

Policy Note 13

Arts, Culture & Heritage



Maldives
Partnership
Forum 2019

Investing in a Resilient & Sustainable Maldives

Background

Culture gives people their identity, which is passed on from one generation to another. It encompasses the heritage, customs, knowledge, language and dialects, traits, value accepted systems, traditions and beliefs.

Arts play the crucial role in defining this culture while arts also reflect the changing world. Maldives share a history of brilliant craftsmanship and a variety of performing and visual arts that collectively serves its tangible and intangible heritage.

Cultural heritage comprises of cultural values, places, antiques, arts contributing to the Maldivian identity. It defines the historical and cultural places that reveal the richness of the extraordinarily diverse cultural heritage of the Maldives.

For a culturally rich country as the Maldives, it is imperative that the process of national cultural development is carried through after a careful and detailed planning process that promotes the Maldivian way of life. This policy note outlines the cultural values supporting the Maldivian national identity and way of life.

The National Centre for the Arts, National Art Gallery, Department of Heritage, National Museum, National Library, National Archives, Dhivehi Language Academy and National Bureau of Classification falls within the broad sector of Arts, Culture and Heritage.

In terms of international conventions, the Maldives has ratified UNESCO's 1972 *World Heritage Convention in 1986*. *Discussion and/or active work is currently ongoing to ratify UNESCO's 2001 Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, 2003 Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and 2005 Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.*

Challenges / Issues

Legislation and Government Policies

Legislation 9/2011 was enacted to enshrine the protection and prioritisation of the Dhivehi language, within which the Act also sets out the establishment of the Dhivehi Language Academy. However, amendments are to be brought to the legislation to harmonise the mandates of other cultural institutions.

Legislation 16/2011 was enacted to establish the National Archives, and defines the depth and scope of the State's responsibility and role in the protection and preservation of national records. Nevertheless, policies are yet to be formulated to increase accessibility to knowledge, information and archives.

Article 38 (a) and (b) of the Land Act (Legislation 1/2002), whilst not nearly adequate for the purpose, does refer to the sighting or discovery of tangible cultural heritage artefacts and sites, and somewhat defines stakeholder responsibility.

Legislation 27/79 was enacted to protect the cultural and historic places and artefacts of the Maldives. This short legal document with one sentence, supplemented by three additional paragraphs/ annotations intends to prohibit the destruction, dismantling or damaging any sites and property of antiques/archaeological and historical values located in the national territory. Except for the promotion of Dhivehi language with a separate legislation (Act No: 9/2011), intangible cultural heritage has not been safeguarded through legislation or policy.

Culture Education and Awareness

Lack of arts, culture and heritage in the education curriculum is resulting in lack of youth and community participation in conservation, preservation, and cultural development based on cultural values. Without proper awareness and education, local productions and preservation techniques do not comply with international best practices and standards.

The sector has been sidelined in the past few years and the underdeveloped cultural institutions and infrastructure, insufficient funds and lack of career advancement opportunities for technical professionals have led to shortage in human resource development.

Even with the Decentralisation Act enforced in May 2010, heritage protection and management is still publicly perceived largely as the responsibility of the Government. Island councils need to be trained in ways to preserve and promote arts, culture and heritage. People should be taught economics of art, culture and heritage and educated on how they can make a living out of it.

Discontinuity between Traditional and Contemporary Culture

Cultural interaction among different cultural components within the community is minimal. As a result, native dialects are endangered, art forms are not practiced leading to the loss of sense of identity.

With the introduction of radio and TV, there has been a paradigm shift from simple audience to mass audience. Due to this, there is a change in which artistic expressions are portrayed and there are issues of ownership and economic value.

Technology and Digital Landscape

Failure to reflect the needs and preferences of artists in policy formulation is due to the existing gap between artist community and other institutions. The target audience or market is not reached because of lack of marketing and promotion on a digital platform.

Likewise, digitising heritage preservation will also increase accessibility nationwide. Bridging the gap between the external environment and the heritage sector would enable the sector to grab opportunities to innovate in novel and modern ways to preserve and manage cultural components.

Social Beliefs

Cultural rights should take central place in the consideration of rights issues and the striving towards a more just world order. Globalisation has had a deep impact on cultural values. Maldivian people have started embracing development at the cost of culture and heritage. Small communities and indigenous groups have lost a great deal of their traditional knowledge and wealth such as dialects, coral carving, and lacquer works and so on in cultural materialism.

Moreover, majority of Maldivians have practiced a moderate Islam. Such views were radicalised prohibiting many art forms being practiced in schools and everyday lives.

It is crucial to build awareness to protect and promote the national, cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic identity as well as heritage and arts.

Policy Initiative

Foster and Preserve National Identity

Government strategies are geared towards ensuring the preservation and management of heritage buildings and sites and locale, historic and cultural places and areas, and cultural heritage artefacts and collections, to heighten awareness and increase understanding of the Maldivian cultural identity. Government also aims to facilitate and encourage creativity and originality among local artists and other cultural practitioners, in ways to promote and preserve national identity.

Arts, Culture and Heritage Education

Strategies are focused on integrating arts, culture and heritage studies in school curriculum, which is key to foster an informed community who will practice and enjoy cultural life and strengthen national unity.

Increase Community Engagement in Cultural Life

Government policies aim to facilitate widespread participation in and affordable access to the arts and cultural heritage. Furthermore, strategies are geared towards developing arts and culture centres, museums/site museums, cinemas/theatres and open spaces to increase accessibility and promote arts, culture and heritage.

Alongside with this, responsibility will be passed onto local councils and communities in terms of funding and ability to develop venues for arts productions, protect language and dialects, customs, rituals and practices, artefacts, places and buildings and heritage collections that are historically and culturally important.

Strengthen Legal Framework

Currently, a Heritage Bill, conceived to protect, preserve, conserve, manage and promote the tangible and intangible heritage of the Maldives, is in the process of being becoming legislation. When enacted, the Act would address the insufficiencies and deficiencies in the current legislative framework as regards cultural heritage.

An Arts Council Act has been drafted. When enacted, an Arts Council will be established to oversee the development of arts sector.

Increase Economic Growth within Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector

Government strategies seek to promote improved communication, coordination and greater cooperation between government ministries, funding agencies, local councils, island communities and other stakeholders involved in arts, culture and heritage, to induce positive cultural, social and economic growth in the sector with a view to promote and develop cultural tourism and provide platforms and markets for sustainable economic benefit to the State, communities and individuals.

Assist Artist Community

Policies seek to provide funding for arts productions and create platforms to promote arts and increase artistic interaction within the community. Strategies are also focused on establishing support facilities to encourage artistic creativity, skill development and productivity.

Furthermore, the Government aims to develop business models to support arts distribution that would enable greater economic benefits for the artist community in achieving sustainable development.