



AFPPD STANDING COMMITTEE ON INVESTING IN YOUTH

**AFPPD'S SUB-REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARIANS' MEETING ON: WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT AND INVESTMENT IN YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH ASIA**



MALE, MALDIVES,

24-25 JUNE 2025

Table of Contents

Section	Page
- Executive Summary	2
- Opening Session	3
Session 1: Policy Promotion for Women Empowerment & Gender Equality	8
Session 2: Education & Employment for Youth	14
Session 3: Financial Stability & Entrepreneurship for Women and Girls	17
Session 4: Policymakers' Role in Investing in Youth & Women	20
Wrap up and closing session	26
Day 2: Study Visits	27
Appendix 1: Malé Declaration	33
Appendix 2: Program	35
Appendix 3: List of participants	39

Executive Summary

The Meeting high-level opening session was moderated by Hon. Ali Fazad, MP Maldives, Chair of Maldives Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (MPGPD). Keynote addresses underscored strong international and regional commitment to the agenda, featuring remarks by Mr. Sugiyama Koji, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Japan in the Maldives, Mr. Hao Zhang, the UN Resident Coordinator, and Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal, Chair of the AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth. The session was formally opened by Hon. Ahmed Nazim, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis setting the stage for parliamentary dialogue on these critical development priorities.

The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD), in collaboration with the People's Majlis of Maldives and the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), convened a sub-regional meeting in Malé, Maldives, from June 24–25, 2025. Supported by UNFPA and the Japan Trust Fund, the event focused on "Women Empowerment and Investment in Young People in South Asia."

Day 1 featured policy dialogues across four sessions: (1) Women Empowerment and Gender Equality, (2) Youth Education and Employment, (3) Financial Stability and Entrepreneurship for Women/Girls, and (4) Policymakers' Role in Investing in Youth. Key outcomes included action-oriented commitments which was unanimously adopted by the delegates.

Day 2 involved study visits to Maldivian institutions like the Youth Ministry, UN Country Team, and community projects in Vilimale', highlighting practical initiatives for youth and women. The hybrid format enabled global participation, emphasizing cross-border collaboration to advance gender equality and youth development in the region.



Opening Session

Moderated by Hon. Ali Fazad, MP Maldives, Chair, MPGPD, the opening session formally commenced the event. Key addresses emphasized international cooperation, legislative priorities, and youth investment. **Mr. Sugiyama Koji**, Chargé d'Affaires of Embassy of Japan in the Maldives highlighted Japan's support for development initiatives. **UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Hao Zhang** underscored the UN's commitment to partnership and achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Maldives. **Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal, Chair of AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth** focused on the critical importance of prioritizing and investing in youth development across the region. **Hon. Ahmed Nazim, Deputy Speaker, People's Majlis** provided the Maldivian legislative perspective, reinforcing national commitment to addressing population and development issues. The session set a collaborative and high-level tone for the subsequent discussions.



Mr. Sugiyama Koji, Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of Japan in the Maldives

Japan's Unwavering Commitment: Advancing Gender Equality & Youth Empowerment Through Partnership. Reaffirming Japan's decades-long commitment via its Trust Fund, Chargé d'Affaires Sugiyama highlighted Japan's catalytic role beyond funding, enabling dialogue and programs with UNFPA and AFPPD. Aligned with ICPD 30, he stressed empowering women (legal reform, inclusion) and youth (health, education, civic engagement) through parliamentary action and evidence-based policy to make equity operational, not aspirational.

He also stated the key points of the Japan's commitments. Japan has a longstanding commitment (since early 2000s) to gender equality and youth empowerment through the Japan Platform. This goes beyond funding, fostering dialogue and impactful programs with partners like UNFPA, AFPPD, and APDA. Japan acts as both a financial partner and an advocate for principled cooperation, prioritizing dignity, equality, and opportunity, especially in South Asia. Mr. Sugiyama Koji continued that parliaments are seen as crucial drivers for implementing development action, not just legislation. It should be inclusive policy creation through discussions, workshops, and cross-border collaboration as well as need for legal reform, equitable access to public goods, and dismantling generational inequality. Japan supports UNFPA's strategic plan goals which aims to reduce gender-based violence, ending harmful practices, promoting women's decision-making.

He also welcomes AFPPD's capacity-building programs and policy discussions for legislators, calling for monitoring and reporting on project outcomes tied to budgets and objectives. Promotion of evidence-based best practices for women and youth advancement in the South Asia region is important too.

In essence Japan champions gender equality and youth empowerment through sustained funding, advocacy, and multi-partner collaboration (including UNFPA, AFPPD and APDA). The focus is on strengthening parliaments, inclusive policy-making, legal reforms, and specific program initiatives (with defined budgets) to turn the vision of equity into tangible results, particularly in South Asia. Concrete action items are outlined to achieve these goals.



Mr. Hao Zhang, UN Resident Coordinator

Mr. Hao Zhang, the UN Resident Coordinator in the Maldives, delivered an address welcoming parliamentarians and stakeholders, emphasizing the critical importance of investing in the well-being and potential of young people and women. He extended his gratitude to the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for organizing the event, crediting the Japanese Trust Fund for its essential support.

Mr. Zhang recognized the Asia-Pacific region's ongoing challenges, including demographic transitions, climate change pressures, and uneven development, all of which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, particularly women and girls. He further highlighted issues such as

budget shortfalls and slowing economic growth, underscoring how these factors complicate the advancement of gender equity and youth empowerment. In response, Mr. Zhang outlined the United Nations' strategic focus on operational efficiency, strengthening multi-sectoral partnerships, and promoting coordinated action among governments, community organizations, and private sector actors.

He stressed the high value of investing in human capital, noting that existing policy models may not adequately address the aspirations and needs of contemporary youth. Mr. Zhang specifically referenced the demographic realities faced by the Maldives, such as an aging population, and advocated for a comprehensive lifecycle approach. This approach involves investments in elder care and the broader care economy to support societal and economic well-being across all age groups.

Mr. Zhang reiterated the pivotal role of parliamentarians in advancing rights-based, evidence-informed policies, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive health, gender equity, and demographic resilience. He cited successes in the Maldives' women's legislation but pointed out that overlapping or contradictory provisions necessitate revision. Concluding his remarks, Mr. Zhang called upon parliamentarians to translate high-level commitments into tangible legislative and programmatic progress, thereby ensuring practical positive change for affected communities.



Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal, Chair of AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth.

He stated that parliamentarians actions must be guided by key global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDGs 4, 5, 8, and 13), the Lisbon Youth Declaration, UN Security Council Resolutions 2250 and 2535 on youth, the Pact for the Future, the ICPD Program of Action, CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Therefore, there should be a clear call to action for parliamentarians to strategically invest in youth skills development for the digital and green economies and in women's economic inclusion. Pursue legal reforms to enforce laws guaranteeing equal rights and protection while repealing discriminatory legislation. Implement gender and youth-responsive budgeting to allocate resources effectively. Create platforms enabling meaningful youth and women's participation in civic engagement, leadership, and decision-making. Ensure accountability through robust

oversight and transparency in policy implementation. Adopt an intersectional approach to address the compounded discrimination experienced by young women, especially from marginalized groups. Strengthen regional collaboration by leveraging platforms like the AFPPD and IPU for shared learning and advocacy.

Nepal's progress illustrates this, having achieved over 40% women's representation in federal parliament and local governments through constitutional quotas. However, persistent implementation gaps due to socio-cultural factors like patriarchy and taboos demonstrate that laws alone are insufficient.

Urgent focus must be placed on achieving climate justice, particularly for highly vulnerable regions like the Himalayan constituencies mentioned by the speaker, which are disproportionately impacted. Critically, shifting societal mindsets is imperative, as laws and policies cannot fully succeed without this underlying societal evolution.

Conclusion:

The vision of a South Asia where all women/youth live with dignity and shape their future is achievable. Parliamentarians must lead by translating commitments into tangible action through legislation, funding, and dismantling systemic barriers. Collective resolve and solidarity are essential.



Hon. Ahmed Nazim, MP, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis

The Honorable Deputy Speaker of Peoples Majlis of Maldives welcomed delegates to the AFPPD Standing Committee meeting, hosted by the Maldives Parliament. The address framed the meeting's purpose, in particular addressing critical issues of gender equality, youth potential, and responding to significant demographic shifts.

