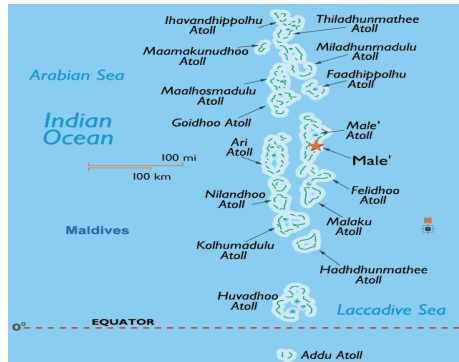


# Strengthening the Livelihood Initiative for Home-based Workers in SAARC Region (SABAH), Maldives



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**SABAH Maldives** is a co-operative society registered in the Maldives with a shareholding of 40 per cent by Maldivian home-based workers and 60 per cent by the Government of Maldives.... The Society was established to empower home-based workers to create sustainable membership based organisation.

## Introduction

Maldives is a Middle-Income-Country (MIC), graduating out of Low-Developing-Country (LDC) status in 2011. Needless to say, the risks and challenges of a post-LDC status were unfamiliar to Maldives. Maldives government had limited knowledge for managing the transition from LDC to a developing country and miscalculated its ability to react and deal with the many challenges that it still faces. Maldives is classified among the Small Island Developing States and for that it pays a high price not only in the form of environmental and climate change issues but is constantly facing the challenges associated with a small but highly dispersed population, and a narrow economic base, and inability to achieve economies of scale. The cost of delivery for basic services and the necessary infrastructure including schools, hospitals, harbour and some level of administrative and security services to almost 200 islands is undoubtedly very high. SABAH project is a shining example of South-South Cooperation that helps to minimise some aspects of the constraints by promoting the people-to-people contacts on bilateral as well as on regional level. It is believed that South-South Cooperation through South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) would help Maldives with capacity and human resource building and have positive impact on the economy, health and many other areas as spelt out by SABAH project.

## SABAH Maldives Co-operative Society

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Maldivian home-based workers and 60 per cent by the Government of Maldives. The Cooperative Society has a share capital of MVR 10,000,000.00 made up of 1,000,000 shares worth MVR 10.00 each. The Society was established to empower home-based workers in Maldives and to ensure that the project runs successfully with sustainable membership based organisation. Objectives of SABAH Project under Maldives Co-operative Society

The objectives of the project can be outlined as follows:

- To strengthen livelihood of home-based workers (especially women and youth) by facilitating opportunity to earn a sustainable income from their products;
  - To collaborate with local cooperatives and SMEs to support the home-based workers to produce and showcase quality products that has a demand in the market;
  - To increase the standard of living of the home-based workers by facilitating earning.
  - To provide market linkages and facilitate training and assistance;
  - To identify, promote, facilitate and provide guidance for the enhancement of skills of the home-based workers, with a special focus on reviving and preserving cultural heritage of traditional art, skills and design;
  - To establish a Trade Facilitation Center as a hub to market and sell products of homebased workers;
  - To introduce quality and authentic Maldivian products produced by homebased workers under the SABAH Maldives brand;
  - To function as a marketer of home-based workers' products produced under SABAH Maldives brand label; and
- To establish relationship among the SAARC member states and other SABAHs on the basis of learning and sharing from each other.

### Activities of SABAH

Maldives SABAH project focusses on implementing three broad activities in the Maldives:

- The first is capacity building, which aims to address the shortage of capacity and skills development needs of the home based workers. The SABAH Maldives will provide and facilitate necessary training and information to enhance production, marketing and productive capacity of home-based workers. The home-based workers will also be given the opportunity to undertake trainings from overseas and local in the fields relating to crafts, food production and entrepreneurial skills development. However, the home-based workers who undergo capacity building programmes under SABAH funded trainings have to disseminate the learning achieved to other home-based workers.
- The second activity will be on setting up a central Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC) that is planned to be set up in Male, which is the central activity hub of SABAH Maldives. This centre will undertake production planning, finished product packaging, quality standards, marketing and selling of SABAH labeled products produced by its members and other home-based workers. In addition to this centre, Community Facilitation Centers (CFC) will also be set up in designated locations in Maldives. Similarly, members residing in islands carry out the production of SABAH and its various programmes at atolls and island level.

- The third activity is on Product Development and Promotion. The aim of this society is to work closely with home-based workers to improve product design of existing traditional craft and local food products. The co-operative will work to introduce new products that display the taste, lifestyle and culture of the Maldives. As part of promotion, marketing strategies will be developed to seek access to new markets and to create demand for home-based workers' products. The marketing campaigns will also ensure that the products from the home-based workers have a long lasting market access.

### **SABAH Maldives Project and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**

As it can be seen from the Foreign Policy of the Maldives, the existing Government has a strong agenda in building the economic resilience of the country through different levels of engagement in bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation. Over 30 years since formal adoption of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) by the Heads of States or Governments of South Asian Countries, Maldives played a significant role in fostering regional cooperation between SAARC and has immensely benefited from this avenue. In fact, Maldives receives assistance through regional cooperation in a number of areas from SAARC. Some of these include capacity and human resource building, economy, health and many other areas.

The SAARC Development Fund (SDF) in association with Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), India and Home Net South Asia initiated the project called SABAH in August 2008,

to strengthen the livelihood for home based workers in SAARC Region via SABAH Phase I & II. SABAH Project is a regional initiative of the SAARC aimed at strengthening the livelihoods of home-based workers in the member countries. The project is implemented in all SAARC member countries except India.

In Maldives, the project implementation started in May 2012. The project would support conducting capacity building training programmes for home-based workers aimed at upgrading skills and improving entrepreneurial know-how. Furthermore, the project would establish a trade facilitation center for improving market access for home-based workers that produce and sustain the cause of livelihood improvement and economic empowerment of women.

**Conclusion** At times, the project has faced adverse challenges in Maldives on sustaining the development gains as Maldives was made to graduate from LDC status. However, SABAH project is a shining example of South-South Cooperation and helps to minimise some aspects of the constraints by promoting the people-to-people contacts on bilateral as well as on regional level. It is believed that South-South Cooperation through SAARC can play an effective role in helping the newly graduated middle-income countries like Maldives to consolidate development gains.

Genuine and long lasting South-South partnerships via SAARC will play a crucial role in advancing core interests and in realising the sustainable development goals in member states, and in reaching the full potential of engagement at all levels of government, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders.