Executive Summary
OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN IN BELIZE 2011
AN ECOLOGICAL REVIEW
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This rights-focused Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Belize is about the importance of the ecology in which children grow. It examines the conditions necessary for the full achievement of children and women's rights. One of the key messages that emerges relates to the importance of early and consistent investments across the life-cycle and how timely, culturally-relevant investments translate into positive outcomes for boys, girls and women to shape lives.

The UNICEF review of the situation of children and women calls the attention of policymakers, parents, teachers and other duty-bearers to the need to build a strong connection between developmental programmes and policies in order to construct a coherent set of supports and services. This system is needed in all spaces and across the lifecycle. Such a system would depend on integrated and multi-level support mechanisms and evidence-based policies managed by skilled providers. It emphasizes the importance that culture plays in a country as diverse as Belize and the need to tailor programmes that place culture as a core component of most, if not all, developmental programmes.

Many laws and policies exist in Belize, which confirm the Government's commitment to the achievement of child rights in keeping with the National Plan of Action on Children. The challenge is translating those legal frameworks into concrete actions, systems and services to achieve full developmental rights. Children and women will be healthier, happier and ready to contribute to Belize's national development agenda when families, schools, social services and communities provide equitable access and opportunities for social, participation and networking. In this process, sub-national structures in towns, villages and communities need to be mobilized to support the change.

Boys, girls and women too, can be more empowered to play a role in their own development by providing them opportunities to express themselves, build knowledge and skills, increase networking and mobility to make lasting and meaningful change in homes, schools and communities as productive citizens. When all children and women know their rights and feel empowered to act on them in favour of development, more overall national development will be the result.

UNICEF is committed to work alongside the Government and people of Belize to support the ongoing efforts to create the environments that foster positive developmental outcomes. In the final analysis, the true measure of success in achievement of rights will be judged by boys, girls and women in Belize through their positive expression about their sense of identity, life satisfaction and social well being as citizens of Belize.

Christine Norton
Representative
Overview

Belize is a unique country, full of natural beauty, historical significance, and a vibrant and diverse cultural mix. It occupies an important political and cultural space between Central America and the Caribbean. It is a country with much promise, as well as challenges in reaching that promise. A broad goal of this Situation Analysis (SitAn) is to support the movement towards the achievement of that promise by gathering information and data on factors related to the promotion of well-being, rights and equity for children and women in Belize, with recommendations for policy and programming. The 2010 SitAn was developed through a collaborative process with the Government of Belize and a broad range of national stakeholders to ensure that the situation and views represented are as inclusive as possible. The document takes into account trends across multiple domains, policies, programmes, capacities and underlying structures related to the rights, welfare and equity of girls, boys and women.

In addition, an important aim of this SitAn is to support a re-positioning of UNICEF in relation to social policy planning and implementation at the community levels in order to maximize its value and contribution. UNICEF Belize is committed to increasing its attention towards policy advocacy and partnerships, while still maintaining its focus on the achievement of MDGs, equity and human rights goals.

Analytical framework. Important for this SitAn, we are employing an ecological framework to organize the discussion of the status of women and children in Belize with respect to the achievement of rights and MDGs. Social development efforts of all kinds are increasingly being understood as occurring within a broad and interconnected framework of contributing factors at multiple levels of society. From this perspective, a key theme underlying the organization of this SitAn is that the attainment of rights and equity is founded on the achievement of social well-being. Therefore, to hasten the attainment of rights, it is necessary to address social well-being.

UNICEF, as the key UN agency focusing on children, has at the core of its mission the advancement of a broad agenda of child rights, health, education, equity, protection, participation and development. From a social-ecological perspective, in order to achieve these goals, progress must occur with respect to a range of contributing factors that, together, support their attainment. To facilitate that understanding and focus policy and programme efforts where they can have the most effective and sustained impact, the SitAn is organized in a continuum of domains from those that have a more proximal impact (socioeconomic opportunities, education, health, and protective assets), to those that have more distal and causal impacts (system capacity, policy and legal structures, poverty and inequity, crisis vulnerability, geography, culture, governance and economic vulnerability).

