

GENDER ACTION PLAN

**Conservation of AToll Ecosystems through an
effectively managed NATional protected area Estate
(CATENATE)**



This report was prepared by Up Close Solutions Pvt Ltd for the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy under the Conservation of Atoll Ecosystems through an Effectively Managed National Protected Area Estate (CATENATE) project.

The report addresses the following deliverables:

- Baseline Gender Analysis for the Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll complex and Shaviyani Atoll (Sh. Funadhoo).
- Gender Action Plan framework covering assessment, consultation and strategy, capacity building, financial and technical support, and leadership.
- Social Safeguards Analysis and Risk Mitigation Framework addressing gender-based risks, economic displacement, and social inclusion.
- Implementation framework and Gender-Responsive Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) System.

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Executive Summary

The Gender Action Plan (GAP) creates a framework for promoting gender equality and social inclusion in all Protected Area (PA) management in the Maldives. This includes efforts at the demonstration site in Shaviyani Atoll Farukolhu PA.

The formulation of the GAP was based on thorough research. It included a desk review, a detailed analysis of the 2022 Census data, and field consultations in October 2025. The GAP identifies specific challenges, relevant opportunities, and required actions. These measures ensure equitable participation and benefit-sharing linked to the Farukolhu Protected Area.

Rationale: Gender and Conservation

Gender equality is fundamental to achieving successful and sustainable conservation outcomes. The CATENATE project focuses on the Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll complex. This region spans four administrative atolls (Haa Alifu, Haa Dhaalu, Shaviyani and Noonu Atoll) and includes 15 Protected Areas. It hosts a resident Maldivian population of 57,460 (MBS, 2022). Within this complex, and specifically in Shaviyani Atoll, women hold a central role in the informal management of natural resources.

Women mainly collect and use materials like coconut fronds, sea almonds, shells, and wood from uninhabited islands. These resources generate income through activities like thatch weaving and local craft production. This economic contribution is key for household livelihoods. However, these vital roles frequently operate outside of formal governance structures. Consequently, women's crucial knowledge and perspectives are underrepresented in environmental decision-making.

Including gender in PA management boosts the legitimacy and success of conservation efforts. It also ensures that resource management decisions result in equitable benefits for both men and women.



Key Gender Findings

Findings from the Census 2022 and field assessments confirm gendered patterns across the Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll complex, where the total population is 58,448, comprising 29,924 males and 30,574 females

- **Political Representation:** Pilot activities in Sh. Funadhoo show the Island Council meets the 33 percent quota mandated by the Decentralization Act (Law No. 7/2010), with two female councilors. Across the region, however, men hold a 79% share of managerial occupations, while women remain underrepresented in technical and associate professional roles (less than 20% share) (MBS, 2023a). Conversely, women occupy a significant 75.6% share of professional occupations in the informal sector (MBS, 2023a).
- **Employment:** Shaviyani Atoll reports the highest rate of Maldivian women in informal jobs at 49.3 percent (MBS, 2023a). Nationally, the majority of reported workers across all industries are male (73%), while women comprise approximately 19% of the workforce (MBS, 2024).
- **Household Leadership:** The number of female-headed households continues to increase. This trend is prominent in administrative islands where half of all households (50 percent) are female-headed (MBS, 2023b). This underscores women's dual roles as economic contributors and household managers.
- **Participation Constraints:** Field consultations identified specific barriers to women's participation. These include time poverty, directly linked to extensive caregiving responsibilities. There is also documented social hesitation to speak openly in mixed or formal decision-making settings.

These findings underscore the need for inclusive mechanisms. Such mechanisms should acknowledge women's roles, lower barriers to participation, and create safe spaces for engaging in PA planning and implementation.

Gender Risks and Opportunities

The gender analysis identifies moderate social risks. These risks might impact women's participation and benefits from the project. Simultaneously, it highlights clear opportunities for empowerment and leadership development.

Risks

- **Exclusion:** Women's voices may be excluded from key PA decision-making processes.
- **Livelihood Impacts:** New PA zoning may restrict access to traditional resource areas, impacting women's existing livelihoods.
- **Gender-Based Tensions:** Access to new financial resources or livelihood support mechanisms may lead to social or gender-based tensions.

Opportunities

- **Formal Partnership:** The project will strengthen Women's Development Committees (WDCs) as formal partners in PA management and livelihood initiatives.
- **Financial Access:** The CATENATE Project will promote equitable access to the Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund for women-led enterprises.
- **Leadership Development:** The project must enhance female leadership. This includes having women represented in the Project Management Unit, the Trust Fund Board, and community advisory groups.

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Integrating Gender Across Project Activities

Gender equality will be operationalized across all project components. It will not be treated merely as a separate activity.

- **Gender-Responsive Assessments:** All resource use and livelihood assessments will systematically collect sex-disaggregated data. They will also ensure women's active participation throughout the process.
- **Inclusive Consultations:** Community consultations will be designed to fit women's schedules and comfort levels. This ensures the creation of safe spaces that encourage open dialogue.
- **Capacity Development:** Training programs will target achieving at least 50 percent female participation. Specific opportunities will be created for WDC members and young women.
- **Financial Inclusion:** Gender-sensitive budgeting will guide the allocation of conservation financing. This ensures equal access to grants and livelihood opportunities.
- **Leadership and Governance:** Gender quotas and equal opportunity measures will be used for project staffing and governance. This promotes women as decision-makers and mentors.

Expected Outcomes

The GAP will bring clear changes in how institutions operate and how communities participate in PA governance.

- **Achieving Gender Parity:** The project will reach gender parity in activities and leadership.
- **Inclusive Governance:** It will establish inclusive and transparent PA governance systems. These systems must reflect community diversity and shared ownership.
- **Economic Expansion:** The GAP will expand economic opportunities for women. This is achieved through equitable access to financing and sustainable livelihood development.
- **Awareness and Change:** The project will strengthen community awareness. It will also encourage positive behavior changes for gender equality in conservation.
- **Accountability and Learning:** Accountability and learning will be enhanced. This is done by using sex-disaggregated monitoring and gender-sensitive indicators in the project's evaluation.

The CATENATE Gender Action Plan serves as both a guiding framework and a commitment. This commitment ensures that conservation in Boduthiladhunmathi is inclusive, participatory, and equitable. By embedding gender-responsive practices at every stage, the project aims to set a national precedent. This precedent is for integrating social inclusion into environmental governance. Ultimately, the project ensures that the conservation of natural resources also strengthens social resilience and community wellbeing.



1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Scope of the Gender Action Plan

The Gender Action Plan (GAP) was formulated during the inception phase of the CATENATE project (Conservation of Atoll Ecosystems through an effectively managed NATional protected area Estate). The GAP is being developed as a framework to integrate gender equality and social inclusion into Protected Area (PA) management in the Maldives. This framework will be piloted through the project's demonstration site at Shaviyani Farukolhu PA.

The GAP addresses gender and social cohesion barriers and challenges through project activities. Weak gender mainstreaming in natural resource management (NRM) hinders effective conservation and equitable outcomes. Its core purpose is to ensure equal benefits for women, men, and vulnerable groups from all project activities. It also promotes women's empowerment. This is recognized as a central condition for achieving biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.

The GAP's scope covers gender equality mainstreaming throughout the entire project cycle. It provides activity-based strategies across five key engagement areas. These areas include assessment, consultation and strategy development, training and capacity building, financial and technical support, and leadership and management. It informs all project stages. These include indicator formulation, budgeting, partner selection, and reporting. It specifically ensures equitable access to financial resources, particularly via the planned Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund as per the project workplan.

Furthermore, the GAP provides a safeguard framework. This framework mitigates social risks identified during environmental and social screening. These risks include Gender-Based Violence (GBV), potential economic displacement, and inequitable benefit sharing. The GAP serves as a mandatory operational guide. Key users include the Project Management Unit (PMU), project staff, and consultants. Institutional partners like the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSFD) are also users. The MSFD oversees national compliance on gender-related commitments. Its guidance is implemented by the Funadhoo Island Council, other island councils across the Boduthiladhunmathi region, and Women's Development Committees (WDCs). These entities utilize the framework to ensure inclusive participation in PA governance and livelihood activities.

In alignment with international standards, the GAP fulfills the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Policy on Gender Equality. It also meets the IUCN Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) requirements. This is achieved by embedding gender-responsive safeguards within project operations (GEF, 2018). The project's ESMS screening categorized CATENATE as posing a moderate social risk. This highlights the GAP's importance in mitigating gender-related vulnerabilities. It ensures compliance with the Maldives Gender Equality Act (Government of the Maldives, 2016).

1.2 Project Overview

The CATENATE project aims to safeguard nationally and globally significant coral reef biodiversity and associated ecosystems. It achieves this through establishing a resilient network of effectively and equitably managed Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) in the Maldives. The project focuses on the Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll complex. This area spans approximately 3,800 km². It includes four administrative atolls and fifteen Protected Areas.

The project structure rests on three interlinked outcomes. These outcomes address PA governance, sustainable financing, and knowledge dissemination.

Outcome 1: Strengthened PA governance mechanisms are key. This uses inclusive models that integrate local communities and WDCs. It adopts the IUCN Green List Standard and enhances managerial capacity.

Outcome 2: A sustainable and equitable Protected Area financing system will be developed. This ensures community benefit and women's economic empowerment via self-financing mechanisms.

Outcome 3: Effective communication and knowledge sharing are necessary. This enables replication of successful practices and institutionalizes gender equality in conservation programming.

The Shaviyani Farukolhu Protected Area (PA9) serves as the project's demonstration site. It covers 72.15ha terrestrial and 437.73ha marine ecosystems. Activities implemented in Farukolhu will inform replication across the other 14 PAs within the Boduthiladhunmathi network.



Integrating gender into this framework is critical for project success. Without deliberate attention to gender dimensions, PA restrictions or zoning decisions may disproportionately impact women who depend on these ecosystems for resource-based livelihoods. Conversely, gender-responsive approaches strengthen both conservation effectiveness and social equity by incorporating women's ecological knowledge, ensuring equitable benefit distribution, and building community ownership of PA management outcomes. The GAP therefore positions gender integration as both a safeguard requirement and a strategic advantage for achieving the project's conservation and social objectives.

1.3 Legal and Policy Framework for Gender Equality

Gender equality in the Maldives is underpinned by a comprehensive framework. This framework includes constitutional, legislative, and policy instruments. These guide the CATENATE project's gender commitments.

The Constitution of 2008 guarantees equality before the law. It prohibits discrimination based on sex or gender. This affirms every individual's right to equal protection and benefit under the law (Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, 2008). It also defines the State's duty to protect and preserve the nation's biodiversity and natural beauty. This preservation is for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Gender Equality Act (GEA) of 2016 provides a rights-based foundation. It mandates women's direct participation in the planning and implementation of development initiatives (Gender Equality Act, 2016). It further requires the government to ensure equal access to economic resources. The GEA mandates the collection of gender-segregated data to monitor equality outcomes (Gender Equality Act, 2016, p. 351; MGFSS and NBS, 2020, p. 82).

Complementing the GEA, the Decentralization Act (Law No. 7/2010) institutionalizes women's participation in local governance. This is achieved through establishing Women's Development Committees (WDCs) under each island council. Despite capacity and resourcing challenges, WDCs remain critical partners for gender-responsive PA management. The 8th Amendment to the Act (Law No. 24/2019) introduced a 33 percent quota for women in local councils (ADB, 2025). Furthermore, the Protected Areas Regulation (Regulation No. 2018/R-78) establishes mandatory requirements for consultative and transparent processes during PA designation. It stipulates that all relevant persons affected by such designations must be identified and consulted, formally recognizing community participation as an essential procedural component.

