

MALDIVES EDUCATION RESPONSE PLAN



May 2020

For COVID-19

Ministry of Education
Maldives

Supported by
UNICEF, Maldives

with financial contribution from
Global Partnership for Education



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Abbreviations

A' Level	Advanced Level
AS Level	Advanced Subsidiary Level
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
COVID-19 EROC	Coronavirus Disease 2019 Education Response Oversight Committee
CSC	Civil Service Commission
DGPH	Director General of Public Health
DoIE	Department of Inclusive Education
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
ESP	Education Sector Plan
ESPRP	Education Sector Preparedness and Response Plan
ESQID	Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division
FS	Foundation Stage
FUP	Fair Usage Policy
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GoM	Government of Maldives
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HECC	Health Emergency Coordination Committee
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HPA	Health Protection Agency
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
ISP	Internet Service Provider
KG	Kindergarten
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KS	Key Stage
LKG	Lower Kindergarten
LT	Leading Teacher
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEMIS	Maldives Education Management Information System
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoGFSS	Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MPS	Maldives Police Service
MRC	Maldives Red Crescent
NALO	National Assessment of Learning Outcomes
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NIE	National Institute of Education
O' Level	Ordinary Level
OOSC	Out of School Children
PFA	Psychological First Aid

PHEIC	Public Health Emergency of International Concern
PO	President's Office
PPRD	Policy Planning and Research Division
Pre-KG	Pre-Kindergarten
PSM	Public Service Media
QAD	Quality Assurance Department
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEN	Special Education Needs
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TAM	Teachers' Association of Maldives
TRC	Teacher Resource Centre
UKG	Upper Kindergarten
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

PART A

1. Introduction

The twin shocks of school closure and economic recession that resulted from the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic could have serious long-term costs to education and development of the Maldives unless the country moves quickly to counter them. The scale of the school closure needed to protect public health is unprecedented. Yet the nature of it is not. Maldives can find important lessons in historical and contemporary emergencies in which schools were closed such as in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. From these cases, the education sector has experienced adverse consequences arising from school closures. However, the challenge of school closure in the context of the extraordinary COVID-19 pandemic, closely followed by an economic recession, demanded a level of preparedness and readiness for education in an emergency that proved to be hugely challenging to the Ministry of Education (MoE). The school closing shock from this crisis will lead to learning loss, increased dropouts, and higher inequality. The longer children are out of school, greater the impacts on learning and the higher the risks that vulnerable children will not return to schools, and very likely leading to greater disengagement in learning due to introduction of new and unfamiliar modalities of learning. Being out of school places vulnerable children, especially girls at increased risks. These negative impacts will be significantly higher for children with disabilities, from under-served or disadvantaged islands, and from low-income households.

Maldives is vulnerable to severe and sudden economic consequences due to its dependence on the tourism sector – the lifeline for its hard currency. The economic shock to the country has compelled the government to reduce public expenditure on education. This will intensify the damage by depressing education demand and supply as it harms households. Together, they will trigger long-run costs on human capital accumulation, development prospects, and welfare. It could lead to a reversal in the gains the Maldives has made in human development, including the progress made towards the achievement of SDG 4 - the education-related sustainable development goal.

This document presents the Maldives Education Response Plan (ERP) for COVID-19. It outlines a framework of interventions to minimize learning loss, address the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on education, and prepare well for reopening of schools under new norms dictated by the unparalleled health and safety concerns. The plan is developed through a consultative process with the senior management team of the MoE, principals, teachers, UNICEF Maldives, specialists in information communication technology (ICT), national COVID-19 response team, public health experts, relevant government agencies and members of the Social Council (a Cabinet Sub-committee on Social Affairs) at the President's Office. Feedback obtained through surveys (via Google forms) from parents, students, and teachers about some of the initial responses for continuity of learning were also used in developing and designing the interventions in this plan.

2. Brief background to COVID-19 situation in the Maldives

The Maldives confirmed its first two COVID-19 cases on March 7th, as two foreign workers at the Kuredu Island Resort & Spa tested positive for the virus. This is believed to have been the result of contact with the first imported COVID-19 case into the Maldives at this resort island. A temporary lockdown was placed on the island as the Government of Maldives (GoM) began to carry out contact tracing and testing. A State of Public Health Emergency (SPHE) was subsequently declared by the government on 12th March 2020.

From 15th March, the GoM offices were closed, but those who needed to attend to urgent matters were permitted to work from offices. Essential service workers were allowed to operate. The Maldives recorded its first confirmed case of COVID-19 from the capital city, Malé, on Wednesday, 15th April 2020. Within hours of the announcement of the first case in Malé, the Greater Malé region was placed under a 24-hour complete lockdown. The lockdown was later extended for the capital and its suburban districts Hulhumalé and Villimalé by a fortnight. Travel within the country was highly restricted.

Within two weeks of the first case recorded in Malé, the pandemic escalated to a new phase with the first death being recorded on 29th April. By the end of April, the Maldives recorded 396 confirmed and 378 active cases of COVID-19, with a total of 17 recoveries. Following the escalation of the pandemic, the GoM extended the closure of all government offices from 30th April until May 14th. This was in addition to the 14-day extension of the Greater Malé region lockdown. This was aimed to contain the COVID-19 outbreak in the country. In addition to the lockdown, the GoM also extended the SPHE until the end of May.

As shown in Figure 1, by 21st May, which marked 75 days since the first case in the Maldives, there were 1,210 confirmed cases, with 1,114 active, 1,556 quarantined, and 1,038 isolated cases. There are more than 20 tourist facilities (resorts/hotels) set aside as quarantine and isolation facilities established with a capacity of more than 3,000 beds.

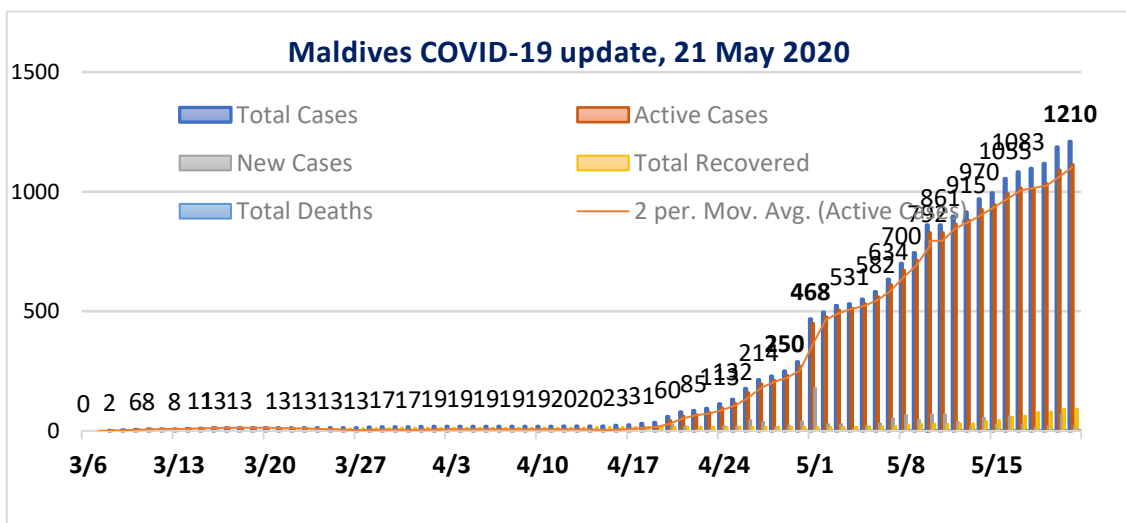


Figure 1: HPA updates of COVID-19 cases in the Maldives as at 21st May 2020

Source: MoH (<https://covid19.health.gov.mv/dashboard/>)

3. Preliminary assessment of the potential impact of COVID-19 on the school education sector

The results of policy initiatives over the last two decades have shown impressive achievements in terms of equity and access to public and free education from K-12 and free and compulsory education from K-10 (MoE, 2019). Consequently, the Maldives has a generally high enrolment rate (over 90%) up to the secondary grade 10 level. However, the scale of school closure due to COVID-19 needed to protect public health is unprecedented. The losses connected to school closures are enormous in terms of interrupted learning and unequal access to continued learning.

The current crisis has impacted in disruption of the whole school system in the country. The breakdown of the number affected, and the potential impacts on learners, provision of education at school, and the system level are examined below.

3.1 Impact on learners

3.1.1 Number of children impacted

COVID-19 has directly impacted over 91,000 school children from pre-KG to higher secondary. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the school enrolment impacted by gender and level of education. These figures include the enrolment in the total 315 schools in the country including government, the private and, the community-run schools.

Table 1: Total School Enrolment by Level and Gender, 2020

Level of Education		Republic			
		Female	Male	Total	% of Total
Pre-KG	Nursery and Baby Nursery	2,766	2,831	5,597	6.1%
FS	Preschool (LKG & UKG)	7,317	7,576	14,893	16.2%
KS 1 & 2	Primary (Gr 1-6)	21,125	22,812	43,937	47.9%
KS 3	Lower Secondary (Gr 7-8)	6,157	6,538	12,695	13.8%
KS 4	Secondary (Gr 9-10)	5,318	5,586	10,904	11.9%
KS 5	Higher Secondary (Gr 11-12)	1,993	1,533	3,526	3.8%
	SEN	51	69	120	0.1%
	Total	44,727	46,945	91,672	
	%	48.8%	51.2%		

Source: MoE, April 2020

Note: The SEN students reflected are those who are taught in a separate classroom setting due to the severity of needs. In general, and by the MoE policy on inclusive education, the SEN students are in mainstream classes.

In the formal K-12 school system, without pre-kindergarten (Pre-KG) level as it is not included in the formal education system, over 86,000 students are affected by the closure of schools.

Learning of all these children has been interrupted, more so for the more vulnerable children of the society. The school system from K-12 has a total of 86,075 students: 41,961 girls (45.8%) and 44,114 boys (48.1%). The FS has a total of 14,893 students and represents 16.2% among the different levels of education. The FS level enrolls 7,371 girls (49.1%) and 7,576 boys (50.9%).

Close to fifty per cent and the largest proportion of children (47.9%) in the Maldivian school system are enrolled in the KSs 1 and 2. These two stages correspond to the primary grades 1 to 6 in the Maldives. In 2020, the six primary grades enrol a total of 42,937 students, of which 21,125 or 48.1% are girls and 22,812 or 51.9% are boys. The lower levels of the education system have had the longest interruption of learning as this is the group for which alternative learning arrangements through Telekilaas were started later in the rollout of programmes.

3.1.2 Impact on secondary school children

The secondary grades are distributed over the KS 3 (corresponding to grades 7 and 8) and the KS 4 (corresponding to grades 9 and 10). In the lower secondary grades of 6 and 7, there are a total of 12,695 students with 6,157 girls (48.5%) and 6,538 boys (51.5%). At the end of grade 10, students sit for their GCE/IGCSE O' Level examination and the local Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination. These high-stake secondary level examinations for grade 10 students have now been postponed, after a period of uncertainty and anxiousness, from October/November 2020 to May/June 2021. The uncertainty over their school status in the first half of 2021 for many young girls and boys who have been preparing for these examinations was resolved with the announcement made by the MoE on 23rd May 2020. These students will remain in their respective schools until the examinations in May/June 2021. Due to the additional disruption, this will cause, the academic calendar for 2021 will change to commence schools in mid-year instead of January, the usual period of starting. The MoE will, in the coming weeks study the implications of these changes.

The KS 5 in the Maldivian school system corresponds to grades 11 and 12 (aka higher secondary). At the end of grade 11, students sit for their AS Level examinations, and at the end of grade 12, students sit for their Advanced Level (A' Level) examinations. In these two grades, there are 3,526 students with 1,993 girls (56.5%) and 1,533 boys (43.5%). The total number of A' Level students is a bit low due to administrative incompleteness of formalities. By the start of school closure, some schools have not managed to promote their students from grade 11 to grade 12 in some schools, while others have. Hence, fewer numbers were recorded for grade 12 in the Maldives Education Management Information System (MEMIS).

The postponement of examinations at the end of grade 10 will affect the transition of some of these youngsters to higher secondary and tertiary level studies for some of them. Depending on the institutions chosen, this may mean losing a full year of studies at a critically young age, affecting, among other factors, the interest for higher studies.

Even before the COVID-19 situation, students find the transition from lower secondary to higher secondary level very stressful. The learning of most of the students who transition to higher secondary level is affected, for various reasons such as maladjustment, change of school and support groups, inability to cope with parental expectations, and other issues related to adolescence. With the COVID-19 emergency disrupting schoolwork, these students have not been properly inducted into a new learning culture and no proper connections have been established with the new school setting. With no proper psychosocial and academic support, there is a real chance that most of these students in grade 11 are not learning, even if online classes are held.

The NERs for 2020 have not been published at the time of preparing this plan. The MoE planning team assures that the NERs for this year would not have declined for any level of education in the system, compared with the ratios published in the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 (MoE and MoHE, 2019).

3.1.3 Disinterest in learning and potential increase in school dropout

The prolonged closure and discontinuation of learning coupled with ineffective alternative arrangements could create further disinterest for learning amongst young children. The subsequent disengagement from studies could lead to dropouts from the school system. This could exacerbate the already existing and growing issues of the OOSC and challenges in reaching them.

Disengagement from learning is more likely to occur at the early secondary education level. Consequently, the number of Out of School Children (OOSC), a phenomenon acknowledged in the recent Education Sector Analysis (ESA) (MoE, 2019) in the country, is likely to increase. Based on an earlier study by UNICEF, the ESA estimated that there were over 600 OOSC at both primary and lower secondary age groups. Out of this, 40% were females and 60% males. The numbers for higher secondary age have not been identified. Lack of proper statistics and research into the area of OOSC is noted in the ESA as an area for strengthening. The problem of lack of data and research on this still remains an issue. The current situation may result in increasing this number. The OOSC are predisposed to vulnerabilities such as lack of life and living skills, induction into criminal activity, and exploitation for criminal and economic purposes. The Maldives Police Service (MPS) has publicly reported a rise in criminal activities in the first two months of the declaration of the public health emergency.

Lack of physical activities due to absence of physical education classes, extra-curricular activities and due to the household situation (especially in Male'), are likely to affect the interest in learning. The potential for school dropout due to loss of interest in learning is something to closely monitor over the rest of this year, as well as the next few years. The Policy Planning and Research Division (PPRD) of the MoE, through its MEMIS, needs to be extra vigilant in monitoring this. All schools should be informed to promptly report any changes in enrolment.

3.1.4 Impact on nutrition due to missing of school breakfast

Schools have been closed for a 12-week period from 12th March to the end of May. This affects the provision of free breakfast, which is a flagship programme of the current government. The programme commenced in 2019, with the start of the school year, and continued this year as well, until school closure. By the scheduled mid-term break, breakfast was taken by 48,021 students, which is 64% of all students in government schools. The average cost of this programme was MVR 22,500,000 (USD 1.46 million) per month. Throughout the entire country, 193 contractors (restaurants, cafés, and individuals) were involved in preparing and delivering the breakfast packages to the 212 government schools. Strict health and hygiene standards were adhered to during the provision of breakfast.

It is understood that a number of students, especially from poorer backgrounds, have developed a dependency on free breakfast (from MoE Official). It could be that this is perhaps the single proper and nutritious meal they get during the day. Suspension of the early morning meal due to the school closure, for an extended period, may have negative consequences for students' wellbeing, nutrition, and ability to become engaged in learning. According to UNICEF, in the Maldives “nearly one in five children is stunted, an irreversible condition marked by low height for a child’s age. Stunting is caused by a lack of adequate nutrients at an early age, debilitating both cognitive and physical growth for the rest of a child’s life” (UNICEF, 2015).

Many stakeholders, including current school principals who provided input to this plan, are of the view that the breakfast as it has been provided, is in need of review. Some were of the view that it needs a transformation, both in terms of the menu as well as how it is organised. It could also be more targeted through a means-tested strategy. Perhaps, this is a timely opportunity to undertake such a review.

From a public health perspective also, restarting the breakfast programme in the same manner even when schools re-open this year, would be difficult to justify. At a time when health and safety are a top priority, it may not be advisable to require a vast array of 193 contractors to be preparing and delivering food to schools throughout the country. As a precaution against the spread of COVID-19, the programme as a whole is recommended to be put on hold until the end of this year, even if schools re-open in 2020. In collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services (MoGFSS), other options such as offering take-home rations, establishing partnerships with food delivery services, or providing breakfast only to those who specifically request could be considered. However, these options may not achieve the objectives of the programme as intended originally.

“The public health crisis is fast becoming an economic and social crisis and a protection and human rights crisis rolled into one.”

(UN, April 2020).

3.1.5 Impact on student enrolment and transition

According to the recently published ESA, the pre-primary Net Enrolment Rate (NER) for 2018 was 92.6% for girls and 92.7% for boys (MoE, 2019, p. 71). The primary NER in 2018 was 96.3% for girls and 95.5% for boys (MoE, 2019, p.72).