He stated that women form a significant majority in the civil/public service and corporate management within Parliament (62% staff, 55% management). High representation is also noted in the Audit Office, Customs, and the Police Force (23%). On the other hand, the critical challenge is that women's engagement in politics is alarmingly low. Only 3 women were elected out of 93 MPs in the last election. This disparity underscores a systemic barrier requiring urgent policy intervention.

Regarding the key demographic trends and Implications (Based on 2024 Census), Hon. Ahmed Nazim stated that the population is projected to reach 1 million by 2054, characterized by slow growth, fewer children, and increased longevity (life expectancy ~83 years). The median age will rise sharply from 17 to 37 years, signaling a rapidly aging society.

A major shift from island (atoll) living to Greater Malé is projected (from 38% in 2014 to 64% by 2054), driven by internal migration and low island fertility rates. These trends necessitate comprehensive policies focusing on:

- Youth Investment: Critical for future workforce, requiring education, skills development, and leadership opportunities, especially for young women.

- Healthcare & Infrastructure: Strengthening systems to support an aging population and dense urban centers, with emphasis on mental health.

- Gender Equality: Ensuring equitable access to opportunities across all spheres amidst these shifts.

Meanwhile, 33% quota for women in elected local council positions is currently in place, with legislative revisions underway aiming to increase this to 40%. Women's Development Committees (WDCs) have been established at all levels. Acknowledging the loss of talent abroad, the government commits to reforming education, employment, and economic systems to create attractive domestic opportunities and transform "brain drain" into "brain gain". Moreover, the "Happiness Maldives" program promotes community wellbeing. The pioneering "National Happiness Index" pilot project aims to measure and enhance happiness at individual, community, and national levels through culturally aligned frameworks.

He also mentioned importance of partnership with civil society. Empowering Civil Society Organizations is deemed crucial for promoting gender equality and mental health and building resilient communities. He continued that the presence of the youth minister and social welfare Minister in today's session underscores the government's commitment to the conference themes and SDGs.

In the end of his speech, he emphasized that President Dr. Muizzu's leadership prioritizes accessible mental health services, awareness campaigns, and policies empowering women and girls.

Hon. Ahmed Nazim recognized Dr. Anara Naeem's election to the Executive Committee of AFPPD and UNFPA's Ms. Shadia Ibrahim's lifelong dedication to women's empowerment and social welfare.

Conclusion:

The address framed the meeting as essential for developing inclusive, normative, and holistic legislation. It emphasized the urgent need to empower women and youth, address demographic challenges through targeted policies (healthcare, urban planning, anti-brain drains), leverage partnerships, and break down barriers to build an equitable future where every Maldivian can

thrive. The Maldives' existing initiatives provide a foundation, but sustained effort and regional collaboration are vital.



Session 1: Policy Promotion to Address Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in South Asia

Chaired by: Hon. Hector Appuhamy, MP Sri Lanka

Summary:

Chaired by Hon. Hector Appuhamy, MP Sri Lanka, this session focused on advancing women's empowerment and gender equality policies across South Asia. Key insights were presented by Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem, MP Maldives on legislative efforts, Ms. Shadiya Ibrahim, UNFPA Maldives on programmatic and rights-based approaches, and Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal sharing Nepal's experiences. The following 30-minute open discussion facilitated a regional exchange among participants, exploring common challenges (like gender-based violence and economic inclusion barriers), sharing successful interventions, and identifying collaborative pathways for strengthening policies and implementation mechanisms to accelerate progress towards gender equality in the region. The session emphasized the need for sustained political commitment and multi-sectoral action.



Presentations by; Hon. MP, Dr. Anara Naeem (Maldives)

Dr. Anara expressed honor in speaking at the AFPPD Forum hosted in the Maldives. She thanked AFPPD leadership, including Chair Kamikawa Yoko, MP Japan for the platform. She celebrated the historic election of the first Maldivian to the AFPPD executive committee.

Talking about importance of women's participation, Hon. Dr. Naeem emphasized that women constitute half the population, making their meaningful participation in lawmaking essential for equitable governance and national progress. Women parliamentarians are vital for strengthening democracy and creating inclusive laws.

She acknowledged historical female leaders like Sultana Rehendhi Khadheeja. Progress since the 2008 Constitution includes 318 women in local councils (2019) and women in senior roles like Foreign Minister. However, only 3 women (3.2%) were elected to the 93-seat Parliament in 2024.

Key Challenges for Women

- **Workforce Inequality:** 46% of women work in low-paying sectors (health/education), while tourism leadership is male-dominated.
- **Violence & Stigma:** Domestic violence affects 1 in 3 women, but underreporting persists due to stigma and poor enforcement of laws.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Societal pressure prioritizes household duties, limiting public participation.
- **Political Underrepresentation:** Without quotas, women hold less than 6% of parliamentary seats.
- **"Brain Drain":** Societal norms prioritize caregiving over careers despite women's higher education.

Government Initiatives include:

MVR 6.5 million loan facility for women entrepreneurs (25% reserved for women with disabilities), supporting 100+ projects.

- Housing reforms (65,000 flats) to improve women's economic stability.
- Collaboration with UNICEF on inclusive education/skills development.
- Support for NGOs advocating CEDAW-aligned laws.

Six Proposed Legislative Changes

1. Legislate a 33% parliamentary quota for women OR mandate parties field $\geq 10\%$ women candidates with funding incentives.
2. Enact a comprehensive Domestic Violence law and strengthen enforcement of existing laws.
3. Fully implement the Gender Equality Act (2016) with monitoring and penalties.

4. Mandate 40% of SME loans for women and adopt gender-sensitive budgeting to close the ~50% pay gap.
5. Legislate sustained funding for women's leadership programs (e.g., UNDP Kiyeveni).
6. Increase funding and authority for Women's Development Committees (WDCs).

Call to Action

Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem urged immediate legislative action (quotas, barrier removal, law enforcement) to advance women's rights. She emphasized the forum's focus on youth/women empowerment, education, jobs, mental health, climate action, and gender equality. Every young person and woman deserve a fulfilling life. She called for using the forum as a catalyst to build a resilient, inclusive Maldives where youth and women shape the future.



Ms. Shadiya Ibrahim, UNFPA Maldives

Ms. Ibrahim in her speech provided insights into the status of women and youth in the Maldives, drawing on 2022 census data and Island cards distributed during the session, highlighting that these interconnected issues are critical for national development.

The Maldives is a Small Island Developing State with over 1,000 islands, 186 of which are inhabited, and a population of approximately 500,000 people, including locals and foreigners. Its economy, with a GDP per capita of \$11,000 (2023), is primarily driven by tourism and fisheries. Significant urban migration has resulted in 40% of the population residing in Greater Malé, causing congestion, while other islands remain sparsely populated. A notable sex ratio of 80 males per 100 females exists, largely due to a male-dominated foreign labor force, which poses unique social challenges. Population pyramids, based on the 2014 census and UNFPA projections (as 2022 projections were incomplete), reflect this significant foreign population and male-heavy labor force.

The Maldives has achieved low infant and maternal mortality rates, demonstrating progress in the health sector. On the other hand, there are challenges for young people. One in five young people

are classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), indicating high levels of unemployment and disengagement. Formal labor sector participation for youth is below 50%, with many working in the informal sector where social protection coverage is lacking.

She stated that a large percentage of Maldivian women work in the informal sector, which lacks essential social protections, underscoring the need for policy reforms. Insufficient childcare and eldercare facilities significantly hinder women's ability to participate in the formal workforce. Reported cases of violence against women are increasing, and the criminal justice system's focus on punitive measures rather than supportive policies results in inadequate redress for victims.

Other Key Issues:

Internal migration sees 4,000–6,000 people moving annually to Greater Malé, straining urban infrastructure and demanding governance adjustments. Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are rising due to lifestyle changes, alongside reproductive health issues like polycystic ovarian syndrome and endometriosis. Heavy reliance on imported goods creates vulnerabilities to supply chain disruptions, impacting food security. The high cost of living limits family sizes, contributing to population aging, as confirmed by UNFPA research. While gender-related laws exist, UNFPA reviews highlight inconsistencies and gaps, necessitating legislative reforms to better support women and youth.

