

Concept Note: Disaster Risk Awareness Campaign

Working with the people of Maldives on the road to relief, long-term recovery and disaster preparedness planning



Introduction to the Campaign

For centuries, Maldivians have co-existed in relative harmony with their natural environment, with the coral reefs and the surrounding oceans forming the lifeblood of the country. However, with the inevitable impact of globalization, tourism and the rapid pace of development, new socio-economic and cultural customs, alien and detached from the essential culture of the Maldives, have surfaced. Today, these unprecedented scales of urbanization have nurtured new lifestyles and novel modes of social organization, marked by a swift departure from sustainable forms of livelihoods. In some islands, such dynamic shifts have irrevocably set in place untenable and dangerous practices that threaten the very social fabric and hence survival of the islands.

The need to revitalize the beliefs of our ancestors and their harmonious way of life therefore has become an urgent and pressing concern. The necessity of this was no doubt seen on December 26, 2004, when the Maldives faced the first and worst disaster ever recorded in its national history. For a country that had never experienced devastation at such magnitude, the tsunami exposed the acute vulnerability of the Maldivian people to natural calamities, but also more importantly, exposed their lack of knowledge and the coping capacities available to respond in wake of such hazards and disasters.

Understanding that people must be given the skills to prepare and cope, it is also essential that they learn to avoid lifestyle and livelihood practices that increase their vulnerability to an impending disaster. Through a phenomenological enquiry, it is hoped that this campaign will unveil new insights into the risk perceived by Maldivians in general, and the actual risk felt, and in so doing, identify the knowledge gaps that exist with regard to disasters. Further, the campaign also strives to identify resources which are accessible and available to the people and in doing so, nurture locally embedded knowledge and capacities..