The lower secondary enrolment has also significantly increased compared with the situation a decade ago. In 2008, the lower secondary NER was only 69.2%. However, in 2018, the lower secondary NER has risen to 90.5%, with 87.8% for girls and 92.9% for boys. The NER for higher secondary is still low, though this has also been increasing. The NER for higher secondary level in 2008 was only 6.0%, while in 2018 it had risen to 44.5%; with 50.4% for females and 38.9% for males. This level of schooling is still available in only some schools. While there is no gender difference at the pre-primary, primary and secondary education level, this is not

Level of Education		Government			Private			Community		
		Female	Male	Total	Female	Males	Total	Female	Male	Total
Pre-KG	Baby Nursery & Nursery	-	-	-	1,792	1,904	3,696	974	927	1,901
FS	Pre-school (LKG & UKG)	4,383	4,518	8,901	2,093	2,147	4,240	841	911	1,752
KS 1 & 2	Primary (Gr 1-6)	19,804	21,489	41,293	937	959	1,896	384	364	748
KS 3	Lower Secondary (Gr 7-8)	5,775	6,204	11,979	211	222	433	171	112	283
KS 4	Secondary (Gr 9-10)	4,953	5,243	10,196	125	146	271	240	197	437
KS 5	Higher Secondary (Gr 11-12)	1,305	1,012	2,317	346	291	637	342	230	572
SEN	SEN	51	69	120	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	36,271	38,535	74,806	5,504	5,669	11,173	2,952	2,741	5,693
	% Female/Male	48.5%	51.5%		49.3%	50.7%		51.9%	48.1%	
	% of National Total/Type		81.6%			12.2%				6.2%

Table 2: Student Enrolment among the three types of schools

Source: MoE, April 2020.

the case at the highest level of schooling. Girls outnumber boys significantly in enrolment at this level. The sharp drop in enrolment at the higher secondary level and the significant gender disparity at this level are noted in the ESA, as serious concerns requiring further study (MoE, 2019).

While there is no evidence of any slippages in these generally high enrolment rates due to COVID-19 yet, the extended lockdown and school closure is of immense concern within the sector. The NERs for 2020 have not been published at the time of preparing this plan. The MoE planning team assures that the NERs for this year would not have declined for any level of education in the system, compared with the ratios published in the Education Sector Plan 2019-2023 (MoE and MoHE, 2019).

3.2 Impact on the provision of education

The Maldives has three main actors involved in the delivery of school education. They are the government, the private sector, and the community. By far the largest provider of school

education is the GoM, through 212 schools operating in 190 islands throughout the archipelago. Table 2 (above) provides a breakdown of the total enrolment under the three types of institutions. This table indicates the scale of the impact on students who are under the three types of ownership of the schools.

3.2.1 Impact on government schools

The government-administered institutions account for a total of 74,806 students, with 36,271 girls (48.5%) and 38,535 (51.5%). Hence, the largest number of students whose learning has been affected are in the government schools. (see Figure 2).

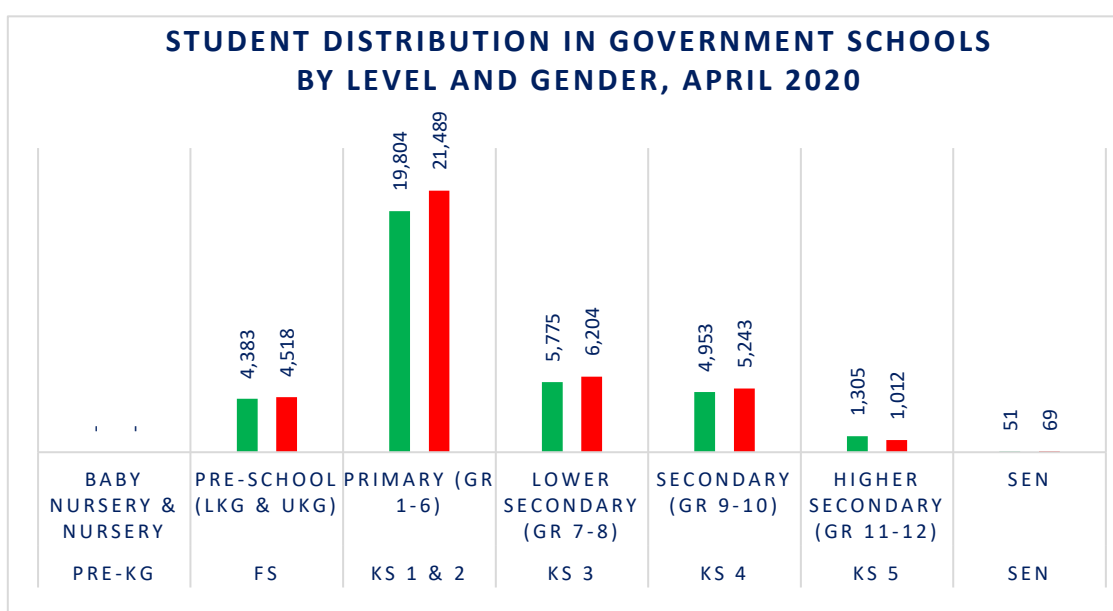


Figure 2: Student distribution in government schools by level and gender

Source: MoE, April 2020

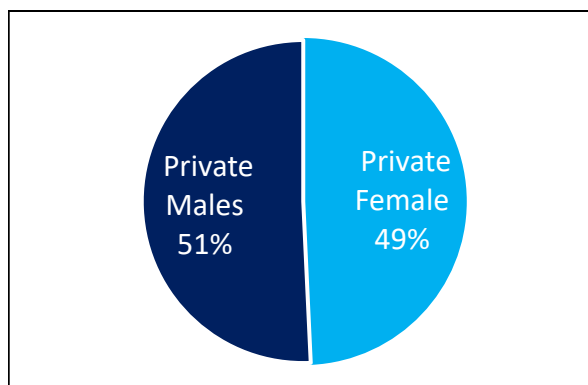
As shown in Table 2, in the government schools, 47.9% of the enrolment is in KSs 1 and 2, which corresponds to the primary grades 1-6 (see Figure 2). A potential impact on the government schools, already running at near full capacity, is the obligation to enrol mostly FS students who may pull out from some non-government fee-paying schools.

3.2.2 Impact on private schools

Although much smaller in comparison with the enrolment in government schools, the Maldives has private and community-owned schools that contribute in a significant way. As shown in Table 2, the private schools cater to the system's lower levels in considerable numbers. Over 70% of their enrolment is in the early childhood age group. There are close to 8,000 young children collectively in the nursery and preschool classes, with little or no gender disparity. Among them are 3,885 girls (48.9%) and 4,051 boys (51.1%).

These private schools that run preschool classes are known to have been heavily impacted due to the current pandemic situation. At least 3 private and 2 community-owned preschools in Greater Malé region, have already approached the MoE seeking support as they are on the verge of closing due to the financial losses they are incurring. These five schools collectively account for 1,745 girls (49%) and 1,841 boys (51%) attending pre-KG and kindergarten (KG) classes. This number may increase as the financial impact on private and community-run schools deepen.

The total enrollment of privately-run institutions in April 2020, is 11,173, which is 12.2% of the total national enrolment. There are 5,504 girls (49.3%) and 5,669 boys (50.7%) in the private schools (see Figure 3).



3.2.3 Impact on community schools

The community administered institutions account for only 6.2% of the national student enrollment. The total enrolment of these institutions stands at 5,693, with 2,952 girls (51.9%) and 2,741 boys (48.1%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Student distribution in private schools by level, April 2020
Source: MoE, April 2020

A significant proportion of the enrollment in the community-run schools, is that of the Pre-KG nursery classes (see Figure 4). Nearly one-third (33.4%) of their students are at this level. Another 30.8% of their enrolment is in the preschool grades of LKG and UKG. The community-run schools, with no direct support or involvement from the MoE, also tend to play an important function in the provision of learning for the early childhood stage in the Maldives. This is in addition to the government and private schools that have a

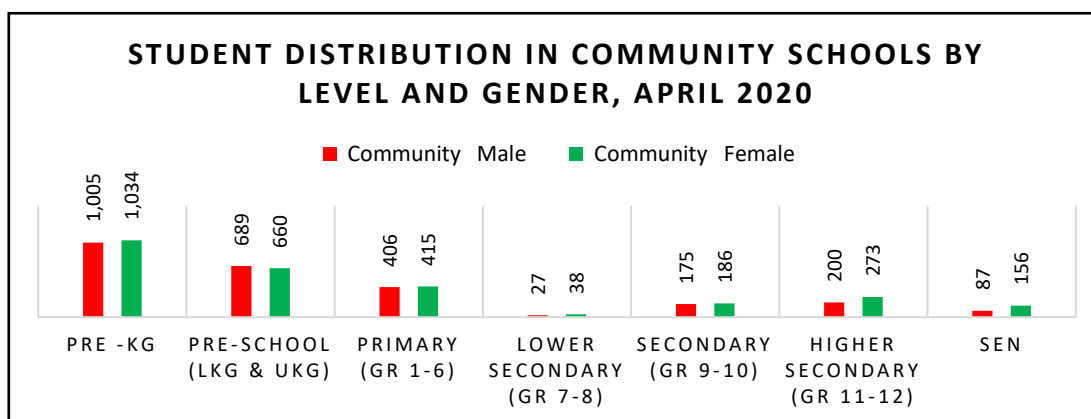


Figure 4: Student distribution in community schools by level and gender
Source: MoE, April 2020

larger share in preschool education.

The community-run schools are at risk of closing or becoming non-functioning, due to the financial and human resource challenges they are experiencing. They rely mostly on teachers employed on a part-time basis. While many of the community schools especially in the atolls, are under the purview of the respective Island Councils, albeit a government entity, without additional financial support from the government, run the risk of remaining closed for a long period.

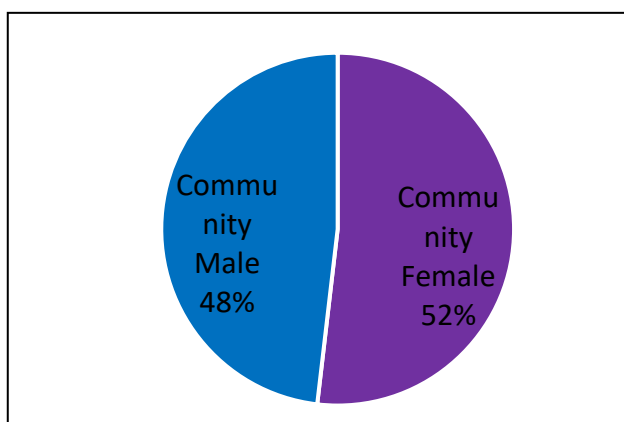


Figure 5: Percentage of enrolment in community run schools, by gender, April 2020

Source: MoE, April 2020

3.2.4 Impact on preschoolers

The Maldives has nearly universal enrolment at the pre-primary level, with little or no gender disparity. Many private and community administered pre-schools across the country enable access to early childhood education, including pre-schools for all children. The provision of pre-school education is mandated by law for the state. The Government subsidizes the two years of kindergarten classes even in community schools. Some private schools offer pre-school education for fees.

There have been reports of parents refusing to pay the school fees during school closure, resulting in financial uncertainties for the schools.

The five non-government schools highlighted in section 1.2.2 above, collectively account for a significant number of girls and boys. If the situation continues, such schools may be forced to close due to the inability to sustain the rent and salaries of teachers. This would mean that the preschool enrolment would reduce drastically, and children's school readiness is unlikely to be on-track. Alternatively, the government schools will be under pressure to absorb the fallout, over-stretching, and over-burdening their predicament.

3.2.5 Inability for payment of school fees

The MoE has received complaints from parents of the excessively high school fees charged during the school closure, without proper teaching and learning. All private schools have given a discount on the fees. However, either the inability or the refusal to pay during this period is real. These schools also depend on student fees for the payment of staff salaries. If they do not receive fees, they are unable to pay their staff, further exacerbating the situation, as schools are likely to have challenges in keeping the staff on the school payroll. The situation

is real for some popular private international schools in Malé. Such schools usually have a salary scale higher than the government schools, understandably to attract and retain good quality teachers. Hence, some private schools are managing to provide some online teaching for their students. Even during the Greater Malé region's lockdown, some of these private schools in Malé have continued to teach, though in a limited manner.

Different institutions have their policies on penalties for delayed payment. This would be an area into which the MoE will find it difficult to intervene. The Ministry may advise schools to pause all penalties during the SPHE, and especially during the lockdown. The MoE can call on private and community schools not to charge extra fees when the schools resume.

3.2.6 Impact on teachers

Teachers have been looking forward to a rise in their pay for a long time. The current administration has also made these promises on several occasions. Revised salary structures have been under active consideration since 2019. The MoE was very hopeful that this will come about along with the promising budget for 2020. However, with the huge budgetary reductions due to COVID-19, it is unlikely that this will materialize any time soon. With no improvement in working conditions or a salary increase, and new demands on work, especially in new ways of learning delivery, teacher motivation is likely to decline. This will result in a poor quality of teaching and relaxation in learning assessment.

With Telekilaas and online learning, student assessment is entering unfamiliar and uncharted territory. Teachers will require intensive capacity building programmes in student assessment in the new teaching and learning methods, be it Telekilaas, internet-based mediums or a combination of these mediums and limited face to face teaching in school – the new hybrid model of teaching. The MoE and the schools may have to consider giving away with letter grade assessment and going for a pass/fail system. If competency-based rigorous models of assessment are to be maintained in a remote/virtual teaching and learning environment, teachers will need on the job training.

Box 1: Farooq the Home Tutor

Farooq (not the actual name) is a trained secondary school teacher. He taught in schools in Male'. In 2019, he moved to the suburb of Hulhumale' and lives with his small family in an apartment. He left the job and fully depends on providing tuition for school children at this apartment. He had over 30 students coming at different hours of the day.

With the COVID-19 situation, Farooq's tuition work has come to a halt and has lost his only source of income. Parents who can afford financially are 'too afraid', Farooq says, to send children. Besides, such educational activities are also prohibited for the time being by the government. Farooq does not have the means nor is he yet prepared with technology mediated set ups to re-start his tuition practice. Even if he can commence tutoring through online/remote means, the questions would be how many parents would be willing to partake or even pay anything comparable to this previous income

How many Farooq's, who depend on tuition income, exist in the Maldives?

3.2.7 Impact on teacher income

The popularity and heavy reliance on private tuition for children of all grades is well recognised in the Maldives. Parents either send their children to small group classes conducted by teachers at their home, or bring tutors home for more individualised tutoring. The restriction of movement and the requirement to stay at home and social distance have stopped the private ‘tuition market’. This would mean a significant number of children will have little or no support at home with their learning. Parental anxiety over their inability to guide their children in their learning will be a cause of stress for both parents and children, depending on the parent’s education level.

Many teachers are known to be dependent on what they charge for tuition as additional or supplementary income. Additionally, the cessation of private tuition also meant a loss of income resulting in reduced income or an altogether loss for some teachers who depend entirely on private tuition.

3.2.8 Impact on expatriate teachers

The community-run schools are at risk of closing or becoming non-functioning due to the financial and human resource challenges they are experiencing. They rely mostly on teachers employed on a part-time basis. Many community schools, especially in the atolls, are under the purview of the respective Island Councils, albeit a government entity. Without additional financial support from the government, these schools run the risk of remaining closed for an extended period.

Table 3: Number of expatriate and national teachers in three types of schools

School Type	Expatriate Teachers			National Teachers			Teachers
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	Grand Total
Government Schools	689	1,301	1,990	5,743	1,191	6,934	8,924
Private Schools	59	44	103	480	28	508	611
Community Schools	7	13	20	160	26	186	206
Total	755	1,358	2,113	6,383	1,245	7,628	9,741

Source: MoE, April 2020

Table 3 provides the number of expatriate teachers in the three types of schools. Expatriate teachers, especially in government schools, is a critical group for whom the impact of COVID-19 is felt far greater. Among the teaching force in government schools, 22% are expatriates (see Figure 6).

Recent studies undertaken by the Quality Assurance Department (QAD) of the MoE indicate that schools with smaller enrolments (e.g. less than 100) tend to have a much higher proportion of expatriate teachers among the total teaching staff when compared to schools with larger enrolments (e.g. over 600) (QAD, 2018). This study, based on an analysis of external school review reports of nearly two-thirds of the government schools, further points

to a difference in the quality of expatriate teachers serving in the capital Male' and the larger schools in population centres, and in the smaller island schools (p. 60).

It has been reported that some of the expatriate teachers are extremely worried about the situation in their respective countries (mostly from India) and their families at home. Some have expressed their keenness to return to their countries as soon as the borders are open, and air or sea travel becomes possible. Principals with whom consultations were held for this plan, believed most of their respective teachers, were not too eager to leave immediately before the end of this academic year which ends in late November. The principals, though, were not sure whether all their expatriate teachers would return in the following year after their annual holiday. The new academic year normally starts in the first half of January.

The worry and psychological tensions these expatriate teachers experience, coupled with the new demands of new modes of teaching, are likely to impact the school system due to a potential shortage of teachers, with the greater impact of such a development in the smaller schools. It is therefore prudent to predict that if expatriate teachers decide to depart this year, or decide not to return next year, the greatest negative impact would be to the more remote and already disadvantaged small schools in the atolls.