At the policy level, national biodiversity strategies still lack explicit gender considerations. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (MEE, 2016) omits direct gender references. However, its principle of mainstreaming biodiversity across sectors provides a strong entry point for integrating gender-responsive conservation.

Internationally, the Maldives is a signatory to major instruments. These include CEDAW (UN, 1993), the Beijing Platform for Action (UN, 1995), and the Cairo Plan of Action (UN, 1994). All commit the State to ensuring women's full participation in social and economic development (IUCN, n.d., p. 200). The CATENATE project also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-5) and the GEF Policy on Gender Equality. It adopts a proactive "do good" approach to promoting gender-responsive conservation (Internal Guideline, n.d., p. 371).

1.4 Objectives of the Gender Action Plan

The objectives of the GAP are structured around five activity types. These collectively ensure the integration of gender equality principles across all components of the CATENATE project.

1. **Assessment Activities:** To establish a gender-disaggregated baseline. To identify barriers and opportunities for women's involvement. To incorporate women's knowledge into assessments.
2. **Consultation and Strategy Development:** To ensure women's meaningful participation and decision-making in planning processes. To promote dialogue and awareness on gender-related concerns.
3. **Training and Capacity Building:** To enhance women's technical capacities and representation. To develop women as trainers, experts, and role models in PA management.
4. **Financial and Technical Support:** To guarantee equal access to funds. To ensure proportional support for women-led livelihood activities.
5. **Leadership and Management:** To ensure women's representation in decision-making roles and advisory capacities. To foster institutional change and equitable governance.

Collectively, these objectives translate the CATENATE project's gender commitments into actionable strategies. They ensure that gender equality is embedded as a core operational principle. This principle is vital for achieving inclusive, effective, and sustainable conservation outcomes in Shaviyani Atoll and beyond.

2. Baseline Gender Analysis

Map showing four administrative atolls (Haa Alif, Haa Dhaalu, Shaviyani, Noonu) and 15 Protected Areas. Shaviyani Farukolhu PA (PA9) highlighted as the project demonstration site with field activities centered on Funadhoo Island.

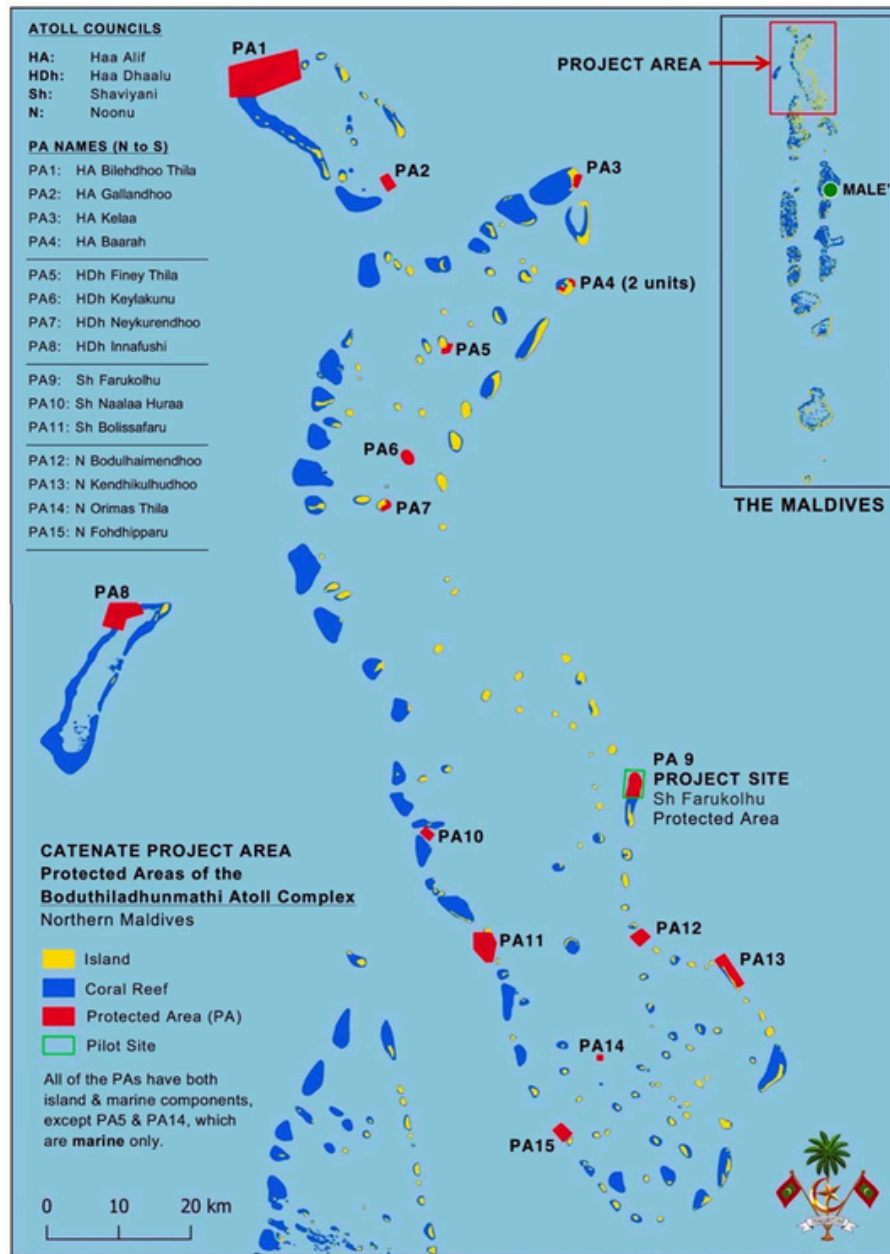


Figure 1: CATENATE Project Area – Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll Complex

Regional Profile — Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll (HA, HDh, Sh, N)

Geographic and Administrative Context

The Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll complex is the largest natural atoll structure in the world. It spans approximately 3,789km². Administratively, it comprises Haa Alif, Haa Dhaalu, Shaviyani, and Noonu atolls. The region contains 15 Protected Areas. These areas safeguard globally significant coral reef biodiversity. The project demonstration site is located at Farukolhu island in Shaviyani Atoll.

Demographic Structure

The total population of the project focus area is 58,448 (MBS, 2022). The region displays distinct demographic characteristics. The population comprises 29,924 males and 30,574 females. This indicates a female-majority resident population. The regional population is relatively young. Shaviyani Atoll has a median age of 29. It has a dependency ratio of 65 dependents per 100 working-age persons (MBS, 2022).

Economic Landscape

The regional economy is transitioning toward a service-oriented model. However, reliance on natural resources remains high. Primary economic activities include fisheries and agriculture. Tourism is well-established in Noonu Atoll. It is still emerging in Shaviyani, Haa Alif, and Haa Dhaalu atolls. Shaviyani Atoll currently hosts two resorts and two guesthouses. Infrastructure developments like the Funadhoo domestic airport are expected to accelerate growth (IUCN, n.d.).

Informality of Employment

A significant portion of the regional workforce operates in the informal sector. Shaviyani Atoll records the highest national rate of Maldivian women in informal jobs at 49.3 percent (MBS, 2023a). Men in Shaviyani also show high informal engagement at 30.5 percent. In Noonu Atoll, 47.3 percent of employed Maldivian women remain in informal roles despite higher resort presence (MBS, 2023a).

Natural Resource Dependence

Livelihoods are heavily linked to biodiversity. Communities rely on reef ecosystems for bait fisheries and food security. Women engage in home-based manufacturing using natural resources. These activities include thatch weaving, coir rope making, and food processing (FAO, 2019; Up Close Solutions Pvt Ltd, 2025).

Governance Context

The Decentralization Act requires local councils to maintain a minimum of 33% female representation. The Funadhoo Island Council (Shaviyani Atoll) complies with this mandate, with two female council members out of five. However, all Island Council Presidents in Shaviyani Atoll remain male. Women's Development Committees (WDCs) operate as legally mandated structures. They are integral to local governance. They advise on development matters and increase women's political participation.

Strategic Implication

Developing equitable Protected Area (PA) governance models for national application requires testing in social contexts with high vulnerability. The project prioritizes the Boduthiladhunmathi region to evaluate these models. Shaviyani Atoll presents a critical focal point, reporting the highest national prevalence of Maldivian women in informal employment at 49.3 percent (MBS, 2023). High informality signifies extreme economic vulnerability to resource access restrictions. Consequently, Sh. Farukolhu is established as the demonstration site to pilot livelihood transitions. The site tests the conversion of risky informal activities into secure, PA-compatible economic roles. This ensures the resulting national governance models are resilient, inclusive, and socially sustainable.

2.1 Demographic Profile — Boduthiladhunmathi and Sh. Funadhoo

Regional Population Dynamics

The Boduthiladhunmathi complex supports a total population of 58,448 individuals (MBS, 2022). Within this regional aggregate, Shaviyani Atoll serves as the primary demographic focus for the project's pilot activities. The atoll hosts 12,687 resident Maldivians, maintaining a sex ratio of 85 males per 100 females (MBS, 2022). A median age of 29 indicates a young population structure. This results in a dependency ratio of 65 dependents for every 100 working-age persons (MBS, 2022). Consequently, household resource needs are predominantly driven by the needs of youth and children.

Gendered Care Responsibilities

Women numerically dominate both the childhood and working-age cohorts across the administrative islands. In Shaviyani Atoll, working-age females total 4,450, significantly outnumbering resident males in the same age group (MBS, 2022). This demographic skew places the primary responsibility for household management and caregiving on women. Approximately 50 percent of households in the region are female-headed (MBS, 2023b). This responsibility is further intensified in households supporting persons with disabilities. In these cases, 55 percent of households are headed by women (MBS, 2023). These structural care burdens directly limit women's availability for external employment or public governance roles.

Island-Level Baseline

Funadhoo. Sh. Funadhoo is the project's focal island for the demonstration site. It records a stable resident population of 2,058 Maldivians (MBS, 2022). Field consultations reveal that 84 percent of women on the island are married with resident children (Up Close Solutions Pvt Ltd, 2025). High prevalence of domestic duties defines the daily schedule for most women on the island. This "time poverty" is a critical barrier to their participation in formal planning processes. Successful PA management depends on scheduling consultations and training to respect these caregiving windows.

Implications for the GAP

The female-skewed working-age structure, high share of female-headed households, and documented care responsibilities confirm central factors for women in Shaviyani. These include time poverty, mobility constraints, and household risk management. These dynamics require specific activity schedules. They must respect caregiving windows and accessible venues. They also require provision for childcare and deliberate outreach. This ensures women's presence and voice in assessments, consultations, training, and governance processes (MBS, 2022, p. 467; NBS, 2023, p. 220; NBS, 2023, p. 104).

2.2 Economic Participation — Boduthiladhunmathi and Sh. Funadhoo

Regional Employment Dynamics

Economic participation across the Boduthiladhunmathi complex is defined by high reliance on natural capital and a transitioning tourism sector. National female Labor Force Participation (LFP) is 48.4 percent, compared to 79.5 percent for men (MBS, 2024). At the island level in Sh. Funadhoo, 62.5 percent of women report working for an income. However, 53.8 percent express dissatisfaction with their earnings, indicating significant underemployment (Sh. Funadhoo WDC, 2024). Nearly half (49 percent) of working women on the island earn less than MVR 5,000 monthly (Sh. Funadhoo WDC, 2024). These modest income levels limit household resilience and capital for reinvestment.