Brief Summary of Findings

Based on the review of data from multiple sources presented in this document, the following is a very brief summary of findings that illustrate the way in which domains of social well-being are linked, and the way in which coordinated policy approaches that incorporate multiple-domain impacts can support the attainment of rights and equity for women and children in Belize:

• Despite the categorization of Belize as a middle and now high income country, poverty and wealth inequity are significant. The poverty rate is typically higher than the norm for Caribbean countries but comparable or slightly better than other Central American countries. Poverty and inequity in Belize are outcomes of both a general economic and environmental vulnerability (e.g., to global market fluctuations, hurricane and storm damage), and a pattern of unequal access across the lifecycle to economic, educational, health, protective assets, and political resources and supports — by gender, region, cultural group, and socioeconomic group. Regarding the achievement of rights and MDGs, alleviation of poverty supports positive change in other domains, including health, education, protective assets (those that guard against violence victimization and exploitation), and participation in society.

• The economic situation and economic opportunities have begun to rebound from the period of global recession beginning in 2008, when levels of poverty and socioeconomic inequity increased. This may somehow improve rates of unemployment and emigration in search for work. Yet in order for the economic sector to support equity, there must be a change in traditional job segregation and opportunities for women of all cultural groups, and efforts to reach out and provide the opportunities needed for training and educational success, so that children and adolescents in all districts believe they have a social and economic future in Belize. Equity of economic opportunity would also be facilitated with the improvement of roads and transportation infrastructure, which is currently a barrier for many, although there have been recently clear improvements in some districts. Improved economic opportunities, tied to education and training opportunities, may also reduce the involvement of youth in violence and gangs. Increasing and diversifying the economic opportunity across districts in an equitable manner supports a positive change in other domains, including education, health, and protective assets. (See Diagram 1)


- There have been notable successes in some health areas, particularly in the provision of vaccines, increased access to anti-retroviral therapy for AIDS patients, prevention of perinatal HIV transmission, national health insurance, health information system, and the completion of a sexual behaviour survey in 2009. Overall, however, there is not nearly enough capacity in terms of trained personnel and data systems, which remains a barrier to equity in health. In order to reduce HIV and STI rates – along with the related risks for cervical cancer – prevention efforts need to reach those at high risk, including adolescents and girls out of school, prison inmates, and individuals both in rural and tourist areas. Stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS needs to be confronted, and the knowledge about HIV/AIDS is still low regarding specific transmission risks. The sanitation infrastructure, especially in rural areas, also remains a problem, though there have been steady efforts towards improvement. Health education regarding hygiene practices would increase the impact of those infrastructure changes. In addition, there has been a historical lack of attention to mental health issues and services, including those related to substance abuse. Importantly, the general disease profile in Belize has moved from infectious and communicable diseases to lifestyle-related conditions (e.g., cardiovascular health, diabetes, obesity), warranting an integrated prevention approach.

**Improved health status and health-serving capacity supports positive change in other domains, including protective assets, participation, education, economic opportunity, and poverty.** (See Diagram 2)

- The educational system is hindered by economic barriers (school fees, transportation), lack of capacity and cultural flexibility, complex organization and management, need for trained teachers, issues with classroom and school discipline practices that do not respect child rights, and the need for vocational and tertiary education opportunities that are stimulating and relevant to the economic need. School success would also be improved by increased public awareness about children's developmental needs (including books and educational materials at home). Gender roles (that differ by cultural group) have an effect on girls and young women's continued school attendance; yet school dropout is also a problem for boys. Repetition beginning at an early age, failure to complete school, and limited opportunities for job skills training affect self-esteem and become a risk factor for employment, access to resources, and health. At the same time, there are examples of strategies and approaches used by some schools that have been effective in meeting these challenges, and these best practices should be disseminated and evaluated. **Improved educational access and quality support, positive change in gender equity, economic opportunity, health, the judicial and legal system (protective assets), and the social services system throughout Belize – all rely on adequate workforce capacity.** (See Diagram 2)
There is a growing body of law and policy in Belize that supports a wide range of protections against exploitation, trafficking, victimization, discrimination, and exclusion, and guarantees participation and religious/cultural freedom. Belize is signatory to the CRC, CEDAW, and many other conventions – most recently the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. A key issue in this domain is the gap between the legal framework and the institutional capacity to support these guarantees. Access to appropriate courts, birth registration, availability of social and legal services, quality and availability of disability and special needs services, elimination of stigma and isolation for those who are disabled, conflicts in the law surrounding marriage and consent, and general legal enforcement outside the major urban centres is an area that needs considerable strengthening – a task that would be facilitated both through the allocation of government resources and capacity building by education, training and certification programmes. Domestic violence, commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), trafficking, child abuse, and labour exploitation require further investment to overcome the challenges exacerbated by the lack of capacity. There are also concerns related to family structure. The growing number of female-head-ed households often results in economic hardship and poor parental supervision and support, impacting inter-personal development, school performance, attendance, and risk behaviour. In addition, the juvenile justice system deserves more investment to fully implement a prevention-oriented approach that ensures that young offenders receive early attention and rehabilitation. Improvement in protective assets supports participation at multiple levels, such as access to health and social services, economic opportunity and equity, improvement in poverty (income increases when labour exploitation decreases), and access to education.

