

TI IPP STRONGG IN THE MALDIVES

Deepening Democracy in the Maldives

Formally registered in 2007, Transparency Maldives (TI Maldives) is part of the Transparency International global coalition against corruption that brings together chapters operating in more than 100 countries worldwide, with an international Secretariat based in Berlin, working towards a shared vision: a world free of corruption.

BACKGROUND

The environment for civil society in the Maldives has undergone significant changes, with severe restrictions on civil and political liberties by the state. The change in government in 2018 promised greater civil and political liberties, along with a strong commitment to anti-corruption efforts. The STRONGG Project started in 2020 amid the COVID-19 lockdown and has since witnessed another change in government in 2024. Despite a significant increase in 2020 to 43 points in [Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index \(CPI\)](#) following promising anti-corruption efforts of the then-new government, the Maldives has continuously scored below 50 points, dropping to 40 in 2022 and 39 in 2023. Public perception regarding corruption, according to [Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer – Asia 2020 \(GCB\)](#), indicates that 90% of the population still believes that government corruption is a significant problem.

PROJECT APPROACH

With support from the TI *Indo-Pacific Partnership for Strong, Transparent, Responsive & Open Networks for Good Governance (TI IPP STRONGG) 2020 - 2023*, TI Maldives has worked to strengthen the capacity of anti-corruption actors to tackle corruption issues and enhance good governance in the country. Through the *Strong Institutions and Empowered Electorate for Deepening Democracy (SEEDD)* project, TI Maldives worked towards improving the national anti-corruption legal framework, enhance the compliance capacity of both public and private sectors, and encourage people to use social accountability mechanisms to take action against corruption. The SEEDD project contributed to better governance in the Maldives and increased public trust in institutions. The project was implemented over a period of 3 years and 6 months, from July 2020 to December 2023.



ALAC Official Backdrop / Picture @ TI Maldives



Migrants Day Stall by TI Maldives at Hulhumale' Phase 1, 2023 / Picture @ TI Maldives

TI MALDIVES' ACHIEVEMENTS

Strengthening Legislative Frameworks for Asset Declaration and Asset Recovery

TM continued to lead the public dialogue and demand for a more robust asset declaration regime in the Maldives. Building on TM's years of advocacy around Asset Declaration, a Bill on Declaration of Financial and Other Interests was drafted and tabled at the Parliament. The Bill proposes to establish a system for the preparation and submission of declarations of property and financial records, business interests, assets and liabilities, and other interests for Obligated Persons under the Constitution of the Maldives and under law, and extends the obligated persons to other politically exposed persons including board and management of state-owned enterprises. For the first time in the Maldives, the Bill also provides for the verification of declarations and the principles for taking additional measures pursuant to declarations. TM's proposed bill addresses crucial aspects of asset declaration and aims to mitigate corruption risks. As the bill progresses through Parliament, TM anticipates its foundational role in enhancing accountability by compelling officials to declare their assets, thereby contributing to broader efforts in promoting integrity and reducing corruption within the governance framework.

In 2023, TM initiated efforts to strengthen the asset recovery regime in the Maldives. While the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Act and the Prevention and Prohibition

Corruption Act offer some provisions for asset recovery through criminal proceedings and convictions, corruption-related charges rarely get convicted. Despite initiatives like the creation of a Presidential Commission on State Asset Recovery, efforts to recover assets have not seen any results, and the public is disenchanted and questions the system's ability to hold power to account. The Maldivian legal framework still lacks efficient legal avenues for asset recovery including confiscation without a conviction and recovery through civil actions. With the support of an international expert, TM has drafted a Bill on Asset Recovery which will be validated and submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and then to the next parliament. Successful passing of this bill into a law will represent a significant advancement in the legal system to reclaim stolen assets lost to corrupt practices.

Furthermore, TM advocated for labour rights by actively pushing for the passage and commenting on the Industrial Relations Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Bill. The successful ratification of this bill underscores TM's dedication to upholding workers' rights and ensuring their safety in the workplace.

Empowering People for Better Access to Information and Justice

Transparency Maldives (TM) has made significant strides in increasing local demand for accountability and empowering communities to actively participate in anti-corruption efforts. Their commitment to raising awareness and increasing civic engagement has resulted in tangible outcomes. TM organised various sessions to

educate the public about anti-corruption tools and principles such as RTI and whistleblowing, catering to groups such as the youth, women, and PWDs. These efforts enhanced the skills and understanding of local communities, instilling in them the confidence to hold institutions accountable. Meanwhile, the launch of the SDG16 report sparked discussions and spurred actions at the grassroots level, emphasizing the significance of SDG16 and the imperative of accountability in sustainable development goals.