Informality and Structural Vulnerability

The region exhibits high rates of informality, exposing women to economic shocks and a lack of social protection. Shaviyani Atoll records the highest national rate of Maldivian women in informal jobs at 49.3 percent (MBS, 2023a). While women comprise a minority of the total informal workforce, they are the majority among Maldivians in this sector. Specifically, 78 percent of women in informal employment are Maldivians, whereas 73 percent of men in the same sector are foreigners (MBS, 2023a). This highlights that informal livelihoods are a vital, yet insecure, economic pillar for the resident female population.

Occupational Segregation

Employment is defined by rigid gender norms. Men dominate labor-intensive primary sectors like construction and fisheries, holding over 90 percent of roles in these industries (MBS, 2024). In contrast, women are concentrated in manufacturing (39%), education, and health (MBS, 2023a). This segregation persists within the informal sector itself. Men hold a 79 percent share of managerial occupations. Conversely, women dominate the "professional" category with a 75.6 percent share, largely in the education industry (MBS, 2023a).

Structural Barriers to Formalization

Entry into the formal workforce is hindered by multi-dimensional constraints. Women in Sh. Funadhoo report spending 12 or more hours daily on unpaid care work (Up Close Solutions Pvt Ltd, 2025). This "time poverty" prevents engagement in formal work or governance meetings. The "one-island-one-resort" model of regional tourism creates further barriers linked to safety, transport, and social norms against living away from families (ADB, 2025). Furthermore, a lack of recognized vocational certification and limited access to finance—often due to land being registered to men—stifles female entrepreneurship (FAO, 2019; ADB, 2025).

Resource-Based and Recreational Economy

Livelihoods remain intrinsically linked to natural capital extracted from uninhabited islands and Protected Areas. Women are the primary processors of resources like coconut, screw pine, and sea almonds (FAO, 2019). Key activities include thatch weaving (fangivinun), coir rope making (roanuveshun), and food processing (FAO, 2019). Beyond extraction, island "picnics" are a vital recreational and social activity. These outings support informal economic roles in catering and logistics. The Funadhoo WDC has expressed strong interest in formalizing these roles into women-led guided tours and eco-tourism initiatives.

Implications for the GAP

The dominance of women in informal, home-based, and resource-dependent sectors underscores their vulnerability to environmental and economic shocks. The GAP must therefore emphasize gender-responsive livelihood diversification. It must ensure equitable access to financing and targeted capacity development. This will help women transition into sustainable and formalized economic roles. Ensuring secure resource access, fair financing mechanisms, and skill recognition will be critical. This promotes economic resilience and advances gender equality across Shaviyani Atoll.

2.3 Governance and Decision-Making — Boduthiladhunmathi and Sh. Funadhoo

Representation in local councils

Women's participation in local governance has improved through legislative reform. However, structural and cultural barriers limit influence beyond nominal representation. The 8th Amendment to the Decentralization Act (Law No. 24/2019) introduced a mandatory 33 percent quota for women in local councils. This significantly increased women's access to elected office (ADB, 2025, p. 598). Following the 2022 elections, women occupied 39.5 percent of council seats nationally, compared with just 6 percent in 2018 (MGFSS and NBS, 2020, p. 63). In Shaviyani Atoll, the Funadhoo Island Council (FIC) reflects this progress. The FIC is the primary governance body for the CATENATE demonstration site. It has two female councilors out of five seats. This surpasses the quota requirement. Despite this achievement, all Island Council Presidents across Shaviyani Atoll remain male dominated. This reinforces gender asymmetry in leadership positions.

Role and performance of Women's Development Committees

The Women's Development Committees (WDCs) are legally established under the Decentralization Act. They serve as the main institutional mechanism for women's participation in island governance (Transparency Maldives, 2015, p. 13). They are mandated to advise Island Councils on local development. Their duties include municipal services, conducting income-generation activities, upholding women's rights, and enhancing political participation (IUCN, n.d., p. 197). However, most WDCs remain underutilized. Historically, their work has been limited to socially oriented activities. These include cleaning, awareness events, and handicraft programmes. This falls short of their statutory advisory and developmental functions (Transparency Maldives, 2015, p. 26).

The Funadhoo WDC serves as an exceptionally active model for the CATENATE project. The committee manages a significant annual budget of MVR 700,000 and conducts weekly coordination meetings. Its operational capacity is demonstrated through the direct management of the island's preschool. Furthermore, the WDC implements approximately 10 self-initiated programs annually, supporting community infrastructure such as the indoor gym. In 2024, the Funadhoo WDC conducted the "Women's Living Conditions Survey," interviewing 170 women to assess health and economic status (Sh. Funadhoo WDC, 2024). This initiative confirms the WDC's ability to gather and analyze gender-disaggregated data. The committee has identified that informal engagement formats, such as "Coffee with WDC," achieve higher participation than formal awareness sessions.

Operational challenges persist

Over half (55 percent) of WDCs report not being consulted on island development matters, despite their legal mandate (Transparency Maldives, 2015, p. 29). WDC representatives have noted “little or no respect” from councils. They report a general disregard for women’s opinions. This undermines their effectiveness (IUCN, n.d., p. 198; Internal Project Document, n.d., p. 318). Financial and resource constraints further restrict their ability to plan and implement initiatives (IUCN, n.d., p. 194).

Barriers to political participation

Despite increased representation, women’s active participation and influence remain constrained. This is due to deep-rooted social norms and time limitations. Cultural expectations continue to confine women to home-based roles. Public perception still tends to favor male leadership—62 percent of respondents agreed that men make better leaders (Transparency Maldives, 2015, p. 22). In Funadhoo, time poverty is a major structural constraint: women spend 12 or more hours per day on household and caregiving tasks. This leaves limited time for governance involvement (Internal Report, n.d., p. 107). As a result, only 15 percent of women reportedly attend council meetings (Internal Report, n.d., p. 108).

Additionally, women’s political participation is hindered by lack of campaign financing and limited mobility. Anti-campaigning against women candidates also discourages new entrants (Transparency Maldives, 2015, pp. 22, 40, 57). The intersection of these factors perpetuates a cycle where women’s representation is numeric rather than influential.

Institutional capacity of the Funadhoo Island Council

The FIC is designated as the Protected Area (PA) management authority for Shaviyani Farukolhu. However, its governance capacity remains limited. The council faces deficits in technical expertise, planning, and resource management. It relies largely on administrative oversight rather than participatory governance (IUCN, n.d., pp. 159–161). A pre-capacity assessment is required. This must identify gaps in institutional ability to manage the PA in line with decentralized governance principles (IUCN, n.d., p. 152).

Although female representation in the council meets policy targets, field consultations highlight a gap between representation and influence. Women members often refrain from speaking in mixed settings. This is due to a cultural hesitation to express opinions in formal discussions (Internal Report, n.d., p. 114). As a result, their input in decision-making processes remains limited. Existing consultation practices fail to capture diverse women’s perspectives (IUCN, n.d., p. 211).

Way forward for inclusive governance

Under CATENATE, gender-responsive governance in Shaviyani Atoll depends on strengthening FIC and Funadhoo WDC collaboration. This ensures women's views directly inform PA management and local development planning (IUCN GEF Maldives, n.d., p. 274). The WDC is active and resourced, with a budget of MVR 700,000, but faces difficulties in community mobilization (Internal Report, n.d., pp. 106–107).

Capacity building for both the council and the WDC must move beyond administrative training. It must embed socially inclusive governance mechanisms. These mechanisms must address time poverty, participation barriers, and the institutional culture of exclusion. By doing so, the CATENATE project will set a precedent. This precedent is for gender-balanced, decentralized PA management that reflects the realities and strengths of women in Shaviyani Atoll (IUCN, n.d., p. 212).

2.4 Vulnerability and Social Inclusion — Shaviyani Atoll

The vulnerability and social inclusion dimensions relevant to gender in Shaviyani Atoll are complex. They are shaped by the intersection of disability, economic insecurity, gender-based violence (GBV), and geographic isolation. Structural barriers compound these factors. These barriers include limited service access and deeply rooted gender norms. These norms restrict mobility and participation. The Maldives Census 2022 and the Women's Health and Life Experiences Survey provide the primary evidence base. This evidence helps understand these vulnerabilities within the atoll context.

1. Women with Disabilities (PWD)

Women with disabilities represent one of the most disadvantaged groups in the atoll. They face simultaneous barriers of gender, disability, and poverty. Nationally, disability prevalence is higher among women (7.8%) than men (6.1%). This disparity widens in the atolls, where 8.8% of women report a disability compared to 6.9% of men (MBS, 2023).

Economic participation among women with disabilities is significantly lower. Only 28 percent are part of the labour force (MBS, 2023, p. 75). Unemployment among them is 9 percent. This is higher than the 6 percent rate for women without disabilities (MBS, 2023, p. 75). About half of employed women with disabilities (50 percent) work in informal jobs (MBS, p. 84). This exposes them to economic instability and absence of legal protection or social benefits.

Education outcomes follow a similar trend. Among young women aged 15–24 with disabilities, 41 percent are classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). This rises to 45 percent in the atolls. Lower school attendance (82 percent compared to 97 percent for non-disabled persons) further restricts their opportunities. The Census 2022 highlights that 55 percent of households with PWDs are female-headed. Within these, 40 percent of household heads themselves have disabilities. This places such households among the most socioeconomically vulnerable.

2. Female-Headed Households (FHHs)

Female-headed households form a critical indicator of economic vulnerability in the Maldivian atolls. Census data show that in administrative islands, half of all households (50 percent) are female-headed (MBS, 2023, p. 234). The dual role of women as primary earners and caregivers heightens stress. It also reduces economic resilience.

Households headed by women experience higher multidimensional poverty (index 0.156) than those headed by men (0.136) (ADB, 2025, p. 6). This reflects inequalities in access to income, education, and social protection (ADB, 2025, p. 6). Divorce and widowhood are key drivers of single-parent status (FAO, 2019, p. 8). The combination of caregiving responsibilities with limited access to formal employment exacerbates poverty risks (FAO, 2019, p. 8; ADB, 2025, p. 18). FHHs are thus disproportionately affected by economic shocks, illness, or natural hazards (ADB, 2025, p. 5; FAO, 2019, p. 28). These events restrict livelihood opportunities (ADB, 2025, p. 4).

3. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

GBV remains one of the most pervasive forms of gendered vulnerability across the Maldives (Fulu, 2005). The Women's Health and Life Experiences Survey reports that 34.6 percent of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. This violence is predominantly from intimate partners. Rates of intimate partner violence are higher in the atolls than in Malé. This reflects both cultural norms and limited access to protective services.

Women in rural areas are more likely to experience severe violence. This includes physical injury and coercive control, compared to moderate forms. Within the CATENATE project context, this presents a moderate social risk. This risk is heightened if economic empowerment interventions alter household income dynamics without adequate safeguards. The project therefore integrates GBV-sensitive programming, referral pathways, and awareness-raising. This is done under its Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF).

4. Intersecting Vulnerabilities in Shaviyani Atoll

Women's vulnerability in Shaviyani arises from the overlap of resource dependence, time poverty, and sociocultural exclusion:

- **Resource Dependence and Livelihood Risk:** Women rely heavily on natural resources. These include coconut fronds, wood, and sea almonds. This supports small-scale livelihoods such as thatch weaving. Any restrictions in the Farukolhu Protected Area (PA) could disproportionately impact women's income and subsistence activities. This requires alternative livelihoods to be developed.
- **Time Poverty and Care Work:** Women perform about three times more unpaid domestic and care work than men. This leaves limited time for education, economic ventures, or civic participation. In geographically remote islands, caregiving obligations often prevent mobility and access to formal employment.
- **Social Exclusion:** Gender norms emphasizing modesty and restraint continue to limit women's voice in decision-making. In Funadhoo, consultations revealed a recurring "hesitation to speak openly in mixed or formal settings". This barrier perpetuates exclusion from governance and community-level dialogue.
- **Poverty and Geographic Isolation:** Approximately 10 percent of people living in the atolls are poor, compared with less than 1 percent in Malé. The dispersed island geography further limits access to financial institutions, markets, and services. This intensifies vulnerability among low-income women dependent on informal or seasonal work.