- The communication infrastructure and capability in Belize are improving, and new media outlets are emerging, even in the face of logistical barriers posed by geography and population dispersion. Yet communications (television, Internet, wireless, radio, print) in Belize are still held back by low (and inequitable) Internet access, and a lack of capacity and training – there are, for example, few media and communication programmes at Belize colleges and universities that have adequate facilities, staff or expertise. Belizeans generally go abroad for such training. Moreover, participation by the youth and across Belizean cultural groups is minimal because there are few communication or civic engagement opportunities. As a consequence, access to information about a wide range of is-
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- Belize is a vulnerable country for reasons that are both beyond and within its control. Its vulnerability to hurricanes and storms is a geographical fact owing to its location and predominantly (except for the Mayan Mountain area) low-lying territory. And because it is a small country, the economy is substantially tied to regional and global markets. The maintenance of a disaster infrastructure dispersed across all regions, and the diverse economic development to buffer market fluctuations are within its control, though. Currently, the disaster infrastructure is an area that needs to be focused, including dispersion of shelters and safety resources as well as improvements in the housing stock, land/water use planning in vulnerable areas, and the basic supply of water, sanitation and hygiene services. Hurricanes, for example, routinely cause extensive damage in areas such as Southside Belize City, some areas of Stann Creek and Toledo districts where housing quality and infrastructure is often inadequate. Basic commodities appear to be available for women and children in responding to crises, and the increased need to address the rights of women and children is recognised. There are still gaps in the availability of a wider range of shelter development and strengthening, physical supplies and less tangible requirements, e.g. privacy for lactating mothers. There are also gaps in the protection of children’s needs during and after emergencies: while many schools have been designated as shelters, for example, very few have decided where to hold classes in/after emergency situations, putting education at risk. Data limitations are substantial with respect to assessing the availability of essential commodities. Improvements in crisis vulnerability support better and more sustained economic opportunity, health, and protective assets. (See Diagram 5)

- General issues of governance in Belize result in a situation where policy, programme and legislative initiatives exist to support progress towards improvement in multiple domains, and thus the achievement of rights and equity. However, many of these initiatives are not fully implemented, because they are not operationalized and/or there is no capacity to implement, monitor, or to evaluate their effectiveness. An improvement in strategies, processes and capacity for implementation in government supports positive change in all domains, and thus the achievement in rights and equity.

- The multicultural strength that Belize offers also presents one of its most sustained challenges. To achieve equity and full participation means continued progress towards the incorporation of children and women across the major cultural groups; for example, by ensuring that communication efforts are available in multiple languages, school curricula and teaching practices are culturally competent, disaster and crisis procedures are multi-lingual, and employment opportunities extend across regions. Supporting the equitable involvement of all cultures increases participation, strengthens the attainment of equity in all domains, and increases cultural identity and a sense of belonging.

