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2011 Resident Coordinator Annual Report – Belize

Belize as a middle income country in Central America and the Caribbean was not immune from the global economic crisis; however she recorded modest economic growth that continued to be constrained by high sovereign debt, weak tourism flows and persistent financial sector weakness. In the first three quarters of 2011 GDP grew by 2.7% compared to 1.8% increase over the same period in 2010. The improved growth was primarily driven by the manufacturing sector with sugar and citrus production increasing, with some modest increases in tourist arrivals. With slow economic recovery Prime Minister Dean Barrow and the ruling United Democratic Party, legislative majority has been challenged in addressing issues of increased levels of crime, delivering quality public services and meeting the public's expectations for improved quality of living.

The Government continued to place poverty reduction at the centre of its national strategy, although the challenges of poverty and inequality remain in the forefront. With 41.3% of the population poor, Belize is not on track to achieving MDG1, which would be further affected by increasing levels of unemployment from 20.3% in 2000 to 23.1% in 2010. Women recorded twice the unemployment rate of men at 16.7% and the age group 15-24 unemployment was 23.1% in 2010. With increased poverty levels the impact on equity for women and children are affected across all domains. It is of note that citizen security has been deteriorating, with 42 murders per 100,000 habitants in 2010 and Belize was categorized among the 14 most violent countries in world. In 2011 Belize ranked 93 of 187 countries with an HDI of 0.699, and on the gender inequality index ranked at 98. Other underlying causes of the challenges in making progress towards the MDGs are linked to weak public sector, both in terms of human resources and business processes for planning, procurement, financial management, audit, monitoring and reporting, which makes it highly susceptible to political influence. Hence, the UNCT in the preparation and elaboration of the next UNDAF has stressed the need to strengthen the national culture of human rights and the use of data and analysis to support policy making.

Notwithstanding the many challenges faced by Belize, in 2011 it became the 148th signatory to the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. This commitment by the state will allow for greater UNCT supported action in this critical area.

Highlights on progress in UN reform

Towards closer coordination of United Nations work in Belize, the UNCT along with national partners in mid-year completed its roadmap and engaged in consultations with stakeholders on the preparatory process for the next UNDAF covering the period 2013 – 2016. This commenced with a roll-out workshop in July 2011 that saw the participation of government officials and civil society engaged in identifying areas for strategic UN support in Belize. The UNCT also undertook to clearly map-out its comparative advantage and areas of greatest impact in delivering support to enhance development results. Lessons coming out of these engagements with national partners pointed to the need for greater coordination among UN Agencies and stakeholder groups. The UNCT engaged in various levels of consultations with stakeholders to guide the process of completing the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and participating in a strategic prioritization exercise that saw the emergence of the priority areas for the next UNDAF. The areas to be addressed

includes, (a) advancing human rights with equity, equality and non-discrimination (b) promoting economic and social well-being, citizen security and justice; (c) environmental and natural resource management, disaster risk reduction and climate change and (d) democratic governance, capacity development, effectiveness and responsiveness enhanced. Capacity development initiatives were done to support the UNDAF process with training in Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and Results Based Management (RBM) programming principles for UN staff, government and civil society officials.

The UNCT, through the Resident Coordinator actively sought the inclusion of non-resident agencies in the UNDAF process that saw their active involvement and commitment to fostering greater coherence and collaboration of UN efforts in Belize. Their inputs were key to demonstrating a coordinated UN system's approach in the second UNDAF for Belize. The challenge will remain on how to better integrate the work of the NRA's in a coordinated and coherent fashion.

Joint Teams and Theme Groups continued to work on their respective mandates throughout the year. The UN Emergency Technical Team (UNETT) chaired by UNDP, continued its work on disaster management and preparedness, and focussed its interventions on improving the country's institutional capacities for disaster preparedness and effective response. The UN Inter-Agency Emergency Response Plan was reviewed and modified to adequately reflect the UN's mandate for emergency humanitarian response by the UNCT. In 2011, UNETT supported training on gender and disaster for government officials of the National Emergency Management Organization; and with support from OCHA, government officials, UNCT and UNETT members also underwent training in disaster management and response. PAHO/WHO also supported the development of a national Cholera Preparedness Action Plan. In May 2011 some UNETT members, namely UNDP, UNICEF and PAHO/WHO participated in the Disaster Risk Management Community of Practice training, in an effort to accelerate capacity development in country.

