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MASTER'S THESIS

**CLIMATE ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN MALDIVIAN TOURISM:  
KEY INFLUENCES AND STAKEHOLDER RESPONSES**

Ljubljana, July 2024

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## **Abstract**

The Maldives, renowned for its pristine beaches and vibrant marine life, faces significant threats from climate change, impacting its tourism industry, which is vital to the nation's economy. This thesis explores climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism sector, focusing on the roles and responses of key stakeholders. By examining the psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors involved, the research aims to understand how these strategies are developed and implemented to mitigate climate risks. The study also highlights the challenges and barriers faced by tourism stakeholders and provides recommendations for enhancing resilience and sustainability within the industry.

The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the Maldivian tourism sector, including representatives from luxury resorts, tour operators, industry associations, and non-governmental organizations. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis, grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, and Institutional Theory. This approach facilitated the identification of key themes related to sustainability practices, challenges, stakeholder collaboration, and future directions. The findings provide valuable insights into the current practices and strategies of the tourism industry in the Maldives, offering a roadmap for future policy and action.

**Keywords:** Climate Adaptation Strategies, Sustainable Tourism, Maldivian Tourism, Stakeholder Collaboration, Climate Resilience, Climate Change

## 1. Introduction

The Maldives archipelago, situated in the Indian Ocean, comprises of twenty-six atolls and over 1,000 coral islands. Known for its stunning white-sand beaches, crystal clear turquoise waters, and vibrant marine biodiversity, the Maldives is a popular global tourist destination (Kundur, 2012). Tourism is a cornerstone of the Maldivian economy, contributing significantly to its GDP and providing employment to a large portion of the population. However, the Maldives faces considerable environmental challenges due to climate change, which threatens its tourism industry and the broader socio-economic stability of the nation. Rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and extreme weather events jeopardize the delicate balance of the Maldivian ecosystem and its attractiveness as a tourist destination. *"To some, these islands are mere dots on the map,"* said Sai Navoti, chief of the SIDS unit at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (United Nations Environment Programme, n.d.). The urgency to develop and implement effective climate adaptation strategies has never been greater. These strategies are essential not only for protecting the natural environment but also for ensuring the long-term viability of the tourism industry and of the country as a whole.

The primary challenge lies in understanding how different stakeholders within the tourism industry perceive and respond to climate adaptation strategies. Stakeholders, including luxury resorts, smaller tourism operators, industry associations, and environmental NGOs, have varying levels of resources, knowledge, and motivation to implement sustainable practices. Identifying these differences and understanding the underlying factors is crucial for developing tailored strategies that can be effectively adopted across the sector. This research aims to investigate the attitudes and intentions of tourism stakeholders towards sustainability and climate adaptation. It will also examine the resource-based factors influencing the implementation of climate adaptation strategies, as well as analyse the role of institutional factors in shaping stakeholders' sustainability practices. This study will also identify the challenges and barriers faced by stakeholders in adopting climate adaptation strategies and propose recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of these climate adaptation initiatives in the Maldivian tourism industry.

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research question:

“How do climate adaptation strategies affect tourism stakeholders in the Maldives, and what are the key psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors involved?”

The study is grounded in several theoretical frameworks, including the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers & Conway, 1992), and Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is particularly relevant in understanding the psychological factors influencing stakeholders' attitudes and intentions toward sustainability. This framework helps analyse how stakeholders' beliefs about the outcomes of sustainable practices, social

pressures, and their perceived ability to implement these practices affect their commitment to sustainability (Ajzen, 1991). The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the resource-based factors that influence the implementation of climate adaptation strategies. SLF examines how various forms of capital (natural, financial, human, social, and physical) interact to affect individuals' and communities' ability to pursue sustainable livelihoods (Chambers & Conway, 1992). This is particularly useful in analysing how different stakeholders leverage these resources to implement sustainability initiatives and the challenges they face due to resource constraints. Institutional Theory offers insights into the role of institutional factors, such as government policies, industry standards, and collaborative efforts, in shaping organizational behaviour. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) highlight how coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures influence organizations to adopt similar practices and structures. This theory helps understand how external pressures from regulatory frameworks, industry norms, and collaborative initiatives drive the adoption of sustainable practices among tourism stakeholders.

The findings from this study aim to contribute to the understanding of how climate adaptation strategies can be effectively implemented in the Maldivian tourism sector, ensuring its sustainability and resilience in the face of environmental challenges. It also aims to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, and communities working towards a sustainable and resilient tourism sector in the Maldives. By addressing these critical areas, the study underscores the importance of coordinated efforts and comprehensive strategies to protect the natural environment and promote the long-term socio-economic well-being of the Maldives. The insights gained from this research can inform the development of policies and practices that enhance the resilience of the tourism sector, ensuring its sustainability in the face of ongoing and future environmental challenges.

This research is presented in seven sections. The first section introduces the reader on the importance of climate adaptation strategies for small island nations and introduces the research area. The next section discusses the global impacts of climate change on tourism, the vulnerabilities of island nations, existing climate adaptation strategies, and the roles of various stakeholders. Following this, the presentation of the case of Maldives makes the reader acquainted with the current state of tourism in the Maldives, its dependency on the environment, and various climate adaptation plans and initiatives currently in place. The methodology section outlines the research design, including interview design, sampling strategy, and data analysis approach used in the study. The analysis and discussion present the findings, focusing on the psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors, and explores the challenges and barriers faced by stakeholders. Thereafter, the conclusion summarizes the key findings, discusses their implications, and provides recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism industry. At the end, the study's limitations along with the scope for future research are also highlighted.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Climate Change and Its Impact on Island Nations*

#### 2.1.1 *Overview of Climate Change Impacts on Island Nations*

Island nations possess unique geographical and environmental characteristics that make them highly vulnerable to climate change. These characteristics include limited land area, geographic isolation, and reliance on marine and coastal ecosystems. They are especially susceptible to rising sea levels, increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and changes in weather patterns, which pose significant threats to their environmental, economic, and social stability (Dodds and Graci, 2010).

The limited land area of island nations means that even small increases in sea level can have disproportionate impacts, leading to significant loss of habitable land, and can also lead to increased coastal erosion. The saltwater intrusion into freshwater supplies can lead to loss of drinking water. Geographic isolation intensifies these challenges, as it limits access to resources. They also increase the cost and complexity of implementing adaptation measures (Barnett & Campbell, 2010). The isolation of these nations means they have limited capacity to respond to and recover from climate-related shocks. Many island nations rely heavily on tourism, an industry that is particularly sensitive to environmental changes. As a result, the impacts of climate change on tourism can have cascading effects on their economies and societies (Nurse et al., 2014).

The significance of climate change for island nations is profound. Rising sea levels threaten to even displacing populations and disrupting economies. Increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and typhoons, pose additional risks to infrastructure, human life, and economic stability. Changes in weather patterns, including altered precipitation regimes and temperature fluctuations, affect agriculture, freshwater availability, and biodiversity, all of which are critical for the survival and prosperity of island communities (Wang et al., 2023b). Climate change impacts on island nations are multifaceted, affecting various aspects of life and the environment.

#### 2.1.2 *Economic Impacts*

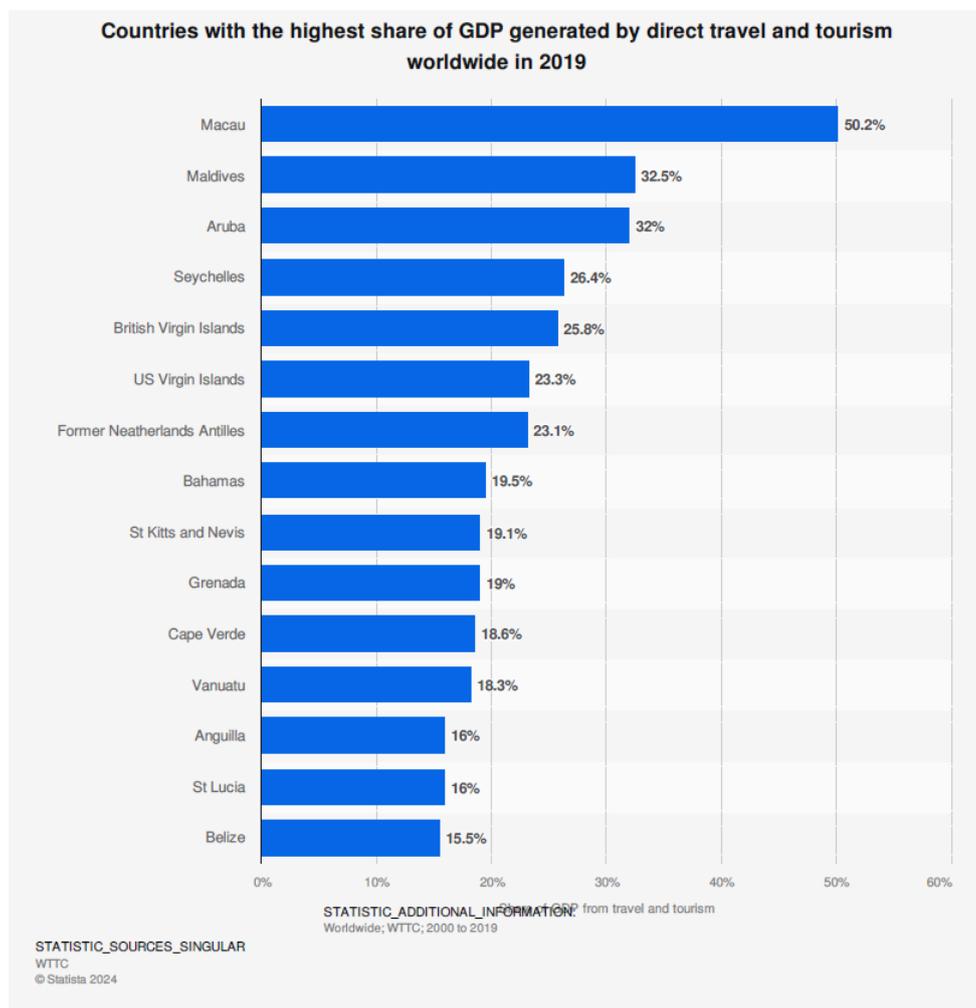
Tourism is a major economic driver for many island nations including Maldives, providing significant revenue and employment opportunities. Figure 1 shows the share of GDP generated by direct Travel and Tourism in Small Island Nations for the year 2019. However, it is also highly vulnerable to climate change. The economic impacts of climate change on tourism are profound and multifaceted. Revenue losses are expected due to decreased tourist arrivals resulting from deteriorating environmental conditions and increased frequency of extreme weather events.

Tourism businesses face increased operational costs due to the need for climate-resilient infrastructure, such as elevated buildings and improved drainage systems, to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events. Additionally, insurance premiums for properties in

vulnerable areas are likely to rise, further increasing operational expenses (Becken & Hay, 2012). These increased costs can strain the financial resources of tourism operators, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, which are common in island nations.

Climate change also affects tourist demand. Tourists may choose destinations perceived to be safer and less affected by climate change, leading to shifts in travel patterns. This can result in revenue losses for island nations unable to adapt quickly to changing market preferences. The Maldives, known for its pristine beaches and marine life, faces threats from coral bleaching and beach erosion, which could deter tourists seeking natural beauty and recreational activities (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

Figure 1: Island Nations with the highest share of GDP from Travel and Tourism in 2019



(Source: WTTC, 2020)

The economic impacts of climate change underscore the need for diversification in island economies. Dependence on a single industry, such as tourism, makes these nations particularly vulnerable to climate-related disruptions. Diversifying economic activities can enhance resilience and reduce the overall economic impact of climate change. However,

achieving diversification requires substantial investment and strategic planning, which can be challenging for resource-constrained island nations (Kayal, 2023).

### *2.1.3 Environmental Impacts*

Climate change significantly impacts the natural environments that are key attractions for tourism in island nations. Coral reefs, for instance, are highly susceptible to rising sea temperatures and ocean acidification. Coral bleaching events, which have become more frequent and severe, lead to the degradation of these vital ecosystems. This not only affects biodiversity but also diminishes the aesthetic and recreational value of coral reefs, which are major tourist attractions (Hoegh-Guldberg et al., 2007).

Coastal ecosystems, including mangroves and seagrass beds, also face threats from climate change. Rising sea levels and increased storm intensity can lead to the erosion of these habitats, reducing their ability to protect coastlines from storm surges and provide nursery grounds for marine species. The loss of these ecosystems has cascading effects on fisheries and tourism, both of which are crucial for the livelihoods of island communities (Duarte et al., 2013). Additionally, the degradation of marine ecosystems can lead to a decline in fish populations, affecting both local food security and the fishing industry, which is often a significant economic sector in island nations. Healthy corals are usually able to live in somewhat warm temperatures. However, even a slight increase in temperature over the usual can lead to coral bleaching. Continued exposure to warmer temperatures may cause coral death (Filho et al., 2021).

Terrestrial ecosystems in island nations are also vulnerable to climate change. Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns can alter habitats and affect the distribution of species. For instance, montane and highland ecosystems, which host unique and endemic species, are particularly sensitive to climate change. The shift in climate zones can lead to habitat loss and species extinction, further reducing biodiversity and impacting tourism attractions such as wildlife viewing (Fordham & Brook, 2008).

### *2.1.4 Socio-Cultural Impacts*

The socio-cultural impacts of climate change on island nations are significant. Changes in tourist behaviour due to climate change can affect local cultures and traditions. For instance, a decrease in tourist arrivals can lead to reduced income for local artisans and performers who rely on tourism for their livelihoods. This economic pressure can result in the loss of cultural heritage as communities may be forced to abandon traditional practices and seek alternative sources of income (Seymour, 2016).

Cultural heritage preservation is also at risk. Many island nations have historical sites and cultural landmarks located in coastal areas that are vulnerable to sea level rise and extreme weather events. The destruction or damage of these sites not only represents a loss of cultural heritage but also diminishes the tourism appeal of the destination.

Local communities are directly impacted by the socio-economic changes brought about by climate change. The displacement of communities due to rising sea levels and extreme weather events disrupts social structures and traditional ways of life. Additionally, the increased frequency of extreme weather events can lead to psychological stress and a decline in overall well-being among affected populations (Kelman et al., 2015). The loss of homes and livelihoods can lead to migration, both internally and internationally, further altering social dynamics and increasing the vulnerability of displaced populations.

The socio-cultural impacts of climate change highlight the need for building adaptive capacity and resilience within local communities. Community-based adaptation initiatives that involve local knowledge and practices can enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability. For example, traditional ecological knowledge and practices in Pacific Island communities have been shown to enhance the resilience of agricultural systems and coastal management (Lefale, 2009). Engaging communities in the planning and implementation of adaptation measures ensures that strategies are culturally appropriate and more likely to be successful.

#### *2.1.5 Policy and International Frameworks*

Addressing the multifaceted impacts of climate change on island nations requires robust policy frameworks and international cooperation. Various international policies and frameworks have been developed to guide climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts in the tourism sector. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has been at the forefront of promoting sustainable tourism practices and providing guidelines for climate change adaptation (*UNWTO Investment Guidelines: Enabling Frameworks for Tourism Investment*, n.d.).

One of them is The Glasgow Declaration. The Glasgow Declaration on Climate Action in Tourism emphasises the need for coordinated action among stakeholders to reduce carbon emissions and enhance resilience to climate change. It outlines specific strategies for the tourism sector, including the promotion of sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, and ecosystem restoration. These strategies are crucial for island nations, where tourism is a significant economic driver and source of employment (Glasgow Declaration, n.d.).

International frameworks like the Paris Agreement play a critical role in shaping climate adaptation strategies. The agreement calls for countries to enhance their adaptive capacity, strengthen resilience, and reduce vulnerability to climate change. For island nations, this means developing and implementing national adaptation plans that incorporate tourism as a key sector. These plans often include measures such as infrastructure development, ecosystem conservation, and community-based adaptation initiatives (UNFCCC, 2015).

Various countries have their own National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). They are essential tools for island nations to address the impacts of climate change. These plans outline strategies and actions to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability. For instance, the Maldives' NAPA includes measures such as the development of climate-resilient infrastructure, promotion of

sustainable tourism practices, and protection of coastal and marine ecosystems (Ministry of Environment, Energy and Water et al., 2007). The successful implementation of NAPs requires strong institutional frameworks, adequate funding, and effective stakeholder engagement.

Aside from the above, international cooperation and funding are critical for the successful implementation of adaptation strategies in island nations. Organizations such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) provide financial resources to support climate adaptation projects. Collaborative initiatives, such as the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) program, facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building among island nations, enhancing their ability to respond to climate change (Ricci & Mangenot, 2023).

## *2.2 Theoretical Frameworks*

### *2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)*

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a prominent psychological theory developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985. It extends the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by incorporating the concept of perceived behavioural control, which accounts for factors outside individual control that may affect intentions and behaviours. According to TPB, three main components drive behavioural intentions and, subsequently, actual behaviour: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991).

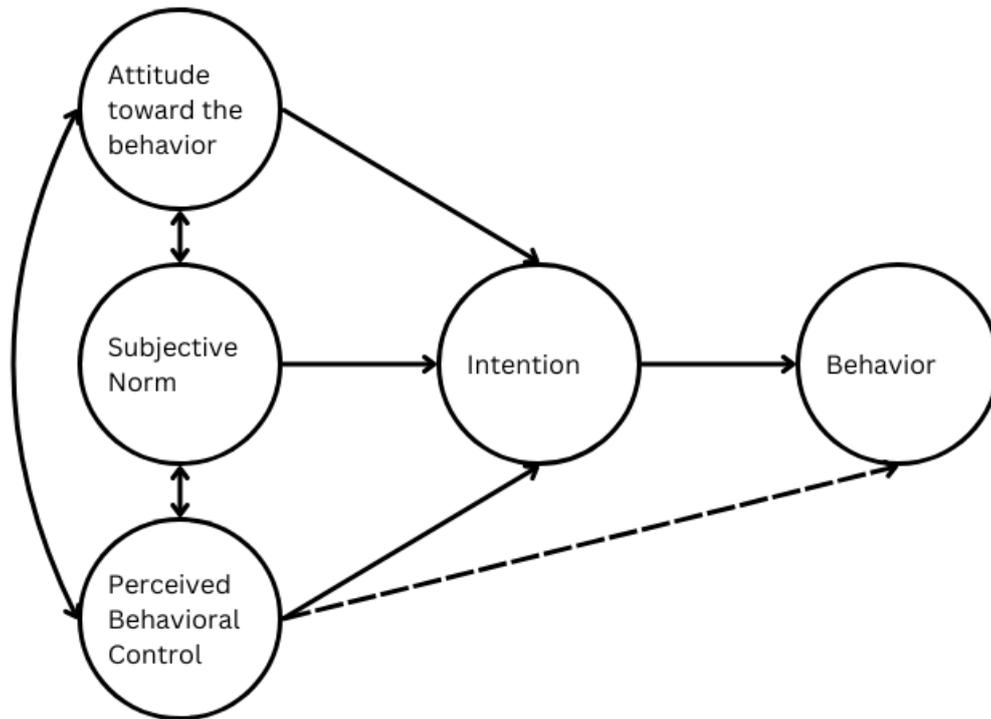
Attitudes refer to the individual's positive or negative evaluations of performing the behaviour. In the context of climate adaptation, stakeholders' attitudes towards adopting sustainable practices play a crucial role. For instance, if resort managers believe that implementing sustainable practices will lead to long-term benefits such as cost savings, enhanced reputation, and environmental conservation, they are more likely to adopt these practices. Studies have shown that positive attitudes towards sustainability are significantly associated with the adoption of green practices in the tourism industry (Han et al., 2010).

Subjective norms are the perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the behaviour. These norms are influenced by the expectations of important referent groups, such as family, friends, colleagues, and broader societal standards. In the tourism industry, subjective norms may include the expectations of government bodies, industry associations, customers, and international organizations. If tourism operators perceive that their peers, industry leaders, and regulatory bodies expect them to adopt climate adaptation strategies, they are more likely to comply. Research indicates that subjective norms significantly impact environmental behaviour in the tourism sector (Quintal et al., 2010).

Perceived behavioural control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour and is influenced by past experiences, anticipated obstacles, and available resources. Higher perceived control can enhance the intention to engage in the behaviour. In the case of climate adaptation, perceived behavioural control encompasses the availability of

financial resources, technical expertise, and institutional support. If a resort manager who believes they have sufficient resources and support to implement sustainable practices will likely have a stronger intention to do so. Studies have demonstrated that perceived behavioural control is a critical determinant of pro-environmental behaviour among tourism stakeholders (Lam & Hsu, 2006).

Figure 2: Theory of Planned Behaviour



(Source: Ajzen, 1991)

As explained in Figure 2, TPB provides a robust framework for understanding the psychological factors influencing stakeholders' decisions to adopt climate adaptation strategies. It helps identify the key motivators and barriers, which can inform the development of targeted interventions to promote sustainable practices in the tourism industry.

### 2.2.2 Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) is an analytical tool developed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in the late 1990s. It provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the assets, strategies, and contexts that influence people's livelihoods, particularly in the face of environmental changes (Scoones, 1998). SLF focuses on five types of capital assets: natural, financial, human, social, and physical.

Natural Capital includes all natural resources such as land, water, biodiversity, ecosystems, etc. In the Maldives, natural capital is crucial for tourism, as the country's pristine beaches,

coral reefs, and marine life are key attractions. Climate change poses significant threats to these natural assets, necessitating adaptive measures to protect and sustainably manage them. The coral reef conservation and restoration projects can enhance the resilience of marine ecosystems to climate change impacts (Allison & Ellis, 2001).

Financial Capital comprises financial resources such as income, savings, credit, and investment. Access to financial capital is vital for tourism operators to invest in climate adaptation measures, such as upgrading infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events or implementing energy-efficient technologies. Financial mechanisms, including grants, loans, and public-private partnerships, can facilitate the mobilization of financial capital for climate resilience initiatives (Ellis-Jones, 1999).

Human Capital encompasses skills, knowledge, health, and the ability to work. Building human capital through education, training, and capacity-building programs is essential for enhancing the adaptive capacity of tourism stakeholders. For instance, training programs on sustainable tourism practices and climate adaptation can equip local communities and tourism operators with the knowledge and skills needed to implement effective adaptation strategies (Chambers & Conway, 1992).

Social Capital involves social networks, relationships, trust, and access to institutions. Strong social capital can facilitate collaboration, information exchange, and collective action among stakeholders, enhancing their ability to respond to climate change. In the Maldives, social capital can be leveraged to foster partnerships between local communities, tourism operators, government agencies, and international organizations to jointly address climate adaptation challenges (Pretty & Ward, 2001).

Physical Capital refers to infrastructure, tools, equipment, and technology. Resilient infrastructure, such as elevated buildings, seawalls, and efficient waste management systems, is critical for reducing the vulnerability of tourism assets to climate impacts. Investments in physical capital can enhance the durability and sustainability of tourism infrastructure, contributing to the overall resilience of the sector (DFID, 1999).

SLF provides a holistic framework for assessing how different stakeholders in the tourism sector leverage these various assets to implement climate adaptation strategies. It highlights the strengths and vulnerabilities within communities and organizations, offering a comprehensive view of their adaptive capacity.

### *2.2.3 Institutional Theory*

Institutional Theory examines how institutional environments influence organizations and their behaviours. It focuses on the rules, norms, and beliefs that become established over time and shape organizational actions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional Theory identifies three main types of pressures that influence organizational behaviour: coercive pressures, normative pressures, and mimetic pressures.

