

management (marketing alternatives to plastics) will be emphasised. The aim is to increase confidence, deepen experience and open more possibilities for women in all their diversity who have often been raised under a patriarchal system which excludes their leadership. WDCs are a part of the Island Councils and are one avenue to help promote women's leadership under this proposed project. As the Maldives is an increasingly youthful demographic, enhancing the ability of young people to lead is critical for the nation's future, which can be achieved through the engagement of formal and informal youth groups at the island level.

**Decentralisation & local authorities:** The Island and Atoll Councils are key stakeholders and rights holders of this project. The local authorities will be engaged from the outset as key partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of results of the Action at site level based on decisions set at national level and will be part of the Steering Committee that will be established. The composition of the Project Steering Committee will strive for equal representation of women and men in the Committee.

A local-level capacity focus is built on the assumption that an increase in decentralised capacities will be of value to local participation in decision-making and sustainable management of resources even if a future government moves to 're-centralise' government administration. Key national government stakeholders (duty bearers) include the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology, in particular the Environment Department and the Environmental Protection Agency which are responsible for protected area management, the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture and its Marine Research Institute; and the state-owned Waste Management Company. The Local Government Authority is responsible to support local councils to implement their tasks and is thus an important stakeholder. The relationship between local authorities and national government agencies will be strengthened to work together for local biodiversity outcomes.

**Civil Society:** The Maldives' civil society is active in both biodiversity conservation and waste management. Organisations such as Water Solutions, Small Islands Research Group, Small Island Geographic Society work with local communities and organisations to promote sustainable resource use, biodiversity protection and expertise and data for environmental impact studies. In terms of waste management, Soneva Namoonaa is applying transformative approaches to waste management to the islands of Baa Atoll and Noonu Atoll. Parley Maldives, Zero Waste Maldives and Save the Beach are also key NGOs developing awareness and waste reduction programs on a local and national level. These organisations (incl. women-led CSOs) play key roles in helping to educate and motivate the island and atoll councils and other local partners, as well as participating in multi-stakeholder platforms.

Educational and research institutions may also be mobilised. The Marine Research and High Education Centre (MaHRE) run by the University of Milan-Bicocca could help provide and collate data regarding biodiversity, the delineation of protected areas, and coral protection or restoration, in partnership with or in support of government research agencies. Links with the Joint Research Centre tools/knowledge hubs will be explored. The Maldives National University may contribute to training and curriculum for local authorities and project beneficiaries regarding natural resource protection and waste management.

**Private sector:** It is estimated that, in the Maldives, biodiversity contributes towards 71% of employment, 89% of GDP and 8% of exports. Its most important economic activities are high-end tourism and fisheries, that both depend on healthy reefs and a clean environment. Private sector stakeholders focus mainly on the tourism sector with over 180 resorts and over 700 guesthouses, as well as approximately 150 safari vessels/liveaboards. The emergence of MSMEs in the tourism industry has diversified the economy catering to a different market segment than the traditional homogenous market dominated by the "one-island-one-resort" model, and enabled local ownership and local employment while mobilising a larger number of women in the workforce. However, this sharp increase has in turn contributed to negative environmental impacts including harmful tourism behaviour around iconic marine species in particular the whale shark, but also in terms of procurement of food, water and beverages which are mostly imported with a high level of single-use plastics/packaging, even while the primary draw of tourism is its pristine environment and well-managed protected areas. Through inclusion in project multi-stakeholder platforms there is potential to harness private sector resources to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of the tourism sector. In the Maldives, some resorts are already leading in this direction, but effort and value could be added to extend economic opportunities to nearby communities, reduce waste, create and manage protected areas, and share knowledge and best practices, thus also aligning with SAP targets of increased capacity development and scale-up. Developing links with the Maldives Tourism Association (MATI) and the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) could also enhance project activities in terms of capacity-building, networking and problem-solving, and perhaps setting of standards or green certification.