3.3 Impact on education at the system level

3.3.1 Cessation of planned initiatives

The last two years have witnessed a significant increase in planning exercises in the education sector. The most significant of these is the undertaking of the comprehensive ESA, followed by the production of a five-year plan – the ESP 2019-2023. The ESP has identified several new initiatives, including the expansion of school infrastructure to achieve single session schooling throughout the country, quality improvement through new education assessment and monitoring, expanded interventions for in-service development of teachers, and the progressive education policy initiatives. The Strategic Action Plan (SAP) of the new government, later developed in 2019 (PO, 2019), incorporated these initiatives.

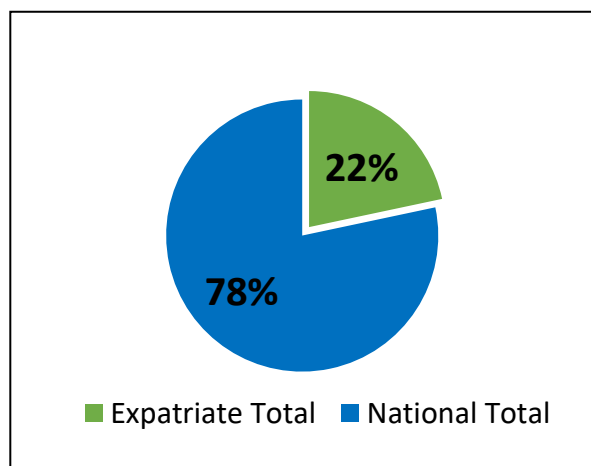


Figure 6: Proportion of national and expatriate teachers in government school in 2020
Source: MoE, April 2020

In addition to these macroplanning documents, the sector has been engaged in more in-depth sub-sectoral exercises and produced useful plans and projects. These include:

- A plan and framework for curriculum review;
- A review and concept for the development of non-formal education;

- A revitalisation plan for the Teacher Resource Centres (TRCs) in the atolls;
- An assessment and project to support 55 disadvantage and underperforming schools;
- A needs assessment and plan for expanding inclusive education in schools, including training of Inclusive Coaches;
- A national literacy and mathematics strategy; and
- The ICT Master Plan (in the process of finalisation).

Some of the interventions in the pipeline have received government endorsement and have been translated into projects with funding from the national budget. Many of these interventions were aimed at reducing disparities in education as well as improving the equity of learning outcomes of students. With the budgetary constraints, the education sector will now be faced within the current and post-COVID-19 situation these interventions would now be stalled, resulting in a worsening of the challenges in the education system and the emergence of new challenges. All of them combined will have a significant negative impact on access and quality of education across the country.

3.3.2 Impact on already identified inequities

Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, the MoE and UNICEF had identified 55 disadvantaged and underperforming schools out of the 213 government schools. This is nearly 26% of the government schools and accounted for approximately 10,000 students and over 2,000 staff of whom 69% were teachers. These schools have been noted to be “on a trajectory of underperformance” (QAD, 2020). They lacked basic Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, libraries, staff rooms, and laboratories. Based on a situation assessment of the 55 schools (QAD and UNICEF, 2019), a special project was designed and launched in early 2020, with several interventions to address the identified needs for physical upgrading, provision of basic teaching-learning resources, capacity building, and strategies for improving inclusion (QAD, 2020). With strong advocacy from UNICEF, some of these schools received a modest allocation from the 2020 budget for Education, including funds for renovation and repair.

The project's first activities were underway when the State of Public Health Emergency was declared in the country. Shortly afterward, the project activities were halted. The ten principals from the atolls who were in Male’ for a training programme to serve as resource persons for project capacity building activities also returned to their respective schools. These 55 schools already identified as disadvantaged and underperforming will be particularly impacted because of the significant national emergency activities currently being undertaken due to COVID-19.

However, due to the requirements to reprogramme the 2020 budget for COVID-19 preparedness and response, and due to high budget deficits, all sectors including education, will experience major budget cuts for the remaining part of the year and the following year.

Consequently, existing issues in these schools already identified as underprivileged will exacerbate the disadvantages for children and teachers. The MoE will experience a setback to its planned efforts to reverse the trajectory of underperformance of the 55 disadvantaged schools, thus preventing/delaying urgently needed measures to reduce disparities in the quality of learning among students in the national system.

3.3.3 Weakening of support to SEN Students

There were 3,796 students throughout the country identified under the SEN category, by the Department of Inclusive Education (DoIE) in 2019. This is 5.2% of all students. The gender distribution among the SEN students, according to the experts in the DoIE, is approximately 45% for girls and 55% for boys. The DoIE was in the process of updating the figures for 2020 when schools were closed. Hence, no update is available for this year at the time of preparing the ERP. However, the DoIE estimates that the figure would correspond to the 2019 percentage of the total enrolment. Only some of the schools have teachers with special skills to support the learning needs of the SEN students.

One planned intervention during the current lockdown in Greater Male' region, is the support by the DoIE facilitated by UNICEF to very severe children with SEN. Around 150 such children have been identified from four schools in Male' to provide a learning and stimulation package to be used at home. With the help of leading teachers, students who are very severe in managing at home; namely children with severe autism spectrum and children who have ADHD have been identified. Materials available from local bookshops and other stores were identified in major 3 domains: (a) literacy and mathematics, (b) gross and fine motor, and (c) sensory activities. These domains were chosen because parents can carry out the activities with few instructions from the teachers and to manage the child until they go back to school. In addition to this, these four schools were given 2 trampolines to each school to be used when the students returned to schools.

Since 2019, a training programme to train existing teachers to work as SEN teachers has been ongoing. The training programme planned for 2020 has come to a halt due to the closure of schools. The SEN students are amongst the vulnerable group who would be most negatively impacted. Additional activities for the senior management in the schools, and engagement of parents and the community are also in place. Twenty schools for the training of Inclusive Coaches were also identified for 2020.

3.3.4 Impact on learning achievement

The MoE has been conducting National Assessment of Learning Outcomes (NALO) at the system level to measure the learning achievement. The analysis from the past three years of NALO, undertaken after the completion of Grade 3 and Grade 6 clearly shows that there is a significantly large group of children who are well behind in the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy. Their competencies in these important areas are below their grade level. Time

away from school for such children (already below grade level in key competencies) will be particularly devastating. Many of these children are from disadvantaged backgrounds, often in more remote islands, and served by relatively more disadvantaged and underperforming schools. Parents of such children often lack skills to help them with schoolwork at home. Their homes are more likely to lack high-speed Internet and devices to learn through distance education. Perhaps middle and high school students can overcome these challenges, given their ability to work and read independently. Nevertheless, most low-income, low-performing elementary students will struggle and almost surely fall even further behind.

Furthermore, it is likely that some children who are not from low socioeconomic backgrounds, could also fall behind in learning mainly due to disengagement from school environment. This is partly due to the new and unfamiliar learning modalities introduced. Evidence from recently published NALO results, as well as from school level testing and observation indicates that many students are moving up the school system without having acquired mastery of, or even an adequate level of, foundation skills in language and mathematics. Some children are already well behind year-level expectations, and many of these children remain behind throughout their schooling. Disruption in learning due to the pandemic exacerbates the predicament of these students who are already behind in their learning achievement.

4 Preparedness and initial response of the sector

The academic year for 2020 commenced in the Maldives on 12th January. The two-term calendar has a one-week mid-term break. All schools in the Maldives were closed for this mid-term break of the first term from 8th to 12th March. Following the declaration of the SPHE, the MoE postponed the reopening of schools by one week, to help prevent the possible spread of COVID-19 from schools into the community. School closure has since been extended until further notice.

In preparation for a possible closure of schools, the MoE started taking a number of measures to respond to the fast-evolving pandemic situation. Some of the early preparedness measures taken by the MoE in the first week of March were (i) the establishment of COVID-19 Education Response Team, and (ii) issuing of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to all schools outlining the ways the MoE and schools will respond and communicate during the different public health risk levels for COVID-19, outlined by the HPA. Other responses include instructions to schools to emphasize the importance of proper handwashing, teach all students to properly hand wash, and ensure that all schools have proper and adequate handwashing facilities

A timeline of specific measures and responses are provided in Annex 1. Some key responses are highlighted here.

4.1 Responses to ensure continuity of education

4.1.1 Formulation of contingency plan and contingency schemes of work

Teachers and other staff were required to attend school during the extended mid-term break. The mid-term break (8th March to 12th March) was utilised to formulate a contingency education plan. Guidelines to ensure continuity of education were formulated and shared with the schools which were then asked to develop contingency schemes of work as per the guidelines. This plan outlined how schools should organise and conduct teaching and learning activities. The key features of the contingency plan recommended by the MoE are provided in Box 2.

Operational guidance to implement the contingency schemes of work was supplemented by the identification of specific responsibilities for various actors of the schools. The responsibilities for the following were written down and communicated to all schools through a circular:

- Principals
- Deputy Principals
- Leading Teachers, and
- Teachers.

With the imminent possibility of government closure in the following weeks, the MoE revised the plan and responded, through a new circular, with further actions to enhance continuity of education to all the KSs as follows:

- Foundation Stage (FS): The MoE provided play-based learning activity packs to all the schools;
- KSs 1 & 2: Literacy and numeracy focused fun activities conducted via Telikilaas;
- KS 3: Lessons conducted via Telekilaas. Schools to also conduct lessons using Google Classroom; and
- KSs 4 & 5: Lessons continued via Telekilaas.

Box 2: Key features of contingency plan recommended by the MoE to schools

- No student will attend school.
- Academic staff are to plan and prepare to teach via digital platforms, in case of school closure continues in the upcoming weeks.
- Prepare schemes of work for the next two weeks, as per the guideline shared by the MoE.
- The following are the digital platforms approved by the MoE for teaching and learning: Google Classroom, TED-ED, YouTube, and EduPage.
- Teaching is to be conducted only for students studying in grade 10, and students preparing for May/June AS level examinations.
- Teaching must be conducted via digital platforms approved by the MoE, and the learning process must be monitored by the respective schools.
- Parents and students should be kept updated on individual school's plans.
- Schools are expected to ensure that every staff follows good hygiene practices and keep social distancing while at work.

Source: MoE Circular No: 22-E/CIR/2020/28 (12th March 2020).

The highlight of this directive is given in Box 3.

4.1.2 Telikilaas

To ensure continuity of education during the pandemic the MoE decided to implement dual modes of teaching and learning: **online classes** and telecasted lessons via television, locally known as **'Telikilaas'**.

Telikilaas sessions were developed and recorded to be telecasted by the Public Service Media, PSM. Data arrangements (5GB per month) for teachers and students were made in consultation with the two local internet service providers. Teachers were instructed to follow the contingency schemes of work and conduct online classes for all grades. A handbook for parents on cyber safety was also launched during the first week of online classes to prevent or minimize the risks associated with technology, including cyberbullying.

Monitoring of student engagement in learning activities was recorded through the following ways.

- Google Classroom attendance was recorded by teachers.
- A QR code to mark attendance was provided for the students before the lesson.
- A Google document link was shared with students where they can clarify their doubts. Student engagement is monitored through the Google document.

Box 3: Instructions to schools regarding the different KSs

- (i) **KSs 4 and 5 (Grades 9 to 12)**: Telekilaas lessons will be conducted by the MoE.

The TV programme – Telekilaas, is nationally telecasted for specific grades. It is advised that schools do not rely on the telecasted lessons alone. The Telikilass lessons should be complemented with daily interactive sessions for students, via Google Classroom, YouTube, EduPage, TED-Ed, Moodle, or any other digital learning platform, approved by the MoE.

- a. The teachers are advised to check with the parents and caregivers, on the children's engagement with the program.
 - b. The teachers need to ensure that the students' doubts are cleared and ensure that the lesson objectives are achieved, using the digital learning platforms suggested by the MoE.
 - c. It was also emphasised to consider sign language and subtitles for children with disabilities.
- (ii) **KS 3 (Grades 7 and 8)**: Teachers are advised to prepare lessons as per the contingency scheme of work and deliver the lessons using the digital learning platforms.
- (iii) **KS 2 (Grades 4 to 6)**: Teachers are advised to prepare lessons as per the contingency scheme of work and deliver the lessons using digital learning platforms.
- (iv) **KS 1 (Grades 1-3)**: Lessons with a focus on literacy and numeracy to be prepared and disseminated by using digital learning platforms.
- (v) **FS (Pre-school LKG and UKG)**: A play-based activity pack will be developed by preschool teachers and shared with the parents to be used at home.

The suggested digital platforms to be used are:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| - Google Meet | - Google Classroom |
| - YouTube | - Google Drive |
| - TED-Ed | - EduPage |
| - Filaa | - Moodle |

Source: MoE Circular No: 22-E/CIR/2020/28 (16th March 2020)

The confirmation of community spread of COVID-19 in the capital city, on 15th April 2020 and the subsequent tight locked down unfortunately resulted in Telekilaas sessions being temporarily discontinued as the teachers were not able to go to the studios to record lessons. Moreover, TV stations sent most of their technical staff home and kept minimal staff in the station for minimal service operation.

4.1.3 Teaching via Google classroom

Attempts were made to continue teaching to Grades 7 to 12, using Google Classroom. However, teachers and parents raised the issue that at a time of unprecedented uncertainty, extreme stress and fear, they were not in a mental state that would allow them to continue with the classes. The MoE consent was given to discontinue the formal classes along with instructions to class teachers to check on the students' condition every third day, either through phone or through Google Classroom to help children to provide psycho-social support during a stressful period. The lockdown period has since then been extended until May 28th.

Education is a child's basic right. Even in times of conflict, war or disaster, temporary learning opportunities must be set up as part of emergency relief to provide continued learning support. As such the MoE endeavoured to ensure students' wellbeing and learning opportunities. The MoE announced the decision to recommence Telikilaas from 15th and Google classes on 17th May even during the lockdown situation. It remains to be seen how well the plan and its implementation strategy can support schools in continuing instruction during the crisis.

Teaching and learning are resuming along a different and improved approach using Telikilaas and Google Classroom. Schools will use G suite tools to conduct live sessions and assign learning tasks to students. Provision of mobile data to students and teachers is being arranged. The MoE has provided general instructions and guidance on the arrangement of teaching and learning for the lockdown period. The MoE is well aware that school closure may continue even after lifting of the current lockdown. Sensing the importance of being prepared to continue learning during the extended school closure the MoE embarked on the development of a comprehensive plan for continuity of learning.

5 Key challenges in continuity of learning and reopening of schools

This section identifies some of the critical challenges the school education sector in Maldives faces following the current public health emergency. Most challenges to be addressed through the COVID-19 education response are not new. They relate to a magnification, due to the scale of this crisis, of existing disparities and inequities within the school system for

many years. As such, this crisis offers an opportunity to address them with innovative interventions and with greater urgency.

5.1 Worsening of the quality of education from learning loss due to school closure

Firstly, external school reviews already point to many students who are well below their grade level in their literacy skills. Secondly, a continuing major concern of the current school system is the performance of a large number of students, at the basic education level, in key subject areas such as Dhivehi (national language), Mathematics and English language. Strong evidence for this has been shown from the recent NALO undertaken in the past 3 years. Thirdly, at the end of the lower secondary level, performance of many students at the external examination in some key subjects has continued to be unsatisfactory. It is important that diagnostic and remedial/ catch-up support be offered to students diagnosed with learning loss and underperformance.

5.2 Significant increase of at-risk children enrolled but not attending school regularly

Due to various COVID-19 issues that adversely affect families, at-risk children will very likely increase. Extended school closures often lead to an increase in the drop-out rate, as some students do not return to class once schools reopen. MoE must develop strategies to address this and other possible consequences of the widespread closures, in close collaboration with schools and other relevant government sectors and agencies. It is important to take appropriate interventions during school closure and after reopening to communicate with families of such children and encourage them to participate in learning.

5.3 Meeting and maintaining WASH and safety needs in schools

A recent study of the 55 disadvantaged and underperforming schools in the Maldives undertaken by the MoE and UNICEF, concluded that “despite the many efforts in creating new spaces through additional construction and upgrading of school facilities in recent past, many schools continue to face constraints of physical space” (MoE & UNICEF, 2019). Among this set of schools, there were schools with cramped sharing spaces for staff, and schools with inadequate WASH facilities.

The project developed in early 2020 to assist the 55 schools referred to earlier, noted with concern a number of inadequate WASH facilities in some schools (MoE, 2020). These included schools with no toilet facilities for staff, schools that did not have hand washing facilities for their staff members and students, schools that did not have age-appropriate toilet facilities for preschool students. There were also some schools with no proper First Aid kits, a Counselling room and some that did not have the necessary fire safety equipment (MoE, 2020 and MoE & UNICEF, 2019).

The setback in implementing the ‘Dhoadhi Project’, designed to address the above-mentioned WASH and school safety issues, will have serious consequences for the already

disadvantaged schools, especially with a health pandemic. Without addressing the identified WASH and safety inadequacies, these schools will not meet the public health requirements for reopening. Furthermore, the anticipated additional WASH requirements that will need to be in place for COVID-19 prevention will add to the previous challenges. After addressing the inadequacies, maintaining the facilities at an acceptable standard for infection prevention and control (IPC) stipulated by the public health authorities would be another challenge.

