I. Introduction and Context

Country Context

The Republic of Maldives, a multi-island nation of spectacular natural beauty, is one of the most advanced economies in South Asia and classified as a middle income country. The Maldives consists of an archipelago of nearly 1,200 islands and a population of approximately 400,000 inhabitants: 310,000 Maldivians and 90,000 expatriate workers. More than 25 percent of the population live in Male’, the capital, while the rest are distributed among just under 200 other inhabited islands. The country ranked 109’th in the human development index (HDI) for 2011, which was the second highest HDI rank in South Asia after Sri Lanka. The Maldives is seeking to accelerate human development and promote economic prosperity. The expansion and development of human capital is central to the country’s strategy to achieve this goal.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

The Maldivian education system consists of the following stages: primary education (grades 1-7, ages 6-12), lower secondary education (grades 8-10, ages 13-15) higher secondary education (grades 11-12, ages 16-17), and higher education (ages 18 onwards). The overall net primary enrolment rate, 96 percent, is high. There is also gender parity, with the net primary enrollment for boys at 95 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate for girls at 96 percent. The net lower secondary enrollment rate is 84 percent, with boys net enrollment at 81 percent and girls net
Despite these achievements the education system faces a number of future challenges. There is a sharp drop in enrollment at the higher secondary education level. The higher secondary education net enrollment rate is a mere 17 percent, with boys net enrollment at 18 percent and girls net enrollment at 16 percent. Gross enrollment rates in higher secondary education are 22 percent for boys and 20 percent for girls. This is one of the most steep falls between lower secondary and higher secondary education in the world. The main reason for the sharp drop in participation at the higher secondary level is the limited number of schools offering education in grades 11-12. Out of 225 schools in the Maldives, until recently less than 10 schools provided high secondary education. Enrollment in higher education is also low, just 3 percent. The Maldives lags behind in higher secondary and tertiary education participation in relation to other small island nations. Policy action to expand higher secondary and tertiary education is now needed urgently.

The quality of education at all levels is another major policy challenge facing the Maldives. For instance, learning outcomes in both primary and secondary education are modest and there is substantial regional disparity. National assessments of learning outcomes at grade 4 and grade 7 show that learning levels are unsatisfactory. At grade 4 the average score of students in English is 32 percent and in mathematics 38 percent. In grade 8 the average score of students in English is 29 percent and in mathematics 30 percent. The performance of students at national examinations is also inadequate. At the General Certificate of Examinations (GCE O/L) in 2010 only 33 percent of boys and 37 percent of girls passed.

The Government of Maldives (GoM) is aware of the challenges in the education sector. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has an education development program to address these challenges. The MoE program has increased the number of schools offering higher secondary education in atolls where there are sufficient student numbers to make this expansion viable. Now 38 schools provide higher secondary education: 4 schools in Male’ and 34 schools in the atolls. In addition, the MoE is promoting private-public partnerships to increase tertiary education opportunities.

The education development program is also addressing the low quality of education through several strategic initiatives. The MoE has developed the concept of a quality assurance (QA) system containing both internal school level reviews and external reviews of quality. The QA system now needs to be pilot tested, refined and scaled up throughout the country. The MoE is also seeking to improve the quality of teachers through suitable pre-service teacher education and continuing teacher development programs, especially school-based teacher professional development (SBTPD). The strengthening of management and leadership skills among school principals, too, is key importance in the MoE program. A further strategic initiative is the development of a system of regular national assessments of learning outcomes, which can then feed into policy formulation and program development.

Relationship to CAS
An Interim Strategy Note (ISN) is under preparation. The development of the education sector has been identified as of one the key areas for Bank support under the ISN. The previous Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) identified education as an important area for the Bank’s knowledge engagement. The proposed project builds on the knowledge generated through two education reports during FY11-12. The project also builds on lessons learned from previous education projects in the Maldives.
II. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s) (From PCN)
The project development objective is to develop and strengthen quality assurance of primary and secondary education, and increase access to higher secondary and tertiary education.

Key Results (From PCN)
The success of the project in terms of meeting its key objectives are to be measured by the following indicative outcomes:
- The establishment of a regular and recurring cycle of Quality Assurance for schools in all atolls.
- Increased enrollment in higher secondary and tertiary education.

Baseline information on these outcomes will be obtained during project preparation. Thereafter, information on the outcomes will be collected during project implementation as part of monitoring and evaluation.

A possible set of intermediate outcomes are given in Appendix One.

III. Preliminary Description

Concept Description
The ESDP will support the GoM education development program. The ESDP will be organized at two levels: (a) front line school-level activities; and (b) supporting central-level activities.

Component One: Front line School-Level Development Activities

The final outcomes of the project will be at this level. The ESDP will support innovative development initiatives at the frontline school level.

Quality Assurance

The Maldives has developed a Quality Assurance (QA) framework, Child-Friendly Baraabararu Schools (CFBS). The QA framework facilitates the assessment of education inputs, processes and outcomes by schools (self-assessment) and by regional and national level authorities (monitoring and supervision). The CFBS model helps to identify the strengths, weaknesses and development needs of schools, and assists school-based development activities. The MoE is in the process of developing a set of streamlined quality assurance indicators that focus strategically on learning. The ESDP will assist the MoE to implement the quality assurance framework according to a regular quality assurance cycle (plan-implementation-evaluation) in all schools in Male’ and the outer atolls.