TM conducted frequent trainings on anti-corruption tools and principles, including an introduction to safe whistleblowing, the Right to Information Act, and how to use RTI. Additionally, sessions covered corruption in the Maldives and, depending on the audience, they also covered topics such as business integrity, vulnerabilities in the health sector, and the Asset Declaration Bill. These sessions were sometimes joined by ACC, ICOM, the Privatisation and Corporatisation Board (PCB), and the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM)'s Whistleblower unit to assist in the knowledge exchange segment. This segment is beneficial for these institutions to hear the complaints and grievances of the participants, helping bridge the gap between people and institutions and providing a safe space for people to voice their concerns without fear, thus encouraging transparency and accountability. It served the purpose of giving people their voice, encouraging them to use anti-corruption tools and principles.

Partnering with the Maldivian Red Crescent, TM also organised health and legal aid camps, providing essential services to local communities. These collaborative efforts raised awareness of legal rights among vulnerable community members, empowering individuals to report corruption.

Inclusive Partnership for Transparency and Accountability

TM has made significant efforts in strengthening partnerships and promoting accountability across various sectors. By collaborating with diverse organisations and stakeholders, TM achieved initiatives aimed at fostering transparency, inclusion, and accountability.

Unveiling Healthcare Corruption

In response to the continued allegations of corruption within the health sector, further amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, TM explored its first sectoral corruption study focusing on the Maldivian health sector. In the absence of any health sector specific corruption related research, the study highlights the corruption vulnerabilities within the sector and proposed practical policy recommendations to the state. The research gained significant traction among media and political parties, and was recognized by the President as a critical piece of work that can help drive efforts of reform within the health sector. The President endorsed the findings and committed to follow through the recommendations by establishing a dedicated multi sectoral working group to implement TM's recommendations. The study's findings received widespread coverage from media outlets, underscoring its significance and the pressing need for such research. Moreover, a media outlet called for an "increase in the system's value for money and to ensure that Maldivians are getting comprehensive and quality service," echoing the public's demand for accountability and efficiency in healthcare provision. As health sector corruption became a point of discussion during the presidential elections, the study's findings played a role in shaping political discourse and public opinion. Additionally, stakeholders began attempting to adopt recommendations from the study, demonstrating its tangible influence on shaping policies and practices in the health sector. TM acknowledges that credit for this study belongs to the Maldivian people, who voiced the need to address health sector issues. It was the people's demand for transparency and accountability that motivated TM to conduct the study, and it was a privilege for TM to provide a resource that can be utilized to meet those demands.



Migrants Camp ALAC center by TI Maldives at K.Thulusdhoo, 2023 / Picture @ TI Maldives

Inclusivity was a key focus area for TM, with partnerships established with organizations like the Maldives Association for Persons with Disabilities and the Maldives Deaf Association. Through collaborative efforts, TM strived to integrate anti-corruption principles in a manner that is accessible to all, ensuring that vulnerable groups are not marginalized in the fight against corruption. To broaden TM's reach and engage more CSOs, collaborative activities were conducted with partners such as the Society for Health Education and the Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives, and the Public Interest Law Center. These initiatives revealed common goals and the collective expertise of participating organizations in raising awareness and advocacy more inclusively. Discussions during these collaborations centered on making training and content more accessible and inclusive, enhancing the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives.

TM worked closely with the People's Majlis, particularly the Public Accounts Committee, to develop recommendations regarding asset declaration practices. This partnership strengthened accountability mechanisms within the government, ensuring greater transparency and public trust. Furthermore, TM provided support to ICOM, offering assistance for information officer (IO) trainings and RTI implementation assessments. Moreover, in efforts to combat corruption and protect whistleblowers, TM collaborated and supported the Whistleblower Protection Unit, delivering trainings and advocacy materials. These joint initiatives reinforced accountability measures and encouraged individuals to report corruption without fear of reprisal.

Another key partnership was forged with the Anti-Corruption Commission, where TM contributed recommendations for asset recovery and declaration. Through collaborative efforts such as anti-corruption conferences and symposiums, TM and the ACC promoted transparency and accountability in governance, engaging various stakeholders in the fight against corruption.



MOU signed together with the Anti-Corruption Commission / Picture @ TI Maldives

Likewise, TM has worked together with HRCM as well as the Whistleblower protection unit of Maldives, assisting the unit in awareness and advocacy needs. Thanks to the support TM grants on activities conducted by HRCM, TM was able to host the Human Rights Day and Anti-Corruption Day in 2023 and have HRCM supporting the fair. Additionally, TM extended its reach to SOE's, providing anti-corruption training to entities like the Maldives Transport and Contracting Company, Aasandha Private Limited, and Public Service Media. These partnerships strengthened accountability measures within these organizations, promoting ethical practices and integrity. Furthermore, TM actively engaged with local councils and civil society organizations, offering training sessions on anti-corruption tools and principles.



Anti-Corruption Conference inaugurated by the President / Picture @ TI Maldives



Anti-Corruption Conference 2022 / Picture at Bandos Island Conference Hall with the president of the Maldives, 2022 / Picture @ TI Maldives