- A research and technical assistance (TA) agenda could include: general TA on programme planning and evaluation (to assist in coordinating programmes under common strategic approaches, and to identify best practices); TA to the Ministry of Education and other Ministries on the implementation of sustainable water/sanitation efforts and infrastructure improvement in schools, together with communication and education on water hygiene; research on media use (youth, adult, rural, urban, by culture) in order to improve communication capability; TA on communications and media development; TA on preventive approaches to juvenile justice; research on perceptions related to participation (“belonging”) across cultural groups; research on gender norms/expectations across cultural groups; and research on HIV risk.
behaviours among higher risk populations (there is, for example, no data on substance use and its relation to HIV/AIDS risk).

These findings and their implications can be summarized by a general principle:

Rights are founded on a web of social well-being that affects the entire life-cycle. Because the domains of social well-being are interconnected, change in any domain can be supported by change in others. Linking progress across multiple domains is key to achieving children and women’s rights, promoting their development and facilitating their ability to contribute positively to Belizean society.

Summary of Recommendations

Based on the findings, a number of specific recommendations were developed, by level of the overall ecological framework within the idea of social well-being. The following is a summary:

The first level encompasses domains that are proximal – most directly connected to social well-being. These domains are: Socioeconomic Opportunity, Health, Education, and Protective Asset Equity. As described in the full Situation Analysis, there have been some significant improvements as well as challenges in these domains. The second level is composed of domains that represent the necessary services, supports, policies and capacities to ensure that the institutions and activities at the first level can in fact provide what is necessary to foster social well-being, rights and equity. These second-level domains include Capacity (resources, infrastructure and workforce), Policy and Legal Structures. At this level, the Situation Analysis has identified important gaps. Issues and recommendations for both levels are combined as follows:

**Socioeconomic Opportunity:**

1) Expand the scope and capacity of tertiary education offerings so that they are a better match for the full range of job opportunities and can support a more equitable gender mix.

2) Encourage, through policy and public awareness, gender-balanced recruitment across all job sectors.

3) Continue to improve the transportation infrastructure and safety monitoring, particularly in Toledo and other areas currently less integrated into the nation’s economic structure.

4) Support public-private efforts to foster innovation and entrepreneurial activity among adolescents, and across all ethnic/cultural groups.

5) Focus on improving communications and information technology (IT) infrastructure and access – a key to contemporary business opportunity.

6) Increase access for women and adolescents of all ethnic backgrounds to civil society organisations that are connected to business opportunities in order to build social capital and increase the likelihood of funding/financial support for new business ideas, including “green” business (important for environmentally vulnerable Belize).

**Health:**

7) Implement a “healthy lifestyle” approach in education and prevention efforts across the life-cycle that integrate multiple health concerns and potentially maximizes the impact of prevention initiatives as well as support for those initiatives.
8) Improve the strategic planning and coordination of programmes targeting vulnerable populations for HIV/AIDS. There should be a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that maximizes resources to identify (with adequate data) and reach these population groups; at present, there are only scattered programmes. Also increase the involvement of those groups with substantial community-level reach, e.g. NGOs, CBOs.

9) Work towards common ground to find an approach to reproductive health education and prevention programming that can cut across the current challenges, inconsistencies and barriers to implementation in part resulting from the politicization of the issue and the complex (but entrenched) nature of school ownership/management. Expand the capacity of tertiary education offerings so that they are a better match for the full range of job opportunities and can support a more equitable gender mix.

10) Continue work to improve sustainable water and sanitation infrastructure in schools – particularly in rural areas – and implement education and communication campaign on water/hygiene practices.

11) Increase the visibility, awareness and capacity with respect to mental health efforts within the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Human Development.

12) Develop and implement public awareness campaigns in multiple languages that seek to reduce stigma related to mental health, disabilities, and HIV/AIDS.

13) Capitalize on cross-border use of medical expertise at least in the short-to-medium term. It is acknowledged that this is a complex and sensitive issue, but regional meetings of the Central American Ministers of Health have already recommended this approach to increasing capacity.

14) Build internal capacity (health, education, data, social services) by implementing requirements (bonding) for Belizean students who are funded to study abroad so that they return to Belize for a specified period of time (e.g. five years).

15) De-centralize and expand training for education and health so that culturally specific practices and materials are incorporated in the recruiting and training of local staff. This, in turn, will have positive impacts on participation, capacity, and economic development. If Belize is to accept its multicultural nature, this must be operationalized in governance structures.