The UN Joint Team on HIV/AIDS chaired by UNFPA, provided technical support to national authorities to strengthen their response in addressing critical issues of gender HIV/AIDS which influences national development and national partners response, through the following areas: development of a national HIV strategic plan and operational plan; UNAIDS supported the Collaborative Network of Persons Living with HIV (C-NET+) to conduct their first general assembly of persons living with HIV. UNDP led UN's support for the development of edutainment, media and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) educational sessions targeted at out of school population. The Joint Team also supported the launch of UNAIDS gender agenda for women, girls and HIV through the conduct of a gender symposium, that had the participation of national partners.

The UN Security Management Team, led by the Designated Official had the support from UNDSS advisor in Guatemala throughout the year that resulted in the Security Level System being implemented January 1, 2011. Other milestones achieved were training on SLS for all UN staff and training of the Security Management Team; drivers from all resident agencies completed defensive driving course; and new MOSS and MORSS were approved for Belize in mid 2011. Due to the increased levels of crime and violence in country, the SMT recommended changing the SLS from level 2 low; no change was made up to year end. This issue will require some revisiting in 2012.

Other joint UN efforts in 2011 saw UNICEF and UNFPA collaboration on an adolescent girl's project through the undertaking of a coverage study. The formalization of a joint programming framework remains lacking but

would allow for greater cohesiveness in UN delivery in this area. While, Belize's is committed in having the normative frameworks that supports human rights principles in national policy and planning, reporting requirements continued to be a challenge. In this regard, the UN system through support from UNDP and UNICEF assisted the Government in meeting CEDAW and CRC reporting. Nonetheless, there is still tremendous scope for UN system support to strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of the national entities involved in human rights education and monitoring.

2011 was marked by a UN led initiative to support aid coordination in the area of citizen security and justice through the establishment of a Development Coordination group on Citizen Security with the participation of key development partners working in Belize, such as the US, UK, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, European Union, OAS and IADB; in addition to resident and non-resident UN agencies. This coordination platform will assist both the UN system and other development partners in identifying the critical gaps to fill in supporting Government's efforts on citizen security. The Government welcomed this initiative and it is expected to allow for greater efficiency in programmed interventions and support. Also established and operational is a Coordination Group on Gender and Politics led by UNDP and the National Women's Commission with the participation of UNFPA.

The UN system continued to support the Government's efforts on achieving the MDG's which was augmented by Belize being a pilot of the MDG Acceleration Framework (MAF) initiative. This targeted focus on MDG7 unearthed governance bottlenecks in water sector management as well as recognized key lessons including the need for a stronger multi-sectorial approach to good governance. The UNCT recognized the benefits of utilizing this framework that allows for the realization of practical solutions and envisage its application for other MDG targets in 2012.

Highlights on progress towards UNDAF outcomes

The UNDAF for Belize originally for the period 2007 – 2011 was aligned with Government's planning cycle by extending to December 2012. Subsequent to the Mid-Term Review conducted in 2009, 6 outcomes were summarized rotating around 3 priority areas.

Priority Area 1: Poverty Alleviation

Key achievements in this area saw Belize benefiting from the completion of 6 human rights based data collection and research initiatives that provided equity-focused disaggregated data for Belize; these included a WASH survey for schools, a MICS4 survey, a situational analysis of women and children and a situational analysis of children with disabilities. There was also the development of an Early Childhood Policy and a Youth Policy both designed to provide comprehensive developmental and pioneering approaches to children's development.