5.4 Maintaining support to foundational learning

Early childhood education (ECE) and foundational learning in early primary school, in particular, are likely to be negatively impacted. As most households and education systems will prioritize continued learning for older children while schools are closed, emphasis on early childhood education may decline. This may also be because children at this age (3–8 years) are less able to independently take advantage of remote learning programs and tools made available

This period of child development and initial instruction for literacy and numeracy is essential for the development of foundational learning skills on which all future learning rests. Student learning is cumulative: if they fail to acquire foundational skills in early grades, children may find it much more difficult to learn later. Hence, a crisis-driven weakening of early childhood education and foundational learning in early primary school will mean lower learning trajectories for a whole generation.

Also, if any non-state pre-primary providers are unable to continue their service provision due to financial considerations, the state will need to take on an additional burden of accommodating the affected children in state schools. This can lead to overcrowding of ECE classes and affecting the quality of ECE.

Many parents and caregivers of preschoolers have found themselves in a situation for which they were never prepared. They are spending so many hours with the children, without knowing how to talk to them during the pandemic, continue to develop their socio-emotional skills, and create structure and routine in the daily life of these children. In this regard, it would be prudent to consider providing support to these parents and caregivers to cope with the situation. A faster approach to this would be adapting an already existing prototype (e.g. from UNICEF resources) to guide parents and caregivers. A locally contextualised draft of an existing prototype could be quickly generated and circulated for comments/additions and improvements among experienced preschool teachers and other specialists. It can then be finalised, printed, and disseminated and/or made available online to parents. It can remain a living document for further improvement. The key is to get good ideas for parents and caregivers as soon as possible.

5.5 Challenges for provision of psychosocial support

The Educational Supervision and Quality Improvement Division (ESQID), the division within the MoE that deals with vulnerable children, and children at risk, reported that they had identified 75 children in the high-risk category and were attending to them daily, by the third week of April 2020. The division has been working with the mental and psychosocial support cluster of the NEOC. Lack of counsellors to provide timely psychosocial support in a lockdown situation is one of the biggest challenges in addressing this issue.

At the time of reopening of schools, one of the key issues noted by principals is the attention they must give for the following:

- ‘psychological preparation’ of all children and teachers for teaching and learning;
- social interaction;
- relationship building;
- changing parental thinking for a ‘new normal’; and
- re-doubling of efforts to motivate learners.

A review of the human resource availability of the schools indicates that there are only 70 school Counsellors and 90 School Health Officers in all the schools of the country. Of the government schools, only 28% of the 212 schools have Counselors (see Figure 7).

The extended school closure has halted all the extra-curricular activities confining the students to their homes, where space for physical activity may be limited. Besides, some of the home environments are cramped and may not be very conducive for healthy living. Some students may take up unhealthy activities like playing video games and so on. Consequently, many children and youth would be very negatively impacted in their physical as well as social activities and human interaction which are essential to learning and development.

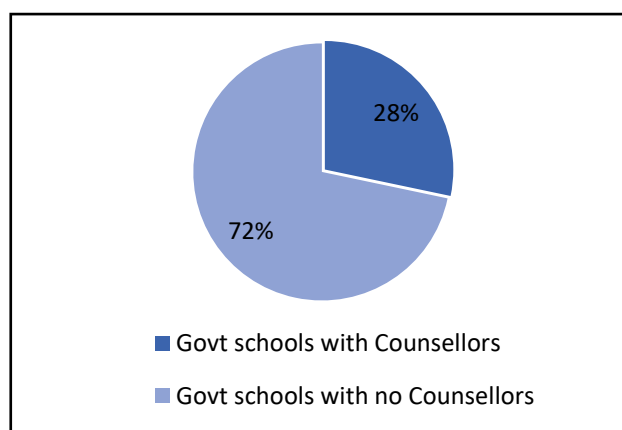


Figure 7: Counsellors in government schools
Source: MoE, April 2020

Only 27% of the government schools have School Health Officers in 2020 (see figure 8).

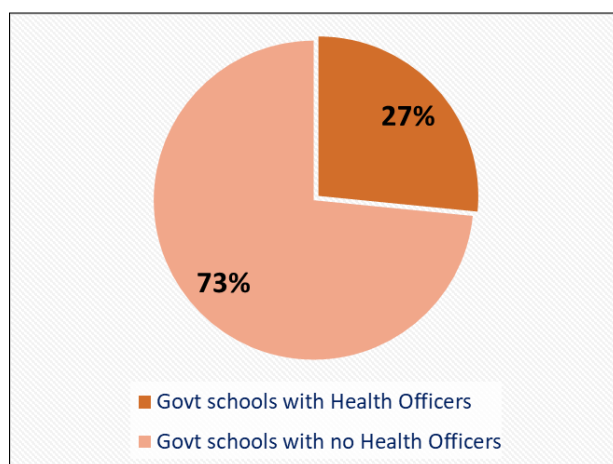


Figure 8: Percentage of government schools with and with no Health Officers
 Source: MoE, April 2020

Only 29 of the government schools have both the Counselor and the Health Officer (see Annex 1 for a list of these schools). Given the nature of the public health emergency and the challenging issues identified by the principals and the teachers, the role of both the Counselor and the Health Officer is expected to be very prominent. These two staff will be required to attend to new problems on a scale they have not experienced in the past. Additionally, they will need new training and orientation to address new issues arising from COVID-19. Schools that cannot recruit qualified staff for these two positions, will have to make alternative arrangements either to provide short intensive training to some of their existing staff or teachers or make special arrangements with the Health Centre or the hospital on the island.

5.6 Addressing teacher shortage

The proportion of expatriate teachers in the schools at the national level is 22%. (see Figure 9). This proportion is slightly less in the non-government school (17%). The schools, both in the government as well as the non-government sector could face a potential teacher shortage if the situation of the pandemic escalates, and due to fear and panic, many expatriates decide to return to their home countries.

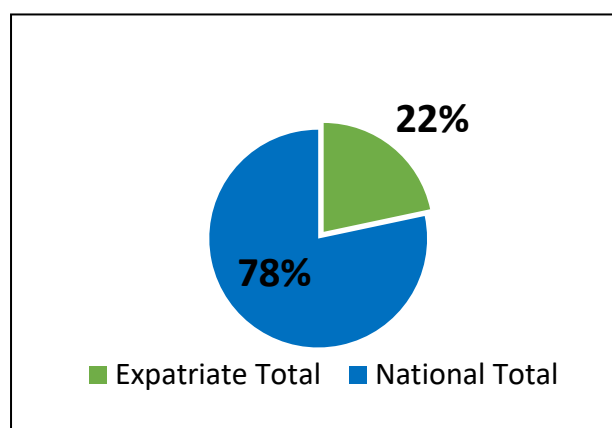


Figure 9: Proportion of national and expatriate teachers, at national level
 Source: MoE, April 2020

After recent developments (e.g. repatriation of Indians facilitated by the Government of India), the MOE has received over 40 applications from teachers to resign and return to India. If the imposed travel restrictions throughout the country are

eased and people can travel to the capital, Male', it is anticipated that more teachers working in the outer atolls would avail the opportunity of repatriation this year itself.

This is going to have a huge impact on the ability of the system to continue teaching in secondary classes. Many of the secondary school subjects are normally taught by expatriate teachers. Expatriate teachers are mainly involved in teaching at higher grades. They are often specialists in their subject area teaching subjects such as chemistry, physics, biology, accounting, commerce, business studies, mathematics, computer studies, and the English language. It would be near impossible to recruit locals to teach these subjects especially at the secondary and higher secondary levels; certainly, not in numbers that would be required, should the teacher situation deteriorate.

Eight higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country currently enrol 2,077 students in various teaching and education-related programmes. The programmes of study range from certificate 4 to postgraduate and master's degree level. Available data at this point indicate that only 28% (591) of them are new (pre-service) students. The rest 72% (1,486) are already employed in education service. The pool of candidates that may be available for joining the teaching service in 2021 will be invariably less, as some of the new students may not necessarily graduate this year as their programme may go beyond.

Additionally, those pre-service teachers who are in the final year of studies and hoping to graduate have already lost some of their practicum requirements. It would be vitally important for the MoE to work with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the respective HEIs to consider options that facilitate the timely graduation of potential teachers who were scheduled for completion this year. This may require special considerations and/or alternative arrangements in completing any missed programme requirements.

5.7 Finding a sustainable distance learning solution for the Maldives

The current surge in the pandemic will subside in the short term. However, there is no guarantee that it will not resume in the foreseeable future. Waves of the pandemic (or other climate-related emergencies) can be expected, compelling additional school closures. In the case of the Maldives, the current pandemic has undoubtedly proven that there is a strong need to increase investments in remote/distance learning solution.

The internet reach in the Maldives is much wider than in some developing countries. Though phone and internet services reach all islands of the archipelago, internet-based solutions have many drawbacks. Based on a survey carried out by the MoE in March 2020, it was found that over 31% of the audience (students, teachers and parents) did not have access to the internet or Wi-Fi at home. Some students also did not have the relevant devices. This meant a programme via the medium would not benefit a significant number of children.

Special arrangements were made by the MoE with support from UNICEF to minimise the impact on learning. Pre-recorded Telikilasses were conducted using the public TV channel,

and other channels who later collaborated in this venture. Telikilass were aimed to give complimentary support to students. Along with the Telikilass, students needed a more interactive mode of learning delivery. In this regard, schools have been instructed to use other platforms (such as Google Classroom) to conduct interactive lessons online.

In collaboration with the Internet Service Providers (ISPs), arrangements were made for the students and teachers to receive 5GD mobile data packages. After a month, the data allowance for the teachers was increased to 10 GB. One of the major challenges to integrate ICT and deliver effective lessons on digital platforms was found to be teacher capacity. It is vital to train the teachers on using the digital tools and platforms.

Based on the MoE internal comparative assessments in terms of cost, simplicity, and flexibility of alternative platforms, the MoE has decided to use G Suite by Google for general administration, and as a platform for teaching and learning. In this regard, the G suite setup has been done in all public schools, and user accounts have been created for all students and teachers in the country. All students, except grades 1 and 2, and teachers have been provided with Android Tablets.

To overcome one of the key challenges in online teaching in the Maldives, which is the technical capacity of teachers, the MoE, with support from UNICEF, has commenced an upskilling programme for 2,000 teachers. Using a core group of local trainers, the MoE expects to train the teachers to become Google Certified Educators during 2020. It is unlikely that this training would be enough to provide the necessary skills to make teachers competent in designing and delivering effective and interactive lessons, including appropriately conceived assignments. Along with the identification issues related to data, poor internet connectivity, and many teachers surveyed during the preparation of this plan have highlighted the need for proper training.

Other challenges in the Maldives include poor ICT infrastructure, expensive internet access, limited national networks, and generally poor inter-connectivity between the ISPs. Additionally, very few people in the Maldives have any experience working from home. The education sector has never had this requirement before this crisis. Developing a disciplined and structured work ethos from home is a challenge to most. Some are also not able to work from home due to the confined living arrangements with no private or quiet space in many households.

Those e-learning platforms that are available on the internet must be accessed using the internet. All users have a different capacity to use internet service. Anecdotal evidence indicate that many subscribers reach their 'fair usage policy' (FUP) limits almost in the middle of the month. Many students cannot afford to top up and increase their online usage.

Providing free internet data package for individual students and teachers, as is done now under special arrangements for the pandemic period, is an unsustainable strategy. All the ISPs also have their limitations. After all, the ISPs still must pay their suppliers for the internet utilised by their subscribers.

The primary requirement of a satisfactory solution is to reach as many students as possible. A student's (or parent's) financial capacity should have no bearing on accessibility. Therefore, the primary goal is to reduce the financial burdens on the students in utilising a virtual learning solution.

In the interim, other solutions that may reduce the current high costs could also be considered. Options that could be explored can include use of Wi-Fi compatible dongles with sim cards given to all students, and testing cheaper devices and redesigning the network in a flexible manner, with backup connection routes and proper IP addresses.

There is neither an enabling policy nor an established digital infrastructure for supporting a virtual learning system for schools that would strengthen education sector resilience to cope with school closure in the current crisis and future shocks that may also lead to school closure. Introducing enabling policies and investing in and building a comprehensive virtual learning system using the potential of technology is urgently needed to prepare for future education emergencies. This would enable teachers to create supplementary content and deliver online instruction; enable online capacity development and collaboration among teachers in the school system; enable remote student assessment, monitoring and tracking; and engage parents in student learning.

Hence, the MoE needs to examine a sustainable model of remote/distance learning. From a long-term perspective, there are **two recommendations** to consider:

- (i) firstly, consider setting up a partnership with a local public-television station to provide educational programmes for say 5 hours each weekday, so that students without effective internet access will still have access to high-quality educational programmes. Selected teachers with appropriate training and resources for recording of such lessons can provide inputs from various schools throughout the country. This would help to address the issue of inequity regarding access to internet, computers/laptops, tablets, and other mobile devices, and the high costs involved; and
- (ii) secondly, continue with the Google classroom teaching in the short term, and consider finding a more cost-effective and sustainable K-12 learning management system for the long term. A more robust remote/homeschooling solution should be considered for the Maldives, especially due to its geography, with schools dispersed across a vast ocean, and challenges in meeting economies of scale.

5.8 Challenge of enrolling students returning back to home islands

Many families from the outer islands living in the capital Male' and greater Male' region have faced serious economic difficulties resulting from the current situation, forcing them to return to their home islands. They returned to escape difficulties (such as regular payment of rent) and to avoid the greater risk to possible infection of COVID-19 by remaining in the crowded capital where physical distancing is not a real option in contrast to their home islands, many of which are unaffected by the pandemic so far. The effect this movement of families with many school children will have on education needs to be considered so that the MoE and island schools can prepare for them prior to reopening. It is possible that children from such families will seek enrolment in public schools in the islands at least for sometime. Island schools affected will be under considerable pressure as it is unlikely that they will receive additional resources needed to cope with the effects.

5.9 Challenge of reorganising schools for the 'new normal'

The closure of schools and the eventual suspension of structured learning pose numerous challenges to the education system. The current government actively pursues its policy initiative of single session schooling (as per the ESP 2019-2023). It is difficult to align and harmonise this policy with new norms of social distancing. This is a system with over 300 schools (212 government schools) widely spread over nearly 190 islands of the archipelago. As shown in Figure 11, there are 40 government schools with an enrolment of 500 and above. Among these, there are 16 schools with an enrolment of 900 and above. Four of these schools have enrolments of over 2,000 students. They are:

- Aminiya School in Male';
- Iskandhar School in Male';
- Jamaluddin School in Male'; and
- Rehendhi school in Hulhumalé.

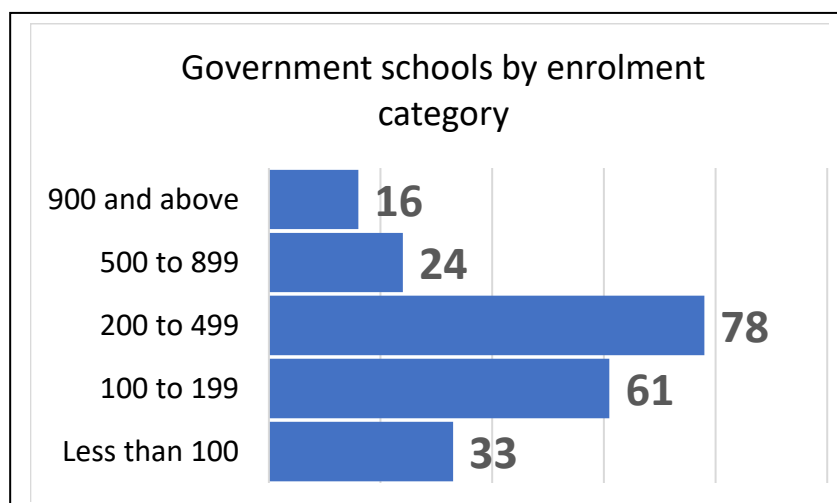


Figure 10: Number of government schools in different enrolment categories

Source: MoE, 2020

The other school in the country with over 2,000 students is Ahmadhiyya International School, a community-owned school. These five schools pose special challenges due to their enrolment size and physical space, in adhering to social distancing requirements whenever they resume physical classes. These schools may have to be run for multiple sessions. From

a social distancing perspective, public health experts suggest it would be better to have longer hours and fewer sessions than to have shorter hours with too many sessions in a day. This would minimise interactions on the road and near the school. For some large schools this would practically mean having sessions to students on alternate days with longer sessions. The challenges associated with human resource capacity should also not be underestimated in these schools as they plan for a new normal.

The need to embrace remote learning either through the pre-recorded Telekilaas or real-time internet/intranet-based solutions is here to stay. Consequently, extra emphasis on learner-centred pedagogy has become even more compelling. The need to plan for home-schooling is something parents will have to come to terms with, even with reluctance. Nevertheless, while the situation has magnified the inequities in the school system, it has also become an opportunity for parents to realise that education is neither easy nor straight forward. It is hoped that through this public health emergency, parents' perception of public education can change for the better.