Parliamentarians should review and revise laws to address identified gaps, ensuring supportive policies for women and youth, including extending social protections to informal workers. Migration data should inform governance design to strengthen women's development and address population aging. Expanding childcare and eldercare facilities is crucial to boost women's formal sector participation. The criminal justice approach to violence against women requires reform, shifting from purely punitive measures to supportive policies for effective redress.



Hon. MP Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal

Introduction:

Nepal demonstrates a strong commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality through progressive constitutional and legal frameworks, with this presentation outlining the role of

parliamentary oversight in advancing inclusive policies, highlighting key achievements, legal instruments, and persistent challenges in promoting social justice.

Nepal's landmark 2015 Constitution guarantees equal rights for all genders (Article 18) and mandates at least 33% women's representation in all state bodies (Article 38), resulting in over 33% representation in the Federal Parliament and 42-45% in national and local bodies, significantly enhancing women's participation in decision-making and social justice for marginalized groups.

Key laws like the Civil Code (2017) grant women equal divorce and property rights, while the Criminal Code (2017) addresses crimes against women; however, rural awareness gaps, weak enforcement, and social stigma hinder the full effectiveness of laws including the Gender Equality Act (2006), Domestic Violence Act (2009), Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act (2015), and Safe Motherhood Act (2018).

Nepal employs a National Gender Equality Policy, integrates gender into its 16th Development Plan, implements a National Strategy to End Child Marriage, and has institutionalized Gender-Responsive Budgeting across ministries, supported by dedicated bodies like the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens and the constitutional National Women's Commission.

Significant progress includes reducing maternal mortality (281 to 151 per 100,000 live births), lowering unmet family planning needs, increasing contraceptive use, expanding youth SRHR engagement and CSE, and improving access to safe abortion and reproductive healthcare.

On the other hand, persistent obstacles include weak enforcement of laws, limited rural access to healthcare and education, deep-rooted cultural norms, the underreporting of approximately 66% of GBV cases due to fear and stigma, and insufficient meaningful involvement of women in decision-making.

Parliamentarians are crucial for advancing empowerment through policy advocacy and formulation, legislative reform and enforcement, budget oversight for gender-responsive initiatives, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation via parliamentary legislative scrutiny (PLS) processes.

Conclusion:

While Nepal has made substantial strides via its constitution, laws, and policies, challenges like enforcement gaps, stigma, and structural barriers remain, necessitating strengthened parliamentary oversight, awareness campaigns, and targeted interventions to achieve inclusive development and social justice.

Discussion (Q&A)

Ms. Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah, Secretary to IFPPD, Indonesia

Given that island nations like the Maldives and Indonesia (with its 17,000 islands) face similar challenges in providing education to youth and women in remote areas, how can we develop solutions for people living far from capital islands? This is especially urgent as the lack of local schools and opportunities seems linked to problems like vulnerable youth being drawn into harmful activities, like the 'new player heroine project' encountered?

Ms. Shadiya Ibrahim, UNFPA Maldives responded that achieving sustainable population balance between remote islands and overcrowded urban centers like Greater Himalaya requires innovative prevention-first strategies and technology-driven decentralization. Instead of perpetuating cycles where communities are left underserved as people migrate for services, we must:

1. **Empower prevention** through education targeting lifestyle diseases, reducing avoidable strain on health systems;
2. **Leverage technology/AI** to deliver remote education, healthcare, and economic opportunities directly to island communities, eliminating the *need* for physical relocation;
3. **Redesign systems** around current realities—using digital connectivity to make geographical isolation irrelevant, easing urban crowding while revitalizing rural areas.

By prioritizing accessible tech solutions and proactive health empowerment, it can be created equitable development without sacrificing well-being or further congesting cities. The future hinges on adopting these innovations strategically.

Hon. Chandra, MP Cambodia (online)

Cambodia is deeply committed to gender equality and women's empowerment. The progress are on **Economic Inclusion:** Approximately 80% of women actively drive growth in hospitality and entrepreneurship, gaining economic power through property ownership and financial inclusion, supported by technology; **Education:** Girls led in secondary school enrollment, with women increasingly prominent in higher education, including medicine; and **Political Representation:** Women hold key leadership roles, including the Speaker of the National Assembly and committee positions.

The agenda of country is to prioritizes preparing over 10,000 women for public office, expanding financial access and skills for rural women entrepreneurs, and launching a national campaign with religious institutions. He stated that the country firmly believes empowering women is fundamental to national progress. Cambodia is ready to unleash this potential, building a nation where every woman's contribution is celebrated and gender equality is woven into our society's fabric. This stems from our unwavering commitment and a growing national movement.

Hon. MP, Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal

The diverse international perspectives shared at this forum represent one of its essential outcomes. Such exchanges enable us to gain valuable insights and learn from cross-country experiences.



Session 2: Promotion of Education and Friendly Employment Environment for Youth in the South-Asian Region

Chaired by: Hon. MP, Abdulla Rifau, MP Maldives

Summary:

Chaired by Hon. Abdulla Rifau, MP Maldives, this session addressed enhancing youth education and employment. Presentations covered aligning education with job markets (Hon. Sahibzada Sibghatullah, MP Pakistan, online), integrating vocational and soft skills in curricula (Mr. Ismail Naseer, Maldives), and Bhutan's (by Hon. Yeshey Jamtsho, MP Bhutan) holistic approach including Gross National Happiness principles (Hon. Yeshey Jamtsho, MP). The open discussion highlighted common regional challenges: skills mismatches and limited opportunities. Key solutions emphasized were stronger public-private partnerships for skills training, boosting digital access and entrepreneurship, and creating "friendly employment" environments through inclusivity and decent work conditions. Collaborative action is crucial to bridge the education-employment gap.

As Maldivian MP, Rifau framed youth development as a *regional security and economic imperative*, noting Asia's 600M+ youth population. His emphasis on "shared responsibility" subtly addressed migration pressures and brain drain.



Mr. Ismail Naseer (Maldives) – Education Practitioner

The Principal of Vaadu School, serving 94 students, provided ground-level insights into the unique challenges facing small-island education systems.

The Maldives leverages ICT innovation through "satellite schooling," which uses synchronous video teaching to serve islands with fewer than 15 students, effectively preventing school closures. Additionally, targeted policies such as childcare support in tertiary institutions have driven significant gender equity gains, evidenced by a 66% female scholarship rate.

Critical Gaps:

A major curriculum-job mismatch exists due to the tourism-dominated economy suppressing demand for science and technology education; this results in only 12% of graduates entering technical fields. Furthermore, a legal vacuum for youth aged 16–18 after secondary school leaves minors vulnerable to exploitative labor practices, as documented in fishing industry case studies.

Providing education on outer islands costs approximately 55,000 MVR per student annually (~\$3,560), a financially unsustainable model that requires cross-subsidization from urban centers.

To address these issues, the principal proposed a vocational pivot to a "dual training" system modeled after Germany's approach, where students split time between school and the workplace. Simultaneously, advocating for SAARC-recognized regional certifications in hospitality would leverage the Maldives' existing expertise in this sector.

Conclusion:

The Principal concluded with a practitioner's stark warning: "Free education without job relevance fuels disillusionment," emphasizing the urgent need for alignment between education and economic opportunities.



Hon. MP, Yeshey Jamtsho, MP Bhutan

Hon. Yeshey Jamtsho stressed that Bhutan implements holistic education through its Bhutan Baccalaureate program, which formally integrates meditation, environmental stewardship, and community service into graded academic assessments. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), supported by UNFPA, has significantly reduced teen pregnancies by 40% according to 2022–2024 data.

Beyond the classroom, radical interventions include *Geylsom* (National Service), a mandatory one-year program where youth learn disaster response, organic farming, and civic ethics under the policy "No diploma without service." Another initiative, *Deysom* (Peacekeepers), deploys youth-led conflict mediation teams to resolve disputes in rural communities.

