**NATIONAL CONSULTATION**

**Sustainable Recovery and Resilience towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in**

**BELIZE**

**Date: April 20th, 2022**

**1 pm to 4 pm**

**ORGANIZERS:**

**United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**

**Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG)**

**United nations office for sustainable development (UNOSD)**

**United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)**

**Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean**

**in close coordination with:**

**United Nations Resident Coordinator Office (UNRCO) and United Nations Country Team (UNCT)**

**in partnership with the Government of**

**BELIZE**

**CONCEPT NOTE**

**Background:**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody the strategic vision and aspirations of all countries for the future of development. Its implementation will require comprehensive actions at the global, regional, and national levels, as indicated in General Assembly Resolution 70/1 on Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, a new emphasis is placed on how policy coherence and better integrated planning mechanisms can help countries strengthen their planning processes, develop holistic development frameworks reflecting global, regional and special commitments, such as the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS, and achieve their national development objectives in a more effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable way, ensuring that ‘no one is left behind’.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic where the world faced an unprecedented fast-changing scenario for which developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have limited capacity, the relevance of strong, integrated policies and policy coherence is reinforced.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started out as a severe and acute public health emergency, has since become a socioeconomic crisis of immense proportion that has had significant impacts on social and economic systems, threatening many of the development gains made across countries. The primary cost of the pandemic has been the loss of many lives although the secondary effects of the pandemic on the economy, livelihoods and sustainable development prospects are more alarming. In a context of global contraction, Latin America and the Caribbean subregion have been hardest hit by the crisis stemming from COVID-19.

External challenges specific to the Caribbean subregion included the near total shutdown of air and cruise travel, significantly impacting the tourism sector which is the backbone of many of the economies in the Caribbean as well as foreign exchange earnings; stress in related supply chains (agriculture, construction, hotels, restaurants, entertainment and the culture, cultural and creative industries or the orange economy); a sharp contraction in larger economies, a downturn in commodities prices, the contraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and remittances; disruption in transportation and global supply chains; risk aversion for external investors, and restrictions on foreign exchange availability.

The impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups - including persons with disabilities (PWDs), children, women and girls, female-headed households, and persons living with HIV/AIDS among others have been stark due to the economic fallout experienced by countries as well as the disruptions in access to basic social services. Many persons also have been impacted by the disruption of essential health services including services for sexual and reproductive health, non-communicable diseases and mental health support. These vulnerable groups and communities were challenged before the pandemic by economic hardship and social disparities.

Like many countries the world over, Caribbean countries also experienced several challenges in education due to school closures. Other social issues worth mentioning as a result of the pandemic include food insecurity, food gluts due to supply chain disruptions, and increases in gender-based violence although the latter has not been fully quantified.

Belize is a lower middle-income developing country with a pre-COVID-19 poverty rate of 52 per cent (201,616 persons), compared to 41 percent or 136,640 persons in 2009. Another 11 per cent of the population is considered vulnerable to poverty[[1]](#footnote-1). Among the ‘poor’ population, about 9 percent or 35,663 persons and indigent are critically poor. About 11 per cent or 42,590 persons were classified as vulnerable to poverty in 2018. These were persons who are classified as not poor’ but are at risk of falling into poverty if they experienced some type of economic/exogenous shock or a natural disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic therefore puts these persons at risk. Fifty-seven per cent of youth 15 – 24 years are classified as poor. The poverty rate in rural areas rose slightly in 2018 to 59 per cent, compared to 55 per cent in 2009. Most of the poor in rural areas are smallholder farmers and agricultural workers. However, the level of poverty in the urban areas showed a more significant increase from 28 percent in 2009 to 43 percent in 2018[[2]](#footnote-2).

Women make up more than 50 per cent of the population. In 2021, Belize scored 0.7 in the gender gap index, the highest score since 2015, representing a gender gap of approximately 30 per cent, meaning that women are 30 percent less likely than men to have equal opportunities.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The 2020 Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Belize 110 among 188 countries, with an HDI of 0.716[[4]](#footnote-4). This status, however, belies a high poverty rate, high income disparity, inequality, stagnation in GDP growth, and an increasing debt to GDP ratio. Although Belize has the third highest per capita income in Central America, the average income figure masks a huge income disparity between rich and poor and high levels of poverty.

Belize therefore entered the pandemic with pre-existing vulnerabilities. Real GDP growth had slowed from 4.7 per cent in 2000–09 to 2.8 percent in 2010–14 and 1.8 percent in 2015–19. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, Belize’s economy was in recession with real GDP contracting by 2.2 per cent year on year in the last quarter of 2019 and 6.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2020[[5]](#footnote-5). The country has also experienced a weakened fiscal position with the fiscal deficit widening from an average of 1.1 per cent of GDP in 2007-2014 per cent to 4.3 percent in 2015-2019. This was due mainly to a rise in public expenditures that was partly offset by an increase in revenues. The primary balance fell from 2.2 percent of GDP in 2007-2014 to -1.5 percent of GDP in 2015-2019. This resulted in a rise in public debt from 78.9 per cent of GDP in 2014 to 97.5 per cent of GDP in 2019.

Labour market outcomes, as of September 2019, indicated an unemployment rate of 10.4 per cent with under-employment at 20 per cent, with women experiencing 33 per cent and men 16 per cent under-employment.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Belize has a natural resource-based economy: tourism, followed by exports of agricultural commodities and crude oil. The lack of diversification of the export base makes Belize highly vulnerable to external shocks and compromises its resilience. For example, Belize is highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards including extreme hydro-meteorological events due to its geographic location, which leaves it exposed to the risk of rising sea levels and more frequent and more intense tropical storms and flooding. Over the past 15 years, natural disasters have caused damage equivalent to 3.16 per cent of GDP per annum[[7]](#footnote-7).

