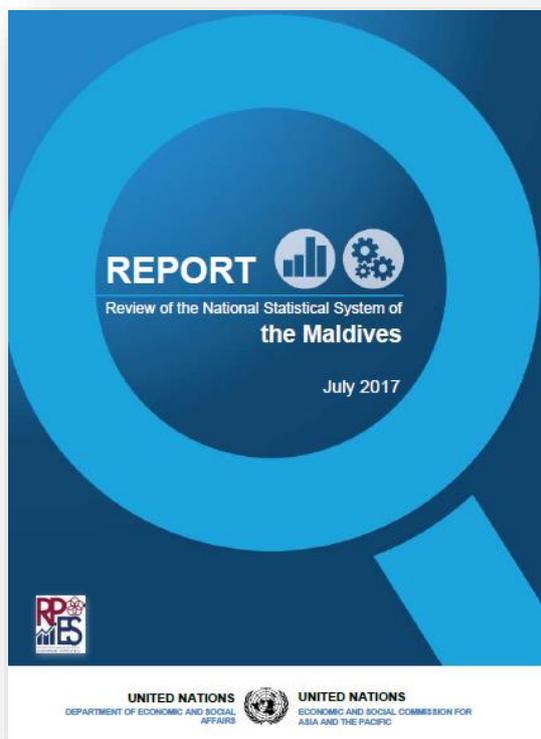
Figure 6 – Target stakeholder agencies for inclusion in the review process



### C. Finalizing and launching the results

21. Once an advanced draft of the review report was available, it was circulated to all relevant stakeholders for comments by a given deadline. Stakeholders validated their respective areas and the feedback was consolidated by NBS into one document using track changes and comment boxes. The review team used this to produce the final draft report which was a "clean" version that also included an executive summary.

22. Initially, an "International seminar on national statistical systems reviews in Small Island Developing States" was planned to be hosted by the Government of the Maldives, co-organized with ESCAP and UNSD. The plan was to launch NSS Review at Maldives at this seminar on 1-3 August 2017 and to present and discuss the outcomes during the seminar. However, there was a lack of support for this within the Maldives and ESCAP diverted the seminar to Nadi, Fiji for the same dates. The Review was presented to the NBS by the review team to the NBS which was accepted by the chief statistician of the NBS Maldives. During the seminar, the Chief Statistician of the NBS Maldives presented the key findings of the review along with the recommendations provided by the review team to strengthen the NSS of the Maldives.



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*The final review report was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 at the inter-regional seminar on national statistical systems reviews in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), hosted by the Fiji Government and jointly organised by ESCAP, ECLAC and UNSD, Nadi, Fiji.*

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<http://statisticsmaldives.gov.mv/review-of-the-national-statistical-system-of-maldives-july-2017/>

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23. The objective of the seminar was for Small Island Developing States to share experiences with reviews of national statistical systems and generate lessons of use for other countries that may wish to undertake a review of their national statistical system in the future. Specific focus was to be on common institutional and organizational challenges, such as professional independence, NSS coordination, NSO leadership, legal basis for official statistics. The workshop was planned to address those challenges in the context of global, regional and national requests to national statistical systems to develop, produce and eventually disseminate indicators for the monitoring of progress towards goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### **IV. Project Results / Outcomes**

24. The review provides a template for a well-organised NSS and provided recommendations to benefit the further development of statistics in the Maldives. It highlighted the strengths and weaknesses in specific areas of concern along with practical recommendations to strengthen official statistics.

## A. Regulatory framework for official statistics

25. The review examined the SRM on the clarity and appropriateness as it relates to the incorporation of internationally agreed principles and best practices for the production and dissemination of official statistics to the SRM. It noted that the SRM had a confusing structure with some redundant information and inconsistencies. The description of the NSS is unclear and the SRM does not outline criteria for the distinction between producers of official statistics and providers of administrative data.

