



Opening Ceremony of the Urban Farming Facility
Under the ‘Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development for SMEs’
(SEEDS) Project

Monday, 20 September 2021, 4:15pm - 5:30pm UTC+5, Hulhumalé HDC Urban Gardening Facility

Speech by Vera Hakim, UNDP Maldives Resident Representative ad interim

Minister of Fisheries, Agriculture and Marine Resources, Honourable Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan,

Minister of Economic Development, Honourable Ustaz Fayyaz Ismail

Her Excellency, Keiko Yanai, Ambassador of Japan to the Maldives,

Managing Director of Housing Development Corporation, Mr. Suhail Ahmed,

Farmers, and other special invitees gracing our ceremony today,

Assalaam Alaikum. A very Good Afternoon.

It is a distinct honour for me to be here today at the official opening of the urban farming programme in Hulhumalé by the Housing Development Corporation.

More so in the presence of many distinguished architects of this new thinking in urban development. And most notably our farmers - who will not only sow the seeds, but we hope will truly reap the rewards, along with the community, of this visionary initiative.

We thank our partner, the Government and people of Japan for their generous support to this initiative.

This urban farming component is one of the offshoots of a project that was immediately conceived to increase resilience in the face of COVID-19.

The pandemic has been a challenging time. When it first hit, the repercussions were felt instantly across sectors here, from tourism to trade.

The Rapid Livelihoods Assessment jointly conducted by the Government of Maldives and UNDP laid bare the deep, widespread and cross-cutting socio-economic impacts of the crisis.

The complete closure of the Maldives tourism industry hit hard on jobs and livelihoods, leaving knock-on effects on families and communities.

As a country that relies heavily on imported food and fuels - when supply chains slowed down and borders shut, the Maldives also faced the risk of food insecurity.

The crisis compounded the existing vulnerabilities of this small island state, arising from its narrow economic base.

It is in this atmosphere that the 'Sustainable Economic Empowerment and Development for SMEs', or SEEDS project was conceived: in a time of challenges, opportunity, and innovation.

I therefore share your immense pride and great hope, as we open this urban farming facility today, under the SEEDS project.

UNDP, supported by Japan, is proud to be a partner of the Government of Maldives and HDC of in this project - an important initiative in the country's efforts to kick-start the economy following the COVID-19 crisis.

The project is innovative: It is designed to promote green farming practices and build resilient food systems.

It focuses on economic diversification: by building a new generation of agro entrepreneurs to help mitigate future shocks.

It promotes entrepreneurship: through sustaining support to farmers by provisioning registration of the agri-business with the support of HDC and Business Center Corporation (BCC). It also enables farmers to scale up production, reduce start-up risks, manage finances and market products.

It cultivates synergies: through mentoring programmes that connects new farmers with more established agriculture businesses - all with the support of BCC and the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture and the AgroNational Corporation.

The SEEDs project also champions inclusivity: providing opportunities for young people, people with disabilities, women and men - to initiate self-owned agricultural enterprises, cultivate new ideas and actively participate in transforming the landscape.

UNDP is very hopeful that this project will not only make a meaningful contribution to sustainable economic development, but will also accelerate social and economic equality and inclusivity in the sector.

It therefore gives me great delight to observe today's important milestone of the SEEDS project.

Congratulations to the 48 farmers who have been selected for the urban farming agriculture incubation programme for young and new generation farmers in the Greater Malé Region! May the fruits of your labour be enjoyed for generations to come.

We are extremely grateful to our partner ministries, the Ministry of Economic Development and Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture and the ministers themselves, for their close support, guidance and keen interest in the project since its inception.

On behalf of the UNDP, I would also like to express a special thank you to our implementing partners, such as HDC, for their drive and dedication to bring this initiative to the people.

Our sincere appreciation goes out to Business Center Corporation, Agro National Corporation, and of course, the Government of Japan for the excellent partnerships that we have enjoyed throughout this project.

As we work to gain back the ground we lost during the pandemic, UNDP remains committed to work with our partners and the people of Maldives to make the transition to more diversified sectors with stronger food value chains, affordable and nutritious food, and a vibrant economy.

This is a crucial step to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, such as Goal 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. Our goal is to Leave No One Behind.

We continue our path towards the resilience, and sustainability of the agriculture sector for people, planet and prosperity.

Together, let's build a future that works for everyone.

I thank you.

Shukriya. Stay safe and well.