Implications for the GAP

Addressing vulnerability in Shaviyani requires integrated approaches. These must combine economic empowerment with social protection and inclusive governance. The Gender Action Plan must prioritize:

- Targeted livelihood programs for women with disabilities and female-headed households.
- GBV prevention and response measures embedded within project design.
- Mechanisms to reduce time poverty through community-based childcare and flexible engagement schedules.
- Deliberate inclusion of vulnerable women in consultations and benefit-sharing mechanisms for the Farukolhu PA.

Through these measures, the CATENATE project can strengthen resilience, inclusion, and gender equity across the social and environmental dimensions of protected area management in Shaviyani Atoll.

2.5 Key Gender Challenges and Opportunities — Shaviyani Atoll

Based on baseline data and field consultations from Shaviyani Atoll (Sh. Funadhoo), the CATENATE project faces entrenched gender barriers. These barriers limit women's participation in protected area (PA) management. Yet these challenges coexist with significant institutional opportunities. These include legal reforms, local structures, and women's existing knowledge systems. Leveraging these opportunities can enable transformative gender-responsive change.

1. Barriers Preventing Women's Full Participation in PA Management

Women's participation in PA governance is constrained by structural weaknesses, socio-cultural norms, and economic dependency. This limits influence even where statutory representation exists.

Structural and Institutional Barriers

- **Weak Gender Integration in NRM:** National and atoll-level environmental policies continue to reflect low gender sensitivity. Few formal mechanisms exist for mainstreaming gender in NRM decision-making. This gap persists across instruments such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016–2025, which makes no explicit reference to gender.
- **Limited Representation in Decision-Making:** Women remain underrepresented in marine and coastal resource governance. This means their traditional ecological knowledge rarely influences management planning (IUCN GEF Maldives, n.d., p. 183).
- **Undervalued WDCs:** The Decentralization Act gives Women's Development Committees (WDCs) an advisory role. However, many Island Councils demonstrate "little or no respect" for their inputs. This leads to persistent exclusion from governance discussions.

Socio-Cultural and Psychosocial Barriers

- **Time Poverty and Care Burden:** Women in Funadhoo spend 12 or more hours daily on domestic and caregiving tasks. This leaves minimal time for meetings or training (Internal Report, n.d., p. 63). Only 15 percent of women attend council sessions.

- **Cultural Hesitation and Gender Norms:** Field consultations describe to speak in mixed settings. This is a common emotional barrier to public engagement. Societal expectations confine women to home-based roles and discourage pursuit of leadership.
- **Economic Vulnerability and Risk:** Nearly 47 percent of employed women in Shaviyani work informally. Many depend on Farukolhu PA resources, such as coconut fronds for thatch weaving. Any restriction on resource access could disproportionately reduce women's income. This leads to livelihood loss without targeted compensation.

2. Opportunities to Advance Gender Equality through CATENATE

Despite these constraints, CATENATE can build upon favorable institutional frameworks and community strengths. This ensures inclusive PA management.

- **Empowering WDCs as Change Agents:** The project can replicate successful models from the Baa Atoll initiative. Active WDC engagement proved critical to gender mainstreaming and community ownership there.
- **Supportive Legal Environment:** The Gender Equality Act 2016 mandates women's involvement in development planning. The 33 percent quota for women in local councils provides a solid foundation for representation. Funadhoo already exceeds this threshold, with 40 percent female councilors.
- **Traditional Ecological Knowledge:** Women possess deep experiential knowledge of resource cycles, craft production, and sustainable harvesting. Integrating this knowledge can enhance ecological outcomes. It also legitimizes women's roles in environmental governance.
- **High Social Engagement Potential:** Maldivian women demonstrate strong participation in civic and voluntary activities. This happens when logistical barriers are reduced (Transparency Maldives, 2015, p. 22). CATENATE's participatory design therefore aligns well with women's latent leadership capacity.
- **Institutional Commitment:** The project explicitly targets a 50 percent gender balance in activities. It assigns a "moderate" gender risk status. This requires mandatory mitigation through the GAP.

3. Leverage Points for Transformative Change

CATENATE must harness these leverage points to translate representation into influence

Leverage Point	Project Mechanism / Activity	Intended Gender Objective
Equitable Financial Access	Incorporate gender-responsive criteria in the Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund (Outcome 2). This guarantees proportionate financing for women-led livelihood ventures.	Ensure fair distribution of financial resources and recognize women's economic contributions.
Inclusive Data and Planning	Apply gender-disaggregated assessments (e.g., Resource Use and Livelihood Assessments – Activities 1.4.1 & 2.2.2). This quantifies women's dependency on PA resources and informs mitigation measures.	Strengthen evidence-based decision-making and integrate women's knowledge into management plans.
Culturally Responsive Participation	Conduct separate, culturally familiar consultation sessions for women. These should be timed around prayer and childcare schedules to reduce participation barriers.	Achieve meaningful and representative women's engagement in PA strategy formulation.
Leadership and Skills Development	Implement targeted recruitment and training for women in ranger, monitoring, and management roles. Include leadership modules for both men and women to promote gender-sensitive governance.	Build technical competence and leadership confidence among women in PA management.
GBV Mitigation and Safeguards	Integrate GBV prevention protocols and referral mechanisms into all livelihood and capacity-building components. Provide staff training on identifying and addressing GBV risks.	Foster safe, inclusive project environments and reduce gender-related social risks.

Implications for the GAP

CATENATE's gender strategy must harness these leverage points to translate representation into influence. Strengthening institutional mechanisms, ensuring equitable financial participation, and validating women's traditional knowledge will create pathways for women to move from beneficiaries to decision-makers. The resulting transformation will not only advance gender equality in Shaviyani Atoll but also demonstrate a scalable model for inclusive and resilient protected-area governance across the Maldives.

3. Gender Action Plan

3.1 – Assessment Activities

This section outlines how gender considerations are systematically integrated into all baseline and diagnostic assessments. The activities listed below identify entry points to embed gender equality, women’s empowerment, and social inclusion within the analytical processes. Each assessment will collect sex-disaggregated data. It must capture women’s perspectives in data gathering and validation. The resulting recommendations must inform project design, monitoring, and adaptive management. Particular emphasis is placed on recognising women’s roles in natural-resource use, leadership potential, and livelihood resilience. The assessments must also identify barriers that limit equitable participation in PA management and decision-making.

Project Activity	Gender Issues Identified	Proposed Gender-Responsive Actions	Responsible Party / Partner	Expected Gender Outcome / Indicator
1.1.2 – Pre-capacity Assessment of Funadhoo Island Council (FIC)	- Limited gender capacity and absence of institutionalized gender analysis within Council operations - Low female technical staff - Limited understanding of GEA obligations.	- Integrate gender-capacity criteria in assessment TOR - Conduct interviews with female councilors and wdc - Include gender-mainstreaming scorecard - WDC formally consulted and recommendations documented in assessment report.	PMU / Gender Expert / Island Council / MSFD	- Gender-capacity baseline established; Council staff trained on GEA - Improved gender-competency ratings - Number of female vs male councilors trained recorded.
1.3.1 – National PA Standards Review	- National PA selection and monitoring standards lack gender criteria - Women’s knowledge and priorities not systematically integrated.	- Review existing national PA standards through a gender lens - Integrate gender criteria into PA selection, assessment, and monitoring guidelines - Consult wdc and women stakeholders at national level; ensure standards require gender-disaggregated data collection.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / National-level WDC representatives	- National PA standards include mandatory gender criteria - Gender-assessment checklist integrated into PA monitoring protocols - Women’s participation documented in standard-setting process.

1.4.1 – Resource Use Mapping of Farukolhu PA	- Women’s resource-collection activities (thatch weaving, food processing) undervalued and unrecorded - Risk of livelihood loss from access restrictions.	- Conduct sex-disaggregated resource-use surveys and separate mapping sessions for women - record who collects, what, where, and who controls benefits - apply IUCN gender-mapping guidelines.	PMU / Consultants / WDCs / Island Council	- Comprehensive gender-disaggregated resource maps - women’s resource knowledge included in PA management plan % of women’s resource uses reflected in final PA management plan zonation decisions.
1.4.2 – Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)	- Ecological thresholds may ignore gender-specific livelihood dependencies - Women’s subsistence activities undervalued.	- Ensure women’s resource data inform LAC benchmarks - Hold focus groups to define acceptable change for female-dominated activities - Ensure any LAC-based restrictions include gender impact assessment and mitigation measures.	PMU / Environmental Consultant / WDCs	- LAC standards include at least three gender-differentiated indicators - Women consulted on acceptable change thresholds.
1.4.5 – PA Management Effectiveness (METT & Green List)	- Women under-represented in PA governance and ranger roles - Effectiveness assessments often gender-blind.	- Adapt METT tool to include gender criteria (e.g., women in decision roles, training access); benchmark against IUCN equity standards - Ensure assessment team includes at least one female PA management expert.	PMU/ IUCN / EPA / WDC representatives	≥ 50 % female participation in METT processes; women’s inputs documented in management decisions - Baseline [X]% women in PA governance; Target 40% by Year 3.

1.4.6 – Protected Area Benefit Assessment (PA-BAT +)	• Women's benefits from PA largely informal • Risk of economic displacement if access restricted.	• Analyze gender-differentiated benefits; include non-material empowerment outcomes; recommend equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms and women-led enterprise support • Document case studies of women beneficiaries and analyze potential GBV risks from income changes.	PMU / Consultants / Funadhoo Council / WDCs	• Benefit-sharing framework includes women's livelihood priorities • ≥ 10 women-led enterprises supported • X% increase in women's reported benefits from PA.
2.1.1 – Financial Management Capacity Assessment	• Risk of fund distribution favouring male-led groups • Limited female financial-management experience.	• Conduct gender-focused SWOT on women's access to finance • Integrate gender-responsive criteria into Atoll Conservation Fund procedures.	PMU / Finance Consultant / Island Council / MSFD	• Transparent fund-allocation policies; proportion of women benefiting from trust-fund grants increased • Gender-responsive budgeting capacity score improved from baseline.
2.2.2 – Livelihood Capacity Assessment	• Women concentrated in low-income informal activities and excluded from formal training and value chains.	• Identify women's existing skills; design inclusive training and mentorship programs • Promote market linkages for female-led enterprises • Ensure women's informal activities (thatch weaving, food processing, tailoring) are formally recognized and supported in livelihood plans.	PMU / WDCs / Ministry of Economic Development	• Women's livelihood portfolio diversified • ≥ 50 % female participation in livelihood trainings • Informal enterprises integrated into local economic plans.

3.2 – Consultation and Strategy Development

This section defines how CATENATE will mainstream gender equality within all consultation, planning, and strategy development processes. It ensures inclusive and equitable decision-making. The activities listed below emphasize the participation of women, youth, and vulnerable groups. This input will shape governance models, standards, and policies related to protected-area management. Each consultation will apply gender-sensitive facilitation methods. This encourages safe and meaningful participation. Strategic planning will incorporate gender criteria into institutional frameworks, sustainable tourism guidelines, and communication strategies. Through these measures, CATENATE aims to institutionalize gender responsiveness in local and national decision-making structures. This ensures that women's perspectives and lived experiences inform governance reforms and long-term biodiversity outcomes.