16) Increase the emphasis on bilingual capability for programme staff and personnel, especially in districts where this is a key social fact.

17) Basic educational resources need to be provided at the community level, through community centres that include educational and health supports – libraries, health education materials, tutoring, computing/Internet facilities, etc.

18) Belize needs to develop an expansive cadre of sufficiently-paid, multi-skilled community/field workers that can, among other roles, adequately address information, education and communication tasks. One option is to expand/enhance the current team of community health workers.

Education:

19) Continue the effort to upgrade teacher training and to improve teachers’ cross-cultural understanding and capability, as well as latitude for incorporating lessons learned. Teacher training should be implemented within the context of a whole-school improvement approach.

20) Educational programmes and curricula need to vary by district and cultural mix so that they are appropriate, more effective, and retain the interest and participation of children (both genders). While there may be increased costs to such an approach in the short term, it offers long-term benefits.

21) Work with organisations in traditional Maya communities to explore strategies for maintaining and supporting the continued involvement of girls in school.

22) Increase the focus on retaining boys in secondary (and tertiary) education, based on the extensive data that now exist, and address factors that are contributing to the pattern of early dropout and low transition. Current practice in disciplining students should be re-examined with an understanding that these practices have an effect on school dropout and consideration of “second chances.” Continue experiments (such as cash transfers/incentives for school completion) and evaluate results.

23) Recruit more men to serve as teachers at all levels.

24) Utilize schools as a dissemination point for education to students and the community regarding hygiene practices (e.g., water treatment, storage, hand washing), and improve effectiveness of relevant messages.

25) As noted above for health, build internal capacity (health, education, data,
26) As noted above for health, decentralize and expand training for education and health so that culturally specific practices and materials are incorporated in the recruiting and training of local staff. This, in turn, will have positive impacts on participation, capacity, and economic development.

27) Increase the emphasis on bilingual capability for programme staff and personnel, especially in districts where this is a key social fact.

28) Basic educational resources need to be provided at the community level, through community centres that include educational and health supports – libraries, health education materials, tutoring, computing/Internet facilities, etc.

29) Disseminate effective educational models and practices and their criteria/methods for measuring success (Examples include: St. John’s College and St. Catherine’s Academy for their focus on teaching excellence and support for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds; Belize High School for its innovative use of technology).

Protective Asset Equity:

30) The approach to youth violence should shift from crime suppression to child development and prevention, in a way that is culturally appropriate for each district, because the context of violence/delinquency manifests itself differently.

31) Develop a plan and implementation strategy for how to handle disabled populations, with assignment of responsibilities, roles, and resource allocation. This, as for other programme administration, should be decentralized. Further identification/facilitation for appropriate targeting should become possible via the recently completed census.


33) Implement recommendations for specific legislative amendments to the Juvenile Offenders Act, the Penal System Reform (Alternative Sentences Act), the Probation of Offenders Act as set out in the “Vulnerability Analysis of the Juvenile Justice System, 2007”.

34) Repeal the Certified Institutions Act and Regulations [Now that there is a Social Services Agencies Act and Regulations for residential facilities taking care of children, the act is no longer needed. In addition, the provisions added to the Families and Children Act (FACA) that address children with anti-social behaviour now renders the provisions in the Certified Institutions Act that address uncontrollable behaviour obsolete.]

35) Remove the Wagner’s Youth Facility from the Prison Complex or place it under the Social Services Agencies Act and Regulations. Also, there is a need to re-energise rehabilitation programmes offered at the facility to address reports of abandoned programmes due to limited resources.

36) Revise and repurpose the National Drug Abuse Council — there is need for an updated policy and plan of action, additional staff, and additional programmes.

37) Develop a new vision for the Youth Hostel in line with the new draft policies and procedures of the Community Rehabilitation Department to strengthen programmes and provide better transition from institution to society in order to address high recidivism rates.

38) Staff the Juvenile Justice Courts with trained mediators and social workers in each district.

39) Strengthen first time offenders programmes and ensure collaboration in those programmes with those offered by the Cadet Core, Youth For the Future, Community Policing Unit and Restore Belize to avoid duplication and also to ensure that comprehensive services are provided.