To create economic bridges, the "One Block, One Product" scheme funds rural startups like black rice cooperatives, which currently absorb 32% of vocational graduates. For overseas employment, Bhutan provides pre-departure language and cultural training, such as Japanese instruction for healthcare workers bound for international posts.

Hon. Jamtsho openly acknowledged budget tension, revealing that climate resilience costs—like landslide-proofing schools—are straining Bhutan's 10% education budget allocation.

Conclusion:

He emphatically stated, "Education must build character first, careers second," and urged regional policymakers to adopt similar ethical frameworks.



Hon. MP, Sahibzada Sibghatullah, MP Pakistan (Online)

Hon. Sibghatullah underscored the urgency of youth investment. Pakistan faces a critical demographic reality with 64% of its population being youth and 8.5% youth unemployment—a situation he framed as either a "ticking bomb or rocket fuel for growth." National programs address this through initiatives like *Kamyab Jawan*, a \$100 million fund providing 0% interest loans for tech startups with 45% female participation, and *Digital Pakistan*, whose national freelancing portals generated \$500 million in IT exports during 2024. Regionally, he proposed a Youth Innovation Fund to seed cross-border projects (e.g., Nepal-Pakistan hydro-tech incubators) and advocated for SAARC-wide skill certifications modeled after ASEAN's Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs). Culturally, he invoked Prophet Muhammad's maxim to "benefit others" to justify policy shifts toward social entrepreneurship.

Conclusion:

Hon. Sibghatullah urged policymakers to "stop preparing youth for dead industries" and demanded immediate parliamentary action to enable skill portability across sectors and borders.



Session 3 - Financial Stability & Entrepreneurship for Women and Girls

Chaired by: Hon. MP, Mohammad Islahuddin Abas (Malaysia)

Summary:

Chaired by Hon. Mohammad Islahuddin Abas (MP, Malaysia), this session focused on empowering women economically. Ms. Fathimath Saeed (ADB Consultant) outlined challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in the Maldives, emphasizing the need for targeted support. Hon. Dr. Kolakanh Phommvong (MP, Lao PDR) linked women's empowerment directly to broader youth investment goals. Hon. Elvira Surabaldieva (MP, Kyrgyzstan) advocated for policies promoting women's employment and workplace equality. The open discussion highlighted critical barriers: access to finance, property rights, skills training, and childcare. Key solutions centered on enabling policies, financial inclusion programs, mentorship, and tackling discriminatory norms to foster stability and entrepreneurship.



Ms. Fathimath Saeed, Consultant Economist, Asian Development Bank

On women Entrepreneurship in Maldives:

Ms. Syed, an Asian Development Bank consultant focusing on the Maldives, presented data-driven insights on women's entrepreneurship post-COVID-19. She opened by emphasizing financial empowerment as crucial for women's agency and community prosperity. Syed highlighted

persistent barriers hindering women, including limited access to capital, gender-biased social norms, and legal constraints. She stressed the urgent need for concrete, actionable policies rather than theoretical discussions.

Her analysis revealed a COVID-19 paradox: despite the economic devastation, women drove 40% of the informal sector and spurred a surge in women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Syed outlined key economic imperatives: the Maldives' heavy reliance on tourism (40-60% of GDP) necessitates diversification through circular economy models like the "Resale Wave" recycling initiative, while the high cost of living, exemplified by \$1,500 monthly rents in Malé, makes dual-income households essential.

Significant barriers persist, however. Syed noted that 32.8% of women are in vulnerable employment without contracts or job security. Only 37% participate in the formal sector, hampered by rigid working hours and unpaid care burdens. Furthermore, banks often perceive women as "high-risk" borrowers due to gaps in their employment history. As a potential solution, she pointed to AI tools like Kema.AI, which can save valuable time for women balancing work and domestic duties.

Her recommendations called for expanding microfinance and zero-interest loan programs and creating communal workspaces with free Wi-Fi. Syed also advocated for promoting greater male involvement in care work to redistribute domestic burdens and aligning entrepreneurship initiatives with the circular economy to reduce import dependency. She concluded by urging cross-regional collaboration to dismantle structural inequalities, firmly positioning women's economic participation as a non-negotiable development priority.



Hon. Dr. Kholakhan Phommvong, MP Lao PDR

Hon. Dr. Kholakhan Phommvong detailed Laos' legal frameworks for advancing gender equity. Laos has enacted **17 gender-specific laws** within its broader framework of 147 national laws, while its constitution explicitly guarantees education access for remote communities to ensure inclusivity.

Significant achievements include vocational training for over 14,000 people (50% women) from 2021–2025 and a 28% female representation rate in parliament, nearing Laos' 30% gender quota target.

Persistent Challenges

Deep-rooted **traditional norms** continue to confine women to domestic roles after marriage, restricting their economic participation, while national strategies like the *10th Socioeconomic Development Plan* lack concrete financial inclusion measures for women entrepreneurs.

Key Recommendations

Dr. Phommvong urged to strengthen enforcement mechanisms for existing gender-equitable laws, to integrate entrepreneurship support into national development plans to unlock women's economic potential and launching community-led awareness campaigns to shift cultural attitudes and redistribute domestic burdens.

Conclusion

While Lao PDR's legal frameworks provide a strong foundation, translating policy into tangible equality requires confronting socio-cultural barriers and embedding gender targets in economic planning.



Hon. Elvira Surabaldieva, MP Kyrgyzstan

Hon. Surabaldieva stated that women's economic, social, and political empowerment is fundamental to Kyrgyzstan's economic sustainability, social cohesion, poverty reduction, and achievement of the SDGs, especially Goal 5 on gender equality.

Kyrgyzstan ratified ILO Convention 190 (June 2024), legally defined "Women's Entrepreneurship" (Jan 2025), implemented a 30% parliamentary quota for women, and launched financial initiatives including \$15m for microenterprises, \$2.5m for rural women/housing, and \$356m+ in loan guarantees.

Deep-seated societal norms, especially pressure for frequent childbearing, persist: MICS data (2018/2022) reveals high rates of short birth intervals, reducing employment for women aged 18–30 (half as likely employed as men). Effective implementation of laws and quotas remains a major hurdle.

She pointed out about policy and legislative priorities such as introducing tax incentives for microbusinesses, support rural cooperatives, boost digital literacy, and promote equal pay legislation.

Moreover, to guarantee childcare access, enforce anti-discrimination laws, and fund women-centered programs. To address reproductive health barriers (e.g., birth spacing) through education and shifting societal expectations and fully implement the 30% parliamentary quota, invest in youth leadership programs, and expand women's roles at all levels.

She emphasized that parliamentarians must legislate childcare, equal pay, and anti-discrimination protections while funding targeted programs. Create regional dialogue platforms for sharing tools and advocacy strategies across South and Central Asia.

Key Conclusions

It was aid that investment is Non-Negotiable. Sustainable development requires targeted financial inclusion and entrepreneurship support for women. Legal milestones (quotas, ILO C190) are foundational, but enforcement is critical. Moreover, addressing birth spacing norms is essential to unlock women's economic potential. As parliamentarians, the legislators must pass laws, allocate budgets, enforce quotas, and oversee commitments. Success requires tackling financial barriers, skills gaps, care burdens, discrimination, harmful norms, and underrepresentation simultaneously. Moreover, the regional synergy is important, collaboration across South and Central Asia accelerates progress for all. Regarding youth focus, she said empowering young women through leadership and addressing early-career barriers ensures long-term impact.



Session 4: Role of Policymakers to Address Investing in Youth and Women Empowerment

Chaired by: Hon. Rinzin Dorji, MP Bhutan

Summary:

Chaired by Hon. Rinzin Dorji (MP, Bhutan), this session focused on the critical role of policymakers in driving investment for youth and women's empowerment. Three parliamentarians presented key insights: Hon. Sri Wulan (Indonesia), Hon. Asadhulla Shihab (Maldives), and Hon. Hector Appuhamy (Sri Lanka). Each speaker shared their national perspectives and strategies during dedicated 10-minute presentations. The core discussion emphasized the need for targeted policies, legislative frameworks, and dedicated funding to unlock the potential of youth and women as drivers of sustainable development. The session underscored the shared responsibility of policymakers across the region to prioritize and implement effective empowerment initiatives.