Project Activity	Gender Issues Identified	Proposed Gender-Responsive Actions	Responsible Party / Partner	Expected Gender Outcome / Indicator
1.1.1 – Governance Model Development	- Existing PA governance structures lack gender balance; - Women's leadership roles undervalued; - WDCs under-utilized in advisory capacity.	- Integrate gender as a core criterion in governance-model options - Ensure women's representation in all governance design consultations; - Engage WDCs in drafting institutional arrangements; - Include gender-sensitive benefit-sharing provisions in the final governance model.	PMU / EPA / Island Council / WDCs / MSFD	- Governance model adopted includes mandatory gender provisions; ≥ 33 % female representation in PA governance structures; - WDC input reflected in governance framework.
1.2.6 – Green Listing Workshops	- Women's perspectives often excluded in technical discussions; - Cultural norms limit active participation.	- Ensure targeted invitations for female councilors, WDC members, and women leaders - Employ gender-sensitive facilitation and dedicated women's breakout sessions - Schedule workshops at convenient times and safe venues; provide on-site childcare.	PMU / IUCN / EPA / Consultants / WDCs	≥ 40 % female participation in Green Listing workshops; - Women's feedback documented and integrated into METT/Green List scoring sheets - Positive participant feedback on inclusivity.

1.3.1 – National PA Standards Review	- National PA standards lack gender criteria - Women's knowledge excluded from formal monitoring processes.	- Review and revise standards through a gender lens; mandate sex-disaggregated data in monitoring protocols - Introduce gender-specific indicators (participation, benefits, leadership); ensure gender expertise in technical teams.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / National WDC Representatives	- National PA standards include gender checklist ≥ 3 gender-specific indicators adopted - Female experts engaged in national-level standards revision.
1.3.2 – Sustainable Tourism Guidelines Development	- Tourism benefits concentrated among men - Sociocultural constraints limit women's employment and entrepreneurship.	- Incorporate gender-responsive tourism practices: promote women-led micro-enterprises (crafts, catering, guided tours) - Integrate safe-workplace standards and flexible schedules - Ensure women participate in drafting guidelines - Link tourism to conservation roles recognizing women's ecological knowledge.	PMU / Ministry of Tourism / EPA / Island Council / WDCs	- Guidelines adopted with gender-responsive provisions ≥ 50 % of planned tourism livelihoods accessible to women ≥ 5 women-led enterprises supported near Farukolhu PA.
3.2.1 – Inclusive Communication Strategy	Women's access to information limited by language, schedule, and male-dominated communication channels.	- Design Dhivehi-language, women-centered communication materials - Use mixed channels (TV, radio, mobile, community sessions); - Feature women as role models in visuals and messages - Partner with WDCs to disseminate information and collect feedback.	PMU / Communications Consultant / WDCs / Island Council	≥ 50 % of communication products co-developed with WDCs - Documented increase in women's awareness of CATENATE objectives - Active two-way feedback recorded.

3.2.1 Regulatory Framework for Stakeholder Consultation

The Protected Areas Regulation (Regulation No. 2018/R-78) establishes baseline requirements for consultation in PA designation. Clause 11 of the regulation stipulates that:

- All relevant persons who may be affected through designation of the protected area shall be identified and consulted
- Community participation shall be incorporated as a process of consultation

Additionally, the regulation's stated objectives (Clause 2) emphasize that the PA designation process must be "consultative and transparent" and must "enhance awareness and participation of community in protected area designation and management."

CATENATE Gender-Responsive Enhancement:

The CATENATE project significantly exceeds these minimum regulatory requirements by incorporating:

- Gender-Sensitive Facilitation: Use of trained facilitators skilled in creating safe spaces for women's participation
- Women-Only Sessions: Dedicated consultations addressing cultural barriers to speaking in mixed-gender settings
- WDC Leadership: Active involvement of Women's Development Committees in consultation design, scheduling, and implementation
- Targeted Outreach: Proactive engagement of female-headed households, women with disabilities, and informal economy workers
- Flexible Scheduling: Consultation timing coordinated around women's caregiving responsibilities and economic activities
- Participation Quotas: Target of 50% women's representation in all consultation processes
- Accessibility Measures: Provision of transportation support, childcare arrangements, and accessible venues for persons with disabilities
- Feedback Loops: Structured mechanisms for women to verify that their inputs are accurately reflected in planning documents

These enhanced measures ensure that regulatory compliance translates into meaningful participation, influence, and co-ownership of PA governance decisions by women across Boduthiladhunmathi.

3.3 – Training and Capacity Building

This section outlines how CATENATE will strengthen gender equality and social inclusion through targeted training and capacity-building activities. The listed activities address structural, logistical, and socio-cultural barriers. These barriers constrain women's participation in education, employment, and leadership within the conservation sector. Training initiatives are designed to build equitable technical capacity. They empower women as environmental leaders. They institutionalize gender responsiveness in all levels of Protected Area (PA) management—from community to national governance. The approach combines gender-sensitive curriculum design, inclusive recruitment, logistical support, and digital accessibility. This ensures all beneficiaries—especially women, youth, and persons with disabilities—gain equitable access to opportunities, resources, and knowledge.

Project Activity	Gender Issues Identified	Proposed Gender-Responsive Actions	Responsible Party / Partner	Expected Gender Outcome / Indicator
1.2.1 – Certificate Course on Protected Area Governance and Management	- Women under-represented in PA governance - Limited access to technical training; curriculum lacks gender content.	- Integrate gender modules into the curriculum (legal frameworks, gender-differentiated needs, women's ecological knowledge) - Ensure ≥ 50 % female enrolment - Provide childcare, stipends, flexible schedules	PMU / EPA / Villa College / MSFD / WDCs	- At least 50 % female participants - Women report increased confidence and skills in PA management - Gender modules institutionalized in curriculum.
1.2.4 – Training for Councillors and Police	Limited understanding of gender mainstreaming among local authorities; weak coordination on women's safety and GBV issues.	Develop two streams of training: (1) Councillors – gender mainstreaming in PA planning and governance; (2) Police – GBV prevention and response linked to project activities; include case-based learning and community dialogue exercises.	PMU / MSFD / EPA / Maldives Police Service / Island Councils	≥ 40 % female councillor participation; police trained on GBV response protocols; 100 % of councillor training modules include gender content.

1.2.5 – Ranger Training	No female rangers currently employed; gender stereotypes and social pressures limit women's entry and career advancement.	Adapt training modules to challenge gender biases and recognize women's skills in community outreach and biodiversity monitoring; ensure inclusive logistics (childcare, stipends, safe venues); trainers equipped with gender-sensitive methods.	EPA / PMU / MSFD / Island Councils / WDCs	At least 5 female rangers trained by Year 3; ≥ 30 % female participation in ranger training; improved community acceptance of women in ranger roles.
3.1.2 – PAMS (Protected Areas Management System) Training and Technical Support	Low digital literacy among women in outer atolls; risk of digital exclusion from PA monitoring systems.	Develop a mobile-first, user-friendly training module; target women and youth for citizen science participation; include qualitative data fields for traditional knowledge; provide childcare and stipends for trainees.	PMU / EPA / ICT Consultants / WDCs / Island Councils	≥ 50 % female PAMS trainees; PAMS includes gender-tagged data fields; ≥ 3 case studies of women's participation in PA data collection documented.

3.4 – Financial and Technical Support

This section outlines mechanisms for delivering equitable financial and technical support. This ensures that women and vulnerable groups benefit directly from conservation-linked livelihood and enterprise development. The listed activities institutionalize gender equality within the project's financing architecture. This ranges from establishing the Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Fund to livelihood diversification and Visitor Centre economic linkages. Each activity combines financial inclusion with technical empowerment. This ensures that women gain both access to resources and the capacity to manage them effectively. The approach prioritizes gender-responsive budgeting, transparent fund management, and livelihood interventions. This enhances women's resilience and economic independence while reinforcing conservation outcomes.

Project Activity	Gender Issues Identified	Proposed Gender-Responsive Actions	Responsible Party / Partner	Expected Gender Outcome / Indicator
2.1.3 – Framework for Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Fund	• Women historically excluded from financial-decision structures; • Weak representation in fund governance; • Limited access to capital.	• Establish gender-inclusive fund-governance board with at least 33 % female representation; • Ensure wdcs have formal voting rights; develop transparent, gender-equitable eligibility criteria; • Incorporate consultation feedback from women's groups into fund-operation guidelines.	PMU / EPA / Island Council / WDCs / MSFD	• Fund governance structure includes ≥ 33 % women; • Eligibility criteria approved with gender safeguards; • Wdcs participate in 100 % of funding-round decisions.
2.1.4 – Establishment of Conservation Revolving Fund	• Women face barriers to formal credit and often depend on informal sectors • Risk of elite capture in fund access.	• Create accessible application process in Dhivehi • Provide technical support for registration of women's groups • Prioritize women-led and vulnerable-group proposals • Include gender criteria in fund scoring • Establish transparent grievance mechanism.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / Island Council / WDCs	• ≥ 50 % of revolving-fund recipients are women or women-led groups • All funding rounds publicly reported with gender data • Grievance mechanism operational.

2.2.1 – Sustainable Financing Plan	- Resource allocation may not fully account for gendered economic differences - Risk of gender-blind budgeting.	- Integrate gender-responsive budgeting across all financial-planning tools - Require gender-disaggregated reporting - Earmark proportionate resources for women-focused livelihood and enterprise activities - Institutionalize periodic gender audits.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / UNDP Finance Specialist	- Sustainable financing plan includes gender-budgeting provisions - Annual gender-audit reports published ≥ 40 % of financed activities directly benefit women.
2.2.4 – Livelihood Diversification and Support for Women	- Women concentrated in informal, low-income sectors with limited market access - High time-poverty and care burdens restrict participation.	- Support value-chain strengthening for women's traditional products (food processing, crafts, tailoring) - Provide business formalization support, childcare subsidies, and flexible work schemes - Facilitate direct market linkages to tourism - Deliver financial-literacy and marketing training.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / Business Development Service Providers / WDCs	≥ 60 % female participation in livelihood programs ≥ 5 new women's cooperatives supported - Documented increase in women's household income and market access.
3.2.4 – Visitor Centre and Knowledge Hub	- Women under-represented in eco-tourism and visitor-service roles - Limited access to digital and financial-literacy training.	- Reserve minimum 50 % of Visitor-Centre employment for women - Develop women-focused financial- and technical-literacy courses through Knowledge Hub - Feature women as guides, educators, and facilitators; promote female entrepreneurship in visitor-related services.	PMU / EPA / Ministry of Tourism / MSFD / WDCs	≥ 50 % of Visitor-Centre staff are women ≥ 3 women-led enterprises linked to Centre operations ≥ 100 women trained through Knowledge Hub by Year 3.

To ensure equitable access to conservation financing and prevent elite capture of resources, the Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund will establish a dedicated gender set-aside mechanism. A minimum of 30-40% of annual grant allocations will be reserved specifically for:

- Women-led livelihood enterprises and cooperatives
- Gender-balanced community conservation initiatives
- Women's informal economy formalization and skills upgrading
- Women-led eco-tourism ventures, including sustainable picnic management, guided nature tours, and cultural experience programs

This set-aside mechanism will be embedded in the Trust Fund's governance charter, grant eligibility criteria, and selection processes. Transparent reporting on disbursements to women entrepreneurs will be mandatory, with annual gender-disaggregated financial statements submitted to the PMU and MSFD.

The allocation ensures structural equity in conservation benefit-sharing while supporting the economic empowerment priorities identified through field consultations with the Funadhoo WDC and women resource users.