40) Re-sensitize the police regarding the rights of juveniles and develop collaborative community initiatives between police and youth in Southside Belize to address juvenile hostility and distrust towards police.

41) Revitalize National and District Committees on Community Service and expand Community Service options in the Penal System Reform (Alternative Sentences) Act.

42) Make improvements with respect to social worker capacity: Re-train the current cohort of social workers in all the policies and procedures of the department as well as cross training for other areas of the Ministry. Implement faster response times by social workers when there are requests for social inquiry reports in custody and adoption cases. Add social workers in each district, especially social workers attached to each family/juvenile court to prepare court reports and to do spot checks and court appointed visitations in matters before the district court.
43) Improve collaboration between the Women’s Department, Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Community Rehabilitation Department (CRD).

44) Include the child protection system and role of the police in the training curriculum for police officers at the training academy.

45) Re-train doctors who must perform medical examinations on the new medical-legal form and on how to present expert medical evidence in court.

46) Improve counseling capacity: Develop a better counseling programme at the University of Belize to provide specializations in trauma counseling and counseling victims of sexual violence. Expand the Belize counseling centre and establish properly staffed counseling facilities in each district.

47) Expand the foster care programme and improve marketing of the programme and the development of more support services for foster families.

48) Enact the law that prohibits commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) and develop and implement a national plan of action to eliminate CSEC.

49) With respect to communications: Increase the capacity at the University of Belize and at smaller colleges to train Belizeans in media and communications – essential for a participating and informed polity, and for the dissemination of information about health, education, socioeconomic opportunities and other facets of public life. (The recommendations listed in this document would benefit from expanded information, education and communications campaigns.)

50) With respect to communications: Increase the percentage of people in all districts who have access to the Internet and are familiar with its use.

51) All recommendations in this Executive Summary and Situation Analysis are relevant to this domain.

Crisis Vulnerability:

52) For crisis vulnerability, the NEMO plan needs to be re-organized to emphasize de-centralization of resources to maximize immediate response. Pro-active planning for disaster response is imperative, especially with global climate change. This includes ongoing disaster preparedness, communication and enforcement of building codes, etc. As it is often the case, there are laws to the matter, but no means of enforcement. Community-level strengthening and resources will also provide more immediate access to response. This could also include capacity-building, training, and engaging village councils with disaster preparedness and response duties.

53) Institute increased enforcement of water, sanitation and related infrastructure requirements to ensure potable water availability.

54) Institute a review and increase enforcement of safety regulations in general, with respect to vehicle and road safety, water safety, and other transport.

Finally, at the most fundamental fourth level are the basic, long-term causal domains that create the environmental and social context that underlies Level Three social conditions. These domains are Geography, Cultural Factors, Governance and Economic Vulnerability.

55) All recommendations that seek to improve infrastructure, socioeconomic opportunity, participation, and crisis vulnerability will mitigate the impact of geographic factors.

Social/Cultural

56) A general principle and commitment: While there has always been public discourse about Belizean multiculturalism, a real commitment must be made to better understand and value the multicultural nature of Belize as an asset. This will require movement towards decentralization of governing functions, training, resources, and programmes, and over the longer term, attitudinal shifts.

57) Improve the working understanding of child and human development milestones across programmes that address children’s issues so that appropriate norms and expectations are understood across the lifecycle. Public education and communications campaigns can be helpful in this respect. There is also a need to recognize potential cultural differences in child-rearing approaches.

58) Address quality of education by investing in the quality of teachers with respect to subject matter expertise and pedagogic methods. Increased quality will also require better pay.
59) Increase discourse on the value of non-English use in school environments.

**Governance:**

60) In order to maximize outcomes towards the achievement of rights and goals, reduce the gap between plans, policies and implementation by including specific procedures and milestones for implementation, and the training and allocation of staff responsible for implementation, as well as consistent monitoring/evaluation.

61) Increase accountability requirements as part of the development of planning documents.

62) Disseminate information about successful small and local programmes, in education, health, youth support, disabilities, juvenile justice, economic development and develop a best practice inventory – via a website – that can be accessed by anyone. Examples include CARE Belize’s disability programmes, several well-performing schools, and many individual success stories. Along the same lines, increase access to lessons learned via non-governmental organisations.