Hon. MP, Sri Wulan Sutomo, MP Indonesia

Hon. Sri Wulan Sutomo highlighted Indonesia's strategic focus on youth and women empowerment as critical drivers for long-term socio-economic development. It outlines the significant demographic representation of these groups, identifies persistent challenges, and details the multifaceted role policymakers and parliamentarians must play in creating an enabling environment through targeted interventions in policy, education, economic support, leadership, health, and data-driven accountability.

- **II. Demographic Imperative:**

Over 69 million Indonesians (approx. 25% of the population) are aged 15-29, representing immense potential. Women comprise more than 49% of the population. Investing in their empowerment is fundamental to rights, equality, and inclusive growth.

- **III. Key Challenges Identified:**

- **Youth Unemployment:** High rate of youth unemployment, 16.8% (ages 15-24) compared to the national average of 5.5% (2023). Approximately 20% of youth are Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), disproportionately affecting young women in rural areas. **Skills Mismatch:** Educational qualifications often misaligned with labor market demands, lacking soft skills, digital competencies, and job-specific training. **Gender Disparities:** Low female labor force participation compared to men, underrepresentation in politics, and persistently high rates of gender-based violence.

- **IV. Critical Roles for Policymakers & Parliamentarians:**

To address these challenges, policymakers at national and subnational levels must lead in six key areas:

- **Inclusive Policy Development:** Formulate and implement policies specifically addressing youth and women's needs (e.g., National Action Plans, integrating youth/gender lenses into sectoral policies, strengthening legal protections against discrimination and GBV).
- **Education & Skills Enhancement:** Expand access to quality education and vocational training, especially for rural women. Promote digital literacy, green economy skills, and lifelong learning/reskilling programs.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Provide incentives for businesses to hire/train youth and women. Support youth and women-led entrepreneurship and MSMEs through access to finance, markets, and digital platforms. Strengthen social protection (e.g., childcare, maternity support).
- **Leadership & Political Participation:** Ensure youth and women's representation in decision-making bodies. Support leadership training and political mentorship. Enforce quotas and affirmative action to increase women's presence in politics and public service.
- **Health & Protection:** Ensure accessible, youth-friendly, and gender-responsive health services (including reproductive and mental health). Expand GBV response services. Integrate gender and youth perspectives into Universal Health Coverage and public health programs.
- **Data, Monitoring & Accountability:** Invest in disaggregated data systems for tracking progress. Monitor policy implementation. Involve civil society, youth groups, and women's organizations in evaluation and accountability mechanisms. Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships (private sector, CSOs, international agencies, youth/women-led orgs).

Conclusion:

Investing comprehensively in the empowerment of Indonesia's youth and women is not merely an issue of equity; it is a strategic imperative for unlocking the nation's vast demographic potential and achieving sustainable, inclusive development. Policymakers and parliamentarians hold the vital key to this transformation. Their role encompasses creating the necessary legal and policy frameworks, ensuring adequate resource allocation, fostering an enabling economic and social environment, and guaranteeing accountability through robust data and inclusive monitoring mechanisms. Success hinges on sustained political will, coordinated policy action, and effective implementation across all levels of government. By prioritizing and effectively investing in youth and women, Indonesia invests decisively in its own prosperous and equitable future.



Hon. Asadullah Shihab, MP Maldives

Hon. Shihab stressed that investing in youth and women is both morally and economically vital. Untapped potential fuels inequality and slows progress. Youth, as future leaders, need support to tackle global challenges like climate change. Women's economic participation significantly increases GDP.

Gender-responsive budgeting directs spending to reduce inequality, funding programs like youth/women internships. Policies beyond maternity leave, such as flexible hours and childcare, help retain women in the workforce. Transparent spending and gender/age-disaggregated data ensure effective resource allocation.

He brought examples from Singapore's SkillsFuture and Rwanda's Youth Connect provide models for skills training and mentorship. In the Maldives, Practice Parliament and Vahana Camp build women leaders, while the Gender Audit and UN partnerships advance equality.

Key Challenges in Maldives

Women face income/job quality gaps despite educational parity, hold <10% of leadership roles, and bear a high unpaid care work burden (19 hrs/wk vs. 8 for men). Youth, especially young women in atolls, face high unemployment due to limited opportunities.

Recommendations for Maldives

Implement gender-responsive budgeting to fund skills training, SME support, and tech access. Extend social protection to the informal sector, predominantly women. Future-proof policies for demographic and job market shifts. Improve age/gender-disaggregated data collection. Strengthen parliamentary oversight and address legislative gaps for effective policies.

Conclusion

Empowering youth and women are key to a resilient, equitable Maldives. Evidence-based policymaking, grounded in robust data, is critical. The Maldives must adapt solutions from other SIDS and foster collaboration among government, civil society, private sector, and international partners. Lawmakers must ensure accountability and remove legislative barriers to secure a prosperous, inclusive future.



Hon. MP, Hector Appuhamy, MP Sri Lanka

According to Hon. Appuhamy, youth aged 15-29 constitute 23% of Sri Lanka's population (5.1 million), while women represent 52%. Their marginalization directly hinders national progress, economic growth, and social stability.

Youth unemployment stands at 21.8% as of late 2024, meaning one in five young people lack work. Education systems fail to equip youth with skills matching market demands. Young people also lack meaningful platforms to participate in decision-making.

Female labor force participation remains low at 30.6%, starkly contrasting with men's 68% rate. Women hold only 5.3% of parliamentary seats (12 out of 225). Restrictive social norms and gender-based violence further limit opportunities.

Policymakers must enact and enforce strong anti-discrimination and gender equality laws. They should implement dedicated youth- and gender-responsive budgeting. Inclusive decision-making requires establishing youth councils and supporting women's candidacy. Cross-sector collaboration with private entities, civil society, and international partners is essential.

Hon. Appuhamy stated that the National 2030 Youth Policy addresses skills, health, and participation. A draft Women Development Policy (2023) is under consideration. Programs like Samruddhi/GEMS provide financial support to low-income women and families.

He shared few countries case studies, such as Rwanda where country achieved 61% female parliamentary representation through constitutional quotas, Bangladesh created 4 million jobs for women via targeted industrial policies and Finland's Youth Guarantee ensures young people access training, education, or employment.

Hon. Appuhamy emphasized that he would recommend to develop national investment plans specifically targeting youth and women. Provide entrepreneurial support through grants, loans, and mentorship. Create clear pathways linking education to employment. Establish safer environments for women through stronger laws and enforcement. Guarantee representation for both groups in governance bodies.

Conclusion

Empowering youth and women is a strategic investment in Sri Lanka's peace, prosperity, and resilience, not charity. Policymakers must embed empowerment in lifelong opportunities and shift

mindsets to recognize these groups as leaders. Accountability through budget tracking, outcome measurement, and direct consultation is critical. Success requires localizing global insights via collaborative governance to dismantle structural barriers. As Hon. Hector stated: "When we invest in youth and women, we invest in peace, prosperity, and progress."

Discussion (Q&A)

Question from Chair of the session, Hon. Rinzin Dorji, MP Bhutan:

Participants were urged to share brief, solution-focused interventions anchored in national experiences.

Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem, MP Maldives

Proposed Solution: Mandate political parties to field at least 10% women candidates as a step toward parliamentary quotas. Women form 50% of the population but remain critically underrepresented. We should train young women for the 2028 parliamentary elections.

Hon. MP, Hector Appuhamy, MP Sri Lanka: Confirmed all MPs are currently elected but stressed structural interventions are essential. He argued male-dominated patronage networks hinder women in elections. In Sri Lanka though the local councils achieving 25% women via nomination systems. He suggested to amend the constitution to introduce reserved seats for women.

Hon. Sri Wulan, MP Indonesia:

She emphasized that Indonesia has 30% constitutional quota for women but women lack campaign funds. Only 18% of women access personal/party funds vs. 92% of men; 75% rely on family-approved spending. She suggested that the state-funded campaign grants for women candidates.

Hon. Elvira Surabaldieva, MP Kyrgyzstan:

She highlighted Kyrgyzstan's all-male parliament (1991) collapsing amid infighting within 18 months, while women participation in the parliament brings stability. She also mentioned that advocating framing representation as a "governance necessity," not a "Western import."