26. The review recommends:

- a) A new statistical regulatory framework based on the model of a professional independent statistical agency under the authority of the government is prepared. The statistical regulatory framework should comply with the UN-FPOS and could be based on the generic law on official statistics developed by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)<sup>3</sup>, adapted to the specific context of the Maldives;
- b) Future census operations be regulated by a distinct regulation or act complying with the provisions of the new statistical regulatory framework;
- c) Existing legal acts and regulations that are relevant to the production (by the Lead Agency or by other producers) of official statistics are adapted as necessary for consistency and compliance with the provisions of the new statistical regulatory framework.

### *PROGRESS*

*Currently the Draft Statistical Act has been revisited by the Attorney General's Office (AG) and the request by NBS through, Minister has been sent to AG Office in order to prioritise the Act in the Governments' Legislative Agenda.*

## B. Data sources, registers, processes and quality

27. The review identified that the Lead Agency for Statistics is not able to exercise its authority to gain access to administrative data at a sufficient level of disaggregation. It cannot make use of these for statistical purposes and cannot assure the quality of the resulting statistics.

28. Major surveys are conducted by the NBS and several other surveys are conducted by other agencies. The review observed that survey plans and schedules are unclear or not communicated widely, change frequently, do not include survey activities of the whole NSS

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<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/statmanuals/files/UNECE\\_Generic\\_law\\_2016\\_EN.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/statmanuals/files/UNECE_Generic_law_2016_EN.pdf)

and do not necessarily respond to priority needs for statistics, partly because such priorities are not clearly established.

29. The review recommends:

- a) Establish a National Indicator Set: this would establish clear data needs and allow subsequent planning of statistical activities, including survey activities; and
- b) Conduct a data gaps analysis on the basis of the National Indicator Set: this would expand of the preliminary data assessment on the Sustainable Development Goals, which was undertaken in 2016.

*Currently the Ministry of National Planning is working on a National Development Plan/Strategic Action plan that will enable the NBS/NSS to identify the data requirement for the development planning which would serve as a National Indicator set. Thereon NBS/NSS could conduct a gap analysis to develop a national statistical programme, including a survey plan.*

### **C. Structure and functioning of the National Statistical System**

30. The decentralized structure of the NSS calls for an effective coordination mechanism. However, current limitations in the legal authority have made this a challenge. NBS lacks the institutional identity and visibility to ensure its professional independence and allow it to exercise its authority to coordinate the NSS through good relations and networking.

31. Absence of comprehensive multi-year or annual programming for official statistics production in the Maldives weakens coordination. Although a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) 2010-2019 is in place, in practice, it is not having the intended impact. The review observed that practical engagement with users of statistics is lacking.

32. The review recommends:

- a) Establish the Lead Agency for Statistics as an organizational unit within the responsible Ministry with the Chief Statistician formally assigned as the Head of the unit;
- b) Establish a Statistical Council at the policy level: the purpose of this new mechanism is to provide policy level oversight and support to the development and implementation of annual and multi-year statistical programmes in the Maldives;

