

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW- HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
UNICEF INPUTS – BELIZE

1. Background and Framework

1. Belize's population is estimated to be at 311,000 with more than half living in rural areas (52%) and almost half (48%) being under the age of 18 years. Belize is characterized by being a multi-ethnic society with the Mestizo being the largest group (48%) followed by Creole (25%), Maya (11%), and Garifuna (6%). Smaller percentages of East Indian, Mennonite, Chinese and European also comprise the population.
2. In spite of increased export volume, Belize's economy is still one with a small productive base and high level of imports. Recent fiscal and economic changes, however, (e.g. impact of hurricanes and changes to global markets) constitute a watershed mark. Major challenges include: unsustainable fiscal and economic account imbalances, pressures of globalization and trade liberalization, weak debt servicing capacity and a vulnerable public revenue base.
3. Belize operates a Westminster Parliamentary System inherited from Great Britain upon gaining independence in 1981. In February of this year Belize saw a new administration after 10 years of government by the now party in opposition. There is a bi-cameral National Assembly comprised of 31 elected members in the House of Representatives and a 13 member appointed Senate.
4. Belize is an active member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Central American Integration System (SICA). Given its geographical location on the mainland of Central America, combined with its deep historical and cultural ties to the Caribbean, many see Belize as having a key role to play as a "bridge" between the two regions. Although the idea has been talked about for many years, it has never really been put on the national agenda and adopted as a part of Belize's development vision.
5. Belize also has a strong record of being an active member of the UN community and participant in global undertakings. At the same time, increased efforts are required to move beyond a focus on global instruments and compliance reporting – to enabling a national human rights framework and a human rights-based approach to development. This is evident in gender based unequal access to basic services, insufficient targeting of social investments and limited disaggregation of data to reflect disparities.
6. The 2002 Country Poverty Assessment demonstrates that 33.5% of the population continues to live below the poverty line, with an indigent rate of 10.8% and close to 40% of children living in poverty, reaching as high as 84.5% in the poorest districts and among the ethnic Mayan population. Women and their families are also over represented in poverty figures. Serious disparities, unevenly experienced by the indigenous populations, are masked by national averages and therefore inequalities and exclusion among populations are largely obscured. Available disaggregated data reveal disparities in income, health and nutrition status, access to quality services, school drop-out and completion rates, teenage pregnancy and child labour.

7. On average, 30% of children access Early Childhood Development (ECD), while access to primary education is relatively high, with net enrolment in primary education over 90%. Currently, access figures disguise high drop out and repetition rates. The education picture is further complicated by a lack of standardised text books and monitoring of schools across the 80/20 of primary schools that are managed by religious organisations / government respectively. Gender differentials see boys more likely to repeat, less likely to transit to secondary education and more likely to be involved in child labour, while the expulsion of pregnant girls continues in schools managed by religious organisations, and despite their higher school attendance and achievement, girls show lower employment rates and a very low share of national income.
8. Belize maintains the highest HIV infection rate in Central America, increasing to 2.5% prevalence rate in 2006. Gender disparities and ingrained stigma and discrimination hamper efforts to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015 and inhibit universal access to testing, prevention, treatment and care. It is estimated, for example, that as many as 90% of the population has not yet been tested for HIV. The overall male to female ratio of infection remains at 1:1; infection patterns are highest for 15-29 year old females and for 30-49 year old males. Women in Belize face obstacles in the use of contraceptives, in seeking sexual and reproductive health counselling, and in making decisions about their sexual behaviour due to the control of their spouses, partners, families, and society. In a 2006 UNICEF study, only 12% of girls aged 15-19 indicated they use any form of contraception and only 39% of any age use contraception even when they recognise their vulnerability. Mother-to-Child transmission (MTCT) in 2006 was at 12%, but it also needs to be acknowledged that not all babies were tested. MTCT remains the most significant source of infection in children below the age of 10 years, who account for 6% of all HIV cases and 4% of AIDS cases.
9. Family violence, gender based violence and the sexual abuse of children, teen pregnancy, the persistent use of corporal punishment in institutions and homes; a re-emerging 'gang' culture combined with easy access to guns; and evidence of rape and sexual exploitation are emerging trends that have heightened human rights concerns. While there have been improvements in recent years, legal and social protection systems require further strengthening to cope with the numbers of children and young people at risk in Belize.
10. Belize is vulnerable to natural disasters, especially hurricanes and flooding. The National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) has indicated that the national emergency response capacity will likely face challenges in responding to major hurricane and flooding related disasters. The Government response also could be undermined by those shelters which are structurally unstable with inadequate water and sanitation facilities. It is apparent that particular vulnerabilities to such disasters are greater for more excluded and dependent populations (especially women and children and the aged). Community-based preparedness illustrates the scope for an increased contribution of children and adolescents to prepare for and respond to disasters and must include a gender focus to better prepare and respond to the vulnerability of women in these disasters. Coastal areas remain especially vulnerable, and indigenous populations in the Southern District further isolated with rising rivers, vulnerable housing and their livelihoods at risk from disasters.
11. The Government of Belize (GoB) has ratified or signed several international human rights instruments to include the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial

Discrimination, Convention Against Torture, and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, CRC Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Protection and Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. Belize has been consistent in its periodic reporting on the situation of and compliance with two of the international conventions, those concerning women and children.

Promotion and protection of human rights and capacity building – The Role of UNICEF

1. Duty-bearers in Belize continue to face challenges in fully meeting their obligations as is evident in the low implementation rates of the National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents - 2004-2015, because of inadequate resources, poor governance and disproportionate urban/rural service provision. The understanding of 'human rights' in Belize requires going beyond civil and political rights to an appreciation of all rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights and to move from need to entitlement. Work undertaken with children and young people in Belize must reach parents and communities, with attention given to the weak role of the media in reporting on human rights issues.
2. The 2007 – 2011 UNICEF Country Programme and Action Plan (CPAP) is designed to support the Government of Belize to meet development priorities, the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and Declaration, and to fulfill the human rights of children and adolescents. Under the framework of the Belize *National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents* (NPA), the CPAP addresses ongoing threats to MDG achievement by focusing on nutrition, child survival, safe motherhood, quality education, HIV, positive adolescent development, violence and disaster preparedness and response. It builds on previous efforts to strengthen the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights and the obligation of duty-bearers, including parents and community members, to ensure that the Belizean child benefits from high-quality and effective policies, legislation, resource allocation, and equitable access to basic services.
3. Key human rights principles underlie the approach of the CPAP. The principles of universality and non-discrimination are applied at the policy level and through programme implementation designed to promote user friendly and accessible services for children living in the most disadvantaged communities. The principles of the child's right to survival, development and participation is incorporated in each programme, coordinated to respond to specific age group characteristics and to the evolving capacities of the child.
4. The respected, independent and impartial voice of UNICEF raised on behalf of the children and women combined with targeted interventions have been crucial as it is one of the very few organizations keeping issues on the public agenda and directed to achieving significant policy, legislative and investment shifts in their favour. There is a need for support to conduct human rights training across the UN System in Belize as well as with Government and other counterparts.
5. UNICEF has also addressed human rights violation as primary school children have access to vastly improved water and sanitation conditions – seven thousand and forty-eight children in 37 primary schools in the Stann Creek and Toledo Districts have access to improved water and sanitation facilities and have received hygiene education. An assessment of all 86 schools in these districts shows that 80 per cent of the school facilities were so unacceptable they constituted a human rights violation. The very concrete results see the children enjoying new flushing toilets or

VIP latrines, wash hand basins and water fountains. Children have learnt improved practices from a hygiene education manual, and other educational materials disseminated as a part of the campaign. Community ownership for the initiative and hygiene education reaching beyond just the child into the families was achieved through a series of community meetings.