The UN continued to foster strategic partnerships in 2011, with UNICEF collaborating with the Organization of American States (OAS) on a country-wide campaign "making your children count" that resulted in a 10% increase in children registered at birth. UNICEF also partnered with the University of the West Indies Open Campus to establish a Centre of Excellence on Capacity Building, which provides a platform for educating national partners on human rights based approach to project management. UNDP also partnered with the US in a project promoting youth empowerment, by focusing on enhancing youth's work skill in urban areas such as south-side Belize City.

Progress in the health sector was recorded with the development of food based dietary guidelines and a NCD plan. Belize also benefited from an assessment on the country's capacity to implement aid effectiveness approach to coordinating international cooperation, using the health sector as a tracer. There was also an evaluation of the national SRH Policy and National Strategic Plan which resulted in the establishment of an SRH Commission to oversee the implementation of SRH programmes and service, these efforts were supported by UNFPA.

Priority Area 2: Reverse the Spread of HIV and AIDS

While the Government of Belize has placed major emphasis on reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence, UN interventions led to the revision and update of the National Treatment Guidelines for HIV/AIDS Clinical Management; contributed to strengthening the national systems for monitoring and surveillance of HIV/AIDS by having the first M&E System strengthening workshop. This effort was led by UNDP, acting as Principal Recipient of Round 9 Global Fund grant, in collaboration with UNAIDS and UNFPA. A global study was completed on the National Coordination of AIDS Responses on the case of Belize, with main findings included in a Global Report covering 7 pilot countries worldwide. A Leadership Development Program supported by UNDP, UN Women and UNAIDS was also launched to address empowerment of HIV women, MSM and transgender community leaders. Belize also benefited from the 1st National Dialogue on Human Rights, HIV and the Law which sought to promote and strengthen leadership among civil society representatives.

Priority Area 3: Sustainable Development

The UN, through UNDP has contributed to improving the country's institutional capacities for preparedness and resilience to natural disasters and the national response and strategies. Main impacts were derived through joint UN support to conduct full disaster assessments; reducing risk and vulnerability through institutional strengthening of the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) in the areas of database development with geospatial assistance and products from the Land Information Centre and data from key sectors; and early wins in the operationalization at district and village level of the national disaster risk assessment and mitigation strategy. National authorities took initial steps to ensure the reflection of the Hyogo protocol into national plans and processes, most mentionable are the initiation of a national investigation on the gender implication of natural disasters within the national context and community engagement in local vulnerability assessment and contingency planning. National efforts to update the national hazard and vulnerability profile were also initiated.

Progress on Sustainable Development and Climate Change were realized through UNDP's support to the Government of Belize to develop policies and plans with regards to the three UN Rio Conventions, leading to steps in strengthening coordination of national climate change issues and advocating for their integration within a cross section of ministries. Belize's first Land use policy and planning framework was completed and approved by Government with UNDP's support. UNDP also supported steps to rationalize and formalize the national protected areas system and to address financial sustainability and management effectiveness of the system.

Key aspects of proposed 2012 work plan

The 2012 UNCT work plan will focus on the following key priorities guided by the UNDG and UNDG LAC strategic priorities which include the following areas:



1. UN agencies and Government signing the next UNDAF for the period 2013 – 2016.
2. Revising the UN System web site to allow easier access to information
3. Continued UN advocacy
4. UNCT to promote greater knowledge management for the benefit of resident and non-resident agencies.
5. Mainstreaming human rights work of the UN by requesting deployment of a human rights advisor
6. Develop human security joint programme

Recommendations

For the implementation of the RC Work Plan 2012, it will be necessary to move forward with the following actions:

1. Establishment of Interagency Thematic Groups for the UNDAF implementation.
2. More interagency financial resources for joint activities and to continue supporting the Belize RC Office as an individual office.
3. Ensure UNDGLAC and DOCO advisory services and support to the country.
4. Continue with the engagement of the UNCT in moving forward with joint initiatives and capacity building.
5. More opportunities to access funds for joint initiatives, including access to corporate thematic and Sectoral Trust Funds.

Belmopan, 29 February 2012