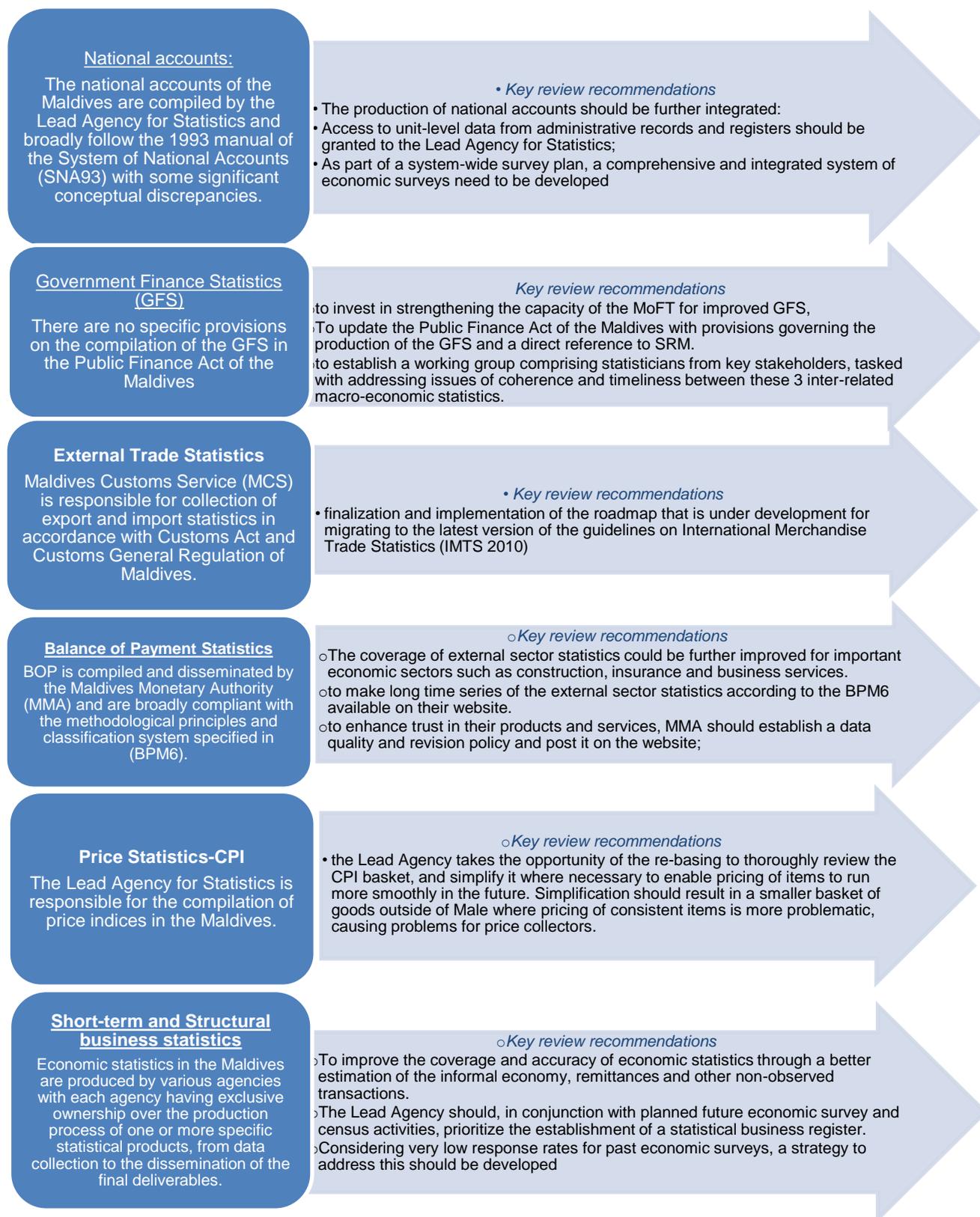
- c) Introduce an Annual Forum for Statistics, to engage the larger user community and build support for and trust in the products and services of the NSS, it is recommended that the Statistical Council organizes an Annual Forum for Statistics for the public; and
- d) Revitalize the NSCC: as an immediate measure, it is recommended that the NSCC revisits the earlier developed list of designated agencies for the statistics outlined in the SRM, and that the Lead Agency uses this exercise to increase awareness among NSCC members on principles governing the production of official statistics.

*Currently the NBS has renewed the NSCC with the inclusion new members and added other relevant agencies to be more representative (e.g. Disaster Managements, Social Protection). And on the user's participation, NBS have been involving the users from different agencies, researchers and civil society in the data dissemination process combined with user's feedback sessions.*

#### **D. Economic Statistics**

33. The review examined the key economic areas in depth and provided the recommendations as illustrated below.

Figure 7 – Findings and recommendations for economic statistics



## V. Lessons learned and recommendations

Lessons learned that could benefit and needs to be considered before or while undertaking a review:

- **Regular reviews of the NSS are needed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the system and to ensure it effectively caters to current and emerging needs**