6. A Positive Discipline Model was piloted in primary schools supported by UNICEF – seven thousand, eight hundred and seventy children in 11 schools are directly impacted by a positive discipline pilot project that employs a whole-school approach, underpinned by the CRC and aimed at eliminating corporal punishment in schools. Two hundred and forty-one teachers and 15 school administrators trained through monthly sessions on classroom management and non-violent techniques of behavior management. The school administrators received additional training in leadership and the management of change processes. Children have been involved not only in the application of the classroom management techniques, but also in the monitoring and evaluation of the project and a baseline study on corporal punishment has been completed and will be disseminated in early 2008. The implementation of the pilot has been met with expected high levels of resistance as it challenges engrained and traditional beliefs and attitudes towards the use of violence against children. Components of the pilot have been reconfigured to better respond to the resistance including a change in the training methodology and increase of monitoring and technical support visits to the schools. The efforts are already yielding results in some schools as reports from students, teachers and observations by project monitors indicate positive changes in adult-child interactions.
7. Indigenous children access early childhood education services as a result of UNICEF's intervention – twenty-three children access early childhood education services through the establishment of a preschool in rural Toledo. The classroom is outfitted and modeled on the best ECE learning environment. This is a major achievement in view of the fact that only 25 per cent of 3 - 4 year olds attend preschool in Belize, and the majority of the schools fail to meet basic ECE standards.
8. Five hundred children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS received care and support (some for the first time) through UNICEF's support to three CBOs. In the Belize District, the district with the highest incidence of HIV infection, 118 children received direct assistance with food, medication, books, uniforms, hygiene and sanitation supplies and other essential items through Hand in Hand Ministries; 300 children nationally are benefiting from direct support through the Caring for Children Network; and 75 children in Stann Creek District – the district with the second highest incidence of HIV infection – are benefiting from participation in a School First Remedial Programme which includes homework help, life skills and an evening meal in a safe and protective environment.
9. Primary schools (Mopan, Kekchi, and Garifuna) are active beneficiaries under the Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) initiative through teaching and use of learning materials in the vernacular language, capacity building/sensitization in the IBE approach at school and community levels, and inter-school networking. With the support of this project, the first ever Garifuna primary school was established providing an impetus for wider acceptance of IBE in Belize. To support this initiative, twelve officials from the MOE, indigenous organizations, the University of Belize and community leaders participated in a "Best Practice Exchange" visit to neighbouring Guatemala. The Guatemala experience crystallized for the team the benefits of IBE, established South-to-South cooperation and renewed their commitments to ensuring success. Assisting UNICEF in the management of this project is an Oversight Committee comprised of representatives of the key agencies including UNESCO.

10. The National Garifuna Council Youth Arm and the Maya Leaders Alliance Youth Coalition and their advisers were trained in areas of human rights, Inter-Cultural Bilingual Education, leadership skills; advocacy & resource mobilization; and writing and reading of indigenous languages through eight capacity building and rights sensitizing sessions/workshops. The spin-offs in this regard has exceeded planned results, as indigenous young people are actively engaged in income generation activities utilizing the products generated from the cultural enrichment and skill development workshops as a means to addressing sustainability of the youth arms. In addition, this aspect of the overall project has seen the Julian Cho Society mobilize further support from Galen University Graduate students as well as the University of South Florida, USA in areas related to research methodologies and video editing/production.
11. Twelve social sector agencies, under the leadership of UNICEF, have established a working alliance resulting in the development and initial implementation of a comprehensive pilot project to ensure that all children who are vulnerable to violence and abuse, victims and or perpetrators of crime have access to quality child protection services.
12. All Senior Commanders of the Belize Police Department, including the Commissioner and his deputies received training in Human Rights. In addition 75 police officers, special constables and community volunteers (Citizen on Patrol - COP) were trained in human rights and policing. Trainings were conducted by UNICEF staff as part of its commitment to build capacity of duty bearers to meet their obligations and to present the issues within the larger context establishing a culture of rights in the country. In addition, UNICEF provided additional technical assistance and resources to strengthen the delivery of human rights at the Police Academy.
13. UNICEF has provided support to the newly appointed National Women's Commission, with responsibility to monitor government's implementation of the CEDAW, by facilitating a two day orientation session on the articles of the conventions as well as other human rights instruments relevant to the attainment of gender equality and equity.
14. This year in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UNICEF has partnered with UNDP to support the Human Rights Commission of Belize to engage in public awareness activities and panel discussions on the theme and other related areas.
15. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Children's Rights (IMCCR), a high level mechanism approved by Cabinet to affect shared responsibility/accountability for the effective planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of GOB/UNICEF's Programme of Cooperation 2007 – 2011 was established. This important mechanism provides further access to policymakers as well as the requisite space for high level policy dialogue through which to influence the development and implementation of national child-friendly policies and programmes.