Coercive Pressures are formal pressures from regulations, laws, and policies. In the tourism industry, government mandates and international agreements create coercive pressures for compliance with environmental standards and climate adaptation measures. The Maldives has implemented regulations requiring resorts to adopt sustainable practices, such as waste management and renewable energy usage. These regulations create a legal obligation for tourism operators to incorporate climate adaptation strategies (Scott, 2008).

Normative Pressures arise from professional norms, industry standards, and expectations from peer organizations. In the tourism sector, normative pressures can come from industry associations, certification schemes, and professional networks that promote sustainability and climate resilience. For instance, eco-certification programs, such as Green Globe and EarthCheck, set normative standards for sustainable tourism practices. Resorts that achieve these certifications gain recognition and legitimacy within the industry, encouraging others to follow suit (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991).

Mimetic Pressures occur when organizations imitate successful practices from others in their field, especially in situations of uncertainty or when facing complex challenges. In the context of climate adaptation, tourism operators may adopt innovative strategies that have been successfully implemented by leading eco-resorts globally. For example, if a well-known resort adopts advanced water conservation techniques or renewable energy solutions, other resorts may mimic these practices to achieve similar success and competitive advantage (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

Institutional Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding how external pressures influence the adoption of climate adaptation strategies. It reveals how regulatory requirements, industry standards, and best practices drive or hinder adaptation efforts among tourism stakeholders. By examining the institutional context, researchers can identify the key drivers and barriers to climate adaptation in the tourism sector.

### *2.3 Climate Adaptation Strategies*

#### *2.3.1 Definition and Types of Adaptation Strategies*

Climate adaptation strategies refer to actions taken to manage the adverse effects of climate change, minimize potential damage, and exploit any beneficial opportunities it may bring. In the context of tourism, these strategies aim to enhance the resilience of tourism destinations and businesses to climate change impacts, ensuring the sustainability of the sector (IPCC, 2014).

Adaptation strategies in tourism can be broadly categorized into two types: structural and non-structural. Structural strategies involve physical modifications and infrastructure improvements, while non-structural strategies encompass policy changes, capacity building, and awareness campaigns.

Structural adaptation strategies focus on physical changes and technological interventions to mitigate the impacts of climate change. These strategies include building resilient infrastructure, such as developing and retrofitting tourism infrastructure to withstand extreme weather events and sea level rise. For example, constructing elevated buildings and installing flood defences in coastal areas (Becken & Hay, 2012). Improving water management is another key aspect, involving the implementation of efficient water use and conservation measures to address water scarcity issues exacerbated by climate change. This includes rainwater harvesting, wastewater recycling, and desalination plants (Gössling et al., 2012). Enhancing coastal protection by restoring and protecting natural barriers such as mangroves, coral reefs, and dunes is also crucial to reduce the impact of storm surges and coastal erosion. Engineering solutions like seawalls and breakwaters can also be employed (Duarte et al., 2013).

Non-structural adaptation strategies involve policy, planning, and behavioral changes aimed at enhancing the adaptive capacity of tourism destinations and stakeholders. Policy changes include developing and implementing policies that promote sustainable tourism practices and climate resilience. This involves zoning regulations, building codes, and incentives for sustainable practices (Gössling et al., 2012). Awareness campaigns are essential for raising awareness among tourists, tourism operators, and local communities about climate change impacts and the importance of adaptation. This can be achieved through educational programs, workshops, and information dissemination (Becken, 2013). Capacity building focuses on strengthening the capacity of tourism stakeholders to plan for and respond to climate change. This includes training programs, technical assistance, and the development of early warning systems (Hall et al., 2013)

### *2.3.2 Factors Influencing Adaptation Strategies*

Economic factors play a crucial role in the adoption and success of climate adaptation strategies in tourism. The availability of funding and investment is essential for implementing both structural and non-structural measures. Public and private sector investment in resilient infrastructure, research and development, and capacity building is necessary to enhance the adaptive capacity of tourism destinations (Gössling et al., 2012).

Environmental conditions influence the choice and effectiveness of adaptation strategies. The specific vulnerabilities of a destination, such as susceptibility to sea level rise or extreme weather events, determine the appropriate adaptation measures. For instance, destinations with significant coastal tourism may prioritize coastal protection and habitat restoration, while those facing water scarcity may focus on water management strategies (Duarte et al., 2013).

Social and cultural factors, including community support and stakeholder involvement, are critical for the success of adaptation strategies. Local communities and tourism stakeholders need to be engaged in the planning and implementation of adaptation measures to ensure their

relevance and acceptance. Cultural values and practices also influence adaptation strategies, as they shape perceptions of risk and responses to climate change (Kelman, 2015).

Political factors, such as government policies and international support, significantly impact the adoption and implementation of adaptation strategies. Strong institutional frameworks, supportive policies, and effective governance are essential for facilitating climate adaptation in tourism. International agreements and collaborations, such as the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provide a framework for coordinated action and resource mobilization (UNFCCC, 2015).

Several barriers hinder the effective implementation of climate adaptation strategies in tourism. These barriers include financial constraints, as limited financial resources and access to funding can impede the implementation of adaptation measures, particularly in developing countries and small island nations (Becken & Hay, 2012). A lack of awareness and knowledge is another significant barrier; insufficient awareness and understanding of climate change impacts and adaptation options among tourism stakeholders can hinder proactive adaptation efforts (Gössling, 2009). Additionally, institutional and governance challenges, such as weak institutional frameworks, lack of coordination among stakeholders, and inadequate policy support, can pose significant barriers to adaptation (Scott, Gössling, et al., 2012). Social and cultural resistance also plays a role, as resistance to change and differing cultural attitudes towards climate change can affect the acceptance and effectiveness of adaptation measures (Kelman, 2010).

Innovative approaches and policy interventions can help overcome these barriers and enhance the effectiveness of adaptation strategies. These include financial mechanisms, such as establishing dedicated funding mechanisms like climate adaptation funds and public-private partnerships, to support adaptation projects (UNFCCC, 2015). Education and training are also crucial; implementing educational programs and capacity-building initiatives can raise awareness and enhance the knowledge and skills of tourism stakeholders (Becken, 2013). Institutional strengthening, which involves strengthening institutional frameworks and governance structures, can improve coordination, policy implementation, and stakeholder engagement (Gössling et al., 2012). Lastly, community-based adaptation, which promotes initiatives that leverage local knowledge and practices, can enhance resilience and ensure the relevance of adaptation measures (Lefale, 2009).

## *2.4 Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities in Climate Adaptation*

### *2.4.1 Identification of Key Stakeholders*

Government bodies play a crucial role in climate adaptation within the tourism sector. They are responsible for developing and implementing policies and regulations that promote sustainable tourism practices and enhance climate resilience. Government agencies at various levels, from national to local, are involved in planning and coordinating adaptation initiatives, providing funding and technical support, and ensuring compliance with environmental standards. In addition, local councils on the islands manage the work on the islands, ensuring

that adaptation measures are appropriately implemented and maintained. These councils often work closely with national agencies to ensure that local adaptation efforts align with broader national strategies and policies (Gössling et al., 2012).

In the Maldives, the Ministry of Tourism collaborates with the Ministry of Environment and Energy to integrate climate adaptation into tourism planning and development. This collaboration ensures that tourism infrastructure is resilient to climate impacts and that environmental sustainability is a core component of tourism policy (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

The private sector, including hotels, resorts, and tour operators, is a critical stakeholder in climate adaptation for tourism. These businesses are directly impacted by climate change and have a vested interest in adopting adaptation measures to protect their assets and ensure business continuity. The private sector can invest in resilient infrastructure, implement sustainable practices, and engage in partnerships with other stakeholders to enhance overall resilience.

In the Maldives, many resorts have adopted renewable energy sources, such as solar power, and implemented water conservation practices to mitigate their environmental impact and enhance resilience. Additionally, some resorts have undertaken initiatives to restore and protect coral reefs and mangroves, which are crucial for coastal protection and biodiversity. These efforts not only contribute to climate adaptation but also enhance the attractiveness of the destination for eco-conscious tourists (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

Local communities are both beneficiaries and key actors in climate adaptation efforts. Their involvement is essential for the success of adaptation initiatives, as they possess valuable local knowledge and are directly affected by the impacts of climate change. Community-based adaptation approaches that engage local populations in planning and decision-making processes ensure that adaptation measures are culturally appropriate and locally relevant.

In the Maldives, local communities have been involved in various adaptation projects, such as beach nourishment, coral reef restoration, and the construction of coastal defences. These projects not only protect the communities from the adverse impacts of climate change but also enhance the resilience of the tourism sector by preserving the natural attractions that draw tourists to the islands. Engaging local communities in these efforts fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, ensuring the long-term sustainability of adaptation measures (Pancrazi et al., 2023).

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations play a vital role in supporting climate adaptation efforts in the tourism sector. They provide funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building resources to help destinations and businesses implement adaptation measures. These organizations also facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders at the local, national, and international levels.

NGOs such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) work on various projects that enhance ecosystem resilience and support sustainable tourism practices. International organizations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) develop guidelines and best practices for climate adaptation in tourism, offering support to member countries in developing and implementing their adaptation strategies (UNWTO, 2019).

Visitors, or tourists, are important stakeholders in climate adaptation as their behaviour and preferences influence tourism demand and practices. Educating tourists about the impacts of climate change and promoting responsible travel behaviours can contribute to the sustainability of tourism destinations. While tourists are not typically involved in data collection for adaptation planning, their feedback and engagement in sustainable tourism initiatives can support the overall adaptation efforts.

Tourism operators in the Maldives have implemented various initiatives to raise awareness among tourists about the importance of environmental conservation and climate adaptation. These initiatives include guided tours that educate visitors about local ecosystems, conservation efforts, and the impacts of climate change. By engaging tourists in these activities, tourism operators can promote responsible travel behaviours and support broader adaptation goals (Gössling et al., 2012).

#### *2.4.2 Stakeholder Engagement in Implementing Adaptation Strategies*

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the successful implementation of climate adaptation strategies in tourism. Engaging stakeholders ensures that adaptation measures are comprehensive, inclusive, and tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the destination. Stakeholder engagement fosters collaboration, builds trust, and enhances the legitimacy and acceptance of adaptation initiatives (Reed et al., 2009).

Stakeholders bring diverse perspectives, knowledge, and resources to the adaptation process. Government agencies provide regulatory frameworks and policy support, while the private sector offers financial investment and innovative solutions. Local communities contribute traditional knowledge and practical experience, and NGOs and international organizations bring technical expertise and global best practices (Gössling et al., 2012).

One of the methods and best practices for effective stakeholder engagement is Participatory Planning. It involves the active involvement of stakeholders in the decision-making process. This approach ensures that adaptation strategies are developed collaboratively, considering the interests and inputs of all relevant stakeholders. Participatory planning can include workshops, focus group discussions, and public consultations to gather feedback and build consensus (Bamzai-Dodson et al., 2021).

In the Maldives, participatory planning processes have been used to develop community-based adaptation plans that address local climate risks. These processes involve engaging

community members, local businesses, and government representatives in identifying vulnerabilities, prioritizing adaptation actions, and developing implementation strategies. This collaborative approach helps ensure that adaptation measures are well-suited to local conditions and have broad support among stakeholders (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

Another method is Capacity building and education. They are critical components of stakeholder engagement. Providing training and resources to stakeholders enhances their ability to contribute effectively to adaptation efforts. Educational programs can raise awareness about climate change impacts and adaptation options, empowering stakeholders to take proactive measures (Gössling et al., 2009).

In the Maldives, training programs for tourism operators focus on sustainable practices, such as energy and water conservation, waste management, and ecosystem protection. These programs help build the capacity of the private sector to implement climate adaptation measures. Additionally, community education programs aim to raise awareness about climate change and promote adaptive behaviours among local residents (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

Next, Collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders are essential for leveraging resources and expertise. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can facilitate the sharing of knowledge, best practices, and financial resources, enhancing the overall effectiveness of adaptation strategies. Collaborative efforts can include public-private partnerships, community-based initiatives, and international cooperation (Gössling et al., 2012).

In the Maldives, partnerships between government agencies, the private sector, and NGOs have led to successful adaptation projects. For example, collaborations between resorts and environmental NGOs have resulted in coral reef restoration projects that benefit both the tourism industry and local ecosystems. These partnerships enhance the effectiveness of adaptation measures by combining resources and expertise from different sectors (Pancrazi et al., 2023).

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are also crucial for assessing the effectiveness of adaptation strategies and making necessary adjustments. Engaging stakeholders in M&E processes ensures transparency and accountability. Regular monitoring allows stakeholders to track progress, identify challenges, and learn from experiences, facilitating continuous improvement (UNFCCC, 2015).

The Maldives has implemented M&E frameworks for various adaptation projects, involving stakeholders in the collection and analysis of data. These frameworks help ensure that adaptation measures are achieving their intended outcomes and provide valuable feedback for refining strategies. By involving stakeholders in M&E, the Maldives can build a more resilient tourism sector and improve the overall effectiveness of its adaptation efforts (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

### **3. Case of Maldives**

#### *3.1 Tourism in the Maldives*

##### *3.1.1 History and Development of Tourism*

Tourism in the Maldives has a rich history, beginning in the early 1970s and rapidly evolving into a major economic driver for the country. The development of tourism in the Maldives can be outlined through several key phases:

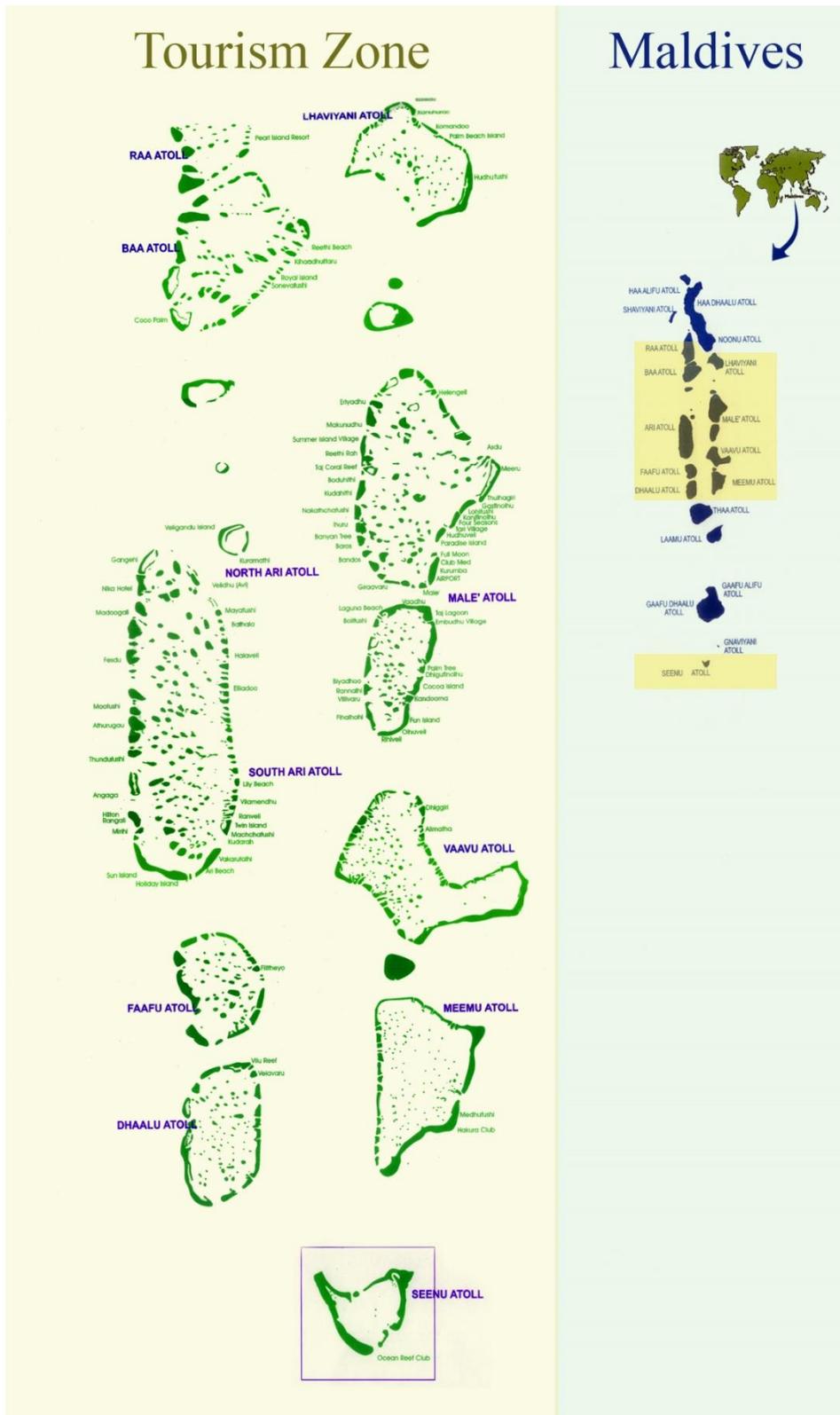
The tourism industry in the Maldives began with the opening of Kurumba Maldives, the first resort, in 1972. This initial venture demonstrated the potential of the Maldivian islands as a prime tourist destination due to their natural beauty, clear waters, and coral reefs. The success of Kurumba led to the development of more resorts and the gradual expansion of the tourism sector (Kachroo-Levine, 2021b).

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Maldivian government recognized the significant economic potential of tourism and began to invest heavily in the industry. This period saw substantial growth, with the number of resorts increasing and tourism infrastructure improving. The government's proactive policies, such as the introduction of the Tourism Master Plan in the 1980s, provided a strategic framework for sustainable growth (Kundur, 2012). These plans emphasized environmental conservation, limiting the number of resorts on each island, and ensuring that tourism development did not adversely impact the natural environment.

In recent years, the Maldives has continued to enhance its tourism offerings, diversifying into luxury tourism, eco-tourism, and adventure tourism. The focus has increasingly shifted towards sustainability and climate resilience, addressing the challenges posed by climate change (Shakeela & Weaver, 2012). The government and private sector have collaborated on various initiatives to promote sustainable tourism practices, improve infrastructure resilience, and engage local communities in conservation efforts.

The vast difference in the number of resorts and tourist attractions can be seen in the Figures 3 and 4 below. Figure 3 shows the tourism zone as it was in the year 2002. Figure 4 shows the extensive number of resorts that are now open and operational in the Maldives.

Figure 3: Tourism Map of Maldives as of 2002



(Source: (File: Tourism Zone (Maldives). Jpg - Wikimedia Commons, 2002)

Figure 4: Tourist Map of Maldives as of 2018



(Source: Large Detailed Tourist Map of Maldives | Maldives | Asia | Mapsland | Maps of the World, n.d.)

### 3.1.2 Current State of Tourism

Since its inception, tourism in the Maldives has experienced significant growth, becoming the largest economic sector in the country. Key milestones include the diversification of tourism products, the introduction of guesthouse tourism, and significant investments in infrastructure. The Maldives has developed a reputation as a luxury destination, attracting high-end tourists from around the world (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2019).

Figure 5: Tourist Arrivals in Maldives 2017-2022



(Source: Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

The Maldives has seen a steady increase in tourist arrivals over the years. In 2019, the country welcomed over 1.7 million tourists, a significant increase from the 1 million arrivals in 2012 (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2020). The major source markets for Maldivian tourism include China, India, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Recent trends indicate a growing interest from emerging markets such as Russia and the Middle East. Tourism trends in the Maldives have evolved, with a notable shift towards sustainable and eco-friendly tourism. The demand for eco-resorts and sustainable tourism practices has increased, driven by a global awareness of environmental issues and the impacts of climate change. The Maldives has responded to this trend by promoting sustainable tourism initiatives and encouraging resorts to adopt eco-friendly practices (UNWTO, 2019).

The tourism infrastructure in the Maldives is well-developed, comprising a mix of luxury resorts, guesthouses, and liveaboard boats. Resorts are typically located on private islands, offering exclusive and secluded experiences for tourists. These resorts range from high-end luxury establishments to more affordable options, catering to a diverse range of tourists (Domroes, 2001).

Guesthouse tourism, introduced in the early 2010s, has allowed tourists to stay on inhabited islands, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and benefiting local communities. This form of tourism has grown rapidly, with numerous guesthouses now operating across various atolls. Liveaboard boats offer another unique tourism experience, allowing tourists to explore

the Maldives' underwater beauty through diving and snorkelling excursions (Hussain et al., 2022).

The Maldives is renowned for its natural beauty, with key attractions including its white sandy beaches, turquoise waters, and vibrant coral reefs. These natural features make the Maldives a popular destination for various types of tourism. Luxury tourism is a major draw, as the Maldives is a premier destination for high-end resorts offering world-class amenities, private villas, and personalized services. Luxury tourists are drawn to the Maldives for its exclusivity, privacy, and serene environment. Eco-tourism has also seen a rise in demand due to increasing awareness of environmental issues. Many resorts in the Maldives have adopted sustainable practices such as solar power, waste recycling, and coral reef conservation projects. Eco-tourists are attracted to these initiatives and the opportunity to experience the natural environment responsibly. Adventure tourism is another popular option, with the Maldives offering various activities such as diving, snorkelling, surfing, and water sports. The coral reefs provide some of the best diving spots in the world, with diverse marine life and stunning underwater landscapes. Cultural tourism has gained prominence with the advent of guesthouse tourism, allowing tourists to experience local Maldivian culture, traditions, and lifestyle by staying on inhabited islands and interacting with local communities (Smith & Smith, 2023).

As of 2023, 176 resorts with 43,279 beds, 14 hotels with 1,940 beds, 809 guesthouses with 13,657 beds and 146 safari vessels with 2,774 beds are operational in the Maldives. Nine new resorts also opened up resulting in additional 2500 beds. The Velana International Airport hosted 52 airlines in the past year. The Maldives was named the World's Leading Destination for the fourth year in a row at the 2023 World Travel Awards, cementing its position as one of the world's top locations. The Maldives has set a goal of more than two million visitor arrivals, and the number of nights tourists stay in the nation is expected to climb by 7% this year (*An Overview of the Maldives Tourism Industry in 2023*, n.d.).