It has become abundantly clear that the teaching philosophy and approach under the current emergency is very different compared to what teachers used to do in a regular classroom setting. Every teacher, parent, and their children are eager for life to return to 'normal'; normal as in the past. However, the circumstances under which schools will reopen, whenever they do, will not be normal. Hence, it has become imperative to realise that pre and post COVID-19 teaching and learning will be markedly different. Firstly, in the post-pandemic emergency, schools and teachers cannot plan to deliver the entire syllabus as per the original scheme of work designed for a full academic calendar. A stronger emphasis on project-based learning (PBL) should be considered by the teachers. Secondly, the primary focus must be ensuring continuity of learning and maintaining learning as part of the daily routine of children and their families. Thirdly, schools should realise the futility of giving homework. Ultimately schools should realise parents are not mentally prepared to engage in supporting the children with schoolwork during this situation. Hence, guidance to parents in ways to support children's learning is essential.

6 Financial implications of COVID -19 on the school education sector

6.1 Overall economic and fiscal impact

The rapid spread of COVID-19 has resulted in many countries closing down its borders, effectively bringing cross-border travel to a halt. The Maldives also took measures by suspending all on-arrival visas effective from 27th March 2020, bringing tourism sector

activities to a halt. The Ministry of Finance (MoF)¹ estimates that compared to the initial estimate for the growth of tourist arrivals of 8 per cent, tourist arrivals will now decline between 50 percent and 78 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year. With 25 percent of national output directly contributed by the tourism sector, and many other sectors like transportation and general commerce heavily reliant on tourism sector activities, this is expected to have significant negative repercussions on the Maldivian economy. Economic growth for the year is now revised downwards from the initial estimate of 7.5 percent, to a contraction between -11.5 percent and -29.7 percent.

With the slowdown in economic activity, a large hit to government revenue during the year is now anticipated. Estimates published by the MoF show that the realisation of government revenue compared to that in the approved budget for 2020 is now projected to be between US\$950.8 million and US\$ 1,205.2 million lower. To address the unanticipated increase in the government deficit that would result and keep the financing gap of the government at manageable levels, the GoM has started implementing a range of fiscal austerity measures.

6.2 Financial impact of COVID-19 on the school education sector

The budget approved by the parliament for 2020 included an allocation of US\$ 175.5 million to the school education sector. This was a 12 percent (US\$ 19.4 million) increase compared to the budget allocated in 2019, up from US\$ 153.9 million. The increase was driven by a 14 percent (US\$ 21.6 million) increase in the allocation for recurrent expenditure. However, the allocation for capital expenses was reduced by 34 percent (US\$ 2.2 million) in the approved budget, down from US\$ 6.5 million in 2019, to US\$ 4.3 million in 2020. Figure 10 shows the budgetary resources allocated to the school education sector over the last few years.

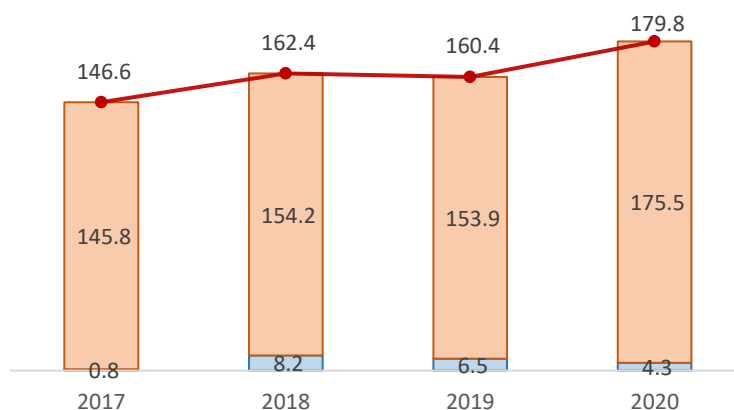


Figure 11: Figure 1: Budget allocation to the school education sector (in millions of US dollars)

In response to the large shortfall in government revenue expected this year, the MoF has reduced budget allocations from across the government, amounting to a total of US\$ 53.5

¹ MoF (2020), Covid-19 aai gulhigen raajjeyge igthisoadhashaai dhaulathuge maaliyyathah kuraane asaru, Ministry of Finance website, <https://www.finance.gov.mv/public/attachments/xAh7sQIBzCOLnOlyWcVEBLDlrg6t8o5W0tbcxexY.pdf>

million. Out of this, the budget of the school education sector, represented by the budget of the MoE and all business areas under the Ministry, was reduced by a total of US\$ 2.6 million. This amounts to 5 per cent of the total reduction already implemented by the Ministry of Finance this year.

Looking at the distribution of how the budget of the school education sector was reduced, the largest reduction, amounting to US\$ 1.1 million, was made from the capital budget. This mostly includes budget earmarked for the purchase of information technology-related hardware, furniture and fittings, and capital equipment and machinery. From the recurrent budget, the main components affected include operational expenses like the spending on utility bills, expenses on repairs and maintenance, and that allocated for travel. Figure 11 illustrates details of how the budget reduction of the school education sector is distributed over the spending areas.

In addition to the budget reduction already implemented, the MoF has announced plans for further reductions in budget allocations across the government, depending on how long the current health crisis, and subsequently the economic crisis, prolongs. Although how these cuts will exactly reflect on the resource allocation of the school education sector is yet unknown, the proposed general areas for further reductions at the government level which may be relevant are:

- 33 per cent reduction in expenditure on travel;
- freeze on all purchases of vehicles;
- 30 per cent reduction in the training expenditures;
- 59 per cent reduction in the expenditure on repairs and maintenance;
- 70 per cent reduction in the expenditure on the acquisition of capital assets; and
- 50 per cent reduction in the implementation rate of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) planned for the year

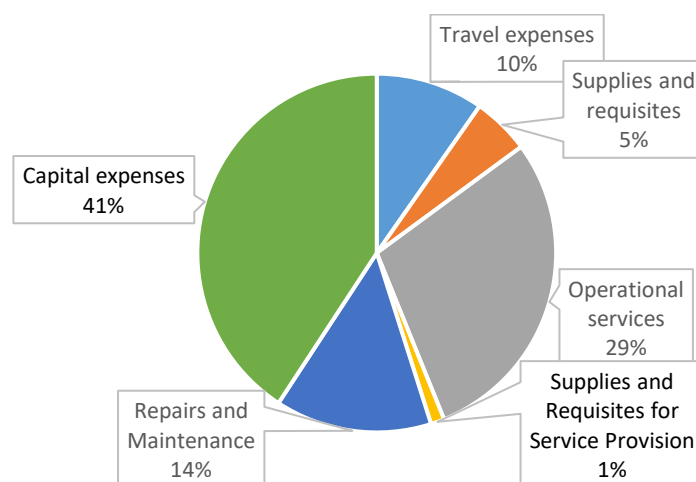


Figure 12: Areas with reduced budget allocations as a share of the total budget reduction of the school education sector (in per cent)

Thus, the Education Response Plan is likely to require substantial resource input. Investment in upgrading /maintenance of WASH facilities, recurrent costs associated with requirements to adhere to strict physical/social distancing norms within the school, infection prevention and control (IPC) measures on cleaning, investments in ICT for education, including the digital content preparation, and capacity development are major areas envisaged for funding. Cost estimates for these will be presented in the Action Plan in Part B of this document.

PART B

7 ERP Goal and Objectives

7.1 Introduction

Part A of this document provided the background and highlighted key issues for this ERP. The first part presented the preparedness and initial responses of the sector to the pandemic, and provided preliminary measures taken, and an assessment of the potential impact of COVID-19 on the school sector. This ERP is prepared based on this assessment. It will address vital and immediate issues identified. It will provide a set of interventions to mitigate the effects of loss of learning, and to recover the learning that has been disrupted in the school education sector of the Maldives.

7.2 Overall Goal

The overall goal of the ERP is **to minimise the loss of learning for students, while simultaneously preventing the spread of COVID-19 from schools into local communities**, by providing safe learning environments, and by putting in place appropriate prevention measures in the schools, and conducting awareness activities as per the HPA guidelines.

All schools currently remain closed since the mid-term break which began on 8th March 2020. By the end of May, students will have effectively experienced 12 weeks of school closure. Remote learning, which commenced via Telekilaas, remains suspended since the lockdown was imposed for the Greater Malé region on 15th March. Internet-based teaching via platforms such as Google classrooms and Zoom was also stopped in all schools, except in some private schools that offered rather limited teaching and learning service. As such, interventions in the ERP will focus on reaching out to school-age children/learners at home during the lockdown period, and at the same time, effectively preparing for the reopening of schools and recovery of lost learning, while adhering to regulations from the public health authorities.

7.3 Specific objectives

The two specific objectives of the ERP are:

- I. To ensure continuity of learning during school closure and attend to wellbeing of all staff and children, with special attention given to the most vulnerable and at-risk children in the school-going age groups.
- II. To prepare for school re-opening and ensuring an effective, inclusive, and safe return to quality learning.

The interventions under these two objectives, are presented under 5 major dimensions. The dimensions are informed by two main sources, namely;

- the MoE document on contingency arrangements for continuity of learning during the lockdown (May 2020); and
- the framework proposed jointly by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the World Food Programme (WFP), for school reopening (April, 2020).

The contingency arrangement for continuity of learning makes use of pre-recorded Telekilaas and Google Classroom (See Appendix 2 for the Concept Chart). Its new arrangement departs from the initial attempts to offer remote learning which had to be stopped when the country went for lockdown in the capital Male' region with a strict travel restriction across the country. The lessons are planned as per the revised/adapted curriculum, where only selected parts of the syllabus will be covered. The focus is ensuring continuity of learning and maintaining learning as part of the daily routine of children and their families.

According to the joint publication of the four organisations mentioned earlier, the "Framework for reopening schools, April 2020", decisions to reopen should be based on context-specific assessments, especially of how learning and wellbeing can best be supported in an individual context. It is recommended that the benefits of classroom-based instruction vis-à-vis remote learning, be considered against risk factors related to the reopening of schools. In an archipelagic nation like the Maldives, with widely dispersed schools in different islands, this emphasis on individual contextualisation is even more relevant.

7.4 Principles

The ERP is prepared with due consideration to the core principles adopted in the ESP 2019-2023. The first three among several core principles are noted here for emphasis.

- Equal opportunity for free and compulsory education from Pre-school to Grade 10.
- Equal opportunity for free, quality education to all, from K to 12, as well as for the first-degree level, irrespective of sex or locality, while considering education to be a basic right for all children and youth, including those with SEN.
- All students acquire knowledge, skills, and values required for successful completion of each stage of education, including the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy, as well as the curriculum competencies contained within the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and 21st-century skills for a decent life in an interconnected world, characterised by globalisation and economic integration.

The current public health emergency has disrupted regular schooling in unparalleled ways. In designing education responses for COVID-19, the ERP considers the following guidelines in ensuring **equity** and **inclusion**.

- a) **Guarantee equal access to learning:** Providing equal access to learning to all whether attending schools or learning remotely at home is vital. This is important as schools are likely to open in a phased and progressive manner, on different dates in different islands and different grades at different times. As such, it is paramount that the education system plan to provide equal access to learning opportunities to all students to continue learning irrespective of the timing of the opening of schools and grades. The expected waves of a resurgence in COVID-19 infections place schools at the risk of frequent and extended closures. Therefore, the emphasis is on the continuation of learning for all students with or without schools re-opening, regardless of home situation or place of living.

- b) **Plan for inclusive learning strategies:** Special care will be taken to address the diverse learning needs of all students during school closures and after reopening. This would mean addressing the learning needs of girls, boys, those at risk, the vulnerable children with SEN, and those with any disability.

- c) **Addressing the digital divide:** Determined equity-focused interventions will be designed to make learning opportunities available for all children from homes that lack access to computers or connected devices for proper online learning. There is greater recognition that significant gaps, both in household connectivity and digital skills, must be urgently addressed if equal opportunity to online learning alternatives are to be ensured.

- d) **Encourage outreach and support** from teachers and school leaders: Proper communication between the school and parents is important for the success of education. The current pandemic has magnified the need to maintain this and, where necessary, establish effective communication lines between schools and parents. Maintaining communication lines between the school and home during this type of crisis is key to supporting the learning of children from home.

- e) **Empower teachers** to meet the students' needs: Teachers are the frontline workers in education service delivery. The MoE will ensure regular and timely information and updates to teachers (and all employees) in the sector, aiming to minimize uncertainty and related stress and anxiety. Teachers will need to be empowered with the right tools, professional development opportunities, and scope to attend to the needs of their students.

8 Dimensions for intervention

The following five dimensions under which interventions are grouped are used in the ERP.

- safety,
- continuity of learning,
- reaching the vulnerable,
- protection and wellbeing (of all students, staff, and parents), and
- building resilience and strengthening coordination.

Changes to policies and regulations, while addressing financial requirements, will provide the enabling environment to pursue intervention under the above five dimensions. The specific interventions under the five dimensions will be considered along a continuum of three distinguishable phases of the reopening process as follows:

1. Before re-opening > 2. During re-opening > 3. After re-opening

A. Safety			
B. Continuity of learning			
C. Reaching the vulnerable			
D. Protection and wellbeing			
E. Building resilience & strengthening coordination			

In other words, the three separate periods will be applied to each dimension. Some interventions will overlap across the periods. A summary of the major interventions under the five dimensions is presented below.

8.1 Dimension A: Safety

The nature and scale of the pandemic dictate that the safety of children be a top priority. The schools were in a mid-term break when the State of Public Health Emergency was declared, and subsequently, all government offices were also closed. The initial responses included major efforts to increase awareness of the pandemic and corresponding safety and hygiene aspects while undertaking the teaching of proper handwashing in the schools. The ERP calls for the **intensification of these awareness programmes**, targeting behaviour changes through continued use of mass media, Viber messaging to stakeholders, the MoE's twitter feed, and regular TV transmission. Once the schools reopen, additional strategies through in-school orientation and practice sessions would be utilised.

The MoE, together with other respective line Ministries and different partners, will conduct a **'new normal back-to-school campaign'** to communicate the safe reopening of the schools. This will be a well-designed campaign to communicate with children as well as parents using

clear and easy to understand messages across many different media. A carefully designed communication strategy to engage with the parents even after schools reopen would be essential.

Developing easily understandable guidelines and SOPs on safety, hand washing, hygiene practices, cleaning procedures, and physical distancing would be undertaken. The primary focus will be on children's health and wellbeing. Additionally, as part of the emphasis on safety, teachers will maintain and further strengthen the practice of keeping regular contact with students and parents either via Viber messages or applications based (Google Meet/Zoom) calls. Continuation of these practices is important, both for checking the safety and to minimise the potential of dropping out of the school system.

Another aspect of this dimension is **preparedness**, preparing the schools for a safe return of all children and staff. Under this, attention will be given to the following:

- Infrastructure status, WASH, resources, supplies for cleaning, disinfection, adhering to IPC measures;
- Preparedness to offer psychosocial and academic support;
- Pedagogical preparedness; and
- Preparedness of students, family & society/community.

A toolkit, based on the draft toolkit shared by UNICEF, will be used to **assess every school for their readiness for reopening**. The toolkit also provided a checklist of activities to look for after reopening as well. The MoE respective departments were in the process of developing the toolkit and all necessary protocols at the time of finalising this plan (i.e. end of May2020).

In some of the more populous parts of the country, especially in Greater Male' region, **overcrowding in schools** is a major challenge. As has been noted in Part A five schools have an enrolment of over 2,000. With such large enrolments, it is very challenging to pursue the policy of single session schooling, one which the current government gives high priority. This plan will seek to alleviate, though to a small extent, some of this overcrowding in schooling. The resolution of this challenge requires far greater investments over a longer period. **Construction of a 50-classroom school and additional 50 classrooms** to be allocated to a number of exiting schools will be pursued.

8.2 Dimension B: Continuity of learning

It is important to make a distinction between schooling and learning. In the absence of alternative mediums of learning and complete reliance on school attendance for learning, school closure has resulted in the loss of 120 hours of learning per student/month. This has led to a total loss of 10.3 million hours of learning for the 86,000 students/month. This lost learning time is very difficult to compensate in the months to come.

The focus on this dimension is on two main areas. The first is **the continuity of learning during the lockdown**, and the other is the **resumption of learning when schools reopen**. Under the

first part, on the continuity of learning, the formalisation of the contingency arrangement for learning will be activated. The Telikilaas sessions had to be temporarily discontinued as the teachers were restricted from going to the studios for lesson recordings. Also, TV stations sent most of their technical staff to their home, and kept minimal staff in the station for minimal operation. Attempts were made to continue teaching to Grades 7 to 12, using Google Classroom. However, due to the sensitive situation in the country, after the start of the community spread, teachers and parents indicated that they were not in a good mental state to continue with the classes. Hence, the learning was disrupted. With much support from UNICEF, attempts are made to revive this medium of remote teaching. The overall concept chart of the revived learning arrangement is given in Appendix 2. A summary of the learning delivery arrangement is as follows:

- Teaching and learning will be conducted via Television broadcast (Telikilaas) and Google Classroom.
- Google Classroom and G Suite applications will be used to conduct interactive sessions with students. The schools will be using G Suite tools to conduct live sessions, give work/assignment to students.
- For the TV broadcast, the lessons will be recorded by individual teachers using their smartphones and other applicable hardware. The MoE shall provide the required hardware/software.
- The Telikilaas video lessons shall be approved by the recording school. These lessons will then be reviewed and polished by the coordinating school before being shared with the TV stations to telecast.
- The lesson for FS and KS 1 will only be delivered via Telikilaas, but teachers will interact with their students through Google Classroom or phone to check upon them, and to check whether they are engaging in their lessons.
- Lessons for KSs 2, 3, 4, and 5 will be delivered through both Telikilaas and Google Classroom. Teachers will check the student engagement and progress through Google Classroom.
- The lessons, worksheets, handouts, and other materials prepared will be uploaded to the MoE digital repository, Filaa portal. Schools will enter the students' attendance of Telikilaas and Google Classroom sessions to MEMIS.
- Islands with internet facilities at home can continue teaching, while the MoE makes mobile data arrangements for all students and staff (provided that they ensure all students have access to the internet and devices).