Teacher Professional Development

The successful achievement of a high quality of education depends on the availability of professionally educated and competent teachers. The MoE considers that school-based teacher professional development (SBTPD) is the most effective model to improve teacher performance through for continuing teacher education and training. This view is supported by the international literature on teacher motivation and performance. The ESDP will assist the MoE to establish a
system for SBTPD. All schools in Male’ and the outer atolls would implement SBTPD programs, according to a recurrent cycle, with project support.

The ESDP would also help the MoE to reduce the stock of untrained teachers (about 23 percent of primary school teachers, and 2 percent of lower secondary and 3 percent of higher education secondary teachers respectively) through suitable pre-service teacher education and equip teachers with necessary skills, including for multi-grade teaching, which is needed in many schools due to the small enrollment numbers in sparsely populated islands.

As part of its plans to enhance the quality of education, the MoE is considering implementing a system of teacher licensing for all school teachers. However, approximately 4,000 teachers in the current teaching force do not possess a Diploma, which is a prerequisite for applying for a teaching license. The project could support the Center for Open Learning (COL) and private higher education institutions that offer such teachers the opportunity to pursue Diploma level courses online. There is a high demand for such courses.

Strengthening the Leadership and Management Skills of Principals

The project will help strengthen the leadership and management capacities of school principals. This is particularly important given the additional roles that school principals will have to play as school-based management is expanded and greater responsibility and power is devolved to schools. Currently there is no systematic leadership and management training for principals. The project would support initiatives to install a systematic leadership and management training program. The project would also support leadership and management training for leading teachers and deputy principals, who are identified as good future school principals.

Component Two: Central Level Development Activities

The ESDP will support novel development initiatives at the central level to complement and support the frontline school level activities.

Expansion and Diversification of Higher Secondary and Tertiary Education

The project also would support the strengthening of higher secondary education opportunities in strategically selected islands with sufficient student numbers. The project would support the addition of classrooms blocks, as well as ICT centers, science and language laboratories, and library resource centers, where needed. The project will also help to enhance access to higher education through the provision of bachelors and masters degrees scholarships targeted mainly for important personnel needed for the development of the Maldivian education system (e.g. higher secondary teachers, principals and education management staff). These scholarships would be made available for use among both public and private higher education providers, and would therefore support private-public partnerships for the expansion of tertiary education opportunities. The project would also assist the MoE to extend the quality assurance framework to cover tertiary education.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Policy Research and Development

The ESDP would have a fund under which project and program monitoring and evaluation, as well as policy research for future education development, would be supported. Some key areas for
assistance through this fund are:

School Report Cards

A school report card system could be introduced for program and project monitoring. This would be a useful tool for decision-making by principals, teachers, school boards and parents. The information in school report cards could motivate education reform and development at all levels, including schools, atolls and the nation. The Policy and Planning Branch of the MoE would be responsible for the development and administration of the school report card.

National Assessments of Learning Outcomes

The Maldives has conducted national assessments of learning outcomes in the past. Many middle-income countries, and countries in South Asia including Sri Lanka, India, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, are developing institutional capacity to undertake national assessments according to a regular cycle and in line with the requirements of policy makers. The national assessments are useful to determine: (a) how well students are learning in the education system; (b) whether there is evidence of particular strengths and weaknesses in students’ knowledge and skills; (c) whether particular subgroups in the population perform poorly; (d) which factors are associated with student achievement; (e) whether the government standards are being met in the provision of resources; and (f) whether the achievements of students change over time. The national assessment can provide feedback into policy and program development. The information from these assessments can be used by policy makers and technocrats in key areas such as curriculum development, teacher education and teacher development, the production of educational materials, and the allocation of resources. The MoE is considering a model to partner with the Faculty of Education (FE) of the Maldives National University (MNU), to establish a reliable and regular system for the measurement and analysis of learning outcomes and the use of this information in monitoring and policy design.

Management Information Systems

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Center for Information Technology (NCIT), plans to develop and implement a Management Information System (MIS) for the government. As part of this initiative, an Education Management Information System (EMIS) for school education could be included. The project could support this work, provided a suitable modality could be found. In addition, the Department of Higher Education is keen on the development of a comprehensive Higher Education MIS that includes, inter alia, student-level information, staff-level information, and financial management information for all higher education institutions. The Bank could explore possibilities for support during the project preparation process.

Policy Research and Development

Three areas were identified as key for policy research and development in the initial years of the project. These are:

a) a model for combined curricula schools, where schools would teach a combination of arts, commerce and science streams in secondary education, rather than specializing in one stream as at present;
b) a system for teacher licensing; and  
c) the development of a master plan for higher education.

Other areas could be identified in subsequent years of the project.

IV. Safeguard Policies that might apply

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VI. Contact point

World Bank

Contact: Harsha Aturupane  
Title: Lead Education Specialist  
Tel: 5723+306  
Email: daturupane@worldbank.org

Borrower/Client/Recipient

Name: Republic of Maldives  
Contact: Aminath Ali Manik  
Title: Director General, External Resources Management  
Tel: 960-332-8790  
Email: aminath.ali@finance.gov.mv

Implementing Agencies

Name: Ministry of Education
VII. For more information contact:
The InfoShop
The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20433
Telephone: (202) 458-4500
Fax: (202) 522-1500
Web: http://www.worldbank.org/infoshop