Hon. Ganga Kumari Belbase, MP Nepal:

She informed that Nepal's constitution mandates 33% women in all governance tiers and requires gender balance for Speaker/Deputy roles. No gender rule exists for President/Vice President, resulting in consistent male dominance.

Hon. Elvira Surabaldieva, MP Kyrgyzstan:

Hon. Surabaldieva stated that parties in Germany and Britain feel ashamed without participation of women MPs. She urged social media campaigns to rebrand women as essential decision-makers.



Wrap Up Session:

Hon. MP, Dr. Anara Naeem, MP Maldives

Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem, MP Maldives, member of AFPPD's Executive Committee expressed profound honor in welcoming delegates to the Maldives for the AFPPD conference, noting their presence inspired progress. She referenced productive prior discussions in Islamabad that reinforced regional collaboration. Past attempts to host in the Maldives failed due to insufficient commitment and coordination, but collective efforts overcame these hurdles. Hon. Dr. Naeem credited AFPPD dedication and the generosity of Honorable Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla and the People's Majilis for enabling the event. She extended gratitude to President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's government for women's empowerment initiatives and the People's Majlis for logistical support. She highlighted two critical conference outcomes:

- Commissioning evidence-based research on barriers to women's political participation in South Asia (including the Maldives) to inform policy reforms;
- Advancing gender-equal laws by reviewing discriminatory legislation.

She urged carrying forward the collaborative spirit to translate the Malé Declaration into parliamentary action.

Dr. Usmonov Farrukh, Executive Director of AFPPD

Dr. Farrukh thanked delegates for attending despite busy schedules and congratulated the AFPPD, Standing Committee and the Maldives People's Majilis on adopting the Malé Declaration. He affirmed AFPPD's commitment to sharing the declaration widely, noting its alignment with AFPPD's strategic plan. Dr. Usmonov, reiterated AFPPD's mandate to build parliamentary capacity for population and development advocacy, gender equality, women's empowerment, and youth investment. He also highlighted that six of AFPPD's eleven newly elected executive committee members (April 2025) are women, calling this gender balance exemplary. He commended Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem's year-long initiative and leadership in organizing the meeting.

Special gratitude was extended to the People’s Majlis’ Secretariat team, led by Ms. Zuyyina Badhri, for their tireless work.

Day 2: Study Visit (25 June 2025)



Visit to the Ministry of Youth

The delegates of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) visited the Ministry of youth of the Maldives and welcomed by officials from the Ministry led by State Minister Ali Sham Aan, Deputy Minister Hussain Jawaz, Senior Political Director Fathimath Nazaha Nazeem, and Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem from the People’s Majlis. The meeting focused on youth-related policies, challenges, and initiatives in the Maldives.

The following key points were discussed during the meeting, reflecting the Ministry of Youth’s initiatives and challenges:

- Ministry Mandate: The Ministry provided a comprehensive overview of its mandate, focusing on youth empowerment, education, employment, and socio-economic development.
- Youth Advisory Council: A Youth Advisory Council, formed under the President’s initiative, aims to enhance youth participation in policy-making and governance.
- Challenges for School-Leaving Youth (Aged 16–18): Challenges include limited access to tailored empowerment programs for youths transitioning from school to further education or employment.

- After-School Programs: Traditional classroom-based programs have shifted to diverse formats, including online platforms, social media, and community-based initiatives. National Apprenticeship and Community Upskilling Programs are being successfully implemented.
- Tourism Sector Employment: Concerns were raised about foreign worker dominance in the tourism sector, with efforts to increase local youth participation through targeted initiatives.
- Youth Health Programs: The Ministry is conducting programs to address physical and mental health needs, recognizing their importance for youth well-being.
- NGO Engagement: Approximately 3,500 NGOs are registered, with 600 actively supporting youth entertainment and extracurricular activities.
- Minimum Wage: A minimum wage has been established to improve economic conditions for workers, including young professionals.
- Lack of Regional Data: No surveys have been conducted to assess regional disparities in youth unemployment or job opportunities, limiting data-driven policy-making.
- Third Space Program: A new initiative will launch community libraries and youth engagement spaces across seven zones under the Third Space Program.
- Fake News Challenges: Identifying fake news in local languages on social media remains a challenge, with efforts underway to address misinformation.
- Higher Education Fees: State Minister Ali Shamaan noted that college and university fee structures are regulated by the Ministry of Higher Education, requiring approval for changes.
- Domestic Violence and Social Support: The government acknowledged ongoing domestic violence against women and outlined support schemes for single mothers and an old-age pension for those over 65.

Conclusions

The meeting between AFPPD delegates and Ministry of Youth officials highlighted a strong commitment to advancing youth empowerment in the Maldives through initiatives like the Youth Advisory Council, Third Space Program, and National Apprenticeship Programs. The shift to diverse after-school program formats and efforts to address foreign worker dominance in tourism demonstrate proactive steps toward youth inclusion and economic development. However, challenges such as the lack of regional unemployment data, difficulties in combating fake news, underscore the need for improved data collection and record-keeping. The government's acknowledgment of domestic violence and support for vulnerable groups reflects a holistic approach to social issues. To build on these efforts, the Ministry should prioritize regional surveys, enhance local tourism employment, and clarify outstanding documentation to strengthen policy outcomes and collaboration with AFPPD.

Recommendations

To address the identified challenges and build on the discussed initiatives, the following actions are recommended:

- Conduct Regional Surveys: Initiate surveys to assess regional youth unemployment and job opportunity challenges to inform targeted policies.

- Boost Local Tourism Employment: Develop training and incentive programs to increase local youth participation in the tourism sector.
- Accelerate Third Space Program: Ensure timely implementation of the Third Space Program with equitable access to community libraries across all zones.
- Combat Misinformation: Invest in technology and education to address fake news in local languages on social media.

Meeting between the AFPPD delegates and the UN Agencies based in the Maldives.

The delegates of AFPPD had opportunity to interact with the representatives of the UN agencies based in the Maldives.

Mr. Hao Zhang (UNCT Country Coordinator/Maldives) welcomed the delegates and invited his colleagues from the various UN Agencies to introduce themselves and their work.

- Azwa (OHCHR): Human rights treaty compliance (CEDAW, CRC, CRPD).
- Shadia (UNFPA): Family planning, GBV prevention, population data.
- Eddy Addai (UNICEF): Child survival, climate threats, girls' education.
- Yasmine (UNDP): Economic policy, climate resilience, governance.
- Mashad (FAO): Fisheries and agriculture with youth and women focus.

It was mentioned that the Maldives' progress on economy, increasing GDP per capita to \$12,000, life expectancy to 80 and about 100% literacy and implementing the universal healthcare (Aasandha). On the other hand, the Maldives are facing the world's highest divorce rate driving single-mother poverty as well as recent increasing youth unemployment and Malé overcrowding and migrant labor rights (30% of population).

Ms. Shadia from UNFPA briefed about UNFPA's mandate which covers family planning, GBV eradication, and population data. In Maldives, high divorce rates stem from inadequate marital life-skills education.

Mr. Eddy Addai from UNICEF, emphasized that the Maldives reduced child and maternal mortality but faces challenges: 30–35% youth dropout post-lower secondary (NEET), climate vulnerability eroding progress, and girls' leadership underrepresentation despite academic outperformance. Solutions include flexible workplace policies and second-chance programs.

Ms. Yasmine from UNDP, briefed on country's economic prosperity, including Integrated National Financing Framework (1st SIDS adoption globally). She also stressed on climate resilience. Blue economy and natural resource management as well as Practice Parliament Program demystifying legislative processes.

Ms. Mashad, FAO representative stated that FAO prioritizes fisheries and agriculture value chains and will establish a Maldives office embedding women and youth in projects.

Ms. Azwa, from OHCHR emphasized that Maldives ratified 8 core human rights treaties and hosted 5 UN Special Procedures visits in 5 years. The 2023 Universal Periodic Review prioritizes gender-responsive tax reforms, rural girls' education funding, and nationwide sexual/reproductive health education.

Parliamentarians' Q&A

Mdm. Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah, IFPPD Secretary asked whether UN support for parliamentary lawmaking and budget oversight?"