Since the start of the pandemic there has been 57,191 infections and 654 coronavirus-related deaths. Belize has administered at least 465,000 doses of COVID vaccines so far, with 52 per cent of the country’s population fully vaccinated[[8]](#footnote-8).

In response to the pandemic, the Government introduced several measures to support its population and key sectors including:

* A fiscal stimulus amounting to BZ$25 million (1 percent of GDP) in 2020 to provide short term relief to employees affected by the crisis, especially those in the tourism sector, exceeding more than 40,000 applications for unemployment relief
* Support to the healthcare sector financed with loans from bilateral and multilateral creditors
* Support to the unemployed financed with loans from bilateral and multilateral creditors.
* The Central Bank of Belize adopted prudential measures to maintain the flow of credit in the economy: (i) reducing the statutory cash reserve requirements; (ii) extending the time period to classify targeted non-performing loans in sectors such as restaurants, transportation and distribution companies, and other affected areas, from 3 months to 6 months; (iii) encouraging domestic banks and credit unions to provide grace periods for servicing interest and/or principal of commercial and ancillary loans, as needed and where commercially viable; (iv) reducing risk-weights for banks on loans in the tourism sector from 100 percent to 50 percent; and (v) reviewing financial institutions’ business continuity and cybersecurity plans to ensure that an adequate level of financial services will be available to the public.

**Objective:**

The National Consultation represents Phase II of the UNDESA and ECLAC cooperation with Belize that aims at strengthening the integrated recovery planning and decision-making capacity of the national stakeholders in **BELIZE** and other participating Caribbean States involved in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and building back better towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

The National Consultation aims at discussing with stakeholders the progress in formulating and implementing sustainable recovery plans in Belize and receiving input and concrete recommendations on building back better and accelerating the implementation of the country’s national plans and advancing the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

**Target Audience:**

The national consultation will bring together a wide range of Government, CSOs, academia, indigenous peoples and private sector representatives engaged in national development planning and other COVID-19 recovery plans, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. The national consultation also will include relevant the UN Country Team in Belize, and UN System partners. Some possible organizations that could be targeted for the consultation include:

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| --- | --- |
| **Public Sector**  | **Civil Society** |
| * Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management
* Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, and Investment
* Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Enterprise
* Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labour and Local Government
* Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and Immigration
* Ministry of Health and Wellness
* Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Housing
* Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous People’s Affairs
* Ministry of Natural Resources, Petroleum and Mining
* Ministry of Tourism and Diaspora Relations
* Ministry of Transport, Youth and Sports
* Ministry of Education, Culture, Science & Technology and E-Governance
* Ministry of Blue Economy and Civil Aviation
* Ministry of National Defence and Border Security
* Ministry of Home Affairs and New Growth Industries
* Ministry of Public Utilities
* Ministry of Public Service, Constitutional, Political Reform and Religion
* Attorney General Ministry
 | * Association of Protected Areas Management Organization
* National Trade Union Congress of Belize
* National Committee for Families and Children
* Belize Family Life Association
* UNIBAM
* Women’s Issues Network of Belize (WIN\_Belize)
* Our Circle
* Economic Development Council
* Protect Areas Management Trust
 |
| **Private Sector**  | **Academia**  |
| * Belize Chamber of Commerce
* Belize Development Finance Corporation
* Belize Credit Union League
 | * University of Belize
* University of the West Indies (Open Campus)
* Galen University
* ATLIB
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| **Development Partners and Regional Organizations** |  |
| * UNDP
* ECLAC
* UNICEF
* Un Women Multi-Country Office
* FAO
* DESA
* CDB
* CCCCC
* The Nature Conservancy
* Inter-American Commission of Human Rights
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**Strategy UNDESA and ECLAC Cooperation (Target Group/ main activities/ approach/methodology)**

The National Webinar/Virtual National Consultation is included under Phase II of UNDESA and ECLAC cooperation in Belize and includes:

**Phase 1:**

* **Provision of advisory support to BELIZE** with focus on researching the COVID-19 pandemic, its impacts and evaluating the progress in recovery planning measures and methodologies in the Caribbean Region in general and in **BELIZE**. The technical support will be provided through regional and national experts.

**Phase 2:**

* Organizing a **virtual national consultation/webinar in** **BELIZE**, during April 2022 aimed at discussing the progress in formulating and implementing integrated recovery plans and strategies that are intended to accelerate the development and implementation of the country’s new medium-term strategy which is currently being prepared to cover the period 2021 – 2025 and which contains the following overarching priorities: poverty reduction (including social protection); economic transformation; citizen security; protection of the environment and eliminating corruption as well as the sustainable development goals.

**Phase 3:**

* **Adapting the UNDESA – UNITAR e-learning course** “*Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence towards the SDGs”*, with specific emphasis to the national context of Belize and integrating green deals and green recovery approaches.

**Phase 4:**

* **Delivery of e-learning course** *“Integrated Recovery Planning and Policy Coherence towards the SDGs: The Belize Context”*, in Belize using a Train-the-Trainer format targeting Government, Civil Society Organization representatives, Academia, Youth, Indigenous People and the Private Sector.
1. <http://sib.org.bz/wp-content/uploads/PovertyStudy2018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://sib.org.bz/wp-content/uploads/PovertyStudy2018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gender gap index in Belize from 2015 to 2021. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/803474/belize-gender-gap-index/>. Assessed on: October 15, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2021/06/07/Belize-2021-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-the-50198> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. IMF. 2021 Belize: 2021 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Belize [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UN Belize Common Country Analysis 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. UN Belize Common Country Analysis 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/belize/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)