Any significant new practice will shape slowly and will take time to get refined. Therefore, even after the COVID-19 emergency is over, the MoE will consider running all schools two days a month via online/video conferencing, supported by Telikilaas.

The second area of focus is the **resumption of learning in schools** once they reopen. MoE will assess the readiness of schools for reopening, by using an adapted UNICEF checklist

compatible with the Maldives HPA guidelines. The MoE will develop all necessary and essential guidelines, and ensure the preparedness of all stakeholders for the resumption of schooling.

The MoE in close consultation with the NEOC and HPA will seek a **phased (or differentiated) and progressive reopening of schools**, starting in “safe islands” where there is no history of COVID-19 cases. A staggered approach where selected grades are opened at different times would be considered.

The MoE will ensure that health protocols, including physical distancing, are strictly followed, and adequate handwashing with “classroom” soap, as opposed to communal soap, are available. The ERP also advocates ensuring that school premises and classrooms are properly and regularly disinfected.

The **national curriculum subjects need condensation**, as the schools will not be able to cover the full syllabus identified for each respective grade. The NIE has already completed the process of curriculum adaption for KS 1-3. This is an opportunity for curriculum developers and trainers to encourage teachers for more creative ways of teaching and assessment. Additionally, the **secondary level examinations both local and external must be rescheduled**. While some have been rescheduled, others are yet to be done. This involves continuing discussions with University Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES).

MoE will enhance its **digital repository (FILAA portal)** to make it a one stop destination to obtain notes, worksheets, assignments, digital lesson and other teaching and learning resources catering to all grades and subjects. Further development will be brought to improve user experience, and to incorporate counts for views and comments on specific lessons.

The MoE will also develop and implement large-scale **remedial programmes** to mitigate learning loss and prevent exacerbation of learning inequality after school closures, with a focus on literacy and mathematics for primary-age children and selected subjects in lower secondary grades.

In line with the NCF, the post Covid-19 world offers opportunities for education systems to make innovative policy responses and look at improving the status quo and facilitating pedagogical renewal. More learner-centred pedagogical approaches can help promote reform-oriented teaching rather than relying on textbooks and rote learning methods. **Project-based learning (PBL)** is one such form of constructivist learning where students are provided opportunities to carry out investigations. The ERP calls to provide further emphasis on this approach to teaching and learning. Students engage in real-world, to pursue meaningful problems relevant to the different subject areas. This approach lets students investigate questions, propose ideas and explanations, discuss their ideas, challenge others' ideas, and try out new ideas. PBL will focus on the student as an active participant in the learning process that could foster more creativity.

Capacity building at the school level will need to be given greater importance than in the past, through school-based in-service training programmes of teachers, LTs, and other staff. Teachers will be supported in their training for online pedagogy and assessment, and distance learning. New policies on student assessment will have to be written to align with the condensed curriculum. The syllabi for KS 1, 2 and 3 have so far been completed and uploaded on the NIE website.

There is near universal enrollment of children at kindergarten and primary school age in the Maldives. With the school breakfast suspended or on hold due to budgetary difficulties following COVID-19 it would be important to ensure that **nutrition education** in the school system is further enhanced. It may be necessary to carry out additional work on promoting nutrition in school and the MoE can work with UNICEF to design and implement nutrition interventions for schools, creating health-conscious environments where children can cultivate life-long nutrition habits. Further refining MoE's School Nutrition Policy, production of resource materials to help teachers conduct nutrition sessions in the classroom will be important.

The role of school principals, teachers, and all other school staff will be crucial as schools resume teaching. They will have to make an extra effort in collaborating with local councils and NGOs to ensure that no child is left behind without attending schools. **Collaboration** with the island councils, the health centre/ hospital, and other stakeholders will be crucial as schools reopen.

The benefits of building a robust system and capacity for delivering distance learning in the Maldives go far beyond the immediate COVID-19 response. Distance learning is the "equity" solution that will ensure the delivery of quality education for the few numbers of students disbursed in small islands all over the Maldives. A highly qualified teacher can run the Teliklass and deliver lessons to students without regard to the physical distance and location. **Connectivity and distance learning** are the new norms in education. It is important to consider swapping/replacing all the tablets with tablets that have built in SIM cards to ensure connectivity of all students to e-learning.

The new norm of connectivity and distance learning brings significant opportunities for efficient financial spending and the use of human resources.

Schools will be resuming classes practically for about half the regular time. Hence, teachers need to extend additional engagement remotely. Schools will have to prepare for a 'new normal' in teaching, with a **hybrid/blended mode of learning**. Under this mode, on-site (in school) learning and technology-based remote learning will be pursued. This will require **training of all teachers** and respective school staff for the new mode of teaching, with continuous monitoring and mentoring. The ERP will seek greater involvement and more

active participation of Higher Education Institutions in **expanding pre-service teacher education programmes**.

Additionally, the MoE will seek services of **additional staff capacity** to devise and strengthen, and if necessary, set up new mechanisms at both the system and school levels. This will enable **customisation of MEMIS for COVID-19** related indicators and to better monitor and track absenteeism and students at risk of dropping out once schools reopen. MEMIS would also be refined to track data and information of students who move back to home islands from Male' and vice versa. The mechanism in place would be linked to the provision of targeted psychosocial and counseling support and referral systems.

8.3 Dimension C: Support to the most vulnerable

The third dimension in the ERP will focus on providing **support to the most vulnerable and at-risk students**. Special measures need to be in place to track children from low socio-economic backgrounds, adolescent girls, and children with disabilities who are at higher risk of dropout. Special support mechanisms may have to be in place for these children. There is concern among education officials, schoolteachers, and parents, that some vulnerable children, especially those from low socio-economic households, may face challenges in going to school. This could be more among children with SEN. The MoE will **develop a portal** to facilitate the identification and tracking of such students.

It will be essential to **provide safety assurance and psychosocial support to learners, teachers, and parents**. Furthermore, stimulation packages to be used at home would be provided before reopening. After reopening, additional incentives and material support may need to be provided for vulnerable children, regardless of gender, and those who may struggle in learning.

The schools would be expected to conduct **separate handwashing awareness campaigns for children with SEN**, as they are likely to take more time than regular students. In this regard, schools will have to ensure mastery of handwashing of children with autism and intellectual impairment, who require additional time than other students. The development of separate visual guidelines for physical distancing for children with Autism will be undertaken followed by dissemination to all relevant schools and SEN Units. SEN teachers require training on dealing with parents and students during pandemics.

8.4 Dimension D: Protection and wellbeing

The Maldives is a very closely-knit society, with a population of about 500,000 widely distributed in 188 inhabited islands. Teachers are linked through their family and other affiliations with many people in the community. Teachers have expressed concerns to the

MoE about **stress and life under the pandemic**, especially after the confirmation of the community spread followed by a lockdown with travel restrictions.

Amid a very fluid situation, there was a tremendous increase in instruction through circulars. The speed with which changing instructions reached schools through circulars was overwhelming. This has been noted to be **stressful both for principals and teachers**.

Additionally, the instructions also kept changing as the situation changed. The situation also exposed the lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities of principals and teachers on the instructions under emergency. Some of the principals and teachers lack the appropriate skills to lead and take necessary actions in this new situation.

Given the difficult and evolving situation, principals and teachers, appear to have performed as best as they could. It is important to **ensure that teachers are paid regularly and that their income is not affected** in any way at a time when the national budget is managed through cost reduction which includes reducing salaries. In the 'new normal' schooling, teachers are expected to work more, not less, and any reduction in overtime pay would be detrimental for teacher morale. Through consultation with the CSC, the MoE will work to obtain **flexible working arrangements** of attendance and sick leave too.

A second aspect to focus on is the need to **review existing SOPs and update** them as School Emergency Operational Plans (SEOPs). Once they are ready, they will be disseminated to all schools. All staff in all schools will need to orient to the new guidelines. While all documents will be shared digitally, some selected documents would require printing.

8.5 Dimension E: Building resilience and strengthening coordination

The ERP is also geared towards system-level strengthening beyond the immediate concerns of safety and continuity of learning. **Building system resilience** and preparing for further recurrences of COVID-19 cases in previously infected locations and/or outbreak in new islands, currently deemed 'safe islands' require system-level planning and institution/school level preparedness. In the case of the Maldives, environment, climate-related emergencies of significant magnitude, and future health crises can plunge the school sector into emergencies. To address such concerns, the MoE will undertake sector-wide crisis response and recovery exercises to develop appropriate planning frameworks and a plan. This will require the review of Disaster Management SOPs and incorporate issues related to the pandemic.

The MoE will **increase local capability in crisis-sensitive planning** in this sector. Local and external experts will be utilised for this exercise. The COVID-19 experience provides an excellent opportunity to learn and build on the lessons from the ad-hoc multiple responses to be better prepared in a more resilient manner for future emergencies. The use of technology during this pandemic has shown the potential for its wide application.

The new **ICT master plan for education** is in the last stage of finalisation and endorsement. The commencement of implementation of this plan is vital for the continuation of initiatives of the past few years in this area. A **new unit** will be established to facilitate the smooth implementation of the ICT master plan. Further **strengthening of data collection and dissemination through the MEMIS** will be undertaken. This will include strengthening the process of data gathering, data entering and monitoring techniques. It is important to streamline the data collection process within the entities of the MoE as well as the schools while ensuring accuracy and verification of data. While gender disaggregated data collection is important, it is equally vital to gather data along the lines of SEN and disability.

The cost-effective and sustainable **virtual learning solution** discussed earlier in the Part of the ERP is one of the key interventions to build the resilience of the education system to be able to minimise discretion and ensure continuity of learning in the future emergencies and crises.

Many lessons can be learned from the technology side as well. For the purpose of **knowledge enhancement and research**, the case of Maldives, from a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) perspective in responding to COVID-19 pandemic in the education sector, will be studied. Additional study will be undertaken to map and **study the phenomenon of children and families returning back to home islands** from Male' and vice versa. MEMIS will be used to track such movements of children between schools. A portal will be developed to capture and report information on student movement as a result of COVID-19.

A key focus that has emerged in importance is the need for wide **coordination amongst multiple stakeholders and partners**. The pandemic required daily high-level coordination with the NEOC, the HPA, MoGFSS, and many clusters that were formed under the emergency operation. Media, telecom companies, and individual groups of IT specialists too, have played a crucial role in assisting the MoE and schools in this pandemic. Many useful partnerships have been forged. It would be worthwhile to maintain and further strengthen the coordination among all stakeholders. The ERP identifies specific interventions and actions to achieve better and strengthened coordination.

The MoE will consider establishing a Social Platform that brings together the current and potential international partners to discuss ways of supporting the mitigation of the social impact of COVID19.

The specific activities under the five dimensions are presented in the Action Plan in Annex 4. A summary of the major inventions and indicative budget is provided in section 8.

9 Target beneficiaries

The following categories of beneficiaries and their respective numbers are identified for the ERP.

#	Beneficiaries /Groups	Number of beneficiaries		
		F	M	Total
4.1.	Pre-KG students (in private and community owned schools)	2,766	2,831	5,597
4.2.	K-12 students in government schools	36,271	38,535	74,806
4.3.	K-12 students in private and community schools	5,690	5,579	11,269
4.4.	All school Principals and Deputy Principals in the country			266
4.5.	All Leading Teachers			790
4.6.	All expatriate teachers	1,358	755	2,107
4.7.	All local teachers (trained)	5,613	1,152	6,765
4.8.	All untrained (Relief) teachers in government schools	770	93	863
4.9.	All School Counsellors			70
4.10.	All School Health Officers			90
4.11.	All admin, support and technical staff in government schools)			2,934
4.12.	Pre-service student teachers graduating in 2020 and joining schools			
4.13.	Vulnerable and at-risk children including the OOSC			600+
4.14.	Parents			of all students
4.15.	Disadvantaged and underperforming schools			55

9.1 Risk communication and stakeholder engagement

The following strategies will be employed for communication of the risks associated with the pandemic, and to achieve greater stakeholder engagement in the education sector:

- I. dispatching the Circulars on school response guidelines and instructions related to COVID-19 electronically;
- II. developing school level SOPs consistent with the MoE/HPA SOPs and guidelines;
- III. using mass media (TV, radio, online media outlets) where relevant, to disseminate relevant circulars;
- IV. using the MoE's Twitter and Facebook to disseminate relevant information;
- V. developing, printing, and disseminating Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials, targeting especially adults in general, teachers and parents specifically;
- VI. e-messaging in collaboration with telecom providers: Dhiraagu and Ooredoo;

- VII. disseminating guidance on homeschooling /cybersecurity and safety; and
- VIII. arranging for referrals, and where applicable, provide psychosocial support arising from COVID-19 related fears, stress, and other anxieties.

10 Possible scenarios to consider in school reopening

The challenge of the pandemic is unprecedented to all sectors and countries around the globe. Education has been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 19th April 2020, 191 countries had shut schools nationwide, impacting almost 1.6 billion learners which is 91.3% of total enrolled learners (United Nations, April 2020). In the Maldives, lives of over 86,000 K-12 students, and over 14, 000 school staff including over 9,000 teachers have been chaotically disrupted.

From a public health perspective, it is difficult to predict when schools can reopen safely, though some countries are cautiously opening-up. Based on the daily updates on the pandemic situation given by the authorities, it is reasonable to assume that the spread of infection in the Maldives is likely to continue, perhaps into the next few months, even with the imposition of a relatively tight lockdown. If the spread continues to increase at the current rate, and to more and/or new geographic locations across the archipelago, it will create new logistical nightmares, resulting in seriously stretching medical frontline staff and facilities, etc. A far stricter implementation, at least for the next 2-3 weeks may be a way forward, however unpopular and painful it may be for the public. With extremely limited means, the Maldives need to use what is within its power (i.e. physical distancing) to gain time to handle the spread in a way that is not chaotic and very painful.

An additional factor considered in assessing the projected growth of the pandemic is the potential spread of infection among populations living in a “communal” setting. Within the Greater Malé region where over one-third of the population resides, a framework of population density and congested living seems meaningful to consider. Physical distancing is almost impossible in such living conditions. This applies mainly, but not solely, to migrant workers, and many Maldivian households as well. A lot of migrant workers and some locals live in cramped, dense, and congested situations/households.

Given the fluidity, uncertain nature of the health emergency, and the complexity of factors in this country, there are no easy and straightforward planning paths to follow in the education sector. Hence, the MoE will consider at least two scenarios for the time being for planning purposes. Other scenarios could emerge as the pandemic situation unfolds.

The scenarios proposed are as follows:

Scenario 1: Prolonged school closure until the end of academic year 2020 and reopen in January 2021, with strict adherence to physical distancing and sanitisation protocols.

The extent and length of the school closures cannot be predicted with exactness. It is reasonable to assume that the schools may remain closed until the end of this academic year. This would be a relatively long period for the whole school system widely distributed in separate islands.

Therefore, it is also important to prepare for this eventuality as well. This scenario will understandably give more lead time for better preparation of the schools after nearly 7-8 months of closure. The physical facilities upgrading and identification of necessary resources, purchasing of resources by the MoE, and development partners where necessary, can fully utilise this additional time. Purchase in Malé can be sent in time to the schools. This scenario, however, does not bring a standstill or 'lockdown situation' for learning. Learning must commence at least in a limited manner via Telekilaas and Google classroom.

The following processes are identified for consideration.

Prior to reopening:

- (i) Make use of the rest of 2020 for planning and preparatory work to facilitate a smooth start of the 2021 academic year. Such planning and preparatory work include:
 - Management of the schools' new enrolment processes,
 - Teacher recruitment, allocation, appointment and redeployment processes,
 - Engagement with the Physical Facilities Development Section (PFDS) of the MoE concerning school physical upgrading, repairs, and maintenance work, with attention to WASH facilities.
- (ii) Train and put in place a core team of teachers well versed in ICT skills and key aspects of virtual learning to serve as a team that can be available for consultation and teacher support in virtual learning matters.
- (iii) Prepare a condensed curriculum focusing on essentials of key competencies primarily focusing on literacy (Dhivehi and English language), mathematic, and Islamic studies.
- (iv) Prepare and telecast Telikilass lessons complemented by additional tv programmes focusing on question and answer sessions by expert teachers, for the rest of 2020.
- (v) Develop and use of online/e-learning strategies (Google classroom,) for delivering the curriculum.
- (vi) Identify more cost-effective mechanisms options to use online teaching (e.g. provision of a dongle with sim card).
- (vii) Provide tablets to grade 1 and grade 2 students.