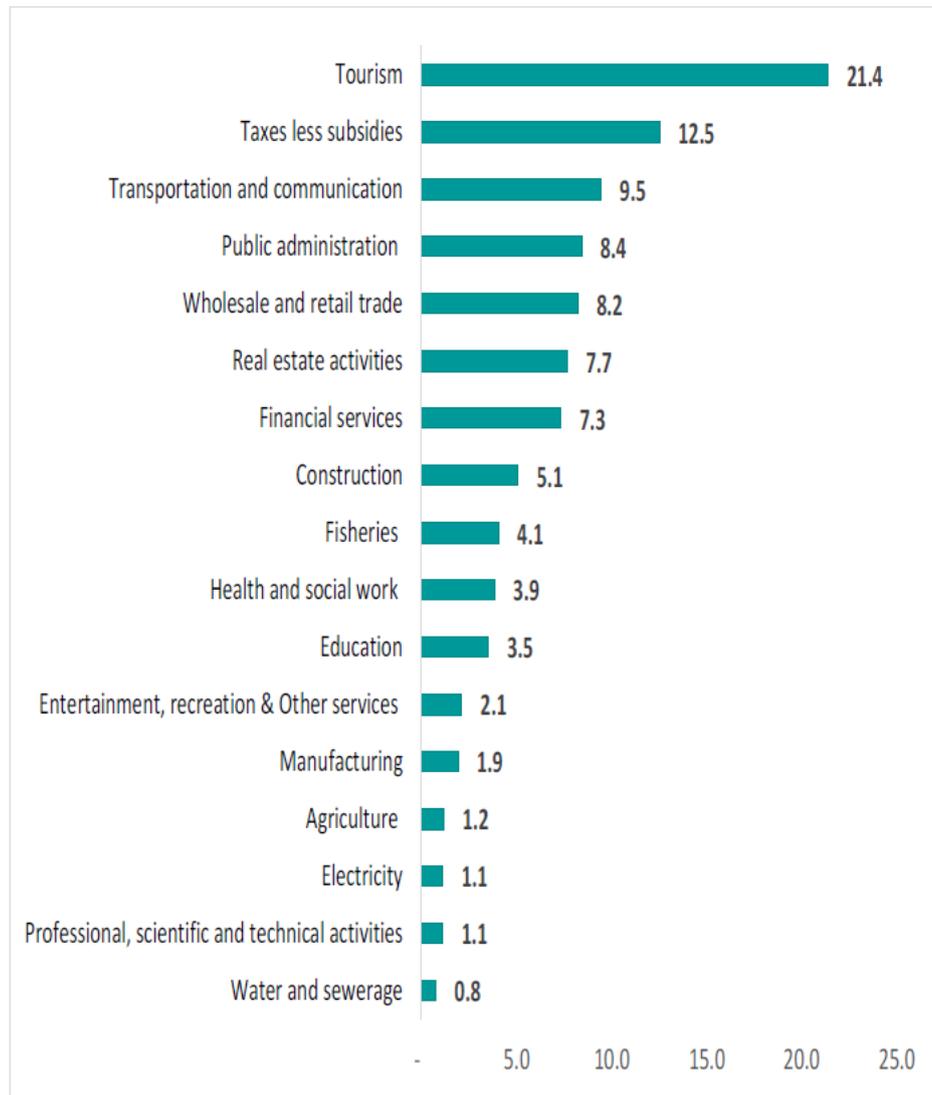
### *3.2 Impact of Tourism*

#### *3.2.1 Economic Impact*

Tourism is the backbone of the Maldivian economy, contributing significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As of 2019, the tourism sector accounted for nearly 30% of the Maldives' GDP, highlighting its importance in the national economy. The revenue generated from tourism supports various other sectors, including construction, transportation, and retail, creating a multiplier effect throughout the economy.

Compared to other sectors, tourism outpaces fisheries and agriculture, which historically were the primary economic activities in the Maldives. While fisheries remain important for local livelihoods and food security, they contribute less than 10% to the GDP. Agriculture is even less significant due to the limited arable land available in the archipelago (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Figure 6: Share of Nominal GDP of Maldives in 2021



(Source: Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2022)

Figure 6 shows the share of Nominal GDP of various sectors for the year 2021. With an increase of 9.8% from 2020 after the recovery of tourism sector from the Covid-19 pandemic, the share of tourism reached 21.4% in 2021 (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Tourism brings numerous economic benefits to the Maldives, including revenue generation, infrastructure development, and employment creation. The income from tourism supports government budgets through taxes and fees, funding public services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure projects.

Tourism generates significant foreign exchange earnings, which are crucial for a small, import-dependent country like the Maldives. The income from tourism helps to balance trade deficits and stabilize the national economy. In 2019, tourism-related activities generated over USD 2 billion in revenue (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2022). International hotel chains

and investors are keen to capitalize on the lucrative market, leading to the development of new resorts and tourism-related businesses. This influx of investment has created business opportunities for local entrepreneurs in areas such as supply chains, transportation, and hospitality services (Zimny, 2005).

The growth of tourism has driven infrastructure development across the Maldives. Investments in airports, seaports, roads, and communication networks have improved connectivity and accessibility, benefiting both tourists and local residents. The expansion of the Velana International Airport and the development of regional airports have facilitated increased tourist arrivals and enhanced the overall tourism experience (Shakeela & Weaver, 2018).

Tourism is a major source of employment in the Maldives, providing jobs for approximately 25% of the workforce (Sugathadasa & Weerasinghe, 2023). The industry offers diverse employment opportunities, from direct jobs in hotels, resorts, and tour operations to indirect jobs in supporting sectors such as transportation, retail, and food services. The high demand for skilled labour in tourism has also led to the establishment of training and education programs, enhancing the skills and employability of the Maldivian workforce.

Tourism has also led to community development initiatives, particularly through the promotion of guesthouse tourism on local islands. This form of tourism allows local entrepreneurs to open guesthouses and small hotels, directly benefiting from the tourism economy. It promotes community involvement and ensures that economic benefits are more evenly distributed across the country (Shakeela & Weaver, 2018).

Despite the numerous benefits, tourism also presents economic challenges. The Maldives' heavy reliance on tourism makes it vulnerable to external shocks such as global economic downturns, natural disasters, and pandemics. Seasonal fluctuations in tourist arrivals can lead to income instability for businesses and workers. Additionally, the high dependence on tourism increases the risks associated with climate change impacts, which can threaten the long-term sustainability of the sector (Armstrong & Read, 2020).

### *3.2.2 Environmental Impact*

Tourism in the Maldives has both positive and negative environmental impacts. On the positive side, tourism revenue has funded environmental conservation projects, including coral reef restoration and marine protected areas. Resorts and tour operators are increasingly adopting sustainable practices, such as waste management, renewable energy use, and water conservation, to minimize their environmental footprint (UNWTO, 2019).

Conversely, tourism also exerts significant pressure on the natural environment. The construction and operation of resorts, airports, and other infrastructure can lead to habitat destruction, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The high volume of tourists contributes to coral reef degradation, water pollution, and waste management challenges. The improper disposal

of solid waste and sewage from resorts can harm marine ecosystems and pose health risks to local communities (Domroes, 2001).

One of the major problems faced by Maldives is Coral Reef Degradation. Maldives is home to about five percent of the planet's coral reefs. These reefs are home to thousands of species of fishes such as whale sharks and manta rays (*Discover Maldives > Geography*, n.d.). Coral reefs, which are a major attraction for tourists, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of tourism. Activities such as snorkelling, diving, and boating can cause physical damage to coral reefs, while increased sedimentation from coastal construction can smother corals. Additionally, pollution from sunscreen and other chemicals used by tourists can contribute to coral bleaching and degradation (Shakeela & Becken, 2014).

Waste management is also a critical environmental challenge in the Maldives. The limited land area and high population density on many islands exacerbate waste disposal issues. The tourism industry generates a significant amount of solid waste, including plastics, glass, and organic waste. The lack of adequate waste management infrastructure leads to the accumulation of waste on islands and the marine environment, causing pollution and health hazards (UNWTO, 2019). Maldives still relies on landfills for waste disposal, but due to limited land available, they will eventually have to transition recycling and incineration. Their solid waste disposal practices vary by region due to non-accessible transportation to disposal facilities environmental awareness, local customs, and involvement of municipal authorities or island councils (Wang et al., 2023).

Water usage in the tourism sector is another environmental concern. Resorts and hotels consume large amounts of freshwater for drinking, sanitation, and recreational purposes. In many cases, freshwater is sourced from desalination plants, which are energy-intensive and contribute to carbon emissions. The over-extraction of groundwater and contamination from sewage can deplete freshwater resources and affect local communities' access to clean water (Gössling et al., 2012).

Another significant environmental issue in the Maldives is Coastal Erosion, exacerbated by both natural processes and human activities associated with tourism development. Tourism infrastructure development is one of the primary contributors to coastal erosion. The construction of resorts, jetties, and other tourist facilities often involves altering the natural coastline. This development can disturb sediment transport processes and natural coastal defences, such as mangroves and coral reefs, which protect shorelines from erosion (Aslam & Kench, 2017). Additionally, the removal of coastal vegetation, including mangroves and seagrasses, plays a crucial role in stabilizing shorelines. The removal of this vegetation for construction projects reduces the natural buffer against wave action, increasing the rate of erosion (Hinkel et al., 2023).

Climate change and sea level rise further exacerbate coastal erosion in the Maldives. As sea levels rise, the frequency and intensity of coastal flooding and erosion events increase,

threatening the very existence of these islands. Sand mining for construction and beach replenishment also leads to increased erosion. The removal of sand from certain areas disrupts the natural sediment balance and accelerates coastal degradation (Brown et al., 2019).

The impacts of coastal erosion are severe, including the loss of valuable land, damage to infrastructure, and environmental degradation. Coastal erosion leads to the loss of valuable land, which is particularly critical for a nation with limited land resources. Erosion can damage tourist infrastructure, leading to costly repairs and threatening the viability of tourism-dependent economies. The degradation of coastal habitats affects marine biodiversity and undermines the ecological health of the region (Brown et al., 2019).

Air pollution in the Maldives, primarily driven by the tourism sector, poses significant environmental and health challenges. The reliance on air travel and the use of fossil fuels for energy generation are the primary contributors to air pollution.

Tourism in the Maldives heavily depends on international air travel. The aviation industry is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and particulate matter (PM) (Gössling et al., 2005). Many resorts and local communities in the Maldives rely on diesel generators for electricity. The combustion of diesel fuel releases carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), sulphur oxides (SO<sub>x</sub>), and other pollutants, contributing to both air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions (World Bank, 2017).

The impacts of air pollution are wide-ranging, including adverse health effects and environmental degradation. Exposure to air pollutants can lead to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, adversely affecting both residents and tourists. Air pollution also contributes to acid rain, which can harm marine and terrestrial ecosystems. It exacerbates climate change, leading to broader environmental consequences (Nandy, 2023).

### *3.2.3 Socio-Cultural Impact*

Tourism has brought significant socio-cultural changes to local communities in the Maldives. The influx of tourists and the development of tourism infrastructure have transformed traditional ways of life.

Tourism fosters cultural exchange, providing opportunities for Maldivians to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. This exchange can promote mutual understanding and appreciation of different cultures. However, it can also lead to the commodification of local culture, where traditional practices and customs are performed primarily for tourists rather than for their intrinsic cultural value (Shakeela & Weaver, 2018).

Efforts to preserve cultural heritage have been supported by tourism revenue, with investments in the restoration of historical sites and the promotion of traditional arts and

crafts. Cultural festivals and events are organized to showcase Maldivian heritage to tourists, helping to preserve and promote local traditions (UNWTO, 2019).

Tourism has brought both social benefits and challenges to Maldivian communities. On the positive side, tourism has improved living standards by creating employment opportunities and generating income. Many locals find employment in the tourism sector, including in hotels, resorts, restaurants, and as tour guides. Improved infrastructure and public services funded by tourism revenue have enhanced the quality of life for many Maldivians.

However, tourism can also exacerbate social issues such as income inequality and cultural erosion. The economic benefits of tourism are often unevenly distributed, with wealth concentrated in certain areas and among specific groups. This can lead to social tensions and disparities between those who benefit from tourism and those who do not. Additionally, the influence of foreign tourists and exposure to different lifestyles can impact traditional values and behaviours, leading to cultural changes that may not always be welcomed by local communities. To cater to tourists, cultural elements may be commercialized and presented in a manner that prioritizes entertainment over authenticity. This commodification can distort the true meaning and significance of cultural practices. The influence of foreign cultures can lead to the erosion of local cultural identity. Traditional customs and practices may be abandoned in favour of more globally recognized behaviours, leading to cultural homogenization (Pancrazi et al., 2023). The construction of resorts and other facilities often requires land acquisition, which can disrupt local communities and their way of life (Arnall & Kothari, 2019).

Building community resilience to the impacts of tourism and climate change is crucial for the sustainability of the sector. Community-based tourism initiatives that involve local residents in tourism planning and development can enhance resilience by ensuring that the benefits of tourism are widely shared. These initiatives can also promote sustainable practices and empower communities to manage their resources effectively (Shakeela & Becken, 2015).

### *3.3 Climate Adaptation Initiatives*

#### *3.3.1 National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)*

The Maldives' National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) is a pivotal framework designed to tackle the country's vulnerabilities to climate change. Initiated in 2006, NAPA aims to prioritize and address the most urgent adaptation needs, particularly in sectors critical to the country's economy and well-being, including tourism. The primary objectives of NAPA include identifying priority adaptation needs, recognizing the most urgent and immediate needs to adapt to climate impacts, building institutional capacity by strengthening local institutions to implement and manage adaptation strategies effectively, and mainstreaming climate adaptation by integrating climate change adaptation into broader national development policies and planning processes.

Key components of NAPA are coastal protection, which involves implementing measures such as seawalls, revetments, and the restoration of natural barriers like mangroves and coral reefs to prevent coastal erosion and protect shorelines. Water resource management focuses on developing sustainable practices for managing water resources, including rainwater harvesting, desalination, and improving freshwater use efficiency. Disaster risk reduction is another crucial component, enhancing early warning systems, emergency response capabilities, and community-based disaster risk management to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather events. Biodiversity conservation aims at protecting and restoring critical ecosystems such as coral reefs, seagrass beds, and wetlands, which provide essential services and are vital for tourism.

NAPA has achieved several milestones, including the successful implementation of coastal protection projects and the establishment of community-based water management systems. Key achievements include coastal defence projects, such as the construction of seawalls and groynes in vulnerable areas to safeguard infrastructure and communities, and community water management initiatives like the installation of rainwater harvesting systems and desalination plants on several islands to secure water supply. Disaster preparedness has been strengthened through the enhancement of early warning systems and community-based disaster response mechanisms. Ongoing projects continue to focus on enhancing the resilience of the tourism sector by promoting sustainable practices and protecting natural attractions vital for tourism. These efforts are crucial for maintaining the Maldives' appeal as a top tourist destination while safeguarding its environmental and socio-economic stability (Ministry of Environment, Energy and Water et al., 2007b).

### *3.3.2 USAID*

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been a key partner in supporting climate adaptation efforts in the Maldives. USAID's initiatives aim to bolster the resilience of Maldivian communities and critical economic sectors, including tourism, against climate change impacts. The Five Strategic Objectives presented in Figure 7 are designed in response to private sector priorities. These objectives are to incorporate community experiences, products, and priorities; protect destination assets; regenerate nature; diversify business models; and align with national and global initiatives.

USAID has funded various projects in the Maldives, focusing on coastal protection, water resource management, and enhancing community resilience. These projects provide technical assistance, capacity building, and financial support to local communities and government agencies. The key outcomes include coastal protection and infrastructure, such as strengthening coastal defences through the construction of seawalls, groynes, and other protective structures to safeguard tourism infrastructure from erosion and storm surges. Water resource management involves implementing sustainable practices, including the installation of rainwater harvesting systems and the development of desalination plants to ensure a reliable freshwater supply for residents and tourists. Community based adaptation is

supported through community-led initiatives to enhance resilience and promote sustainable livelihoods via training programs, awareness campaigns, and the development of local adaptation plans.

One notable project is the Climate Adaptation Project (CAP), which aims to reduce climate vulnerabilities and improve resilience in coastal communities. CAP focuses on integrating climate adaptation into local development planning and strengthening community-based resource management. Another significant initiative is the Enhancing Climate Resilience of the Maldives Project, which works on enhancing the capacity of local institutions to manage climate risks effectively (King et al., 2021).

Figure 7: 5 Strategic Objectives for Climate Adaptation in the Maldives Tourism Industry



(Source: King et al., 2021)

### 3.3.3 Maldives Fifth Tourism Master Plan 2023-2027 (5TMP)

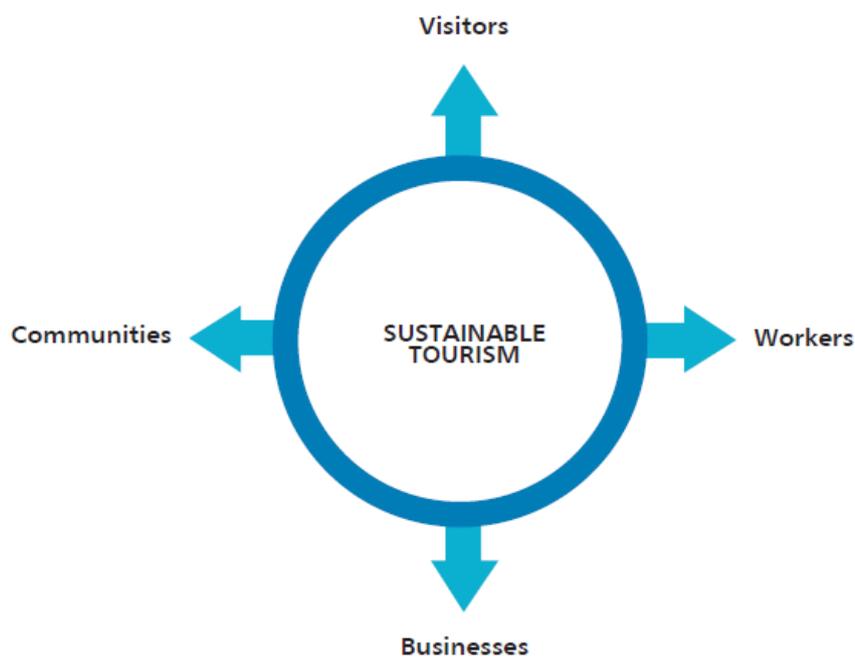
The Maldives Fifth Tourism Master Plan (5TMP) outlines the strategic direction for the tourism sector from 2023 to 2027. The plan focuses on promoting sustainable tourism practices, enhancing infrastructure, and diversifying the tourism market to ensure long-term resilience and growth. The vision for tourism according to 5TMP is based on four pillars: Visitors, Communities, Workers, and Businesses.

The key goals of the 5TMP include sustainability, which involves promoting eco-friendly tourism practices and minimizing the environmental footprint of tourism activities. This includes encouraging resorts to adopt renewable energy, waste management, and water

conservation measures. Infrastructure development is another key goal, focusing on upgrading and expanding tourism infrastructure such as airports, seaports, and transportation networks to improve accessibility and enhance the overall tourist experience. Market diversification aims to expand the tourism market by targeting new source markets and promoting different types of tourism, such as adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and wellness tourism.

The 5TMP identifies several focus areas to achieve its goals. Environmental protection involves implementing measures to protect and restore natural attractions such as coral reefs, beaches, and marine ecosystems that are crucial for tourism. Community involvement is another focus area, engaging local communities in tourism development and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are widely shared. This includes promoting community-based tourism and supporting local enterprises. Policy and governance are also emphasized, with efforts to strengthen policy frameworks and governance structures to support sustainable tourism development. This includes developing regulations and incentives to encourage sustainable practices among tourism operators (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2023).

*Figure 8: Four Pillars of Sustainable Tourism in Maldives*



*(Source: Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2023)*

#### *3.3.4 Other Climate Adaptation Initiatives*

Besides NAPA and USAID projects, the Maldives has implemented various other climate adaptation initiatives to enhance resilience and sustainability in the tourism sector.

Significant projects and policies include coral reef rehabilitation efforts aimed at restoring and protecting coral reefs through activities such as coral gardening, artificial reefs, and

establishing marine protected areas. These projects enhance biodiversity, protect coastal areas, and maintain the aesthetic value of coral reefs for tourism. The Reefscapers Project, initiated by several resorts in collaboration with marine biologists, is one such initiative focused on coral propagation and reef restoration. Sustainable fishing practices are also promoted to protect marine ecosystems and ensure the long-term viability of fisheries, which are important for both local communities and tourism.

The Fisheries Management Plan aims to regulate fishing activities, protect spawning areas, and promote the use of sustainable fishing gear. Renewable energy initiatives encourage the use of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, to reduce the carbon footprint of the tourism sector. This includes the installation of solar panels at resorts and the development of renewable energy infrastructure. The Clean Energy for Climate Resilience Project focuses on increasing the adoption of renewable energy technologies in the tourism sector, with several resorts transitioning to solar power and hybrid energy systems.

International organizations and partnerships play a crucial role in supporting climate adaptation efforts in the Maldives. Organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) provide financial and technical assistance to support adaptation projects. These collaborations enhance the capacity of the Maldives to implement effective adaptation measures and promote sustainable development. For instance, the GEF Small Grants Programme supports community-based initiatives that aim to enhance resilience and promote sustainable livelihoods. Projects funded by this program focus on areas such as biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation, and sustainable land management. Similarly, the GCF's Enhancing Climate Resilience Project aims to strengthen the adaptive capacity of vulnerable communities by providing funding for infrastructure projects, capacity building, and policy development (Government of Maldives, 2020).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of how climate adaptation strategies affect tourism stakeholders in the Maldives, focusing on key psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring complex phenomena where context and participant perspectives are crucial (Creswell, 2009). This approach allows for the collection of rich, detailed data directly from individuals involved in these processes. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection method because they offer a balance between guided questioning and the flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This format encourages participants to share additional remarks and viewpoints that may not be captured through more rigid, structured interviews.

Theoretical frameworks guiding this research include the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), and Institutional Theory. These theories provide a structured approach to understanding the psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors influencing climate adaptation strategies. TPB helps analyse stakeholders' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control related to sustainable practices (Ajzen, 1991). SLF highlights how stakeholders leverage various assets (natural, financial, human, social, and physical capital) to implement adaptation strategies (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Institutional Theory examines the external pressures (coercive, normative, and mimetic) that shape organizational behaviour in adopting climate adaptation measures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

In preparing this thesis, ChatGPT Version 4o was used to assist with structuring the overall thesis, designing the research approach, and help with coding the interview data. Specifically, ChatGPT Version 4o helped outline the chapters, refine the research design, and provide guidance on thematic analysis. The tool also contributed to overseeing the drafts and breaking down complex structures for ease of understanding (OpenAI, 2024, 7 July).

### 4.2 Interview Design

The interview guide was meticulously prepared to ensure that all critical topics related to climate adaptation strategies, their impact on stakeholders, and the key influencing factors were covered. The interview guide was created by writing down the topics relevant to the research such as the development and implementation of adaptation strategies, challenges faced, the motivations, considerations, and influences behind the adaptation of such strategies. The topics were then grouped into certain keywords that ensured the flexible nature of the interviews. The questions were framed around the guide depending on the participant and their role in tourism. The resulting Interview Guide (attached in [Appendix A](#)) had the following sections:

- Role in Tourism Industry
- Climate Adaptation Strategies implemented

- Efficiency of implemented strategies
- Factors, Challenges, Barriers
- Impact on Business and Community
- Stakeholder Collaboration
- Plans/Perceptions for the future

Interviews were conducted online via Zoom and Google Meet due to the inability to visit the Maldives. This adjustment was necessitated by strained political relations between India and the Maldives, making travel unfeasible. The participants were then contacted via email to request their participation in the research. The limited response and interest were the biggest challenge. While, online interviews offer several advantages, including convenience and the ability to reach participants in separate locations, they also introduced issues such as aligning schedules across different time zones and ensuring stable internet connections for clear communication. Ultimately, four interviews were conducted and were transcribed with the help of Parrot AI, which facilitated accurate and efficient documentation of the conversations.

#### *4.3 Sampling Strategy: Selection of Tourism Businesses in Maldives*

The sampling strategy employed purposive sampling to select diverse stakeholders from different sectors of the Maldivian tourism industry. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who are most likely to provide relevant and rich data based on their knowledge and experience (Patton, 2015). This approach ensured a comprehensive view of the various perspectives and practices in sustainability and climate adaptation.