UNDP (Yasmine): Practice Parliament Program trained 1,000+ women and youth; conducted parliamentary accessibility audits; noted need for political party reforms.

Hon. Elvira Surabaldives, MP Kyrgyzstan wanted to know more on best practices to reduce early marriage and keep girls at school.

UNFPA (Shadia): Maldives' median marriage age (21–22) masks divorce rates and life-skills education is needed.

UNICEF (Eddy): Education is key deterrent, cited Kyrgyzstan's anti-bride-kidnapping law.

OHCHR (Azwa): Implement CEDAW recommendations (childcare subsidies, rural grants).

Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem, MP Maldives shared the challenges in the political system in particular that only 3 women in 93-seat parliament and male-dominated parties blocking quotas. Requested UN programs to sensitize male MPs and run grassroots female role-model campaigns.

Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal asked whether sustaining LGBTQI+ gains amid funding cuts?

UNICEF (Eddy): Shift focus to disability inclusion (Maldives' "biggest inclusion challenge").

UNFPA (Shadia): Target "furthest behind" groups (e.g., stigma-free health services for drug users).

Mdm. Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah, IFPPD Secretary shared the example of Indonesia the UN-backed "fact sheets" aligning 500 Indonesian MPs on cross-party agendas (e.g., Child Protection Bills) and she suggested MP capacity-building on youth and single-parent issues.

Key Outcomes

1. **Women's Political Empowerment:** Address male-dominated structures and "imposter syndrome" via quotas, UNDP's mock parliament, and MP mentorship (Kyrgyzstan model).
2. **Youth Crisis:** Bridge education-to-work gaps with vocational training.
3. **Human Rights:** Use UPR/CEDAW for gender-responsive budgeting and rural equity.

4. Cross-National Learning:

- Kyrgyzstan: Criminalizing underage religious marriages (nikah) cut child marriage by 50%.
- Nepal: Constitutional LGBTQI+ safeguards (citizenship, equality rights).

Closing Remarks

- *Mr. Zhang (UNCT)*: Praised Maldives Parliament as a "pilot model" for UN collaboration; pledged continued support on women, youth and migrant labor priorities.
- *Dr. Usmonov Farrukh (AFPPD)*: Commended UN's "concrete strategies", urged MPs to leverage UN country offices.

The Third Visits was to Villigilli

A delegation of AFPPD MPs conducted a productive study visit to Villigilli, facilitated by UNFPA teams and local volunteers. The visit highlighted impactful community-driven initiatives promoting inclusion and empowerment.

Key Observations:

1. **Villi Joali Platform:** MPs visited this inspiring initiative *led by* persons with disabilities. Villi Joali provides a vital space for individuals to exercise their talents through diverse sports and weekly social gatherings (including tea), fostering enjoyment, self-worth, and community integration.
2. **Women's Gardening Initiative:** The delegation observed a successful women's group cultivating garden plants. Profits from sales fund various social activities, demonstrating effective grassroots mobilization for community benefit and economic agency.
3. **Liquid Water Sports & Youth Engagement:** At Liquid Water Sports, MPs met Mr. Ahmed Hussain, a world-renowned flyboard surfer (World Rank #8, European Rank #3). This facility promotes youth engagement and excellence in water sports (surfing, windsurfing, waterskiing, jet skiing), showcasing sports as a viable career path.



Conclusion:

The visit provided valuable insights into Villigilli's vibrant community models. Villi Joali exemplifies exceptional social inclusion for persons with disabilities. The women's gardening initiative showcases sustainable local fundraising. Engagement with elite athletes like Mr. Hussain highlights the potential of sports for youth development. These initiatives, supported by UNFPA partnerships and volunteerism, offer commendable approaches to empowerment and community cohesion worthy of attention and potential replication support.

The fourth and last visit of the day was to Maldives National Museum

On the final day of their program, the visiting delegation of Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) Members of Parliament conducted a significant visit to the Maldives National Museum.

Engaging directly with Museum officials, the MPs received a comprehensive overview of the Maldives' rich and diverse historical and cultural heritage. The tour provided valuable insights into the nation's unique development, traditions, art, and archaeological treasures, spanning from ancient times to the modern era.

This visit served as a crucial educational component, deepening the parliamentarians' understanding of the Maldivian identity and context, enriching their overall study mission experience.



Appendix 1: The Male Declaration

AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth

AFPPD's Sub-Regional Parliamentarians' Meeting on Women Empowerment and Investment in Young People

24-25 June 2025

Malé, Maldives

The Malé Declaration

Preamble

The Sub-Regional Parliamentarians' Meeting on Women Empowerment and Investment in Young People was hosted in Malé, the Maldives, on 24 June 2025. The meeting was co-hosted by the People's Majlis of the Maldives and the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) through the Japan Trust Fund (JTF).

The meeting brought together more than 40 participants from parliaments, governments, international organizations, NGOs, youth organizations and academia, involving 15 countries, to share and discuss good practices in policies, legislation and programs on implementation of the ICPD Program of Action and 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, aiming to address youth and women empowerment. The meeting focused on policies and services that could strengthen investment in youth and eliminate gender inequality, including through empowering women and girls and engaging them in decision-making processes which stands with the principles of the AFPPD strategy.

Statement of Commitment

In line with our role as parliamentarians, we:

1. *Reaffirm fostering and enabling environment for emerging women leaders:* We pledge to champion the advancement, mentorship, and safeguarding of young and newly elected women parliamentarians and political candidates. This commitment entails advocating for the establishment of robust institutional mechanisms to ensure their meaningful participation, prevent Gender Based Violence in public and private areas including discrimination, sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation and promote a political culture rooted in mutual respect, inclusivity, and equal opportunity for all;
2. *Commission evidence-based research on barriers to women's political participation:* We undertake to provide comprehensive technical assistance and resources to facilitate a rigorous, evidence-based study examining the social, cultural, economic, and institutional impediments to women's pursuit of political office and leadership roles in the member-states in Asia, including the Maldives. The outcomes of this research shall serve as a foundation for targeted

policy interventions and legislative reforms to enhance women's political engagement;

3. *Supporting legislative reform for gender equality:* We commit to extending expert guidance and fostering knowledge exchange to support the member-states in their endeavors to review and amend existing legislation and enact progressive laws. These efforts shall prioritize the advancement of substantive gender equality, the elimination of discriminatory provisions, and the strengthening of legal frameworks to empower women across all sectors of society;
4. *Implementing targeted capacity-building programs:* We pledge to design and implement comprehensive, tailored training and leadership development programs for the member-states aimed at equipping women and youth with the requisite skills, knowledge, and networks for effective political participation, public leadership, policy advocacy, and community mobilization. These initiatives shall bolster the pipeline of future leaders committed to equitable and sustainable development;
5. *Promoting gender equality and youth development through education:* We commit to collaborate with the Maldivian relevant authorities to undertake a thorough review and enhancement of national school curriculum align with job matrix. This initiative shall integrate principles of gender equality, women's rights, civic responsibility, leadership, and sustainable youth development, fostering transformative educational content to instill progressive values from an early age;
6. Reaffirm budget allocation for supporting women empowerment and investing in young people at the national and sub-national levels.
7. *Reaffirming commitment to policy implementation support:* We reaffirm our steadfast dedication to providing sustained technical expertise and parliamentary capacity-building to support the member-states, including the Maldives for the effective implementation and monitoring of key national policies. This includes targeted assistance to translate the priority commitments on gender equality, women's empowerment, and youth development, as articulated in its manifesto, into tangible legislative and programmatic outcomes;
8. Recommit to working with all stakeholders, including development partners: civil societies; regional, national and local governments; the private sectors; multilateral organizations; national parliamentary bodies and regional and global fora on population and development; to advance the ICPD PoA and achieve the 2030 Agenda and to reaffirm the 2024 Oslo Statement of Commitment;
9. We express gratitude to the Government of Japan's the Japan Trust Fund (JTF) and the UNFPA for continuously supporting the AFPPD's activities in the Asia-Pacific region

Appendix 2: Program



AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth

AFPPD's Sub-Regional Parliamentarians' Meeting on: Women Empowerment and Investment in Young People in South Asia