63) Improve IT/data capabilities and access across all ministries and agencies (including NGOs, CBOs), with respect to technology, technical skills, etc. Data is essential to effective planning and accountability – for example, to determine where to locate schools and services so that they are accessible, and to better identify high risk HIV/AIDS populations (including those in prison).

64) Minimize high turnover and loss of skills as well as institutional knowledge in agencies through increased investment in staff, better pay, and improved documentation. Also minimize turnover (solely) due to political reasons.

65) Increase the dissemination of institutionalized knowledge within ministries so that proper functioning is not dependent on just a few individuals.

66) Continue progress towards elimination of corruption and patronage politics. In the long term, this will increase participation, increase trust in government, reduce cynicism, and improve attitudes among children and women regarding equity and opportunity.

67) Using the kind of theoretical framework presented in this document, organize the governmental response to key issues around an understanding of multiple contributing factors, which should then lead to coordinated, multi-sectoral action.

**Economic Vulnerability:**

68) Continue efforts to reduce the debt burden and debt-to-GDP ratio.

69) Over the long term, work towards a diverse economy less dependent on fluctuating external sources, and more forward-looking – particularly in the area of “green economy” enterprises.

70) Over the long term, continue progress towards inclusive economic involvement that maximizes the development and employment of internal capacity. This will contribute to a sense of “belonging” and reduce emigration.

**Key Principles**

The findings and recommendations in the 2010 Situation Analysis follow from the analysis of specific domains, and from their interconnected nature. This can be understood under three basic principles:

**ONE:** Investments to achieve children’s and women’s rights in Belize must be made across the lifecycle. Development is a continuous and cumulative process – what happens later in the lifecycle is conditioned by what happened earlier.

**TWO:** Investments to achieve children’s and women’s rights in Belize must be made across multiple domains. No domain exists in isolation from others – what happens in schools and neighbourhoods is conditioned by what happens at home, which is in turn conditioned by social, cultural and economic opportunity as well as gender equity, which in turn is affected by the capacity of multiple systems to support those opportunities.

**THREE:** The institutions of Belizean society, as duty-bearers, exist in an ongoing, multi-dimensional relationship with children and women as rights holders. That relationship is not confined to single actions, or programmes or policies. Like any relationship, it requires continuity, interaction, responsiveness, and commitment.
This rights-focused Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Belize is about the importance of the ecology in which children grow. It examines the conditions necessary for the full achievement of children and women's rights. One of the key messages that emerges relates to the importance of early and consistent investments across the lifecycle and how timely, culturally-relevant investments translate into positive outcomes for boys, girls and women to shape lives.

The UNICEF review of the situation of children and women calls the attention of policymakers, parents, teachers and other duty bearers to the need to build a strong connection between developmental programmes and policies in order to construct a coherent set of supports and services. This system is needed in all spaces and across the lifecycle. Such a system would depend on integrated and multi-level support mechanisms and evidence-based policies managed by skilled providers. It emphasizes the importance that culture plays in a country as diverse as Belize and the need to tailor programmes that place culture as a core component of most, if not all, developmental programmes.

Many laws and policies exist in Belize, which confirm the Government's commitment to the achievement of child rights in keeping with the National Plan of Action on Children. The challenge is translating those legal frameworks into concrete actions, systems and services to achieve full developmental rights. Children and women will be healthier, happier and ready to contribute to Belize's national development agenda when families, schools, social services and communities provide equitable access and opportunities for social, participation and networking. In this process, sub-national structures in towns, villages and communities need to be mobilized to support the change.

Boys, girls and women too, can be more empowered to play a role in their own development by providing them opportunities to express themselves; build knowledge and skills; increase networking and mobility to make lasting and meaningful change in homes, schools and communities as productive citizens. When all children and women know their rights and feel empowered to act on them in favour of development, more overall national development will be the result.

UNICEF is committed to work alongside the Government and people of Belize to support the ongoing efforts to create the environments that foster positive developmental outcomes. In the final analysis, the true measure of success in achievement of rights will be judged by boys, girls and women of Belize through their positive expression about their sense of identity, life satisfaction and social well being as citizens of Belize.

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Representative