The original plan was to interview at least ten to twelve stakeholders. They would be selected based on their type of organisation, their focus, motto and vision, the level of impact of their actions and their diverse backgrounds. This would have provided sufficient information to offer a comprehensive understanding of the situation. However, due to the lack of response, and limited period of time, only four interviews were possible. Despite this limitation, these interviews were conducted with stakeholders from distinct types of organisations, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Each organization has a strong focus and values for Sustainability and Climate Action, providing enough data to move forward with the thesis and draw meaningful conclusions about the current motivation, influences, responses and future directions in the Maldivian tourism industry.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Name	Organisation	Type of Organisation	Position	Focus of the Organisation
Mr. Arnfinn Oines	Soneva Foundation, Soneva	Non-profit organisation by Luxury Resort Company Soneva	Company Secretary	support the development of projects that have a positive environmental, social, and economic impact.
Ms. Ruth Franklin	Secret Paradise	Tour Operator / Destination Management Company	Co-founder / Director	commitment to protecting the environment and supporting the local economy
Mr. Rafil Mohammed	Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI)	Non-governmental, non-profit organisation and Advisory and Representative Body of Maldives Tourism Industry	Executive Director	Motto: Driving Sustainable Tourism. Vision: Make Maldives the World Leader in Sustainable Tourism
Mr. Hassan (Beybe) Ahmed	Save the Beach	Non-governmental, non-profit organisation	President	conserve and preserve the beaches and reefs of the Maldives

#### 4.4 Data Analysis Approach

Given the limited data set, thematic analysis was conducted manually to identify patterns and themes within the interview transcripts. This approach was chosen because it is flexible and allows for a detailed, nuanced analysis of qualitative data. The interview transcripts generated by Parrot AI were mostly accurate but had to be proofread and smaller mistakes either due to bad internet connection or missing data due to the difficulty of understanding the English accent of the participants had to be corrected. The transcripts were thoroughly read and understood to then pick out the similarities and differences in the answers by various stakeholders.

Initial codes were then picked out from the transcripts and later organized into broader themes. The themes were then aligned with the three theories namely The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) and Institutional Theory, to better analyse the data. The major themes that stood out while talking about the implementation of climate adaptation strategies were Psychological Factors, Resource-based Factors, Institutional Factors, the Stakeholder Impact and Involvement and the Challenges and Barriers faced by the participants. These themes represented patterns in the data that were

important to the description of the phenomenon. These themes were then visualized using a conceptual map to aid in the systematic analysis of the data. Conceptual mapping helped in organizing and presenting the findings effectively and easily by showing the relationships between themes and sub-themes. They were colour coded based on the theory used to analyse them. This method is particularly useful in qualitative research as it helps in visualizing complex relationships and enhances the clarity of the findings (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2017).

#### *4.5 Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance in conducting this research. All participants signed a consent form that ensured them of their rights, including the right to confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.. They were then asked to introduce themselves where they willingly shared their names, position in their respective organisation and other details. While the names of participants will be used in the analysis, participants were informed about the use of their names and data for research purposes. This approach ensured transparency and maintained the integrity of the research process.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

The participants in this study are key stakeholders involved in various aspects of the Maldivian tourism industry, each bringing unique insights and experiences related to sustainability and climate adaptation strategies. While there are only four participants, they each provide critical information each representative of their type of tourism businesses.

Mr. Arnfinn Oines, Company Secretary of Soneva Foundation, represents Soneva Luxury Resorts, which is known for its strong commitment to sustainability. Soneva integrates sustainable practices into its operations, focusing not only on environmental conservation and waste management but also community engagement and development. He talks about the importance of an organisation and its founders that believe in Sustainable practices. This affects the views and values of the employees at Soneva. Soneva has adopted sustainability practices since the beginning of this business in mid-nineties by the founders Sonu and Eva. They had managed to find alternatives for plastic straws in 1998. Mr. Oines also provided valuable insights into the strategies employed by high-end resorts to balance luxury tourism with environmental responsibility. He compares their sustainability practices as peeling an onion, there is always more to do and better to do.

Ms. Ruth Franklin, Co-founder of Secret Paradise, runs a tour company specializing in local island guided tours. She first visited Maldives in 1999 as a scuba diver. Frequent trips to Maldives and coming across the right people, she returned to start a travel agency. Since its inception, Ms. Franklin wanted to do something at the local island level. She formed Secret Paradise to provide tourists experiences she had been fortunate to have. Secret Paradise is now a proud signatory of the Glasgow Declaration, highlighting its commitment to sustainable tourism. While Secret Paradise is a destination management company for international operators, they still get direct customers. They believe in unconscious learning, which is learning via conversations, discussions and on hand experiences as opposed to classroom learning. Ms. Franklin shares her experiences on promoting sustainability in local island tourism and the challenges faced in engaging both tourists and local communities in sustainable practices.

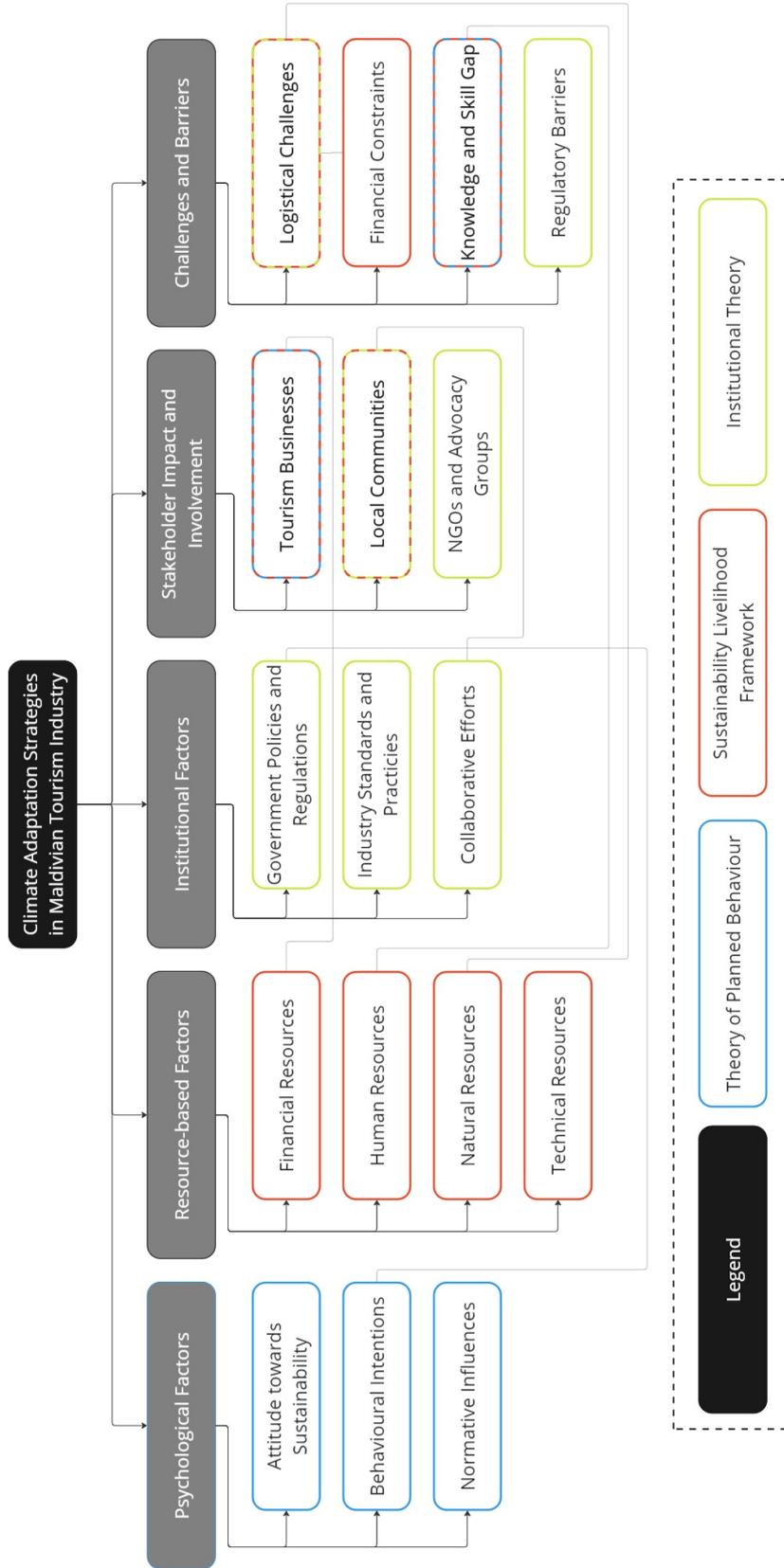
Mr. Rafil Mohammed is the Executive Director at the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI). Having worked at MATI for six years now, he oversees the day to day operations of the secretariat. MATI is a non-governmental, not for profit organisation that was created in 1982. MATI plays a crucial role in advocating for the tourism sector in the Maldives, working with government and industry players to promote sustainable tourism practices. Mr. Mohammed provided a broader industry perspective as MATI also represents the industry internationally and locally. He discussed the institutional and regulatory aspects of sustainability in the Maldivian tourism industry. He also mentioned how Climate Change is the biggest threat currently facing Maldives and they are putting in measures to mitigate that. Their areas of focus include Sustainable Tourism Development, Advocacy, Human

Capital Development, Preservation and Promotion of Culture and Heritage, and Community Engagement.

Mr. Hassan (Beybe) Ahmed is the president of Save the Beach, an NGO focused on environmental protection and awareness, particularly related to coral reefs and marine ecosystems. His organization works closely with local communities and tourism businesses to promote marine conservation. Mr. Ahmed's insights highlighted the importance of community involvement and the challenges of implementing sustainable practices at the grassroots level. His dedication for Coral Restoration was evident in his actions. From setting up a lab in his home to studying about corals with short courses available online, he also speaks about the importance of education and the need for a good Marine Biology course in local universities.

The interviews revealed a range of attitudes towards sustainability, from strong commitments to environmental conservation to more pragmatic approaches driven by economic considerations. While all work in implementing Climate Adaptation Strategies and Sustainable Development, their attitudes, intentions, and motivations vary significantly as do their way of work. They are analysed in detail according to the themes with the help of the three theories. Below is a conceptual map that helps understand the themes and the various sub-themes related to it. The three theories, TBP, SLF, and Institutional Theory have been colour coded for easier comprehension.

Figure 9: Conceptual Map of Maldivian Tourism Stakeholders in respect to Climate Adaptation Strategies as described in Chapter 5



(Source: Own Work)

## 5.1 Psychological Factors

### 5.1.1 Attitudes Towards Sustainability

Attitudes towards sustainability among the stakeholders interviewed varied widely, reflecting both personal beliefs and organizational priorities. These attitudes significantly influence the adoption and implementation of climate adaptation strategies within the Maldivian tourism sector.

Mr. Oines articulated a strong commitment to sustainability, which is deeply ingrained in Soneva's operational philosophy. He emphasized that sustainability is not just a business strategy but a core value of the organization. He stated, *"Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do. It's about creating a positive impact on the environment and the communities around us."* The founders of Soneva, Sonu and Eva, have always been passionate about the environment and have had an environmental conscience since they opened the first resort in the mid-90s. Thus, Soneva's approach to luxury tourism includes significant investments in environmental conservation and community engagement initiatives. This commitment is reflected in their use of renewable energy, waste reduction programs, and coral reef restoration projects. Mr. Oines' attitude towards sustainability highlights a proactive and comprehensive approach, driven by both ethical considerations and long-term business viability. His attitude is also influenced by the organisational values that the founders have kept at the heart of the organisation.

On the other hand, Ms. Franklin's attitude towards sustainability is rooted in a pragmatic understanding of its importance for both business success and environmental preservation. As a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration, Secret Paradise is committed to promoting sustainable tourism on local islands. She is also subscribed to various Sustainable travel and tourism newsletters and keeps herself up to date with industry practices. Her involvement with NGOs and She noted, *"We believe that promoting sustainability is not only good for the environment but also enhances the tourist experience."* However, Ms. Franklin called attention to the challenges of engaging both tourists and local communities in sustainable practices. Practical implementation often requires overcoming significant barriers, such as changing long-standing habits and dealing with limited resources. Her attitude reflects a balanced perspective that considers both idealistic goals and realistic constraints. She also mentions the attitude of luxury resorts in embracing sustainable practices while also building new resorts in locations of environmental importance is questionable.

While providing an industry-wide perspective, Mr. Mohammed noted that attitudes towards sustainability within the Maldivian tourism sector are evolving. MATI advocates for sustainable tourism practices among its members, and Mr. Mohammed has observed increasing awareness and willingness to adopt sustainable strategies. He mentioned, *"The industry is slowly but surely recognizing that sustainability is not just a trend but a necessity for the future."* However, he also pointed out that economic considerations often influence these attitudes. Many businesses recognize the need for sustainability but struggle with the associated costs and resource requirements. His perspective brings attention to the tension

between economic pragmatism and environmental responsibility. He also mentions that they are just an advisory board and can only help with consultations and connections.

Mr. Ahmed's attitude towards sustainability is deeply influenced by his work in environmental protection and community engagement. He views sustainability as essential for the survival of the Maldives' delicate marine ecosystems and the long-term viability of its tourism industry. *"Our reefs are our lifeline. Protecting them is crucial not just for tourism but for our very existence,"* he stressed. His organization focuses on educating local communities and working with tourism businesses to promote marine conservation. Mr. Ahmed's commitment to sustainability is driven by a sense of urgency and a profound understanding of the ecological challenges facing the Maldives. He also states that the attitude of the government needs to be addressed as the newer resorts are being made on reclaimed lagoons close to the capital Male. He says, *"they have started reclaiming islands in lagoons and selling to investors,"* and that there are hardly any local islands left around the capital.

According to TPB, for the Maldivian tourism industry, stakeholders' attitudes towards sustainability are shaped by their beliefs about the environmental and economic benefits of sustainable practices, the social pressure to adopt these practices, and their perceived ability to implement them effectively.

Positive attitudes and strong commitment towards sustainability were evident in stakeholders like Mr. Oines and Mr. Ahmed, who exhibit proactive measures and significant investments in sustainability initiatives. Their ethical values and long-term vision for environmental conservation drive their comprehensive approach. On the other hand, pragmatic attitudes were observed in stakeholders like Ms. Franklin, who balances commitment to sustainability with practical challenges, pointing out the importance of addressing barriers before committing. Economic considerations, as emphasized by Mr. Mohammed, play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards sustainability. While there is growing awareness and willingness to adopt sustainable practices, financial constraints often limit the extent of their implementation.

### *5.1.2 Behavioural Intentions*

Behavioural intentions refer to the willingness of stakeholders to adopt and implement sustainable practices. This theme is closely linked to attitudes towards sustainability but also influenced by perceived behavioural control and subjective norms, as outlined by TPB.

Mr. Oines demonstrated strong behavioural intentions to integrate sustainability into Soneva's operations. He mentioned how in 2008 at a symposium the founder Mr. Sonu challenged the then President Mr Nasheed to take away the tariffs on renewable energy to make them affordable. Soneva has set up waste management systems on three different islands to change

the behaviour of the locals and tourists alike. They have also set up water bottling stations to eliminate the use of plastic bottles. Mr. Oines' actions and plans are supported by the organizational culture at Soneva, which prioritizes sustainability and encourages continuous improvement in this area.

In the same way, Ms. Franklin's behavioural intentions are also strong, driven by both a commitment to sustainability and the practical benefits it brings to her business. She explained, "*We aim to create awareness among our guests about sustainable tourism practices and encourage them to respect the local environment and culture.*" However, she also noted the challenges in consistently implementing these practices, particularly when dealing with diverse tourist expectations and behaviours. She mostly works on a local level and with local guest houses. The example she gave was of the tourist's expectation of a western menu served at guest houses especially beef as it is not easily available. However, the businesses think that if they don't serve these 'westernised menu', the tourists will go to places that do and they lose that business. This makes them un-willing to localise their menus. Despite these challenges, Ms. Franklin remains committed to promoting sustainability and continues to seek ways to enhance her company's practices.

Mr. Mohammed also underlined the varying levels of behavioural intentions among MATI members. According to him, the resorts and other businesses have already adopted and are implementing various degrees of climate mitigation measures as their (resorts) survival is at risk. While they do have sessions for knowledge sharing among the stakeholders, MATI cannot enforce any strict rules as they are just an advocacy group. They do assert the importance of these measures, but it depends on the willingness of the business.

Similarly, Mr. Ahmed's behavioural intentions are deeply rooted in his commitment to environmental protection. He stated, "*We actively work with local communities and tourism operators to promote marine conservation and sustainable practices.*" His organization's efforts include educational programs with schools and tourists where they teach the importance of protecting the local marine ecosystem. They have been studying the reef for the past 8-9 years and collecting data and sharing with the government. Mr Ahmed also collaborates with international organisations for the studies as there is no Marine Biology program at the local university. His's strong intentions are driven by a sense of urgency and the recognition of the critical role that sustainability plays in the Maldives' future.

The Stakeholders understand the importance of adopting these plans as it is for the survival of their business and ultimately, themselves. While to some extent the locals might seem reluctant, there might not be any other option in the future. Stakeholders like Mr. Oines and Mr. Ahmed exhibit high levels of perceived behavioural control, which enhances their intentions to adopt comprehensive sustainability measures. Their organizations provide the necessary resources and support, enabling them to pursue ambitious sustainability goals. Ms. Franklin, while also exhibiting strong intentions, faces more practical challenges in implementation. Her commitment is influenced by the need to balance idealistic goals with realistic constraints, such as tourist behaviours and resource limitations. Mr. Mohammed's

observations showcased the variability in behavioural intentions across the industry. This variability suggests that enhancing perceived behavioural control through targeted support, training, and incentives could significantly boost the overall adoption of sustainable practices in the industry.

### *5.1.3 Normative Influences*

Normative influences refer to the impact of social norms and peer pressure on the adoption of sustainable practices. These influences play a critical role in shaping stakeholders' behaviours and intentions in the Maldivian tourism industry.

Mr. Oines highlighted the importance of industry leadership in promoting sustainability. Soneva has set up Soneva Namoonaa, an initiative to help with setting up Sustainable Waste Management practices. They started with three islands to be called 'Namoonaa' as it means something Ideal in Dhivehi, the official language of Maldives. Currently they are working with 22 different islands. They have also set up water bottling stations at their resorts to eliminate the use of plastic bottles. According to Mr. Oines, Soneva is ready to share their model to influence others to follow in their steps. However, some still prefer the old ways of waste disposal by incinerators. But this peer influence creates a ripple effect, encouraging other businesses to follow suit and adopt more sustainable practices.

Next, Ms. Franklin discussed that there are not any regulations, policies or eco credentials for properties, be it resorts, hotels or guest houses. So, they have taken up the WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council) standard to audit the properties they work with. Each of their properties are at different stages of following the minimum standard. A major part of their climate action plan is to educate the locals whether they are a part of the tourism industry or a part of the general community. They have also eliminated 'beef' from their tourist vessels as it is a food item that generates the most carbon emission. Now, they are working on making the food options more local at their affiliated guest houses and businesses. Ms. Franklin has also been a part of various local tourism and sustainability forums such as International Maldives Travel Trade (IMTM) and Travel Trade Maldives.

Mr. Mohammed emphasized the influence of industry associations and regulatory bodies in promoting sustainability. He mentioned that they offer consultations and help to any and each of their members that usually consist of private tourism businesses. They do bring together the industry stakeholders for knowledge sharing but can only influence them to adopt certain practices. While this influence of industry associations helps to create a collective commitment to sustainability, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility within the tourism sector, the decision to adopt them depends entirely on each stakeholder.

Highlighting the impact of community while working on sustainability practices, Mr. Ahmed mentions that they make friends with everyone around your work and a mutual respect is shown towards one another. Every island that he goes for coral restoration projects, he makes sure to raise enough funds to train and support two locals to keep checking and working those

projects as a part time job. He is not only creating jobs in marine ecosystem restoration but also setting a standard for other NGOs and also the country of Maldives.

While the pressure to conform to social norms and industry standards encourages stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices, it is still a money-making business. There is always a certain level of greenwashing when it comes to big resorts and their climate action plans. Positive peer influence, accountability to international agreements, guidance from industry associations, and community expectations all play a role in driving sustainability efforts in the Maldivian tourism industry. There needs to be stricter rules and regulations for the businesses to succumb to the peer pressure.

The psychological factors influencing sustainability in the Maldivian tourism industry encompass a nuanced interplay of attitudes, behaviours, and influences. These elements collectively shape how stakeholders perceive and implement sustainable practices.

Attitudes towards sustainability, as seen in the commitment of stakeholders like Mr. Oines and Mr. Ahmed, reveal a strong ethical foundation and a long-term vision for environmental conservation. Soneva's proactive measures, such as investments in renewable energy and community engagement initiatives, underscore a comprehensive approach that blends ethical considerations with business viability. In contrast, Ms. Franklin balances her commitment to sustainability with practical challenges, bringing attention to the importance of addressing barriers such as tourist expectations and resource limitations before full implementation.

Behavioural intentions further elaborate on these attitudes by demonstrating stakeholders' willingness to adopt and integrate sustainable practices. Mr. Oines and Mr. Ahmed exhibit high levels of perceived behavioural control, enabled by organizational support and resources, allowing them to pursue ambitious sustainability goals. Ms. Franklin's intentions, while strong, are tempered by the need to navigate practical constraints, emphasizing a realistic approach to sustainable tourism.

Normative influences play a critical role in reinforcing these attitudes and intentions through social norms and peer pressure. Industry leaders like Soneva set benchmarks for sustainability, encouraging other businesses to follow suit. The influence of industry associations, as highlighted by Mr. Mohammed fosters a culture of collective responsibility and knowledge sharing, even if practical implementation varies. Community expectations and international standards also drive stakeholders towards adopting sustainable practices, though economic and logistical challenges persist.

Overall, the integration of these three factors creates a dynamic environment where sustainability is increasingly recognized as essential. This holistic perspective suggests that enhancing support, resources, and regulatory frameworks can significantly boost the adoption of sustainable practices, ensuring the long-term viability of the Maldivian tourism industry.

## 5.2 Resource-based Factors

### 5.2.1 Financial Resources

Financial resources play a critical role in the ability of tourism stakeholders to implement climate adaptation strategies. The availability and allocation of funds can significantly impact the extent and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

Mr. Oines clearly depicted Soneva's significant investments in sustainability, supported by substantial financial resources. He stated that they have received two grants from USAID regarding their home composting trial. They are almost finished with the project and are expecting great results. They are primarily funded by Soneva Foundation and Soneva. This financial commitment enables Soneva to implement comprehensive and ambitious sustainability measures, reinforcing their proactive approach to environmental conservation. Mr. Oines also mentioned that they do not take grants from the government as it might rake in complaints and are more restrictive.

In contrast, Ms. Franklin pointed out the financial challenges faced by smaller businesses like Secret Paradise. Their climate adaptation and sustainability plans are entirely funded by the profits they generate. While they do have connections with international operators that provide funds, Ms. Franklin likes to pass on these opportunities to local NGOs and marine life organisations. Despite the challenges of staying profitable enough to support their projects, Secret Paradise continues to invest in sustainability, driven by both ethical considerations and the potential long-term benefits for their business.

Additionally, Mr. Mohammed also discussed the financial constraints faced by many businesses within the Maldivian tourism industry. Since MATI is not an enforcer of these practices and just an advocacy group, their cost of operation is not that high. They have a membership fee for the tourism businesses that allows them to run their organisation.