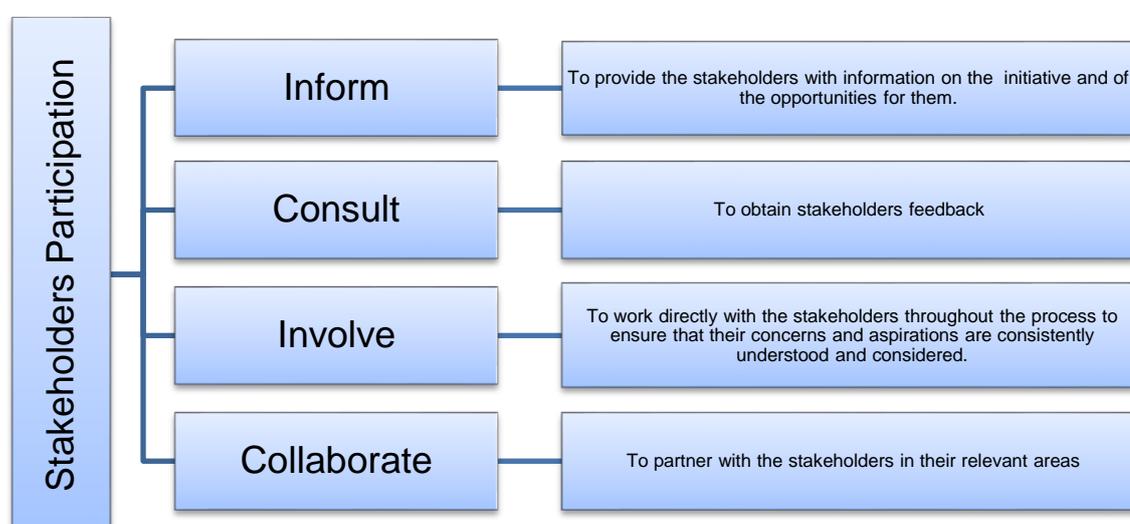
The National Statistical System is the key mechanism that supports planning and development of a country. The system needs to be regularly diagnosed to ensure that the system is capable of supplying the country's information needs. An assessment helps identify and transform the capacity of NSS to produce quality statistics considering the standards compliance of the statistical products, production process and institutional environment for the overall user needs.

- **Success of a review relies on engagement of all stakeholders across all levels**

Ownership and commitment by all the stakeholders is the key to a well-functioning NSS and developing and implementing the NSDS as the overarching framework.

During the review process, the questionnaire was circulated to relevant ministries, authorities and agencies. However, the priority given on this activity was low from the stakeholder agencies. After several reminders, feedback was obtained from some agencies but not others. In order to tackle such issues, it is important to make the line ministries and agencies aware of the importance of such exercises and how this will eventually benefit their organizations as well. Figure 8 shows the approach used to engage multiple stakeholders throughout the review process.

Figure 8 – Model for ensuring stakeholder participation in the NSS review



➤ ***Strong political and policy level support is essential throughout the process***

Political support and will is critical for the success of any exercise related to developing an enabling policy framework such as an NSDS. It facilitates mobilization of financial and technical resources from government budgets, and consequently enables increased resource allocations from multilateral and bilateral development partners.

At the time of this review, the political situation in the Maldives was at a critical point with upcoming presidential elections and a chance of transition of the government. During the review process, NBS as the lead agency in statistical coordination, faced significant challenges in getting political/policy level support and commitment.

Given the low support, the technical team at NBS and the stakeholders together with ESCAP team completed the process. The challenges were most apparent at the stage of launching the final review report, when the whole event which was initially planned to be hosted in Maldives had to be postponed. It was fortunate that Maldives was able to participate in the "International Seminar on reviews of National Statistical Systems in Small Island States" and launch the report successfully at a technical level.

Based on this review, together with PARIS21, NBS is currently undertaking the process of formulation of the NSDS for the next 10 years 2020-2030.

➤ ***The review needs to cover all aspects of official statistics, including economic, social and environment statistics along with the institutional and legal environment of the whole NSS.***

The NSS review needs to be comprehensive, covering the all aspects of the system including economic, social and environmental statistics together with the institutional and legal areas. As the recommendations of the reviews usually serve for the strengthening of the NSS, not only a specific area is of importance. With the limited financial resources, the recommendations need to give a sense of priority, including for the cross-cutting issues.

For example, mainstreaming of gender and other perspectives are critical for statistics produced under different statistical standards. Given that the SDGs call for disaggregated data, and that economic, social and environmental statistics contribute to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the collection and reporting of statistics must address all these issues.

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