3.5 – Leadership and Management Activities

This section details how CATENATE embeds gender equality, inclusive governance, and social accountability within leadership and management structures. This applies to all project levels. The listed activities operationalize national legal mandates and project commitments. They ensure women's equitable participation in decision-making, policy oversight, and project management. The approach strengthens institutional capacity. It links legal frameworks (GEA, Decentralization Act) with project-specific gender balance targets. This ensures the Farukolhu PA governance model, PMU, and PSC reflect a 50% gender balance. It enables women's meaningful participation, voice, and leadership.

Project Activity	Gender Issues Identified	Proposed Gender-Responsive Actions	Responsible Party / Partner	Expected Gender Outcome / Indicator
1.1.3 – Governance Mechanism for Farukolhu PA	- Historically male-dominated PA management structures - Limited recognition of women's traditional knowledge - WDC marginalized in formal decision-making.	- Institutionalize a gender-balanced PA Management Committee ($\geq 40\%$ women) - Ensure WDC has voting rights and decision authority - Organize dedicated consultations for women - Include gender specialists in teams for governance design.	PMU / EPA / Funadhoo Island Council / WDC / MSFD	- Governance mechanism approved with formal WDC representation and $\geq 40\%$ female membership - Minutes reflect women's inputs in decisions.
1.4.3 – PA Management Plan Development	- Women's resource use patterns often unrecognized - Access restrictions risk economic displacement.	- Integrate women's resource rights into management zoning - Map female resource use areas; conduct women-only consultations - Develop alternative livelihood measures before restricting access.	PMU / EPA / Island Council / WDC / MSFD	- Management plan includes gender chapter and resource-use maps with sex-disaggregated data $\geq 50\%$ of women users consulted - Livelihood mitigation plan approved.

1.4.4 – Protocols for Gender-Responsive Data Collection and Monitoring	• Lack of sex-disaggregated data in PA systems • Limited capacity for gender analysis.	• Develop gender-tagged data fields in PAMS; train local staff and WDC members in data collection • Establish standard gender indicators (e.g., participation rates, benefit distribution, leadership roles).	PMU / EPA / ICT Consultants / MSFD / WDCs	• ≥ 50 % of monitoring data disaggregated by sex • Pams includes at least 3 gender indicators • Annual gender monitoring report produced.
1.4.5 – Baseline Governance Assessment and Leadership Mapping	• Absence of gender-balanced leadership baseline data • Limited visibility of women leaders.	• Conduct gender-disaggregated leadership audit across PA structures • Document case studies of women leaders; use findings to set targets for PA committees and PMU staffing.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / Consultants	• Baseline established for gender representation in leadership (Year 1) • Target: ≥ 40 % women in leadership roles by Year 3 • Leadership case studies published.
Project Management and Oversight (Gender Mainstreaming in PMU & PSC)	• Gender balance and accountability mechanisms not fully defined in PMU structure • Lack of designated focal points.	• Apply project-wide 50 % gender balance target to PMU and PSC composition • Embed gender criteria in recruitment • Assign gender focal point within PMU • Integrate gender reporting in M&E framework • Include GBV-sensitive grievance protocol.	PMU / PSC / EPA / MSFD / UNDP	• PMU and PSC achieve ≥ 50 % gender balance • Quarterly M&E reports include gender section • Grievance mechanism operational and accessible to women.

3.6 Cross-Cutting Areas: Gender Safeguards, Inclusion and Institutional Measures

This section outlines cross-cutting actions. These apply across all CATENATE components. They strengthen gender equality, social inclusion, and safeguard compliance. These measures ensure all project activities are gender-responsive, intersectional, and culturally appropriate. They simultaneously build institutional capacity and ensure visibility of women's roles in environmental governance. The matrix below consolidates actions related to gender risk mitigation, inclusion of vulnerable groups, institutional strengthening, and communication of gender outcomes.

Project Activity	Gender Issues Identified	Proposed Gender-Responsive Actions	Responsible Party / Partner	Expected Gender Outcome / Indicator
Gender Risk Integration and Safeguards Implementation	- Weak gender mainstreaming in environmental safeguards; - Limited GBV risk mitigation; risk of economic displacement from restricted resource access.	- Integrate gender risk screening into the ESMF and all activity TORs; - Include GBV and social-risk mapping in livelihood design - Train PMU and EPA staff on gender-responsive safeguards and referral mechanisms - Designate GBV focal points within each atoll.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / Island Councils	- Gender-risk screening checklist applied to 100 % of project activities. - At least one GBV focal point trained per atoll.
Intersectional Inclusion of Women with Disabilities and Female-Headed Households	Women with disabilities and female-headed households (FHHs) face economic insecurity and exclusion from participation and benefit sharing.	- Ensure consultations and trainings are physically accessible; provide targeted transport or childcare support - Design livelihood packages prioritising fhhs and PWD women - Collect sex- and disability-disaggregated data in monitoring.	PMU / Island Councils / WDCs / MSFD	- Minimum 20 % of beneficiaries are women from vulnerable groups (FHHs, PWDs). - All data disaggregated by sex and disability.

Cultural and Religious Sensitivity in Community Engagement	• Social and religious norms restrict women's open participation and leadership in public forums.	• Conduct women-only sessions and use female facilitators where appropriate • Frame environmental stewardship in line with Islamic principles of community care • Engage religious leaders to support women's roles in PA management.	PMU / Island Councils / WDCs / Community Leaders	• At least 50 % of consultations apply gender-sensitive methods. • Positive change in attitudes toward women's participation documented through surveys.
Institutional Strengthening of Women's Development Committees (WDCs)	• WDCs are under-resourced and often excluded from decision-making on environment and livelihood planning.	• Formalise WDC representation in PA management committees • Provide training on budget management and gender-responsive governance • Allocate funds through the Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund to support operations • Develop MOUs with Island Councils.	PMU / Island Councils / WDCs / EPA / MSFD	• WDC representatives formally included in 100 % of PA planning committees. • ≥ 1 annual capacity-building session on gender-responsive governance.
Gender-Responsive Communication and Knowledge Management	• Gender results under-reported • Women's roles in NRM not visible in knowledge products.	• Integrate gender indicators into MEL system • Develop a gender dashboard for sex-disaggregated data • Document and publish case studies highlighting women's leadership and livelihood success stories • Use national communication channels to share gender lessons.	PMU / EPA / MSFD / Communications Consultant	• Annual gender report produced and shared with national partners. • ≥ 30 % of project communication outputs feature women's contributions.

3.7 Summary of Gender-Responsive Actions and Indicators

This subsection provides a consolidated overview of gender-responsive measures. These are integrated across the assessment, consultation, capacity building, livelihood support, leadership, and cross-cutting components of the CATENATE project. It synthesizes core actions, institutional responsibilities, and indicators. These collectively ensure gender equality and social inclusion are systematically embedded in the development, management, and governance of the Shaviyani Farukolhu Protected Area.

1. Summary of Gender-Responsive Actions Across All Activity Categories

The Gender Action Plan includes a comprehensive set of actions. These are designed to address the structural, socio-cultural, and economic barriers identified in the baseline analysis. Key measures include:

1.1 Gender-Responsive Assessments

- Conduct resource use, livelihoods, governance, and LAC assessments using sex-disaggregated data.
- Document women's resource dependence, benefit control, mobility constraints, and time burdens.
- Include women with disabilities and female-headed households in all baseline and follow-up assessments.
- Ensure at least one female expert is included in each assessment team.

1.2 Inclusive Consultations and Strategy Development

- Conduct dedicated women-only consultations using culturally appropriate formats.
- Schedule consultations around caregiving times; provide safe, accessible venues.
- Ensure WDCs are fully engaged and their inputs are formally integrated into management plans.
- Document women's participation and influence in all strategic planning processes.

1.3 Gender-Responsive Capacity Building

- Set participation targets for women across all training activities, including ranger training, PA governance, and leadership.
- Recruit women as trainers, facilitators, and subject-matter experts.
- Ensure course modules integrate gender perspectives in PA management, governance, finance, and monitoring.

1.4 Equitable Livelihood and Financial Support

- Apply gender-responsive criteria within the Shaviyani Conservation Trust Fund.
- Ensure women-led informal and formal enterprises have equitable access to grants and technical support.
- Identify and mitigate risks of economic displacement for women dependent on PA resources.
- Strengthen women's financial and business management capacity.

1.5 Gender-Inclusive Governance and Leadership

- Strengthen the role of WDCs in PA governance and advisory processes.
- Promote women's representation in PA committees, Trust Fund boards, and planning teams.
- Develop gender criteria within national PA standards and monitoring protocols.
- Implement gender-responsive governance practices within the Funadhoo Island Council and PMU.

1.6 Cross-Cutting Safeguards

- Integrate gender risk screening, GBV mitigation, and disability inclusion measures across all activities.
- Apply gender-responsive communication strategies, including Dhivehi messaging and visual inclusion.
- Include vulnerability tracking, case studies, and behaviour-change outcomes in monitoring.

2. Summary of Key Indicators

The following indicators provide a consolidated basis for tracking progress on gender equality across the project cycle. Indicators originate from the activity matrices in Sections 3.1–3.6.

2.1 Participation Indicators

- Percentage of women participating in assessments, consultations, and strategy development processes (target: 50 percent).
- Number of female vs male trainees completing PA management and leadership training.
- Number of women recruited or supported through PA management roles, ranger candidates, or trainer positions.

2.2 Livelihood and Economic Indicators

- Percentage of Trust Fund grants awarded to women-led enterprises.
- Number of women-led livelihood initiatives supported (target: minimum 10).
- Percentage of informal women's enterprises integrated into PA-compatible livelihood plans.
- Number of cases where women's resource use is reflected in zoning and LAC decisions.

2.3 Governance and Institutional Indicators

- Representation of women in PA governance bodies and advisory committees.
- Number of WDC recommendations formally incorporated into planning documents.
- National PA standards updated to include gender criteria and gender-disaggregated monitoring requirements.

2.4 Safeguard and Inclusion Indicators

- Number of activities applying gender risk and GBV screening.
- Number of women with disabilities participating in project activities.
- Number of gender-sensitive consultations conducted (women-only, culturally appropriate formats).
- Case studies documenting gender outcomes, GBV risks, and mitigation effectiveness.

2.5 Behavioural and Perception Indicators

- Reported changes in perceptions of women's roles in PA management among key stakeholders.
- Women's self-reported confidence in participating in planning and governance processes.
- Changes in time burden or mobility constraints experienced by participating women.

3. Overall Expected Outcomes

Through the integrated gender-responsive measures summarised above, Section 3 of the GAP is expected to contribute to the following overarching outcomes:

- More inclusive and gender-balanced PA management systems, with women's knowledge and contributions formally embedded in decision-making.
- Strengthened economic resilience of women and vulnerable groups, supported through equitable financing, skills development, and livelihood diversification.
- Enhanced institutional capacity within the PMU, Funadhoo Island Council, WDCs, and national agencies to implement gender-responsive governance.
- Improved safeguards through proactive identification and mitigation of GBV, economic displacement, and exclusion risks.
- Behavioural and perception shifts that normalise women's leadership and participation in PA management.

4. Safeguards Analysis: Gender, Social Inclusion, and Risk Mitigation

This section presents the safeguard considerations required to ensure that the CATENATE project advances gender equality, protects vulnerable groups, and upholds the Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) standards of IUCN. The project has been screened as having a Moderate Social Risk, necessitating a gender-responsive and socially inclusive approach to project design, implementation, and monitoring. The analysis below draws on the ESMS Screening Report, Gender Action Plan, Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), and field findings from Shaviyani Atoll.

The safeguards analysis identifies key risks, outlines their gendered implications, and specifies the mitigation measures necessary to maintain compliance with ESMS safeguard standards—particularly the Standard on Access Restrictions and Resettlement, the Standard on Involuntary Resettlement, and the ESMS cross-cutting principles of Gender Equality, Human Rights Due Diligence, and Stakeholder Engagement.