Mr. Ahmed also highlighted the role of financial resources in supporting community-based sustainability initiatives. *"Funding is crucial for our conservation projects and educational programs. Without adequate financial support, it's challenging to maintain and expand these efforts,"* he stressed. Save the Beach relies on donations and grants to fund their activities, which stresses on the importance of financial resources in driving grassroots sustainability efforts. Since coral restoration projects are usually long term, it is difficult to get long term funding. Most of their funds are from international organisations and currently they will begin restoration projects on two islands for three years funded by a chocolate company.

Financial capital is a critical asset that enables stakeholders to invest in sustainable practices and technologies. However, the availability of financial resources varies widely among different stakeholders, impacting their ability to pursue comprehensive sustainability initiatives. On island nations, even travelling between islands can become expensive.

For well-funded organizations like Soneva, substantial financial resources facilitate the implementation of extensive sustainability measures. Smaller businesses like Secret Paradise face more significant financial constraints, which require them to balance sustainability investments with profitability. Industry-wide financial challenges, as highlighted by Mr. Mohammed, suggest the need for targeted financial support and incentives to promote sustainability across the sector. Community-based initiatives, such as those led by Save the Beach, rely heavily on external funding, accentuating the importance of financial resources in supporting local conservation efforts. Also, sufficient financial aid is required to keep the projects running smoothly.

### 5.2.2 Human Resources

Human resources, including the skills, knowledge, and capacity of individuals, are essential for the effective implementation of sustainability practices. The availability and development of human capital significantly influence stakeholders' ability to adopt and maintain sustainable strategies.

Mr. Oines emphasized the importance of training and capacity-building programs at Soneva. He states that they primarily work with local communities. They also have women development committees set up. They are trying to and encouraging the locals to become suppliers and distributors. They are also trying to set up vegetable farms on islands, but they have not been as successful. Their focus on human resources supports Soneva's comprehensive approach to sustainability, ensuring that their staff are well-equipped to carry out their environmental conservation efforts.

Also, Ms. Franklin discussed that the main part of their climate plan is about the education of locals. The bigger picture of their business is to reinvest into the community. Secret Paradise strives to enhance their human capital by leveraging external training opportunities where their members get to join projects and expeditions with NGOs and the knowledge gained is then shared with the rest.

Mr. Mohammed states that MATI works by bridging the gap between the government and industry stakeholders. They do not work with local communities at any level and only with private businesses.

With a huge focus on the people of Maldives, Mr. Ahmed states, *“The most important part of our work is to educate others on our natural environment and the status, the current status of our natural environment”*. He stressed the importance of community education and engagement. Save the Beach conducts workshops and educational programs with local schools and communities to build local capacity for environmental conservation, emphasizing the role of human resources in grassroots sustainability efforts.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) emphasises human capital as a vital asset for sustainability. The skills, knowledge, and capacity of individuals directly impact their ability

to implement, maintain, and promote sustainable practices. Organizations like Soneva that invest in training and capacity-building can effectively carry out comprehensive sustainability initiatives. Smaller businesses and community organizations often face challenges in developing human resources but continue to prioritize education and training within their capacity. This is also linked to financial resources available for these stakeholders. Industry-wide efforts to strengthen human capital are essential for promoting sustainability across the Maldivian tourism sector.

### *5.2.3 Natural Resources*

Natural resources are fundamental to the Maldivian tourism industry, which relies heavily on the country's pristine environment and biodiversity. The sustainable management of these resources is crucial for the long-term viability of tourism and the preservation of the natural environment.

Mr. Oines discussed Soneva's efforts in natural resource conservation. *"We have several initiatives aimed at protecting and restoring our natural environment, including coral reef restoration and mangrove planting projects,"* he explained. These efforts are integral to Soneva's sustainability strategy, ensuring that their operations do not degrade the natural resources they rely on.

Ms. Franklin also talked about the importance of natural resources but stressed on their importance for local tourism experiences. *"Our tours focus on showcasing the natural beauty of the local islands, and it's essential that we protect these resources to maintain the appeal of our tours,"* she stated. Secret Paradise emphasises the conservation of natural resources to enhance the tourist experience and ensure the sustainability of their business. She also emphasises on the importance of local food items to be made available in guest houses. While Secret Paradise contributes sufficiently to offset their carbon, there are not many options for investment available on the islands.

As an NGO, naturally Save the Beach works for the conservation and restoration of their extensive marine ecosystem. Mr. Ahmed underscored the importance of community involvement in natural resource conservation. While actively raising funds and working on various long-term projects, Mr. Ahem also has a laboratory in his house to study corals. They have successfully revived entire reefs around the Maldivian islands. Their initiatives shines light on the role of community engagement in natural resource management.

The Maldivian tourism industry's dependence on natural resources emphasises the importance of effective resource management. Organizations like Soneva lead the way with comprehensive conservation initiatives, while businesses like Secret Paradise integrate resource conservation into their tourism experiences. NGOs like Save the Beach have done tremendous work in order to protect these natural resources.

#### 5.2.4 Technological Resources

The adoption of innovative technologies is essential for enhancing the sustainability of tourism operations. Technological advancements can support efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and improve resource management.

Mr. Oines emphasized Soneva's investment in sustainable technologies and the need to transition to renewable energy. *"this year installed about 4.5 megawatt solar PV, including batteries. So that is taking us up at the moment to about 40% renewable energy. So, there's still a way to go to do more, but that has been a big step in the right direction for us. It's the biggest installation, as far as I know in the Maldives,"* he stated. These technological investments are integral to Soneva's sustainability strategy, enhancing their operational efficiency and environmental performance.

In similar fashion, Ms. Franklin mentioned that they are currently offsetting their carbon emissions. The tours available on their website, all have carbon labelling. They have been measuring and offsetting their emissions since last year. She also states that there aren't any projects in Maldives such as planting trees or increasing sea grass to invest in. She would like to see more such projects that allows them to invest in Maldives but also understands that as a country, it might be take time to reach that position.

Mr. Mohammed highlighted the role of technological innovation in industry-wide sustainability efforts. According to him, technology is moving at a fast pace and rise of artificial intelligence, they could leverage technology to innovate and come up with long lasting solutions.

Mr. Ahmed also underscored the importance of technology in supporting conservation efforts. He has a makeshift lab in his home as there are no labs in Maldivian universities, He also addresses the hypocrisy of the government and resorts where they build resorts on reclaimed land, destroying marine habitat and install solar plants as a means of being sustainable.

The adoption of innovative technologies can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of sustainability practices. Organizations like Soneva lead with substantial investments in renewable energy. Industry-wide promotion of technological adoption, and the use of technology in conservation effort, are crucial for advancing sustainability in the Maldivian tourism sector. The importance of having proper labs, tools and technology for studying coral health is a necessity of an island nation dependant on nature.

The effectiveness of sustainability initiatives within the Maldivian tourism industry is deeply influenced by the interplay of all available resources. Each of the above resource-based factors plays a critical role in shaping the capacity of stakeholders to implement and maintain sustainable practices.

Financial resources are fundamental, as highlighted by the contrasting scenarios of well-funded organizations like Soneva Foundation and smaller businesses such as Secret Paradise.

Mr. Oines illustrates how substantial financial backing can facilitate comprehensive sustainability measures, from renewable energy investments to waste management systems. In contrast, Ms. Franklin weighs in on the financial constraints faced by smaller enterprises, which rely heavily on their profits and external funding to support sustainability efforts. This disparity emphasises the need for targeted financial support and incentives to promote widespread sustainability.

Human resources, encompassing skills, knowledge, and capacity, are equally crucial. Organizations like Soneva invest in extensive training and capacity-building programs, ensuring their staff are well-equipped to execute sustainability strategies effectively. Ms. Franklin's focus on educating locals and reinvesting in the community lays stress on the importance of developing human capital at all levels. Meanwhile, Mr. Ahmed highlights the role of community engagement and education in driving grassroots sustainability efforts. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework also supports this notion, that human capital directly impacts the successful implementation of sustainable practices.

Natural resources are the backbone of the Maldivian tourism industry, with stakeholders like Soneva and Save the Beach leading initiatives to conserve and restore these vital assets. Mr. Oines and Mr. Ahmed emphasize the importance of protecting marine ecosystems through projects like coral reef restoration. Ms. Franklin's efforts to display and conserve the natural beauty of local islands further illustrate the reliance on natural resources to attract and sustain tourism. Effective management of these resources is essential for the long-term viability of the industry.

Technological resources also play a significant role in enhancing sustainability. Investments in renewable energy, as demonstrated by Soneva's extensive solar PV installations, are critical for reducing environmental impact and improving operational efficiency. Carbon Offsetting Projects if introduced in the Maldives, would be great option for other organisations to invest in. Technological innovation, as discussed by Mr. Rafil Mohammed of MATI, offers industry-wide opportunities to develop long-lasting solutions for sustainability challenges. Mr. Ahmed's use of technology in conservation efforts underscores its importance in supporting detailed and effective environmental protection measures.

The synergy of financial, human, natural, and technological resources is vital for advancing sustainability in the Maldivian tourism sector. Ensuring that all stakeholders have access to these resources can bridge the gap between intention and implementation, fostering a more sustainable and resilient tourism industry. By addressing financial constraints, investing in human capital, managing natural resources sustainably, and leveraging technological advancements, the Maldivian tourism sector can enhance its sustainability practices and secure its future.

### 5.3 Institutional Factors

#### 5.3.1 Government Policies and Regulations

Government policies and regulations play a significant role in shaping the sustainability practices of tourism stakeholders. These institutional frameworks can either support or hinder the implementation of climate adaptation strategies.

Mr. Oines discussed how it is easier in a small nation to influence the government to take charge on certain sustainable matters. The founder of Soneva, Mr. Sonu made sure that the government would remove the tariffs on renewable energy sources. On the contrary, he would rather work with international funds rather than government funds as it can lead to ‘complaints’. He also highlighted the need for more consistent and robust regulatory frameworks to ensure industry-wide adherence to sustainability standards.

Ms. Franklin emphasized the challenges posed by regulatory inconsistencies. *"While there are policies promoting sustainability, the enforcement is often weak, which makes it difficult for businesses like ours to fully comply,"* she explained. She states that feeding sharks and sting rays are completely illegal but such experiences are still being sold to tourists as experiences. They are being promoted to bring revenue in. Since tourism is such a big part of the economy of Maldives, that these activities are not policed. According to her, there is a need for stronger policies and regulations. Ms. Franklin is critical about Maldives goal to achieve carbon neutral by 2030. She states, *"And so, you know, like six years away, that's an awful lot of work that needs to be done because on local islands, we still burn rubbish. and whilst there's resorts that have their own, green agendas, I think at a resort level, there's still some aspects of greenwashing and from an environmental point of view, where we have got policies or regulations in place."*

Mr. Mohammed highlighted the role of MATI is advocating for effective government policies. They advise the government and the Ministry of Tourism when and how to make certain guidelines and regulations. As Maldives has pledged to achieve Carbon Neutral by 2030, Mr. Mohammed believes that Maldives has always been an innovator and is moving forward in the right direction.

In contrast to Mr. Mohammed, Mr. Ahmed speaks about the hypocrisy of government policies and actions. He states that newer resorts are being built on reclaimed land on smaller lagoons. This not only destroys the marine habitat, but they are also close to the capital Male. Due to this activity, there are hardly any local islands left around the capital of Maldives. He emphasises the need for better actions by the government instead of just talking about climate change.

Institutional Theory provides insights into how government policies and regulations shape organizational behaviour. Coercive pressures from regulatory frameworks can compel organizations to adopt sustainable practices, while normative pressures from industry standards and best practices further reinforce these behaviours. The effectiveness of these

policies and regulations, however, depends on consistent enforcement and adequate support for businesses.

Most of the stakeholders are not happy with the current government's work on implementing climate adaptation strategies. Ms. Franklin and Mr. Ahmed point out the hypocrisy of the government on various levels. Mr. Oines also mentioned that the previous government was more supportive of renewable energy plants. The government needs to step up with not only proposing and implementing strategies but also measuring the effectiveness and ensuring the proper adherence by everyone involved.

### *5.3.2 Industry Standards and Practices*

Industry standards and best practices play a crucial role in guiding the sustainability efforts of tourism stakeholders. These standards set benchmarks for environmental performance and encourage organizations to adopt sustainable practices.

Soneva Foundation setting up Soneva Namoonaa is a major example of setting industry standards. Soneva has leading resorts in Maldives and their commitment to waste management, elimination of single use plastics and coral restoration efforts is upping the standards for other resorts. They are also open to sharing their success plans but according to Mr. Oines, the other resorts are not very receptive of it.

Similarly, Ms. Franklin discussed the impact of industry standards on smaller businesses. Secret Paradise is one of the very few tour operators working on sustainable and eco tours. They are currently offsetting their carbon emissions as well. They have taken the WTTC standard to help local guesthouses achieve eco credentials. The work that they do with NGOs and the local community, sets them apart from other tour operators.

As an advocacy group, MATI organises knowledge sharing and brainstorming sessions to allow the members to share their ideas and opinions amongst each other. Save the Beach is also setting the standards as a successful NGO that has restored coral reefs across Maldives. They are at the forefront of marine conservation in the Maldives. Mr Ahmed talks about the double standards of luxury resorts where single use plastics are supposedly eliminated but they are used by the staff and can be seen in staff quarters. He also talks about reclaiming lagoons and creating islands to build resorts is not the standard that should be set in the country.

Industry Standards are subjective and only relevant to the businesses that care. Most of the tourism businesses are for profit and while they have implemented sustainability practices and climate adaptation strategies, it is either for survival or a greenwashing stunt. That is not the case for all but for many.

### 5.3.3 Collaborative Efforts

Collaboration among stakeholders is vital for the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives. Partnerships between businesses, government agencies, NGOs, and local communities can enhance resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and collective action.

Mr. Oines highlighted Soneva's collaborative approach to sustainability. They mainly collaborate with local communities and women development committees. There are still many who aren't very receptive of sustainability practices. Their solution to this issue is that they make the locals from the Soneva Namoonaa islands talk to the other locals about the benefits and importance of such practices. However, they have not been successful in collaborating with other resorts as they have their own action plans and strategies.

Ms. Franklin discussed the benefits of collaboration for smaller businesses. *"Collaborating with local communities and NGOs helps us implement effective sustainability practices. These partnerships provide valuable support and resources that we might not have on our own,"* she explained. Secret Paradise values collaboration as a means to enhance their sustainability initiatives. As education and awareness is a major part of their climate action plan, collaborative efforts are of utmost importance. As they are working with local businesses instead of resorts, they are more in touch with the local community. They were also involved in the development of the USAID Maldives Tourism Climate Action Plan.

MATI's members have the advantage of better collaborations with each other under the guidance and help of MATI. The various seminars organised by MATI bring together industry leaders as well as their expertise. Mr. Ahmed also talks about the importance of community collaboration in conservation efforts. He mentions that there is always a certain level of collaboration either with other NGOs or locals during conservation projects. They also collaborate with Secret Paradise in organising eco tours. Mr. Ahmed appreciates the efforts and work of Secret Paradise and states that they are one of the only tour operators based in Maldives that does sustainable tours. Save the Beach's collaborative approach enhances the effectiveness of their conservation efforts.

Partnerships, as emphasized by Mr. Oines and Mr. Ahmed, provide access to external resources and support, enhancing the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. Secret Paradise benefits from collaborations that provide additional support, resources and knowledge that is then passed on to other members. MATI's role in facilitating industry-wide collaboration is essential for achieving collective sustainability goals.

Institutional factors play a pivotal role in shaping the sustainability practices within the Maldivian tourism industry. These factors collectively influence the implementation and effectiveness of climate adaptation strategies.

Government policies and regulations are crucial in setting the framework for sustainability. However, the effectiveness of these policies is often marred by inconsistencies and weak enforcement. Mr. Oines highlights how government support can be pivotal, yet he prefers

international funds to avoid the potential complications of local government grants. Ms. Franklin criticizes the inconsistency in policy enforcement and the prevalence of practices like illegal wildlife feeding tours, which are tolerated despite being harmful. Mr. Ahmed points out the hypocrisy in the government's actions, such as approving environmentally damaging resort developments, which undermines their sustainability goals. This sentiment is echoed by Mr. Mohammed, who believes in the necessity of robust policies to achieve the nation's carbon-neutral goals. The effectiveness of government policies depends on consistent enforcement, adequate support, and a genuine commitment to sustainability rather than mere rhetoric.

Industry standards and practices serve as benchmarks for environmental performance and guide organizations in adopting sustainable measures. Soneva Foundation sets high standards with their comprehensive sustainability initiatives, influencing other resorts albeit with limited receptivity. Secret Paradise adopts the WTTC standards to guide local guesthouses towards achieving eco-credentials, illustrating how industry standards can drive smaller businesses towards sustainability. MATI's efforts in organizing knowledge-sharing sessions help disseminate best practices across the industry, although the actual adoption varies. Meanwhile, Mr. Ahmed from Save the Beach highlights the double standards observed in luxury resorts, where greenwashing can often overshadow genuine sustainable practices. Thus, while industry standards are essential, their impact is contingent upon the genuine commitment of businesses to adhere to and exceed these benchmarks.

Collaborative efforts among stakeholders are vital for the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives. Soneva's collaboration with local communities and women development committees exemplifies the importance of grassroots engagement, though their attempts to collaborate with other resorts have been less successful. Secret Paradise thrives on partnerships with local NGOs and communities, leveraging these collaborations to enhance their sustainability efforts and contribute to broader initiatives like the USAID Maldives Tourism Climate Action Plan. Mr. Ahmed emphasises the importance of community collaboration in conservation projects, which enhances the reach and effectiveness of their efforts. MATI facilitates industry-wide collaboration, bringing together various stakeholders to share knowledge and resources, thus fostering a collective approach to sustainability.

The interplay of government policies, industry standards, and collaborative efforts creates a dynamic environment where sustainability initiatives can flourish or falter. Effective governance, adherence to high industry standards, and strong collaborative networks are essential to advancing sustainability in the Maldivian tourism industry. By addressing regulatory inconsistencies, promoting genuine adherence to industry standards, and fostering robust collaborations, stakeholders can collectively enhance their sustainability practices and contribute to the long-term viability of the industry.

## 5.4 Stakeholder Impact and Involvement

### 5.4.1 Tourism Businesses

The impact of climate adaptation strategies on tourism businesses in the Maldives varies significantly based on the size, resources, and focus of the business. These strategies also influence how these businesses engage in sustainability practices and their overall operational approach.

Mr. Oines highlighted Soneva's comprehensive approach to sustainability, which impacts every aspect of their operations. As a leading luxury resort brand, Soneva set up Soneva Foundation that focuses on Sustainability Practices. Mr Oines mentions, *"it makes, business sense to operate sustainably"*. Soneva's commitment to sustainability has led to significant investments in renewable energy, waste management, and community engagement, setting a high standard for the industry. However, it is important to note that Soneva has the financial resources to adopt certain strategies that might not be possible for smaller businesses.

On the contrary, Ms. Franklin discussed the challenges faced by smaller tourism businesses. While they are committed to sustainability, the financial and logistical challenges can be significant. They also work as a destination management company for international operators. As they've said their main motto is education, even unconscious learning is a part of it. As a tour operator, about 65% of their customers come to Maldives because it is Maldives but about 35% of them seek out Secret Paradise because of Sustainability. Secret Paradise emphasises on local experiences and sustainable practices, which resonate with a growing segment of eco-conscious travellers.

As MATI is not a tourism business in itself, it does not have any direct climate adaptation strategies. Mr. Mohammed states that most of the member businesses have adopted some form of sustainable practice as it is now about survival.

Mr. Ahmed emphasized the role of tourism businesses in supporting community-based conservation efforts. *"Tourism businesses have a significant impact on local communities and the environment. Their support is essential for the success of our conservation projects,"* he explained. Save the Beach collaborates with tourism operators like Secret Paradise to promote sustainable practices and enhance community engagement.

The involvement of tourism businesses in sustainability efforts is critical for the success of climate adaptation strategies. Larger businesses like Soneva can lead by example, investing heavily in sustainability and setting industry benchmarks. Smaller businesses like Secret Paradise face more challenges but can leverage sustainability as a market differentiator. Industry-wide efforts, supported by organizations like MATI, are essential for promoting sustainability across the sector. Collaboration between tourism businesses and community-based organizations, as highlighted by Mr. Ahmed, is crucial for achieving broader environmental and social goals.

#### 5.4.2 Local Communities

Local communities are integral to the success of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldives. Their involvement and support are essential for the implementation and sustainability of these initiatives.

Mr. Oines discussed Soneva's efforts to engage local communities in their sustainability initiatives. He states, *"we have also then wanted to help local communities, local islands to improve their waste because waste is a big challenge in the Maldives"*. Soneva's initiatives include waste management and composting initiatives to prevent them from burning the waste on the island. They also work with women development committees and for collaborative conservation efforts. While some communities are open to adopting new practices, some are not so willing.

Even Ms. Franklin emphasized the importance of community involvement in sustainable tourism. *"Our tours are designed to provide authentic local experiences while promoting environmental and cultural preservation. We involve local communities in our activities to ensure that tourism benefits them directly,"* she explained. Secret Paradise's approach highlights the role of local communities and local tourism businesses in enhancing the sustainability of tourism practices.

On the other hand, Mr. Mohammed states that MATI is not directly involved with local communities as it is more on the government side of things. Lastly, Mr. Ahmed discussed the critical role of local communities in conservation efforts. *"Community involvement is at the heart of our conservation projects. We work with local residents to protect marine ecosystems and promote sustainable practices,"* he stated. Save the Beach's initiatives focus on educating and empowering local communities to take an active role in environmental conservation. As a local himself, he is very adamant on involving others in his conservation efforts.

Local communities are vital partners in the implementation of climate adaptation strategies. Engaging communities in sustainability initiatives ensures that these projects are culturally appropriate, locally supported, and more likely to succeed. Organizations like Soneva, Secret Paradise and Save the Beach emphasize community engagement as a core component of their strategies, while industry-wide efforts, supported by MATI, aim to promote inclusive and community-driven tourism development.

#### 5.4.3 NGOs and Advocacy Groups

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups play a crucial role in supporting and promoting sustainability initiatives in the Maldivian tourism industry. These organizations provide expertise, resources, and advocacy to enhance the effectiveness of climate adaptation strategies.

Mr. Oines highlighted Soneva's creating of Soneva Namoonaa, an initiative to enhance their sustainability efforts. The Namoonaa islands have already become a success and they are

essential in encouraging other islands to adopt the same practices. They try to advocate the same practices and try to encourage other islands to follow their example.

Being a private organisation, Ms. Franklin discussed the support Secret Paradise gives NGOs in their sustainability initiatives. *"I like to see us as an ambassador for those NGO s and marine life organisations and give them a little bit more global, exposure and also the support in order to be able to do, the work that they do,"* she explained. She says that they receive important knowledge in return as their members join on conservation trips with their partnered NGOs. Knowledge sharing is the most important aspect for Ms. Franklin.

Since MATI is an advocacy group, it has the influence on promoting industry best practices. They help with the planning and consultations with government as well as to international organisations such as UN. They have the connections to get businesses and important organisations together.

As an NGO themselves, Mr. Ahmed highlighted the collaborative efforts between Save the Beach and other NGOs. *"Our partnerships with other NGOs strengthen our conservation projects and expand our impact. Collaboration is essential for addressing complex environmental challenges,"* he explained. Save the Beach works with various NGOs to enhance their conservation and education initiatives.