- (viii) Develop a contingency plan for the national and international examinations (the SSC, the GCE O' Level, and the IGSCCE).
- (ix) Conduct continuous adult education /awareness-raising programme for parents and adults in general on special topics related to COVID-19.
- (x) Conduct continuous parental awareness programmes, distance/remote learning, homeschooling and how to assist children at home for learning.
- (xi) Provide child protection/safeguarding and psychosocial support for students through various platforms.
- (xii) In schools where there are no counsellors, arrange a mechanism for online counselling through the counsellors on the job in other schools.
- (xiii) Consider online training of staff as counsellors.
- (xiv) Liaise regularly and coordinate with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), the NEOC, and HPA to share information and to keep abreast of the COVID-19 situation as it unfolds for the rest of the year.
- (xv) Set up an information-sharing mechanism with other stakeholders, including development partners.

After reopening

- (i) Review all protocols at the end of the 2nd week and adjust as necessary (Review will be based on health advice and infection trends across the country and specific islands).
- (ii) Schools should maintain good communication with parents, providing up-to-date information about arrangements for study and other activities.
- (iii) Based on the WHO, UNICEF, and HPA guidelines, reinforce frequent handwashing, sanitation, and procure needed supplies.
- (iv) Every island/school should practice and plan for distance/virtual learning days every year. Distance/virtual learning isn't just for pandemics; it's also for times when schools would otherwise be closed — whether for heavy rain, tsunami or other emergency events.
- (v) Establish a mechanism to get feedback from parents, students, teachers on things that need improvement.

Scenario 2: Schools reopening later in 2020 (possibly during August/September) on a date recommended by the HPA and approved by the government, with strict adherence to physical distancing and sanitisation protocols.

Once a decision, based on science, is reached to reopen schools, effective measures must be put into place to prevent the transmission of the virus at the school level. Since there is “inconclusive evidence around the infection risks related to school attendance” (p. 2, UNESCO, UNICEF, The World Bank, WFP, 2020), the MoE will take a cautious and careful approach to reopening, based on the HPA’s recommendation.

Parents must be informed that when reopening schools, the top priority will be safety, not only of students but the whole community. Studies of prior epidemics show that schools can be a major source of disease transmission. While more research is needed to shed light on the transmission of COVID-19 by children, the MoE must inform parents that schools will not reopen until public health experts are confident that it is safe to do so.

The MoE may need to give schools flexibility, waivers, or even make changes to the MoE regulations around the number of days of this academic year, academic calendar, minimum instructional time, student testing, school prize giving and promotion requirements, reporting deadlines, and so forth. Another important consideration to be made is to provide as much advance notice to schools of the plan for when and how schools will reopen, so that schools, in turn, can inform families. With plenty of notice, people can plan, rather than keep pushing out the date every week or two and forcing families to readjust multiple times.

Under the first scenario, approval to reopen may be restricted to some grades. Higher grades could open first, followed by lower grades after careful monitoring of the situation.

The MoE will work closely with its partners to put the following into place at the Ministry, its departments, and at every school.

Prior to reopening:

- (i) Prepare for progressive reopening as per HPA guidelines for ease of restrictions.
- (ii) Review/develop school emergency and contingency plans for COVID-19. Every school must have a school-specific emergency and contingency plan for COVID-19.
- (iii) Develop a guideline for every staff about their work.
- (iv) Review and revise the school health education policy.
- (v) Develop and disseminate school disinfection policy/manual.
- (vi) Conduct a thorough orientation to all the staff specially the support staff (who may not be able to adjust to the new normal) on disinfection and cleaning the school area.

- (vii) Preparing well for IPC measures on cleaning – surface cleaning will be a major part in classrooms
- (viii) Ensure that every school has access to clean water, adequate WASH facilities including “classroom soap”, as opposed to communal soap. The MoE, together with its partners will work to ensure this is readily available at all schools nationwide. *[Students to bring individual soap suggested by HPA to minimize handling of the bottle by multiple students].*
- (ix) Establish hand hygiene facilities as available (entry, exit, classroom, toilet, lunchroom).
- (x) Ensure good ventilation, especially in offices/classrooms that are air-conditioned.
- (xi) Reassess and provide free breakfast only to those who genuinely need this service. Consider options for providing food rations or transferring into money.
- (xii) Develop and activate a contingency plan for continuity of learning during the lockdown.
- (xiii) Strengthen the staff capacity of ESQID/MoE.
- (xiv) Curriculum/syllabus condensation to be completed, with a selection of key subjects, competencies, and time allocation identified.
- (xv) Make arrangements for continuing classes for students on quarantine.
- (xvi) Arrange a mechanism for catch-up of learning for students who are positive and are kept in isolation, as some of them might not be psychologically able to study while in isolation if positive.
- (xvii) Inform parents that all children who have comorbidities such as Thalassemia, severe asthma, diabetes, other lung conditions, should be seen by a doctor before starting in person classes. For all such students alternative arrangements (online learning) must be made in place of face to face classes.
- (xviii) All staff and students must wear masks. *[Awaiting more guidelines from HPA].*
- (xix) Orienting parents about the new protocols and guidelines to be followed in ‘new normal’ schools.
- (xx) Training and orienting all teachers to the new condensed curriculum, new protocols and guidelines for ‘new normal’ schools.

Reopening process:

- (i) Institute new school day/programme:
 - Implement progressive reopening as per HPA guidelines.
 - Distribute schools in to 4 or 5 bands based on enrolment and instruct /guide the schools to work out practicalities for progressive reopening and staggered attendance of students and inform the MoE in writing. Two or possibly three and four sessions (depending on the enrollment may have to be considered in some schools. Different grades will come at different timings or different days.

Alternatively, two days of schooling could be considered for FS and KS 1 and 2, with 3 days of schooling for all other grades.

- The MoE to support schools to make their own arrangements around staggered starts, breaks and staff mealtime (where applicable) to help reduce physical contact in common areas and staff rooms.
- Arrange 4-day school attendance for children, with one day for teachers to prepare for teaching (mid-week suggested). Attendance data must be collected through MEMIS. Students who do not return to school must be identified and reached.
- Arrange a mechanism for catch-up of learning for students who are positive and are kept in isolation, as some of them might not be psychologically able to study while in isolation if positive.
- For those who have comorbidities such as Thalassemia, severe asthma, diabetes, other lung conditions, alternative arrangements (online learning) must be made in place of face to face classes.
- Class arrangements: Distribute tables and chairs for half the class at a time, again depending on the enrolment. Class for shorter timings
- Assemblies once a week in schools where proper physical distancing can be enforced, playtime /indoor games under supervision once a week, creative physical education activities with physical distancing in open spaces.
- Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces. E.g.: tabletops, stair railing, doorknob, play equipment, etc. This would be compulsory in between sessions every school day. Students may be taught to clean/disinfect their desks and chairs on a daily basis before leaving the school.
- Schools will be required to monitor and confirm weekly that the revised cleaning arrangements are complied with.
- Cancel any events other than the class timings.

(ii) Institutionalise physical distancing through:

- Increasing physical space between staff/workers at the worksite (enforce minimum distance of 3 feet between people)
- Smaller class sizes, physical distancing, and hygiene and sanitization protocols.
- Staggering work schedules (different timings for starting / finishing office achieved through arrangements of entry and leaving at different times)
- Decreasing social contacts in the workplace (e.g., limit in-person meetings (encourage video conference), limit meeting for lunch in a break/tearoom, etc.).
- Parents and visitors will not be allowed on the school compound, instead, they will need to drop children off at the gate and collect at the gate when school is over.

- Use of parent cards may be considered to avoid potential issues arising from children from broken families.
 - In schools with lifts, there must be measures to regulate the number of people using it at a time. Hand sanitisation should also be kept at lifts.
- (iii) Provide extra support for vulnerable and at-risk students and staff (including teachers) who may be unwell or who have a disability.
- (iv) Arrange a space designated as a health room, where such a room is not available.
- (v) Schools that do not have School Health Officers/Assistants to arrange with the Island Health Centre/Hospital to provide support as needed throughout this emergency. Consider hiring untrained staff, where possible and provide short intensive training. Such training may also be given to selected /interested staff from the school.

Focus on teaching and learning

- (vi) Train and put in place a core team of teachers well versed in ICT skills and key aspects of virtual learning to serve as a resource group who can be available for consultation and teacher support.
- (vii) Continue online teaching and submission of assignments, where relevant.
- (viii) Special attention should be given to upper grades of 10, 11, and 12.
- (ix) A mechanism is to be developed for the students in higher grades especially those who will sit national level as well as international examinations in the year 2020 (e.g. attending schools with strict adherence to physical distancing requirements.)
- (x) Accelerate the identification of health and safety-related activities and integrate into lesson plans.
- (xi) Increase online delivery/interaction to complement the face-to-face teaching. MoE to develop a guideline for this.
- (xii) Minimise sharing of laptops and disinfect in between.
- (xiii) Train teachers, LTs, principals, and parents (including members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)) in the Psychological First Aid (PFA) (based on the WHO guidelines), the WHO guidelines on how to help children cope with COVID-19 and UNICEF guidelines on how to talk to children about COVID-19.
- (xiv) Train a set number of teachers/school staff, and parents to identify COVID-19 symptoms using the HPA/WHO guidelines.
- (xv) Based on the HPA/WHO guidelines, train teachers to implement preventative measures at the school level (e.g. physical distancing, proper handwashing, respiratory hygiene, etc.).
- (xvi) Provide extra support for vulnerable and at-risk students and staff (including teachers) who may be unwell or who have a disability.
- (xvii) Maintain good ventilation
- (xviii) Promote hand hygiene vigorously
- (xix) Cleaning and disinfection of workspaces

- (xx) Screening at the entry to school (for temperature and symptoms):
- Checking the temperature of children and staff at the gate.
 - Check respiratory symptom screening of staff and visitors entering buildings (if feasible)
 - Ensure a procedure for separating sick students and staff from those who are well (without creating stigma), and instill a process for informing parents/caregivers, and consult with the HPA
 - Vulnerable high-risk students needing psychosocial support to attend schools with physical distancing.

After reopening

- (i) Review all safe school protocols at the end of the 2nd week and adjust as necessary (review will be based on advice from relevant authorities including the HPA and the MoGFSS and infection trends across the country and specific islands).
- (ii) Schools should maintain good communication with parents, providing up-to-date information about arrangements for study and other activities.
- (iii) Based on the WHO, UNICEF, and HPA guidelines, reinforce frequent handwashing and sanitation, and procure needed supplies.
- (iv) Continue training of teachers, LTs, principals, and parents in Psychological First Aid (PFA) (based on the WHO guidelines), the WHO guidelines on how to help children cope with COVID-19 and the UNICEF guidelines on how to talk to children about COVID-19.
- (v) Activate flexibility in school policy on attendance and sick/medical leave. Priority would be given to protect staff who are considered high risk. High-risk people and those who are above 60 years may be asked to stay at home. Changing such rules and regulations would require consultations with the Civil Service Commission (CSC).
- (vi) Keep posters near the school gates (or around the school, where and when applicable), giving information to parents on topics related to the pandemic, safety and good hygiene.
- (vii) Conduct research in collaboration with HPA.
- (viii) Assessment and evaluation of learning would be undertaken by the respective schools Attendance data must be collected through MEMIS. Students who do not return to school must be identified and reached.
- (ix) This would also require changes in the assessment policy.

A possible variation of Scenario 2:
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Malé and some parts of the Greater Malé region and a few outer islands are directly affected by the spread of COVID-19. This region is under strict lockdown. Teachers and parents, as well as students in the uninfected islands (and not affected by strict lockdown), will not be in the same mental state as those in Malé and the Greater Malé region and the few outer islands affected.

With the introduction of new measures for internal travel (plus internal border controls) the islands not affected by COVID-19 infection are likely to remain even safer.

So, the possibility of differentiated school reopening and continuity of learning measures could be considered. Considering current inequities in the education system, it is children in the outer islands who will have more to lose due to school closure/lack of opportunity for education. This makes policy matters less neat and more complex but, in the interest of children's right to education, this variation to Scenario 1 may be worth considering.

This variation could be considered as a pilot exercise, in which measures for the 'new normal' can be practiced and assessed before being implemented in bigger schools in the atolls and in schools in the Greater Male' Region. With the increase in capacity for testing, contact tracing, and isolating, differentiated reopening of school makes sense. Islands with smaller enrolments that have not been infected so far could start with physical distancing and all IPC measures, as mentioned for scenarios 1, followed by others under little or no restrictions.

Following the reopening of schools, teachers may need to identify children who, due to various reasons (including those related to disadvantage and lack of access to distance learning) have fallen further behind. Principals interviewed, have noted that one of the first priorities would be to attend to the mental, emotional and psychosocial needs of their students. It would be incumbent on the school management and teachers to re-establish the supportive and comforting relationships and routines of the school and classrooms. All children would have fallen behind in varying degrees in their grade level studies; some more so. Teachers would need to quickly develop individual plans to identify and fill in the gaps in learning for each student to make progress. The MoE, through its QAD should consider assisting schools to make use of high-quality diagnostic tests which will be critical in assessing how much ground has been lost in reading and mathematics.

The next step would be for teachers to develop plans for each pupil to make progress, aimed at getting them to grade level as soon as possible. Since, class size would be affected, the plans should involve as much small-group instruction as possible, with children grouped according to their current reading or mathematics levels. If necessary, and if possible, those who are furthest behind could get regular one-on-one tutoring from specialists. Schools that do not have such specialists may in the new learning environment be more willing and comfortable to ask for help, literally from any other school in the country. Parents of such children should be provided with information on how they can help the children in catching up.

The HPA has recently shared with the MoE the following schedule for differentiated and progressive reopening of schools.

Phase One:	Week 1 and 2	June week and 2	All schools remain closed
	Week 3 and 4	June week 3 and 4	All schools remain closed
Phase Two:	Week 1& 2	July week 1 and 2	Start KS 4 and 5 (Grades 9-12). (July 1 st)
	Week 3 & 4	July week 3 and 4	Start KS 3 (Grades 7 and 8)
	Week 5 & 6	Last week of July and Aug week 1 and 2	Start KS 1 and 2 (Grades 1-6)
	Week 7 & 8	Aug week 3 and 4	Continue classes for KS 1-5.
Phase Three:	Sept	Sept 1 st onwards	Reopen Preschools, Day care Centre, Tution Classes and Quran Classes

At the time of finalising the ERP, the MoE was in consultation with the HPA to open schools for all the grades in all COVID free islands for KS 1 to 5 on the 1st of July. The MoE will communicate accordingly with all the schools about preparations for reopening.

PART C

11 Indicative budget

The ERP is structured over five dimensions, each composing interventions and activities which are essential to ensure the continuity of education of students and provide safe learning environments. The total financing requirement to fully implement the ERP is estimated at US\$ 22.91 million, including 2 main capital development activities. These two activities, namely the construction of a single session school in a high-density location and the construction of 50 new classrooms in selected schools in the atolls, are medium to long term targets. The two activities, included in the ERP to address the issue of overcrowding in more populous regions, together are costed at US\$ 13.4 million (58% of the total budget), and are currently not financed.

With the total financing gap of the ERP estimated at US\$ 22.91 million, urgent action is required to seek and mobilize financing towards activities in a way that would enable the implementation schedule to be met. Some of this financing could be from the domestic budget, possibly by reallocating expected savings from expenditure reductions due to the closure of schools. The immediate focus should be on meeting the financing needs for the implementation of activities planned for the immediate and short to medium term, which amounts to US\$ 9.55 million.

The following table provides a summary of the major interventions and the indicative budget of the ERP.

COVID-19 Education Response Plan Indicative Budget 2020-2021			
#	Interventions	Timeframe	Indicative Budget (USD)
Dimension A: Safety			
A1	Ensure safe return to schools	Immediate	291,100
A2	Construction/upgrading of WASH facilities in schools (age- and gender appropriate toilets, hand washing stations and drinking water facilities including filtration and storage).	Immediate	1,216,705
A3	Cleaning and disinfection of school premises.	One week before re-opening, and later deep cleaning every weekend.	2,108,173
A4	Conducting awareness campaigns in schools	Immediate	22,500
A5	Revise relevant school staffing and personnel policies as are applicable during the emergency.	Immediate	0
A6	Review of protocols and practices in place.	Re-open + 3 weeks	0
A7	Infrastructure to ease overcrowding in schools.	Medium to Long Term	13,353,500
Sub-Total of A			16,991,978
Dimension B: Continuity of learning			
B1	Access to learning: initial mitigation response for continuity of learning	May 2020	58,500
B2	Curriculum condensation	Immediate (Partially achieved)	7,000
B3	Re-commence learning that was stopped after Male' lockdown, and support continuity of learning.	May 2020	0
B4	Support through development and printing of learning packages for Foundation Stage students	Immediate	40,000
B5	Enhancing teacher effectiveness for improved student learning	Immediate	131,192
B6	Sustaining the innovative distance education learning model through tele class (local brand name Telikilaas)	Immediate -Medium Term	4,937,870
B7	Re-arrangement of high-stake (secondary level examinations and Higher Secondary Certificate examination.	Achieved	0
B8	Capacity building of staff in mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) needs.	Immediate & Short Term	25,800
B9	Training of teachers	Immediate	0
Sub-Total of B			5,200,362

Dimension C: Reaching the vulnerable			
C1	Strengthen the professional capacity of ESQID to meet the growing demand in the SIQAAF dimension of Health and Safety.	Immediate	294,500
C2	Provide psycho-social support to students, teachers, parents and caregivers.	Immediate/Short to Medium Term	55,833
C3	Identification of high risk students and provide adequate support.	Immediate/ongoing	98,133
C4	Conduct awareness through non-formal adult education programmes on key pandemic related topics.	Short to Medium Term	0
Sub-Total of C			448,466
Dimension D: Protection and well being			
D1	Psychosocial counselling for students.	Immediate and ongoing	0
D2	Review, update and disseminate the School Emergency Operational Plans (SEOP)	Immediate to short term	1,750
D3	Stimulus package for disadvantaged groups	Immediate and ongoing	4,850
D4	Conduct a risk assessment for staff	Short term	0
Sub-Total of D			6,600
Dimension E: Building resilience and strengthening coordination			
E1	Building resilience for emergency preparedness (At system and school level)	Short to Medium Term	77,000
E2	Strengthening monitoring and evaluation with respect COVID-19 response in the education sector.	Immediate and ongoing	74,860
E3	Establish online/remote coordination facilities and modality.	Short to Medium Term	10,000
E4	Develop parental awareness on how to support home-based learning.	Immediate	33,500
E5	Knowledge enhancement and research	Medium Term	65,000
Sub-Total of E			260,360
GRAND TOTAL (USD)			22,907,765

A more detailed action plan outlining the activities under major interventions related to each respective dimension is given in Annex 4.