4.1 Analysis of Core Gender-Related Risks

Proactively assessing gender risks is essential for ensuring that conservation outcomes remain socially legitimate, equitable, and sustainable. The following risks underpin the project's "Moderate Social Risk" classification:

- **Exclusion from Decision-Making:** Women may be systematically underrepresented in PA governance structures, consultations, management planning, and monitoring processes due to entrenched gender norms and limited institutional mechanisms for women's inclusion.
- **Inequitable Benefit Sharing:** Without clear safeguards, financial benefits—including livelihood grants, ecosystem service revenues, and conservation incentives—may disproportionately flow to male-dominated groups or be captured by local elites.
- **Risk of Economic Displacement:** Restrictions on resource use in the Farukolhu PA may negatively impact women who rely on natural resources for supplementary income and household subsistence. Women may face sudden loss of access without adequate alternatives.
- **Heightened Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Risk:** Changes in household income, increased mobility for project participation, and interactions between community members and project staff can exacerbate the risks of GBV or sexual harassment if not proactively managed.
- **Institutional Capacity Constraints:** Local institutions, including Island Councils and Women's Development Committees (WDCs), have limited experience integrating gender considerations into environmental management, exacerbating risks of exclusion, weak safeguards oversight, and inconsistent application of mitigation measures.

4.2 Risks of Exclusion in Participation and Benefits

Gender norms that limit women's public participation pose a significant risk of exclusion from:

- Stakeholder consultations
- Zonation and management plan development
- PA governance mechanisms
- Benefit-sharing arrangements
- Economic opportunities emerging from the conservation financing mechanisms

This is compounded by time poverty, limited mobility, and hesitation to speak publicly in mixed-gender forums. There is a documented risk that the new Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund may inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities if eligibility criteria and decision-making processes are not gender-responsive and transparent.

4.3 Economic Risks from Resource Dependency and Displacement

Women in Funadhoo rely on Farukolhu PA for materials such as:

- Coconut fronds (thatch weaving)
- Wood collection
- Handicraft inputs
- Subsistence materials

Restrictions implemented through the PA management plan—especially Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)—may trigger economic displacement unless mitigation measures are applied before enforcement.

Table 1. Livelihood Activities at Risk of Economic Displacement

Livelihood Activity
Thatch Weaving
Coconut/Frond Collection
Wood Collection
Handicraft Raw Materials

4.4 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Risk Analysis and Mitigation

GBV risk is considered moderate due to shifts in intra-household economic dynamics, required mobility for trainings or consultations, risks associated with mixed-gender or staff-community interactions, and cultural norms restricting women's movement.

Required GBV Safeguard Measures

- Mandatory GBV prevention training for PMU, ERA, Island Council, WDCs, and project field staff.
- Adoption of a Code of Conduct prohibiting sexual harassment and exploitation.
- Establishment of a discreet and survivor-centred reporting pathway aligned with national GBV services.
- Identification of safe venues, consultation timings, and women-only sessions to minimise risk exposure.

4.5 Institutional and Governance Gaps

The project depends on decentralized governance, yet:

- Island Councils have minimal experience with gender-responsive PA governance.
- WDCs face financial, legal, and operational constraints that limit their influence.
- ERA and PMU require dedicated gender expertise to meet ESMS requirements.
- Local partners need capacity to implement livelihood assessments, safeguard procedures, and gender-disaggregated monitoring.
- Failure to strengthen these institutions could undermine project safeguards, exacerbate gender inequalities, or result in weak application of mitigation measures.

4.6 Social Inclusion Risks for Other Vulnerable Groups

Beyond gender, the project must ensure inclusive engagement of:

- **Persons with Disabilities (PWDs):** Barriers include mobility, communication, limited access to public services, and higher unemployment rates.
- **Female-Headed Households (FHHs):** These face higher multidimensional poverty, increased caregiving burden, and limited participation in public decision-making.
- **Youth:** This group has limited employment opportunities and under-representation in governance processes, despite high educational attainment.
- **Safeguard Requirements to Ensure Inclusion**
 - Provide accessible venues, transport support, and information materials.
 - Ensure active participation of PWDs and youth in project consultations.
 - Implement culturally appropriate women-only consultations.
 - Integrate inclusion criteria in livelihood grants and capacity-building activities.
 - Ensure the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) is accessible, confidential, and responsive to vulnerable groups.



4.7 Programmatic Integration of Safeguard Commitments

To ensure long-term compliance and effective implementation, safeguard measures must be embedded across all project systems.

a) Integration into the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Framework

The MEL system must capture:

- Sex- and age-disaggregated participation rates
- Livelihood impacts on vulnerable groups
- Benefit distribution through the Conservation Trust Fund
- Qualitative indicators on empowerment, voice, and influence
- Compliance with gender balance targets in training, governance, and employment

b) Integration Across PA Management Plan Phases

- **Before:** Complete gender-differentiated livelihood and resource-use assessments; identify individuals/households at risk.
- **During:** Ensure inclusive consultations; integrate women's recommendations into zoning and LAC thresholds.
- **After:** Monitor implementation impacts; adaptively adjust measures; use GRM for emerging concerns.

c) Clear Institutional Responsibilities

Institution	Safeguard Responsibilities
PMU	Oversight of ESMS, GAP implementation, MEL integration, safeguard compliance.
Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy	Technical oversight, hosting PA knowledge systems, compliance monitoring.
Island Councils	On-ground implementation, inclusive PA governance, community engagement.
MSFD	Gender technical leadership, GBV risk mitigation guidance.
WDC	Mobilizing women, facilitating women-only consultations, representing women's concerns.

4.8 Conclusion

This safeguards analysis confirms that while CATENATE faces moderate but manageable gender and social risks, it is well-positioned to address them through the robust mitigation framework embedded in the Gender Action Plan and ESMF. Ensuring strict adherence to these safeguards is essential not only for preventing harm but also for enhancing conservation outcomes, strengthening community ownership, and promoting equitable benefit-sharing.

The project's success depends on operationalizing this framework across all phases of PA management, ensuring that gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion remain central pillars of CATENATE's long-term sustainability.

5. Implementation Framework

This section outlines the institutional and operational architecture required for the effective roll-out of the Gender Action Plan (GAP). It translates the commitments from Sections 2 and 3 into a clear implementation pathway, detailing who is responsible, what they must deliver, and how gender-responsive actions will be embedded into the project's governance, safeguards, and operational systems. The framework builds on the national mandates of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MOTE), the statutory authority of the Funadhoo Island Council as the delegated PA Management Authority, the social protection expertise of the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSFD), and the project coordination role of the CATENATE Project Management Unit (PMU). It also emphasizes the essential leadership role of the Funadhoo Women's Development Committee (WDC) as the primary mechanism for women's representation at the island level.

5.1 Institutional Arrangements

National Level Oversight – Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MOTE)

MOTE serves as the national custodian for Protected Areas (PAs) under the Maldives' National Framework for Management of Protected and Conserved Areas. Its responsibilities include:

- Ensuring the GAP aligns with national PA policies and environmental legislation;
- Approving PA management plans;
- Issuing the formal delegation of PA management authority to the Funadhoo Island Council;
- Overseeing compliance with national standards for gender equality, safeguards, and inclusive governance;
- Ensuring that CATENATE lessons are integrated into national PA governance reforms.

Project Coordination – Project Management Unit (PMU)

Embedded within MOTE, the PMU manages overall project implementation and has direct responsibility for operationalizing GAP commitments. The PMU:

- Coordinates all gender-responsive activities across Outputs and project partners;
- Integrates gender and social inclusion requirements into plans, procurement, and deliverables;
- Provides technical backstopping to the Council and WDC;
- Manages the project's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system, including gender-disaggregated indicators;
- Ensures that all assessments and consultations comply with ESMS and Gender Equality Act requirements.

The PMU will not include a dedicated gender specialist. Instead, the incoming Safeguard Specialist will also serve as the Gender Focal Point, providing targeted oversight and ensuring that gender-responsive actions are consistently implemented across all field-level activities.

Delegated Management Authority – Shaviyani Funadhoo Island Council (FIC)

Upon delegation from MOTE, the FIC will serve as the responsible authority for on-the-ground governance of the Farukolhu PA. Its roles include:

- Integrating gender-responsive and inclusive approaches into PA governance mechanisms;
- Co-leading all assessments, consultations, and planning activities with the WDC;
- Ensuring women's needs, traditional knowledge, and resource-use patterns are incorporated into the PA management plan;
- Implementing livelihood mitigation measures for resource users affected by access restrictions;
- Reporting to MOTE and PMU on gender outcomes.

Island councils managing PAs beyond Farukolhu will be engaged through regional validation workshops, peer learning exchanges, and participation in the development of national PA governance standards. This ensures that lessons learned from the demonstration site inform broader institutional transformation across Boduthiladhunmathi and beyond.

- **Consistency:** Adoption of gender-responsive PA governance approaches across all 15 Protected Areas in Boduthiladhunmathi
- **Peer Learning:** Structured exchanges where councils share experiences on WDC engagement, inclusive consultation methods, and community-based resilience building
- **Cross-Atoll Coordination:** Joint planning on issues affecting multiple PAs, including migratory species management, resource use zoning, and conservation financing
- **National Preparation:** Building institutional readiness for scaling gender-mainstreamed PA management to all PAs nationwide

The PMU will facilitate regional knowledge exchange and capacity building with other island councils in the project area to ensure:

While the Funadhoo Island Council serves as the delegated PA Management Authority for the Shaviyani Farukolhu demonstration site, the governance models and gender-mainstreaming approaches developed through CATENATE are designed for replication across all island councils within Boduthiladhunmathi Atoll (HA, HDh, Sh, N administrative atolls).

Gender and Social Protection Mandate – Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSFD)

MSFD provides national-level oversight on gender equality, family welfare, disability inclusion, and GBV mitigation. Its role is to:

- Ensure GAP alignment with the Gender Equality Act (2016) and related national standards;
- Provide technical guidance on GBV prevention, ethical reporting, and referral pathways;
- Support the design of socially inclusive livelihood restoration measures;
- Ensure disability-inclusive access to consultations, training, and benefits.

Community Representation and Mobilization – Funadhoo Women's Development Committee (WDC)

The WDC is a statutory local governance body under the Decentralization Act and will serve as the primary mechanism for:

- Mobilizing and representing women resource users;
- Co-designing women-only consultations using culturally appropriate methods;
- Facilitating collection of gender-disaggregated data and validation of assessment findings;
- Ensuring the perspectives of vulnerable women (fhhs, pwds, young women) are included in pa governance;
- Monitoring and communicating livelihood impacts of access restrictions to the council and pmu.

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Institution	Safeguard Responsibilities
Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MOTE)	Provide national oversight for GAP implementation. Ensure PA management plans incorporate gender-differentiated findings. Approve TORs, plans, and reports containing gender-responsive commitments. Facilitate inter-ministerial coordination with MSFD.
Project Management Unit (PMU)	Lead implementation of all GAP activities. Ensure gender-responsive design in assessments, planning, training, and reporting. Monitor progress against gender indicators and compile MEL reports. Operationalize ESMS and gender safeguards. Manage capacity-building support for FIC and WDC.
Safeguard Specialist (Gender Focal Point)	Provide technical oversight on gender and social inclusion. Ensure compliance with ESMS and Gender Equality Act. Review all deliverables for gender responsiveness. Facilitate GBV risk mitigation training and ethical conduct protocols.
Shaviyani Funadhoo Island Council	Serve as delegated PA management authority. Lead gender-inclusive PA governance processes. Implement access mitigation and livelihood restoration measures. Maintain local-level MEL records.
Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSFD)	Provide technical guidance on gender, social protection, GBV, and disability inclusion. Support safe consultation environments and referral pathways. Advise on equitable livelihood schemes for affected women.
Women's Development Committee (WDC)	Represent women's perspectives in all stages of the project. Lead women-only consultations and validation sessions. Identify vulnerable women and resource users for livelihood assessments. Monitor social risks and support GRM implementation.