NGOs and MATI provide critical support for sustainability initiatives in the Maldivian tourism industry. These organizations offer expertise, resources, and knowledge that enhance the effectiveness of climate adaptation strategies. Collaborations between tourism businesses, NGOs, and advocacy groups are essential for achieving significant environmental and social impacts. Organizations like Soneva and Secret Paradise benefit from NGO partnerships, while industry-wide efforts, supported by MATI, promote broader sustainability goals. Save the Beach exemplifies the collaborative approach needed to address complex environmental challenges effectively.

The involvement and impact of various stakeholders are crucial for the success of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism industry. Each stakeholder plays a unique role in promoting sustainability.

Tourism businesses, both large and small, have a significant influence on sustainability practices. Large businesses like the Soneva Foundation, as highlighted by Mr. Oines, can leverage substantial financial resources to implement comprehensive sustainability measures. Soneva's initiatives in renewable energy, waste management, and community engagement set a high benchmark for the industry. Conversely, smaller businesses like Secret Paradise, represented by Ms. Franklin, face financial and logistical challenges but use sustainability as a market differentiator. Their focus on providing authentic local experiences and promoting environmental preservation resonates with eco-conscious travellers. Mr. Mohammed underscores that most tourism businesses have adopted some form of sustainable practice out of necessity, reflecting the industry's broader shift towards sustainability. The collaboration

between tourism businesses and community-based organizations, as emphasized by Mr. Ahmed, is vital for supporting conservation efforts and enhancing community engagement.

Local communities are integral to the success of sustainability initiatives. Their involvement ensures that climate adaptation strategies are culturally appropriate and locally supported. Soneva's efforts to engage local communities in waste management and conservation projects, as discussed by Mr. Oines, highlight the importance of grassroots involvement. Secret Paradise's tours, designed to promote environmental and cultural preservation, demonstrate how tourism can directly benefit local communities. Mr. Ahmed emphasises the critical role of local residents in conservation efforts, highlighting the need for community education and empowerment. Although MATI, represented by Mr. Mohammed, does not directly engage with local communities, the organization's advocacy efforts indirectly support community-driven tourism development.

NGOs and advocacy groups provide essential support and resources for sustainability initiatives. The Soneva Namoonaa initiative, plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable practices across multiple islands. Ms. Franklin positions her company as an ambassador for local NGOs and marine life organizations, facilitating global exposure and support for their work. MATI's role as an advocacy group involves planning and consultation with government and international organizations, promoting industry best practices. Mr. Ahmed's collaborative efforts with other NGOs through Save the Beach underscore the importance of partnerships in addressing complex environmental challenges.

The combined efforts of tourism businesses, local communities, and NGOs create a robust framework for advancing sustainability in the Maldivian tourism industry. Large and small businesses, through their operational practices and community engagements, set standards and drive market demand for sustainable tourism. Local communities, through their active participation and support, ensure the cultural relevance and local success of sustainability initiatives. NGOs and advocacy groups provide the necessary expertise, resources, and advocacy to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts. Together, these stakeholders form a synergistic network that can significantly contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Maldivian tourism sector.

## *5.5 Challenges and Barriers*

### *5.5.1 Logistical Challenges*

Logistical challenges can significantly impede the implementation of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism industry. These challenges include transportation difficulties, limited infrastructure, and supply chain issues.

Mr. Oines highlighted the logistical difficulties associated with operating in remote locations. *"Transporting materials and supplies to our resorts is both challenging and costly"*, he explained. The main problem that arises due to this is the waste management. That is why

Soneva has decided to change the mindset with water and viewing it as a resource. Compost from food waste is used to grow vegetables in an otherwise acidic soil.

Similarly, Ms. Franklin also discussed the logistical complexities of island nations. However, she stressed on the increasing number of domestic airports in Maldives. She also mentioned how 'Soneva' wants to build an airport very close to a Manta feeding station. This shows the power and hypocrisy of big resorts. She mentions that creating seaplane hubs are far better than domestic airports where private jets could park.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) emphasises the importance of physical capital, including transportation infrastructure, in supporting sustainable practices. The unique geographic challenges of the Maldives necessitate innovative transportation solutions to reduce the carbon footprint and enhance the efficiency of sustainability initiatives. Stakeholders like Secret Paradise are actively seeking ways to mitigate transportation impacts and implementing better options of transportation between islands. It is a major challenge that affects other factors as well.

#### 5.5.2 Financial Constraints

Financial constraints are a major barrier to the implementation of sustainability initiatives. Limited financial resources can restrict the ability of tourism stakeholders to invest in sustainable practices and technologies.

Mr. Oines mentioned that they have received two grants from USAID and rest of the projects are funded by the Foundation. They sell carbon credits on their website that supports the various projects they are involved in. They did not mention any constraints. As Secret Paradise is a for profit organisation, they usually reinvest their profit into the community. They bring funds to the NGOs that require the funding to finance their activities.

Mr. Ahmed highlighted the role of financial resources in supporting community-based sustainability initiatives. *"Funding is crucial for our conservation projects and educational programs. Without adequate financial support, it's challenging to maintain and expand these efforts,"* he stressed. As an NGO, Save the Beach relies on donations and grants to fund their activities, weighs on the importance of financial resources in driving grassroots sustainability efforts.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) identifies financial capital as a critical asset for sustainability. Organizations like Soneva can invest heavily in sustainability, while smaller businesses and NGOs face more significant financial constraints. Industry-wide financial challenges suggest the need for targeted financial support and incentives. Community-based initiatives also rely heavily on external funding.

### 5.5.3 Knowledge and Skill Gaps

Knowledge and skill gaps can hinder the effective implementation of sustainability practices. Addressing these gaps through education and training is essential for building the capacity of tourism stakeholders.

Mr. Oines emphasized the importance of training and capacity-building programs at Soneva. *"We invest heavily in training our staff to ensure they have the skills and knowledge needed to implement our sustainability initiatives effectively,"* he stated. This focus on human resources supports Soneva's comprehensive approach to sustainability, ensuring that their staff are well-equipped to carry out their environmental conservation efforts.

On the other hand, Ms. Franklin discussed the challenges of building human resource capacity in smaller businesses. *"We face difficulties in providing extensive training programs due to limited resources. However, we prioritize educating our staff and guides about sustainable tourism practices,"* she explained. Secret Paradise strives to enhance their human capital by leveraging external training opportunities and partnerships with sustainability organizations.

While Mr. Mohammed stated the need for industry-wide capacity-building initiatives, he also noted that *"Many businesses lack the expertise needed to implement sustainable practices effectively. MATI is working on developing training programs and workshops to address this gap,"*. Strengthening human resources across the industry is crucial for promoting widespread adoption of sustainability strategies.

Mr. Ahmed stressed the importance of community education and engagement. *"Educating local communities about the importance of sustainability and how they can contribute is a core part of our mission,"* he stated. Save the Beach conducts workshops and educational programs to build local capacity for environmental conservation, emphasizing the role of human resources in grassroots sustainability efforts.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) emphasises on human capital as a vital asset for sustainability. The skills, knowledge, and capacity of individuals directly impact their ability to implement and maintain sustainable practices. Organizations like Soneva that invest in training and capacity-building can effectively carry out comprehensive sustainability initiatives. Smaller businesses and community organizations often face challenges in developing human resources but continue to prioritize education and training within their capacity. Industry-wide efforts to strengthen human capital, as emphasized by Mr. Mohammed, are essential for promoting sustainability across the Maldivian tourism sector.

### 5.5.4 Regulatory Barriers

Regulatory barriers can significantly hinder the adoption and implementation of sustainability practices. These barriers may include bureaucratic challenges, inconsistent regulations, and lack of enforcement, which can create obstacles for tourism stakeholders.

Mr. Oines discussed the regulatory challenges that Soneva faces. Regulatory hurdles can slow down or complicate the execution of sustainability projects, even for well-resourced organizations like Soneva. With the help of Mr. Sonu, the tariffs in renewable energy were scrapped and that allowed Soneva to build one of the biggest solar plants in Maldives.

Ms. Franklin also drew out the difficulties posed by inconsistent regulations. The lack of clear and consistent regulatory guidance complicates efforts to adopt comprehensive sustainability measures. She also states, *“It's more challenging because they have things written down on paper and they say things in media forums. But the reality of what actually happens isn't necessarily the same.”*, about the government policies. She is concerned that even though there are great proposed actions in the fifth Tourism Master Plan, there are things that will not come to fruition.

Bureaucratic challenges, regulatory inconsistencies, and weak enforcement create obstacles for stakeholders trying to adopt sustainable practices. Streamlining bureaucratic processes, harmonizing regulations, and strengthening enforcement, as underscored by the participants, are critical steps towards reducing these barriers and promoting sustainability within the Maldivian tourism industry.

The implementation of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism industry is significantly hindered by a range of challenges and barriers. These include logistical challenges, financial constraints, knowledge and skill gaps, and regulatory barriers.

Logistical challenges are a major impediment, particularly for remote locations where transportation difficulties and limited infrastructure prevail. Mr. Oines points out that transporting materials and supplies is both challenging and costly, which complicates waste management and other sustainability initiatives. The unique geographic context of the Maldives necessitates innovative solutions to mitigate these challenges. Ms. Franklin echoes these sentiments, emphasizing the logistical complexities of island nations and advocating for better transportation options, such as seaplane hubs, over building more domestic airports. Addressing logistical barriers is essential for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives across the archipelago.

Financial constraints present another significant barrier. While organizations like Soneva, with robust financial backing, can invest heavily in sustainability, smaller businesses and NGOs face substantial financial challenges. Ms. Franklin highlights how Secret Paradise reinvests profits into the community and seeks external funding to support their initiatives. Mr. Ahmed points out the critical role of financial resources for community-based conservation projects, which rely on donations and grants. The disparity in financial resources between larger and smaller entities suggests a need for targeted financial support and incentives to promote sustainability across the industry. The SLF identifies financial capital as crucial for sustainability, emphasising on its importance in driving both corporate and grassroots sustainability efforts.

Knowledge and skill gaps also hinder the effective implementation of sustainability practices. Mr. Oines emphasises Soneva's investment in training and capacity-building to equip their staff with the necessary skills and knowledge. Ms. Franklin discusses the challenges smaller businesses face in providing extensive training due to limited resources, yet they prioritize educating their staff and guides on sustainable tourism practices. Mr. Mohammed highlights the need for industry-wide capacity-building initiatives to bridge these gaps, while Mr. Ahmed focuses on community education and engagement to build local capacity for environmental conservation. Enhancing human capital through education and training is vital for the widespread adoption of sustainability strategies.

Regulatory barriers further complicate the adoption of sustainability practices. Mr. Oines notes that regulatory hurdles can slow down or complicate sustainability projects, even for well-resourced organizations. Ms. Franklin points to the inconsistent regulatory environment in the Maldives, where policies may not be effectively enforced or aligned with practical realities. She expresses concerns about the gap between proposed actions and their implementation, which undermines the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. Streamlining bureaucratic processes, harmonizing regulations, and strengthening enforcement are critical steps to overcoming these barriers and facilitating the adoption of sustainable practices.

Overall, the successful implementation of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism industry requires addressing the multifaceted challenges of logistics, finance, knowledge, and regulation. By tackling these barriers through innovative solutions, targeted support, comprehensive training, and streamlined regulations, stakeholders can enhance the sustainability and resilience of the tourism sector. Collaborative efforts among businesses, communities, and regulatory bodies are essential to overcoming these challenges and achieving long-term sustainability goals.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the impact of climate adaptation strategies on tourism stakeholders in the Maldives, focusing on key psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors. By employing qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews with representatives from luxury resorts, tour operators, industry associations, and environmental NGOs, the research provided a comprehensive understanding of how these strategies are developed and implemented to mitigate climate risks.

The findings point out the importance of attitudes towards sustainability in driving the adoption of climate adaptation strategies. Stakeholders such as Mr. Arnfinn Oines of Soneva Resorts exemplify a deep-rooted commitment to sustainability, motivated by the founders' vision and core values. This commitment manifests in extensive use of renewable energy, waste reduction programs, and community engagement initiatives. Conversely, Ms. Ruth Franklin of Secret Paradise highlights the challenges faced by smaller businesses in promoting sustainability, where economic constraints and limited resources necessitate a more balanced approach between environmental goals and financial viability.

Resource availability emerged as a critical factor influencing the success of adaptation strategies. Financial resources are essential for investing in climate-resilient infrastructure and sustainable technologies, while human capital, encompassing skills and knowledge, is vital for effective implementation and progress of such strategies. The disparity in resource availability among stakeholders underscores the need for equitable distribution and capacity-building initiatives. The commitment of NGOs like Save the Beach, led by Mr. Hassan Ahmed, to marine conservation and community education emphasises the importance of local engagement and long-term funding. Long term funding is essential as Coral Restoration projects take years of work and monitoring to be viable enough of regenerating reefs.

Institutional factors, including government policies and industry standards, significantly shape the adoption of sustainability practices. The Maldivian government has implemented various policies to promote climate adaptation, yet inconsistencies and enforcement issues remain a challenge. Stakeholders such as Ms. Franklin and Mr. Ahmed criticize the government for its contradictory actions, such as supporting environmentally destructive developments while promoting sustainability initiatives. This highlights the need for more robust and consistent regulatory frameworks to ensure effective climate adaptation across the sector.

The analysis also reveals that collaborative efforts among stakeholders are crucial for successful climate adaptation. Partnerships between tourism businesses, NGOs, and local communities enhance resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and collective action. Secret Paradise collaborates with local communities and NGOs to implement sustainable tourism practices and support conservation projects. Similarly, Save the Beach works with various

stakeholders to promote beach clean ups marine conservation and educate communities about environmental protection.

Despite these collaborative efforts, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of climate adaptation strategies. Logistical challenges, such as transportation difficulties and limited infrastructure, impede the efficient execution of sustainability initiatives. Financial constraints further exacerbate these issues, particularly for smaller businesses and community-based organizations. Knowledge and skill gaps among stakeholders also pose significant barriers, emphasizing the need for comprehensive training and capacity-building programs.

Regulatory barriers, including bureaucratic challenges and inconsistent enforcement, further complicate the adoption of sustainability practices. Streamlining bureaucratic processes, harmonizing regulations, and strengthening enforcement are critical steps towards overcoming these barriers and promoting sustainability within the Maldivian tourism industry.

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics influencing climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism sector. The attitudes and motivations of stakeholders, the availability of resources, and the institutional frameworks all play pivotal roles in shaping sustainability practices. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging the strengths of various stakeholders, the Maldives can enhance its capacity to mitigate climate risks and secure the long-term viability of its tourism industry.

Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of coordinated and well-supported climate adaptation strategies to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the Maldivian tourism sector. While individual businesses may implement their own climate adaptation strategies, a unified action plan regulated by the government would yield better results. Such a plan would facilitate the effective allocation of resources, streamline regulatory processes, and foster collaborative efforts among stakeholders.

All in all, the success of climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism industry hinges on the collective efforts of all stakeholders. By fostering a culture of sustainability, enhancing resource availability, and strengthening institutional frameworks, the Maldives can build a resilient and sustainable tourism sector capable of withstanding the impacts of climate change. The insights gained from this research provide a roadmap for policymakers, industry leaders, and communities working towards a sustainable and resilient future for the Maldivian tourism industry. As the Maldives continues to grapple with the effects of climate change, it is imperative that all stakeholders remain committed to adopting and promoting sustainable practices. The road ahead is fraught with challenges, but with concerted efforts and a shared vision for sustainability, the Maldivian tourism sector can thrive amidst the changing climate, ensuring a prosperous future for generations to come.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the impacts of climate adaptation strategies on tourism stakeholders in the Maldives, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Future research should aim to address these limitations and further explore the complexities of climate adaptation in the tourism sector.

**Sample Size:** The study was based on interviews with four stakeholders, which may not fully represent the diversity of perspectives within the Maldivian tourism industry. Expanding the sample size to include a wider range of stakeholders, such as government officials, community leaders, and international organizations, would provide a more holistic view of the challenges and opportunities in climate adaptation.

**Geographical Constraints:** The inability to conduct in-person interviews due to logistical challenges limited the depth of engagement with participants. Face-to-face interactions might have yielded richer data and more nuanced insights. Witnessing the climate adaptation strategies in person would give a better understanding of the actual situation.

**Scope of Study:** The focus on psychological, resource-based, and institutional factors, while comprehensive, may have overlooked other important dimensions such as cultural and social factors that affect climate adaptation practices. Exploring these factors would enrich the understanding of how local traditions, values, and community dynamics influence sustainability efforts.

**Data Collection Method:** Relying on semi-structured interviews may introduce interviewer bias and limit generalizability. Future research should incorporate multiple data collection methods, including direct observations, surveys, and secondary data analysis, to triangulate findings and enhance validity.

**Quantitative Research:** Integrating quantitative methods, such as surveys and statistical analysis, could complement the qualitative findings and provide a more robust understanding of the factors influencing climate adaptation. Mixed-methods approaches would offer a holistic view of climate adaptation strategies.

In conclusion, while this study has made significant contributions to understanding climate adaptation strategies in the Maldivian tourism sector, there is much more to learn. Future research should continue to build on these findings, aiming for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how to effectively address the challenges posed by climate change in vulnerable tourism-dependent regions.

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## **Appendices**

### *Appendix A: Interview Guide*

The interview guide was designed to facilitate semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. Due to the dynamic nature of semi-structured interviews, the questions were adapted in real-time based on the flow of the conversation and the specific expertise of each stakeholder.

The following keywords were used as the basis for developing interview questions. These keywords helped ensure that all relevant topics were covered during the interviews:

- Role in Tourism Industry
- Climate Adaptation Strategies implemented
- Efficiency of implemented strategies
- Factors, Challenges, Barriers
- Impact on Business and Community
- Stakeholder Collaboration
- Plans/Perceptions for the future

#### Sample Questions:

- What specific climate adaptation strategies have you implemented in your organization/business and what action plans are they influenced by?
- What motivated you in implementing those strategies?
- How do you collaborate with other stakeholders? Are they open to collaboration and knowledge sharing?
- How do you perceive the future of tourism in the Maldives in the context of climate change?

Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the exact wording and sequence of questions were adjusted based on the stakeholder's responses and areas of expertise. This approach ensured a more natural and comprehensive discussion, allowing stakeholders to elaborate on topics they were most knowledgeable and passionate about.

**Consent Form for:**  
CLIMATE ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN MALDIVIAN TOURISM: KEY  
INFLUENCES AND STAKEHOLDER RESPONSES

**Researcher:** Rajvi Vora, a student of European Masters in Tourism Management at the School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana.

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The faculty advisor for this research project is Dr. Prof. Tanja Mihalič, who is a professor at the School of Business and Economics, University of Ljubljana.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to analyse the climate adaptation strategies adopted by stakeholders in the Maldivian tourism industry. The insights from this research will help understand the effectiveness of current strategies and identify the influences behind the adaptation. The findings will contribute to academic knowledge and practical applications in tourism management and climate adaptation.

**Participation and Confidentiality:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The information you provide will be used solely for academic purposes and will be kept confidential. However, with your consent, your name and the information provided during the interview may be used in the research findings and analysis.

**Consent to Use Information:**

I consent to the use of my name and the information provided during the interview for the purposes of this research. I agree to my interview being audio recorded. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.

If there is any particular aspect you want to opt out of, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_

Your Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix C: Interview Transcripts*

### **Soneva Foundation Company Secretary Mr. Arnfinn Oines - Interview**

*Rajvi:*

Can you hear me now?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

Yeah, I can hear you.

*Rajvi:*

Yeah, OK, Perfect. So, good morning. I think it's good afternoon where you are.

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

Yeah, its Afternoon for me. Good morning to you.

*Rajvi:*

Thank you. Can you just start by introducing yourself? And can I know a little bit more about your role and your background?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

Yeah. my name is Arnfinn Oines. Part of the social environmental conscience of Soneva. So, I oversee our sustainability practises. and I also run the Soneva foundation as the company secretary there. so that's, been, been working with the company for a number of years since 2006. So, been involved in a while? and, yeah, very much focused on sustainability on. yeah, very improving practises, etcetera. Monitoring what we're doing.

*Rajvi:*

Oh, that's amazing. so, the focus of my thesis is to just, understand how these climate adaptation strategies work for stakeholders from their perspective and especially, how important it is for small island nations. So, can I just know some of the factors of why, you adapted some all of these climate adaptation strategies and, like, the action plans or what made you look into it in the beginning, like, how did it start?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

It very much started from the founders, who is, has always been passionate about the environment. and the environmental conscience, particularly Eva. And we have Eva and Sonu, which are our founders. a couple and hence the name 'Soneva' and, yeah, they always been very passionate about it. They, pushed very hard in the beginning back in. I mean, this was the company was started in in mid-90s where their focus on sustainability was less obvious, but they always pushed a lot. for instance, they managed to find alternatives for plastic straws in 1998. and so nowadays, you see, some companies are proud that they have eliminated or changed some of the plastic straws, but it's something we have done for long, and it's been part of the company DNA if you like and how we operate. obviously, there are always things that you can improve and do better. And as we, we develop, we sort of say that it's our sustainability practice is like an onion where we when we think we have done something, then you peel off another layer and then there's more things you can do.

So, it's. It's always important to recognise that it's a journey that you always can do more and do better, and it's important to change and adapt and you would also have to consider local, aspects in in. So, it's not one size fits all, and I mean being located in; our main business was started in the Maldives and our main business is in the Maldives. It's a small island state, which in one way, is the most vulnerable and one of the most vulnerable places for climate change. So that is, is something that that also strengthens, to the incentive of doing it and interest in it and getting others involved. So, so that's plays a part. but I think also what's important is that we recognise that, actually, from a business perspective, it makes, business sense to operate sustainably. So, we're

not doing it just because we have a passion about it. Yes, it is one thing, but also because we feel that it makes business sense and also especially from the long term. And we have, we are fortunate to have founders that are still involved, and they are thinking more long term, not just short-term profits, So their sustainability definitely is important, and climate adaption practises is crucial also for their survival.

*Rajvi:*

That's very nice to hear, because usually the sustainability is an upcoming term. And businesses have started using it in recent years. so also, like, Maldives, has the national adaptation programme. It also has this tourism plans. It, also, collaborates with, like, USAID, for example, for these climate action plans. So, do you also collaborate with these plans? Or do you have your own like the Soneva Foundation that works on it? Or how does it work? Like, do you have your own action plan or do you change it according to,

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

We certainly have our own action plans, and we have our own things we're doing. But we also I mean, I do, follow and align with what? What the government doing. And also, we have been active in also to, to try and encourage and influence the government to improve their practises. I mean, at the end of the day, also, our government, same as us as a business, there's always more that can be done. We can improve. And so, we had in 2000. When was it? 2008. I believe it was. We had our first, slow lap symposium where we brought in our various people in in order to focus and on sustainability matters. And we also had then that time, President Nasheed, visiting and actually in that meeting, Sonu challenged him to say, Like, Look, renewable energy is important. but at the time, there was a, a tariff on it, so he challenged them to take away those import duties tariffs, and make it easier, more affordable to do that. And actually, the president said yes, we do, and he changed that.

So, so that's also one advantage being in a small, country where you can have easy access. And we have regular meetings with them various ministries and collaborations and we had influence on the and when was it? I think 2019. When, at that time the government announced the plastic reduction plan. we had influence on that and actually also provided them the consultant that helped, making sure that they could be confident of announcing it in the at the I think it's the UN in New York Climate week or something. so, yeah, we do have that in relation and work and try and, help and also push, sometimes, in order to make things more sustainable for the not only for us, but also for the country and the Maldives.