12 Monitoring the ERP

The COVID-19 situation is fluid, evolving, and uncertain. As such, the ERP of the Maldives needs to be regularly monitored for its implementation, by various actors, and for timely achievement of activities. However, because the situation is fluid, it is also important to aim to minimise stringent reporting requirements to all partners, while at the same time providing regular and required information about the progress of implementation. It is important to liaise closely with the NEOC, the HPA, and other relevant clusters, to ensure alignment with the Maldives National Response Plan.

For monitoring and evaluation of the plan, the COVID-19 Education Response Team already set up at the MoE will play a key role in monitoring. This team will be transformed into the COVID-19 Education Response Plan Oversight Committee (**COVID-19 ERPOC**) with additional members from the MoGFSS, the MoHE, the HPA, UNICEF, and the Maldives Red Crescent (MRC).

The COVID-19 EROC will meet bi-monthly in the first quarter. The frequency of meetings could be reviewed at the end of this period. Regular conduct and participation in this monitoring will be critical to maintaining strong coordination among all partners. This will not only allow to strengthen the partnership and collaboration but will also facilitate the identification of gaps and further needs in the sector as it responds to a fluid and evolving situation. All meetings will be conducted online (e.g. Google Meet or Zoom).

The PPRD will assume the **lead role** in the monitoring of the ESPRP. The monitoring of the implementation of specific activities will be carried out within the overall monitoring of the COVID-19 National Response Plan. The PPRD will provide progress reports to the PO as required.

The implementing departments shall submit their reports on a fortnightly basis to the PPRD via MEMIS. Based on the submissions, the Division will develop summaries to disseminate, identify gaps and possible duplications, and recommend ways to strengthen the coordination of the ESPRP.

Review meetings shall be coordinated and convened by the PPRD. Progress will be monitored against the meeting of the suggested Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Based on the progress reports, necessary adjustments will be shared with the SMT of the MoE by the PPRD, on behalf of the COVID-19 EROC. Changes necessary to the realisation of interventions and enabling factors such as resources, physical, human and financial, should be examined from time to time.

Under the guidance of the COVID-19 EROC, a **comprehensive biannual review** shall be organised. All relevant sections, divisions, and departments, and selected schools would be invited to the biannual reviews. The PPRD and respective implementing agencies/departments shall provide technical inputs to this biannual review.

A detailed results framework is provided in Annex 5.

13 Coordination and implementation arrangements

The ERP will be implemented by the MoE with the support of several partners. The collaborating partners identified are:

The MoH, the HPA, the NEOC, TAG, the MoGFSS, the MoHE, WHO, UNICEF, the World Bank, WHO, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Teachers' Association of Maldives (TAM), the CSC, the MRC, Dhiraagu, Ooredoo, PSM, Dhivehi Channel, Munnaaru TV, and all HEIs who train pre-service teachers.

Within the MoE, the oversight for the ERP will be with the PPRD. Specific activities are assigned to respective and most relevant departments/sections/institutions under the MoE. These are identified in the Action Plan table.

The ERP reiterates the calls for the revival of the TRCs through a more collaborative/professional (rather than an administrative/authoritative) model that provides sufficient resources and facilities (especially digital facilities), and greater autonomy to these atoll-level structures. These centres, with essential resources established through UNICEF support, need reconceptualising and reactivating. They further need to be supported with additional resources to handle new training tasks, especially through online /video conference mediums. A concrete and specific structure and arrangements within which the TRCs will become an integral part of capacity building, needs to be finalised soon. The NIE can take the lead in this, to work with a group of principals and the TRC Coordinators to develop a draft document and share it with all TRCs and schools associated with the centres.

Inter-ministry coordination is of utmost importance for the success of this ERP. The MoE will proactively seek a stronger and well-coordinated whole-of-government approach in the implementation of this plan. The Social Council at the President's Office (PO) will facilitate high-level inter-ministerial coordination.

All development partners of the Maldives, especially those who are associated more closely with the education sector, have played a crucial role so far in their timely response to the emergency of the pandemic. The role of these international partners is vital in the months and years to come as Maldives weans out of the pandemic and tries to regain and recover students' lost time in learning. Continuation and close collaboration with UNICEF, the World Bank, the GPE, WHO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, the Commonwealth, ICESCO and other bilateral partners will be a priority for the MoE.

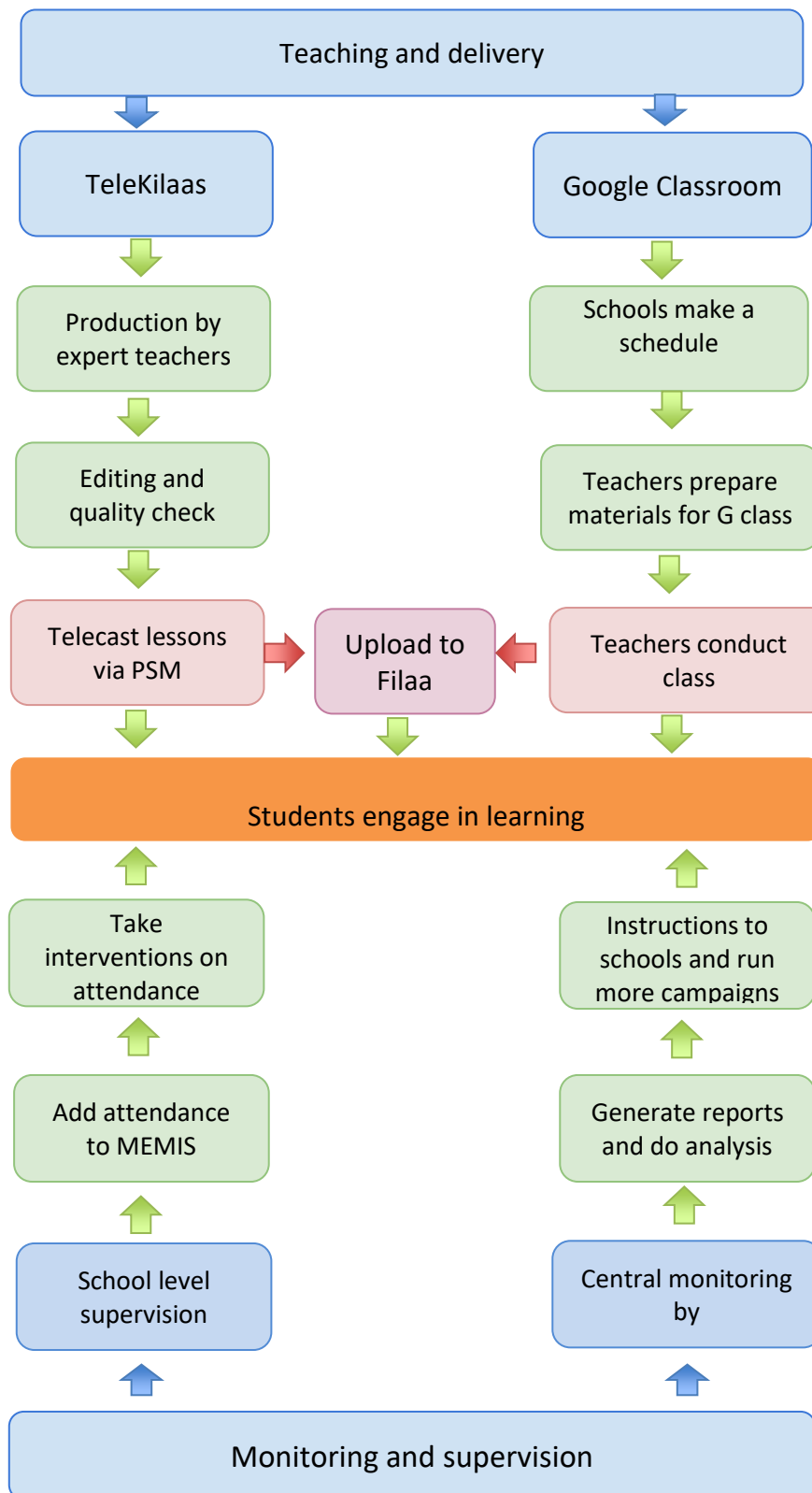
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Annex 1: List of Government schools with both Counsellors and Health Officers, May 2020

#	Atoll	School	# of Counsellors	# of Health Officers
1	HA	Ihavandhoo School	2	2
2	HDh	Nolhivaranfaru School	1	1
3	Sh	Foakaidhoo School	1	1
4	Sh	Milandhoo School	1	1
5	N	Maafaru School	1	1
6	N	Meyna School	1	1
7	R	Raa. Maduvaree School	1	1
8	R	Raa Atoll Education Centre	1	1
9	R	Duvaafaru Primary School	1	1
10	B	Baa Atoll Education Centre	1	2
11	Lh	Lhaviyani Atoll Education Centre	1	1
12	K	Maafushi School	1	1
13	ADh	Dhigurah School	1	1
14	Th	Madifushi School	1	1
15	Th	Hirilandhoo School	1	1
16	Th	Kinbidhoo School	1	1
17	GDh	Mohamed Jamaluddin School	1	2
18	S	Sharafuddin School	1	1
19	S	Maradhoo School	1	2
20	Male'	Aminiya School	1	1
21	Male'	Iskandhar School	1	1
22	Male'	Jamaluddin School	1	2
23	Male'	Arabiyyathul Islaamiyya School	1	2
24	Male'	Majeediyya School	5	2
25	Male'	Thaajuddeen School	1	2
26	Male'	Centre for Higher Secondary Education	1	2
27	Vilimale'	Muhyiddin School	2	2
28	Hulhumale'	Huravee School	1	2
29	Hulhumale'	Rehendhi school	1	1

Annex 2: Teaching and learning during lockdown – the Concept Chart



Annex 3: Timeline of initial key measures and responses by the MoE

The following is a brief timeline of events of the MoE preparedness measures, initial responses leading towards school closure, and subsequent responses to continue learning.

Timeline	Preparedness measures and responses of the education sector
February	Identification of arranging psychosocial support to 75 students from various schools who were at the highest risk. This involved daily telephone contact with the students.
First week of March	<p>The MoE issued an SOP to all schools outlining the ways the MoE and schools will respond and communicate during the different public health risk levels for COVID-19, outlined by the HPA.</p> <p>This is one of the first preparedness measures taken by the MoE.</p> <p>The MoE established COVID-19 Education Response Team.</p>
8-12 th March 2020	<p>All schools closed for a scheduled mid-term break of one week. Hence, children did not attend schools from 6th March onwards, as 6th and 7th were the weekends before the break.</p> <p>Although not planned as a preparedness measure concerning COVID-19, this scheduled closing of the entire school system is believed to have contributed well (though not scientifically validated) in minimising and slowing down the spread of the COVID-19. This week was used to prepare the contingency education plan (by the MoE) and the contingency schemes of work (by the schools).</p>
10 th March 2020	The MoE issued its Circular no: 22-E/CIR/2020/22 (signed by the Minister), instructing schools to emphasize the importance of proper handwashing, teach all students to properly hand wash, and ensure that all schools have proper and adequate handwashing facilities. Even prior to the Circular, information sessions on Covid-19 and awareness on general hand hygiene was conducted in many schools.
12 th March 2020	<p>After extending the mid-term break for a week, the MoE issued its Circular: 22-E/CIR/2020/28 (signed by the Minister), instructing schools on how to act when teaching is temporarily suspended in schools.</p> <p>This Circular, which served as an interim contingency plan, gives guidance on minimum curriculum time for the various Key Stages (KSs) and stipulates the roles and responsibilities of the school heads, Leading Teachers (LTs), heads of departments (HODs), teachers, students, and parents.</p>

For all practical purposes, this Circular of 12th March is one for school closure, rather than one for the extension of the mid-term break for one week.

14th March 2020

The first government directive that affected education institutions came from the DGPH on 14th March 2020, just one day before the schools were set to reopen after the mid-term break, from the Director General of Public Health. This came in the form of precautionary measures which read as follow:

“Pursuant to the powers vested by Section 34(c) of the Public Health Protection Act (7/2012), the Director General of the Public Health of the Maldives, hereby takes the following precautionary measure, to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Maldives.

All universities, colleges, and other academic institutions are required to temporarily suspend all activities on campus for 2 (two) weeks, effective from today” (HPA Directive No. 2020/7, 14th March 2020, 14:00hrs).

15th March 2020

Under Article 33 of the Public Health Protection Act of the Maldives, the Minister of Health declared a State of Public Health Emergency for 30 days.

Following this declaration, and based on a Cabinet decision, the President’s Office (PO) directed to stop all face-to-face education activities and closed all schools and educational institutions from 15th March onwards.

The MoE, in collaboration with the Public Service Media (PSM), broadcasted pre-recorded Telekilaas programmes targeted to students studying in Grades 10 and 11, via PSM's YES TV channel. These were grades from where students will be sitting for the General Certificate of Education (GCE)/International General Certificate of Secondary Examinations (IGCSE) Ordinary Level (O’ Level)/Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations and Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS Level) examinations this year.

The Telikilaas followed the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), and the timetables for the classes were shared with parents via the MoE’s Twitter feed, Facebook, as well as the respective schools.

The pre-recorded classes can be accessed on YouTube, Facebook, and the Ministry's online portal. The Telikilass were supplemented by digital online classes using Google Classroom or Zoom.

16 th March 2020	<p>The MoE issued its Circular number: 22-E/CIR/2020/28 (signed by the Minister), instructing schools to ensure continuity of education during the State of Public Health Emergency.</p> <p>MoE in collaboration with Maldives Police Service (MPS) launched a handbook for parents on cyber safety.</p>
24 th March 2020	The MoE announced the postponement of the Advanced Supplementary (AS) level examinations from May/June to Oct/Nov.
27 th March 2020	The MoE issued its Circular Note (signed by the Senior Policy Director), to all schools, outlining how to conduct teaching from 29 th March to 2 nd April 2020.
1 st April 2020	The MoE issued its Circular Letter: 22-E/CIR/2020/30 (signed by the Minister), outlining a capacity building programme on online teaching for all teachers. The Circular outlines a programme for the training of teachers as well as school leaders for “G Suite,” paving the way for effective utilisation of Google Classroom for teaching purposes. This programme aims to train 7,000 teachers. Out of this, 2,000 will be trained initially with financial support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).
2 nd April 2020	The MoE teamed up with Cambridge University Press (CUP) to ensure that all teachers can continue their lessons uninterrupted during the emergency. Teachers and students could access their Cambridge books in their digital classroom via Cambridge Elevate Platform.
8 th April 2020	The MoE issued its Circular number 22-E/CIR/2020/32 (signed by the Minister), announcing the establishment of an education repository by the name of “Filaa”. This portal was launched for the purpose of making available the digital content produced by the MoE and teachers. The policy guideline to manage the portal was attached to the Circular.
21 st April 2020	<p>The Department of Inclusive Education (DoIE) issued a circular letter number 476/GS-72/2020/3 Signed by the Director General) to all the schools with guidelines for dealing with Special Education Needs (SEN) students and their parents.</p> <p>SEN teachers or the LTs will respond to parents’ concerns regarding supporting SEN students.</p>
29 th April 2020	The MoE issued its Circular: 22-E/CIR/2020/33 (signed by the Minister), regarding the postponement of the Cambridge GCE and IGSCCE O’ Level examinations and the SSC (local examination for

Dhivehi language and Islamic Studies). Dates for these examinations have not been set, but options are being considered by the MoE.

The Circular also indicated that the assignment submission dates for the Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) students will be reviewed.

May 2020

Plan to re-start learning during lockdown.

Curriculum revision/adaptation

Continuation of psychosocial support.

Providing care packages.

Learning and stimulation packages to SEN students.

Re start of Telikilaas and Google classroom.

Physical assessment of schools for readiness.

Certified disinfection of schools currently used as health facilities.

Collecting information on students and teachers planning to change place of enrolment or work.

Annex 4: This is an internal document

Annex 5: Results Framework: This is an internal document