5.3 Capacity Requirements and Strengthening

The baseline assessment shows limited PA management capacity within FIC and insufficient gender-related expertise across PMU and Council staff. CATENATE will implement a targeted capacity strengthening program including:

- Gender-responsive PA governance training for FIC members
- Social safeguards training, including ESMS, GBV, and economic displacement
- Inclusive facilitation skills for PMU, FIC, and WDC
- Gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data skills building
- Mentoring female leaders within the WDC and Council to enhance participation

Capacity development will be sequenced alongside assessments and planning to ensure immediate application of new skills.

5.4 Budget and Resource Allocation

GAP implementation will be supported through:

The Shaviyani Atoll Conservation Trust Fund will integrate a gender-responsive financing mechanism with a dedicated 30-40% set-aside allocation for women-led or gender-balanced enterprises. This ensures structural equity in conservation benefit-sharing and prevents systemic exclusion of women entrepreneurs from livelihood opportunities linked to PA management.

- The existing CATENATE project budget for assessments, training, and planning;
- Funds allocated to the PMU for gender-responsive activities;
- Dedicated resources within the Atoll Conservation Trust Fund to support women-led alternative livelihoods and economic displacement mitigation;
- Cost-sharing by partner agencies (MOTE, MSFD, FIC) where relevant.
- A detailed budget allocation will be finalized during the project's Annual Work Planning (AWP) process and aligned with Output-level cost structures.

5.5 Coordination, Reporting and Accountability Mechanisms

- Quarterly coordination meetings between PMU, MOT, FIC, MSFD, and WDC
- Biannual reporting to the Project Steering Committee (PSC) on gender outcomes
- Annual Gender Review integrated into the PA Management Plan progress report
- Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) providing gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive channels
- Independent gender audit at mid-term and end-of-project (if resources permit)

6. Monitoring, Evaluation And Learning (Mel)

The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system for the CATENATE Gender Action Plan (GAP) establishes the mechanisms through which the project will systematically track gender-responsive actions. It verifies progress toward gender equality and social inclusion outcomes. It ensures continuous adaptive learning. This section outlines how gender-related commitments will be operationalised, monitored, and reviewed throughout the project cycle. This is in alignment with IUCN ESMS, GEF requirements, and the national framework for Protected and Conserved Areas.

The MEL framework ensures that gender equality is not treated as a standalone activity. Rather, it is fully integrated into all project processes. This includes assessments, planning, PA governance, livelihood support, and financial mechanisms. The approach emphasises accountability, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous feedback. This includes feedback between project implementers, local institutions, and community stakeholders.

6.1 Purpose of the MEL System for Gender Equality

The MEL system serves four core functions:

- Track progress on gender-responsive actions identified in Section 3 of the GAP. This covers assessments, consultations, training, financing, leadership, and cross-cutting safeguards.
- Monitor risks and impacts on women, girls, and vulnerable groups. This includes economic displacement, access restrictions, and participation in PA governance.
- Strengthen accountability and transparency. This is done by clearly defining institutional responsibilities, reporting channels, and verification mechanisms.
- Enable adaptive management. This allows the project to adjust activities, methods, or resource allocations in response to emerging data, feedback from women and WDCs, and monitoring findings.
- Gender equality is therefore embedded as a central performance domain within the project's overall MEL architecture.

6.2 Gender-Responsive Monitoring Framework and Indicators

The monitoring framework uses:

- **Quantitative indicators:** This includes participation rates, sex-disaggregated training numbers, number of women-led livelihood activities funded, percentage of Trust Fund grants allocated to women, and increases in women's representation.
- **Qualitative indicators:** This includes women's reported influence in PA governance, perceived safety during consultations, reported confidence in PA management processes, and the extent to which women's inputs are reflected in final plans.

Indicators are aligned with:

- IUCN ESMS Standards
- GEF Core Gender Indicators
- CATENATE results framework (target of 50% gender balance in project activities)
- National Gender Equality Act obligations

All indicators are integrated into the consolidated matrix under Section 6.6.

6.3 Roles and Responsibilities for GAP Monitoring

Project Management Unit (PMU)

Leads overall monitoring and ensures compliance with gender commitments. Integrates GAP indicators into all project reporting tools. Oversees data quality and ensures information is systematically collected.

MEL Focal Point

The MEL Focal Point plays a central coordination role. Core responsibilities include:

- Integrate GAP indicators into the MEL plan and annual monitoring schedule.
- Compile sex-disaggregated participation and benefit-tracking data from all activities.
- Ensure monitoring tools are gender-sensitive and accessible.
- Work with WDCs and the Island Council to capture qualitative feedback from women, PWDs, youth, and vulnerable households.
- Prepare gender-responsive sections of quarterly and annual progress reports.
- Support learning processes and adaptive management based on the evidence generated.

Safeguard Specialist (PMU)

Monitors gender-related safeguard risks. This includes GBV, economic displacement, and access restrictions. Ensures compliance with IUCN ESMS, including Access Restriction standards. Supports grievance documentation and ensures referral pathways for GBV.

Funadhoo Island Council (Delegated PA Management Authority)

- Reports sex-disaggregated participation in PA-related decisions.
- Ensures women's feedback is integrated into PA management and zoning decisions.
- Supports MEL data collection at the island level.

Women's Development Committee (WDC)

- Mobilises women for consultations and assessments.
- Documents women's concerns and submits them through official channels.
- Provides verification that women-specific issues were discussed and addressed.

Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy (MOCEE)

- Provides oversight on PA governance standards and compliance.
- Verifies that gender criteria in national PA systems are reflected in project-level monitoring.

Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSFD)

- Provides guidance on GBV risk mitigation, vulnerability inclusion, and national gender policies.

6.4 Data Collection, Quality Assurance and Reporting Cycle

Data Collection

- All activity leads must collect sex-, age-, and vulnerability-disaggregated data using standardised templates.
- Data must integrate disability markers where possible (in line with Census 2022 classification).
- Qualitative data must be gathered through interviews, focus groups, WDC consultations, and feedback forms.

Quality Assurance

- MEL Focal Point conducts quarterly data verification.
- Gender focal persons (where present) or WDC members validate community-level data.
- PMU cross-checks MEL findings with safeguard monitoring reports.

Reporting Cycle

- Quarterly progress reports include GAP progress updates.
- Biannual safeguard reports include gender, GBV, and vulnerability indicators.
- Annual Project Implementation Report (PIR) consolidates all gender-related indicators and progress.
- Mid-term and Final Evaluations will independently review GAP implementation.

6.5 Learning and Adaptive Management

Learning is central to the effectiveness of the GAP. The MEL system includes:

- Annual reflection workshops with PMU, WDC, Island Council, and Ministry representatives to review what is working and adjust approaches.
- Feedback loops that ensure women's inputs from monitoring are integrated into PA management decisions.
- Adaptation triggers, such as: low participation of women in consultations; indicators showing increased livelihood vulnerability; signs of elite capture in Trust Fund disbursement; or GBV-related concerns emerging during implementation.

When triggered, the PMU must revise activity methods, consultation formats, or livelihood support mechanisms accordingly.

6.6 Consolidated Gender-Responsive Monitoring Matrix

Below is the consolidated monitoring matrix aligned with your confirmed column structure from Chapter 3.

GAP Section	Activity	Expected Gender Outcome	Indicators	Data Sources & Tools	Responsible Entity	Frequency
3.1 Assessments	1.1.2 Pre-capacity assessment of Funadhoo Island Council	Council capacity gaps identified; women's priorities included in PA governance readiness	# women vs men consulted; # female vs male councillors trained; WDC recommendations documented	Assessment reports; attendance sheets; interview notes	PMU, Island Council, MEL Focal Point	Once; updated mid-term
3.1 Assessments	1.3.1 Review of National PA Standards	National PA framework integrates mandatory gender criteria	Gender criteria included; gender checklist approved; women represented in national consultations	National standards review; meeting minutes	MOTE, PMU	Once
3.1 Assessments	1.4.1 Resource Use & Livelihood Assessment	Women's resource-use patterns fully mapped and integrated into PA planning	% of mapped users who are women; record who collects, what, where, and who controls benefits; % of women's resource uses reflected in PA zoning	Assessment tools; GPS mapping; socio-economic surveys	PMU, MEL Focal Point, WDC	Once; prior to zoning

3.1 Assessments	1.4.2 Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC)	LAC criteria developed using gender-differentiated thresholds	# of gender-specific LAC indicators; women consulted on thresholds; gender impact assessment documented	LAC documents; workshop reports	PMU, Safeguard Specialist	During PA plan development
3.1 Assessments	1.4.5 Gender baseline for PA governance	Establish baseline for women's representation and influence	% baseline of women in PA governance; qualitative feedback from women on governance barriers	Baseline report; interviews; attendance	PMU, Island Council, WDC	Once; updated mid-term
3.1 Assessments	1.4.6 Livelihoods Vulnerability Assessment	Vulnerable women and households protected from access restrictions	# of women-led enterprises at risk; case studies documented; GBV risk check completed	Assessment report; community consultations	PMU, Safeguard Specialist	Once
3.2 Consultations	2.1.1 Stakeholder consultations	Women meaningfully influence PA planning	% women participating; qualitative evidence of women's views integrated; gender-responsive budgeting score improvement	Consultation forms; recordings; WDC reports	PMU, Island Council, MEL Focal Point	Ongoing
3.2 Consultations	2.2.2 Livelihood consultations	Women's informal activities formally recognised and supported	Women-only consultations conducted; informal enterprises integrated into livelihood plans	Workshop reports; livelihood plan drafts	PMU, WDC, Safeguard Specialist	Ongoing
3.3 Training	Ranger training	Increased technical capacity and recruitment of women in PA roles	# women trained; change in knowledge/skill scores; % female applicants	Pre/post tests; attendance	PMU, Island Council	Scheduled sessions
3.3 Training	Leadership & governance training	Women increasingly influence PA decisions	% women trained; women report increased confidence	Surveys; training evaluations	PMU, WDC, MEL Focal Point	Annual
3.4 Financing	Trust Fund procedures	Equitable access to livelihood grants and funds	% of grants to women-led enterprises; transparency score; WDC verifies fair disbursement	Fund records; audits; WDC reports	PMU, Fund Board, MEL Focal Point	Quarterly
3.4 Financing	Livelihood restoration	Women's livelihoods restored or improved post-access restrictions	# women receiving livelihood alternatives; income change trend; satisfaction score	Beneficiary surveys; income tracking	PMU, Island Council	Semi-annual

3.5 Leadership	Recruitment into project teams	Women able to serve as advisors, team members, and trainers	% female project staff; # women in decision-making positions	HR records; PMU reports	PMU	Annual
3.5 Leadership	WDC strengthening	WDC actively contributes to PA governance	# WDC meetings on PA topics; WDC recommendations adopted	WDC meeting minutes; interviews	Island Council, WDC	Quarterly
3.6 Cross-Cutting	Safeguards compliance	GBV, displacement, and vulnerability risks mitigated	# staff trained on GBV; functional confidential reporting mechanism; participation of PWDs and FHHs	Safeguard reports; training logs	Safeguard Specialist, PMU	Quarterly
3.6 Cross-Cutting	Inclusive communications	Information accessible for women, PWDs, youth	# materials in accessible formats; feedback from vulnerable groups	Communication materials review	PMU, MEL Focal Point	Ongoing

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