*Rajvi:*

Oh, that's, that's wonderful. there must have been major challenges or barriers to take such a big step because it has always been in the forefront for sustainability in Maldives. So, what were some of the major challenges or something that, people didn't understand or what was it?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

Well, in the Maldives, logistics is always a challenge. there is. I mean, you are located in a remote island setting where even travel between islands is costly. And you are far from bringing in and products, et cetera, there are few natural resources. So, there is There is, some of those logistical challenges that are certainly, very true. And, I mean, one of the things that we focused early on was on waste, and we set up our waste well centre and trying to change the mindset of waste, viewing it as a resource where we turn it into something valuable. Recycle it and we have set up a, I mean, we composed of food waste rather than throwing it in the ocean as common the Maldives. And then we use that to improve the soil because the soil in general is very acidic and not great for growing vegetables. But by improving it with the compost, we are able to produce a lot of vegetables. We have set up a glass studio where we turn glass waste into art pieces that we sell, and then we, we get some good revenue, so those are some things. we have also then wanted to help local communities, local islands to improve their waste because waste is a big challenge in the Maldives. As I mentioned, the cost of transporting it is very high. So many islands tend to just burn it on their own island. And now, with more of modern society bringing a lot more plastic, then that's not great because it's quite toxic and also it doesn't degrade. In the past, in the Maldives when every waste organic, it was not a problem that they just threw it down on the beach. I mean, the

very word for, for waste or dump side is like near the beach. because it was common you threw your banana peels or something like that, there. And it's naturally degraded. Now with plastic. That's not an issue. And that's a big problem in the Maldives. and it's costly for them to try and get it off the island because the boat trips and sending so they end up usually burning it.

So, we, we have been working, started working in, with three islands. this was a collaboration with three islands, actually. Also, the central government was in part of the initial meeting. All that, so we use those three islands as a pilot to try and find ways to do similar that we do at our resort. getting them to segregate waste. compact it, recycle it, and also stop open burning the waste. Now we are working with 22 islands, so they expanded. and really, I mean, there are different levels of engagement they have and how far they are but have given them a five-step model. And how to, to take the steps needed in order to, become what we call a 'Namoonaa' island. 'Namoonaa' is a Dhivehi word that means an ideal or something desired. Something ideal. so which is what basically we want. We have the Soneva Namoonaa set up an NGO to run this, and the idea is to get islands to become Namoonaa islands. So ideal islands that handle the waste, eliminate plastic waste. So, we have set up one water bottling plant and one of the local islands. They provide water in glass bottles, reusable glass bottles rather than plastic bottles. We have one more plant coming up. We are waiting for permission to start operating it. So those are our aspects. There's also a key point of eliminating single use plastic waste. So those are things that we are working on.

*Rajvi:*

Plastic waste is actually the biggest problem with tourists coming in. You cannot control the amount of waste that comes in with them. So also, like, like you said, you're working with local communities. Do you also work with, like, local businesses? Or, do you have, meetings with other resorts, other hotels, where you show your model, or is it just, local communities?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

It's I mean, it's primarily local communities that we are working with. We are open to share it. And we have, shared with other resorts. They are not necessarily always, very, receptive for it. They kind of want to do their own thing and sort of, yeah, you have those bit pride in there so we don't. We're not very successful with other resorts, but and our focus is on local islands. and that's working with the community primarily with the island council. and then also often with the women development committees. usually an island have a women development committee. so to do that, we are encouraging businesses to be involved. and, for instance, with the water we're trying to get some to, become suppliers and distributors, again, the challenge is the cost of getting it between islands, which is problematic. so that's something, that we are We are encouraging also in terms of if we can get someone to set up a vegetable farm on an island or taking on. So far, we haven't been very successful of getting other businesses to be involved in doing it. But, yeah, the island communities. with the women development committees and, island councils, they are the ones to take, take responsibility for the for the waste management and try and find ways to reduce. what you call it plastic I

*Rajvi:*

And, how are these activities financed? I read about the about the foundation. But, do you also take government aid, or is there any financial help that comes in from the outside, or is it internal?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

well, it it's primarily funded by Soneva Foundation and Soneva. for that drive, we've had a grant or two grants from USAID, one that we are about to finish now is has been around our home composting trial. so we are been setting up home composting on our islands, and that has been very successful. so that is that we don't We don't take, grants or funding directly from the government. That's sort of our little... We don't want to. It's easy to get some complaints if we do that, so we try to avoid that. But the government in one way provide funding through directly through the island councils. And so then we can by guiding them and telling them these are the best ways of doing it. We are better utilising their budgets and, funds. So indirectly, yes, we are involved there.

*Rajvi:*

Ok, that's, and, like, how efficient or successful have these, like, action plans have been like, do you usually, the timeline that you have? Is it easy to collaborate with these local communities, or does it take much longer? Because maybe they don't understand or they don't know the importance?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

it varies. It varies. Some islands are very positive and receptive and forthcoming, and some islands are sceptical. One of the things we have used and tried to do is by having those three, three pilot islands. We had them talk about what they're doing and share their experiences, and that has helped getting others on board. So but, yeah, it varies. Some islands are very positive, very engaged, whereas other not so. So it all depends. Sometimes the challenge is that you have, elections. Where, yeah, island council is being re-elected and new come in. That can be some positive thing, that they are more engaged or that they're not so because they don't want to do what the previous did. So it it's it varies. But certainly there are many that are very positive. And by having, in connecting these islands so that they can talk about themselves and share their experiences, that helps on increasing the engagement.

*Rajvi:*

OK, thank you so much. And just the last question. It's, maybe like any future plans or what are your future perspective? Like, what direction is this going to take. does Maldives need, a more accelerated approach towards these climate adaptation strategies and or action plans, or is it at a good pace already?

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

No, I definitely would say an accelerated pace would be good. I mean, we want I mean, our like, long term goal and vision is to for all the Maldives to have, be Namoonaa and have sustainable waste management practises. It is needed on every island. Of course, we for us to do it only us, will take very long. So, we need others to get involved. So that's why we're trying to share the model and have a model that others can take on and move. so that's, but they're sometimes in conflict with the national, because they often prefer to have the, not a community. decentralised way of doing it. They want to have the central with big, big, incinerators and make those kind of investments. So that's where there are sometimes a bit of a conflict, if you like, and opposite directions. So, and we can only do what we can and encourage and try and show that this is a is a good way of doing it. and it doesn't necessarily mean that's the only way. it's sometimes you need both. so that is that is there? speaking.

Another thing that is needed is, the transition to renewable energy. And that is definitely way too slow in the Maldives. and, it's something I think that I'm not sure how engaged the current government is on that, the previous one was more supportive and trying to do, but, but yeah, it's still lagging big time. Ourselves, we have now this year installed about 4.5 megawatt solar PV, including batteries. So that is taking us up at the moment to about 40% renewable energy. So, there's still a way to go to do more, but that has been a big step in the right direction for us. It's the biggest installation, as far as I know in the Maldives. And, we'd like to see that others also do a lot more and as well ourselves do even more so. Yeah.

*Rajvi:*

Thank you so much for this. It will help a lot. And, that is it for my questions. Actually. It was really nice that, I got to chat with you. And actually, I went on your LinkedIn page, and I saw that you've studied, environment friendly development and all of these, and I'm really passionate about it, so it was a really great opportunity to talk to you as well. thank you so much. And, this is it. Thank you.

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

Yeah, it's my pleasure. I'm glad I could help and assist. And I wish you best of luck with your studies. And, is there anything you, have forgotten or want to just drop me a mail And I'll be happy to answer further questions.

*Rajvi:*

Thank you so much. Have a good day.

*Mr. Arnfinn Oines:*

You too. All right, bye.

## **Secret Paradise Co-founder/Director Ms. Ruth Franklin - Interview**

*Rajvi:*

OK, can we start this by, some background information about, your role in the tourism industry about what you do, how you're involved. and how long you have been involved in the industry?

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

OK, so, secret Paradise has been in existence since 2012. We are a tour company that is specialising in local island guided tours. predominantly based around engagement with locals and protection of the environment. So, I'm originally from the UK. And I came to the Maldives for the first time back in 1999. I arrived as a scuba diver, which is what brought me to the Maldives on what was intended to be a once in a lifetime trip. And consequently, I returned maybe twice or three times a year. And then in, 2011, I was here for three months doing my dive master and was introduced to a local businessman, and we got into conversation. because the law had changed to allow guest houses to operate on local islands, So, we were discussing what impact that would have on the industry and on the consumer. And I went back to my job in the UK. And then he called me up and said, Did I want to start a travel agency? And I said, no, I don't want to sell resorts, but I do something at the local island level. So I was very fortunate. I was in the right place at the right time. and I guess we formed Secret Paradise to provide experiences that I've been fortunate to have as a guest going to the home of a local family, learning to cook Maldivian food, and then over.

So the first three years, that's where we sort of really grasped. what we what we do and what we're still doing is very different to most businesses in the Maldives. So, we get direct customers. But we also act as a destination management company for, international operators. and definitely we're, I would describe us as unconscious learning. So, when travellers travel with us, they will learn about the environment, the culture, the traditions. They'll learn about the climate impact; they'll get involved in data protection. sorry data, research for marine life organisations. But it's all through either conversation. and discussion or hands on experiences as opposed to a classroom learning.

*Rajvi:*

Oh, that's very interesting to hear. and also, I got to know about, your company, because you're a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration, and, we learned about it in class, and so I just wanted to know How did you come about it? Because there's only two companies from Maldives as a signatory of the Glasgow Declaration. So how did you know about it? How did you sign it?

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

Ok, so we are part of the ATTA, the adventure travel and tourism Association. So I was aware of it through them. And also, I guess, through I'm, subscribed to various sustainable travel and tourism newsletters. But early in 2023 through connections we have with USAID, we were involved in they the development of the Maldives Tourism Climate Action Plan. So, we, participated initially in their feedback at the very beginning of their project. And then at the end stage of the project, we were one of the stakeholders that were able to review and discuss and debate in terms of what they were proposing the plan to be so that was published in May 2023. And once that was published, I felt it was right time then for us to establish our own, climate action plan, which dovetailed into the Maldives destination plan and then following that, we then signed the Glasgow declaration.

*Rajvi:*

OK, so, like, as a signatory. Also, you need to create an action plan. You need to adopt some strategies. so, do you have your own action plan, or does it align with the Maldivian, like, say, the national adaptation programme that they have or the tourism plan that they propose the government proposals? Do you align yourself with it, or do you come up with?

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

So we have our own plan, which aligns with aspects that we can as a business physically do. but there are also points in there that we're doing, that aren't necessarily part of the, the destination strategy. and one of those is currently we do offset our carbon emissions. So, all the tools on our website have, carbon labelling. So last year was the first year where, we measured and offset, and I know that offsetting isn't necessarily something that's seen as a positive way. But for us, there isn't any. there aren't any projects here in the Maldives that we can invest in. So, whether that's, planting trees, for example, or increasing sea grass. so, whilst we do those as aspects of our tours, there isn't anything that we can contribute to sufficiently to offset our carbon.

So, we feel that it's a, it's a decision to aid us in terms of understanding what our measurements are, being able to obviously understand that measurement and review what we're doing within each of the tools to try and drive that carbon offset down. But ultimately, in long term, we'd like to be in a position that that offset is something we can practically do here in the Maldives. But I think as a destination, we're, some distance away from that, and then other things for us is that's quite key is because we're really outside of the resort industry. We are the only business that I'm aware of that, is really focused on sustainable and responsible tourism. and that's always at the heart of our business. Yes, we're a business that needs to make profit. but the bigger part of our picture is not the profit that we make, but what we reinvest into the community. And so, part of our climate plan is about education of locals, whether those are locals that are in the industry or whether that's the general community, and then also educating and supporting our partners. So particularly guesthouse properties. So currently there are no regulations or policies with regard to properties, be they resort properties or local island guest houses and hotels in relation to eco credentials. So we have taken the WTTC standard, the minimum standard, and we have an audit that we do with each of our properties, and it's I guess it's about a journey with them. So they're all at different stages, and it's a small, inexpensive actions for them to try and encourage them to understand the impact that they have so that it would be as easy as them having signage to communicate about not changing towels on a daily basis, to utilising reusable water bottles as opposed to guests having to purchase plastic bottles.

And one of the things that we are doing this year currently is a food survey. As you're probably aware, the Maldives imports over 95% of its food produce but there is produce here in the Maldives and not necessarily to the volume that every guest house would be able to utilise it. but we are trying to gain an understanding from our guests what how they feel about beef, as beef is the biggest carbon emitting product. So that that we're trying to encourage then our properties to remove beef from their menu. We've already done that with our vessels because that's really easy to do on a vessel, but less more complicated with a guest house, because everybody thinks that if I don't serve it, then the guest will go and eat it somewhere else. And also to understand that it's important to have more local food on the menu. They're still very westernised menus realistically, and I think that comes from people's perception of food when they see it at resorts and guest houses. Think that tourists are still looking for what resorts offer. So, a couple of things that we're doing is that don't directly link in with the overall destination that we feel are, beneficial to our market and to our partners.

*Rajvi:*

that's, really interesting to hear and also you mentioned USAID before, so can I know. like, were you part of the decision-making process for the action plan,

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

so we weren't formally part of, like, the middle bit. So we provided feedback and thoughts at the beginning on what we felt were the key things or the challenges that would be faced at a local island level. And then at the end, we were able to, review what they're in, What they felt the action should be and review, as a stakeholder

team to say that how communities would rate them in terms of importance of, being able to not just being able to achieve, but how easy they would be for locals to achieve. So the final plan sort of drew from our feedback at the beginning and at the end.

*Rajvi:*

OK, so, so, you'd say education, I think, is the biggest challenge to just make the local communities understand what how they should do things, or is that something else? Like the major barrier in implementing these strategies

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

if I'm very honest, I think the major barrier is the government, which it tends to be in a lot of destinations. Ultimately, tourism is about the dollar. It's about revenue, and there are actions that could be taken that would make the Maldives a far more sustainable destination. But they may impact what the overall revenue coming back could be. So whilst there is a lot of great information and great, proposed actions, either in the climate action plan or in the fifth Tourism Master plan, there are things that probably actually won't come to fruition. The Maldives has said that they will be carbon neutral by 2030. And so, you know, like six years away, that's an awful lot of work that needs to be done because on local islands, we still burn rubbish. and whilst there's resorts that have their own, green agendas, I think at a resort level, there's still some aspects of greenwashing and from an environmental point of view, where we have got policies or regulations in place.

And a classic example is, with regard to shark and stingray feeding. So it is, it's illegal to feed fish. It's illegal to feed stingrays. It's illegal to feed sharks, but it happens. It happens locally and it happens on resorts. But no, it doesn't get policed. And people don't get fined because ultimately it's experiences that are being promoted that bring revenue in. and I think the because tourism is such a big part of the economy for the Maldives. I have a strong feeling that, there's an aspect of They don't want to be saying we're not doing this. We're not doing that because of X, Y and Z that they believe that tourists will go. Oh, we're not going to come to the Maldives because we can't go to an area and swim with nurse sharks or we can't go to this area and swim with whale sharks. So I think there's a There is a very fine line in terms of where the Maldives balances out sustainability and revenue.

*Rajvi:*

Yeah, because, why I chose Maldives is because it's a small island destination that has a bigger impact. and also like, tourism is a big part of its GDP. And with the climate change happening, it will be affected more and because also Maldives has always been a part of these climate action strategies. They always had a national adaptation programme that they've been working on, but there was not much information about what's actually happening at the local level. So that's what I wanted to research. And, that's why I'm interviewing stakeholders like this and also like another thing I'm focusing on is this collaboration between stakeholders. Do you think that it's easy to for businesses, for tourism businesses to come together and work on sustainability? Are there any opportunities that come up or is it difficult? And you just you can only work with the local communities in your own way?

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

I think that, for resorts and local island businesses to come together and collaborate, that's more challenging. resorts have a general managers conference once a year. That's, held by a, hotelier publication, a local hotelier publication. There's also another publication called, Travel Trade Maldives. But they are both focused on resorts, and they may come together and there'll be presentations with regard to how to improve sustainability but not necessarily debates and discussions as to how they can, work with other members of the industry. IMTM so International Maldives Travel Market, they hold a sustainability forum, every year. So, the first one was pre pandemic, and they've been to one during the pandemic, which was online and two post the pandemic. And they have a very clear sustainability agenda. And I presented at those, and I've been part of those discussions. And on the back of, 2022 and 2023 a white paper was pulled together and was presented to the government, and that forum brought together, I think there was two or three resort general managers there. there was somebody from

the guest house of the Maldives Association, but a lot more. NGO s and marine life organisations. So I think there are opportunities, but I don't, but they're driven by private entities as opposed to a government entity.

*Rajvi:*

OK, and so all these actions that you take are they part of your CSR or part of your finances? Or do you get some financing or grants? Do you apply for grants from the outside?

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

No. So, we So everything that we do, we do through profit that we've generated. and we have, some of the international operators that we work with have funds, they will use for the local projects. So we utilise that connection to pass that opportunity on to NGO s and marine life organisations that, we work with so definitely for us. We, I guess I like to see us as an ambassador for those NGO s and marine life organisations and give them a little bit more global, exposure and also the support in order to be able to do, the work that they do, and it works in two ways. So for us, we gain their experience and knowledge. Members of the team get to join them, on projects and expeditions, And then that knowledge comes back and is shared with the team, which can then be passed on in turn, to, to our guest. I think if you were to go on to most local islands and speak to members of the community. Be that people who are involved in tourism or people that are not and ask them about sustainability and about climate change. I think that they would have limited knowledge about the impact that they can make as an individual towards sustainability. and I think from a climate change, it would be around how we have definitely seen the weather patterns change. So where, when people think about climate change in the Maldives, the main, conversation is about sea level rises, isn't it? But I think the reality is that the climate, the weather patterns that we're seeing are impacting, due to higher tidal swells, more rain. And that is the impact that we're seeing here and now. So tidal swells, mean that, salt water can get into the groundwater level, so that obviously has an impact on water supplies to the island. it also impacts erosion. So on a day to day basis, whereas the global conversation might be about the Maldives disappearing because of increased, sea levels, it there's an impact happening here, here and now because of the change in weather patterns.

*Rajvi:*

OK, and also like, what about the visitors? do you think they have this active interest in sustainability? Because I think most of them just visit Maldives for the resorts and the beautiful beaches and to explore the corals. But, like, there's a lot of coral bleaching that also might be happening because of this climate change. So do you think visitors have an active interest in to learn about sustainability or just to learn what they can do better as tourists? Or do you think it's just, just they're just there for fun? And do you see that?

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

I think the majority of people coming to the Maldives come because the Maldives is on the bucket list. I think there are probably, repeater guests that have a greater understanding of the impact that climate change and their travel or how they travel in the Maldives has on the environment. And those people are probably more, interested in doing something to make a positive impact in terms of our own client base, I would say that 65% come because again it's the Maldives, and that 35% seek us out and travel with us because of the sustainability aspect, because they can get involved in activities and give back and make a positive impact. And I think the reality is that, you know, we still have a very strong proportion of people that travel with us that perhaps don't have, that haven't booked with us because of the sustainability. But hopefully because they're travelling with us, they then leave with a greater understanding And that sort of that ripple effect, isn't it? In terms of you, if you're speaking to people and you're giving them information and knowledge that hopefully they then go away and they talk about it. So I think it's far better that we have this opportunity where people are coming, not with sustainability in mind but if they're going to a resort, it really depends on how their resort, utilises the information and activities they have in the resort to spread that, and I think there's also a bit of, I would suggest this from a resort point of view, particularly that they won't necessarily, push or encourage. It's there if you're offered it potentially. But it's not something that they would naturally talk about in that connection. It will be spoken about as a experience, perhaps, but not the whys and the wherefores and how it links into that sort of climate impact and the work that they're doing.

*Rajvi:*

OK, that's Yeah, that's very interesting. also, what do you personally think about, the future of Maldives in this way? Like, do they need to accelerate the pace at which they are adapting these strategies? Or, you know, putting in these action plans into place or the pace that they're going now should be enough Or is there something more that they can do? They should do.

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

I think it's two-fold. So, I think there is an opportunity for education of tourists and agents before they even get to the Maldives. We had a meeting with Maldives border miles last year who are, like, who are connected to immigration. And it's a loyalty scheme basically for the Maldives. and we, we talked about two things. We suggested having a link on their website to a series of articles that talked about code of conduct for snorkelling, all positive things that are connected with the Maldives, but how people could do it in a more responsible manner. And then we also suggested about introducing, a pledge similar to those that are in Fiji and Iceland and Palau. So when guests were coming again, sort of that, opportunity for them to sign, to say that they've been made aware of five or six things and the Maldives border miles were very positive about it. and it was presented to the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism said, Well, if we get people to sign a pledge, then they're going to think they're going to get fined if they don't follow it, so, no, we won't introduce a pledge. And then the block. The articles also got sidelined because there was a change in, government.

So I'm, That's one thing that I'm still working on at the moment. The, you're probably aware the airport is under development, so there'll be a new international airport. So again, there's an opportunity there for people arriving for the arrival area while they're standing to get through immigration, having some form of, you know, I say education, but I don't mean it in the sense of, you know, classroom style and in terms of things that are, like a positive message. But people wouldn't perhaps take on board the, you know, the reasons why that positive message is there. So I think that that aspect, I believe, is something that could be very easily and very inexpensively done. And you're then targeting all those people that come to the Maldives firsthand. everybody has to fill in the Imuga, which is the online travel declaration. And from there, you could get them going off to look at these articles and or pledges pre their, arrival in the destination.

And then I think the other part of it is the, the actual what needs to happen? in terms of physical actions and there has got to be a change of pace, for sure. there has to be stronger policies or regulations in place that are effectively policed. So again, there's this, you know, setting up, you know, really easy standards for accommodation. And, you know, I'm a great believer in keeping it simple. So for a small guest house, you may just have two or three things under each of the sustainability pillars. So let's not make it complicated. And let's make it accessible for everybody to be able to do, or even people or even businesses, particularly resorts, having to feed back on the, you know, like a sustainability impact report, for example, on an annual basis. So I think there are things that I believe would not be difficult to implement. but I also think our biggest challenge is reclamation and development. We're still reclaiming islands. they stopped for five weeks during the main coral bleaching, but they've gone back to doing dredging again. So the coral reefs themselves are probably far more greatly impacted here because of development and reclamation. And ultimately, development and reclamation is about revenue source. With new resorts opening, and so that won't, regardless of what they say that won't ever go away.

*Rajvi:*

No, that's true because I also read their opening. They're going to work on more domestic, airports for a better connection between islands. Because it's and I understand that's also very important to have greater connectivity between the islands. but it at the cost of, environment.

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

Yeah. So the proposal, from the previous government was that there would be an international airport no more than 20 minutes from a local island, which meant in some atolls they were proposing two domestic airports. And at the moment, if they if they were to follow that through at the moment, that isn't the domestic air fleet in order

to be able to service those destinations, we also have, fleets of seaplanes. So surely it would be far more beneficial, in my opinion, to have a, a local ticketing price to enable locals to be able to fly to Mali as opposed to using a domestic flight. But they also introduced in the in the north in the, the three northern atolls and the two southern atolls. the RTL, which is a scheduled speed boat service operating on a timetable and the North because of how it connects. It's like a tube line underground map in terms of it has a number of hubs. and that definitely has improved transportation. and they're allegedly bringing it down now into the next three atolls. So if that boat service was available throughout the Maldives, then that would most definitely help with transportation and again be able to limit the need for, domestic airports. And I think the reality is that domestic airports are also probably. in some cases driven by requests from resorts as opposed to local requirements.