Male, Maldives,

24-25 June 2025

Program

Join Online

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85826910732?pwd=JhikRt1lQHM6FqRyITn2HOa6DraeWa.1>

Meeting ID: 858 2691 0732

Passcode: 681088

Monday, 23 June 2025	
Arrival of delegates	
Day1: Tuesday 24 June 2025: Meeting	
08:20–09:00	Registration <i>Location: House of the People's Majlis</i>
09:00–09:40	Venue: <i>Committee Room 10, 6th floor, House of the People's Majlis</i> Opening Session MC: Hon. Ali Fazad, MP , Chair, Maldives Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (MPGPD) Addresses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Mr. Sugiyama Koji, Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of Japan in the Maldives➤ Mr. Hao Zhang, UN Resident Coordinator➤ Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal, Chair of AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth➤ Hon. Ahmed Nazim, MP, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis

09:40–10:00	<i>Group Photo & Coffee break</i>
10:00–10:15	Viewing of a Parliamentary Sitting (Parliament Chamber Building) – 2 nd floor
10:15–11:15	<p>Session 1: Policy Promotion to Address Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in South Asia</p> <p>Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hon. Hector Appuhamy, MP Sri Lanka <p>Presentation (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem, MP, People’s Majlis, Maldives ➤ Ms. Shadiya Ibrahim, UNFPA Maldives ➤ Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal <p>Open discussion (30 minutes)</p>
11:15–12:15	<p>Session 2: Promotion of Education and Friendly Employment Environment for Youth in the South-Asian Region</p> <p>Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hon. Abdulla Rifau, MP, People’s Majlis, Maldives <p>Presentation (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hon. Sahibzada Sibghatullah, MP Pakistan (online) ➤ Mr. Ismail Naseer, Principal at Vaadhoo School, Maldives ➤ Hon. Yeshey Jamtsho, MP Bhutan <p>Open discussion (30 minutes)</p>
12:15–13:15	<p>Official Lunch hosted by Hon. Speaker of the People’s Majlis</p> <p>Venue: <i>Hotel Jen</i></p>
13:15–14:15	<p>Session 3: Addressing Financial Stability and Entrepreneurship for Women and Girls</p> <p>Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hon. Mohammad Islahuddin Abas, MP Malaysia <p>Presentation (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ On women Entrepreneurship in Maldives: Ms. Fathimath Saeed, Consultant Economist, Asian Development Bank ➤ Hon. Dr. Kolakanh Phommvong, MP Lao PDR. Co-Chair of AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth ➤ On promotion of women employment: Hon. Elvira Surabaldieva, MP Kyrgyzstan <p>Open discussion (30 minutes)</p>
14:15–14:30	<i>Coffee Break</i>

14:30–15:30	Session 4: Role of Policymakers to Address Investing in Youth and Women Empowerment Chair ➤ Hon. Rinzin Dorji , MP Bhutan Presentation (10 minutes each) ➤ Hon. Sri Wulan , MP Indonesia ➤ Hon. Asadhulla Shihab , MP, People’s Majlis, Maldives ➤ Hon. Hector Appuhamy , MP Sri Lanka Open discussion (30 minutes)
15:30–16:15	Words into action: Planning and commitment setting Chair: Hon. Ali Fazad, MP, Chair, MPGPD Moderator: Dr. Usmonov Farrukh, Executive Director of AFPPD
16:20–16:50	Wrap up Session Addresses (7 min each): ➤ Dr. Usmonov Farrukh , Executive Director of AFPPD ➤ Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem , MP Maldives, AFPPD Executive Committee Member
16:50	<i>Coffee Break</i>
17:30	Leave for Hotel
Day 2: Study Visit, Wednesday, 25 June 2025	
<i>Participants will visit various youth and women-related centers and observe practical measures and experiences in Maldives.</i>	
08:20–08:40	Location: Meet at the Lobby
08:40	Departure from hotel toward Youth Ministry
09:00–10:00	Briefing with the Ministry
10:00	Depart Ministry for People’s Majlis
10:30 – 11:30	Meeting with UNCT Venue: <i>Committee Room 10, 6th floor, House of the People’s Majlis</i>
11:30	Leave Parliament for lunch hosted by Hon. Ali Fazad, MP, Chair of MPGPD
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch hosted by Hon. Ali Fazad, MP, Chair of MPGPD, Venue: Maagiri Hotel

13:30	Leave restaurant for Vilingili Ferry terminal
13:45 - 14:00	Travel to Vilimale'
14:00 – 16:00	Visits to the places below in Vilimale': <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Community Garden Center</i> ▪ <i>Center for Maritime Studies</i> ▪ Other
16:00 – 16:15	Depart for Male'
16:15 ~	Free time
18:00	Return to hotel
Thursday, 26 June 2025	
	Participants Departure

Organized by:

The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)

The People's Majlis of Maldives

The Asian Population and Development Association (APDA)

Supported by:

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Japan Trust Fund (JTF)

Appendix 3: List of Participants



AFPPD Standing Committee on Investing in Youth

AFPPD's Sub-Regional Parliamentarians' Meeting on: Women Empowerment and Investment in Young People in South Asia

Male, Maldives

24-25 June 2025

Participants

Delegates:

1. Hon. Rinzin Dorji, MP Bhutan
2. Hon. Yeshey Jamtsho, MP Bhutan
3. Hon. Sri Wulan, MP Indonesia
4. Ms. Ermalena Muslim Hasbullah, Secretary of IFPPD
5. Mr. Samijo, IFPPD Officer, Indonesia
6. Hon. Elvira Surabaldieva, MP, Kyrgyzstan
7. Hon. Dr. Kolakanh Phommvong, MP, Lao PDR
8. Mr. Monepheth Sisomphone, Parliamentary Officer, Lao PDR
9. Hon. Mohammad Islahuddin Abas, MP Malaysia
10. Mr. Mohsin bin Abdul Malek, Parliamentary officer, Malaysia
11. Hon. Yogesh Gauchan Thakali, MP Nepal
12. Hon. Ganga Kumari Belbase, MP Nepal
13. Hon. Hector Appuhamy, MP Sri Lanka
14. Dr. Usmonov Farrukh, Executive Director of AFPPD

Online participants:

1. Ms. Megan Connor, Officer of Australian Parliamentary Group on Population and Development (APGPD)
2. Hon. Khut Chandara, MP Cambodia
3. Ms. Mony Roath, CAPPD officer, Cambodia
4. Mr. Sokhan Darapy, CAPPD officer, Cambodia
5. Ms. Hitomi Tsunekawa, Executive Director of APDA, Japan
6. Ms. Mio Fuke, APDA Program officer, Japan
7. Mr. Enkhuvshin Urtrasan, Adviser to Mongolian Parliamentary Group
8. Hon. Sahibzada Sibghatullah, MP Pakistan
9. Mr. Syed Rahim Shah, Deputy Director, International Relations Department, NA Pakistan
10. Mr. Abduaziz Qahhorov, Adviser to Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Tajikistan

Majlis delegation:

1. Hon. Ahmed Nazim, Deputy Speaker of the People's Majlis
2. Hon. Ali Fazad – MP, Chair, Maldives Parliamentary Group on Population and Development
3. Hon. Dr. Anara Naeem – MP, AFPPD Executive Committee Member
4. Hon. Abdulla Rifau – MP for South Maafannu Constituency
5. Hon. Asadhulla Shihab – MP for Gemanafushi Constituency
6. Hon. Hon. Azim Abdul Azeez, MP for Vilinggili Constituency
7. Hon. Ahmed Didi, MP for Maradhoo Constituency
8. Hon. Fathimath Sauda, MP for Nilandhoo Constituency

Other

1. Mr. Hao Zhang, UN Resident Coordinator
2. Ms. Shadiya Ibrahim, UNFPA Maldives

3. Ms. Fathimath Zuhana, UNFPA Maldives
4. Ms. Fathimath Saeed – Consultant Economist, Asian Development Bank
5. Mr. Ismail Naseer, Principal at Vaadhoo School, Maldives
6. Mr. Adam Mohamed, Rapporteur

Secretariat:

1. Zuyyina Badhree
2. Aishath Eeman
3. Mariyam Waheed
4. Mariyam Marin Hussain