So, for an example, Soneva, who has three properties now in the Maldives and as a, a business. And they are very sustainable. They do a lot of great work, but there's also things that they do that they don't that doesn't get spoken about. So, for example, I was on an island in the far north called Makunudu, And I was there with Manta Trust because they were setting up a local research station there to train locals. And because there is, two Manta feeding points. So, Soneva took the only picnic island that was accessible to this local island. And that's where he's built his most recent resort, which is a stone's throw away from one of the Manta feeding stations. And then secondly, because he wanted because of the type of clientele he gets. He wanted an airport where private jets could also, park. part of the local island was reclaimed with lots of, trees being cut down in order to establish a domestic airport there for Soneva's resort.

*Rajvi:*

OK. That's, because, I read also about the Soneva Foundation, and went into detail about how much they do, And this is, not something that they cover. Yeah. And also, Maldives is a very It's a luxurious, tourism destination. So, I understand the kind of flight, these resorts get, so it makes sense, but not at the cost of environment.

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

I'd be far better off, in my opinion again, looking at, establishing a seaplane hub in the north and in the south. So at the moment, the seaplanes come out of Mali and then fly north and fly south, and they won't be able to fly all the way north or all the way south. So, they would be better off having, like, a hub where planes can land, can refuel. But then also, planes being able to get out. So I think, you know we as a destination, ultimately, sustainability, in my opinion, comes second play to the dollar and to, What's the word I'm looking for to what they believe would be a alienating tourists Because they feel that tourists, don't want to wait around. They don't want to take a longer seaplane flight. so yeah, it it's tough and it's got, I suppose, in the last post the pandemic. It's got more challenging because post the pandemic there, as with the rest of the tourism industry, you know, sustainability became far more of a talking point and before that, what we were doing was very unique. And I guess I felt that whilst there were challenges, there weren't there was the acceptance that this is the Maldives and this is what they're focused on whereas post the pandemic. It's more challenging because they have things written down on paper and they say things in media forums. But the reality of what actually happens isn't necessarily the same.

*Rajvi:*

Yeah, that's exactly why I wanted to learn about this. It's super interesting. This is also what I want to work on in the future. so this is this is just literally a stepping stone to understanding how these things work and how frustrating it can be to actually make people understand. Even in the tourism industry people, I don't think they have any idea about the term sustainability or what it actually means. It's more greenwashing at this point, So it's just something I need to learn more about the industry. I just want to thank you so much. This has been really, really nice.

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

You're very welcome. you can see on the website. There's a link to the climate action plan and also a link to the USAID Maldives plan as well.

*Rajvi:*

Yes, I will look into it. I went through your website and I just hope we can work again in the future together. It would be really nice.

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

You know where I am now. And if you've got any other questions or something comes out later on, when you're reviewing our conversation, then just drop me a note.

*Rajvi:*

Thank you so much for your time.

*Ms. Ruth Franklin:*

Bye

## **MATI's Executive Director Mr. Rafil Mohammed - Interview**

*Rajvi:*

OK. Can we start can I get an introduction about who you are and what's your role is in the morning?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

So I am, my name is Rafil Mohammed. I'm the executive director for MATI - Maldives Association of Tourism Industry. I oversee the day to day operations of the secretariat. that includes member communication, liaising with the governmental officers, other stakeholders as well. So I lead the secretariat and I also assist the executive board in execution of long term plans and strategies.

*Rajvi:*

And how long have you been a part of MATI?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

I, I've been here. This is gonna be my sixth year at MATI.

*Rajvi:*

Oh OK. Wow. So the focus of my thesis is about the strategies that are implemented and how it affects the various stakeholders in the tourism industry. And since your association is kind of a big player, it's, it's a very old organization. I just wanted to know that how you implement these strategies, what goes in the process, like what goes in the planning process and if there are any AIDS that you make use of and how you contact it. So I would just like to start with like what strategies do you use or what plans are you currently a part of action plan? Something that you can tell me about.

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

Yeah, so we are a nongovernmental organization and we are not a regulatory body. So we are not we, we, we, we are not a watchdog or we don't oversee the industry. So that mandate falls in the Ministry of Tourism. So we, we provide more of an advisory and advocacy role. So we don't come up with strategies ourselves, but we advocate for industry best practices. We advise the government and the Ministry of Tourism to when they make regulations or guidelines or policies to bring them to international best practices, tourism best practices, things that are conducive to the business environment and for the sustainability of, of our industry. So we are more of an advocacy and advisory body.

*Rajvi:*

Ok. so you, but so do you bring about the stakeholders, do you help them in it or are you just helping in the planning process of these as an advisory committee? Like do you also have implementation or?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

No, we, we don't we don't help with implementation because our members are private entity resorts. So, members are private parties. So, they would incorporate any measures, mitigation measures already as per their business requirements. We help in the planning, and we provide consultation to the relevant governmental bodies and other international organizations such as even UN based organizations as well. So, and we are mediator, we connect our members and the, and the tourism industry with such organizations.

*Rajvi:*

OK. So, have you also helped with the USAID program?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

we do, we give consultations.

*Rajvi:*

OK. And so, what would you say are the factors that influence with these climate adaptation strategies in Maldives? I understand it's a small island nation and it's far more affected by these changes in the environment. So, what are the main focus points that you like focus on while advising for these committees or anything that you could do?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

You mean what are the challenges. What are the most pressing?

*Rajvi:*

Yes. What are the factors? What is the most pressing issue or something that really grabs your attention?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

Climate change? Yes. Yes. So, climate change is one of the biggest threats facing Maldives and other small island nations, I guess. I think it's one of the biggest threats. And we see in terms of, we see severe weather-related events becoming more frequent. We see coral bleaching, mass, coral bleaching events, natural events like El Nino become more frequent as well. And we see soil erosion, beach erosion, sorry, beach erosion and weather-related damage were in intensifying. So, this is our biggest concern and we are putting in measures to mitigate that.

*Rajvi:*

Ok. And how difficult is it to put these plans into action? Because I understand you're an advisory committee. But so people might not be open to it or there are other like government bodies or that are very difficult to deal with?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

it's, it's a necessity. So almost all of the resorts that are affected, they are implementing various degrees of climate mitigation matters. So it's, it's to do with survival. So it's costly. But I think almost all the resorts are doing that, those that are at most risk. So due to the geographical, our geography is quite unique and not every island is the same. So different islands will have different, varying degrees of risk and effects. So that will differ. But I think almost all resorts are implementing and even local islands, they are implementing yes locals as well.

*Rajvi:*

So if you work, when you work with the government side of these things, like on paper, I can like we can say that, ok, they're taking these plans into action or something. But do you think it also happens in real life? How it's been discussed or is it way more difficult to know

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

for the resorts? It happens as planned. I don't know about local islands and government. We don't really engage

with the local island councils. That's more the government side, we represent more the tourism industry, private businesses, mainly resorts, but also suppliers some travel agencies and members like that.

*Rajvi:*

So, ok. So when you are so like when you're working with these private entities do also like they come together and do these results work together also if you have any idea about it

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

yes, we have brainstorming sessions. There are forums and exchange of knowledge amongst the not just our members but across the industry as a whole.

*Rajvi:*

Oh OK. And how effective are these plans like are they open to learning more from other resort or are they more individualistic? Like OK, we want to do it this way. So we do it this way.

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

You mean knowledge sharing or?

*Rajvi:*

Yeah, knowledge sharing like do they accept the knowledge or sometimes the results are like this is our policy and this is how we do it.

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

So no knowledge sharing is always, but at the end, the result decides what to do based on their unique geographical environment. But knowledge sharing happens across the board and even the government, some governmental entities give advice on best practices. So as a whole knowledge sharing takes place. But yes, at the end of the day, the resort will decide based on their requirements. So it's not a one size doesn't fit all?

*Rajvi:*

OK. Makes sense. And so since it's a Nongovernmental organization, how do you finance these things? Do you have like a membership fee for these members or how

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

we, we don't, as mentioned, we don't implement projects. So we are more an advisory and we are an advocacy group. So for us, the cost of operation is not that high. Our main costs are for manning the office, secretariat and conducting events. We have a membership fee based model. So our members pay a fee for our operation.

*Rajvi:*

Oh, ok. And what are the future plans or what direction do you think the tourism industry will move into due to these climate changes?

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

I think we are becoming, we are one of the first we are, I think the first nations to pledge to go carbon or net zero, achieve net zero by 2030. So, I think we are, we have always been an innovator and moving forward, I think whether even climate change is going to get worse. I think it will get worse before it gets better. I don't know whether we can avoid the temperature increases or adhere to the international climate change agreements that all countries are the most of the countries are signatories to. So, I think with emerging new technology and the rise of artificial intelligence, I think technology is moving at a fast pace and our hope is that we are able to leverage technology and innovate and in and innovate to come up with long lasting solutions. ok.

*Rajvi:*

That's so interesting. I think this is it. Thank you so much for your time.

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

Most welcome and apologies. I, I, I had some internet issues and my phone since joining this.

*Rajvi:*

Oh, It's ok. Yeah, don't worry. It's, it's ok completely. Thank you so much.

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

All the best with your research.

*Rajvi:*

Thank you and have a nice day.

*Mr. Rafil Mohammed:*

Have a nice day.

## **Save the Beach's President Hassan Ahmed - Interview**

*Rajvi*

Hm. Ok. So can, can you start by introducing yourself like what you do? what's your role in tourism and in your company?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Actually, my name is Hassan Ahmed. I am the President for Save the Beach Maldives. Save the Beach Maldives is a non-governmental local organization. So mostly our work is based on protecting the environment, doing awareness work, doing educational work with schools. Yeah, and we have been also doing a lot of studies on our coral reefs and in terms of tourism, we also carry out eco tours. So also, it's a educational program we do for tourists.

*Rajvi*

Ok. Ok. That's super interesting to hear. So, do you have like any adaptation strategies that you refer to maybe the USAID guideline or the government like the tourism plan or something that you refer to or do you follow your own personal sustainability plan?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Actually, sustainability is a word, sustainable tourism and climate adaptation is a big word that they use, also our government. Hm. The thing is most of the resorts which is built within the last five years, I will say it is mostly reclamation of lagoons, which is which they made land in, in a lagoon. They fill, they put a land on top of coral reefs and make a resort in this and they do like ecofriendly practices after all. So, these, these kinds of work has been carried out in the Maldives within the past five years. Like mostly it is not natural islands, but they make islands where there is shallow lagoons and where it is close to Male, the capital city where things are, where, where things are made. Also, things are made cheaper if, if the resorts are located near capital city. So as the government has given out most of the resorts for like the local islands where people are not living, uninhabited islands, they have, it is given out for to build resorts. And nowadays, like now there isn't any local island near Male at all. So, what they have started reclaiming islands in lagoons and selling to investors.

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok. That sounds horrifying, to be honest. So, like it must have a very adverse effect on the marine life around Male and those lagoons. Right?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Exactly. There is like a huge impact on our reefs. For an example, if you can search crossroads, I think it's made 6-7 islands within one big lagoon. Where they have reclaimed it all. And it's terrible still. and they take their guests far away to other reefs to do snorkelling.

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok. So, like all of these, like you said, are funded by the government, they are initiatives taken by the government to give these islands...

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Yeah. Yeah, those are initiatives taken by the government as well. Without government. they can't do reclamation, like even the biggest investors like it, it is going to get along with the government. Yeah.

*Rajvi*

Correct. Because this sounds interesting like to, for me to listen to because Maldives has always been known as a leading nation for this development, sustainable development for because it's a small island nation, it's more prone to these climate changes happening with the sea level rise and all of that.

So the more I am researching about this topic, the more I learn about this. So, so what do you like as an NGO as Save the Beach, what are your main priorities or what do you look forward like? What's your work plan? the most important part of it?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

The most important part of our work is to educate others on our natural environment and the status, the current status of our natural environment together with coral reef. So this is something we are very much focused on. as we've been studying our reefs since eight years now. So we can see the difference and we can see the impact of like the human impact to the reefs where the reefs are even not recovering back.

So, what we do is mostly we deliver this information to the government because in the Maldives still, we don't have a university where they teach marine biology. So we don't, meaning actually, there is very less knowledge within our community regarding our marine environment.

*Rajvi*

OK. So it must be difficult, to get your point forward to people who don't have the knowledge about this.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Yeah. So we have been trying for the past 17 years. So like we started our work in 2007. So it's still there in the field doing this work. But we started studying our reefs around like 8-9 years ago after, after we made a partnership with the University of Genoa in Italy.

*Rajvi*

Oh OK. So like the most education so do you educate the local communities or maybe the local businesses or who do you partner with the most?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

We, we try everything we could. So mostly we try with our local schools, local community. Other than that, we have done a collaboration with Secret Paradise. It's a tour operator who does sustainable tours around Maldives. I think the only to operator who does sustainable tourism around Maldives.

*Rajvi*

Ok. Secret Paradise. And, so what about these educational tours? Do you think tourists are more interested in learning about these things or because Maldives is shown as a luxury destination where you just go to resorts and relax? So, do you have tourists that come to you for education purposes or with the idea of..?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

A lot actually, we have been doing actually, our organization is sustained by doing these tours actually. So, we do a tour to explain our work that we have been doing in the island where we are based on. It's the island name is Villimale. So we call it a Villimale tour. So what we do is we take them around, we show them the work that we have been doing. Like we've been maintaining our beaches, we have been maintaining the island. We have we have placed dust bins on the beaches and we also do regular clean-ups, where our beaches are very, very clean now. So, it's a good successful project where we can show it to people. And also explain them the damages that we have been facing regarding the coastal developments after it started to go through the island. So, like we explain them the truth. And we also talk about the best practices, the people, about the corals, and the fishes and why they are important. After the tour, we do a presentation about our organization and the work and we have a local team and then that's about the tour. That's, yeah. And, and a lot of people do that and other than that, we do a snorkelling tour.

*Rajvi*

Ok. A snorkelling tour? Wow. so like, do you get, these tours directly or through Secret Paradise that you work with? Do you also work with some other companies?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

at the moment? No Secret Paradise because they are the only local. They are not wholly local but they, they are the most local company which is doing sustainable tours, like they only promote sustainable tours. So that's why. Yeah.

*Rajvi*

No, I understand. So, any other NGOs that you partner with that, you share your plans with that? You know, like I'm assuming there are not many in Maldives. So, do you guys work together or again, there's still a bit of individuality between these organizations.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Actually, we do a lot of individually, like we work individually but now there is a network, there is a platform where we have made that we all are connected together. So there we have formed a Maldives Ocean Alliance,

*Rajvi*

Ocean Alliance. OK.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Meaning we are partnering with all the people who are working in coral restoration work like growing reefs, studying reefs, even within resorts and local islands.

*Rajvi*

Ok. That's, that's a good initiative, I guess for, education, like knowledge sharing at least.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Yeah. Yeah. And also, like, we have, we get a lot of guests to do our tours and people, they do really appreciate it because we have been meeting people who have visited Maldives for 5-6 times and they have not gotten this experience. The people who really appreciate our tours.

*Rajvi*

I can imagine because there is more to Maldives than just the resorts and those white beaches, there's still a lot of culture to explore.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Also every island, it is like a resort. You know, we have white sand on every island we have.

*Rajvi*

That's, that's true. It's, it's really beautiful and I will definitely visit one day. I will let you know, I will book an eco-tour with you.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

It's not just a honeymoon destination anymore. It is also about experience today. Like I think you can explore Maldives also.

*Rajvi*

So what would you say? Like your biggest challenge is, is it the finances or how to sustain yourself or education, like you already said? But what are the main challenge that you face?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Still it's very difficult to do our own studies. Like I had to make my own small laboratory in my house to do my like to do my own basis of the experiments that we have been working on. So it's not easy. Also to raise funds is not easy still. because I don't know people, they don't, people are not willing to spend money in long term projects.

And now we don't like to work on short term projects because to grow corals for an example, it takes a long period of time, have a proper coral reef grown. It takes something like 3 to 4 years. So we need to in the, to initiate the project. We need to make sure that we have funds for like four years.

*Rajvi*

Wow. Ok. So do you look for these funds outside of Maldives? For example, do you have some maybe some organization or NGO that helps local businesses with coral restoration? Do you look for those outside or are you still trying to sustain yourself with it?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Mostly our funds are international funding actually. So we get funds for projects, specific projects. So now we are going to start a restoration for three years in two islands. We got this funding from Glo Mass Global like the, yeah, the chocolate people.

*Rajvi*

Oh, that's really interesting. So how do so what are your future plans like this three year project that you just said now is do you focus, I think you're a small company? So do you focus on one project at a time or do you have a few ongoing projects that you are also looking after.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Actually, we have few projects we are looking even now we have three projects in three islands which we are looking at. And we have grown reefs. Actually today, we are not just growing corals, we have grown back reefs. So that we can, every site that we work on it is a research site. Every site that we work on it is a site where we can do eco tours.

What we do is we train people in the local islands that we've been working on, and we empower them to understand their coral reefs, also to grow their coral reefs. And also, to gain from, the work that they're doing. So we, we also teach them to do eco tours and gain some funds from that to keep the projects going, sustaining.

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok. And another question. So once you are successful, like you have these coral reefs growing, do you think that these private companies who have, like snorkelling cruise or scuba diving and will come to those reefs or are they not allowed to, do you have any measures in place so that it doesn't?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

No, actually we, we have measures just for safe swimming practices other than that, anybody can visit the sites. It's just on the reef. So it's for everybody. We are growing corals for the world. It's not for us only.

*Rajvi*

No, no, I understand. It's just that if the people start coming again with the same boats and the same thing, I think it would have the same effect again.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

The thing is when you start doing sustainably, doing a project sustainably for a year or two, like you make friends with everybody who are around your work. And at the same time, you, you find respect from them where you, when you give respect they really want. So we are, I am, I am based in the capital city. I am going to islands where they need coral restoration for an example when they call me, when they ask me, hey, Beybe (Mr. Hassan), can you come, can you teach me something about coral?

So I say, hey, let's do a long term program and I raise funds and I go to these islands and I carry out the work. I try to train a team of 8-9 locals on restoration. And when we raise funds also, we put salaries for two people in the local islands where they can keep going as a part time job.

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok. That's, that's really nice. self-sustaining business model.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

The thing about staying in the greater Male. How can I save the whole of Maldives?

*Rajvi*

Yeah, this is long way to go

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

as much as possible.

*Rajvi*

Yeah, true. So, so with the current direction that Maldives is going in do you think it needs to accelerate on these kind of initiatives? And or do you think it's going at a pace that's understandable or good enough pace? Or do you think there has to be more initiatives by the government, by the businesses?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

I think we have to start even I'm talking about the government, I'm talking about the big investors, everybody actually. but I think is they need to face the reality. by saying climate change is happening and we are feeling it, we are the most low-lying countries is not enough.

*Rajvi*

Yeah.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

we need to act now, we need to act today. You know, the thing is when you make a island on top of a coral reef, when you destroy the whole area to make an island. and as a sustainable practice, what they do is they put solar for an example. I don't know how to measure this like they are killing a reef altogether and putting the island and putting solar in the and saying, hey, we are sustainable and they give their guest water in the glass bottles. They, they say they don't use single use plastics.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

And but when, when you go inside the staff areas, you see all single use plastic

*Rajvi*

This is the hypocrisy of big organizations.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Yeah. So what happens is mostly when people come to Maldives, they will not see this to their eyes. sometimes just to, what can I say? Sometimes to be nice. they also offer people to show their staff areas and when they do that, they will hide everything from your eyes. The resorts are like a separate government running within the island so they control the, the managers will control everything.

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

So the, the, the, the thing is there is good resorts. There are good people who are working in, the people aren't so hypocrite. It's the management.

*Rajvi*

Yeah. I can imagine. I mean, also for Maldives. the GDP is also dependent on tourism.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

So tourism and our coral reefs, tourism is based on our coral reefs. It's not just honeymooning like it's not just, it's not just a honeymoon destination. A lot of people, more people come here for diving.

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok. That's what you don't hear usually. So,

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

but the thing is that the only thing we have, that's the uniqueness, which we have, which we can compare like it can't be compared to any other country. in Maldives every day, you can go find a whale shark in Maldives. You can, every day you can swim with the manta in Maldives. You can every day, try to swim with dolphins in the wild.

*Rajvi*

No, I, I definitely need to visit soon.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

So, yeah. if we tried, like the only thing we sell is the ocean like there is so many excursions. There is like so many things that we do just like beside the room, they get, they get more money from the excursions, excursions, like are very much focused on honeymooners. But think about it when you go to a resort, when you stay for like 14 days. After a week, come on, you need to do stuff like this, can't just stay in the room.

*Rajvi*

No, I understand. ok. I think that was it for the like all the questions that I had if you have anything to add maybe, but I think you've said so much. Thank you so much. It's really going to help me with the research.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Actually, like we follow, we practice one of the best. like our hotel industry is really, really nice, like the service we give for our tourists, is another level, it can't be compared to anyone else. So our hotel industry in that sense, like it's the top notch, I will say like I have been to Europe, I have been to resorts elsewhere. You don't get this service.

*Rajvi*

No, no, I agree. Definitely the resort industry like the hotel industry is exceptionally good.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

You and the big brands who come here, they, they learn from our industry like hospitality experiences. So it's a mixture now where it has become really, really good. The service will be really nice. Even the staff are not paid enough. They will have a big smile for you. They will greet you like the happiest day.

*Rajvi*

Well, I, I have one more question. sorry. so like you said, the staff are not paid well, do you think that the locals are, are being exploited by these hoteliers and the industry?

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

that definitely

*Rajvi*

Oh, ok.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Yeah, like the low line staff will be paid the minimum wage. They will not pay more than that. But they, our resorts, they earn millions, they earn millions. And there is the, what can I say? Like, the, the most of the money which it's tourism, it's not even staying here. the most of the two operators who are selling Maldives, they are registered in other countries.

So the money, when they take money it's going to other countries, it's not directly coming to Maldives, you know, and they say in this resorts they can cheat in their accounts. They say, hey, we are not profiting, you know?

*Rajvi*

Ok.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

that today all, all these kind of things are there. I think it's all around the world today.

*Rajvi*

Yeah, it's all around the world. I understand.

*Rajvi*

I guess the government needs to, have more strict rules regarding...

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

the thing is government is also like that. They are all together.

*Rajvi*

That's, that's the problem, I think all over the world.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Exactly. Like we can, like, we can try it, we can try, things can change because, I think the new generation, they, they can't tolerate all of this. At a point, It will change. So we just have to try.

*Rajvi*

Yeah, let's hope for the best and hope it happens soon because we're losing time, the more we actually.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Exactly. But, I think more and more people are today, are aware on, different issues because today the world is in your, on your fingertips so you can do everything where you have the interest in. So, yeah, like even here I am studying without having a university.

I think I have learned which have come, we had to come to this point, like it's coming from different universities. Different short courses. Yeah, it's not easy. But you can do what you really wanna do. That's what I mean.

*Rajvi*

No, I agree. I agree with you. Yeah. So, thank you so much. And hopefully, I'll see you soon in Maldives.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

You're welcome. Yeah. See you soon. Actually. I love Maldives. You can see more in person.

*Rajvi*

Oh, definitely. Bye.

*Mr. Hassan Ahmed*

Bye.